
18. The will to defend: a Nordic divide over security and defence policy

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I. Introduction

The five Nordic countries have made different choices as to where to look for their security. Denmark, Iceland and Norway are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Finland and Sweden participate in the European Security and Defence Policy, while Denmark has an opt-out from this area of European Union activity. Differences in Nordic security policy are, however, not only institutional. There is a deeper divide related to national identity and the ‘will to defend’.

This chapter focuses on the difference between Finland on the one hand and the three Scandinavian countries—Denmark, Norway and Sweden—on the other. Three dimensions are considered in this context: the perceptions of threat, the role of conscription in the armed forces and the way in which ‘help from others’ forms part of the national security policy. The gap between Finland and the three other countries is seen as a result not only of geography and history but also of modern identity construction.

Section II of the chapter considers the definition and measurement of the ‘will to defend’ in the Nordic countries. The role of conscription is assessed in section III while the different threat perceptions and policies on territorial defence are discussed in section IV. The relationship between the Finnish ‘will to defend’ and the ESDP in the future is explored in section V, and conclusions are presented in section VI.

II. The will to defend: what it is and how it is measured

According to the Swedish National Board for Psychological Defence, the will to defend is: (a) a characteristic of the individual; and (b) represents a mental state of support for the total defence of the country.¹ It is an individual’s state of mind during peacetime, as opposed to the will to fight, which: (a) is a phenom-

¹ Swedish National Board for Psychological Defence, *Försvarsvilja 2000* [The will to defend 2000] (Styrelsen för Psykologiskt Försvar: Stockholm, 1996); and Alanen, P. ‘Puolustustahto: ja miten se mitataan’ [The will to defend: and how it is measured], *Sotilasaikakauslehti*, vol. 72, no. 744 (1997), pp. 52–57. A distinction may be made between the will to defend and the necessary spiritual strength, ‘the spirit to defend’. For detailed definitions see Huhtinen, A.-M. and Sinkko, R., *Maanpuolustustahto tutkimuskohteena: kylmasta sodasta informaatiootaan* [The will to defend as a subject of research: from cold war to information warfare] (Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu: Helsinki, 2004).

enon related to a group, community or society; and (b) represents an attitude of or capacity for standing against threats of violence.

The will to defend in the Nordic countries is measured regularly in surveys. In Denmark these surveys are carried out by the Defence Academy; in Finland by the Advisory Board for Defence Information, a permanent parliamentary committee; in Norway on behalf of Folk og Forsvar, an association of defence-related organizations; and in Sweden by the National Board for Psychological Defence.²

Unfortunately, the questions asked in the four countries differ. In Finland and Sweden the interviewees are asked whether they would be 'willing to defend their country by weapons in all situations, even when the outcome is uncertain'. In Denmark the will to defend is measured as an index based on eight questions. These reflect very different aspects such as the role of defence in maintaining peace in Denmark, in keeping Denmark independent and in giving Denmark a voice internationally. The question closest to the Finnish and Swedish question asks 'whether an attack against Denmark should be resisted with weapons'. The question asked in Norway is a very general one: 'Do we need a military defence in the present situation?'

Given the general nature of the question, 88 per cent of Norwegian respondents answered 'Yes' in February 2005.³ The answers to the question of whether one's country should be defended by weapons vary. In Denmark in 2002, 65 per cent of respondents were willing to resist an attack with weapons.⁴ In Sweden in 2004, when asked whether they would defend their country with weapons, even if the result were uncertain, 50 per cent said yes; 26 per cent were more hesitant and answered 'Probably yes'.⁵ In Finland in 2004, 80 per cent support resistance by weapons, even with an unknown outcome.⁶

The will to defend is by no means constant. In Finland in 1970, only 42 per cent said that they were willing to defend with weapons, while 51 per cent said that they were not.⁷ In Denmark, the total index for the will to defend rose from 3.8 in 1975 to 5.5 in 2002, out of a maximum index of 10.⁸

² Kousgaard, E., 'Befolkningens forsvarsvilje maj 2000–oktober 2002' [The population's will to defend, May 2000–October 2002], Institut for Militærpsykologi, Forsvarsakademiet, Copenhagen, Jan. 2003, URL <<http://www.fak.dk/>>; Finnish Advisory Board for Defence Information, Suomalaisten mielipiteitä ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikasta, maanpuolustuksesta ja turvallisuudesta [Finnish views on foreign and security policy, national defence and security], Ministry of Defence, Helsinki, 2004, URL <http://www.defmin.fi/print_page.phtml?menu_id=175&lang=1&chapter_id=1785>; Folk og Forsvar, 'Holdninger til forsvaret' [Attitudes to defence], Oslo, 2 Feb. 2005, URL <http://www.folkogforsvar.no/Meningsmalinger/Meningsmalinger_/>; and Swedish National Board for Psychological Defence, *Opinion 2004* (Styrelsen för Psykologiskt Försvar: Stockholm, 2004), URL <<http://www.psydef.se/reports/default.asp?FileID=80>>. The actual surveys may be carried out by other organizations; e.g., in Denmark by Danish Statistics and in Norway by the firm ACNielsen.

³ Folk og Forsvar (note 2), p. 7.

⁴ Kousgaard (note 2), p. 4.

⁵ Swedish National Board for Psychological Defence (note 2), p. 104.

⁶ Finnish Advisory Board for Defence Information (note 2), kuvio 20, p. 28. See also Alanen (note 1), p. 53.

⁷ Finnish Advisory Board for Defence Information (note 2), kuvio 20, p. 28.

⁸ Kousgaard (note 2), p. 3.

As reflected in the above results, defence is seen positively in all four Nordic countries. This extends to a will to defend with weapons by the majority of those asked. These results can be viewed in a European context. In a review of public opinion on European defence, Philippe Manigart compared how much trust the different nations have in their own armies.⁹ Finland had the highest score: 91 per cent expressed trust in the Finnish Army. The equivalent figure was 72 per cent in Sweden and 66 per cent in Denmark. The European average was 71 per cent.

III. The role of conscription

The will to defend is closely related to conscription, using ‘citizens in arms’, rather than trusting the task of defence to a professional army. The degree of conscription—the percentage of the (male) age group drafted—is consequently an indicator of how the will to defend is maintained in a country. Conscription levels and the role of conscription in the national identity are therefore important dimensions of the will to defend.

All four Nordic countries base their defence on conscription. However, in Denmark, Norway and Sweden recent defence reforms have radically changed the role of conscription: it is now seen as a recruitment arena for professional soldiers. Consequently, the percentage of an age group actually drafted has been reduced dramatically. The opposite is true in Finland. There no reduction has been proposed in the level of conscription, which is currently above 80 per cent. The Finnish Government’s report *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004*, discussed in the Finnish Parliament in the autumn of 2004, explicitly stated as a starting point that general conscription would be maintained at this high level.¹⁰

The defence reform in Norway in 2000, at the same time as stressing the importance of conscription in the relationship between society and the armed forces, proposed a modern and ‘flexible’ selective conscription. Around 40 per cent of an age group goes through armed service in Norway. In Sweden a defence reform is currently being carried out.¹¹ Conscription is to be retained, even though only a small proportion of an age group is expected to be drafted. Currently, Sweden’s plans are that less than 20 per cent will participate in armed service. In addition, a more voluntary form of recruitment has been envisioned. Traditionally, the Danish armed forces have been the most professionalized of the Nordic countries. Only around 20 per cent of each age group enters the armed services. The length of compulsory in Denmark service has now been reduced from 10 months to 4.

⁹ Manigart, P., ‘Public opinion and European defence: results of a European opinion survey’, Paper presented at the International Symposium on Public Opinion and Defence, Brussels, 3–4 Apr. 2001, p. 10.

¹⁰ Finnish Prime Minister’s Office, *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004*, Government Report no. 6/2004 (Prime Minister’s Office: Helsinki, 2004), URL <<http://www.vnk.fi/vn/liston/vnk.lsp?r=88862&k=en>>.

¹¹ See chapter 7 in this volume.

In Finland the high level of conscription enjoys the full support of the population. The current Finnish model of 80 per cent general (male) conscription is supported by 79 per cent of citizens.¹² In comparison, in 2004 only 36 per cent of Swedes supported general conscription (down from 45 per cent in 2003), while 31 per cent considered a professional army to be the best solution (up from 21 per cent) and 22 per cent considered that armed service should be voluntary (unchanged).¹³ In Finland less than 10 per cent support a reduction in the level of conscription and less than 10 per cent support a move towards a more professional army. It is interesting to note that the Danish and Norwegian surveys did not include questions about conscription.

IV. Threats and territorial defence

The European Union's security doctrine defines a number of the threats to Europe, at the same time pointing out that Europe has never been so stable, wealthy and secure as it is today.¹⁴ The current threats are terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states and organized crime. A massive attack on the EU's borders is considered highly unlikely. Russia is seen as a strategic partner, not an enemy.

This general European outlook is also reflected in the security and defence policies of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Russia is no longer seen as a threat in any of these countries and all three consider a large-scale attack highly unlikely. The position of Sweden, for example, is that, should the threat of a large-scale attack re-emerge in the future, signs will be seen in advance and there will be ample time to prepare for the new situation.

Traditional territorial defence is thus being pushed strongly into the background in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The new direction of attention and effort is both towards internal security, given the new threats of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and crime, and towards international interventions reflecting the global nature of these new threats. All three countries have consequently carried out institutional reforms to redefine the relationship between internal and external security.

The Danish Emergency Management Administration has moved to the country's Ministry of Defence with the explicit goal of merging internal and external security.¹⁵ In Norway internal security is coordinated by the Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning in the Department of Justice. A new National Security Directorate has been established in the Department of Defence. The Swedish Emergency Management Agency is already under the

¹² Laitinen, K. and Nokkala, A., *Suomalainen asevelvollisuus historiaa, haasteita ja tulevaisuutta* [Finnish conscription: history, challenges and future] (Puolustusministeriö: Helsinki, 2005), URL <http://www.defmin.fi/chapter_images/394_Laitinen-Nokkala.pdf>.

¹³ Swedish National Board for Psychological Defence (note 2), tabell 43, p. 87.

¹⁴ Council of the European Union, 'A secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy', Brussels, 12 Dec. 2003, URL <http://ue.eu.int/cms3_fo/showPage.ASP?id=266>.

¹⁵ See chapter 16 in this volume.

Ministry of Defence, although with a sharper distinction between internal and external security than is the case in Denmark. The current Swedish defence reforms have had the expressed objective of transferring resources from external to internal security, in particular to the police forces.

In Finland territorial defence is still the assigned role of the armed forces. Although the Finnish Government's report *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004* discusses the new threats, it draws no conclusions for the organization and tasks of the defence forces.¹⁶ Defence planning is still based on three possible threats: regional crisis, military pressure and military attack. The Russian threat is still on the agenda, although not explicitly. History, geography and a long land border with the neighbour to the east are still factors that strongly affect Finnish security and defence policy in spite of the general rhetoric about the new threats.

To some extent territorial defence has also been questioned in Finland. Recent discussion has taken place in the Finnish policy community and Parliament over whether only strategic positions should be defended rather than the whole territory. In its report on the *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004*, the parliament's Defence Committee explicitly underlines the need to defend the whole country.¹⁷ The need for territorial defence also explains the high level of conscription. In the past a mobilized force of 450 000 men was seen as necessary for territorial defence. As a result of the new defence policy this level will be reduced to 350 000 men.¹⁸ By way of comparison, Sweden has 262 000 men in reserve.¹⁹

A concrete indication of the importance of territorial defence are the responses to the question of anti-personnel mines. Denmark, Norway and Sweden have ratified the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mines Convention and have agreed to remove anti-personnel mines from their arsenals.²⁰ In Finland a new round of intensive debate took place during 2004 on whether and when to sign the convention. Although earlier defence agreements have required that Finland sign in 2006, the *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004* states that Finland will accede only in 2012.²¹ All landmines would be destroyed by 2016, by which time the army will have had enough time to compensate for the loss in fighting power. For this purpose an additional €200 million will be allocated to the defence forces in 2009–16.²²

¹⁶ Finnish Prime Minister's Office (note 10).

¹⁷ Finnish Parliament, Defence Committee, 'Government report: Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004', Helsinki, 16 Dec. 2004, URL <<http://www.eduskunta.fi/efakta/hakem/vk.htm>>, p. 21.

¹⁸ Finnish Prime Minister's Office (note 10), p. 116.

¹⁹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2004/2005* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004), p. 92.

²⁰ The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction was opened for signature in Dec. 1997 and came into effect on 1 Mar. 1999; the text is available at URL <<http://www.un.org/millennium/law/xxvi-22.htm>>.

²¹ Finnish Prime Minister's Office (note 10), p. 87.

²² Finnish Prime Minister's Office (note 10), p. 130.

| | | The national will to defend in Finland | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| | | Stronger | Weaker |
| European Security and Defence Policy | Gains in strength | Conflict situation: what differences with the rest of the European Union are possible? International pressure and national resistance | European identity and security guarantees |
| | Weakens (or is not developed further) | National security and defence policy | Problem situation: how can the safety of citizens be guaranteed? Alternatives: stronger ESDP; stronger will to defend; security community; NATO membership |

Figure 18.1. The basis of Finnish security and defence policy in relation to the European Security and Defence Policy and the national will to defend

V. The Finnish will to defend and the European Security and Defence Policy

The defence solutions of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, such as the low level of conscription and the abandoning of the concept of territorial defence, imply that in case of attack help from others is expected. For Denmark and Norway this help is institutionalized by NATO's Article 5 collective defence guarantee.²³ For Finland and Sweden, the ESDP provides security guarantees, but without military strength: these guarantees are a political declaration of will. While in Sweden this seems to be sufficient in the case of unexpected attacks, this is not the case in Finland.

Although, for Finland, joining the European Union was to a significant and conscious degree a question of security, membership has not reduced the Finns' will to defend themselves. On the contrary, the Finns believe in their own army and not necessarily in European solutions. To quote the *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2004*: 'Finland will participate fully in the development and implementation of the Union's common security and defence policy. The

²³ This refers to Article 5 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty (Treaty of Washington), the text of which is available at URL <<http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/treaty.htm>>.

Union's coherence, solidarity, and common commitments in this area, too, will serve to enhance Finland's security.²⁴ However,

Finland maintains and develops its defence capability as a militarily non-allied state and monitors the changes in its security environment. The aim of a credible national defence capability is to prevent security threats against Finnish territory. Finland must be able to guarantee the country's independent capability and secure the functioning of a democratic society under all circumstances.²⁵

The discourse states that 'we will defend ourselves'. The historical understanding has been that 'others will not help us', and this has now been extended to the future. Finland does see its place in European Union security, but it has its own special view of Finnish security and defence. The cornerstones of this view are the perceived Russian threat, the concept of territorial defence and a high level of general conscription. Together, these form the foundation of the will to defend, a characteristic of the Finnish state of mind and even of Finnish national identity.²⁶

Recently, Kari Laitinen and Arto Nokkala studied the Finnish model of conscription both in a historical perspective and in the context of current changes in Europe. Their conclusion was that the Finnish military political culture is under pressure owing to the professionalization of European armed forces, the focus on international interventions, technological development in the armed forces and even the question of how the younger generation in Finland will view conscription. On the other hand, the authors conclude that: 'The military political culture in Finland seems to be particularly unified with respect to territorial defence. The close relations between the armed forces and society and the strength of society's believe in a citizens' army combined with uncertainties related to Russia are factors maintaining it.'²⁷

To understand what this might mean for the future, the relationship between the ESDP and the 'will to defend' needs to be examined. This is done graphically in figure 18.1. One dimension represents the will to defend, seen as becoming either stronger or weaker. The second dimension is the ESDP, which also either gathers strength or weakens (or is not developed further; e.g., if the Constitutional Treaty is abandoned).

Two of the possible combinations seem to be unproblematic. The first is the case where the will to defend in Finland becomes weaker and the ESDP gains in strength. This would mean that European identity and security guarantees will become the basis of Finnish security and defence policy. The second case is where the will to defend either remains the same or gains in strength while

²⁴ Finnish Prime Minister's Office (note 10), p. 79.

²⁵ Finnish Prime Minister's Office (note 10), p. 87.

²⁶ See, e.g., Harle, V. with Moision, S., *Missä on Suomi? Kansallisen identiteettipolitiikan historia ja geopolitiikka* [Where is Finland? The history of national identity and geopolitics] (Vastapaino: Tampere, 2000); and Laitinen and Nokkala (note 12).

²⁷ Laitinen and Nokkala (note 12), p. 218 (author's translation).

the ESDP weakens. In this case national defence will be the foundation of Finnish security.

A conflict situation arises in the case where the will to defend remains strong or becomes even stronger and the ESDP evolves and gains in strength. In this case the question is the extent to which an EU member state, even a border country such as Finland, can differ in relation to European security and defence policy. A stronger ESDP will put additional pressures on conscription, on territorial defence and on the harmonization of threat perceptions.

The fourth alternative is where both the ESDP and the will to defend become weaker. This combination is unlikely, as the Finnish will to defend will probably become weaker only as a result of a stronger ESDP. However, in this scenario the question is how to guarantee the security of the citizens. Obvious solutions are to try to strengthen either the will to defend or the ESDP. A further solution is to look at the European Union as a peace project, where a security community is created through economic, political and cultural ties, without a military dimension. An alternative to this would be to apply for NATO membership and to be included in NATO's collective defence.

VI. Conclusions

The Nordic countries have a positive attitude towards defence. A large majority of the population is even willing to defend their country with weapons in case of attack. However, there is a great Nordic divide in defence and security policy. In recent Danish, Norwegian and Swedish reforms, conscription has been increasingly seen not as a cornerstone of defence but rather as a recruitment arena for professional soldiers. This is a diametrically opposite to the Finnish position, in which conscription is the basis of territorial defence. The decrease of conscription levels to 20 per cent in Denmark and Sweden indicates a focus that is shifting from national defence to international interventions and professionalization of the armies. While Finland also supports international interventions, this is motivated by the support they offer for the defence of Finland, by making the country appear more trustworthy.

The security and defence policy solutions in the Nordic countries will thus continue to be very different unless strong pressure for harmonization is exerted. The Finnish 'will to defend'—as a state of mind with strong popular support that forms an important part of national identity—may prove more difficult to change than if it were 'only' a question of security and defence. A critical question is, of course, how the relationship between the European Union and Russia evolves. If a strategic partnership is developed together with strong economic ties, it will be incongruent for an EU member state to remain on guard against a perceived Russian threat. However, current problems in the EU–Russia partnership support the maintenance of such a threat perception.