Enhancing US-Finnish and regional defence cooperation

An exploratory analysis

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<td>AI/ML</td>
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<td>ASW</td>
<td>Antisubmarine Warfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
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<td>DoD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
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<td>EI2</td>
<td>European Intervention Initiative</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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<td>EOP</td>
<td>Enhanced Opportunity Partner</td>
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

Geography, history and recent experience inform Finland’s security policy and defence posture. Sharing a 1,340-km (830-mile) border with Russia and having experienced three wars with its larger neighbour in the 20th century, Finland seeks to maintain strong territorial defences. It aims for cordial and practical relations with Russia, but Finnish officials hold no illusions about the current situation and Russia’s foreign-policy trajectory. Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and initiation of a conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, its rapid military modernisation and its malign activities directed at Western democracies have galvanised both the Finnish defence establishment, and efforts to strengthen regional defence cooperation.1

Finland has long pursued a comprehensive security strategy that brings together all government levers of power, as well as industry, civil society and the general population.2 Finnish defence, which forms an essential component of this broader security concept, integrates military instruments alongside other civil authorities and national capabilities.3 Given its geopolitical and historical context, Finland seeks to strike a balance between retaining sovereign defence capability and working closely with like-minded nations facing common security challenges.

To this end, Finland has adopted a two-pronged approach:

- On the one hand, Finland’s militarily nonaligned status means that it seeks to disincentivise or prevent aggression largely on its own.4 Here, the focus is on enhancing territorial defence and national preparedness, capabilities for crisis management and security of supply.5 The Finnish defence toolkit includes a small but highly capable active duty force, Europe’s largest reserve force and conscription programme, and a wartime mobilisation system that aims for the activation of 280,000 troops within 30 days.6 Notwithstanding its relatively small population and economy,  

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1 Finnish Government (2020); Szymański (2018).
3 Defence capability is recognised as one of Finland’s Seven Vital Functions, along with leadership; international and European Union (EU) activities; internal security; economy, infrastructure and security of supply; functional capacity of the population and services; and psychological resilience. Finnish MOD (2017).
4 Finnish official documents generally use the phrase ‘raise the threshold against any incidents and attacks’ in lieu of the more traditional ‘deterrence’ language found in some US or NATO doctrine and policy (Finnish Government, 2020), although the latest Government’s Defence Report (Finnish Government, 2021) employs both formulations.
6 Finnish Army (2020).
Finland compares favourably to most European defence establishments in terms of metrics such as the size of its armed forces and the quality of its equipment and infrastructure. Furthermore, in recent years Finland has taken steps to enhance its forces’ combat-readiness and emphasise the need to prepare for a limited-notice, high-end warfighting contingency. Finnish society not only supports investment in this robust military posture, but also actively participates in the nation’s comprehensive security concept. All government sectors and industry – down to the local level – emphasise resilience and routinely exercise their wartime roles and responsibilities.

On the other hand, Finnish leaders realise that their national security is directly linked to that of fellow European Union (EU) Member States and their partners from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Over the last decade or more, the Finnish government and defence establishment have gradually been integrated into a web of defence cooperation initiatives in the Nordic-Baltic region. Such bilateral, trilateral and multilateral security arrangements do not provide NATO-like collective security guarantees. They do, however, offer practical ways and means of peacetime cooperation, and the potential for political support and joint action in the event of a crisis or conflict. These links also enhance interoperability and mutual understanding of defence strategy, policy, plans and capabilities. Ensuring close ties – in particular with Sweden and the United States – makes it possible that Finland could receive, or provide, effective military support if and when needed. From the US and NATO perspective, Finland’s location, expertise, strategic outlook and substantial capabilities make it an important partner.

Despite recent advances in strengthening regional defence cooperation, questions remain as to Finland’s evolving role in the Nordic-Baltic region and what further steps can be taken in future. Most observers deem Finnish pursuit of NATO membership as unlikely in the current political context or without an unanticipated external shock. However, given developments in the regional security situation since 2014, a net assessment of how NATO integration would impact Finnish military requirements could inform any future decisions on this matter. In the interim, there are opportunities to ‘raise the threshold against incidents and attacks’ short of undertaking formal alliances or security obligations. The Finnish Ministry of Defence (MOD) thus asked RAND to provide an independent perspective on Finland’s defence posture, the transatlantic dimensions of Finnish security policy in the context of a potential crisis and conflict in the Nordic-Baltic region, and the dilemmas that the government and armed forces could face at the strategic

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7 The total wartime military force of 280,000 represents around 5 per cent of the total Finnish population, which is much higher than the equivalent figures for other EU member states or NATO partners. At the same time, the Finnish defence budget for 2019 was €3.1 billion, representing only 1.3 per cent of gross domestic product, though it is projected to reach 2.0 per cent in 2021–2023, given significant spending on a new fighter jet (HX Fighter programme) and multi-role, ice-breaking corvettes (Squadron 2020 programme), among other investments. For more on Finland’s mobilisation system and national resourcing, see for example, Nicholson et al. (2020).

8 Jonsson and Engvall (2018); Finnish Army (2020).

9 Salonius-Pasternak (2017).

10 Finland, like Sweden, is not a NATO ally, but is an Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP). Source: NATO (2020).

11 This study does not assess the benefits or risks of Finland’s potential membership in NATO, an important topic that is beyond the present scope.
and high operational levels. In particular, this study focuses on key challenges and opportunities to further develop bilateral cooperation with the United States.

This study’s principal conclusion is that defence cooperation can and should proceed at a slow yet steady pace, building on existing foundations and raising the level of ambition as political and resource constraints (primarily on the Finnish side) permit. A combination of initiatives at the strategic and operational levels could yield long-term dividends if pursued systematically and with due consideration for political sensitivities on all sides.¹²

1.2. Research approach

A transatlantic team of RAND researchers based in Washington DC and Cambridge, UK conducted this unclassified study between December 2020 and May 2021. The team undertook a review of publicly available strategy documents, defence agreements, news articles and academic literature on recent developments in the Nordic-Baltic region. The Finnish MOD also provided copies of speeches and presentations made by officials over the last several years at think-tanks and similar settings. Data collection also relied heavily on interviews with current or former civilian and military officials from Finland, the United States and other Nordic countries, as well as experts outside government. Most interviews were conducted on a non-attribution basis to facilitate candid discussions. An internal workshop was also organised to receive feedback on draft findings from RAND experts on topics such as the US posture in Europe, Russian military capabilities and security cooperation. Annex A provides further information about the study methodology.

Readers should bear three caveats in mind. First, this work pertains mainly to defence issues relating to the security of the Nordic-Baltic region and the challenge posed by Russia. Second, the study team considered a breadth of professional and national perspectives, but due in part to COVID-19-related travel limitations, it was impossible to discuss all relevant issues with all relevant parties in this round of research. For example, it was not possible to ascertain the full range of Norwegian and Swedish perspectives, nor others in Europe, based on the project’s limited scope. Third, since the Finnish MOD asked RAND to develop high-level options for eventual further analysis, this exploratory research does not make recommendations to take specific, implementable actions. Instead, the study’s main purpose is to provide independent evaluation of the Nordic-Baltic defence landscape and offer a framework for pursuing further analysis and action.

¹² Although this RAND report was completed in the summer of 2021, its insights remain compatible with the intent and trajectory of Finnish defence as described in the Government’s Defence Report released in September 2021.
1.3. Structure of the report

The remainder of this report presents key findings from this research:

- **Chapter 2** describes the current situation in the Nordic-Baltic region, Finland’s role and current fora for regional defence cooperation.

- **Chapter 3** outlines a series of strategic and high-level operational options for the Finnish MOD’s consideration, and further analysis and consultations with the United States and other close partners.

- **Chapter 4** offers brief final reflections from the study team.

- **Annex A** provides a more detailed description of the study methodology.

The high-level findings presented are intended to provide a conceptual framework and initial insights for follow-on analysis by governments and research organisations on both sides of the Atlantic, especially as regards concrete actions for weighing and implementing the proposed strategic policy options.
This chapter provides an overview of the strategic situation in Finland’s neighbourhood, along with the contributions that Finland makes to regional stability and defence, before outlining the existing mechanisms for cooperation with the United States, NATO and key European partners.

2. Context for regional defence cooperation

2.1. The situation in the Nordic-Baltic region

From Finland’s perspective, the strategic landscape in the Nordic-Baltic region is defined by the continuation of existing threats and the gradual emergence of new challenges. This context forms a complex strategic and operating environment marked by ‘an intense state of flux’.\(^\text{13}\)

Russia’s posture and behaviour – from ongoing military modernisation to increasing political repression at home – pose major concerns for Finnish policymakers and dominate the strategic agenda in the Nordic-Baltic region. Russia’s decision to annex Crimea and initiate a conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 served as a transformative moment in regional security, not only raising tensions between Russia and the West, but also incentivising closer regional defence cooperation. Despite past divergences, threat perceptions among Finland and some partners in the region have increasingly aligned and continue to evolve together. As the 2020 ‘Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy’ noted: ‘Russian operations in areas like Georgia, Ukraine and Syria show that the country has lowered its threshold to use military force’.\(^\text{14}\)

In addition, Russia’s violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, its continued development of a wide array of nuclear- and dual-capable systems, its increased reliance on nuclear weapons for defence and its doctrine of employing limited nuclear attacks for coercive purposes, have elicited a great deal of concern from Nordic and Baltic nations alike.\(^\text{15}\)

From a conventional military threat perspective, Finland’s strategic concerns include Russia’s growing footprint in the Arctic and its military posture on the Kola Peninsula and surrounding waters, a strategic stronghold that serves as Russia’s nuclear bastion.\(^\text{16}\) Lapland, the northernmost region of Finland, would be particularly vulnerable if Russia were to take decisive military action in a crisis to extend its defensive zone in the High North. The conflict in Ukraine has also drawn attention to Finland’s potential vulnerabilities.

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15 For a definitive account of nuclear deterrence and its impact on Nordic-Baltic security, see Michel (2017). On Russia’s nuclear doctrine and strategy, see Reach et al. (2021).
to hybrid threats, highlighting the need for strong national defences and wider resilience against both above- and sub-threshold forms of attack. Although it has a cohesive society, Finland – like others in the region – constantly monitors for malign activities, such as misinformation and political interference.

China stands out as a major emerging regional security challenge, though primarily in terms of its diplomatic, political, economic and soft security levers, as opposed to hard defence matters. Still, a growing debate within Finland is focused on the security implications of China’s foreign policy, particularly as its presence and ability to influence developments in the Nordic-Baltic region increases. For example, in addition to declaring itself a ‘near-Arctic state’, China has included Arctic sea lanes in its Polar Silk Road initiative, demonstrated an interest in enhancing its cold weather capabilities (e.g. through the construction of new icebreakers) and invested in Arctic infrastructure and natural resources. This mounting challenge from China, in addition to Russia’s assertiveness in the High North, comes at the same time as climate and environmental change and the increasing likelihood of competition over natural resources as a result.

Finnish and regional defence officials also recognise that emerging technologies play an increasingly important role in shaping the threat environment. Digitalisation and newer disruptive technologies – such as 5G telecommunications, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and cyber and space capabilities – represent not only significant opportunities for Finnish defence, but also sources of increasing competition among international actors and drivers of new threats and vulnerabilities. Finland has already taken steps to help shape the technology landscape – so far as the levers of a small nation allow – for example through promoting the global regulation of autonomous weapon systems.

In addition to these evolving threats and challenges, the context of regional stability and defence features new linkages across geographic areas and domains. Finnish officials increasingly view developments in the Baltic Sea theatre as directly linked to the wider High North. This loosely-defined region includes not only Northern Europe but also the North Atlantic, with shifts in the security situation of one part of the broader region impacting the others. Though Finland has long adopted a comprehensive security approach, the threats that Finland faces have evolved from traditional military ones into newer and morphing forms – including hybrid challenges and cyber-attacks – as internal and external security continue to become more intertwined. Compounded by weakening norms of behaviour and international governance structures, these trends exacerbate challenges to Finland’s foreign and security policy.

In this context, the Finnish government has highlighted a number of cross-cutting dilemmas affecting national defence: increasing levels of societal vulnerability, greater levels of competition and military activity,

17 Kuusela (2020a).
18 Finland has recognised the need to address the impacts of climate change in the Arctic in particular, as the region is likely to be ‘the first to feel the effects of global warming’, and deterioration of the Arctic ecosystem is likely to produce knock-on environmental impacts on a global scale. Source: Kuusela (2020a).
19 CSIS (2019); Finnish Government (2020).
potentially shortened early-warning periods for military crises and increasing complexity in the character of warfare. Together, these challenges require a robust national defence capability – as well as effective cooperation with relevant partners – to ensure Finland’s security against a wide range of military and non-military threats.

2.2. Finland’s contribution to regional defence

As Finland and its partners look to strengthen stability and defence in the Nordic-Baltic region, several features of Finnish security and defence are likely to inform future efforts:

- **An independent national defence capability:** Finland contributes to regional stability and defence by maintaining its own national defence capabilities and its strong commitment to territorial defence. After the end of the Cold War, Finland did not follow most other Western nations in making substantial cuts to military forces, capabilities and spending; nor did it reconfigure the Finnish Defence Forces away from territorial defence and high-end warfighting in favour of expeditionary operations, as many NATO members chose to do in the 1990s and 2000s, given their focus on counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although Finland has been building interoperability with NATO, and has participated in a number of crisis-management operations, its main focus has been – and remains – territorial defence. Since 2014, Finland has also bolstered its readiness. These developments inform Finland’s approach to raising the threshold against attack, which centres on ensuring that the potential costs for an aggressor outweigh any possible gains. From the perspective of the United States and NATO, Finland’s self-reliance is thereby an important contribution to regional deterrence. Of particular significance, also, is the military’s role of preventing incursions into Finland’s land and air space, thereby essentially supporting the defence of a large portion of NATO’s northern flank.

- **Military non-alignment balanced with regional cooperation:** Finland’s contributions to regional security and defence are shaped by its policy of military non-alignment. Although it remains outside of any alliance, since Finland is an EU Member State, security threats in the Nordic-Baltic region or elsewhere in Europe remain of concern. Finnland’s militarily non-aligned status is complemented by a strong focus on self-reliance – a key pillar of Finnish strategic culture. As such, while officials recognise cooperation as a necessity, it is fostered ‘not based on treaty obligations, but on common interests’. This policy produces both challenges and opportunities for defence cooperation. While they entail a level of planning complexities, the flexible cooperative...
arrangements preferred by Finland also make it more difficult for adversaries to predict with which
nations it might partner in a crisis, to what extent, and how.29

- **Comprehensive security and societal resilience**: Finnish defence activity is characterised by its role
within the broader ‘Comprehensive Security Model’, a concept that fosters close inter-departmental
cooperation under the aegis of the Security Committee and promotes civil–military cooperation.30
By ensuring collaboration across all sectors of society, Finland places resilience at the heart of its
security and defence against external threats, including through preparedness, crisis management,
security of supply and international cooperation.31 This is seen as a key strength that shapes
Finland’s contributions to regional stability and security – Finland is frequently cited as a model
for other nations less familiar with concepts such as total defence.32

- **Regional and subject-matter expertise**: The United States and regional players value Finland’s in-
depth knowledge of Russia, reflecting its proximity, broad historical awareness and comprehensive
ongoing assessments. This understanding enables Finland to advance cooperation with NATO and
others, and to raise awareness of developments in Russia that the West may not fully appreciate.
Finland also has niche but important defence-related capabilities in areas such as cold weather
operations, icebreakers, mine laying and mine countermeasures – assets that NATO members
including the United States expect would be highly relevant in any future conflict in the region.
Other areas of expertise valued by Finland’s partners include Arctic security, Baltic Sea surveillance
and best practices for countering hybrid threats and enhancing societal resilience. Regarding the
latter, Finland is commonly perceived as a thought leader, as evidenced by its hosting of the Hybrid
Centre of Excellence in Helsinki. The small professional cadre of the Finnish defence community
has comparatively limited expertise on emerging technologies, but leveraging select areas of
expertise from industry, academia and civilian research institutes (e.g. on cyber and artificial
intelligence) could provide Finland with opportunities to boost defence cooperation with key
partners, including the United States,33 the EU and NATO.

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29 Kuusela (2020b).
30 Finnish MOD (2017); Kaikkonen (2019).
33 For example, Finland participated in the inaugural International AI Dialogue for Defense organised by the US
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Finland’s expertise and capabilities allow it to be less reliant on support from others in a crisis compared to some of its neighbours. Nevertheless, Finland also faces important challenges to strengthening its contributions to regional stability and defence. These include:

- Structural barriers to achieving influence over the policy agenda of larger nations (such as the United States) and multinational organisations (such as NATO), or global industrial and technological trends.  

- Domestic political sensitivities over the scope of cooperation with the United States and NATO.

- Resource limitations due to competing spending imperatives, as well as uncertainty around the possible long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on national defence budgets.

- Limited national defence industry with comparatively restricted access to major foreign defence markets, including the United States.

Perhaps most notably, Finland’s policy of military non-alignment imposes hard political and practical limits on the scope of cooperation. While Finland’s contributions through various cooperation initiatives can be continuously strengthened, Finland’s militarily non-aligned status means that partners cannot provide Finland with safeguards based on an obligation to provide support in a crisis. Conversely, NATO countries cannot necessarily assume that Finland will be willing and able to assist in a regional crisis that does not directly affect Finnish sovereignty – notwithstanding the fact that Finland does have other mutual defence (Article 42 [7]) and solidarity (Article 222) obligations as an EU member state under the Lisbon Treaty.

The next section discusses in greater depth recent and ongoing efforts to strengthen defence cooperation within these constraints, including in the bilateral, trilateral and multilateral dimensions.

### 2.3. Ongoing defence cooperation

Finland has, in recent years, advanced defence cooperation with a number of partners, forming a layered web of cooperation agreements in a variety of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral formats. Table 2.1 summarises key relationships.

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34 These limitations stem in part from Finland’s small size and finite personnel, and organisational bandwidth within the MOD and the Finnish Defence Forces to manage multiple partners, cooperation frameworks and related activities, such as exercises.

35 Conversely, NATO countries cannot necessarily assume that Finland will be willing and able to assist in a regional crisis that does not directly affect Finnish sovereignty – notwithstanding the fact that Finland does have other mutual defence (Article 42 [7]) and solidarity (Article 222) obligations as an EU member state under the Lisbon Treaty.
## Table 2.1 Key recent Finnish defence cooperation formats

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<th>Format</th>
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<td>Bilateral US–Finnish cooperation</td>
<td>Current US–Finnish cooperation is underpinned by a broad <strong>bilateral Statement of Intent (2016)</strong> aimed at enhancing defence cooperation; deepening defence dialogue, joint training and exercises; exchanging information; and collaborating in research and development. Specific agreements exist on topics such as information and intelligence sharing; research and development; testing and evaluation; and procurement.</td>
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<td>Bilateral Swedish–Finnish cooperation</td>
<td>Swedish–Finnish cooperation has progressed with an expansive <strong>bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (2018)</strong>, prescribing ‘no predetermined limits’ for deepening cooperation, with the aim of ‘creating pre-requisites for combined joint military action and operations in all situations’.</td>
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<td>Bilateral Norwegian–Finnish cooperation</td>
<td>Finland and Norway have pursued cooperation on the basis of the <strong>Framework Arrangement on Defence Cooperation (2021)</strong>. This replaced the previous 2018 Framework Arrangement and has advanced cooperation in several areas, particularly in the context of operations planning.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Trilateral Finnish–Swedish–Norwegian cooperation</td>
<td>The Finnish–Swedish–Norwegian <strong>trilateral Statement of Intent (2020)</strong> provides a basis for operational cooperation through the formation of a steering group, a strategic planning group and fora for discussions on common security concerns and relevant operations plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperation through NORDEFCO</td>
<td>Building on the 2009 Memorandum of Understanding on Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), the basis for cooperation between Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland is encompassed by <strong>NORDEFCO Vision 2025</strong>. This document provides guidance to develop ‘defence capability and cooperation in peace, crisis and conflict’, and establishes 16 targets to operationalise the vision.</td>
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<td>Cooperation with NATO</td>
<td>Finland joined the NATO Partnership for Peace in 1994 and the Euro-Atlantic Council in 1997. In 2014, Finland became one of six nations to enter into an <strong>Enhanced Opportunity Partner</strong> status. As EOPs, Finland and Sweden also participate in the ‘30+2’ forum, whereby they maintain a close dialogue with NATO with a current focus on Baltic Sea security.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Membership in the EU</td>
<td>Finland participates in the establishment and execution of the Common Security and Defence Policy and partakes in initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Fund.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other multilateral cooperation</td>
<td>Finland participates in the German-led <strong>Framework Nations Concept (FNC)</strong>, a structured framework for multinational capability development, and the French-led <strong>European Intervention Initiative (EI2)</strong> to promote the creation of shared strategic cultures and structures for joint action. Finland is also a member of the <strong>Northern Group</strong>, an informal cooperation format for discussing regional defence matters and issues such as military mobility. This includes the NORDEFCO states, the Baltic nations, Poland, Germany, the UK and the Netherlands. In addition, Finland is a member of the UK-led <strong>Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF)</strong> construct, a high-readiness force providing a basis for joint crisis response. JEF membership also includes Sweden and Norway.</td>
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Source: RAND analysis.
In the bilateral dimension, the 2016 Statement of Intent (SoI) has served as a basis for strengthening cooperation with the United States. The SoI has enabled more in-depth and regular engagements, facilitating a broader shift from cooperation focused on defence materiel and procurement to one with an increasing emphasis on information-sharing and joint exercises, among other areas. While defence and military-to-military cooperation has continued throughout changes in US administrations, the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed its tempo. Additionally, there could be opportunities to deepen ties beyond the Finnish MOD and the US Department of Defense. Increasing linkages between military threats and other aspects of adversarial activity – such as cyberattacks, subversion of elections and disinformation campaigns – requires expanded cooperation on issues within the remit of departments such as the ministries of foreign affairs and justice.

US and Finnish officials have identified several priorities for strengthening bilateral defence cooperation. Building on Finland’s previous procurement of F-A/18 Hornets – commissioned in 1995–2000 and to be phased out by 2030 – the HX Fighter programme is a major opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties with the United States. However, US and Finnish stakeholders both recognise that defence cooperation does not fundamentally depend on a single procurement programme.

Finland engages in two important trilateral defence cooperation frameworks – first with Sweden and the United States, and second (more recently) with Sweden and Norway. The former, as formalised through a trilateral SoI, is seen as a significant step towards enhancing mutual trust and strengthening US engagement in the region with two NATO EOPs. It similarly promotes alignment between Finland and Sweden as to the priorities for US engagement. Discussions with stakeholders portrayed this trilateral format as essential for reducing duplication of effort and maximising the value of engagement between the three parties, in addition to further bolstering bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden. Practical barriers to realising the full potential of such trilateral cooperation include a preference to discuss certain issues on a bilateral basis, though this appears to be a less frequent concern in recent years as joint operational planning has become more commonplace.

Finland also continues to advance cooperation through a number of multilateral fora. Through Finland’s EOP status and participation in the ‘30+2’ format, Finland–NATO ties have advanced significantly in

39 Finnish MOD et al. (2020).
40 NORDEFCO (2018).
41 Bilateral defence cooperation historically centred on the Finnish procurement of the US-produced F/A-18 Hornet fighter, and more recently on foreign military sales, such as weapon systems like the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile. Procurement of the Hornet fighter jet represented the ‘first big modernisation of the Finnish Air Force in the post-Cold War period’ and was seen as setting the stage for a new phase in bilateral relations between Finland and the United States in the post-Cold War era. Source: Defense.Info (2020).
42 Alternatively, if Finland opts to procure one of the European aircraft on offer (e.g. the Saab Gripen), this may enhance cooperation with others (e.g. Sweden in the case of the Gripen), while potentially reducing the concrete opportunities for cooperation on materiel that anchored bilateral defence relations with the United States since the Cold War around the Hornet programme.
recent years. This is reflected in Finland’s presence in many of NATO’s commands and organisations; involvement in the Alliance’s crisis management exercises; maintenance of a host nation support agreement; long-standing engagement in the NATO Response Force; and participation in bodies such as the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. Finland’s continued engagement with NATO brings the possibility of maintaining or increasing collaboration in areas of common interest. These areas include the Baltic Sea region, defence issues in the North Atlantic and Arctic, the security implications of climate change, arms control, and hybrid threats. While Finland’s policy of military non-alignment imposes limits on this cooperation – such as around operational planning – further formalisation and institutionalisation of the ‘30+2’ format could, for example, enable relations to advance further in some of these areas.

Finnish policymakers also view the EU as a central pillar of regional security, albeit not a framework for collective defence in the vein of NATO. Finland has a reputation as one of the strongest advocates among the bloc’s members for advancing EU cooperation in security and defence, as well as strengthening inter-institutional ties with NATO, which most Finnish decision-makers view as essential to ensuring transatlantic coherence in security and defence.43 EU–NATO cooperation is recognised as a ‘must’, rather than a ‘good to have’ in the current threat environment.

Several other multilateral formats also constitute important aspects of Finland’s efforts to maintain a web of regional cooperation. These include NORDEFCO (and the Northern Group), FNC, EI2, the JEF and various Arctic-specific fora:

- Regional defence cooperation through NORDEFCO has evolved significantly over the last decade. As set out in Vision 2025, it continues to be strengthened through improvements in defence capability, readiness, interoperability and dialogue with the United States, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.44 With Vision 2025’s emphasis on cooperation in crisis and conflict, NORDEFCO increasingly serves as a vehicle to enhance regional deterrence through concrete actions. The establishment of a reliable classified communications network for the grouping’s five members constitutes one recent, tangible manifestation of cooperation through NORDEFCO.

- Of FNC, EI2 and JEF, the latter provides arguably the greatest opportunity for enhancing defence and deterrence in the Nordic-Baltic region, including by fostering interoperability and establishing the military relationships needed to act together in a crisis. The JEF serves as a means for deepening Finnish defence cooperation with the UK, for which popular national support exists, while also complementing NORDEFCO and trilateral relations with Sweden and Norway. Given its northern European orientation and operational focus, the JEF offers an attractive means to address potential crises, most likely alongside the United States, before NATO as a whole decides to act.

- As an Arctic State, Finland also partakes in fora such as the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable and Arctic Coast Guard Forum. However, Arctic governance arrangements depend heavily on the

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43 Opportunities for EU–NATO cooperation, from Finland’s perspective, include countering hybrid threats and addressing the current deficiencies in military mobility across Europe to shorten response times in a crisis.

44 NORDEFCO (2018).
Arctic Council, which by design has no remit for defence issues (and includes Russia), limiting the opportunity to address hard security topics in this grouping.

2.4. Implications for future cooperation

Recent developments in the Nordic-Baltic region and the growing panoply of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral frameworks provide a robust foundation for enhancing defence and deterrence. Several implications for the future direction of cooperation require consideration:

- Though the web of defence cooperation described above offers pathways for enhancing political and military interoperability, it may not provide the kind of structural basis for what Finnish and regional officials and experts describe as ‘day-zero interoperability’, meaning effective cooperation from the very beginning of a crisis.\(^{45}\) Given its militarily non-aligned status, access to NATO’s structures (e.g. its integrated command structure) may not be available to Finland, and may not even be preferable. However, should a crisis occur, Finland needs to approach day-zero interoperability so that it can work near-seamlessly alongside its partners should mutual interests align. For this report, the study team shall refer to this as the ‘NATO/non-NATO dilemma’.

- Relatedly, Finland does not participate in the Alliance’s joint operational planning, so needs other means to ‘lay the foundations for what [it] can [collectively] do in times of crisis’.\(^{46}\) Political consultations, tabletop exercises (TTXs), command-post and live military exercises and day-to-day operational cooperation all play a role in setting expectations for potential collaboration during a crisis or conflict. However, many of this study’s interlocuters suggested that currently, Finland, Sweden, the United States and other partners have yet to establish a comprehensive vision for potential joint responses to specific scenarios. TTXs hold promise in this regard, but often take place on an ad-hoc basis rather than through a regular and formalised routine.

- Alongside its strong national defences, an active, layered network of cooperation is expected to remain a key feature of Finland’s security.\(^{47}\) Nonetheless, Finland has limited political, organisational, human, technological and financial resources. As such, Finland needs to avoid stretching its resources too thinly, and should instead prioritise its contributions, for example through deepening cooperation to derive more benefit from existing relationships. Practical utilisation and implementation of existing agreements through slow yet steady advances could ensure Finland maximises the tangible benefits of defence cooperation.

- While many officials and experts point to the need for advancing cooperation in both traditional and emerging defence issues (e.g. disruptive technologies, cyber, space and the Arctic), there is less clarity as to how to proceed in practical terms. This points to the need for Finland to further reflect on and define its desired role and outcomes. This assessment should be based on an appreciation

\(^{45}\) NATO ACT (n.d.).

\(^{46}\) Kuusela (2019).

\(^{47}\) For another description of this network, see Michel (2019).
of how deepening cooperation on specific topics might – or might not – support its wider policy objectives and make best use of finite national resources and levers of influence.
Based on the preceding analysis, this chapter outlines a set of options for the Finnish MOD to consider as it continues to deepen bi-, tri- and multilateral cooperation with the United States, NATO and key European partners.

3.1. Policy framework

Russia’s military posture – most recently its large-scale build up on Ukraine’s border in 2021⁴⁸ – and China’s growing influence on security in the Nordic-Baltic region, make deepening transatlantic cooperation an imperative as Finland and its partners recover from the pandemic and look to strengthen regional stability and defence. Achieving day-zero interoperability has registered with Finland, its close partners and NATO as a particularly worthwhile goal. However, Finland, the United States and others in the region face a range of political, practical and resource limitations that will temper the pace and scale of cooperation, at least without an unforeseen external shock. With this dynamic in mind, Figure 3.1 introduces a conceptual framework for thinking about US–Finnish and regional defence cooperation in the coming years.

Figure 3.1 Framework for US–Finnish and broader defence cooperation in the Nordic-Baltic region


The blue arrows in the graphic suggest a progression from policy ambitions to practical actions, while the text underneath provides examples of activities that fall under each of the four levers of defence cooperation.

In theory, broad agreements reached during political and policy-level consultations should inform TTX-style events, which in turn reveal the types of operational concepts and constructs most beneficial for advancing mutual objectives. Detailed agreements and plans then formalise the types of arrangements needed to enable ministries and militaries to partner with each other in times of crisis. In practice, of course, cooperation follows a nonlinear path: constant feedback loops from one lever to another can inform, or constrain, cooperation. For example, the execution of cross-border air training, or the development of concepts for cross-border air operations in a time of heightened tensions, may reveal the need for wider modifications to airspace management policies, which in turn could require additional consultations and TTXs and the inclusion of non-MOD stakeholders and experts.

The orange box on the right of the graphic represents the systemic limits on how much governments can realistically achieve by employing the levers of cooperation. This simplifies complex policy dynamics but serves as a reminder of Finnish and partners’ domestic and geopolitical considerations. Decision-makers should discuss their considerations explicitly during consultations and TTXs. Finally, what steps towards interoperability are perceived as ‘too provocative’ or ‘beyond domestic consensus’ will shift as governments change and world events unfold. Policymakers and defence planners could thus consider, without fully implementing, deeper and potentially riskier forms of defence cooperation as a hedge against uncertainty.

This framework reinforces the theme of slow yet steady progression:

- Collaboration should be slow, to accommodate Finland’s (and its partners’) political and budgetary constraints, respect diplomatic preferences and preserve dialogue and practical cooperation with Russia to the extent possible.

- Cooperation should also be steady, to build momentum and ensure that the outputs of one engagement or initiative feed into and reinforce subsequent bi-, tri- or multilateral activities.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how a less-than-consistent tempo of engagements can frustrate defence initiatives, a phenomenon exacerbated by the typically high turnover rate for key US positions at both leadership and action-officer levels. In the view of many Finnish and US government officials and external experts, it is thus just as important to institutionalise levers of defence cooperation over the longer term – translating the extant SoIs into a robust programme of work that delivers practical results – as it is to execute any single initiative or set of activities.

### 3.2. Strategic policy options

Relying on the above framework, Figure 3.2 proposes three high-level policy options for enhancing US–Finnish bilateral defence cooperation. These options, and their subordinate mechanisms, are forward-looking and challenging, but are designed to enhance defence cooperation within anticipated budgetary and political constraints. These include Finland’s continued status as a partner, but not an ally, for the United States and NATO. The options presented here are not exclusive of each other. Indeed, they are mutually
reinforcing. Cumulatively, the options aim to yield enhanced interoperability and a more credible defence posture in the Nordic-Baltic region.\textsuperscript{49}

**Figure 3.2 Overview of strategic policy options**

- **Option 1**: Continue to elevate the core trilateral relationship (Finland—Sweden—United States) and selectively expand cooperation with different combinations of other partners.

- **Option 2**: Expand the use of high-level tabletop exercises to build a shared understanding of threats, potential responses and areas for further joint action.

- **Option 3**: Continue to develop and exercise new operational concepts and constructs and agreements across all domains.

Source: RAND analysis.

Within each of these broad options, the below sections discuss more specific mechanisms for cooperation on an illustrative basis, not as recommendations or as part of a fully developed roadmap. Most of the postulated actions could only be executed over the course of several years or more. The Finnish MOD will need to consider further how to maximise returns from these options given resource and organisational constraints on both sides of the Atlantic. The study team understands that aspects of these options may already be under consideration and acknowledges that some of the steps noted could have downsides, the detailed investigation of which falls outside the scope of this exploratory analysis.\textsuperscript{50}

The 2018 trilateral SoI provides a foundation for deeper and broader defence cooperation between Finland, Sweden and the United States. Nonetheless, most US and some Finnish interlocutors expressed a strong desire for more consistent three-way engagement. Key considerations that favour trilateral over bilateral cooperation, at least from the US viewpoint, include both logistical and strategic factors. Logistically, it is difficult for US officials and military planners to allocate time for separate events with Finland and Sweden, and to track agreed actions. This reality stems, in part, from the need to keep pace with the high tempo of NATO engagements while at the same time dedicating more attention to the Indo-Pacific region. Strategically, Finnish–Swedish–US security interests are so intertwined that parallel bilateral dialogues can

\textsuperscript{49} This study focuses primarily on activities within the remit of MODs and their joint forces.

\textsuperscript{50} The Finnish MOD asked RAND to develop high-level options for further analysis and potential development into detailed pathways with evaluated benefits and risks.
also be inefficient and incomplete. Although the bilateral track will remain important, it could be employed on a more selective basis or for sensitive issues where there may be important national differences, as part of a wider ambition to move towards a ‘trilateral by default, bilateral by necessity’ approach.

To illustrate the importance of trilateral cooperation, consider a hypothetical scenario in which Russian submarines and unmanned underwater vehicles operate in the Gulf of Bothnia – the northernmost arm of the Baltic Sea situated between Finland and Sweden – in the lead-up to a potential crisis. Sweden has traditionally maintained a highly capable antisubmarine warfare (ASW) capability, while Finland aims to increase its own competencies for this mission through the Squadron 2020 Programme, which includes acquiring new ASW-capable corvettes. Sweden and Finland, with baseline interoperability maintained through the Swedish–Finnish Naval Task Group construct, would presumably communicate about the potential crisis and agree which wartime operating concepts should be used to monitor the maritime environment. Given the common geography, from the US and NATO perspective, it would also not make sense to hold consultations, arrange TTXs or discuss capability development pathways without both Sweden and Finland in the room.

Beyond bilateral and trilateral fora, the web of defence cooperation Finland has pursued offers several possibilities to work, alongside the United States, with new combinations of partners. For example:

- The UK’s intent to exert a leadership role in Northern Europe could provide openings for four-way dialogue and policy-level exercises with Sweden and the United States. The JEF stands out as a valuable near-term and operationally focused multilateral construct for enhancing interoperability and crisis response capabilities. In a crisis, this UK-led formation could respond before NATO decides to act. It could be expedient to develop a division of labour between the JEF and US forces in crisis and conflict. Indeed, NATO’s Baltic Operations-2019 exercise featured the JEF (Maritime) operating alongside the US Second Fleet, whose area of responsibility includes the North Atlantic and High North. There are also opportunities for Finland, including together with Sweden, to take more of a leadership role within the JEF, using it to exert further influence on NATO and key nations within the Alliance and strengthen cooperation in key areas of interest for Finland.

- Another promising opportunity could be four-way consultations and training that include Norway, Sweden and the United States, particularly to explore Arctic contingencies in greater depth. Engaging the United States in this line of effort would complement and potentially bolster efforts that the defence ministers of Finland, Norway and Sweden agreed to pursue in their 2020 SoI on...
Enhanced Operational Cooperation.\textsuperscript{55} Relatedly, Finland and other members could benefit from periodic US engagement at NORDEFCO meetings,\textsuperscript{56} which could help advance the elements of Vision 2025 that are most interrelated with or dependent on US planning.\textsuperscript{57}

- Finally, US and European interlocutors recognise the beneficial role that Finland plays within EU defence initiatives. Finland could continue to push for deeper engagement of the EU with the United States (and the post-Brexit UK and Norway) on topics such as military mobility, emerging technologies and China. It could similarly continue to advocate for EU–NATO cooperation and deconfliction. Finland could also play a valuable role in shaping how the new EU Strategic Compass addresses cooperation with NATO and, in turn, offer its perspectives as an EOP in the development of NATO’s new Strategic Concept over the coming year.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Option \#2: Expand the use of TTXs to build a shared understanding of threats, potential responses and areas for further joint action.}
\end{center}

Stakeholders on both sides of the Atlantic consulted for this study repeatedly stressed the importance of TTXs and similar events for strengthening defence relations. Formal defence plans, such as those jointly developed among NATO allies, imply a level of commitment with which militarily non-aligned states may not be comfortable. For Finland and the United States, this aspect of defence planning raises a dilemma for both policymakers and operational planners: in the absence of joint plans, how can each side know what the other is likely to do in a crisis or conflict, and how can they best work together?

Though they are not a full substitute for joint planning, TTXs provide a low-pressure environment for brainstorming, sharing perspectives and exploring specific scenarios, operational concepts and capabilities. These exchanges are nonbinding yet informative. Executed consistently, TTXs can help test plans and force structures against specific scenarios, identify concrete areas for further investigation or action and enable a range of other activities (e.g. command post exercises, and concepts for enhanced communications interoperability). Collectively, these efforts can help to mitigate the thorny NATO/non-NATO dilemma.

Finland, the United States and other regional actors have gradually increased the frequency of TTXs, as well as the range of issues covered in these settings. TTXs can take place at the MOD level, focusing on strategic and policy considerations.\textsuperscript{58} Various types of exercise can also be conducted at the military-to-military level to explore specific operational dilemmas. To date, however, according to several former and current government officials and outside facilitators, TTXs have often been ad hoc rather than built into a cohesive formal programme. Furthermore, the pandemic has interrupted this element of cooperation – virtual environments have proven less conducive for basic consultations, let alone TTXs.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} NORDEFCO also provides a suitable forum, though it may be more efficient to explore operational matters in the North Calotte region without taxing Danish and Icelandic defence establishments with additional consultations.
\item \textsuperscript{56} According to multiple officials interviewed for this study, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis’s presence in a 2017 meeting of NORDEFCO (and Northern Group) defence ministers energised cooperation.
\item \textsuperscript{57} NORDEFCO (2018).
\item \textsuperscript{58} Some TTXs include participation from parliamentarians, whose inclusion can foster a broader appreciation and insight into strategic dilemmas facing the Finnish Armed Forces and its Western counterparts.
\end{itemize}
One option to take greater advantage of this tool would be to develop a (preferably trilateral) TTX schedule that is routine, iterative and nested. Routine, here, means organised on a predictable, long-term timetable. Iterative means that each TTX builds upon prior events, resulting in a cycle of learning. Over time, sequenced TTXs could feature different scenarios and capabilities of interest. Lastly, nested means that policy-level TTXs set the foundation for more detailed operational-level events. The operational TTXs in turn provide practical military insights to inform the policy-level discussions in the next cycle. This framework for routine, iterative and nested TTXs (blue boxes) is captured in Figure 3.3. With enough regularity and depth, TTXs can lead to a range of concrete cooperative actions (green boxes).

**Figure 3.3 Framework for routine, iterative and nested tabletop exercises**

Meaningful TTXs that lead to actionable cooperation require significant analytical and logistical preparation and requisite resources. Collaboration between US and Nordic national defence universities and research centres could be an efficient enabler, bringing in external methodological expertise and an independent perspective. Based on RAND analysis, potential topics for demanding TTXs could include:

- Information and cyberspace operations during a time of heightened tensions.
- Host nation support arrangements and the use of Finnish, Swedish and NATO members’ territory for signalling, staging or sustainment.
- The division of responsibility and the nature of mutual support for sea denial and sea control operations in the Baltic Sea.
- Adversarial hybrid activity or military incursions into northern Finland, Sweden and/or Norway (the North Calotte region).
- Implications of and possible responses to nuclear-related threats and dilemmas posed by dual-capable systems.

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59 For an authoritative source on best practices for wargaming, see Bartels (2020).
Following consultations and TTXs, partner ministries and militaries should have a firmer basis for designing operational concepts and constructs, jointly and within individual warfighting domains. The study team suggests continuing existing lines of cooperation in this regard, while selectively introducing newer concepts to be led at the defence policy level or by counterpart military services.

The United States and other potential Finnish partners (e.g. the UK, Norway, NATO) are currently developing new operational concepts and command, control, communications and information architectures based on the notion of ‘multi-domain’ or ‘joint all-domain’ operations. The United States, in particular, is pushing ahead with an ambitious new Joint Warfighting Concept and investment in areas such as Joint All Domain Command and Control, underpinned by cloud and edge computing, artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) and a so-called military Internet-of-Things. These innovations present opportunities for Finland, but there is also a risk that the US military might diverge from smaller European nations in the coming decade – both in terms of its concepts of operation and the levels of technical interoperability that partners can achieve with its advanced networked systems. As such, Finland could seek to mitigate this risk (and maximise the benefits) by promoting regular exchanges with the United States and others to share perspectives on emerging multi- or joint all-domain concepts, or related topics such as long-range precision fires and countering anti-access, area denial in the Nordic-Baltic region.

In the air domain, specifically, and regardless of the upcoming HX decision, there will similarly be a need for continued focus on interoperability and joint concept development and planning. For interoperability, there is an opportunity to build on recent progress with joint exercises (e.g. Arctic Challenge) and smaller but more routine training (e.g. cross-border training in the North Calotte region). Examples of potential collaboration include the use of Finnish territory for exercises focused on air-to-ground missions, as well as continued Finnish participation in the US-hosted air domain exercise Red Flag.

For the United States and NATO, there is growing emphasis on the integration of so-called fourth and fifth generation platforms and capabilities. As highlighted in NATO’s Joint Air Power Strategy, this is an important effort for the Alliance and a growing focus for exercises, both NATO-organised and multinational. If Finland procures the F-35, it will possess unique intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. If Finland decides on another system, the reverse will hold true: Finnish aircraft would benefit from the United States and others’ F-35s feeding data that ensures full situational awareness, including the information needed to strike hard targets. Examples of potential collaboration include

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60 See e.g. Hoehn (2021).
61 Arctic Challenge exercises are part of cross border training between Sweden, Finland and Norway, with combined air combat training missions conducted on nearly a weekly basis. Source: Swedish Defence Forces (2021).
63 Sea- and ground-based systems can also maintain links with F-35 aircraft. For more on this concept and its criticality to future combat airpower, see Binnendijk et al. (2020).
Finnish and Swedish participation in exercises such as Atlantic Trident, currently a trilateral US–UK–French exercise.

The growing proliferation of air and missile threats in the Nordic-Baltic region – ranging from the smallest unmanned systems to sophisticated cruise, ballistic and now hypersonic missiles – has also been recognised as a priority for action by the United States, NATO and European militaries. Developing Finland’s ties to the evolving NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System, potentially alongside Sweden, could enhance stability, defence and deterrence in the region.

In the maritime domain, there are opportunities to leverage Finnish expertise in areas of great interest and value to the United States and NATO, building on the areas discussed in Chapter 2. The Finnish Navy has a deep understanding of operations in the Baltic Sea, and in recent years Finland has increased information-sharing with Sweden. There is scope to build on this foundation by promoting a common operational picture and mechanisms for information exchange in a crisis. The Finnish Navy also has respected mine-laying and counter-mining capabilities, which is a shortcoming for the United States and other allies. Finland could pursue deeper naval cooperation with Sweden, individual NATO members and NATO’s Allied Maritime Command, including by sharing maritime surveillance information and conducting regular deployments and exercises with NATO’s Standing Mine Countermeasures Group 1. Such steps could build interoperability and enhance the collective capacity to deter or constrain any hostile naval and amphibious operations. Finland’s naval capabilities, including its icebreakers, also present a valuable contribution to multinational deployments or exercises in the Arctic (e.g. operations under the aegis of the JEF). This entails a further opportunity to share expertise and lessons learned with the US Navy and Coast Guard, as these entities invest in an enhanced presence in the Arctic’s challenging environment.

In the land domain, continuing intermittent small-scale deployments of US forces to Finland for training (e.g. in cold weather conditions) could provide opportunities for enhancing interoperability and readiness to operate together in a potential regional crisis, while contributing to a broader deterrence posture. Army-to-army cooperation could also focus on integrated fires, ground-based air defence and theatre-wide sustainment.

In-depth discussion of the cyber and space domains was impractical at this project’s classification level. Other studies have already identified cyber as an emerging technological and operational domain suitable for cooperation between the United States and its Nordic allies and partners.64 There may also be room in future for limited but growing cooperation on space, for example focused on polar orbits. To this end, Finland could continue to engage with the new US Space Force and others (e.g. Norway, Sweden, the UK) to identify potential opportunities for participation in joint programmes. The presence of Finnish liaison or exchange officers within US-based cyber and space organisations could be one way of identifying and cultivating specific opportunities for collaboration.

Option #3 represents the most ambitious level of effort and could consequently trigger hostile disinformation campaigns or other malign activity. Strategy and policy consultations would thus benefit from including the issue of countering adversarial and misleading narratives on the agenda.

64 CSIS (2021).
Table 3.1 below provides a summary of illustrative actions and initiatives that might be taken under each of the three strategic options.

### Table 3.1 Options and representative initiatives and actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Representative initiative or action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 1</strong></td>
<td>Solidify trilateral Finland–Sweden–US cooperation as the default mode of cooperation, with bilateral dialogue held on an as-needed basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alongside the United States and Sweden, increase engagement with the UK, including as it relates to potential contributions to the JEF.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collaborate on US–Finland–Sweden–Norway operational planning.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Include the United States in select NORDEFCO meetings and initiatives to advance elements of NORDEFCO’s Vision 2025.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continue to exert Finnish leadership within the EU and advocate for increasing US engagement with the EU, as well as EU–NATO cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 2</strong></td>
<td>Develop a multi-year schedule for policy-level TTXs to strengthen defence relations and identify areas for enhanced cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a multi-year schedule for operational-level TTXs to generate a cycle of learning and provide practical military insights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 3</strong></td>
<td>Enhance cooperation on joint and multi-domain operations to generate opportunities for Finnish Defence and maintain technical interoperability.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure a Finnish contribution to the European integration of fourth and fifth generation aircraft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pursue additional collaboration on minelaying, countermining, ice breaking, ASW and maritime domain awareness.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continue small-scale US land deployments for training and exercises in order to enhance interoperability and readiness in case of a regional crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Position liaison or exchange officers within US cyber and space organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RAND analysis.

### 3.3. Additional considerations

Beyond the strategic options discussed in Section 3.2 and Table 3.1, which are tailored for defence planning, three additional considerations could inform US–Finnish bilateral and regional defence relations:

- **Comprehensive security:** The primary focus of this project has been on defence cooperation between Finland, the United States and other partners at the MOD and military-to-military level. However, today’s threat environment does not heed the boundaries between different departmental areas of responsibility; indeed, hostile state and non-state actors deliberately exploit seams in institutional decision-making, both within and between democratic nations. Finland is already recognised as a thought leader, both regionally and globally, for its cross-government and whole-of-society approach to hybrid threats. US interlocutors expressed an appreciation for Finland’s strengths and capabilities in this area, as well as a desire to learn from the Finnish experience. Given Finland’s strong reputation in this area, it could continue to address scenarios involving complex threats to societal resilience (i.e. comprehensive/total defence) as part of joint exercises, training or
TTXs with Sweden, the United States, NATO and others. This could build shared understanding of the evolving threat landscape and of potential means of responding.

- **Cooperation across departments and ministries**: In addition to engaging with the US Department of Defense to share lessons learned and Finnish expertise on evolving Russian intentions and defence capabilities, the MOD could also encourage and facilitate broader cooperation between other government departments (e.g., homeland security, justice and law enforcement). This could serve to strengthen strategic interoperability beyond the two nations’ defence establishments and facilitate more comprehensive responses to emerging threats.

- **Research and development (R&D), including collaboration across industry and the scientific community**: Cooperation between Finland, the United States and others should be forward-looking and geared towards addressing emerging strategic opportunities and threats, including those posed by new technologies. Finland and the United States could seek to share perspectives on emerging technology trends such as advances in AI/ML, for example through continuing to explore emerging technologies in exercises such as Bold Quest, strengthening cooperation through the Department of Defense Joint AI Center and conducting joint horizon scanning. Relatedly, Finland could identify and leverage areas of strength in its national industrial, technological and scientific base to promote joint R&D projects with the United States and others. This could support development of new capabilities as well as garner broader economic benefits and cause possible spillovers into other areas of innovation. Finally, Finland could seek to develop areas of expertise through experimentation, for example by working with Sweden, the United States and others to develop novel concepts of operation and capabilities based on the needs identified in consultations and TTXs.
4. Conclusion

In the event of a conflict, NATO members stand to benefit fully from the Alliance’s structures and capabilities. These include the North Atlantic Council, crisis decision-making mechanisms, an integrated command structure, formal defence plans and well-developed standards and procedures for combining disparate national forces into a cohesive whole. For Finland and other non-NATO partners, many of these structures are unavailable in peacetime or a crisis and are not necessarily desirable, for example due to the political sensitivities of military non-alignment, or other factors. The NATO/non-NATO dilemma thus centres on ensuring that, should a crisis occur, Finland, the United States and other partners preserve the option to work together as part of an effective coalition. Achieving something approaching day-zero interoperability with other like-minded nations will consequently be central to mounting an effective response to any future provocations or attacks in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Full interoperability may not be available outside of a formal alliance. Yet there is still more that could be accomplished, as the framework of policy options outlined in this study has demonstrated. It is also prudent to consider how more ambitious steps beyond this framework might work if political assumptions in Finland or external conditions were to change. While active pursuit of NATO membership is currently not on the agenda in Helsinki, a net assessment by the MOD of how NATO integration would impact Finnish defence requirements and plans could be useful to inform any future consideration of that option.

In addition, in the current political and strategic context, small but determined nations such as Finland can pursue achievable objectives to support their national security and sovereignty, while also contributing to wider regional stability and defence. Comparatively low-cost actions with substantial potential returns include identifying likely scenarios where different forms of cooperation could be needed, engaging in notional planning, determining required capabilities for mutual support and exercising these capabilities and decision-making processes. The United States and other European partners fully support Finland in these efforts for reasons including geographic proximity, shared strategic interests and democratic values.

This study’s exploratory research has reaffirmed the importance of Finland’s dual-track approach of comprehensive national defence and an integrated regional defence posture. While there is no way to predict the levels of unity between partners and allies in a crisis, deliberate preparations today can preserve the option of effective cooperation tomorrow. The authors hope that the analysis and options outlined in this short report provide food for thought for the Finnish MOD and a basis for further investigation and implementation in support of deepening defence cooperation with key partners in the Nordic-Baltic region.


Enhancing US–Finnish and Regional Defence Cooperation: An Exploratory Analysis


Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. N.d. ‘The special status of the Åland Islands’. As of 2 September 2021: https://um.fi/the-special-status-of-the-aland-islands

NATO Allied Command Transformation. N.d. ‘Federated interoperability’. As of 2 September 2021: https://www.act.nato.int/federated-interoperability


https://www.nordefco.org/Files/nordefco-vision-2025-signed.pdf


As of 2 September 2021:
To address the overarching requirement provided to RAND by the Finnish MOD, the study team applied a mixed-methods research approach structured around a set of key questions constituting a high-level analytical framework. Those questions are summarised in Table A.1.

**Table A.1 Study analytical framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Questions and issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic context</strong></td>
<td>• What are the current and evolving strategic challenges and threats to security in the Nordic-Baltic region?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the trends and drivers likely to shape the strategic and threat landscape in the Nordic-Baltic region?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Geopolitical</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Technological</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Environmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Other (e.g. informational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional defence and deterrence postures</strong></td>
<td>• What are the strengths and limitations of defence and deterrence postures in the Nordic-Baltic region?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the priorities for strengthening defence and deterrence in the Nordic-Baltic region?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the most significant enablers and hurdles for actualising these priorities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finland’s contribution to defence and deterrence in the Nordic-Baltic region</strong></td>
<td>• What are Finland’s role and key contributions to defence and deterrence in the Nordic-Baltic region?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How can this role and contributions be strengthened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the relevant enablers and hurdles for doing so?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What are the key opportunities and challenges for Finnish defence?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Defence strategy and planning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Optimising its contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technological innovation and new concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bilateral defence cooperation</strong></td>
<td>• What is the status and extent of US–Finnish defence cooperation?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What are the strengths and limitations of the current framework?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What are the priorities for improving cooperation, including in relation to the identified limitations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the most significant enablers and hurdles for actualising these priorities?</td>
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</table>
Addressing the above-described questions entailed several data-collection and analysis tasks, which are summarised in Figure A.1.

As outlined above, the principal data collection and analysis activities that were carried out by the study team included:

- **Expert and stakeholder interviews**: To capture expert and stakeholder perspectives on issues covered in the study, the study team conducted 13 interviews with Finnish experts and stakeholders, 10 interviews with US stakeholders and 3 interviews with Swedish and Norwegian stakeholders or experts representing selected European partner countries. A full list of individuals interviewed for this study is provided further below in Table A.2.

- **Document review**: The study team conducted a targeted review of open-source literature and sources provided by the Finnish MOD. The former comprised academic and ‘grey’ literature on regional defence and deterrence postures, and Finnish security and defence cooperation, and the latter comprised Finnish MOD reports and statements from Finnish MOD stakeholders.

- **RAND expert workshop**: To synthesise data collected in the study and produce analysis underpinning the options presented in this report, the study team held an internal workshop with

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65 ‘Grey’ literature refers to sources published by government, research institutes, think-tanks and international organisations outside academic, peer-reviewed journals.
transatlantic RAND experts. This workshop focused on formulating an overarching framework for cooperation options and vetting the strategic options.

- **Reporting and Quality Assurance**: Drawing together data and insights generated in previous tasks, the study team summarised the evidence base and research findings captured in this report. This task also entailed review of the report by RAND’s Quality Assurance reviewers.

Throughout the research, the team also engaged with the study’s sponsors at the Finnish MOD to discuss emerging themes and research findings and gather feedback, which informed subsequent research activities. A number of caveats, limitations and assumptions should be considered in relation to the findings presented in this study. These include:

- Findings presented in this study have been formulated on the basis of a number of assumptions concerning the limits for Finland’s engagement in bilateral, trilateral and multilateral defence cooperation. These assumed limits include NATO membership for Finland, actions that may be perceived as overly provocative by countries in the region and limits stemming from political appetite and domestic public opinion.

- The study findings were derived largely from data collected through expert and stakeholder interviews. While the study team sought to ensure that a breadth of perspectives was captured, insights generated during consultations inherently reflect the expertise and background of those engaged. It should also be noted that perspectives from interviewees do not necessarily represent the official stance of Finnish, US, Swedish or Norwegian governments.

- Options produced in this study for strengthening Finnish defence cooperation are formulated primarily at the policy and strategic level, and thus only consider operational and tactical aspects of cooperation to a limited degree. The study conclusions provide several avenues for further research and analysis, which could utilise a range of methods to provide insights on these aspects of cooperation in potential follow-on work.
### Table A.2 Stakeholders consulted through study interviews

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