DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

POST-WAR SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN FINLAND

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About this publication project

This publication is part of a policy research project on Post-War Security Sector Reform, entitled ‘Striking a Balance between Effectiveness and Democratic Accountability within the Defense Sector: Learning lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan with a view of Ukraine’ undertaken by DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

This comparative policy research project aims to identify challenges and best practices of post-war Security Sector Reform (SSR). It focuses on external strategies for building defense and security alliances, and internal strategies aimed at enhancing credible deterrence, democratic civil-military relations, and accountability—drawing lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan with a view to Ukraine. In a similar way as Ukraine, these countries were at war and have experienced a permanent threat of war over decades. Nevertheless, they have succeeded in enforcing their sovereignty despite facing asymmetrical power relations and being on the edge of geopolitical tensions. Moreover, they have managed to become consolidated democracies despite the constant pressure of securitization. What lessons can inspire, and which challenges may provide food-for-thought for Ukraine’s own SSR efforts during and post-war?

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
EU	European Union
US	United States
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
R&D	Research and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
AMV	Armored Modular Vehicle
YYA	Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (Finnish: Ystävyys-, yhteistyö- ja avunantosopimus)
WWI	World War I
NAKO	Independent Anti-Corruption Commission
OPCON	Operational Control
ROK	Republic of Korea
UN	United Nations
US	United States

About the author

Dr. Ilmari Käihkö is an Associate Professor of War Studies at the Swedish Defense University and a veteran of the Finnish Defense Forces. His research focuses on civil-military relations, military sociology, and strategy. He is the author of the book 'Slava Ukraini!' Strategy and the Ukrainian Spirit of Resistance, 2014–2023 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2023) and Sotilaan päiväkirja: Kuinka rauhanturvaaminen muuttui kriisinhallinnaksi [A Soldier's Diary: How Peacekeeping Turned into Crisis Management] (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2024). Dr. Ilmari Käihkö's articles have appeared in various journals, including Civil Wars, Journal of Modern African Studies, Parameters, Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Armed Forces & Society, Defense Studies, and Comparative Strategy.

Abstract

The classic conundrum in civil–military relations is the fear that the military, because of their control of force, might militarize and supplant civil society and subvert democracy. Against this background, Finland is often deemed a successful case of combining both democracy and defense despite several wars and the almost constant threat of war. While the resiliency of Finnish democracy is undeniable, on closer investigation responses to internal and external threats have historically threatened democratic civil–military relations in Finland. This study offers the first attempt to subject Finnish civil–military relations to social scientific study. The trajectory of Finnish civil–military relations is presented through chronological phases and models, each of which begins with an external shock: the 1918 civil war, the interwar era, the Second World War, the Cold War, the post-Cold War era, and the ongoing NATO era. Several crucial variables that have affected Finnish civil–military relations are presented. These include concentration of power during crises, societal cleavages that cause domestic threats, external balancing that curtails sovereignty, and civil–military tension during times of war. Ultimately, the widespread belief that civilian oversight and narrow professional military autonomy can be achieved and maintained even in challenging circumstances without major conflict or tension is questioned. The study concludes with lessons for Ukraine and possibly other countries.

Keywords: armed forces, civil–military relations, democracy, Finland, Russia

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Finland's independence from Russia in December 1917 preceded that of the Ukrainian People's Republic by a mere 48 days. Both subsequently became involved in the Russian civil war, where they received substantial assistance from Imperial Germany against the communists. Whereas Ukraine soon succumbed to the Soviet Union, Finland defended its independence until the Second World War, where Finland had to cede a tenth of its territory to the Soviet Union and curtail its sovereignty as a part of the Soviet sphere of influence in exchange for peaceful relations.

The classic conundrum in civil–military relations is the fear that the military, because of their control of force, might militarize and supplant civil society and subvert democracy. This conundrum is especially pronounced for small, frontline states threatened by much greater powers: they are forced to balance power asymmetries internally by strengthening their militaries and/or externally through alliances and diplomacy (Mearsheimer 1990). Internal balancing raises worries about militarization at the cost of democracy, external balancing about limited sovereignty.

Against this background the Finnish case is often presented as a least likely case where effective defense has been successfully combined with a democratic society despite a threatening environment. From the point of view of civil–military relations, Finland thus offers an unusual and hence an unusually instructive case with several parallels to countries like Ukraine which face dire situations.

Finland was subjected to a much more intense and diverse series of stress tests than the Western democracies typically studied. These include a civil war, several small-scale expeditionary wars, a world war, and a cold war. Each posed unique challenges to the archetypal model of democratic civil–military relations where the military submits to civilian rule in order to serve the broadest possible national interest. The diversity of stress tests makes Finnish civil–military lessons especially valuable, as they allow lessons to be drawn that are applicable to a wider variety of cases–including several trajectories Ukraine could encounter in the future.

The aim of this study is to investigate why and through which mechanisms Finland succeeded at maintaining a balance between effective defense and democratic control of the armed forces in a liberal democratic political system.

Set against the benchmark of democratic civil–military relations, the Finnish case hardly offers a success story. Finnish civil–military lessons question the widespread belief that civilian oversight and narrow professional military autonomy can be achieved and maintained in challenging circumstances without major conflict or tension (Huntington 1957). That said, while internal and external balancing tested and often seriously limited Finnish democracy and sovereignty, Finland prevailed: it remains a prosperous democracy with a considerable defense sector. The Finnish success is attributed to at least three factors. The first concerns societal reforms that emphasized rule of law, countered corruption, encouraged economic growth, reinforced national cohesion and contributed to a strong tradition of national consensus in foreign and security policy. This contributed to the second factor, strong societal trust in the armed forces. This allowed the establishment of conscription-based territorial defense, but more broadly also the objective control of the armed forces where the military is granted autonomy within its professional sphere (Huntington 1957). Third, Finland prioritized defense reforms in the post-Cold War era that allowed swift entry into NATO in 2023.

To date, the literature on Finnish civil–military relations is limited and consists mostly of biographies and memoirs of senior politicians and commanders of the armed forces instead of social scientific studies or policy papers that focus on ways to increase civilian oversight of the defense sector. This lack of research is puzzling. To an extent it can be explained by the

armed forces' level of autonomy within historically changing boundaries, as well as the armed forces' weak academization, combined with pragmatic emphasis when it comes to research that discourages anything deemed potentially critical of their practices (Kotilainen 2021; Salasuo 2020). It is also possible that Finnish decision makers have simply not fully understood the importance of civil–military relations to democracy (Käihkö & Honig 2024).

The evolution of Finnish civil–military relations has been affected by domestic and foreign conflicts related to domestic nation- and state-building as well as external confrontation with Russia. Both conflicts required internal and external balancing. The Finnish case offers several crucial variables that affect civil–military relations. These include concentration of power during crises, societal cleavages that cause domestic threats, external balancing that curtails sovereignty, and civil–military tension during times of war because the line between political and military matters almost inevitably blurs.

This chapter first looks at a quick historical overview of the six phases before zooming in on the external balancing strategies of international military cooperation and defense diplomacy during and after the Cold War. This is followed by internal balancing strategies, first the effectiveness of the defense sector, followed by the accountability and democratic control of the armed forces. The chapter concludes with Finnish lessons for Ukraine.

CHAPTER 2

Historical context

Civil war phase

Finnish success in maintaining independence and democracy was never a given. Finland declared itself independent in December 1917 in the wake of the October Revolution. With encouragement from the Bolsheviks, Finnish socialist Reds captured control of the more industrialized southern Finland from the bourgeois White senate.

A brutal three-month civil war ensued. Because the erstwhile army of the autonomous Russian Grand Duchy of Finland had been gradually abolished during a period of Russification between 1901 and 1905, both sides initially relied on indigenously recruited ad hoc militias. The Whites reactivated conscription in areas under their control, with two-thirds of their forces being conscripts. The Whites soundly won, partly due to German military intervention. With no military at its independence, Finnish civil–military relations were formed during the civil war. The White military, led by General C. G. E. Mannerheim, gained significant political power, prompting politicians to attempt to limit his authority toward the end of the war (Tuompo 1938).

Inter-war phase

There were three main points of civil–military contestation. The first concerned democratization, which resulted in fears of a socialist resurgence. These caused the re-emergence of the White Guard militia as the guarantor of White domestic order. The volunteer guards became a cheap reserve force, assisted in police tasks, and helped with civic education. Moreover, they focused on keeping the left in check and ensured that socialists could not win through ballots (Selén 2001).

The second point of contestation was the White officers' belief that they deserved political power. Some supported small-scale military expeditions eschewed by the government across Finland's borders to expand Finnish territory at Russia's expense. Domestically Mannerheim had resigned after the German ascendance in Finland but plotted to return to power during the interwar years. Despite the Finnish Penal Code of 1922 banning soldiers from party politics, the far right, which had significant support in the military and the White Guard, planned coups to reinstate Mannerheim as a potential leader (Suomi 2023). However, strong anti-communism did not lead to the deconstruction of Finland's parliamentary system and in 1931, Mannerheim became chairman of the Defense Council, securing his loyalty to the regime.

The third point of contestation arose from intra-military relations. The military leadership consisted predominantly of older Russian-educated officers like Mannerheim and younger anti-Russian jaegers who had committed treason by seeking military training in Germany during the world war. By 1926 the *jaegers* had purged their senior Russian-educated competitors from the top military positions through political advocacy and threats of mass resignation.

While democratic control of the defense sector was a concern, the rise of jaegers in the 1920s may have helped protect Finland from the far right in the early 1930s. As part of the establishment, jaegers and younger officers were divided when the White Guard attempted a coup in 1932. The chief of defense sided with the elected government at the cost of ostracism by some of his fellow officers. Interwar Finland was a young and poor state with a society divided by the civil war. Finnish nationalism was rife. Communist parties were gradually forbidden. Controlled by Moscow, they continued to operate underground.

The Finnish interwar era ended in November 1939 with the Soviet invasion, known as the Winter War. The background to the war was the unsuccessful Soviet attempts from 1938 onwards to exchange land with Finland to strengthen the defense of Leningrad and more immediately the August 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which ceded Finland to the Soviet sphere of influence. The invasion unified the Finns, who now saw the Soviet Union as the sole enemy, helping to mend domestic cleavages that had complicated internal balancing.

For analytical purposes the Finnish case can be divided into six phases:

Table 1 Six Finnish phases of civil–military relations

Phase	Civil–military relations	Geopolitical factors	Conflict dynamics	Political regimes & defense sector
Civil war	Military supremacy	Largely outside WWI, but affected by the Russian Civil War	Finland a battleground between German and Bolshevik interests	Contested political regime. Militias, foreign-trained forces, and the emergence of conscript-based armed forces
Interwar era	Civilian supremacy. Repeated unconstitutional interference from the defense sector that culminates in a failed militia coup in 1932	Establishing borders. Mutual suspicion and fear with the Soviet Union	Societal rifts after the civil war. Finnish communists escape to the Soviet Union. Security dilemma	Emergence and strengthening of Finnish democracy despite threats from extreme left & right. Intra-military conflict
Second World War	Military supremacy	The Soviet Union invades Finland to defend Leningrad. Finland subsequently allies itself with Nazi Germany, until peace treaty with the Soviets forces Finland to expel Germans	Societal rifts mended because of an external enemy	Concentration of power to a small political–military elite that bypasses the parliament. Society mobilized for war
Cold War	Political supremacy. Military tightly controlled to prevent escalation	Soviet security concerns continue. Finland remains in the Soviet sphere of influence but seeks neutrality to increase independence	Defeat in war accepted, peace prioritized	Finlandization, or limited democracy and sovereignty. Defense sector initially neglected
Post-Cold War	Political supremacy. Limited oversight of the military's operations abroad	Concern about Russia continues in Finland, yet no acute security threats	No acute conflicts	Limitation of presidential powers strengthens the parliament. Military independence abroad
NATO	Political supremacy	Finland joins NATO following increased geopolitical tension caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022	Finnish support for Ukraine increases tension with Russia	Democracy, where domestic security is prioritized over rule of law. Military also focuses on national defense despite increased internationalization

Second World War phase

Finland faced existential external threat during the Second World War. Mannerheim's power over elected politicians grew, making him as influential as the ailing President Kyösti Kallio and allowing him to set the official stance on both foreign and domestic policy (Killinen 1983: 72, 75). When it came to civilian leaders, Kallio's influence in turn had waned with his health. He soon withdrew from decision-making. The civilian leadership was assumed by the former politician and governor of the Bank of Finland, Risto Ryti, who become prime minister on December 1, 1939. Neither Ryti nor Kallio could control Mannerheim and his military during the war (Suomi 2023: 142–143).

After 105 days of heavy fighting, Finland succumbed to Soviet brute force. The March 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty required Finland to accept major territorial concessions. Despite yielding, the Finnish resistance showed Stalin that the price of complete occupation would be steep. Occupation also posed the risk of escalating into a war against Britain and France, or alternatively Germany (Meinander 2012: 62–63).

To maximize security, Finland unsuccessfully sought alliance with Sweden. The remaining alternative against the Soviet threat was Nazi Germany. In August 1940 Germany offered arms in exchange for right of transit to occupied Norway. Four months later, Finland agreed to join the German invasion of the Soviet Union, believing in a decisive German victory. This alliance heightened Soviet security concerns which remained unresolved by the peace treaty. The Continuation War began on midsummer 1941, when Finnish forces invaded the Soviet Union. The invasion again resulted in concentration of power and the bypassing of parliament. The top military leadership gained significant political influence, partly because Mannerheim remained commander-in-chief after the Winter War. This and Nazi Germany's habit of maintaining diplomatic relations through military channels created tension between Mannerheim and Ryti, who in December 1940 became president. Ryti's war cabinet during the Continuation War included three ministers, one of whom, as minister of defense, mainly served as Mannerheim's eyes and ears, along with the commander-in-chief himself. Rivalry between Ryti and Mannerheim deepened after Mannerheim was promised wide autonomy to lead the war, an autonomy he sought to maximize. As the historian Juhani Suomi has written, it is reasonable to ask whether it was the president or Mannerheim who steered Finland during the Continuation War (Suomi 2023: 152–159).

One thing was certain: the war cabinet saw little need for the parliament, making decisions about Finland's invasion of the Soviet Union without its involvement. The parliament had no control over the war, and Mannerheim made political decisions without consulting elected politicians. Despite surprise and initial success, the invasion soon faltered. Finnish troops reached their easternmost positions in December before digging in. As the war dragged on, Finnish skepticism of the German ability to emerge victorious grew. Withdrawing from the war was difficult because of domestic opposition, the presence of almost 200,000 German soldiers in northern Finland and Finnish dependence on German matériel and grain deliveries. The main concerns were that Germany would occupy Finland or leave it without the means to resist a Soviet counteroffensive (Suomi 2013: 54–57).

When the Finnish government ultimately agreed to start negotiations about a separate peace in the spring of 1944, it was surprised by Soviet demands of massive war reparations. To move from war to peace, Ryti was replaced by Mannerheim. By combining military and political authority Mannerheim held unprecedented power. Even if indecisive, Mannerheim was seen as the figure who could unite Finnish society and the military, making the necessary concessions to save the nation.

Finland lost the war but avoided occupation. Mannerheim's unprecedented power as president and commander-in-chief, whose government was described as his 'personal assistants', culminated in November 1944 when a 'palace coup' by political parties forced

the installation of a new prime minister to lead a new government. Mannerheim subsequently withdrew from daily politics (Suomi 2023: 212–214).

Cold War phase

Defeat in the Continuation War left Finland in a precarious situation: the field army was demobilized while still needing to protect its own territory, in part to contribute to Soviet security. This paradox required maintaining just enough military capability to meet these demands without threatening the Soviet Union.

Cold War-era civil–military relations were characterized by tension and suspicion. Some leading politicians believed that with defeat in the Second World War, the time of armed defense was over. This was, for instance, the view of the minister of justice (subsequently the five-time prime minister and four-time president), Urho Kekkonen of the Agrarian League (from 1965 onwards the Centre Party), in late 1945 (Suomi 1988: 143–146). As a result, the military's societal standing weakened domestically, leaving Finland with no choice but to rely on external balancing through Finlandization, conceding to Soviet demands that limited its independence (further discussed below). In exchange, Finland remained at peace. The military understandably thought differently. As a result, politicians sought to keep the military on a tight leash and emphasized its nature as an unpolitical instrument of the state and its political leaders. This tension left the chief of defense – the commander of the Finnish Defense Forces – in an uncomfortable position. He was obliged to his political masters, while he simultaneously faced the ire of his fellow officers critical of the official policy (Visuri 2010: 156, 159). Finlandization also affected domestic politics, which became subservient to Finnish relations with the Soviet Union. This led to Kekkonen's gradual consolidation of power as president from 1956 to 1982.

The civil–military shift away from the Cold War-era concentration of power to the president was made visible by Kekkonen's successor, social democrat Mauno Koivisto (1982–1994). Koivisto sought to limit presidential powers by ceding power to the parliament. Simultaneously, he decided that he would under no circumstances delegate his authority as commander-in-chief in the way his predecessors had done during the Second World War. He and the government were nevertheless still wary of the military meddling in matters broadly understood to constitute foreign policy (Suomi & Suominen 2008: 257–262).

Post-Cold War and NATO integration

The disintegration of the Soviet Union prompted Finland to reassess its defense policy, but core priorities remained unchanged due to Russia's superior military capability. The main change was that Finnish politicians and the defense establishment began a closer alignment with the West by participating in international crisis operations, arms purchases, and joining the EU and NATO.

Joining the EU in 1995 spelled the end of the Finnish neutrality policy. The renewal of peacekeeping legislation in 1995 enabled Finland's participation in NATO-led operations in Bosnia in 1996. Parliament broadly supported increased crisis management involvement, with most small parties backing enhanced European cooperation. Only the USA's and NATO's critics on the extreme political left were ready to resist a more international orientation in defense and military crisis management policy. It was enough for a majority of the parliament that Finland would not participate in any peace enforcement efforts, while taking advantage of the increased participation to develop the Defense Forces (Nokkala 2022: 52).

While politicians made decisions about use of force, their understanding of objective control translated into focusing on budgetary control, assuming that their international partners would control multinational operations. As a result, relatively junior contingent commanders often had the ultimate say in decisions about use of force abroad (Honig & Käihkö Forthcoming). This significant military independence highlighted the armed forces' objective control. It also

raised serious questions about Finland's strategy and democratic oversight of its military. A case in point is the war in Afghanistan, where Finnish forces gradually moved from peacekeeping to warfighting.

NATO membership remained unpopular in Finland even after the Russian invasion and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014. Instead, Finland focused on cooperation with Nordic countries, particularly Sweden, and joined the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force in 2017. The defeat in Afghanistan in 2021 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine the year after led to the reprioritization of national defense in Finland. Finland joined NATO in April 2023, a mere fourteen months after seeking membership. The quick accession can be explained by long doctrinal and material preparation towards NATO compatibility, and the absence of the kinds of international conflicts that delayed the Swedish membership process.

Finland's NATO membership more than doubled the alliance's land border with Russia and raised questions about Finnish civil–military relations. The debate has largely centered on national security needs amid Russian tensions. One of the looming issues is whether the Finnish military's relative independence in executing international operations will continue in NATO. A related issue concerns the division of power between the newly elected president, the minister of defense and the minister of foreign affairs — who all hail from the right-wing National Coalition party. The fate of the ongoing war in Ukraine will significantly affect Finnish defense policy and civil–military relations. While Finland is committed to supporting Ukraine, future military assistance is constrained by the need to address a reconstituted Russian threat.

CHAPTER 3

External balancing strategies: international military cooperation and defense diplomacy

As a small state, Finland has always had to balance between greater powers and seek alliances to be able to defend itself against a greater foe. The Finnish alliance with Germany after defeat in the Winter War provided Finland with an opportunity to retrieve territory lost during the Winter War. When this failed, three treaties built the framework of Finnish foreign and defense policy after the Second World War: The Moscow Armistice (1944), the Paris Peace Treaty (1947) and the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (in Finnish: Ystävyys-, yhteistyö- ja avunantosopimus or YYA Treaty, 1948).

The Moscow Armistice signed in September 1944 amended the 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty that had ended the Winter War with further loss of territory in the north, as well as the 50-year lease of the Porkkalanniemi peninsula, located mere 30 kilometers from Helsinki to the Soviet Union. Finland furthermore had to rapidly demobilize its wartime army and dismantle organizations considered 'fascist' by the Soviet Union. These included the White Guard militia and most veteran organizations.

The final peace treaty between Finland and the Allies was signed in Paris in 1947. The Paris Peace Treaty limited the Finnish military to 41,900 soldiers (34,400 in the army, 4500 in the navy and 3000 in the air force), 60 planes, 10,000 naval tonnages, and banned several capabilities like submarines and nuclear weapons altogether. The demilitarized status of the Åland islands was reinstated. It was not the Soviet Union that sought to limit Finnish military capabilities, but the United Kingdom: because Finland was deemed to belong to the Soviet sphere of influence, Finnish military capability was understood to benefit the Soviets. It thus made sense from a Western perspective to disarm Finland to the greatest extent possible (Saarikoski 1997: 356). The Soviets in turn saw the conscription system as a way to prevent invasion through Finland: it sold weapons in excess of the needs of the force stipulated in the Paris Peace Treaty.

Finally, a year later in 1948, Finland was forced to sign the YYA Treaty with the Soviet Union which was built on two premises: Finland had lost the war to the Soviet Union and a disarmed Finland would not survive another war against its greater neighbor. In realpolitik terms the only military threat Finland could do something about came in the form of a third party using Finnish territory to invade the Soviet Union. Defending Finnish territory would thus both safeguard Finnish sovereignty and reassure the Soviet Union. According to the YYA Treaty, Finland committed to resisting attacks against its territory or against Soviet territory from Finland and, if necessary, request Soviet support for this.

The YYA Treaty became the stable cornerstone of Finnish domestic and foreign policy during the Cold War, and was renewed in 1955, 1980 and 1983. It also constituted the main Soviet instrument for exerting influence on Finnish domestic and foreign policy. Simultaneously, it contradicted the Paris Peace Treaty. Whereas the Paris Peace Treaty sought to disarm Finland, the YYA Treaty obliged Finland to maintain a credible defense capability.

Thanks to this contradiction, the clauses of the Paris Peace Treaty were never fully implemented. Because some Finnish defense capability benefited the Soviet Union, Finland was allowed to maintain its military. This said, there were limits to what the Soviets (and other Allies) allowed: too much military capability could have caused a security dilemma in the sense of being interpreted as threatening (Tang 2009). This, or at least Finnish worries over the Soviet reaction, made leading politicians maintain a low-key defense policy. A second explanation for this policy was financial. Burdened by the substantial war reparations, the Finnish government focused on rebuilding, not military expenditure.

In the late 1950s some clauses of the Moscow Armistice were revoked during the thaw in superpower relations that followed Stalin's death. Porkkalanniemi

was returned to Finland in 1955, and Finland soon joined the United Nations and the Nordic Council. The armed forces' funding increased. Even Finnish veterans were allowed to organize anew. In 1961 the Note Crisis nevertheless concretely illustrated the extent to which the Soviet Union limited Finnish democracy and independence in what has been called 'Finlandization'. The timing of the note coincided with forthcoming Finnish Presidential elections wherein Kekkonen and his foreign policy were the clear Soviet preference. He soundly won the elections. Kekkonen's reign was later extended by making an exception in the constitution.

Finland sought to employ claims of neutrality for freedom of maneuver during the Cold War. As a result, neutrality and the foreign policy that maintained it built the foundation of Finnish Cold War security policy. With the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviets became increasingly wary of Finnish attempts to unilaterally withdraw from the military obligations of the YYA via such referrals to neutrality. The Finnish claims nevertheless grew stronger with the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, a predecessor to the 1994 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Similarly, in the 1970s, United Nations peacekeeping allowed Finland to use military means to emphasize its neutrality — even if many in the military saw peacekeeping as harmful to national defense (Visuri 2010: 224–226). Finnish civil–military relations normalized towards the end of the 1970s, in large part due to the personal relationship between Kekkonen and his designated chief of defense Lauri Sutela (Suomi 2023: 342–343).

The disintegration of the Soviet Union allowed Finland to regain sovereignty. Already in January 1992, Finland and Russia, the Soviet Union's successor state, agreed the basis of their relationship. With the conclusion of the YYA Treaty, Finland oriented towards the West both economically and politically yet remained militarily nonaligned.

In March 1992 Finland applied to become a member of the European Community and in May purchased 64 F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets from the United States. A year later, Finland joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Despite a cautious approach, Finland, by engaging in technical cooperation, training, and matériel exchanges with NATO, gradually narrowed the gap between a close partnership and full membership. The value of the common Partnership for Peace program or Partnership for Peace-like exercises was significant, even if they often focused on crisis management rather than warfighting (Nokkala 2022: 53).

The defense alliance nevertheless remained unpopular in Finland. Against this background it was not surprising that for Finland the main reason given for joining the European Union in 1995 by leading politicians was security maximization through deeper integration with the West (Vaahtoranta & Forsberg 2000: 12). The electorate only agreed in part. In the advisory referendum, no more than 56.9% of voters were in favor of membership. Nevertheless, seeking security also helps to explain Finnish support for the EU's clause of mutual defense adopted in 2009. A spring 2024 Eurobarometer study confirmed that 80% of Finns viewed Russia's invasion of Ukraine as the most influential crisis (against 42% of Europeans in the 27 member states). Similarly, 50% of Finns (against 34% of Europeans) felt that the EU should prioritize measures within the fields of security and defense (European Commission 2024).

Domestically, the so-called NATO option kept both proponents and opponents of NATO membership content during a time when public opinion was against joining the defense alliance. This was in part because of the durable tradition of Finnish neutrality as national identity (Aunesluoma & Rainio-Niemi 2016), but also because of concerns of negative Russian reaction to a Finnish membership application (Käihkö 2023a). All the while the defense sector invested in becoming NATO-compatible. Politically, participation in international crisis management operations —

especially in Afghanistan after 2007 (Käihkö & Honig 2024) — became an important way to improve relations with the United States and NATO.

The Russian invasion and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 caused a significant shift in Finnish international defense cooperation. Finland for the first time began to emphasize territorial defense instead of international commitments and deepened bilateral defense cooperation with similarly non-NATO Sweden. In 2017 the two countries joined the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force, again to enhance their territorial defense. It was only after the Russian march towards Kyiv was stopped in the spring of 2022 that Finland increased its defense funding and applied for membership (Pesu & Iso-Markku 2024: 575–577).

CHAPTER 4

Internal balancing strategies (1): establishing the effectiveness of the defense sector

Absent security guarantees gained through external balancing, with a long border and negative historical experiences with Russia, it is hardly surprising that Finland has historically invested in internal balancing and its defense sector. During the interwar phase the Finnish authorities were furthermore wary about domestic threats caused by societal polarization. This led to a defense sector where a volunteer militia was responsible for maintaining domestic order and the conscript-based armed forces for external threats. The White Guard militia also contributed to a large and comparatively cheap reserve deemed necessary for the traditional Finnish policy of defending the entire country. For Stalin, the White Guard in part raised the price of occupying Finland in 1940 to an unacceptable level (Rentola 2016).

Even after losing the Continuation War, Finland continued to emphasize maintaining peace through foreign policy and diplomacy. In case this failed, Finland invested in deterrence by punishment — threatening to respond to unwanted behavior with great harm — to ensure that the costs of occupation would surpass the gains (Snyder 1960). This required continuing a compulsory male conscription, which in 2013–2015 consumed between 5–6% and in 2024 at €186 million 3.1% of the defense budget (Finnish Ministry of Defense 2024a). In the 1990s initiatives to re-establish the White Guard, which had been banned after the Second World War were opposed by the armed forces as harmful to societal acceptance of the broader defense sector. While voluntary participation in the defense sector is welcomed in Finland, the professional armed forces seek to control all defense activities (Suomi & Suominen 2008: 451–453).

In 2022 Finland ranked 26th (immediately after the United States) on the Global Militarization Index, which compares military spending in relation to GDP and health spending (Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies 2024). The effectiveness of the defense sector can in turn be measured through Finland's position on the Global Firepower Index, which ranked Finland 50th of 145 countries in 2023.

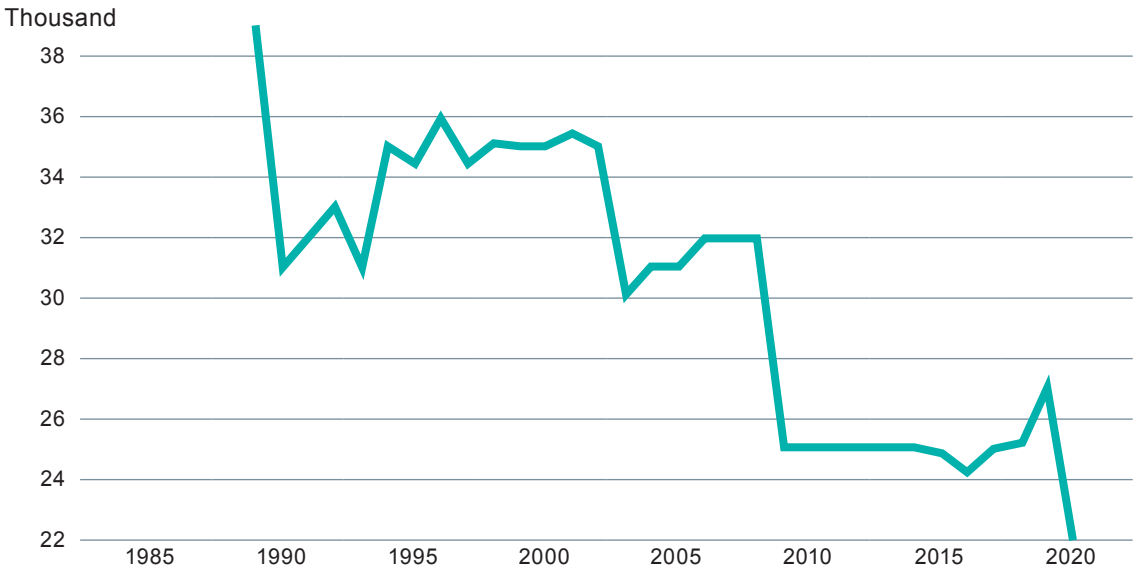
Finland's main strength is its conscript system, which allows a large reserve. The peacetime Finnish Defense Forces possess 24,000 active personnel (0.4% of the population, ranking Finland 87 out of the 145 countries in the index), divided into around 12,000 employees (one-third civilians) and 22,000 conscripts per year. This bi-annual intake allows the cost-effective maintenance of a 280,000-strong reserve, with the possibility of mobilizing up to 870,000 personnel. In practice, the professional cadre and the better equipped general forces would be mobilized first and thereby buy time for the mobilization of the older reservists — many of whom would be poorly equipped and would be used in support roles.

While the reserve is just over half the Cold War-era strength of 500,000, it still constitutes the 9th largest reserve of the countries evaluated (Global Firepower Index 2024). Since 2017, Finland has focused on improving military readiness and capabilities rather than increasing the size of its forces.

The size of the Finnish reserve is considerable. Unlike many European contemporaries, Finland has not limited, paused, or dismantled, but has continued to sustain a large, relatively well-equipped and well-motivated reserve. Over time financial constraints and societal expectations have led to the gradual increase of permission days and monetary benefits, as well as the shortening of the conscription period. In 1950, ordinary conscripts served for 240 days, non-commissioned officers and reserve officers for 330 days. By 2024 the duration was 165, 255 or 347 days.

The conscription system is written into Finland's constitution but depends on Finnish society's will to defend the country. In late 2023 no less than 79% of those polled felt that Finns should take up arms and

Figure 1 **Armed forces, personnel, total – Finland, 1985–2020**



Source: (World Bank 2024a)

defend Finland if the country were invaded, regardless of the circumstances (National Defense Information Planning Board 2024: 31). From 1995 onwards, Finnish women have been able to apply for voluntary military service. With decreasing birth rates and a third of the male population not completing conscription, the military has been keen to increase the number of female volunteers (Hakahuhta & Stenroos 2020). While the official view is that conscription needs to mirror Finnish society (Kosonen & Mälkki 2022: 458), several discrepancies between the two — for instance concerning national minorities and women (see Hast & Kotilainen 2024) — have become increasingly pronounced over time. According to conscript questionnaires, around 40% of female and 4% of male conscripts reported repeated sexual harassment during their conscription in 2023 (Finnish Ministry of Defense 2024b: 20).

While bullying in the military is periodically reported, 2022 and 2023 saw particularly severe cases of long-term bullying of dozens of conscripts by instructors in two units of the Navy (Kerkelä 2023). Accidents often resulting from inadequate safety measures during conscript exercises also regularly come to light (Muhonen 2024). Soldiers' and officers' regular use of prostitutes and alcohol abroad (Suopanki 2021b), and sexual harassment and illegal behavior at home have also been noted (Suopanki 2021a). In every case the response by the military has been to emphasize that the incidents reported are outliers, and to assign responsibility to individuals. The priority has thus been to protect reputation instead of concrete measures taken to get rid of unwanted and, in some cases, illegal behavior.

Between 1960 and 2022 Finnish defense expenditure fluctuated between an all-time high of 2.5% in 1962 and 1.1% in 2001, with an average of 1.54% (World Bank 2024b). During the Cold War this was among the lowest of the world's developed countries (Tartter 1990: 324). Since 2015, the defense budget has increased modestly, but starting in 2021, it rose sharply due to major acquisitions like the Squadron 2020 naval vessels and the HX Fighter Program. The budget increased from €3.2 billion in 2020 to €4.9 billion in 2021, largely driven by the costs of new fighter jets, significantly boosting Finland's matériel budget (Johnson 2020: 2–3). In 2024 the Finnish defense budget stood at €6 billion or 2.31% of GDP, ranking 44/145 in the Global Firepower Index (2024). Defense expenditure was nevertheless expected to decrease to 1.99% by 2027 after the completion of these acquisitions (Finnish Ministry of Defense 2024a).

Finland's military forces consist of three service branches: the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy. Because of its large territory, the long Russian border, and the lower cost of land forces in comparison to more technological air and naval forces, Finland has prioritized its army. Much matériel was purchased affordably when other countries reduced their militaries

following the end of the Cold War. Because matériel could tie Finland to the producer for decades to come, matériel acquisitions inevitably had a political dimension. More expensive high-technology investments from the United States, Sweden and Israel have recently updated the fighter fleet with 64 Lockheed Martin F-35A multi-role fighters, long-range missiles, and anti-aircraft capability.

While provision of refresher training has historically varied due to budgetary constraints, recently investments have been made to ensure that the troops can perform their wartime duties. Up to 10,000 of the reserve are called up rotationally each year by the military. Voluntary exercises are additionally organized by the National Defense Training Association (Maanpuolustuskoulutus, MPK). MPK is monitored by the Ministry of Defense, and its training is directed and supported by the Defense Forces. Approximately 50,000 citizens voluntarily participate in the courses each year.

Finland also continued its notion of total defense in the new guise of the comprehensive security model, which joins together the military and civilian spheres of defense to prepare for threats against society's critical functions and ensure security of supply. By 2000, civilian defense had nevertheless been diminished. While coordination of total defense remains in the hands of the Ministry of Defense, it lacks the prerequisites to do this in practice (Häkkänen 2024). Part of this total defense pertains to energy supply independence, which Finland has sought to guarantee through nuclear power. Russian hesitancy to directly attack Ukrainian nuclear power plants suggests their importance in ensuring the functioning of economies and societies during interstate war.

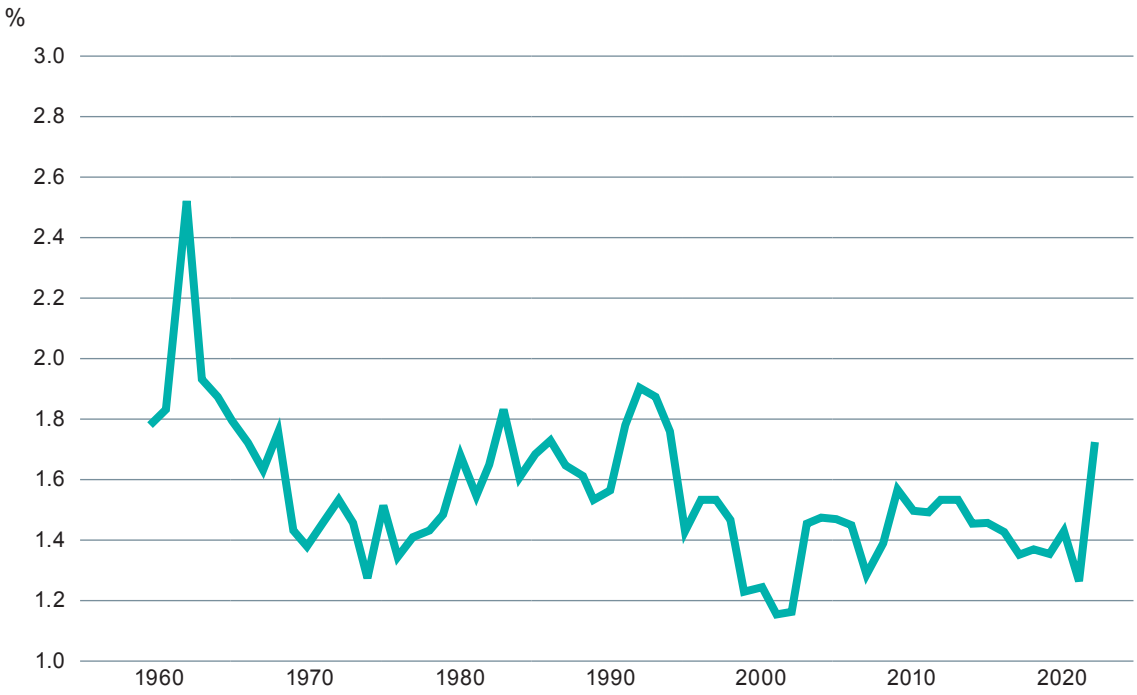
Another important area of self-sufficiency emphasized in Finland is defense industry, which forms an integral, yet to date poorly researched part of national defense. Already at independence Finland faced a situation where there were no guarantees that Finland would receive matériel during an international crisis. After initially relying on a private actor, in the early 1920s the strengthening state set up its own enterprise for ammunition production in order to increase control and decrease costs. While state-owned and private enterprises could provide for peacetime needs, in times of war imports would be necessary. Because defense industries were controlled by the state, intermediaries could be eliminated: funding was simply moved from one state entity to another.

After the Cold War, self-sufficiency suffered as state-owned industries were privatized. Finland was not immune to the international trend of weakened demand for military matériel, which made it difficult to support a strong Finnish defense industry. Dependency on exports led to the search for international markets, widening to civilian products and the building of first domestic and by the end of the 1990s–international consortiums (Roiko-Jokela et al. 2023a: 360–362). Domestic supply and maintenance were ensured through public–private partnerships. In addition to contracts, even ownership was deemed a way to ensure self-sufficiency during war.

The resulting protectionism and national monopolies impeded, for instance, the quick increase of munitions production after 2022 as the industry sought long purchase commitments from governments that would allow investment in production. Governments in turn worried about long-term commitments to purchases whose prices were inflated by weak competition.

The Finnish defense industry is relatively small. The Association of Finnish Defense and Aerospace Industries has about 150 member companies, the majority of which are privately owned. They directly employ about 9900 people. The fact that most of the companies operate even outside the defense sector contributes to a substantial 15% R&D investment, and allows investments from sources which shun the military

Figure 2 **Military expenditure (% of GDP) Finland, 1960–2022**



Source: (World Bank 2024a)

(Association of Finnish Defence and Aerospace Industries, 2023). Tesi (Finnish Industry Investment Ltd) has in turn identified 368 Finnish defense firms (Tesi 2024).

Emphasizing niche areas, the Finnish defense industry focuses on armored wheeled vehicles, turreted mortar systems, logistics, command and control systems, and Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C5ISR). Examples of this niche expertise include: the tactical communications company Bittium; the satellite intelligence ICEYE which, for instance, cooperates with the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense; the encryption and data wiping software creator Jetico; the producer of UAV launchers Robonic; or the naval combat survivability software designer Surma. The ability to provide cutting-edge products within niche spaces and ensure whole-of-lifespan servicing for procured matériel makes the domestic industry an important stakeholder in national defense. However, with a few exceptions such as Patria, producer of AMV armored wheeled vehicles and NEMO mortar systems (2016 turnover €490m, personnel 2800) they are not large industrial players (Salonius-Pasternak 2018: 6). Because most companies operate in the civilian market as well, they also produce dual-use products that work in varying climate conditions (Association of Finnish Defence and Aerospace Industries 2023). These kinds of companies have also grown three times faster in recent years than the large established defense companies (Tesi 2024).

As the Finnish defense industry historically focused on meeting the demands of a mass army, military modernization decreased Finnish self-sufficiency. By the end of the Cold War, Finland produced about 40% of the equipment used, with the remainder imported equally from the Soviet Union and Western countries in order to emphasize Finnish neutrality (Tartter 1990: 327). In 2000 a mere fifth of the matériel purchased came from Finland (Roiko-Jokela et al. 2023b: 189). Even today much of the most modern matériel is imported.

CHAPTER 5

Internal balancing strategies (2): accountability and democratic control of the armed forces

The six phases and models of civil–military relations illustrate how accountability and democratic control of the armed forces developed in independent Finland. The military was put in its place immediately after the civil war but continued to maintain major influence in Finnish politics and society during the interwar years. The situation changed after the Second World War, when the uncertain foreign and domestic political situation was deemed to necessitate tight control of the military.

Regardless of who was superior to the other, both civilian and military leaders tended to bypass the parliament. In fact, it was only from 1970 onwards that a parliamentary defense committee broadened political and societal participation in defense planning amidst growing demands from society to democratize and modernize the military. Until then the president had prepared and decided on defense policy. Now the parliament — including the leftist opposition parties — became involved and responsible for preparing defense policy (Visuri 2010: 206–209). In 1971 the center-leftist government set up a committee to investigate how the military could best join societal compatibility with efficiency. Its final report in 1976 contained 140 recommendations, many of which were subsequently implemented. From the perspective of the military, the committee was a useful 'buffer' against the criticism that had started to grow in the 1960s, especially from the political left (Suomi & Suominen 2008: 154–155).

Strengthened societal participation helped develop national consensus in defense matters and strengthened the position of the minister of defense, responsible for appropriations and jurisdiction. The chief of defense is directly subordinated to the president and decides on the implementation of the armed forces' tasks and on the use of their capabilities. The Defense Command functions as his headquarters. Four generals — those leading the Army, Navy, Air Force and the National Defense University — are directly subordinated to the commander (see Appendix 1). The chief of defense answers either to the president of the republic or the Council of State on the execution of military decisions. The commander presents promotions to the president, who decides upon them.

Professional military personnel have their own unions and 1970 also saw the establishment of the Conscripts' Union (Varusmiesliitto) with the aim of improving service conditions. The bonds between society and the military had been strengthened the decade before, when in 1961 Finland began to organize Finnish National Defense Courses (until 1964 Total National Defense Courses) aimed at top decision makers from different spheres of Finnish society. The course became an important way for the military to improve its societal standing after it had been largely ignored after 1944, even with the far left, after they began to be invited to the course. Women and younger participants also received special consideration from organizers. Through building consensus about Finnish security policy (Tienari et al. 2009), the courses improved Finnish civil–military relations, interagency cooperation and enabled total defense.

The post-Cold War phase heralded a crucial new instrument for guiding defense planning in 1995, when the Finnish government began to publish reports on foreign and security policy. Because the reports were usually published once during the parliamentary electoral term of four years and built on political consensus across party lines, they strengthened long-term defense planning. As fears of escalation waned, the autonomy of the armed forces increased. This was especially the case for military operations abroad. For instance, it is difficult to find evidence of strong civilian oversight of the two decades-long Finnish military activities in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021 (Käihkö & Honig 2024; see also Käihkö 2024), let alone in Iraq.

Regarding the existing oversight bodies, Finland has two independent guardians of the law: the Chancellor of Justice and the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Chancellor of Justice oversees the legality of actions by all government ministers, including the minister of defense, and supervises anti-corruption measures, public procurement, competition, and state aid. The Parliamentary Ombudsman focuses on safeguarding human rights and monitoring the legality of institutions, including the armed forces (Office of the Chancellor of Justice 2022).

The Parliamentary Ombudsman in Finland reviews the legality of military actions, administrative decisions, and personnel conduct. A 2011 amendment allowed the Ombudsman to dismiss frivolous or groundless complaints, enhancing efficiency and enabling a focus on critical tasks, including inspections of the Defense Forces. While the Ombudsman is also tasked with monitoring Finnish peacekeepers abroad, such inspections are infrequent, with the last occurring in Kosovo in 2009. Because of secrecy, operations have not been subjected to much public scrutiny. Consequently, the number of Finnish peacekeepers has decreased in recent years. For example, in 2017 the Ombudsman received at most five complaints per year (Turtio 2017: 76–80).

The parliamentary defense committee in turn plays an important role in exercising political control over the Defense Forces. The defense committee is usually manned by more experienced members of the parliament and has recently been prioritized more because of the deteriorated international security situation. It is currently chaired by a member of the main government party, the National Coalition. The committee examines defense budgets, policies, and strategic planning. It ensures that defense initiatives align with national security interests and legal frameworks. It also oversees defense-related legislation and provides recommendations for improvements (Turtio 2017: 76–80).

Recently, Finland has implemented stringent regulatory controls over intelligence operations. In 2019, the Intelligence Ombudsman was established to ensure oversight and accountability, with unrestricted access to Supo's (Finnish Security Intelligence Service) documents, premises, and information systems, and the authority to review or suspend intelligence methods. The Parliamentary Ombudsman is responsible for the oversight of secret intelligence collection. In his office's 2023 annual report, the Parliamentary Ombudsman noted that prior to the new intelligence laws the military had employed 'questionable' surveillance methods. This was deemed 'very problematic' from the perspective of rule of law (Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland 2024: 178). While the 2019 intelligence legislation improved the monitoring of intelligence activities, it also substantially increased the mandate for these activities. Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Intelligence Oversight Committee monitors intelligence activities, reviewing information and methods used within the intelligence sector (Finnish Security and Intelligence Service 2022).

While strong societal trust in the military is necessary for its objective control and strong consensus in defense matters, it also complicates civilian oversight (Hast & Kotilainen 2024). No critical journalism about the Finnish military exists even during peacetime (Yleisradio 2023). While no major scandals have emerged since 1944 within the armed forces, even decision makers who sit in the parliamentary defense committee struggle to understand military activities because of a strong tradition of secrecy.

More recently, legal and other scholars have voiced serious concerns regarding the prioritization of security in a way that trumps rule of law. In July 2024, the parliament voted for a controversial temporary deportation law that allows Finnish border guards to refuse asylum applications under certain circumstances. Aimed at protecting Finland from refugee flows organized by Russia, legal scholars have argued that domestic security has been prioritized over the rule of law: the law could not be applied in practice because it conflicted with European and international law (Havusto 2024).

To summarize, accountability and oversight of the military appear to be taken for granted in Finland. A major reason for this is that the military enjoys broad societal approval and trust. Simultaneously, the almost complete absence of societal discussion about democratic civil–military relations suggests that public awareness about them is low. This may work during peaceful times, but Finnish participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq alone illustrate how use of force raises questions that the Finnish military, society and decision makers appear insufficiently equipped to manage.

CHAPTER 6

Learning lessons with a view of Ukraine's post-war Security Sector Reform

This study has investigated why and through which mechanisms Finland has succeeded at maintaining a balance between effective defense and democratic control of the armed forces in a liberal democratic political system. The question can be understood as biased. Finnish balancing between effective defense and democracy in a challenging domestic and international environment has always been precarious. While Finland remains a prosperous democracy with an effective defense system, the Finnish case questions the widespread belief that civilian oversight can be achieved and maintained in challenging circumstances without major tension. The same appears to be true in other cases, including Ukraine.

The unusual and hence unusually instructive Finnish case nevertheless offers several important lessons for Ukraine, as well as other countries. From 2014 onwards, Ukraine has faced several challenges that Finland had to deal with during the interwar years. Both countries have faced the challenge of building a defense sector that could defend the country against Russia in a context characterized by societal polarization and division, contested democracy and rule of law, and weak economy. In Finland, it was reconciliation, strengthening democracy, and societal reforms that reduced corruption, boosted economic growth, increased national cohesion, allowed the strengthening of the defense sector through conscription, and encouraged national consensus on civil–military issues. In addition to this investment in Finnish society, the prioritization of defense reforms later allowed Finland swift entry into NATO after the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine questioned the viability of the Finnish deterrence strategy.

While domestic issues never completely disappeared in Finland before the Winter War or Ukraine before 2022, the more pressing external challenge faced by both Finland and Ukraine was the same: How could they cope against a vastly stronger aggressor? The Finnish answer to the question was to seek alliances and to invest in the effectiveness of its defense sector to deter aggression. National unity was emphasized, and decision-making concentrated through bypassing the parliament. The price of quicker decision-making was weakened democratic debate.

Many Finnish Cold War-era civil–military lessons pertain to a bleak scenario where Ukraine too is forced to cede some of its territory, independence, and sovereignty to the aggressor, and possibly to limit its military strength and capabilities. A major complication, however, pertains to the uncertainty over whether Ukraine would achieve lasting peace even in exchange for concessions in the way that Finland did after the Second World War. There are no guarantees that the to date positive ending of the Finnish case will materialize in Ukraine in the near future.

An important reason for this is the uncertainty over whether Ukraine will or even can follow the Finnish example of conceding to Russia's sphere of influence for decades to come for the sole reason that neutrality might not be an option in the increasingly polarized circumstances. From the Russian perspective, anything less than Ukrainian subjugation would likely lead to the continued Western integration of Ukraine. Russian rhetoric has furthermore indicated that a Russian victory might entail the loss of Ukraine's statehood altogether. From the Ukrainian perspective, neutrality would leave the country without security guarantees against further Russian aggression. These guarantees can only come through the very integration and external balancing that Russia has sought to prevent. Absent guarantees, Ukraine may in the short term perceive continued warfare the best of a set of bad alternatives. In the long run, it would need to invest in self-sufficiency to maintain deterrence against Russia.

War often leads to the centralization of power. Unlike in Finland and despite civil–military conflicts (Shuster 2024), in wartime Ukraine the president has remained the commander-in-chief and stronger civilian oversight

of the military has been observed. Like in Finland, the Ukrainian parliament has weakened considerably during the war due to the introduction of martial law and the banning of 11 pro-Russian political parties, including the largest opposition party. A strong civil society and independent media nevertheless strengthen oversight (Januta 2024a; Januta 2024b). While understandable in the short-term, concentration of power into the hands of the president can complicate Ukraine's long-term external balancing strategy because both the EU and NATO expect Ukraine to fulfil certain political criteria guaranteeing democratic consolidation. Excessive political intervention in military affairs can in turn worsen Ukraine's chances in the war.

Russian control of Ukrainian territory poses another hurdle to integration into the EU and NATO. The same institutional integration can nevertheless also further democracy and democratic control of the Ukrainian defense sector. If nothing else, external demands will encourage Ukrainian policymakers to continue military reforms with the assistance of Western training and expertise to make the Ukrainian military NATO-compatible. The same applies for political reforms, which should emphasize the parliament's role in overseeing the rule of law, reducing corruption and reinforcing national cohesion to strengthen the will to defend the country. This is necessary for adopting the kind of conscription system Finland uses, but so is an economy that ensures that sufficient personnel can be freed from the labor market and trained and equipped. This is also recognized by Ukrainian officials, who claim that six or even eight taxpayers are required to support each soldier (Court 2024).

When it comes to internal balancing strategies, Ukraine struggles to match Russian matériel production and manpower mobilization. The former may in time be helped with external support, although continued Russian airstrikes favor production outside Ukraine's borders and hence beyond its control. When it comes to manpower, in the absence of general conscription, militias may appear an affordable solution. The Finnish case nevertheless illustrates how militias can threaten societal unity, democratic civil–military relations, and potentially even democracy itself — not to mention the lessons also apparent in Ukraine after the 2014 Maidan Revolution (Käihkö 2023b). The armed forces should refrain from engaging in party politics but remain in control of all defense activities, supported by a strong society and civilian oversight.

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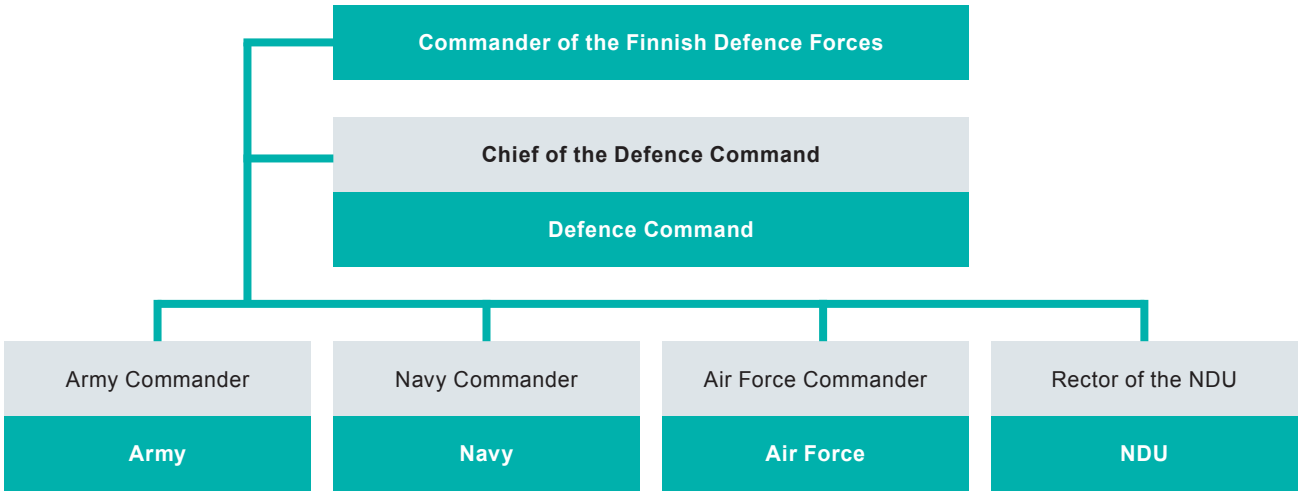
Appendices

Appendix 1 **The command organization of the Finnish Defense Forces**



Source: The Finnish Defense Forces.

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DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

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