

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Resilience through total defence: Towards a shared security culture in the Nordic–Baltic region?

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Abstract

This article investigates the defence policies of the Nordic and Baltic countries from the perspective of shared security culture. To that end, the article analyses conceptualisations of total defence and resilience in a comparative perspective and inquires into existing and prospective regional cooperation in this area, in order to determine to what degree there exists a common security culture based on shared norms and identities and manifested in practices of security cooperation. The study, which draws on 19 interviews with civil servants from the eight states of the region, shows that while there is fertile ground for a shared security culture to emerge, thus far, due to variations in conceptualisations, threat perceptions, and interaction preferences, only three Nordic states show clear signs of a shared security culture. The study contributes to existing research by situating the concept of resilience in (total) defence discourses; by expanding the theoretical work on security culture to an international context; and by offering a unique empirical account of the process of (re)building total defence policies in a region crucial to European security.

Keywords: Baltic; Baltic Sea region; Nordic; resilience; security culture; strategic culture; total defence

Introduction

The disastrous and devastating war in Ukraine following Russia's invasion in February 2022 marks the extreme point of an incrementally failing security regime in Europe, clearly under way since the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and warfare in Eastern Ukraine but originating well before that. In the shadow of the acute military conflict in Eastern Europe, the deteriorating security situation has not least been evident in the Nordic–Baltic region, where conflict between Russia and Western states is apparent, with Nordic¹ and Baltic² states revisiting their national security postures in the direction of 'total defence', a whole-of-society approach aiming to strengthen societal resilience.³ These developments have in turn implied a deepening of security cooperation among the Nordic states and to a degree also involving the three Baltic states. In addition, enhanced engagement and involvement of NATO and the European Union (EU) in the Baltic Sea region is obvious.

While the five Nordic and three Baltic states all move towards a revived total defence, they do so based on different historical experiences, varying degrees of integration in different forms of security cooperation, and also varying threat levels. This variation in preconditions has influenced the conceptualisation and organisation of total defence as a way to build resilience. Yet these states develop and operationalise their total defence policies not in a vacuum but in a context where

¹Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland.

²Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

³It is to be noted that Finland has maintained its policy largely intact since the Cold War.

they to a degree both share security challenges and interact with one another in different relevant policy fields. While favourable conditions thus exist, it remains an open question whether regional cooperation within the Nordic–Baltic group can bridge the different understandings of total defence and resilience – the ability of a society to resist and recover from challenges to national security – towards a shared security culture, which would facilitate mutual understanding and deeper cooperation. After all, considering the strategic importance of the Nordic–Baltic region in the conflict between Russia and the West, this is particularly vital for the security of the whole region.

Against this background, this article sets out two aims: (1) to analyse conceptualisations of total defence and resilience among the Nordic and Baltic countries in a comparative perspective; and (2) to inquire into existing and prospective regional cooperation in this field. By reaching these aims, we will be able to answer our research question: to what degree does a shared security culture, expressed through common threat perceptions, identities, and interaction patterns, exist within the Nordic–Baltic group of states?

We first discuss our theoretical understandings of total defence, resilience, and shared security culture, and the analytical framework that will guide the comparative empirical analysis. We then turn to our methodological points of departure, including a discussion of our data, consisting of interviews with civil servants in the different Nordic and Baltic countries as well as complementary documents. The analytical section that follows focuses first on conceptualisations of total defence and resilience and proceeds with existing and prospective Nordic–Baltic cooperation in this field, after which we link our findings to the topic of a shared security culture. The article concludes with a review of our results.

Resilience through total defence

In the contemporary era of globalisation, security challenges include not only threats of armed aggression and hybrid warfare but also vulnerabilities emanating from external dependence on strategic goods and services. This applies not least to open and small democratic states. Such a broad conceptualisation of security is related to an expanding debate on resilience, where growing scholarship identifies a number of different understandings of the concept. For instance, one distinction that can be made is between the ability of societies to withstand challenges that arise and the ability to ‘bounce back’ once hit.⁴ A related matter concerns the distinction between internal dimensions (such as the self-transformation of society to become more resilient) and external aspects centring on processes and subjects to be resilient against.⁵ Bourbeau argues for a non-binary understanding of resilience, as a scale, rather than the conventional understanding as a dichotomous concept. He suggests a conceptualisation of resilience as ‘the process of patterned adjustments adopted by a society ... in the face of endogenous or exogenous shocks’.⁶ While there is good reason to include both endogenous and exogenous triggers, a focus merely on shocks risks overlooking more structural features of dependencies and vulnerabilities that challenge modern societies (i.e. gradually destabilised democracies, potential disruption in the supply of essential goods, hybrid operations from antagonistic forces, etc.).

The existing, broad definitions of the concept of resilience have been growingly intertwined with that of security and employed as a framework for addressing a range of interrelated security threats.⁷ However, it has thus far been mainly attributed to ‘a certain area of security strategy, namely the area relating to civil protection and preparedness, but less so – if at all – in more strategic

⁴Jonathan Joseph, *Varieties of Resilience: Studies in Governmentality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵David Chandler and Jon Coaffee (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of International Resilience* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁶Philippe Bourbeau, ‘Resilience, security and world politics’, in David Chandler and Jon Coaffee (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of International Resilience* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 26–37.

⁷Tapio Juntunen, and Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, ‘Resilience, security and the politics of processes’, *Resilience*, 2:3 (2014), pp. 195–209; David Chandler, ‘Resilience’, in Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Thierry Balzacq (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 436–46.

areas of foreign and defence policy.⁸ However, the deteriorating European security situation during the last decade has changed this as more comprehensive security policies have developed. One example is the return of the total defence principle, consisting of both military and civil dimensions of defence, most prominent in the Nordic and Baltic region. While the conceptualisation of total defence differs across countries, each embodies a whole-of-society approach to national security extending beyond the armed forces for deterring and managing severe crisis or even war. Thus, total defence builds on the combined effect of armed forces, various civilian actors, and the general public for deterring as well as actually countering security threats.⁹ Originally developed by non-aligned states during the Cold War (Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Yugoslavia) and back then closely related to territorial defence, the total defence principle is typically employed by, but not limited to, small states as a way of increasing the deterrent effect of national defence postures. With the (re)turn of total defence policies, the concept of resilience has been inserted more prominently into the context of national security and become somewhat of a defence discourse, so that 'infrastructure and societal resilience jointly constitute national resilience, a cornerstone of total defence'.¹⁰

Simultaneously, resilience is increasingly appearing in the agendas and strategies of security organisations, not least so in the cases of the EU and NATO. Indeed, while resilience is not a new term in the EU context, it increasingly features in the EU's foreign policy, not least in its Global Strategy (EUGS)¹¹ and in the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (from 2022). Ambitions for greater European resilience are evident also in the Critical Entities Resilience Directive (2022/2557), entering into force in 2023, urging all member states (and partners) to strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure to a range of threats.

NATO defines resilience as 'the individual and collective capacity to prepare for, resist, respond to and quickly recover from shocks and disruptions'.¹² By perceiving resilience as 'the first line of defence',¹³ the alliance leaders have elevated Article 3 (on national and collective resilience) of the founding treaty and formulated seven baseline requirements (NBR) pointing to areas of particular relevance for resilience. These baseline requirements include: (1) assured continuity of government and critical government services; (2) resilient energy supplies; (3) ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people; (4) resilient food and water resources; (5) ability to deal with mass casualties; (6) resilient civil communications systems; (7) resilient civil transportation systems.

Thus, we can see that resilience increasingly configures security and defence policy discourses, with conceptions of total defence as a way to build resilience. Yet resilience remains oriented towards domestic affairs 'with the emphasis on the development of self-organisation and internal capacities and capabilities rather than the external provision of aid, resources or policy solutions'.¹⁴ However, this may be shifting with an increased desire for deepened (total) defence cooperation, in order to strengthen resilience. Here, cooperation among the Nordic-Baltic states stands out with different forms of cooperation, ranging from bilateral (Finland and Sweden) and trilateral

⁸Joseph, *Varieties of Resilience*, pp. 15–16.

⁹James K. Wither, 'Back to the future? Nordic total defence concepts', *Defence Studies*, 20:1 (2020), pp. 61–81; Jana Wrangle, 'Entangled security logics: From the decision-makers' discourses to the decision-takers' interpretations of civil defence', *European Security*, 31:4 (2022), pp. 576–96.

¹⁰Wither, 'Back to the future', p. 62.

¹¹Ana E. Juncos, 'Resilience as the new EU foreign policy paradigm: A pragmatist turn?', *European Security*, 26:1 (2017), pp. 1–18; Jonathan Joseph and Ana E. Juncos, 'Resilience as an emergent European project? The EU's place in the resilience turn', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57:5 (2019), pp. 995–1011; Nathalie Tocci, 'Resilience and the role of the European Union in the world', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41:2 (2020), pp. 176–94.

¹²NATO, 'Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3' (2023), available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm. See also Bryan Frizzelle, Julie Garey, and Isak Kulalic, 'NATO's national resilience mandate: Challenges and opportunities', *Defence Studies*, 22:3 (2022), pp. 525–32.

¹³Wolf-Diether Roepke and Hasit Thanky, 'Resilience: The first line of defence', *NATO Review* (27 February 2019), available at: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2019/02/27/resilience-the-first-line-of-defence/index.html>].

¹⁴Chandler cited in Juncos, 'Resilience as the new foreign policy paradigm', p. 4.

(Finland, Norway, and Sweden), to multilateral cooperation among the Nordic states and within the full group of Nordic–Baltic states. Through an exploration of the conceptualisation of resilience in the context of total defence and the patterns of cooperation in this field, we contribute to the literatures on resilience and on the prospects for interstate cooperation within total defence. As we elaborate below, we do so based on unique empirical evidence.

Analytical framework: Shared security culture

How do we best grasp these total defence approaches to national security and comprehend the potential for (regional) cooperation in this field? We posit that the concept of *shared security culture* is a fruitful way forward. We reach our understanding of shared security culture by first departing from an adjacent concept, that of strategic culture.

Strategic culture has been defined as ‘the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other.’¹⁵ Thus, strategic culture is ‘concerned with the perceptions, beliefs, ideas and norms that guide national security elites in their task of sorting out strategic priorities for the hard core of a state’s foreign and security policy’¹⁶ that all together constitute a ‘a set of discursive expressions and narratives related to security-military affairs ... rooted in socially constructed interpretations of history, geography, and domestic traditions.’¹⁷ As such, strategic culture forms an important, but not exhaustive, understanding of the culture underlying the security work within a state. Similarities in such cultures among different states undoubtedly increase the potential for joint security cooperation among these states.¹⁸

Still, the notion of strategic culture has primarily been applied to the sphere of military defence. As resilience and total defence denote a broader conceptualisation of security, we extend our conceptual framework to the concept of *security culture*. The concept of security culture helps us to capture both the breadth of total defence and the social dynamic on a shared international level. In existing definitions of national security culture, four criteria stand out: worldview; national identity; instrumental preferences; and interaction preferences. Worldview refers to elites’ views of the international system and threat perceptions, whereas national identity captures the extent to which national elites have retained an antagonistic definition of the national interest or rather have embedded the national interest in a broader, collective ‘we’ defined against some ‘other’. Instrumental preferences concern views on effective means of power for managing security and are thus a reflection of conceptualisations of security and defence. Interaction preferences, finally, ‘fall along a continuum marked at one end by unilateral action and at the other by a reflexive multilateralism within highly formalized institutional structures’.¹⁹

While states’ strategic cultures are often perceived as strictly domestic affairs with national preconditions as the main sources, the perspective of security cultures opens up for patterns of interaction between states. In any given regional context, certain similarities and differences are then to be expected, related to factors such as geography, history, size, value base and political culture, and international outlook, manifested in membership in regional institutions. Similarities in these factors enhance cooperation and enable alliances.

¹⁵Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1977), p. 8.

¹⁶Iver B. Neumann and Henriikka Heikka, ‘Grand strategy, strategic culture, practice: The social roots of Nordic defence’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 40:1 (2005), pp. 5–23.

¹⁷Elias Götz and Jørgen Staun, ‘Why Russia attacked Ukraine: Strategic culture and radicalized narratives’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 43:3 (2022), pp. 482–97.

¹⁸For an overview of the literature on strategic culture, see Kerry M. Kartchner, Briana D. Bowen, and Jeannie L. Johnson (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Strategic Culture* (London: Routledge, 2023).

¹⁹James Sperling, ‘National security cultures, technologies of public goods supply and security governance’, in Emil J. Kirchner and James Sperling (eds), *National Security Cultures: Patterns of Global Governance* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1–18.

We understand such similarities, both concerning practices and in security cultures, as contributing factors for the development of a wider *shared security culture* on a regional cross-national level. The concept of shared security culture is rooted in a social understanding of international politics, where states interact and are socialised into common understandings of what is the appropriate behaviour and more fundamentally the understanding of the self, i.e. the identity of the group and its members. Shared practices and shared cultures can thus spill over into the international arena and provide fertile ground for a shared security culture.

Conversely, it is known that disparate security cultures pose barriers to interstate cooperation, as for instance, 'states will disagree not only on what constitutes a threat, but the appropriate means for ameliorating it'.²⁰ Thus, in order to cooperate, a certain degree of shared culture is needed. Expressed differently, a shared security culture rests on a certain degree of cultural and institutional density, which in turn implies a shared understanding but also expectations on how the members of the community ought to act and regard each other.²¹ Applied to the European context, Gnesotto argues in a similar way when defining the overlapping concept of common security culture, as 'the aim and the means to incite common thinking, compatible reactions, coherent analysis – in short, a strategic culture that is increasingly European, one that transcends the different national security cultures and interests'.²²

To that end, the likelihood of a shared security culture increases if there are convergences in the following, highly intertwined, areas: conceptualisation/priorities of how security is strengthened (what it is and how it is best managed); threat perceptions (worldview); overlapping identity (rooted in shared history, geography, and political culture); and interaction preferences (that reinforce shared norms and identities). The last is especially central to our argument as we depart from the proposition that practical cooperation between states on different policy issues, such as total defence, over time results in a learning process between states where states socialise and learn from each other and develop common norms and a common identity within the policy field. It is possible that practical cooperation exposes fundamental differences between the cooperating states, which in effect reveals both limits to and prospects for deeper security culture. However, if the cooperation results in shared norms and identity, the states can be argued to be socialised into a shared security culture where the states relate to each other to different degrees. A degree of shared security culture, in turn, affects approaches to new policy challenges and enables new policy initiatives, making the security culture even more dense. In that way the causal argument could be understood as a policy loop.

Studying a potential shared security culture

Selection of cases

As is clear to the reader by now, we are studying the five Nordic states together with the three Baltic states. We depart from the proposition that these eight states can be seen as part of the same Northern European region, integrated in shared Nordic–Baltic forums of cooperation. However, there are also several dividing lines within the group of the Nordic–Baltic eight. From a conventional perspective, the most obvious one is that these constellations are often addressed as the group of Nordic states and that of Baltic states, respectively, but more seldom as a Nordic–Baltic collective. We argue that it is a simplification to talk about two groups. The Nordic states have long been seen as a group of states that share many relevant aspects (history, size, many parts of the geopolitical context, public administrative structures, liberal values, and so forth), and there seems, in consequence,

²⁰Kirchner and Sperling (eds), *National Security Cultures*, p. 40.

²¹Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Norms, identity, and culture in national security', in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 33–75 (p. 38).

²²Gnesotto cited in Jolyon Howorth, 'The CESDP and the forging of a European security culture', *Politique Européenne*, 8:4 (2002), pp. 88–109.

to exist fertile soil for a shared Nordic security culture.²³ However, there also exist important differences between the states. The five Nordic states (have) differ(ed) in their approaches to security, expressed through institutional affiliation, reforms within defence, security policy in general, and approaches to resilience in particular.²⁴ However, after Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022, the Nordic approaches to security seem to be converging.²⁵

Looking at the three Baltic states, one could assume even more favourable conditions for a common Baltic security culture. The three Baltic states share the history of Soviet occupation, of re-independence after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and membership in the EU and NATO at the same time. Still, the three states differ in terms of language, religion, and to some extent geographical outlook.

Hence, it is fair to conclude that the Nordic–Baltic eight is a group with a set of similarities but also variation in many relevant contextual factors. We argue that it is relevant to address these eight states in one context since they to varying but increasing degrees have cooperated since the re-independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The more ambitious Nordic cooperation has increasingly come to expand into the form of Nordic–Baltic cooperation, thereby coming closer to closing the Nordic–Baltic gap, which in turn would make a shared security culture more likely. Over time, Nordic–Baltic cooperation has become more operative, not least within policy areas with a direct or indirect link to total defence, with the Nordic–Baltic eight sharing geopolitical challenges as small states with limited capabilities. It remains an open question, however, how and to what extent such interaction relates to a common security culture that would facilitate cooperation and hence contribute to best securing the region; or to what extent significant variations remain within this Nordic–Baltic group, potentially hindering collective action. We therefore conclude that the case of the Nordic–Baltic eight constitutes fertile ground for exploring the possibility of overcoming historical variation and developing a shared security culture motivated by strong security incentives for cooperation.

Research design

Our empirical analysis is structured around the four criteria discussed above: conceptualisation/priorities of how security is strengthened; threat perceptions; overlapping identity; and interaction preferences. Relating to our first aim of how resilience and total defence are conceptualised in the different countries, we analyse to what extent conceptualisations overlap and what, if any, significant differences are to be found among the states of the region. We ask to what extent the rationale for developing total defence and resilience is the same in the region, and what prominent challenges exist in the implementation of total defence. As for our second aim, we take stock of existing frameworks for cooperation relevant to resilience and total defence in the Nordic–Baltic region, in order to probe questions about the perceived need and possibilities for, as well as obstacles to, enhanced cooperation. In the third section, we discuss the degree to which there is a shared Nordic–Baltic security culture within the field of total defence, based on the previous findings. Structured around threat perceptions, overlapping identity, and interaction preferences, we here focus on signs of diffusion of ideas regarding total defence and resilience across the region as well

²³Darryl Howlett and John Glenn, 'Epilogue: Nordic strategic culture', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 40:1 (2005), pp. 121–40; Douglas Brommesson, Ann-Marie Ekengren, and Anna Michalski, 'From variation to convergence in turbulent times: Foreign and security policy choices among the Nordics 2014–2023', *European Security*, 33:1 (2024), pp. 21–43.

²⁴For an analysis of the variations in strategic/security culture among the Nordic states, see Howlett and Glenn, 'Epilogue: Nordic strategic culture'.

²⁵Brommesson, Ekengren, and Michalski, 'From variation to convergence'. This also speaks to the fact that strategic culture is not static; instead, it can change over time or as a reaction to external shocks that influence strategies (see Colin S. Gray, 'Strategic culture as context: The first generation of theory strikes back', *Review of International Studies*, 25:1 (1999), pp. 49–69; Håkan Edström and Jakob Westberg, 'Between the eagle and the bear: Explaining the alignment strategies of the Nordic countries in the 21st century', *Comparative Strategy*, 39:2 (2020), pp. 191–208.

on the practical obstacles to cooperation in this field, arguing that the degree of shared security culture is instrumental for the durability of Nordic–Baltic cooperation on total defence.

Data

The article primarily draws on 19 informant interviews with a total of 24 civil servants from relevant government institutions from the Nordic and Baltic countries, conducted during the first half of 2023.²⁶ During the interviews, the respondents were asked to reflect on their understandings of their respective countries regarding security, total defence, and resilience; as well as their perspectives on the dynamics, prospects, and problems of regional cooperation in this area (see Appendix 1 for our interview guide). In addition, a set of documents, including the most recent government white papers and bills, national security strategies, and public reports from the countries of the region, as well as information from public websites and secondary literature, were used in the analysis to provide background to the interview material.

Conceptualisations of total defence and resilience in the Nordic and Baltic countries

In relation to our first aim, this section begins by analysing conceptualisations of the total defence approaches of the Nordic and Baltic states and then focuses specifically on understandings of resilience. The third and final part centres on the administrative operationalisation of total defence.

Total defence in focus

As was noted above, the ‘total defence’ concept has traditionally been associated with the defence doctrine of neutral/non-aligned or small states. Mainly developed during the Cold War as a way to manage the security situation in the absence of contractual defence relations with other states, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, and others established what can be thought of as a whole-of-society approach to defence, involving conscription as well as societal engagement in civil and military defence matters, aimed both at deterring a potential aggressor and withstanding – and recovering from – potential aggression.²⁷ In the Nordic region, this notion of total defence related to a clear dividing line during the Cold War, although the concept was employed by four out of the five states. The security-political choices of the Nordic countries reflected a fundamental choice between a military defence logic based on NATO membership with prioritisation of a collective defence commitment, as in the cases of Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, and a non-aligned posture built on relatively large military forces and a ‘total defence’ approach involving both military and civil defence dimensions, as in the cases of Finland and Sweden. While Sweden gradually after the end of the Cold War dismantled the planning for total defence and abolished conscription in 2009, Finland has maintained both conscription and total defence planning throughout the post–Cold War period. From the mid-2010s, Sweden reinstated the planning for total defence (2015) and reintroduced conscription (2017).

Since the end of the Second World War, both Denmark and Norway have relied on a total defence concept, ‘intended to ensure the best possible utilization of society’s limited resources when it comes to prevention, contingency planning and consequence management across the entire spectrum of crises ... from crises in peacetime to security policy crises and armed conflict.’²⁸ While ever-present in Danish security discourse in reference to society’s overall preparedness to efficiently

²⁶ At least two institutions were selected from each state. All participants signed a letter of consent prior to interviewing and were promised anonymity. The majority of the interviews were held in English. Interviews held in Estonian, Swedish, and Norwegian were translated to English by the authors. Interviews are in the following referred to by standard country abbreviations LT1, LT2, and so on.

²⁷ Wither, ‘Back to the future’; Wrangé, ‘Entangled security logics’.

²⁸ Government of Norway, ‘Support and cooperation: A description of the total defence in Norway’ (2018), available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/5a9bd774183b4d548e33da101e7f7d43/support-and-cooperation.pdf>.

use and coordinate collective resources in order to ‘maintain vital social functions and protect the lives and property of the population’,²⁹ the concept of total defence is rarely utilised in Danish defence policy as it separates the military and civil defence in practice.³⁰ To illustrate, the concept is not even mentioned in the strategic document on Danish defence published by the government.³¹

However, in Norway, the total defence concept has been constantly adjusted to security needs and developed with NATO in mind, not least when it comes to the more recent work with resilience. From the 1990s, Norway’s civil defence aimed at supporting the armed forces’ capacities to support civilian society.³² However, Russia’s aggression in Georgia in 2008 and, more importantly, its annexation of Crimea and entry into Eastern Ukraine in 2014 triggered a reform in defence policies in the Nordic and Baltic states alike, and for Norway it meant that ‘the pendulum shifted back to the centre or even more towards civil society supporting the armed forces yet again’,³³ putting the revival of total defence high on the agenda, this time with an ‘increased emphasis on *civil protection and emergency preparedness* ... protecting the safety of the civilian population, and securing critical societal functions and important infrastructure from attacks and other damage ... including situations defined as a threat to national security.’³⁴ In contrast to Sweden, Norway never really abandoned its use of the concept of total defence.

The same can be said of Finland. As mentioned, when Sweden abandoned conscription and the planning for total defence, Finland maintained both. This was to some degree the result of slow policy processes; decisions to substantially cut down total defence were not taken until around 2012. However, when the security climate changed for the worse, Finland changed its plans and kept important parts of total defence in place.³⁵ In parallel with the maintenance of both conscription and total defence, Finland broadened its conceptualisation of security towards a wider security concept and around 2010 started to describe security in terms of comprehensive security. With increasing security tensions in the neighbourhood, the focus returned to more antagonistic threats from 2013 and onwards (i.e. hybrid threats, cyber threats).³⁶ Still, Finland has continued to describe its understanding of security in terms of comprehensive security.³⁷ As noted above, Sweden has returned to its total defence principle, although conceptualisation and emphasis have been adjusted to reflect a more complex threat picture and new preconditions for national security.³⁸

After regaining independence in the early 1990s, the three Baltic countries found themselves in search of viable security and defence models. In the early years, all three Baltic states embraced different forms of total defence models inspired by the Swedish and Finnish approaches – as Maskaliunaite notes, ‘these two countries had significant influence on the thinking of defence policymakers, especially in Latvia and Estonia’³⁹ and somewhat later also Lithuania.⁴⁰ In practice, however, the main focus was on the construction of military defence capabilities, where again

²⁹ Danish Defence, ‘Totalforsvaret’, public website available at: <https://www.forsvaret.dk/da/ogaver/nationale-ogaver/Totalforsvaret/>.

³⁰ Interview DK1.

³¹ Government of Denmark, ‘Danish security and defence towards 2035’ (2022) available at: https://www.fmn.dk/globalassets/fmn/dokumenter/strategi/rsa/-regeringens_security-policy-report_uk_web-.pdf.

³² Interview NO2.

³³ Interview NO2.

³⁴ Government of Norway, ‘Support and cooperation’.

³⁵ Interview FI1.

³⁶ Government of Finland, ‘Security strategy for society’ (2017), available at: https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YTS_2017_english.pdf.

³⁷ Finnish Security Committee, ‘Comprehensive security’ (2023), available at: <https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/en/comprehensive-security/>.

³⁸ For elaboration, see the most recent report of the Swedish Defence Commission, ‘Kraftsamling’, Ds 2023:34 (2023).

³⁹ Asta Maskaliunaite, ‘Editorial introduction: Special issue on understanding of total defence in the Baltic countries’, *Journal on Baltic Security*, 6:2 (2020), pp. 5–6 (p. 5).

⁴⁰ For elaboration, see Kristine Atmante, ‘Comprehensive defence in Latvia: Rebranding state defence and call for society’s involvement’, *Journal on Baltic Security*, 6:2 (2020), pp. 31–45; Viljar Veebel, Illimar Ploom, Liia Vihmand and Krystof Zaleski, ‘Territorial defence, comprehensive defence and total defence: Meanings and differences in the Estonian defence force’, *Journal*

Finland and Sweden played a significant role by providing material support in the form of arms and vehicles. As one Baltic practitioner said, if Swedish soldiers were, as NATO members, to find themselves placed in one of the Baltic countries today, they would probably still come across their own old equipment.⁴¹

In order to distance themselves from Russia, all three Baltic states strived to be included in the Western sphere and in due course concluded that their security was best served through formal inclusion in Western institutions, notably NATO – a logic similar to that employed by Norway, Denmark, and Iceland a number of decades before. Thus, once ‘the door to NATO opened’⁴² in the early 2000s, the defence policy of these states was reoriented towards collective defence.

There were differences, however, in how the Baltic states arranged their defence approaches after NATO entry – while Latvia and Lithuania adopted more of an expeditionary approach along the lines of Denmark, ‘lowering the political focus on national defence capacities,’⁴³ Estonia took on a more cautious stance similar to the Finnish defence model, retaining conscription and relying on volunteer units. However, since the war in Ukraine, Latvia and Lithuania are also revising their approaches and reintroducing conscription as ‘a social contract between the society and the state.’⁴⁴

Resilience in focus

Resilience constitutes a key goal of ambitions and implementation of total defence as ‘resilience of the State and society contributes to deterring aggression and is the first line of defence.’⁴⁵ Resilience is often conceptualised either in terms of the functioning of the government and society or as a population’s ability to withstand various challenges and resist external manipulation. While these two conceptualisations are not incompatible, they still illustrate a difference of focus, from the practical functioning of public services (which we refer to as state resilience) to broader capacity of resistance within the population (which we refer to as societal resilience).

Finland’s understanding has over the years tilted towards societal resilience.⁴⁶ The same can be said about Sweden, as illustrated by the government’s choice in 2018 to return (as during the Cold War) to informing the population about societal functions and personal responsibilities for preparedness in crisis or war (through a brochure sent to all households) and in instituting a national agency for psychological defence (from January 2023), tasked to identify, analyse, prevent, and counter ‘foreign malign information influence activities and other disinformation directed at Sweden or at Swedish interests’ and ‘strengthen the population’s ability to detect and resist malign influence campaigns and disinformation. Thereby, psychological defence contributes to creating resilience and a willingness to defend the country.’⁴⁷ These efforts have been picked up by other Nordic and Baltic states, with Norway, Lithuania, and Latvia drawing inspiration from Sweden.⁴⁸

However, the Danish approach to societal resilience is more ‘laid back, thinking everything will be fine’,⁴⁹ as the political elite does not find it necessary to cause panic among the population nor to allocate resources to societal resilience. Instead, the work is focused primarily on state resilience. This is based on the current threat assessment (provided by the intelligence services) with reference

on *Baltic Security*, 6:2 (2020), pp. 17–29; Liudas Zdanavičius and Nortautas Statkus, ‘Strengthening resilience of Lithuania in an era of great power competition: The case for total defence’, *Journal on Baltic Security*, 6:2 (2020), pp. 47–67.

⁴¹ Interview LV3.

⁴² Interview LV3.

⁴³ Interview LV3.

⁴⁴ Interview LV1.

⁴⁵ Government of Lithuania, ‘National Security Strategy’ (2022), available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/3ec6a2027a9a11ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e?fwid=rivwzvpvgj>.

⁴⁶ Interview FI1.

⁴⁷ Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar, public website available at: <https://www.mpf.se>; see also Swedish Defence Commission, ‘Kraftsamling’.

⁴⁸ Interview LV1; NO1, NO2; LT2.

⁴⁹ Interview DK1, DK2; also SE1; IS2.

to the geographical location, not perceiving Russia as immediately threatening in the way other states in the region sharing a border with Russia perceive it to be.⁵⁰

While both aspects of resilience discussed above have been part of total defence policies for over 10 years, in practice, in the three Baltic states, the work with resilience has only begun, as ‘so far it has been only on paper’ due to the lack of resources and political direction.⁵¹ Yet the war in Ukraine has pointed to the importance of resilience, not least in terms of the functioning of state infrastructure, including bomb shelters and the healthcare, energy, banking, and transportation sectors, to name a few. Thus, ‘the lessons on resilience from Ukraine are many and enormous,’⁵² and the building of resilience is now ongoing on many fronts simultaneously in all three Baltic countries. Due to the variety of sectors that are covered within state resilience, there are numerous actors involved in this process, from the highest government bodies to local businesses and volunteer units. An important role is assigned to the local municipalities that are responsible for their own planning for crisis and war, including evacuation plans and shelters.⁵³

A key dimension concerning societal resilience is that of the populations’ preparedness for crisis or war and eventual resistance. Here, governments’ strategic communication efforts have served as a key strategy for the three Baltic states, as well as educational initiatives to increase the public’s patriotism and basic survival skills. When talking of societal resilience in Latvia, for instance, much effort is put into attempts to get the younger generation involved in military training as well as to engage with civil society, as civil engagement in Latvia is perceived to be very low and thus problematic for current resilience capacities: ‘this is the Soviet heritage where people believe the government to be solely responsible for providing security.’⁵⁴ Furthermore, as identified in the ‘National Security Concept’, the Russian war in Ukraine has revealed the differences in ideological belief systems and historical memory between certain groups and the majority of Latvian society.⁵⁵ Therefore, large investments are made in increasing societal engagement and ‘finding common ground and values’ through educational reforms, conscription, voluntary basic training initiatives, and strategic communication from the government.⁵⁶ Here, the Baltic states display differences compared to the Nordics, who do not share this historical experience and have a higher civic engagement and consequently societal resilience. This is in particular true for Finland, Norway, and Sweden, who in many respects share historical understandings of the importance of societal resilience and who also cooperate closely on these issues.⁵⁷

Administrative operationalisation of total defence and resilience

Conceptualisations of total defence and resilience in the various Baltic and Nordic countries are reflected in the administrative operationalisation of the policy area. In Estonia, to take one example, the Ministry of Defence deals with only military defence – issues of societal resilience are not part of their agenda. That is due to the governing principle where the responsibilities of government bodies are to remain the same in peace as well as in crisis or war.⁵⁸ Thus, it has been a deliberate choice not to overload the Ministry of Defence with issues that fall under the jurisdiction of other ministries, coordinated by the Government Office. The same organisational logic can be found in Lithuania, while in Latvia the Ministry of Defence is the one responsible for the development and

⁵⁰ Interview DK2.

⁵¹ Interview EE2; SE2.

⁵² Interview LT2.

⁵³ Interview LV1.

⁵⁴ Interview LV1; see also Atmante, ‘Comprehensive defence in Latvia’, pp. 35–42.

⁵⁵ Government of Latvia, ‘National Security Concept’ (2023), available (in Latvian) at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/legal_acts/16851249-a50a-4e69-a05b-fc4b23bf0162.

⁵⁶ Interview LV1.

⁵⁷ Interview FI2; DK2.

⁵⁸ Interview EE2, EE3; see also Estonian Government Office, ‘Development plan for national defence’ (2021), available at <https://Users/ja0680be/Downloads/Riigikaitse%20arengukava%202022%20-%2020231.pdf>.

implementation of the comprehensive defence policy, which means that the topics are organically integrated into the general defence policy.

Moving to the Nordic countries, Finland and Sweden share a bureaucratic model with distinct responsibilities for different domestic actors. There is, however, one important difference between Finland and Sweden, despite their joint historical roots. In Sweden, the government ministries have limited operative power. Instead, government agencies have an independent role within the laws and regulations that the parliament and the government have decided on. The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) is a large government agency which over time has come to be designated a coordinating role among the national agencies. Corresponding agencies in the other countries are considerably smaller, both in terms of mandate and employees.⁵⁹ In Finland, the ministries have a more operative role to play, and the ministers thus become both political leaders and responsible for the implementation of different initiatives.⁶⁰ Still, in both cases, there are strict separations between ministries and agencies. In Finland, this has resulted in the creation of the Security Committee, where ministries, agencies, the President's office, NGOs, and business organisations coordinate comprehensive defence. While the security committee staff is employed by the Ministry of Defence, the committee still has an independent coordinating role to play.⁶¹

In Denmark, the Ministry of Defence is formally responsible for total defence coordination. However, in practice, its two parts – societal and military security – are kept very separated, and the main responsibilities for the former are delegated to the Danish Emergency Management Agency (with no decision-making powers though) as well as other ministries (with a strong sectoral responsibility principle in place).⁶² And while this sectoral principle is similar to the ones adopted in Sweden and Norway, the organisation of total defence is different in the Nordic states. Sweden, for instance, has relocated the civil defence portfolio back to the Ministry of Defence (from the Ministry of Justice), and the current government includes a designated minister for civil defence issues. In Norway, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security organises resilience, while cooperation with the Ministry of Defence is very much present with synchronised planning.

Iceland's model differs from the Nordic and Baltic entirely, mainly due to the fact that the country does not have a Ministry of Defence. Thus, comprehensive defence issues are covered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the Ministry of Justice coordinates civil defence efforts which differ from those of the other Nordic and Baltic states and are focused on Iceland's unique preconditions as an isolated island, thus focusing mainly on guarding the coastline and internal security.⁶³

This incompatibility poses certain challenges to Nordic–Baltic cooperation at the political level, as 'there are differences in organizational aspects and historical traditions and therefore it is hard to find overlaps'.⁶⁴ Furthermore, considering that both state and societal resilience are considered domestic affairs, some states are yet to prioritise international cooperation in practice. Also, with numerous actors involved in resilience matters, this cooperation faces practical obstacles such as language barriers as, for instance, civil servants at 'the Ministry of Interior have more this language barrier because not everyone is speaking in English and they don't have these other formats, frameworks and so on, they have smaller structures'.⁶⁵

In summary, around 2010 the three Baltic states, but also Finland, Norway, and Sweden, revisited their national defence policies, grounded in the idea of a constantly evolving security situation containing both military and non-military threats, where 'a narrow (military) approach to defence does not ensure countries' ability to withstand possible threats expressed though

⁵⁹ Interview SE1, SE2.

⁶⁰ Interview FI3.

⁶¹ Interview FI2.

⁶² Interview DK1, DK2.

⁶³ Interview IS1, IS2.

⁶⁴ Interview LV1; FI1, FI2, FI3; SE1, SE2.

⁶⁵ Interview LV2.

non-military means.⁶⁶ Thus, national defence policies are now reliant on broad conceptualisations of defence, where military capabilities are complemented with areas such as internal defence, state and societal resilience, strategic communication (psychological defence), and international affairs.⁶⁷ To that end, national defence becomes a ‘collective responsibility for the entire society’,⁶⁸ ‘where vital societal functions are handled together by authorities, businesses, NGOs and citizens.’⁶⁹ In that regard, the Nordic–Baltic group displays an increasing degree of convergence towards notions broadly related to total defence. Still, the conceptualisation of these broader defence approaches varies within the group.

In conclusion, the notion of total defence has come to attain somewhat different relevance and meanings in the different Nordic and Baltic countries in the post–Cold War period. A key aspect concerns the simultaneous yet separate development of the notion of total defence in the Baltic states based on a degree of ideational diffusion from Sweden and Finland.⁷⁰ This observation points to important questions regarding the possible link between ideational diffusion and the development of a shared security culture. Simultaneously, it is important to underline that conceptualisations of security and defence vary also among the Nordic countries and over time in quite a complex fashion (that cannot fully be explained by institutional membership). This variation has however decreased following Russia’s war on Ukraine.⁷¹ This is reflected in patterns of enhanced security and defence cooperation, which for our purposes beg questions about the relationship between practices of bilateral and multilateral cooperation and the existence of a shared such culture. It is to these practices of interaction we now turn.

Existing and prospective frameworks for Nordic–Baltic cooperation in the areas of resilience and total defence

Against this background of conceptualisations of total defence and resilience, we approach our second aim: to inquire into current and prospective schemes for cooperation among the Nordic and Baltic countries in the area of total defence and resilience.

Regional cooperation within the Nordics and the Baltics

Since the mid-2010s, the Nordic countries have woven a web of different forms of cooperation in policy areas that are related to total defence. Some of this cooperation is bilateral, other parts are trilateral, and some is based on a multilateral framework, including all Nordic countries. Relating to the discussion above on how to conceptualise resilience and total defence, we can see how the different forms of Nordic cooperation on total defence relate to different dimensions. The earlier forms of cooperation sprung out of threat perceptions mostly based on civilian threats, like environmental threats, natural disasters, or terrorism. Gradually, with clearer signs of an assertive Russia, the different forms of cooperation came to relate more directly to hybrid and explicitly military threats.

In 2009, the former Norwegian foreign minister Thorvald Stoltenberg published the so-called Stoltenberg report on the future development of Nordic cooperation on foreign and security policy. The report can be said to be one of starting points of a wider Nordic integration process within security and defence. Also in 2009, the Nordic states established NORDEFECO as a framework

⁶⁶ Estonian Government Office, ‘Development plan for national defence’.

⁶⁷ Estonia and Latvia use the label ‘comprehensive national defence’; Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden ‘total defence’; Finland ‘national comprehensive security’. Iceland does not have a military defence, and thus defence matters are covered in the National Security Policy.

⁶⁸ Latvian Ministry of Defence ‘The state defence concept’ (2023), available at: <https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/The%20State%20Defence%20Concept%202023-2027.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Finnish Security Committee, ‘Comprehensive security’.

⁷⁰ Interview SE2.

⁷¹ Brommesson, Ekengren, and Michalski, ‘From variation to convergence’.

for different forms of cooperation between the Nordics on defence-related issues. Already existing forms of cooperation were put under this new umbrella, but the establishment of NORDEFECO also meant higher ambitions concerning Nordic cooperation within the area of defence policy. Even higher ambitions would follow during the next few years, as evident in the NORDEFECO Vision 2025.⁷²

However, with Finland and Sweden now being NATO members, there are many questions in the air regarding the future of NORDEFECO cooperation. While some believe that 'NORDEFECO is more important now than ever before',⁷³ there are voices that also question the relevance of this forum now that all Nordic countries are presumably also in the alliance in the near future. That said, there is no denying that there is a need for new planning and strategy within this framework. Some argue that while there may be less need for formal Nordic institutions, the need and will for informal cooperation and coordination on a concrete basis has indeed increased,⁷⁴ also within a wider NATO framework.⁷⁵

While NORDEFECO was (and is) an initiative within the military side of defence policy, initially most importantly regarding defence procurement, it was paired with a civilian process leading up to the so-called Haga I agreement. According to this agreement, the Nordic governments declared cooperation on civil crisis management to be a priority. In 2013, Haga I was followed by the Haga II agreement, which raised ambitions and took a joint Nordic perspective on crisis management.⁷⁶ The Haga framework institutionalises Nordic cooperation among civilian agencies. Furthermore, in recent years representatives of NORDEFECO and the Haga process have begun annual joint meetings aiming at, among other things, participation in mutual exercises. Lessons learned from strengthened cooperation can then feed into future defence planning.⁷⁷ At the same time, these meetings display the different dynamics of the civilian and military sides, with the civilian side (Haga) being more top-down and politically oriented and NORDEFECO more concretely goal-oriented.⁷⁸

While Haga I and II were based on a joint Nordic perspective, several steps would follow based on more limited numbers of countries. Sometimes the steps were bilateral, and sometimes trilateral. However, as Haugevik et al. point out, Sweden was to be most often included.⁷⁹ In 2015, Sweden and Finland reached an agreement on operative defence planning beyond peace time.⁸⁰ Sweden also developed cooperation with Norway on civil defence, with exchange of experiences as a way to mutual learning. The Swedish parliamentary defence commission soon recommended that both Swedish–Finnish cooperation and Swedish–Norwegian cooperation on civil defence should develop into operative planning in order to be able to receive civilian help in the case of a crisis or war.⁸¹ The commission also urged the government to develop the two bilateral agreements into a trilateral agreement, and in 2020 a formal agreement on cooperation between Finland, Norway, and Sweden was signed, including that the three countries declared their intent to develop enhanced operational cooperation. A year later, an agreement along the same lines was signed

⁷²Rikard Bengtsson, 'Nordic security and defence cooperation: Differentiated integration in uncertain times', *Politics and Governance*, 8:4 (2020), pp. 100–9; Kristin Haugevik, Øyvind Svendsen, Katja Creutz, et al., *Security Debates and Partnership Choices in the Nordic States: From Differentiation to Alignment*. Report 1/2022 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2022).

⁷³Interview NO2; IS1.

⁷⁴Interview FI2, FI3.

⁷⁵Interview FI1; SE1.

⁷⁶Bengtsson, 'Nordic security and defence cooperation'.

⁷⁷Interview NO2.

⁷⁸Interview SE1.

⁷⁹Haugevik, Svendsen, Creutz, et al., *Security Debates and Partnership Choices*.

⁸⁰Carl Haglund and Peter Hultqvist, 'Så ska Sverige och Finland samarbeta i militär konflikt', *Dagens Nyheter* (27 February 2015).

⁸¹Swedish Defence Commission, *Motståndskraft*, Ds 2017:66 (Stockholm: Swedish Government Offices, 2017), p. 211.

among Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.⁸² While Sweden seems to have an all-Nordic approach, the Finns have put more emphasis on trilateral cooperation with Norway and Sweden, while not neglecting the importance of the all-Nordic Haga cooperation track.⁸³ The trilateral focus is explained both by geographical proximity, and by the fact that cooperation in this setting is seen as easier.⁸⁴ Finland has also developed more practical cooperation with the Baltic states, most importantly with Estonia given their relationship as neighbours.⁸⁵

The cooperation among the three Baltic states is described by one of our respondents as ‘tight, deep, and long, dating back to the 1990s.’⁸⁶ A testament to that is ‘when we need to discuss something with Latvia or Lithuania, we won’t bother sending an official letter or book a meeting, we just call them and agree on it.’⁸⁷ Indeed, Baltic cooperation is perceived to be ‘very good. We have cooperated for ages. I think when we renewed our independence, we had all these common Baltic cooperation projects – Baltic Security Assistance for air surveillance networks and so on.’⁸⁸ The three countries have also signed a Declaration of Mutual Assistance (which during the interviewing was not yet ratified by Estonia) – ‘we are entering the age of declarations, a regionalisation of sorts, but the challenges lie in maintaining balance between the regional and collective.’⁸⁹

Nordic–Baltic cooperation

Institutionalized Nordic–Baltic cooperation involving all eight countries remains limited and is primarily to be found in the context of the so-called Nordic–Baltic Eight (NB8) format. In this group, the eight countries meet annually at the level of prime ministers and foreign ministers; annual parliamentary meetings are also held. Practical cooperation takes place in a number of sectors including issues about regional security.⁹⁰

In a more pronounced way, Nordic–Baltic interaction takes the form of various bilateral and multilateral relations. As one Baltic respondent explained, ‘the relationship is good and the contacts are there’ but to varying degrees among different Nordic states.⁹¹ For Estonia, cooperation is closest with Denmark and Finland. Denmark has helped and educated Estonians as well as having been on shared international missions. Finland has educated Estonians since the 1990s, and the military sector also engages in joint procurements. Recently, Finland has introduced new cooperative formats in relation to the three Baltic states.⁹² In addition, as mentioned before, Finland’s defence policy has been the source for inspiration for the Estonian one. In parallel with Finland, Sweden has provided various forms of support to the Baltic states individually but for a long time remained outside of NATO and thus with limited possibilities for cooperation. ‘Norway remains on the other side of the Scandinavian peninsula and has been focusing more on the Arctic area so there hasn’t been much in common with them.’⁹³

For the three Baltic states, whose defence policy is designed towards NATO, regional cooperation towards the Nordics ‘has not been primary ... mainly due to the fact that Finland and Sweden have not been NATO members which has set certain limitations to the cooperation from both sides.’⁹⁴ However, Finland’s and Sweden’s NATO membership is understood to imply that ‘the

⁸² Haugevik, Svendsen, Creutz, et al., *Security Debates and Partnership Choices*.

⁸³ Interview FI3.

⁸⁴ Interview FI2.

⁸⁵ Interview FI3.

⁸⁶ Interview EE2.

⁸⁷ Interview EE2.

⁸⁸ Interview LV2.

⁸⁹ Interview LV1.

⁹⁰ Government of Estonia ‘Nordic–Baltic cooperation (NB8)’, available at: <https://www.vm.ee/en/international-relations-estonian-diaspora/regional-cooperation/nordic-baltic-cooperation-nb8>.

⁹¹ Interview EE2.

⁹² Interview EE2, also SE1.

⁹³ Interview EE2.

⁹⁴ Interview EE2.

Baltic Sea will become NATO's internal sea which will change both the strategic and operative conditions in the region.⁹⁵ While the Baltics are 'supportive of regional cooperation formats and integration, we are also the ones saying that all these efforts should be made complementary to NATO, of course',⁹⁶ as 'for us, NATO always comes first'.⁹⁷

So, while there is not much of direct Nordic–Baltic cooperation to speak of, the intraregional cooperation on various levels still takes place but in a European and transatlantic context centred around the EU and NATO. While, up until very recently, it was politically sensitive for non-aligned countries such as Finland and Sweden to cooperate with Nordic NATO members on operative defence measures, planning on civil defence and developing EU cooperation has proven to be a more fruitful avenue. However, following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 this has changed. With the Finnish and Swedish applications for membership in NATO, we see a more homogeneous group of states in the Nordic region, with similar security perceptions and solutions. In a sense paradoxical, membership in NATO for Finland and Sweden may lead to even closer cooperation among the Nordics. After all, as one respondent described,

Finland's and Sweden's joining NATO will be a game changer for the Nordic cooperation in the field of security and defence ... Never have the Nordics been all on the same page in wanting to kind of develop their cooperation in the field of security and defence until now. Now everybody's on the same page ... of being members of the same defence alliance so there are no grey areas anymore in that regard ... it will enable further Nordic cooperation.⁹⁸

Thus, while Nordic cooperation was, according to some, seen earlier as a substitute for a military alliance, it may now be a fruitful platform for operative planning for (total) defence within one region of NATO, making the further evolution of a shared security culture more likely. To an extent, this will depend on the future command structure of the new NATO, with all Nordic states as members; should the inclusion of Finland and Sweden result in a separation of the Nordic and Baltic groups of countries into different structures, this will inhibit the growth of such a shared culture.

As for resilience issues, NATO is a good carrot to use nationally 'to push civilian institutions to work towards common goals because what we have done is that we have involved our civilian institutions into NATO defence planning processes ... and they get this feeling of responsibility towards NATO'.⁹⁹ For international cooperation in resilience, however, NATO is not perceived to provide a substantial forum, as 'in NATO's general politics, civil defence is not considered to be a NATO issue area but rather something that each state does themselves ... NATO will not come to [our country] and build bomb shelters. That we have to do ourselves'.¹⁰⁰ Thus, 'our main effort would be that we develop this [NATO] resilience in a way that helps for defence plan to be executed' and as for national resilience, 'we don't want NATO to do something about that'.¹⁰¹

Yet NATO provides other formats that offer opportunities for resilience cooperation. One such is the informal cooperation format called the Northern Group¹⁰² 'that was created ... so that it would be possible to discuss security and defence issues with Sweden and Finland more regionally

⁹⁵ Interview EE2.

⁹⁶ Interview LV1.

⁹⁷ Interview LT1, also LT2.

⁹⁸ Interview IS1.

⁹⁹ Interview LV2.

¹⁰⁰ Interview EE3.

¹⁰¹ Interview LV1.

¹⁰² Comprising Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

as they were not NATO members.¹⁰³ In November 2022, the ministers of defence of this group issued a joint statement, announcing their commitment to regional resilience collaboration.¹⁰⁴

Closely related to this format, with 10 overlapping members,¹⁰⁵ is the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), led by the United Kingdom, where the political purpose ‘for the UK was about building and preserving close partnerships with some carefully selected northern European countries.’¹⁰⁶ Formally launched as a NATO initiative at the Wales Summit in 2014, as a reaction to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, the JEF is described as ‘a powerful security initiative that brings together the full range of military and inter-governmental capabilities from the United Kingdom and nine like-minded participants from northern Europe’¹⁰⁷ and is perceived by the Baltic respondents as ‘an excellent format for Nordic–Baltic cooperation ... because we are like-minded countries, understanding each other and sharing our let’s say values on threat perception and so on.’¹⁰⁸ While JEF partners were picked based on ‘shared historical ties, trust and a common “mind-set”... the key function of the JEF partnership would be to facilitate quicker political and bureaucratic decision-making in the non-British JEF capitals,’¹⁰⁹ which is considered by the Baltic states to be the key asset of this cooperative initiative. Within JEF projects, a good practice of collective problem-solving is established with clear mechanisms and structures that would possibly be beneficial also for resilience cooperation.¹¹⁰

Turning finally to the EU level, it can be concluded that EU cooperation contains a number of elements relevant to total defence and resilience, including cooperation on civil protection, security of supply, critical infrastructure, and defence matters. Moreover, since the launch of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy in 2009, the EU has come to occupy a central position in Baltic Sea cooperation not least through its funding opportunities, to a degree ordering the division of labour among regional institutions.¹¹¹

The EU thus links European-level and intra-regional processes. As one of our respondents explained, Haka cooperation is not only internally oriented but also ‘a way of strengthening our voice in the EU, there is no contradiction’ between EU and Nordic formats.¹¹² Finland not least has been very EU-focused, for instance regarding the financing of projects, and aimed during its EU Council presidency in 2019 to integrate the two levels of interaction.¹¹³ In the same vein, the EU can also work as an arena for trying out projects that originate in the Nordic–Baltic context.¹¹⁴

While not identical in orientation, the Nordic EU members have thus far considered the EU the natural platform for multilateral work on resilience and readily coordinate their efforts in this context.¹¹⁵ For Norway and even more so Iceland, the difference in institutional affiliation implies a more complex picture: as most EU directives and initiatives encompass the European Economic Area (EEA) in which Norway and Iceland are members, also these countries are effectively part

¹⁰³ Interview EE2.

¹⁰⁴ Swedish Government Office, ‘Joint statement by the Ministers of Defence of the Northern Group 23 November 2022’, available at: {<https://www.government.se/statements/2022/11/joint-statement-by-the-ministers-of-defence-of-the-northern-group-23-november-2022/>}.

¹⁰⁵ Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

¹⁰⁶ Håkon Lunde Saxi, ‘British and German initiatives for defence cooperation: The Joint Expeditionary Force and the Framework Nations Concept’, *Defence Studies*, 17:2 (2017), pp. 171–97.

¹⁰⁷ Latvian National Armed Forces, ‘Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) brochure’, available at: {https://www.mil.lv/sites/mil/files/document/JEF%20Brochure%20Apr_2022.pdf}. See also Lunde Saxi, ‘British and German initiatives for defence cooperation.’

¹⁰⁸ Interview LV2.

¹⁰⁹ Lunde Saxi, ‘British and German initiatives for defence cooperation.’

¹¹⁰ Interview LV2.

¹¹¹ Interview SE2.

¹¹² Interview SE1, also DK2.

¹¹³ Interview SE1.

¹¹⁴ Interview SE2.

¹¹⁵ Interview DK2; SE1.

of EU work on resilience, with NATO simultaneously being of central importance.¹¹⁶ In contrast especially to the Nordic EU members, the Baltic states are more concentrated on NATO than on the EU – ‘the basis of our security and defence is NATO’.¹¹⁷ This is a reflection of security-political orientation – as one Baltic respondent noted: ‘We don’t want this idea of [EU] strategic autonomy ... it’s basically weakening the transatlantic link, which is not good for us’.¹¹⁸

It can be concluded that in the Nordic context, different agreements with different designs (ranging from bilateral to trilateral and multilateral frameworks) illustrate the growing importance of resilience among the Nordic states. The different forms also reveal a rather loose character of cooperation, allowing different countries to progress at different paces, but possibly also illustrating limitations in shared security culture. Intra-Baltic cooperation is formalised to a limited degree, but informal relations are functioning well. Specific Nordic–Baltic cooperation on matters related to total defence and resilience is largely absent, in part because of the inclination on the side of the Nordic countries to develop intra-Nordic cooperation further before extending it to the Baltics. But fundamentally it reflects the central importance of European and transatlantic frameworks for Nordic–Baltic security. Noting that, it should be added that there are some differences in emphasis regarding the roles of the EU and NATO among the countries of the region. It remains to be seen what the implications will be of all five Nordic countries being NATO members, both in terms of the relative emphasis on the EU and NATO, respectively, and as regards a possible Nordic grouping within NATO, which could in turn potentially reinforce – or create tensions with – the Baltic states.

A shared security culture?

What can be concluded from the discussion above is that the countries of the region engage in quite a complex, multilayered structure of cooperation. Against this background, we now proceed to probe to what extent there exists a shared security culture among the Nordic and Baltic states. Revisiting our analytical framework, we structure our analysis under the themes of threat perceptions, identity, and interaction preferences.

Threat perceptions

Contemporary threat perceptions among the Nordic and Baltic states are similar, not least after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. From the Baltic side, the feeling is that while the Nordics are changing their views now, the approach of the three Baltic states has always remained the same – Russia has always been and remains the main existential threat to these countries.¹¹⁹ The same applies to Finland and Sweden, although in different strategic settings. However, it is important to note that also for Norway, the threat from Russia has always been high on the agenda due to their shared border. Yet this has been geographically limited to the High North and therefore its focus and preconditions differ from those of the Baltics and Finland. Furthermore, Norway has relied on its own resources in this matter and, in contrast to the Baltic states, has not been dependent on having a US presence and allied bases on the ground.¹²⁰ Again, the same goes for Finland and Sweden. As mentioned before, in Denmark the threat perception differs from other Nordic–Baltic states as it does not share a historical threat nor a border with Russia, and thus the likelihood of a war is assessed to be low. Therefore, Danish priorities in terms of resilience differ too.¹²¹

Adding to this, the Baltic states moved rapidly towards NATO membership, while Finland and Sweden were more hesitant up until 2022. The Russian invasion of Ukraine seems to have united the Nordic–Baltic group, moving towards greater convergence.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Interview NO2.

¹¹⁷ Interview LT2; also EE2; LV3.

¹¹⁸ Interview LV1.

¹¹⁹ Interview LT1.

¹²⁰ Interview NO2.

¹²¹ Interview DK1, DK2.

¹²² Interview SE1; IS1, IS2; see also Brommesson, Ekengren, and Michalski, ‘From variation to convergence’.

Identity

For our purposes, the most relevant aspects of identity are history and geography. Regarding the historical aspect, the central dimension is that of the Baltic Soviet heritage, which to this day influences societal resilience in terms of low civil engagement in defence matters as well as the public's attitude towards the government.¹²³ Furthermore, the historical experience of Soviet occupation in the Baltic states is fresh in the memory, and thus an imminent Russian threat to their sovereignty has been the basis of their defence policy since the regaining of independence in 1991. This predicament, however, has not always been fully grasped by the Nordic states, leading to diverging political approaches towards Russia. In this context, it is relevant to take note of the variation (at least before Russia's invasion) in terms of the willingness of people in the region to defend their own country. The latest wave of the World Values Survey (2017–22) shows that the populations of the Nordic countries are generally substantially more willing to defend their country than the populations of the Baltic states.¹²⁴

As for the importance of geography, one of our respondents noted:

if you put geography into the equation as well then you see that the we will have different approaches to problems. Talking about the view on Russia – I'm pretty sure that's different between at least Norway, Finland, Sweden and the Baltic countries. I even think the Baltic countries don't look at Russia the same way. That builds on history and it builds on geography. Hence, there is a Baltic problem set and there is a Scandinavian peninsula problem set that form the security approaches of individual nations.¹²⁵

All five Nordic states have an interest in the High North, meaning the Baltic is not the only prioritised area. For Denmark, Iceland, and Norway, the High North is likely to be of higher relevance and priority,¹²⁶ while for the Baltic states, the Baltic Sea region is for obvious reasons key to their defence and survival.¹²⁷ One respondent noted:

Sweden and Finland are Baltic Sea oriented and Norway and Denmark and Iceland are open sea nations, maritime oriented, and have much the same perspective. But we know now that all the Nordic nations are very heavily looking at the transatlantic lines of communication and the importance of reinforcements into the region that will come across the North Atlantic, which is why there are similarities in Nordic approaches while the Baltic nations are more focused on the land through central Europe.¹²⁸

Geography plays a role also among the Baltic three, where Lithuania stands out – while the other two Baltic states look at the Nordics for support and cooperation, for Lithuania,

Poland is very important. The most important [due to] their capacity, size, and their geographical location. They are the southern flank of our region. So they cover that side and they're closing up Kaliningrad and closing up Belarusian borders. And let's not forget the Polish side is an access to our land corridor.¹²⁹

¹²³ Interview LV1.

¹²⁴ In Norway, 87.6% of respondents say that they are willing to defend their country against an armed attack; the corresponding figure for Sweden is 80.5%, Finland 74.8%, Denmark 74.6%, and Iceland 53.7%. In the Baltic context, the figure for Estonia is 61.3%, substantially higher than Latvia's 50.4% and Lithuania's 32.8%. The gap between the Nordics and the Baltics may be narrowing, however, as a recent poll in Estonia has shown, in which 81% of respondents consider it necessary to militarily defend their country ('Poll: Estonian population more willing than ever to defend country', available at { <https://news.err.ee/1608664810/poll-estonian-population-more-willing-than-ever-to-defend-country>}).

¹²⁵ Interview NO2.

¹²⁶ Interview LT1.

¹²⁷ Interview EE2; FI2.

¹²⁸ Interview NO2.

¹²⁹ Interview LT1.

Geography also matters in terms of shared borders not only for threat perceptions and having different approaches to these problems, but also in terms of the necessity to cooperate and the potential gains from cooperation.¹³⁰ For instance, the trilateral cooperation between Norway, Sweden, and Finland is especially strong because of the need to cross borders and ‘the potential to make plans together that solve geographical challenges and are cost beneficial to all’.¹³¹ Not to mention, there is also a historical, to this day somewhat secret, cooperation that was established during the Cold War between Sweden and Norway that is being built on even now.¹³² Also in Finland, the historical roots and the high degree of informal cooperation over time have made this form of cooperation easy to develop and build on.¹³³

Interaction preferences

There is constant albeit varying interaction taking place among the Nordic and Baltic states in the area of total defence and resilience. Over the last decade and a half, the Nordic countries have developed bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral cooperation schemes of both a military and a civilian nature, notably in the form of NORDEFECO and the Haga process. The Baltic states have not to the same degree developed joint institutions, but as our analysis shows, the three countries have ongoing practical cooperation of more informal kind. Notably, Nordic–Baltic cooperation is limited beyond the NB8 format – whereas both NORDEFECO and Haga have ambitions to extend to the Baltics, this has not materialised. Instead, Nordic–Baltic cooperation primarily takes place in European-level/transatlantic formats, notably the EU and NATO, but also the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Northern Group, and JEF.

Interestingly, there is significant variation in perspectives on the role of the EU and NATO. For example, while Finland and Sweden have been more positive towards the EU’s defence ambitions, at least in the past, the Baltic countries have remained

sceptical about EU’s defence. And we’ve been always very cautious about the new initiatives coming from the EU, especially after the UK left ... we see big strategic problems there behind French ambitions ... basically weakening the transatlantic link, which is not good for us.¹³⁴

This scepticism extends to resilience issues as well, as one respondent explained, ‘in the EU, of course, they are doing and drafting some crisis plans and procedures and so on, but we don’t feel these practical benefits from that’.¹³⁵ Conversely, perspectives on (the relevance and potential contribution of) NATO vary, not only between the Nordic and Baltic groups of countries, but also within the Nordic context.

Again, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine proves important – the motivation for more regional cooperation is perceived to be changing currently:

Now the Nordics are more interested in cooperation with Baltic countries ... but I remember that some years ago on Nordic–Baltic agenda we had topics like veteran policy, gender balance and not really discussing security issues or common security. But I think it has changed with this and JEF projects a lot and then there is the annexation of Crimea and of course now is Russian invasion in Ukraine. So, they see now that we understand Russia and trust much more the Baltics than before. Because I think before that it was like they [Baltic countries] were panickers making this noise about Russia in every kind of form and forum.¹³⁶

¹³⁰Interview NO2.

¹³¹Interview NO2.

¹³²Interview NO2.

¹³³Interview FI2, FI3.

¹³⁴Interview LV1

¹³⁵Interview LV2.

¹³⁶Interview LV2; see also Jana Wrangé and Rikard Bengtsson, ‘Internal and external perceptions of small state security: The case of Estonia’, *European Security*, 28:4 (2019), pp. 449–72.

In conclusion, the hard lessons learned from Ukraine, and with that the converging security policies regarding NATO membership, have undoubtedly brought the Nordic–Baltic countries closer together. Although there has been some hesitation on the Baltic side, we can from 2022 see more common ground and increased opportunities for interaction and joint learning that could arguably provide the Nordic–Baltic states with fertile ground for a shared security culture. Even more importantly, a shared broad conceptualisation of security, although also featuring some different nuances, also makes a shared security culture a credible prospect. At the same time, there are still differences in (the intensity of) threat perceptions, and the geographic outlooks of the different countries are somewhat different. In addition, preferences for the level and type of interaction vary within the group. Our conclusion is therefore that while the conditions for a shared security culture have improved lately, there is still some way to go before we can talk of a deep shared security culture.

Concluding remarks: Towards a shared security culture based on total defence?

We started out this study with two aims – to analyse conceptualisations of total defence and resilience among the Nordic and Baltic countries in a comparative perspective, and to inquire into existing and prospective regional cooperation in this field – in order to address our research question, concerning to what degree there exists a shared security culture, expressed through common threat perceptions, identities, and interaction patterns.

In relation to our first aim, we can conclude that the Nordic–Baltic group in general has moved towards an increasing degree of convergence regarding conceptualisations of resilience and total defence. One important explanation for this uncovered in our analysis is ideational diffusion from not least Finland and Sweden to the Baltic states. Still, our empirical analysis has revealed remaining differences in relation to the concepts, both regarding the relevance of total defence and resilience as such, but also the fundamental meaning of the concepts. We have also pointed out varying meanings of the concepts within the Nordic group, although this variation has decreased lately.

With regard to our second aim, our analysis has revealed a growing importance of different forms of intra-Nordic cooperation on issues relating to resilience. But we have also showed how this cooperation has proceeded in various forms, from a close bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden, which expanded into a trilateral form of cooperation including Norway, to looser forms of all-Nordic cooperation. When we turn to intra-Baltic cooperation, we find less formalised interactions, although the degree of shared understandings and informal relations is still considerable. With variation in the forms of cooperation within and among the Nordic and the Baltic groups, respectively, it is not surprising that the more ambitious step of formalised Nordic–Baltic cooperation is more or less absent, especially in light of multilateral cooperation in European and transatlantic forums.

Returning to our research question on the degree of shared security culture, we do find elements of a shared security culture in the group, a reflection of similar threat perceptions, not least after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These states share common Western values, placing institutions such as the EU and NATO at the heart of their security. This Western identity has been strengthened after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as seen in the Finnish and Swedish move towards NATO membership and the Danish abolishment of the opt-out from the EU's common foreign and security policy. The continuous albeit varying interactions taking place among the states generate learning processes that have shaped and continue to shape shared norms, practices, and structures of their total defence apparatuses, in turn progressing towards a deeper shared security culture.

Putting this general observation about a degree of shared security culture into perspective, it is to be noted that two groups of countries stand out in the region. One is the three Baltic states, primarily based on their Soviet heritage. The other is the group of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, which share the most similarities in their bureaucratic models, geography, and historical traditions within total defence. The three have shown real commitment to cooperation and direct attention to

both state and societal resilience, enabling them to move further towards a shared security culture. Indeed, the current trajectory for a shared security culture leans towards a ‘Nordic three’ rather than a ‘Nordic–Baltic eight’.

In conclusion, it is obvious that further cooperation in total defence is needed and desired – for small states, dependencies matter. No one has all the expertise or resources needed, and crises are transboundary. Finland’s and Sweden’s entry into NATO is conducive to further Nordic–Baltic total defence cooperation and is in turn relevant for a deeper shared security culture,¹³⁷ but whether such cooperation is best served by strengthened regional forums or integrated into NATO and EU structures is an open question.

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Appendix 1. Interview guide

1. Conceptualisations and operationalisations of resilience among the Nordic and Baltic countries in a comparative perspective

How would you characterize the security approach of your country, encompassing military as well as non-military elements? How has the approach changed since the end of the Cold War/independence? What conceptualisations of security and defence underlie or inform national security policy?

From your perspective, what is a resilient society and how can resilience be enhanced? What are the major challenges to (becoming) a resilient society? In your country, how is recovery from severe societal challenges (‘bouncing back’) ensured? From an organisational perspective, which are the major national actors in this area?

2. Existing and prospective regional cooperation regarding resilience and total defence

Could you please briefly describe the current state of cooperation among Nordic and Baltic countries regarding resilience and total defence? Which different issues are covered, what different forms of interaction can be found? What is the dynamic of cooperation for instance in terms of leadership? Is everyone equally interested in pursuing regional cooperation in this area?

Against this background, what would in your opinion be needed in terms of areas and forms of interaction, and why? Is this realistically achievable? What are the major obstacles to further cooperation?

Looking beyond the Nordic–Baltic group of countries, what roles does the EU play for the development of Nordic–Baltic cooperation concerning resilience? Security and defence? What about NATO – how do you view its roles in these policy areas?

3. Potential existence of a common security culture, expressed through shared norms and identities underlying security cooperation.

To what extent would you say that there exists a common security culture among the Nordic and Baltic countries? What are the main dimensions/drivers of this pattern?

How, if at all, has the Ukraine war influenced security perceptions of the Nordic–Baltic countries? How, if at all, has the war impacted prospects for Nordic–Baltic cooperation?

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¹³⁷For a similar argument see Katherine Kjellström Elgin and Alexander Lanoszka, ‘Sweden, Finland, and the meaning of alliance membership’, *Texas National Security Review*, 6:2 (2023), pp. 33–56.

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