

**Contemporary national and collective defence in Europe:
Perspectives from Finland and the EU**

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The basics of Finland's national defence policy have remained relatively unchanged since the Cold War. These basics have been influenced especially by the country's geography and history. With regards to the former, Finland is a somewhat isolated country in the North-East corner of Europe that shares a long land border with Russia. With regards to the latter, Finnish defence policy—and national identity more broadly—has been shaped heavily by the wars it fought against the Soviet Union during World War II (i.e. the 1939-1940 Winter War and the 1941-1944 Continuation War) and the period of neutrality during the Cold War.

Since the Cold War, the aim of Finland's defence policy has been to ensure that any aggression against the country would be so costly that a potential aggressor would think twice before attacking it. During the Cold War, this meant convincing the Soviet Union of Finland's autonomous ability to resist possible third-country efforts to use its territory as a staging ground for an attack against the Soviet Union itself so that Moscow would not find an excuse to deploy forces on Finland's territory under the 1948 Finno-Soviet Treaty. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, this has meant maintaining a credible national defence so that Finland's sovereignty would be respected. To use a metaphor from the animal kingdom to describe Finland's approach to defence policy, even a bear might not want to stick its claw into a hornets' nest in order to get honey if it knows that it will get stung in the process.

Another reason why the basics of Finland's national defence policy have not gone through a significant change is that the events of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union did not disprove the country's Cold War-era defence policy narratives. The Baltic states, for example, went through a fundamental defence political reorientation to align themselves firmly with the United States (US) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after they regained their national independence. In Finland, however, the policies of neutrality and non-alignment were seen as the reasons for why the country was able to preserve its national independence during the Cold War. Although Finland is no longer officially neutral, the old discourse on the benefits of military non-alignment continue to feature prominently in Finnish national defence debates to this day. This was partly why Finland joined the European Union (EU) in 1995 but has so far not applied for NATO membership. The country

feels that now is not the appropriate time to seek membership in the Alliance, although it maintains the option to do so at a later date.

Yet, the fact that Finland's Cold War-era defence policy narratives partially survived the collapse of the Soviet Union also meant that the country was somewhat immune to the defence political 'fads' of the 1990s and 2000s, such as prioritising international crisis management over territorial defence in national defence planning. The importance of maintaining a credible national defence policy focused on territorial defence was therefore never questioned in Finland. Furthermore, the country never abandoned conscription as its main military recruitment method. Although Finland has so far chosen to stay outside NATO, the country has developed close relationships with the Alliance and the US. An early demonstration of Finland's willingness to deepen its relations with the US in the area of defence was Helsinki's decision in 1992 to replace its fleet of Soviet manufactured MIG-21 jet fighters with American F-18 Hornets. Finland has also participated actively in international peacekeeping and crisis management operations, including in the framework of NATO.

Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region in 2014 forced many European countries to re-evaluate their post-Cold War national defence policies. The August 2008 Russo-Georgian War had already created similar pressures, but these were buried under the global financial crisis and the European debt crisis. The Crimea annexation also increased the prominence of defence political debates in the Finnish public sphere. Yet, the event also gave further validation to Finland's post-Cold War defence policy based on the maintenance of a credible national defence focused on territorial defence. To maintain the credibility of its national defence posture after the events of 2014, Finland has continued to modernise its capabilities and is currently in the process of undertaking two major capability acquisition programmes. These are the HX Fighter Program, which aims to replace Finland's aging fleet of F-18s with modern fighter jets, and Squadron 2020, which aims to replace seven aging naval vessels with modern corvettes. In addition, Finland has deepened its cooperation with partners such as the US and Sweden. The Finnish Defence Forces are also NATO standardised to the extent that it is often said that Finland is a NATO country without actually being a member. The country also changed its national legislation in 2017 to simplify the process of providing and receiving international assistance. This change was driven by a need to ensure that Finland

would be able to meet the solidarity and mutual assistance obligations of the EU's 2007 Lisbon Treaty.

Although the EU is not a military alliance, it has been developing a Common (formerly European) Security and Defence Policy since 1998. The development of CSDP was a response to the EU's failure to handle the wars of Yugoslav secession in the Balkans without the US. Since becoming operational in 2003, the EU has launched over 30 civilian missions and military operations in the framework of its CSDP. The mandates of these operations and missions have ranged from maintaining a safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina (i.e. Operation Althea) to deterring maritime pirates around the Horn of Africa (i.e. Operation Atalanta). However, the 'D' in CSDP (i.e. the defence dimension) has so far been rather silent. CSDP activities have dealt primarily with EU member states' second-order security concerns such as crisis management and stabilisation in sub-Saharan Africa. They have more touched traditional defence issues at best in a very indirect way, such as when CSDP operations have been protecting European vessels from maritime pirates (i.e. Atalanta) or seeking to deter human smugglers in the Mediterranean (i.e. Operation Sophia). For the vast majority of EU countries, NATO continues to be the bedrock on which their national defence policies are founded.

Yet, the EU has ambitions to develop its nascent defence dimension further. Article 42(2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states that CSDP 'shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy', which 'will lead to a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides.' The clearest expression of the EU's defence dimension is Article 42(7) TEU, the so-called mutual assistance clause. It states that 'If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.' It is based on Article V of the 1954 Modified Brussels Treaty of the old Western European Union (WEU), which was shut down as redundant in 2011 after the Lisbon Treaty had entered into force in 2009. Article 42(7) has so far been invoked only once. This took place after the November 2015 Paris terror attacks when France invoked it to request contributions from its EU partners to various national, CSDP and international operations so that France itself could focus on the fight against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terror group.

Given that Finland is a non-NATO EU country in the North-East corner of Europe, EU defence cooperation and Article 42(7) in particular have an oversized significance to it compared to other EU countries. In fact, Finland has become Article 42(7)'s strongest proponent in the EU and Helsinki often speaks of the importance of developing it further. Given that the majority of Finland's population is still against NATO membership, the development of Article 42(7) is seen as a less sensitive partial alternative to seeking security guarantees from the Alliance. Thus, the more credible Article 42(7) becomes, the better it is for Finland. Finland has also been keen to discuss the nature of the assistance the EU member states could expect to receive through Article 42(7) by organising scenario-based discussions during its Autumn 2019 EU Council Presidency. The usefulness of the lessons learned from France's 2015 invocation of Article 42(7) have limited value to Finland because Helsinki would not invoke the article to request contributions from its EU partners to international crisis management operations. It is generally thought that Article 42(7) is likely to be used mainly in hybrid scenarios that would fall below the threshold of NATO's Article 5, such as hybrid and cyber-attacks.

With regards to the future of European and Finnish defence policy, there has been a proliferation of various 'minilateral' or 'extra-organisation' (i.e. non-EU and non-NATO) structures for defence cooperation between European countries in recent years. Examples include France's European Intervention Initiative (EI2) and the United Kingdom's (UK's) Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). The emergence of such structures has been driven especially France's frustration towards CSDP following the sluggishness in which the EU responded to crises in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2013 and 2014 respectively, and the UK's expected departure from the EU due to Brexit. Thus, it is likely that the operational dimension of European defence cooperation will increasingly be conducted in the framework of these new structures, and that the EU will focus even more on conducting civilian capacity building missions and developing the European defence technological and industrial base through instruments such as the new European Defence Fund (EDF).

This proliferation of structures like EI2 and JEF creates new challenges for countries like Finland that have an interest in a strong and credible EU defence dimension. To hedge against the weakening of this dimension, Finland has decided to participate in both JEF and EI2. This is also a way for Helsinki to show solidarity towards Paris and London to improve the chances that it would receive solidarity from them in return, either through the EU

framework of outside of it, in a possible crisis situation. Finland, like many other countries in Europe, is conscious of the fact that it is challenging to make autonomous European defence cooperation credible without the involvement of the “big three” (i.e. France, Germany and the UK). Thus, given that it is likely to be politically difficult for post-Brexit British governments to be involved in CSDP for years to come, Finland has chosen the pragmatic path of increasing its security and defence cooperation with the UK outside the EU.

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