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Shelter-Seeking in Bilateral Cooperation: The Case of Finnish-Swedish Security Political Rapprochement (2009-2022)

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Author:

Sebastian Linderdahl

Supervisor:

Hanna Tuominen

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Author: Sebastian Linderdahl (015815879)

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Abstract: This thesis investigates the phenomenon of security and defence political rapprochement between Finland and Sweden in 2009-2022, exploring the hypothesis of bilateral shelter-seeking in response to a deteriorating security environment. The study examines the changes in and alignment of threat perceptions, substantive security dimensions therein, and the formulation of policy objectives in bilateral cooperation, against the backdrop of the worsening security environment owing to the increasingly aggressive neighbour politics by Russia since 2008. This research problem posits two research questions: (1) "What kinds of security and defence political threat perceptions did the changing regional security dynamics invoke in Finland and Sweden, particularly in light of Russia's increasingly aggressive neighbour politics, since 2008?", and (2) "What roles did the Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation play in the security and defence policies of Finland and Sweden during the period under study?". Qualitative answers to these questions are obtained through document analysis, process tracing, and content analysis of official government reports on security and defence policies issued between 2009-2022. Moreover, the study deploys an additional conceptual tool, drawing from the work of Christopher Daase, to analyse the substantive dimensions of security evident in the threats perceived. The theoretical framework of small states and shelter theory suggests that small states naturally seek alliances, patrons, and international organizations for political, economic, and societal shelter from external security threats. The findings of the analysis reveal a gradual convergence in threat perceptions, and in the substantive dimensions therein, and a notable development in bilateral cooperation objectives since 2015, suggesting a deliberate move towards seeking shelter amidst escalating security challenges. The study contributes to small state studies by applying small states and shelter theory to an unexplored case and sheds light on the role of bilateral cooperation as a source of shelter in navigating complex security threats. Limitations include the relatively niche policy focus, potential data constraints, and challenges in establishing causality between bilateral cooperation and perceived threats, indicating the need for further research in broader policy areas.

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1 Introduction

Finland and Sweden have a special relationship that spans across centuries. Finland was a part of the Swedish realm for some 600 years, and the relations between the two withstood even the loss of Finland over to Russia in 1809, and the subsequent Russian rule that lasted until 1917 when Finland gained its independence. Since then, Finland and Sweden have continued to uphold and develop their close relationship both bilaterally and internationally. The social, political, and economic ties between the countries are historically extensive, however, in the areas of security and defence, no formal security policy guarantees have been exchanged between the two. This was set to change in May of 2022, when Finland and Sweden applied for NATO membership in unison after a rapid decision-making process that started in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022.

Finland was admitted as a full NATO member on 4th of April 2023, followed by Sweden on 7th of March 2024. The historicity of these developments is major, as Sweden effectively ended its neutrality, or at least military non-alignment policy, after over 200 years (in place since 1812). Secondly, Finland and Sweden's NATO accession marks the first time all five Nordic countries are militarily allied since the dissolution of the Kalmar Union in June 1523, i.e. after 500 years. However, the bilateral security and defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden witnessed gradual increase over several years prior to their NATO accession, and the starting point of their closer cooperation could be argued to be the EU's mutual defence clause Article 42 (7) in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, reinforced by Sweden's unilateral declaration of solidarity presented likewise in 2009 (Saxi, H. L., 2022, p. 60). The giving to and receiving of military assistance from other member states or Nordic countries, if need be, was now declared an expectation (Government of Sweden, 2009, p. 9).

On the backdrop of Finland and Sweden's long histories of neutrality/military non-alignment policy, such a declaration of solidarity, coupled with subsequent increase in bilateral cooperation between the two, marks a point of departure away from non-alignment to bilateral military alignment, which ultimately expanded to seeking alliance through the applying for membership of NATO in 2022. Finland and Sweden thus moved from neutral/non-aligned states to seeking membership in a military

alliance between 2009-2022, all while increasingly aligning bilaterally in the meantime. Thus, instead of focusing on the result of NATO membership, this thesis is focused on studying that transition period between 2009 and 2022, namely from the perspective of examining the underlying reasons for Finland and Sweden's security political rapprochement in the given timeframe.

Moreover, this thesis takes its departure from the notion that following Russia's more active and aggressive neighbour politics since 2008, Finland and Sweden, as small states, became increasingly interested in cultivating not just closer bilateral cooperation, but also closer relations with NATO and the United States to receive "shelter", all while maintaining their non-aligned status (Pedersen, R. B., 2018, p. 236). Furthermore, Sweden and Finland have cooperated increasingly close on operative defence matters ever since 2014, eventually culminating in the two of them being each other's closest defence cooperation partners by 2022 (Brommesson, D., et al., 2022, p. 4). Perhaps not coincidentally but rather because of the Russian war in Georgia in 2008, Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and subsequent full scale invasion war against Ukraine in 2022, the deepening Finnish-Swedish cooperation has taken place around these events. Finland and Sweden's 13-year rapprochement thus depict a continuum of a kind of shelter-seeking behaviour. In other words, the two countries drew increasingly close to one another in their security and defence policies amidst the worsening of their immediate security environment.

This bilateral evolution constitutes the research problem of this thesis, which is focused on how small states such as Finland and Sweden navigate negative changes in their security environment, and how the bilateral security political rapprochement emerged. To meet this research goal, the main research question is put forward as *"What kinds of security and defence political threat perceptions did the changing regional security dynamics invoke in Finland and Sweden, particularly in light of Russia's increasingly aggressive neighbour politics, since 2008?"*. To provide an exhaustive answer to that question, a sub-research question will also be covered: *"What roles did the Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation play in the security and defence policies of Finland and Sweden during the period under study?"*.

The theoretical framework deployed to this study is small states and shelter theory, coined by Baldur Thorhallsson, which assumes that small states need external shelter to survive and prosper (Thorhallsson, B., 2018b, p. 1). The theory argues that small

states are dependent on the economic, political, and societal shelter provided by alliances, larger states and/or regional and international organizations (*ibid.*, *passim.*). According to this theory, and the abovementioned security political rapprochement, Finland and Sweden could be seen as having sought shelter from their bilateral cooperation during their transition away from military non-alignment. This hypothesis is novel, as it has not previously been studied as part of small states in IR academia.

Small states and shelter theory is likewise a rather novel addition into the world of small states in IR academia, filling a gap in both enhancing our understanding of the external outlook and affairs of small countries and by developing a novel approach to thinking theoretically about small state foreign policies in general (Haukkala, H., 2019, p. 89). Moreover, the justification of this topic selection thus rests upon the above reasoning, and the aim of this thesis can be viewed as twofold; (1) contributing to small state studies in IR theory, and (2) producing knowledge on the previously untouched research problem of mapping Finland and Sweden's bilateral cooperation's role as a source of 'shelter' in their navigation amidst negative changes in their security environment and how the bilateral security political rapprochement emerged.

The scope of this thesis is set on analysing governmental security and defence policy reports issued by the Finnish and Swedish governments between 2009 and 2022 as the primary source of data. A qualitative document analysis is then conducted on these data as means to produce answers to the qualitative research questions posed. Moreover, content analysis and process tracing methods are deployed as supplementary research methods to execute a methodologically triangulated, causally informed, systematic, and temporal sequence comparative analysis of Finnish and Swedish security and defence policy developments. This thesis is divided into seven main chapters, the first being the introduction. The second chapter discusses the theoretical framework deployed, while the third chapter introduces the methodology. The fourth and fifth chapters comprise the analysis of the selected data, followed by the sixth chapter introducing the research findings and discussion. The seventh and final chapter provides the conclusions of the study.

2 Theory

This thesis draws its theoretical framework from small states' studies in international relations (IR) theory. Small states have generally not been at the core of interest for IR theorists, but there exists a growing academic interest towards the research of small state power, status, and influence. The fundamental changes in global politics that occurred after the Cold War led to rising scholarly interest in small states (Park, A., & Jakstaite-Confortola, G., 2021, p. 1280). Small states not only increased in numbers but also gained larger room for manoeuvre since the end of the Cold War, which led to their increased participation in international cooperation and coalitions (Pedersen, R. B., 2018, p. 222). This phenomenon presented a puzzle for IR theorists to explain through traditional theories, and several different approaches to small state studies have since evolved.

As these small state matters may be approached through multiple different IR theories, it becomes necessary to outline the relevance, contributions, and shortcomings of some of the mainstream IR theories - namely realism, liberalism, and constructivism - before arriving at the choice of small states and shelter theory adopted for this thesis. Each theory offers unique insights into the behaviour of small states in the international system, which is why it is worthwhile to provide contextualization on the mainstream theories, and in so doing setting the theoretical landscape within which this thesis operates. This could be argued to help the reader grasp the theoretical framework that informs this analysis and its relationship to broader debates in IR academia. Moreover, evaluating the contributions and shortcoming of different theories demonstrates how the choosing and justifying of small states and shelter theory is informed by a critical assessment of available theoretical frameworks and their applicability to this research context.

The following sub-chapters thus provide a more detailed discussion on relevant concepts, and an overview of small states in IR theory, and concludes with the reasoning of the chosen approach.

2.1 Small states in international relations theory

A vast majority of the 195 recognized countries in the contemporary world are small states, but what constitutes as "small" is a more disputed concept, which begs the

question of what smallness means. The answers are often linked to the theoretical lens applied to the analysis of small statehood. In much of IR literature and in world politics in general, country size has often been connected to capability and influence, thus, denoting smallness being viewed as a handicap to state action vis-à-vis the correlation between having power and being big (Browning, C. S., 2006, p. 669). It has also been argued that small states' reality is beyond their direct control (Aaltola, M., 2011, p. 257). Thus, it is tempting to draw a conclusion that studying small state influence or status in the international political arena is somehow intrinsically less worthwhile than the study of the rivalries between the great powers.

However, given the lack of a widely accepted definition of what constitutes as a small state, it becomes justified to contribute to existing literature on small states to provide knowledge on that very debate. Moreover, the concept of smallness could be argued meaningless, unless we take into consideration relations with other states and the size of other states (Kurecic, P., et al., 2017, p. 130). Smallness is therefore a relational concept to largeness, and vice versa, denoting that the study of large or great powers is essentially inexhaustive without the study of small states. Moreover, smallness is therefore dependent on several relational criteria, both qualitative and quantitative, which must be weighed in contrast to surrounding counterparts' qualities (*ibid.*, *passim.*). Studying small states is thus subject to varying theoretical approaches deployed, as well as varying understandings of smallness which often derive from the theories used.

There is also a need for conceptual clarifications to be outlined between what "status", "influence", and "shelter" mean to avoid confusion between the terms. Moreover, to provide ground on which 'shelter-seeking' underpins in this thesis, it is important to identify the difference and to some extent overlap between status-seeking and shelter-seeking. The quest for status is a central motivation for small state policies, and it is something that is achieved through being noticed and useful for greater powers (De Carvalho, B., & Neumann, I. B., 2015, p. 1-2). In other words, status is granted to small states by their larger counterparts in the international system, depending on the level of usefulness or attention received by bigger powers. The instruments of status seeking are often routines of institutionalized diplomatic exchange, as the displays of e.g. hard military power are generally not an option for small states (*ibid.*, p. 1). Status seeking can also be understood as acts undertaken to

maintain or better one's position in comparison to relevant others, as status can be understood as a state's position or rank in a status community (Pedersen, R. B., 2018, p. 219). Status is therefore filling a place in a social hierarchy, and hence by definition relational and malleable (De Carvalho, B., & Neumann, I. B., 2015, p. 4).

Influence, on the other hand, denotes a state's ability to translate its prestige to be considered or even kowtowed to by other states in situations where they would not otherwise have done so – a kind of power over others that can also generate a status increase (De Carvalho, B., & Neumann, I. B., 2015, p. 6). Influence can thus contribute to a state's status, whereas a status itself can be considered the goal for small states – it is the recognition acts that status-seeking small states are after (ibid., p. 7). Therefore, it follows that status and influence differ conceptually, while effectively ruling out the meaningfulness of focusing on influence denoting evidence for this thesis that focuses on small states of Finland and Sweden. The security and defence policies of Finland and Sweden could hardly be imagined being kowtowed to by relevant others – namely Russia as the greater power in the region.

Lastly, shelter-seeking is a theoretical concept that posits “shelter” from larger entities (states and/or alliances) as a goal for small state survival, to mitigate structural weaknesses associated with their smallness (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 196). Seeking shelter inherently denotes that there is a lack of security against an external threat which is mitigated through a shelter-seeking strategy. This begs a further question of categorization of these conceptual shelters to the given small state, and for the sake of this thesis and the chosen theoretical framework of small state shelter-seeking, there are three categories of shelter derivable: economic, political, and societal (ibid., p. 196).

Larger states/entities, international organizations, and alliances can e.g. grant smaller states access to more favourable markets and provide diplomatic or military backing (ibid., p. 196), which can be interpreted as bettering a small state's position/rank (i.e. status) in the international system in comparison to its relevant others. Shelter is therefore something that small states seek from their larger counterparts and allies in the international system (much like status) that appears the opposite of the concept of influence. However, regarding the concept of shelter *per se*, it is taken to encompass those external relations which are favourable to the small entity, namely the three sectoral shelters of political, economic, and societal shelter

(Haukkala, H., 2019, p. 90). Shelter thus bears obvious overlapping with status, as both are granted to small states by greater states, allies, and international organizations, and both are arguably sought through diplomatic exchange that results in boosting the small state's relational status.

To sum up, status focuses on achieving recognition in the international arena, while shelter emphasizes security and protection from external threats. Status can thus be seen as encompassing a wider set of policy areas coupled with broader aims of recognition vis-à-vis shelter, which can be seen as a by-product of a given status-seeking behaviour yet with the sole aim of state survival. However, these objectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and small states may pursue both status and shelter simultaneously to advance their interests and ensure their survival in a complex global environment. Status-seeking can therefore be seen as a crucial tool for shelter-seeking as well.

Given that this thesis focuses on Finland and Sweden's security and defence policies, the emphasis is put on hard security questions. Moreover, as this thesis conducts a comparative analysis of two small states' policy developments regarding security political rapprochement, it becomes more suitable to deploy shelter-seeking over status-seeking as the main theoretical concept in the following analysis, as analysing status inherently requires a broader sampling of relative states in the international community than a single bilateral setting allows for. In other words, examining Finland and Sweden's status-seeking strategies would require, or at least benefit from, looking into their foreign policy behaviour in a wider international setting, coupled with data that contains evidence of foreign policy behaviour. However, this is not to say that examining a bilateral case study is unfit for deploying status-seeking as a research goal, or that shelter-seeking would be an only option to study here.

2.1.1 Realism and small states

Realism is one of the most dominant IR theories and although the school of thought comes in a variety of different forms, nearly all realists agree on the core notion that states are guided primarily by security and survival; states act based on national interest over principle; and that the international system is defined by anarchy (Ashford, E., 2022, p. 211). Current explanations by classical realists on the foreign

policy behaviour of any state put their emphasis on power, military capabilities, and prestige (Park, A., & Jakstaite-Confortola, G., 2021, p. 1280).

Moreover, for realists the measure of smallness is power, defined as the state's ability to influence outcomes, and the units of power are primarily materially measurable (Browning, C. S., 2006, p. 670). Defining state power with materially measurable units points it obvious that smallness becomes synonymous with being weak (ibid., p. 670). Realist perceptions of small state status are thus inherently limited, denoting small state shelter-seeking from larger and more powerful states as a necessary and viable strategy, given the realist view of the international system being characterized as an 'anarchic self-help system' (ibid., p. 670). Such a premise leaves little room for small states to manoeuvre, forcing them to adopt a limited position in international politics. A notable example of such phenomenon is what Mika Aaltola (2011, p. 266) argues for Finland having had to come to terms with the legitimate interests of major powers (namely Russia) when referring to Cold War era realism in a Finnish context.

States are thus power maximising entities and peace is best served by maintaining a balance of power (Kluth, M., & Lynggaard, K., 2018, p. 112). The balance of power is what neo-realists would argue as dictating the rationality of small state action, and that changes in the balance of power between great powers largely determine the policies which small states will or should adopt (Browning, C. S., 2006, p. 670). Thus, it follows, that small states are treated as objects of international relations, rather than subjects (ibid., p. 671). Size does therefore matter, and as one of the most notable neo-realist scholars Kenneth Waltz coined it: the international system inevitably produces functionally equivalent units that differ only in their power resources, whereby the system itself creates the differences between states and smallness is therefore a systemic characteristic (De Carvalho, B., & Neumann, I. B., 2015, p. 8).

Realists and neo-realists, such as Waltz, do not acknowledge that culturally informed work has any systemic relevance in the discipline of IR, further stressing that small states can be somehow categorized as objects of international relations, absent of any variation in their foreign policies pursued (ibid., p. 8-9). Taking small state interests as identical, the foreign policy-making role of cultures, histories and identity politics are effectively excluded, thereby paralyzing realist understandings' capability to

exhaustively explain why small states have varying foreign policy objectives (Browning, C. S., 2006, p. 672).

However, neo-classical realists have attempted to address this shortcoming by claiming small state variations in foreign policy behaviour owing to variations in domestic processes of decision-making, which ultimately explain why the systemic pressure is not enough to fully determine small state foreign policy behaviour (Meibauer, G., et al., 2021, p. 272-273). Neo-classical realists hold that “threats and interests do not automatically originate from the material international system but are socially constructed by ideas and values” (He, 2017, as cited in Gvalia, G., et al., 2019, p. 25). Giorgi Gvalia (2013, as cited in *ibid.*, p. 25) argues that states’ foreign policy choices are thus not only determined by their external security environment “but also by the ideas and identities of relevant foreign policy actors who interpret the external security environment and their material interests”.

Neo-classical realists thus acknowledge that small state shelter and/or status-seeking through different foreign policy objectives and behaviours is possible, as material capabilities are not entirely linked to foreign policy behaviour (De Carvalho, B., & Neumann, I. B., 2015, p.9). In other words, through neo-classical realist interpretation, small states may find themselves in different relational positions vis-à-vis the international status community, notwithstanding their small material capabilities or varying demands for shelter. The different relational positions meaning the variations in small states’ domestic understanding of the external security environment, rising from the ideas and identities behind those understandings, which lead to varying foreign policy behaviour and outcomes.

In conclusion, realists would view small state shelter-seeking as an inherent course of action dictated by the international system’s nature, varying only in their different [neo-classical] views on small states’ potential leeway in ways of pursuing shelter. While classical realists emphasize power and anarchy as the primary drivers of state actions, neo-classical realists introduce the crucial role of domestic processes and ideational factors in shaping [small state] foreign policy behaviour. Shelter-seeking, viewed through the lens of realism, underscores the pragmatic manoeuvring of small states amidst the anarchic international system, where survival and security are paramount concerns.

2.1.2 Liberalism and small states

Realism has traditionally dominated academic discourse, but through the prominence of the study of international organizations and transnational actors, both governmental and non-governmental, the basis for what became known as the liberal image of world politics was formed (Kauppi, M. V., Viotti, P. R., 2023, p. xiii).

Liberalism contributes to the understanding of foreign policy by stressing how individuals, ideas, social forces, and political institutions can have direct effects on foreign policy and international relations (Doyle, M. W., 2008, p. 50). Most liberals would argue that democratic market economies are the most conducive to maintaining peace in the world (Miller, B., p. 140). Institutions such as the European Union are thus central examples for liberal theorists when arguing for small state opportunities for manoeuvre and influence (Browning, C. S., 2006, p. 672).

Uniting their powers in creating common markets and market regulations, through international organizations and alliances, small states especially could be argued to achieve something that produces shelter from larger powers and contests the realist power game. This becomes even more pronounced, as by quoting notable neo-liberals Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, in arguing that “smallness and greatness are often issue specific such that a small state in one sphere may be a great power possessing considerable influence in a different context” (Browning, C. S., 2006, p. 672). For example, Finland could be seen as an archetypal small state in many aspects; it has a small population, limited military capability and resources, yet it is geographically one of Europe’s largest countries and could be considered as a great power in telecommunications and paper industry (ibid., p. 674). Likewise, Switzerland can be seen as possessing great issue-specific power in the financial sector (Neumann and Gstöhl, 2004, as cited in Kurecic, P., et al., 2017, p. 132). Liberalism thus takes a less fixed approach to state power and status as small states can be seen to possess significant issue-specific power despite their limited overall resources. This perspective challenges the realist notion that smallness equates to weakness and underscores the potential for small states to carve out influential roles in the international arena through cooperation and specialization.

However, according to Michael W. Doyle (2008, p. 59), liberalism could be argued as a domestic theory, since it is defined by the centrality of individual rights, private

property, and representative democracy. Moreover, when transposed to the international relations arena, a web of cooperation based on mutually beneficial trade is expected between other liberal states, instead of assuming a realist state of war (ibid., p. 59). Liberals do agree with the realists that the international community operates in a state of anarchy but disagree as to the nature of anarchy; liberals assume a zone of peace among fellow liberals, in which either a positive or negative-sum game of cooperation prevails (ibid., p. 59). For small state studies, this means that the realist theoretical handicap of inherently limited or outright impossibility to manoeuvre is absent. In other words, for liberals the foreign policy behaviour of small states may be attributed to cultural, historical, and identity-based questions, contrary to what realists agree to account for.

When perceived through the concept of [small state] shelter-seeking, however, it seems that liberalism is unable to appropriately address the issue of conflict and outright belligerence from non-liberal states, such as the relations with Russia and European liberal states in the wake of the Ukraine invasion in February 2022. Liberal scholars often argue that economic interdependence can reduce conflict among states (Paul, T. V., 2019, p. 58), which is much like the prevailing idea with European trade with Russia before the war erupted. A foreign economic policy of free trade is seen by liberals to produce material benefits superior to potential tariffs, hence 'liberalism produces special material incentives for cooperation because among fellow liberals the economic interdependence should not be subject to security-motivated restrictions' (Doyle, M. W., 2008, p. 61). Liberalism thus does not account for external and non-liberal aggression, as it emphasizes the preservation and protection of the liberal community itself, instead of focusing on expansionism (ibid., p. 62).

These notions, together with the erosion of the European security environment in the wake of the Russian war against Ukraine, have rendered much of these liberal ideas of international relations insufficient in providing exhaustive answers to these phenomena. This is not to say that individuals, ideas, social forces, and political institutions would not possess influence on small state foreign policymaking, however, liberalism could be argued falling short in explaining small state shelter-seeking by focusing mostly on domestic structures and individual differences over that of the pressure and influence from the international system (ibid., 2008, p. 59).

After all, it is from the external international system where small states receive their perceived existential security threats from, that underpin shelter-seeking behaviour.

However, adding to the conceptual discussion between status-seeking and shelter-seeking, in the case of liberalism, it becomes evident that small states may utilize the structure of the international system (namely the EU, for instance) to their advantage when seeking for status. For example, demonstrated by Denmark's foreign policy activism, the country has effectively 'promoted liberal ideas and imposed liberal values regionally and globally, entailing a strong defence of an international order, rule of international law and reinforcement of the role of international organizations in the international system' (Pedersen, 2012, as cited in Kluth, M., & Lynggaard, K., 2018, p. 108). This goes to show that small states may pursue the international organizations and international cooperation therein as a source of status-seeking among the structures of the international system, through active advocacy of norms and ideas to their own benefit. Increasing one's status through this kind of liberal activism can be argued to produce shelter-seeking conditions simultaneously, as small states become more integrated into the political and economic "shelters" of, for instance, the EU.

2.1.3 Constructivism and small states

The third and one of the most recent mainstream approaches to IR theory analysed here in the context of small states, is constructivism. Constructivist approaches in the study of IR rose to limelight in the 1990s, and as coined by Price and Reus-Smit, the inability of dominant rationalist theories (i.e. realism and liberalism) to properly explain the demise of the Cold War prompted the new generation of IR scholars to adopt new alternative insights into the intersubjective bases of IR (Jung, H., 2019, p. 1). After all, the demise of the Cold War was ensured by the actions of ordinary people over those of states or international organisations, thus pointing the traditional theories' negligence of the agency of individuals (Theys, S., 2017, p. 36). In other words, there was a novel type of demand for accounting for the social factors and intersubjectivity as influencing factors in international relations, which had previously been neglected in IR academia. It could be argued that this particular constructivist emphasis on social factors such as identity and ideas, together with

international norms, may have contributed to the opening of the field of small state studies in the 1990s (De Carvalho, B., & Neumann, I. B., 2015, p. 9).

De Carvalho and Neumann (2015, p. 9) argue that “if not only relative power and/or international institutions matter, but also ideational factors, small states may gain new room for manoeuvre in their foreign policy”. Constructivism thus assumes a more fluid take on smallness, whereby small states could be seen as larger than their relative size if they succeed in influencing world politics through ideational advocacy, as hinted above with the example of Denmark’s foreign policy activism. Moreover, the Nordic countries have all played a leading role in strengthening standards and norms in the international society (*ibid.*, p. 9). For small states like the Nordic countries, this becomes possible through the constructivist insight that a sense of ‘being’ and ‘identity’ are forged only through intersubjective interaction between actors; whilst “such identities (and the interests that flow from them) are unstable and in constant need of reaffirmation and reconstruction in view of unfolding events and developing relationships” (Browning, C. S., 2008, p. 10-11). The malleable nature of IRs thus presents an opportunity for small states to influence larger powers’ narratives and decision-making, which is always formed by the intersubjective ideas of actors within the governing bodies.

Building upon the more fluid understanding of smallness, Christopher Browning (2006, p. 669-670) argues that “smallness can be constructed differently in different identity narratives, with different narratives in turn entailing different implications for state action, and while putting material constraints aside, smallness should not always be conceptualised as a negative attribute of weakness”. This entails that small states may pursue to replace their concern with size with a growing focus on being ‘smart’ or ‘innovative’ instead (*ibid.*, p. 670). Constructivists would view international relations as existing only by human agreement, emphasizing the importance of normative as well as material structures (Adler, 1997, & Price & Reus-Smit, 1998 as cited in Jung, H., 2019, p. 2), thereby underpinning the case of the Nordics’ leading role as norms advocates in the international arena as something small states can pursue to influence world politics.

Small states can thus play their smallness to their own advantage, since small states are often presented as more peaceful and altruistic than larger powers; smallness can thus be a way to create space for action by indicating that the [small] state in question

poses no threat (Browning, C. S., 2006, p. 674). Constructivists could argue that small states can via their smallness also engage in bargaining with greater powers, and even argue with them, while pursuing to socially construct more favourable identities in their relationships through framing and discursive politics (De Carvalho, B., & Neumann, I. B., 2015, p. 9).

When it comes to small states and status-seeking, constructivism does address status-seeking by focusing on cultural and hence intersubjective categories (*ibid.*, p. 9).

Regarding shelter-seeking, however, a constructivist approach could offer conceptualizing [external] security threats as constructed in the public discourse (Weiss, T., & Edwards, G., 2021, p. 19). Thereby the external threats that small states are seeking shelter from, are somehow linked to mere discourses that prevail, instead of system-endemic traits. Constructivism thus assumes a more malleable stance towards security threats than its materialist counterparts, which could be argued having potential in explaining contemporary complex security threats that small states face, such as information influencing, better or at least alternatively than traditional IR theories. Moreover, constructivism possesses potential in providing grounds for small state foreign policy analysis especially in the societal and to some extent political spheres of shelter-seeking. As shelter-seeking is often performed through diplomatic instruments, “an important element of political shelter” (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 205), it could be argued that constructivism does account for such accounts better than its materialist counterparts.

It could also be argued that seeking political shelter from partnerships, alliances, and larger entities/states becomes more viable if the shelter-provider and the shelter-seeker share common identities and interests. Constructivists argue that identities are socially constructed through interaction with other actors, and that identities in turn signal their interests (Theys, S., 2017, p. 37). Thus, by active interaction, small states can seek both status and societal/political shelter through aligning their identities and interests with those of the shelter-provider. However, if identities constitute interests and actions, the identity of a small state implies a different set of interests compared to those implied by a large state; state survival vis-à-vis concerns of dominating global affairs, respectively (*ibid.*, p. 37). It is therefore not a given that small states would be able to perform such shelter-seeking with ease, as the larger

states are arguably not equally invested in the partnership with a small state than vice versa.

The above-mentioned asymmetry underpins the shelter-seeking concern with external threats to small states, which constructivism can be argued to be unable to comprehensively account for by conceptualizing security threats as merely socially constructed in public discourse. Threats thus become an epistemological question, which for constructivists is best illustrated by Alexander Wendt's example of "500 British nuclear weapons being less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons – the difference being not in the material structures but rather in the ideational structures that give meaning to the material structures, that is nuclear weapons" (ibid., p. 36). In conclusion, constructivists would view small state shelter-seeking as a process influenced by norms, perceptions, identities, discourses, and narratives about security politics which shape the shelter-seeking behaviour. In doing so, constructivism provides less attention to empirical specificity and the structural constraints that shape small state behaviour.

2.2 Small states and shelter theory

The fourth and final approach analysed here in the context of small states in IR theory, is what political scientist Baldur Thorhallsson has coined as "small states and shelter theory" (SSST), which he initially developed only a few days after the Icelandic economic crash in late 2008; arguing that small states need economic and political shelter provided by larger states and/or international organizations (Thorhallsson, B., 2018b, p. xvi). Moreover, SSST details how small states mitigate the disadvantages that come with a lack of material capabilities by seeking political, economic, and societal shelter provided by larger states and international organizations (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 195). Thorhallsson and Steinsson (2017, p. 10) argue, that this shelter-seeking happens because 'small states need diplomatic, military, and administrative assistance from these larger units; in order to both integrate economically and receive economic assistance in times of crisis; as well as to ensure access to innovations, culture, and ideas that a small population cannot provide on its own'. In sum, there lay domestic incentives behind small states' shelter-seeking behaviour, but their shelter options are seen as restricted in scope due to geopolitical factors (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 215).

The theory thus consists of three different sectoral shelters that small states are seen as seeking from their larger or partnering counterparts in the international system. These shelters are (1) political, (2) economic, and (3) societal, and for the sake of the following deployment of this theory in the analysis of Finland and Sweden's security and defence policies, it is deemed appropriate to provide a more detailed look into each form of shelter independently to paint a coherent overview of the theory. The chapter then continues to address the advantages and limitations of SSST vis-à-vis other approaches to small states in IR theory.

2.2.1 Political Shelter

Small states can be seen as facing several political problems related to their smallness, and ensuring security from external violence is their main vulnerability (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018). Small states can mobilize fewer numbers of forces, invest less on research and development of military technology, and can sustain military campaigns for shorter periods – effectively lacking a buffer against external threats (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2017, p. 4). SSST thus assumes small states in a position where they are inherently weaker in materially measurable units and resources than their larger counterparts in the international community. Small states also have less diplomatic power than large states, deriving from having a small population, military, economy, and thus less aggregate structural power and capacity to generate large diplomatic resources (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018). The theory thus assumes small states at a major disadvantage when it comes to protecting their people and interests from external military threats, which is argued to lead to a kind of natural gravitation towards alliances (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 196-197).

Alliances and “patrons” are thus pursued by small states because of these vulnerabilities, and the alliances work to ensure small states become militarily as powerful as the combined power of their allies (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018). Alliances also produce deterrence and increase both economic ties and diplomatic assistance between the allies, hence tackling the political problems that small states suffer due to their smallness (*ibid.*). Moreover, these political problems are also rectified through regional and international organizations, which help to shift negotiations from an anarchic international system of unilateralism and violence to

institutions governed by rules and norms (ibid). SSST thus seems to borrow from both a realist and liberalist approach to small states in IR by agreeing to the anarchy of the international system, while agreeing more with the liberal view of perceiving the nature of anarchy as something that can be mitigated through international organizations and cooperation. International organizations are seen to encourage cooperative behaviour by punishing cheaters and formalizing the means of communication for its smaller members – making it costly for large states to violate the rules (ibid.). Military capabilities, the diplomatic assets, and the reinforcement of international law and norms that come with alliances and international organisations thus encompass the political shelter (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 196).

2.2.2 Economic Shelter

Small states can also be seen as suffering from economic problems that are likewise related to their small size. Firstly, small states have a limited domestic market and more reliance on trade, which leads to small states being highly dependent on free movement of goods, capital, and labour (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018). An open international economy where states can trade freely, coupled with a need for non-tariff or low-tariff trade conditions in the world, are vital for the prosperity and viability of small state economies (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2017, p. 6). Secondly, small economies are also low in sectoral diversity, and less competitive and productive, which makes them more vulnerable to economic crises and fluctuations in the world economy (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018).

These vulnerabilities are seen as creating a need for seeking economic shelter from larger states and/or international organizations, since the external economic insurance and assistance mitigates more severe economic crises that small states may face (ibid.). Economic shelter may take the form of direct economic aid, help from an external financial body, a common market and favourable market access (Thorhallsson, 2011, as cited in Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 196). Moreover, currency unions, beneficial loans, and direct economic investment are also seen as forms of economic shelter that tackle the economic problems of small states (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018).

In other words, small states may benefit from cultivating their issue-specific economic assets, such as Finland with its previously mentioned regional “great-power” status in telecommunications and paper industry, by having their economy expand to a larger and favourable common market. This could arguably also benefit in tackling the problems that derive from having a small population i.e. limited supply of human resources, through free movement of capital and labour. SSST assumes that this need for economic shelter becomes even more pronounced in the wake of crises, such as the case of Sweden and Finland joining the EU in the 1990s shortly after experiencing economic crises (ibid.).

2.2.3 Societal Shelter

Small states also face size-related societal problems. As demonstrated above with small state dependency on free trade for economic prosperity, also their dependence on the free flow of ideas across their borders is crucial (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018). Moreover, the societal problems are viewed as encompassing isolation, social stagnation, and issues rooted in a lack of native knowledge (Thorhallsson, 2019, as cited in Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 196). Small states are thus seen as incapable of independently producing enough knowledge/information resources, which could again be seen as deriving from the small population which posits restrictions on the number of human resources at disposal for any given issue area. This problem has significant implications for technological, educational, and cultural ideas and practices (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018). The degree of isolation has also profound implications for the small state’s access to new innovations, technology, ideology, and culture (ibid.).

In other words, small states are societally unable to independently uphold certain standards of education, culture, and innovation if they lack access to wider international marketplaces of ideas. Relations with the outside world are thus essential for the development of small states as constant interaction with other cultures, ideas, and ideologies are what helps societies evolve and move forward (Bailes, A. J. K., et al., 2016, p. 14). Without good communication and consistent flow of ideas from the outside world, which are central societal concerns for especially the more peripheral small states, a risk of societal stagnation grows (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018).

Small states thus seek societal shelter to meet these societal problems. Larger states, alliances and/or international organizations are seen as the source of societal shelter as they provide societal circumvention of isolation and social stagnation through granting exposure to ideas and inventions (ibid.). This exposure is also tackling the small states' lack of native knowledge (ibid.), i.e. the lack of adequate human resources to meet the needs of the society to function appropriately. In conclusion, there appears to be a degree of overlap between economic and societal shelters, as both forms of shelter underpin access to wider markets that benefit the small states' opportunities to develop. Social interaction is arguably a central facet in generating foreign economic trade, and by securing economic shelter through trade agreements and access to foreign marketplaces, the marketplaces of ideas would likely be expected to follow suit.

2.2.4 Advantages and limitations of small states and shelter theory

On the backdrop of this thesis' main research question – What kinds of security and defence political threat perceptions the changing regional security dynamics invoked in Finland and Sweden, particularly in the light of Russia's increasingly aggressive neighbour politics, since 2008 – SSST provides a suitable theoretical foundation to draw from. Especially when coupled with the bilateral shelter-seeking hypothesized as inherent in Finland and Sweden's security and defence political rapprochement. All above analysed approaches to small state studies in IR could likewise be justified as the chosen theoretical framework for this thesis. However, through weighing the contributions and shortcomings of each approach considering Finland and Sweden's bilateral security political rapprochement and the hypothesized bilateral [small state] shelter-seeking within, it becomes evident that SSST provides a particularly nuanced perspective that is relevant to the security concerns of Finland and Sweden. Moreover, as this thesis attempts to capture the shelter-seeking evidence in two small states drawing from their bilateral security and defence cooperation, the mainstream IR theories of realism, liberalism, and constructivism could be argued to provide a less exhaustive analysis in this regard.

Firstly, liberalism falls short in explaining small state shelter-seeking by focusing mostly on the domestic structures, the role of international organizations, and individual differences over that of the pressure and influence from the international

system (Doyle, M. W., 2008, p. 61). Liberalism's lack of focus on non-liberal states' behaviour and emphasis on the canon of economic interdependency in mitigating conflict among states, underpin liberalism's limited usefulness in explaining [bilateral] small state shelter-seeking. As Finland and Sweden have drawn increasingly close to one another in their security and defence policies – following Russia's growing aggression deteriorating Finland and Sweden's regional security environment – it becomes rather clear that liberalism is unable to provide exhaustive explanations to why these events have occurred.

However, liberalism does address several key issues that help explain small state status and/or shelter-seeking by emphasizing the role of individuals, social forces, political institutions, and international organizations such as the EU as significant platforms for small state advocacy and agency. This could in turn be translated to contribute to explaining small state status-seeking and thereby shelter-seeking from the structures of the international system. This is especially applicable to the societal and economic shelters, but also political shelter in the sense that international organizations are diplomatic forums that could be seen to benefit small states' diplomatic assets and backing. This approach nevertheless fails to fully accommodate the shelter-seeking behaviour in a bilateral setting between two small states through neglecting the systemic pressures that derive from the worsened security environment, i.e. Russia's aggressive neighbour politics.

Secondly, constructivism also bears several useful takeaways for small state studies through emphasizing the role of identities, ideas, norms, and intersubjectivity as influencing factors in international relations. This gives small states what De Carvalho and Neumann (2015, p. 9) coined earlier as “new room for manoeuvre”, as the conceptualization of smallness is seen as more issue-specific and fluid. However, constructivism likewise neglects or at least downplays the systemic pressure as an influencing factor for small state foreign policy behaviour, interpreting small states to possess leeway in their foreign policy choices regardless of their small size vis-à-vis the gravity of external threats – i.e. Russia's aggressive neighbour politics.

Small state shelter-seeking would thus be dependent on perceiving the external security threats as mostly [socially] constructed in the public discourse. This places constructivism in a position where shelter-seeking, especially in the societal and political (diplomatic) shelters where ideas and social interaction are key, is a result of

small state identity politics towards a shelter-providing entity. This could be argued to hold well in the case of Finland and Sweden being each other's closest partners both on a societal and political level. As De Carvalho and Neumann (2019, p. 9) argued before in small states' such as the Nordics' key role in advocating norms and standards in the international society, and that such activism and influence is possible to pose on larger powers' decision-making, the theory of constructivism assumes such phenomena to inherently be in the realm of possibility for small states.

However, if such strategies fail, like in the case of Russia where its belligerent foreign policy behaviour was not successfully influenced or mitigated, it becomes questionable as to how constructivism accounts for external existential threats in other than ideational frameworks and socially constructed threat perceptions. This is not to say that constructivism is not capable of adequately capturing the bilateral shelter-seeking between Finland and Sweden, on the contrary, but analysing the systemic pressures as driving forces for material security in small states' security policies could be argued to benefit from incorporating more attention paid to empirical specificity and structural constraints than constructivism accounts for. For this reason, constructivism is not deployed in this study.

Thirdly, the analysis of realism and small states in IR revealed likewise some useful takeaways and some shortcomings when it comes to small states and shelter-seeking. Realism assumes power to be materially measurable and that states act based on national interest over principle, denoting small states' manoeuvrability in the international system to be limited to seeking survival through shelter. Smallness thus becomes a systemic characteristic and synonymous with being weak, as Browning, De Carvalho and Neumann coined it previously, which underpins small states' need to find shelter in alliances and/or from larger states and international organizations. Apart from some neo-classical realist approaches, realists tend to neglect agency by assuming small states' foreign policy behaviour to be: (1) identical, due to the international system producing functionally equivalent units that differ only in their power resources, and (2) dictated by systemic traits rather than culturally informed work. This is one of the main handicaps of realist approaches to small state studies, as variations in foreign policy actions of small states cannot exhaustively be accounted for. Shelter-seeking is thus seen somehow as an inherently identical course

of action for small states, varying only in neo-classical realist views that add domestic processes as a variable that dictate small state foreign policy behaviour.

Small states and shelter theory thus seems to borrow something from each traditional approach to small states in IR theory while seeking to fill the gaps left open by the traditional approaches by including both materialistic and ideational factors, and the systemic and domestic factors, when trying to “develop a comprehensive framework to studying small state foreign policy behaviour” (Thorhallsson, B., 2018b, p. 13). Given that Finland and Sweden are small states that have increased their bilateral security and defence cooperation in tandem with simultaneously occurred worsening of their security environment, i.e. due to Russian aggression, it becomes justified to shed light onto the underlying mechanisms and motives of the transition. Bueger and Wivel (2018, p. 172) argue, that “as a consequence of their limited resources, small states typically lack a buffer allowing them to adjust to new conditions during times of change, and that they are vulnerable when it comes to shielding themselves against external shocks, for example, in times of crisis, whether economically, politically or militarily”. It is exactly for this reason that small states tend to seek shelter (ibid., p. 172).

Thus, it becomes possible to argue that Finland and Sweden have adjusted to these [negative] changes in their security environment by attempting to shield themselves through increased bilateral cooperation, i.e. through shelter-seeking in bilateral security and defence political rapprochement. Small states and shelter theory thus seems to capture this exact phenomenon. While the bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden has not by any means been all-encompassing of the two countries’ security and defence cooperation or shelter-seeking internationally, it still stands as a solid framework for testing SSST in a previously untouched research topic. Moreover, there exist cases within the Nordics, such as Iceland, that has increasingly turned to its Nordic neighbours for political shelter in terms of security (Thorhallsson, B., 2018a, p. 6), thus the hypothesized scenario in this study would not be entirely novel in a Nordic framework.

In sum, SSST draws insights from various mainstream theoretical perspectives in IR, but when considering the dynamics between small states like Finland and Sweden and their security environment, realism emerges as particularly relevant to understanding shelter-seeking behaviour (and shelter theory). Realism's focus on

power, survival, and the anarchic nature of the international system seems to resonate smoothly with the [SSST's] perceived inherent vulnerabilities of small states due to their limited resources and lack of buffers to withstand external shocks.

Realism holds that small states are compelled to pursue strategies that enhance their security and protect their sovereignty, hence acknowledging the strategic calculations and pragmatic considerations that drive small states to form alliances and seek security guarantees to maximize their chances of survival. Moreover, realism highlights the importance of systemic pressures and the distribution of power in shaping small state behaviour. The need for survival in an anarchic international system could thus be interpreted as compelling small states to adapt to changing geopolitical realities and seek shelter where possible. By aligning themselves with other actors and forging alliances, small states aim to enhance their security and minimize their vulnerability to external threats. Realism thus seems to be rather close to SSST, especially in their joint concerns over small states' security threats and dependency on gaining access to key networks as well as flows of ideas (Haukkala, H., 2019, p. 90).

SSST does, however, bear some crucial points of critique that ought to be brought forward before deploying the theory. Hiski Haukkala (2019, p. 90-91) has coined four sets of limitations to SSST as follows:

Firstly, the concepts of economic and societal shelters may be too rigid to fully capture the dynamics behind shelter-seeking phenomena, implying a fixed shelter provided by specific actors, even though economic and societal exchanges often occur within broader markets and global flows absent of clear shelter providers (*ibid.*, p. 90). However, as this study focuses on two small states' bilateral exchanges, this limitation is not relevant.

Secondly, the theory may overlook variations in the need for shelter among small states, assuming too much uniformity which risks neglecting important differences and nuances, potentially downplaying the agency of small states (*ibid.*). This limitation is especially relevant and linked with realist notions of small states' fate in the international system, but also a concrete factor to consider when analysing Finland and Sweden's security threats (and political/military shelter-seeking) that

may reveal differences between one another, even though both states share much of the same security environment.

Thirdly, SSST appears to undervalue small states' readiness and capacity to pursue broader objectives beyond their immediate survival and prosperity (*ibid.*, p. 91). This limitation may hold if reflected upon wider foreign policy objectives of Finland and Sweden, but regarding the security and defence policy objectives that derive from perceived security threats, the issue of wider milieu goals is absent of focus here.

Fourthly, by seeking political, and essentially military, shelter can inadvertently transform an otherwise benign small state into a perceived threat to its larger neighbour, thus jeopardizing the sought-after shelter (*ibid.*). This limitation is likewise noteworthy to address, albeit reflecting a sort of Finlandization effect that might not hold in contemporary security environment. However, this limitation is again reflective of largely hypothesized issues that are not clearly present in the context of this study, nor derivable from the data collected.

In conclusion, while SSST does face some limitations, when applied judiciously and in conjunction with the relevant data, the theory is able to provide valuable insights into the security dynamics and shelter-seeking behaviour of Finland and Sweden as small states.

3 Methodology

3.1 Method

This thesis is qualitative research as it produces answers to qualitative research questions. As the primary source of data analysed are governmental policy documents, it follows that a qualitative document analysis is deployed as the main research method. Document analysis allows for a systematic evaluation of documents to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, as cited in Bowen, G.A., 2009, p. 27). This method thus serves the purpose of this thesis, as the research goal is producing empirical knowledge from predetermined documents. Moreover, the analytic procedure of document analysis entails finding, selecting, evaluating, and synthesising the data contained in the documents (*ibid.*, p. 28). In other words, this procedure forms a tool for extracting the needed data from the documents, which is then yielding knowledge according to the procedural parameters of the study.

Qualitative research can also be argued to benefit from methodological triangulation – using multiple methods to study the same phenomenon – which increases the viability and comprehensiveness of the findings (Morgan, H., 2022, p. 65). The methods of process tracing and content analysis are thus deployed as supplementary research methods. Process tracing allows for using evidence from within the data to make inferences about causal explanations of the case at hand (Bennett, A., & Checkel, J. T., 2015, p. 4), which aims at tracing the causal relationship between the worsening of Finland and Sweden’s security environment and that of their security political rapprochement (i.e. bilateral shelter-seeking). When coupled with document analysis, a coherent, causally informed, and systematic analysis is possible. Lastly, a qualitative content analysis method provides tools for identifying thematic patterns in a text (Neuendorf, K. A., & Kumar, A., 2015, p. 4), i.e. the changes in and evolution of thematic security threats and the role of the bilateral cooperation in the policy documents under study. In the following sub-chapters, a more detailed and contextual analysis of each method is provided.

3.1.1 Document analysis

Taking a qualitative approach to analysing a document refers to “describing and tracking discourse, words, meanings, and themes over time” (Altheide, D. et al., 2008, p. 127). The content of the policy documents under study are thus examined systematically, while empirically evaluated in the framework of the theory deployed. What constitutes as a “document” that is suitable for a qualitative analysis can be taken to encompass any form of textual material as well as visual sources, such as photographs, video, and film (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, as cited in Morgan, H., 2022, p. 64). Given that this thesis utilizes predetermined recorded documents of Finland and Sweden’s security and defence policies, it is deemed appropriate to arrive at qualitative document analysis. However, document analysis has several advantages and limitations in relation to other qualitative research methods that are worth noting here.

Glenn A. Bowen (2009, p. 31) argues, that there are seven major advantages to document analysis; firstly, it is an efficient method because it requires data selection instead of data collection, pointing it less time-consuming and thus more efficient than other research methods. Secondly, documents are often easily available and obtainable without the author’s permission, especially on the internet and the public domain that contain a vast supply of official records (ibid.). Thirdly, document analysis is rather cost-efficient in relation to other methods that require data collection, and all that remains is evaluation of the content and quality of the documents (ibid.). Fourth, document analysis lacks obtrusiveness and reactivity as documents are unaffected by the research process – document analysis thus counters reflexivity inherent in other qualitative research methods (ibid). Fifth, as a corollary to non-reflexivity, documents are stable and unaltered by the presence of the researcher (Merriam, 1988, as cited in ibid). The sixth and seventh advantages are “exactness” and “coverage”, respectively, whereby the former underpins documents’ inclusion of exact names, references, and details of events as advantageous in the research process, while the latter underpins documents’ broad coverage; a long span of time, many events, and many settings (Yin, 1994, as cited in ibid).

Document analysis is thus a very useful method for this topic at hand, but there exist some limitations to the method that ought to be addressed for the benefit of the

study. Firstly, relying on pre-existing texts/documents involves working with limited data (Morgan, H., 2022, p. 67). The selected governmental documents are issue specific to security and defence policy areas; hence they do not account for wider state action in other policy areas. The bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden is extensive in many, if not all, policy areas, and the two cooperate also in many trilateral and multilateral settings which are left out of this study.

For instance, regarding regional security and defence political cooperation, there exist many forums where both states cooperate in wider settings, such as Nordefco (Nordic Defence Cooperation), JEF (Join Expeditionary Force), and FNC (Framework Nations Concept). Moreover, Finland, Sweden and Norway have signed a trilateral statement of intent (SOI) on enhancing their defence cooperation (Teivainen, A., 2022), and the trilateral defence cooperation between Finland, Sweden and the United States is also conducted under a similar SOI (Ministry of Defence, 2024). These cooperation settings are arguably detailed also in many other - and many times classified - documents external to the documents selected for this study. Moreover, considering studying shelter-seeking, which is arguably a phenomenon that constitute multiple policy areas in addition/overlapping to security and defence (e.g. economic policies and cooperation that would be linked to economic shelter), the selected documents provide only limited insight into the multifaceted bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden. This limitation could also be labelled as “insufficient detail” following Bowen’s (2009, p. 31-32) argumentation, whereby documents are seen as “produced for some purpose other than research; they are created independent of a research agenda, which translates to insufficient details to answer a research question”.

Secondly, and to an extent overlapping with the previous, the data sources – which are policy documents in this case – allowed by the government for the public to examine might be expected to provide access to only a certain amount of content (Morgan, H., 2022, p. 66). In other words, the public governmental policy documents contain plenty of information on key areas of security and defence cooperation and objectives, but due to e.g. the classified nature of military cooperation plans between states it is reasonable to assume that the data is limited for the public to some extent. Thus, fully exhaustive empirical findings to test Finland and Sweden’s shelter-seeking is not possible to derive from only the official governmental security and defence

policy documents. Bowen (2009, p. 32) argues this limitation as “low retrievability”, meaning that sometimes documents are not retrievable, difficult to retrieve, or the access is deliberately blocked.

Thirdly, an incomplete collection of documents can be argued to suggest “biased selectivity”, which denotes that the available documents are ‘likely to be aligned with corporate/governmental policies and procedures and with the agenda of the organization’s principals or reflexive of the emphasis of the particular organizational unit handling the record-keeping’ (ibid, p. 32). In other words, biased selectivity refers to the tendency to selectively choose documents that align with preconceived ideas, preferences, or biases, while disregarding or minimizing the importance of contradictory or alternative sources of information. This becomes evident in that this thesis draws primarily from the official government sources (security and defence policy documents) without considering a broader range of sources that could provide alternative perspectives or critical analyses. This narrow selection of sources may not fully accurately represent the complexity and diversity of viewpoints surrounding Finland and Sweden’s security and defence political rapprochement and/or bilateral shelter-seeking.

However, the security and defence policy documents selected for examination here are all derived from open access online repositories of the governments of Finland and Sweden, issued by respective governmental bodies in cooperation between relevant ministries, and thus denoting reliability and transparency as a source since they represent the countries’ official standing on the matters. In addition, a high degree of representativeness and authenticity can also be expected of these documents based on the above reasoning. Moreover, due to the scope of a master’s thesis, a limit of data selected must be settled at a reasonable level to avoid an overly lengthy result.

3.1.2 Process tracing

Process tracing has its roots in cognitive psychology where the term refers to the identification and analysis of intermediate steps in a process and making inferences of the process reflecting with hypotheses and outcomes of interest (Bennett, A., & Checkel, J. T., 2015, p. 6). In political science, process tracing can be argued to be a fundamental tool in qualitative analysis as it can contribute decisively to describing

political and social phenomena and to evaluate causal claims (Collier, D., 2011, p. 823). What this means in action, is that process tracing analyses “trajectories of change and causation”, hence careful description – or in a sense “static description” – is a crucial building block in the analysis of the processes being studied (ibid., p. 823). Process tracing thus entails measuring and testing hypothesized causal mechanisms (Bennett, A., & Checkel, J. T., 2015, p. 3-4). Moreover, process tracing is a theory-based evaluation approach (Raimondo, E., 2023, p. 1). As this thesis hypothesizes a security and defence political rapprochement in the form of a bilateral shelter-seeking strategy of Finland and Sweden, the interest lies in identifying causalities between the rapprochement and the underlying mechanisms. For the sake of this study, and the key mechanism of a demand for security inherent in small states and shelter theory, the main causal mechanisms are taken to be the perceived national security threats and the bilateral policy objectives set to meet those threats in the documents analysed.

Before reviewing the advantages and potential limitations to process tracing as a research method, the four different variants of process tracing are briefly explained. Process tracing can be argued to come in four variants according to their purposes: (1) theory-testing, (2) theory-building, (3) theoretical-revision, and (4) explaining outcome (Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. B., 2019, p. 9). Variants 1-3 are what can be termed “theory-focused research designs, where the goal is to test/build/revise theories of causal mechanisms that can in principle be present in multiple cases” (ibid.). The fourth variant, explaining outcome, involves a goal of developing case-specific mechanistic explanations accounting for the historical outcome in the case (ibid.).

As this thesis focuses on deploying and testing small states and shelter theory in the case of Finland and Sweden’s bilateral security political rapprochement, it becomes natural to gravitate towards variants 1 and 2. Out of these two, variant 1 is adopted for this thesis, since variant 2 – theory-building – encompasses the research purpose of identifying the causal mechanism between the cause and outcome (ibid., p. 9). As this thesis already puts forward a hypothesis of shelter-seeking between Finland and Sweden, the causal mechanism is already assumed but needs to be tested.

Thus, theory-testing process tracing starts with the conceptualization of a plausible hypothetical causal mechanism that is based on existing theorization and empirical

research – i.e. the hypothesis that Finland and Sweden deployed shelter-seeking strategies in their bilateral security cooperation, which is based on the shelter theory deployed here. Moreover, this involves operationalising the causal mechanisms (perceived national security threats vis-à-vis bilateral cooperation objectives) to develop propositions about potential empirical fingerprints/evidence of the activities associated with the mechanism (ibid., p. 9-10). This evidence is then collected and examined in the framework of the theory applied, resulting in evidence of the theorized mechanisms presence – i.e. if the theory worked or not (ibid., p. 10). In sum, this process answers to whether the hypothesized causal mechanism was present or not and did it function as theorized. By applying theory-testing process tracing to this case, one can systematically evaluate the theoretical underpinnings of Finland and Sweden's security policies and contribute to a deeper understanding of how small states navigate negative changes in their security environment. This approach allows for rigorous empirical testing of theoretical propositions, enhancing the theoretical and practical relevance of this study.

Next, a brief look at the main advantages and limitations of process tracing as a research method follows, before concluding its suitability for this case at hand. Process tracing's comparative advantage over other methods is its potential in “fully opening the black box of change processes” (Raimondo, E., p. 1). In other words, the method allows for the use of a range of methods of data collection and analysis, quantitative and qualitative, in seeking to form a body of evidence robust enough to adjudicate between “process theory of change under study and alternative explanations” (ibid.). The method's main advantages can be summed into four points following the above, and according to Raimondo's (2023, p. 4) evaluation: Firstly, process tracing, when well implemented, strengthens causal inference, and provides explanatory power behind processes of change. Secondly, it offers transparency in evidence gathering and assessment, surpassing typical case study approaches (ibid.). Thirdly, it vividly unfolds the theory of change and facilitates deriving practical lessons for improving outcomes (ibid.). Fourthly, it excels in evaluating interventions not amenable to quantification or experimentation, such as policy dialogue and advocacy campaigns (ibid.).

Regarding the limitations to process tracing approaches, there could be argued three main points. Process tracing struggles to adequately denote how much of an impact a

certain causal mechanism or intervention had on average vis-à-vis the outcome of interest (Raimondo, E., p. 4). In other words, the links between a certain cause to a specific outcome can be identified, but the exact amount of impact a certain cause had on the outcome is not. Secondly, process tracing requires a steep learning curve to master, involving setting up empirical tests, reconstructing [process] theories of change, and leveraging existing literature to theorize about change linked to specific actions (ibid.). Thirdly, process tracing has weak external validity on its own and needs to be paired with a cross-case design, which can become laborious and time-consuming (ibid.).

Process tracing is thus facilitating the systematic description of newly identified political phenomena by drawing descriptive causal inferences from data observed in a temporal sequence (Collier, D., 2011, p. 824). In other words, it focuses on the unfolding of events over time (ibid.). This makes for a suitable research method for the case at hand since this thesis attempts to discover the unfolding of a bilateral shelter-seeking strategy of Finland and Sweden over the timeframe studied. Moreover, process tracing offers a tool for identifying the intermediate steps predicted in the framework of the [small states and shelter] theory, hence linking the independent and dependent variables identified in the causal chain (Checkel, J.T., 2008, p. 115). It follows, that within-case steps or evidence may be identified and allocated a description to provide knowledge on how the policy-making process of the studied actors took place, and how it changed over time in a temporal sequence to the benefit of the theoretical premises made.

Process tracing is therefore deemed useful for the purpose of this thesis, while it supports the document analysis method. The causal links across the data and between the independent and dependent variables are thus able to be identified and ascribed a role in the process or change in Finland and Sweden's shelter-seeking strategies in a temporal sequence. In sum, as 'shelter' is the result of alliances, partnerships, and security guarantees from larger entities, and shelter-seeking being a core state activity for small states seeking protection from perceived security threats, the process being traced here is Finnish and Swedish security policies' threat perceptions (independent variable) translated to objectives for bilateral rapprochement (dependent variable). By attaching meaning to the objectives found it

is deemed possible to determine Finland and Sweden's [bilateral] shelter-seeking strategy.

3.1.3 Content analysis

Content analysis is used in numerous different disciplines (Krippendorff, K., 2019, p. 17), hence a uniform description of its features and usage is difficult to summarize. Moreover, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative analyses of message content is sometimes contested, varying between what Neuendorf and Kumar (2015, p. 1) argue in "(a) whether the constructs of interest are principally quantitative or qualitative in nature, and (b) whether the measures of these constructs result in quantifications or more qualitative descriptions of the messages". Klaus Krippendorff (2019, p. 21) even argues that the validity and usefulness of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analyses should be questioned entirely, as "all reading of texts is qualitative even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers". Content analysis can thus be regarded as a "mixed methods approach" that contains both qualitative and quantitative steps of analysis (Mayring, P., 2014, p. 6). However, before moving on to examining content analysis' applicability to this study, some crucial notions of the main advantages and limitations of content analysis as a research method ought to be briefly outlined.

Klaus Krippendorff (2019, p. 47-50) summarizes content analysis' main advantages in four features. Firstly, content analysis is an unobtrusive research technique, avoiding the interference caused by subjects' awareness of being observed or tested, the artificiality of tasks, and other influences, offering a nonreactive approach that minimizes the risk of data distortion and manipulation (ibid., p. 47). Secondly, content analysis is adept at handling unstructured data, allowing researchers to preserve the individual voices of sources (ibid., p. 47-48). In other words, this approach enables researchers to capture the richness of data and explore a wide range of perspectives, despite the challenges posed by unstructured data formats. Thirdly, content analysis is context-sensitive, allowing researchers to analyse texts that hold significance and meaning to others, thus upholding the importance of understanding data within their contexts; this approach enhances the relevance of inferences drawn from the analysed texts, making them more meaningful to the intended audience (ibid., p. 48). Fourthly, content analysis is capable of handling

large volumes of data efficiently, offering researchers a significant advantage over methods reliant on small samples (*ibid.*, p. 48-50). These advantages make for a robust method for analysing the rather vast and unstructured (relative to the research questions) primary data selected for this thesis.

However, content analysis also has some limitations that a researcher ought to be aware of when deploying the method. The categorization or “coding” of words and concepts for probing the data ought to be done carefully to avoid misleading estimations and false inferences, as well as recognising potential synonyms used in the text (Weber, 1990, as cited in Stemler, S., 2000, p. 2). Moreover, faulty definitions of categories and non-mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories are two potentially major flaws to content analysis for researchers to bear in mind (*ibid.*, p. 5). In the context of this thesis, these issues may be translated to addressing the complexity of the security and defence policy documents that may present challenges in category development; emphasising the importance of flexibility in category development to accommodate nuances and variations in the data. These challenges may become pronounced in e.g. the variations of the language used in and across the documents over time. This is further examined below when introducing the coding scheme for this thesis.

Content analysis is one of the most widely used research methods in the academic field of political communication, and it includes text analysis, systematic study of written text, as well as techniques that focus on non-textual message content (Neuendorf, K. A., & Kumar, A., 2015, p. 1). Moreover, content analysis has been defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics (*ibid.*). As this thesis will examine some quantitative elements, namely the amount of references Finland and Sweden make to one another in the documents, coupled with qualitative elements in both the analysis of the references made and in the discursive shifts in how the two countries have perceived and responded to security threats in their respective policies, it is deemed appropriate to deploy techniques of content analysis. Moreover, as this thesis’ sub-research question aims at discovering the roles that the Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation has played in the security and defence policies during the period under study – 2009 to 2022 – it is deemed useful to include content analysis techniques to provide answers to such question.

Regarding the qualitative features of the method in this study, the analysis of the perceived security threats and the set security objectives for bilateral cooperation in the documents analysed could be argued to benefit from incorporating interpretive and reflexive elements; features of qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012, as cited in Neuendorf, K. A., & Kumar, A., 2015, p. 4). What is meant by interpretive and reflexive elements here, are the extraction of information from the analysed policy documents including specific policy measures (objectives set to meet perceived security threats and bilateral cooperation), the language used to describe security threats, and the role of the bilaterality (hypothesized as reflexive to meeting the threats) in these contexts.

The quantitative features of content analysis deployed here are linked to the qualitative features, and following Mayring's (2014, p. 10) logic, they are (1) the assignment or coding of categories to the text as a qualitative step, and (2) working through many text passages and analysis of frequencies of categories as a quantitative step. The qualitative categories, or units for coding, assigned for the data analysed in this study are (1) the perceived security threats, (2) references Finland and Sweden make to one another, and (3) objectives set for bilateral cooperation. The quantitative step will thus be the analysis of frequencies of these above-mentioned categories from the data, i.e. how many threats are perceived, how many references the countries make to one another, how many objectives are set to meet the perceived threats, and how many of those objectives relate to bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden. The qualitative step is thus to interpret the meaning, language used, and (potential) reflexiveness between perceived security threats, bilateral references, and bilateral cooperation objectives. The coding scheme of this study will thus deploy frequency counts and qualitative analyses on categories which are detailed in the Appendices (see Appendix 1.).

While this study is qualitative in nature, incorporating elements of quantitative content analysis, such as frequency counts, can provide quantitative insights into the prevalence or intensity of certain themes - e.g. the hypothesized shelter-seeking - within the policy reports. This quantitative data can thus complement the qualitative analysis from document analysis and process tracing, offering a more holistic understanding of the security narratives presented in the documents. This triangulation of findings from document analysis and process tracing with content

analysis can be expected to enhance the validity and reliability of the research outcomes by corroborating findings across multiple analytical approaches. In short, triangulation helps to confirm the research findings, albeit this does not mean that the findings cannot be questioned (Bans-Akutey, A., & Tiimub, B. M., 2021, p. 3).

3.2 Data Sample

The data sample of this thesis is drawn from a timeframe between 2009 and 2022. Limiting the timeframe to begin from 2009 onwards owes to the adopted interpretation of Finland and Sweden's *de jure* abandonment of their security political 'neutrality' doctrines through the EU's mutual defence clause Article 42 (7) in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, which was reinforced by Sweden's unilateral declaration of solidarity that also debuted in 2009. The latter is partly a result of the former, and the mutual defence clause sparked discussion on defence and solidarity in both Finland and Sweden (Winnerstig, M., 2014, p. 156). The following rise of solidarity thinking marked a fundamental change in the Swedish security policy doctrine's main tenets through assuming the giving and receiving of military assistance plausible in crisis scenarios, while in Finland the solidarity and defence clauses of the Lisbon Treaty were likewise officially and strongly adhered to – albeit absent of a similar unilateral declaration (*ibid.*, p. 156-157). These developments are here taken to mark the starting point of Finland and Sweden's transition away from neutrality towards military non-alignment – and subsequent bilateral security political rapprochement.

Even though Finland and Sweden's transition away from military non-alignment eventually culminated in accession into NATO in 2023 and 2024, respectively, both countries' NATO membership were applied on 18th May 2022. The hypothesized bilateral shelter-seeking thus occurred primarily between 2009 and 2022, as their shelter-seeking could be argued to have become multipolar (NATO) in post-2022. This is not to say that the bilateral shelter-seeking ended on that note, quite the contrary. Seeking NATO membership merely expanded the two countries' shelter-seeking strategies, which is why 2022 only sets a natural limit to studying the case at hand – the “end” of relying mostly on the bilateral shelter-seeking in the two countries' relationship.

This timeframe allows for chronological analysis. Finland and Sweden's official government issued security and defence policy documents constitute as the primary

source of data. The data sample are thus the Finnish government's security and defence policy reports from 2009, 2012, 2017 (+ 2016), and 2021 (+ 2020), as well as the Swedish government's security and defence policy reports from 2009, 2015, and 2020. The two additional Finnish documents referred to in parentheses denote the Foreign and Security Policy Reports, which are also included in the study due to their interlinkedness with the separately issued Defence Reports. The selection of these specific documents also serves as high relevance to the study since both sources of documents represent the official stances of the governments of Finland and Sweden. In addition to the primary data, also secondary and tertiary sources of data such as academic articles and other literature written on the subject matter are utilized, providing support for the arguments made throughout this thesis.

3.3 How the analysis proceeds

The analysis proceeds by systematically examining security and defence policy documents released by Finland and Sweden between 2009 and 2022. Following a chronological order, the investigation first focuses on Finland's four (+ 2) respective documents and then transitions to Sweden's three documents. The analysis is thus divided into two separate chapters, one of Finland and one of Sweden. Each of the documents analysed are allocated their own subchapter, except the two additional Finnish foreign and security policy documents which are analysed together with their relevant interlinked defence reports.

Moreover, each subchapter encompasses two subchapters: one devoted for the analysis of the perceived national security threats in the documents, and one devoted for the analysis of the set objectives for Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation. This sequential approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of both countries' evolving security perceptions and objectives for bilateral cooperation over the specified timeframe. Moreover, the evidence, when collected from the data in these two chapters of analysis, are then further examined through a comparative analysis set in the theoretical framework of the thesis in the following findings-chapter.

The concepts of "security" and "security threat" are central facets to the analysis, following the selected data, theoretical framework applied, and the research questions posed. The perceived security threats and bilateral security objectives set to meet those threats, as put forward in the documents analysed, provide the means for

both the interpretation of how ‘security’ and ‘security threats’ are understood, as well as how the bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden is brought forward as a means for answering to the threats. In other words, the independent variables constitute of the security threats perceived in the documents, whereas the dependent variables constitute of the security objectives – especially the bilateral objectives – set in the documents. Drawing from the theoretical framework of small states and shelter theory, the analysis thus aims to uncover nuanced insights into the dynamics of shelter-seeking behaviour evident from these processes; bilateral cooperation, and threat perceptions in the context of changing regional security dynamics, particularly in response to Russia's assertive foreign policy behaviour since 2008.

By later synthesizing insights from SSST the analysis seeks to provide a holistic understanding of how Finland and Sweden have navigated the worsening of their security environment, adapted to systemic pressures (namely from Russia), and pursued a particular bilateral shelter-seeking strategy to safeguard their sovereignty and national interests. Through this multifaceted examination, the research endeavours to contribute to both theoretical debates in small state studies in international relations theory and practical insights for policymakers in Finland, Sweden, and beyond.

3.3.1 Concept of security

Next, a detailed introduction will follow on how the concepts of ‘security’ and ‘security threats’ are analysed here. Ernst Hirsch Ballin, Huub Dijstelbloem, and Peter de Goede argue in their book called *Security in an Interconnected World: A Strategic Vision for Defence Policy* (2020, p. 13), that the conceptualisation of security in contemporary societies is encompassing more than safeguarding the state's territory against military aggression by another state, and that there exist multiple different dimensions of security. They argue that security may be understood as a four-dimensional concept as illustrated in Figure 1. Security is taken to refer to “multiple substantive domains, reference objects, levels of geographic scale and interpretations of danger, and every dimension of the concept of security has expanded ‘beyond’ the classical view of security as it relates to nation states and the military protection of their territory” (ibid., p. 15).

Moreover, the concept of ‘threat’ has also expanded beyond armed aggression by another state, also encompassing “anticipation of diffuse, potential threats that are associated with emotions and feelings of insecurity that can give rise to conduct that in itself becomes a factor in creating insecurity” (ibid., p. 14-15). This conceptualization of security threats is rather holistic and complex to decode and operationalise in the scope of a single master’s thesis, but before arriving at a narrower take on this approach to the concept of security deployed in this analysis, a brief overview of the four discussed dimensions of security is presented.

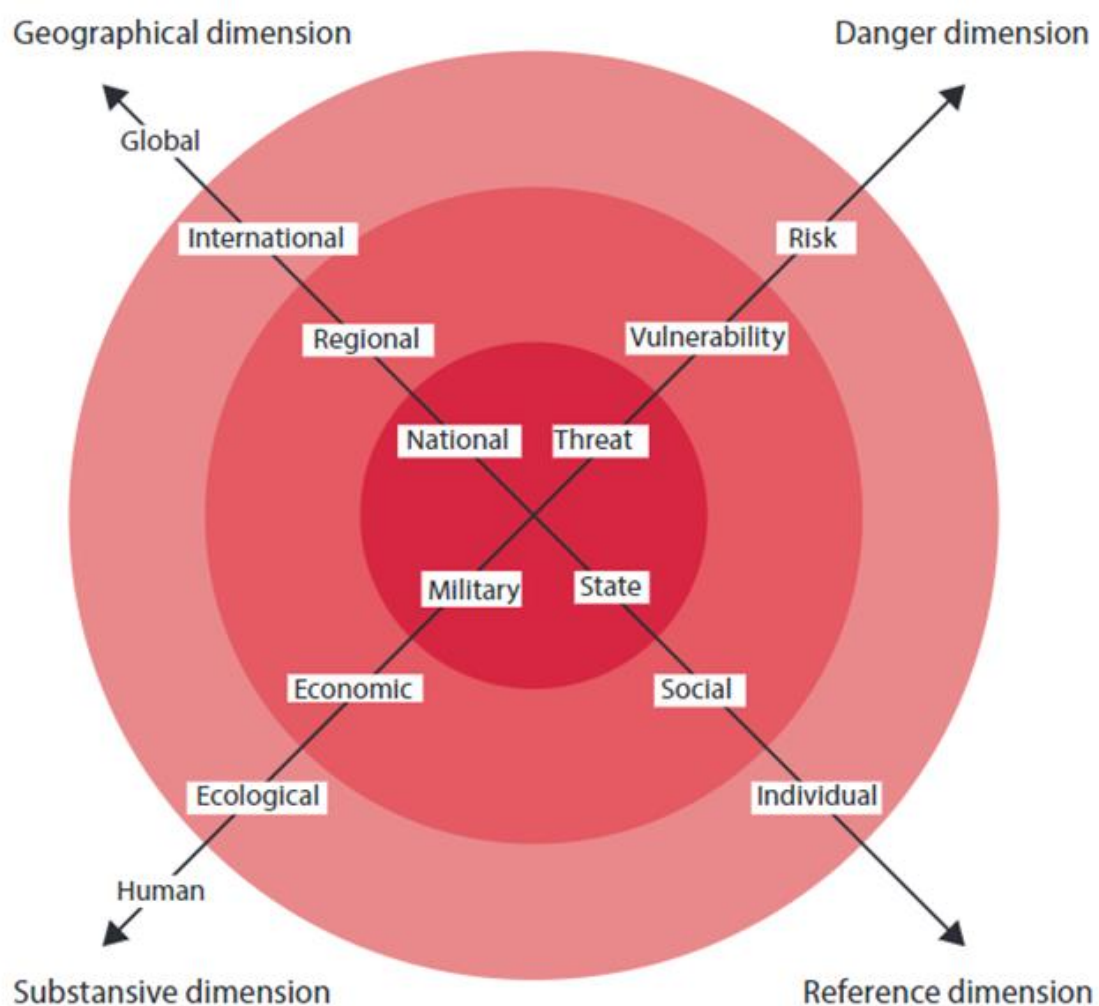


Figure 1. Dimensions of security (Daase, C., 2013, p. 13, as cited in Ballin, E., et al., 2020, p. 14.).

The substantive dimension of the concept of security encompasses the specific domains in which security threats are being observed; the types of security that security policy must guarantee (ibid., p. 15). While military security was paramount in the post-World War II and Cold War periods, the importance of economic security became apparent following the oil crises of the 1970s (ibid.). Ecological threats gained

prominence with the Brundtland Report in 1987, and contemporary discourse highlights the threat of climate change to "planetary security" (ibid.). Additionally, there has been increased attention paid to "human security" and human rights since the end of the Cold War, although traditional power politics have resurfaced in recent years, particularly since the Russian War with Georgia in 2008 (ibid.). The "comeback" of military security is reflective of the more realistic views on security threats, and something that arguably affects small state shelter-seeking in a significant way, albeit being relational to geopolitical circumstances.

The geographical dimension of the concept of security is taken to determine the levels of geographic scale to which security policy applies: (1) the territory of a nation state as limited to the borders of the society, (2) the regional level, (3) the international level, or (4) the global level (ibid., p. 23). The latter three denote the interconnectedness of states leading to an inability to separate between national security and the security of other states, which results in security being a relational, inter-state concept (ibid.). This becomes pronounced in security and insecurity being more and more manifested through networks of non-state actors that cannot be classified as internal or external, thus demanding investment in collective security and alliances (ibid.). This dimension thus depicts a conceptualisation of security that resonates with a broader shelter-seeking demand for states to maintain their security – arguing that it is only through cooperation between states that these common threats can be sheltered from. Ballin E., et al. (2020, p. 23) argue that international terrorism is a good example of security threats that may be identified on all levels of geographic scale. However, with the recent increase in national and regional concerns of security (due to Russian aggression), the shelter-seeking that underpins national scale of security first and foremost, could be argued to have risen back to limelight.

The danger dimension of the concept of security refers to interpretations of what constitutes danger; the securitization of threats, vulnerabilities, and risks (ibid., p. 27). From a realist view on international relations, the main constitutive factor to security and threats could be linked to military threats, but the increasingly diffuse and subjective interpretations of dangers absent of identifiable hostile actors has led to the expansion of the danger dimension of security (ibid.). This securitization denotes active engagement from different societal, political, and state level actors in framing of tensions as threats to security, and by establishing what the threats are,

how they manifest, and who is threatened, a meaning and order is established in the international environment (ibid.). From a small state shelter-seeking perspective, the securitization of threats is ultimately interpreted through state survival, hence military threats, economic vulnerabilities stemming from dependence on external trade or resources, climate change, and humanitarian challenges such as refugee flows or pandemics could be seen as key topics for securitization to seek shelter from.

The reference dimension of the concept of security refers to the question of whose security must be guaranteed: (1) the nation state's, (2) the society's, or (3) the individual's security (ibid., p. 22). In other words, this dimension focuses on identifying the reference points that define what is considered a threat and who is considered the referent object deserving protection. In the context of international relations, these reference points can vary widely and arguably include states, regions, international organizations, communities, or even individuals. This dimension is perhaps one of the most open to theoretical approaches adopted in the analysis of a given set of security threats. From a liberal or constructivist perspective that highlight the agency of individuals, social forces, norms, ideas, identities and the role international organizations as key influencing factors in small state foreign policymaking, the individual and societal security are paramount concerns. Whereas from a realist perspective, the nation state's security is prioritized. However, from a small state shelter-seeking approach, the nation state and society's security could be argued paramount through small state's orientation towards other actors and entities in the international system as points of reference for their security policies and shelter-seeking strategies. After all, SSST assumes that small states seek shelter from larger powers, regional or international organizations, and alliances, which leaves the individual's security as less concerning vis-à-vis the survival of the state.

In conclusion, the substantive dimension of security emerges as the most pertinent for the analysis in this thesis. This dimension provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the evolution of security threats over time, from traditional military concerns to contemporary issues such as economic, ecological, and humanitarian challenges. Given the focus on small state shelter-seeking behaviour amidst changing regional dynamics, the substantive dimension allows for a nuanced examination of the specific domains in which security threats are observed, aligning well with the research goals. In contrast, the other dimensions—geographical, danger,

and reference—while important, are comparatively less relevant to the thesis' focus. The geographical dimension, although highlighting the interconnectedness of states, does not directly address the evolving nature of security threats or small state shelter-seeking behaviour. Similarly, while the danger dimension sheds light on the securitization of threats, it does not provide the same level of insight into the types of security that security policy must guarantee. Lastly, the reference dimension, while essential for understanding the referent objects deserving protection, does not offer as direct a pathway for analysing small state shelter-seeking behaviour in response to evolving security threats. Therefore, the substantive dimension stands out as the most suitable framework for advancing the thesis' objectives.

4 Finland's security and defence policy 2009-2022

4.1 Comprehensive concept of security

The *Finnish Security and Defence Policy Report 2009* offers a thorough assessment of Finnish security and defence policy, outlining future strategies into the late 2010s. Beginning with an analysis of the international landscape and its implications for Finland, the report proceeds to outline policy guidelines and their implementation to enhance national security (Government of Finland, 2009, p. 9). The report recognizes security as encompassing various dimensions, from state sovereignty to individual well-being and societal resilience; acknowledging a wide array of threats, including armed aggression, terrorism, and natural disasters, the report emphasizes the importance of holistic security measures beyond traditional defence mechanisms, highlighting the need for preventive and security-building actions in an interconnected world with unpredictable challenges (ibid.).

The report also addresses global issues like climate change, energy and water scarcity, and population movements, noting their potential to cause widespread destruction and destabilization if unchecked, thus impacting security (ibid.). Moreover, the report also acknowledges the possibility of military force for political ends, reflected in Finland's security assessment (ibid., p. 10). Finland's key security and defence policy objectives include safeguarding independence, ensuring population well-being, and contributing to global problem-solving (ibid.). Also, EU membership is viewed as integral to Finland's security policy, offering both opportunities to influence its surroundings and obligations to address broader security challenges (ibid.). All these above security issues are mainly assessed under the umbrella concept of “comprehensive security”, which, according to the report, encompasses security questions which “may develop into threats, causing significant danger or harm to Finland, to the population or the vital functions of society” (ibid., p. 130). Moreover, the report deploys the concept of “comprehensive defence”, referring to all military and civilian functions by which Finland's sovereignty and the livelihood and security of its citizens are safeguarded against all threats (ibid.).

4.1.1 Human dimension of security as the primary concern

The report is based on the comprehensive concept of security (Government of Finland, 2009, p. 3), thus it takes a rather holistic approach to security threats, the analysis of such, and the implications of threats in and beyond Finland and Finland's security environment. The report states that in an interdependent world many security threats have far-reaching transnational impacts, which is why traditional policy instruments and military defence cannot suffice alone (ibid., p. 9). Especially, as Finland's security is argued closely linked with international developments (ibid., p. 10). It thus follows, that the report acknowledges security threats as being difficult to foresee, hence attention is paid to prevention and security-building measures (ibid., p. 9). The report thus refrains from formulating an explicitly detailed list of security threats posed directly or specifically to Finland, but it does acknowledge a set of national security challenges, accordingly with the comprehensive security concept deployed. In the subchapter titled "*Finland's security*", the report implicitly outlines eight thematic security issues related to the overarching goal of the functioning of society that could potentially encompass threats to Finland. The following listing of threats also include (in parenthesis) each threat's most evident substantive dimension(s) of the concept of security.

1. Functioning of the economy (economic dimension):

The report discusses potential threats related to economic dislocations and financial instability (ibid., p. 85). Economic downturns and disturbances in financial markets could lead to solvency problems among banks and undermine confidence in the banking and financing systems (ibid., p. 86). Technical disruptions in payment transactions and the stock exchange could further exacerbate these challenges (ibid.).

2. Functioning of the infrastructure (economic and human dimensions):

Threats related to critical infrastructure is acknowledged, and the need for state control or ownership in strategically important companies to ensure their resilience and continuity (ibid., p. 87). Energy security is addressed through promoting diverse energy production and domestic fuels to reduce dependence on imports (ibid.). Transport operations vital to Finland must be safeguarded, and infrastructure usability and service availability must be ensured (ibid.). Water

supply and food security are also critical, with measures to guarantee access to potable water, wastewater treatment, and sufficient primary food production (ibid.). Additionally, information security is highlighted as essential for protecting social functions, IT infrastructure, and citizens' security, with a focus on combating cybercrime through real-time public-private collaboration (ibid.).

3. Issues related to the population (economic and human dimensions):

The report outlines potential challenges related to labour shortage in Finland due to population ageing (ibid., p. 88). Moreover, Finland plans to address this issue through the mechanisms of the EU – leveraging free movement of labour, etc. – but implies indirect challenges inherent in the movement of labour in human trafficking, ethnic relations, social exclusion, and societal cohesion related matters (ibid.).

4. Infectious diseases (ecological and human dimensions):

The report lists infectious diseases, animal and plant diseases, pests, and epidemics as environmental health risks (ibid., p.89). It underscores the need for efficient cooperation between health care, food safety, and veterinary authorities to monitor and address these threats, especially in the frameworks of the EU and the World Health Organization (ibid.).

5. Environmental challenges and climate change (ecological and human dimensions):

Climate change poses a significant security threat, exacerbating extreme weather events and oceanic phenomena that Finland aims to account for in land use plannings and other activities related to zoning as well as in training, and rescue service procurements (ibid., p. 89-90). The main framework for international climate policy is acknowledged as the EU as well as the UN (ibid.).

6. Major accidents and natural disasters (ecological and human dimensions):

The report highlights Finland's focus on enhancing preparedness for various threats, including extensive storm damage, environmental hazards, accidents involving hazardous substances, and intentional use of chemical, biological, and radiological substances (ibid., p. 90). Additionally, Finland aims to improve

readiness for increasing flood risks and prepares for major accidents, natural disasters, and catastrophes at home and abroad to ensure the safety of its citizens (ibid.).

7. Terrorism and international organised crime (human dimension):

The report outlines Finland's participation in international cooperation (within the EU and the UN) to combat and prevent terrorism and organised crime, emphasizing the importance of respecting basic human rights in all actions taken (ibid., p. 91). It also highlights the need for national cooperation between security authorities and other agencies to effectively tackle these threats (ibid., p. 92). The exchange of organized crime intelligence with Europol and other international police cooperation efforts are mentioned as essential for preventing crime that could extend into Finland (ibid.).

8. Border security (human dimension):

One concrete security threat perceived in this context is cross-border crime, including illegal immigration, human trafficking, and the facilitation of illegal entry (ibid., p. 93-94). This threat undermines border security and can pose risks to societal stability, which is why the report emphasizes the need for national and international (especially within EU) inter-authority cooperation to prevent, expose, and combat such criminal activities (ibid.).

4.1.2 Bilateral cooperation in an offside position

The report makes a total of only nine references to Sweden throughout the document, albeit allocating Sweden a brief two paragraph long discussion under the chapter titled “*Security developments in Finland’s neighbouring areas*”. However, the discussion provides no references or proposals to any policy objectives set for bilateral cooperation with Sweden, and Sweden is positioned merely as part of the broader Nordic security environment. The report does state in a later chapter titled “*Finland’s security and defence policy guidelines*”, that it promotes and strengthens bilateral relations “especially with its neighbours”, while claiming that “national interests are best advanced through international cooperation” (Government of Finland, 2009, p. 70).

The report puts forward several various guidelines and objectives for its international cooperation in this above-mentioned chapter, especially in the frameworks of the EU, NATO, OSCE, and the UN (ibid., p. 70-81), but makes references to Sweden only in a trilateral setting with Norway, and in a multilateral Nordic framework – stating that Sweden and Norway constitute Finland’s closest security policy partners, and highlights Nordic cooperation’s importance (ibid., p. 73). Moreover, the report mentions Sweden in a NATO’s Partnership for Peace -framework, stating that cooperation with Sweden is important in that regard (ibid., p. 98). Other than these references, no connections are made to Finland’s bilateral cooperation with Sweden, or the role of it, with regards to any security objectives set in the document.

4.2 Commitment to global security

The second analysed security and defence policy report issued by the Finnish government is titled simply as “*Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2012*”. It outlines the government’s security and defence policy, emphasizing its focus on safeguarding independence, sovereignty, and the well-being of the population of Finland (Government of Finland, 2012, p. 10). It highlights the proactive nature of Finland's security approach, which involves both creating security and responding to threats, while relying on a variety of instruments such as good bilateral relations, maximizing influence in the EU, and broad international cooperation (ibid.). The report states that Finland actively participates in global governance and crisis management, demonstrating continuity, transparency, and a strong commitment to European and international collaboration (ibid.).

The report underscores the multifaceted nature of global security, preconditioned by economically, socially, and ecologically sound development (ibid., p. 14). The importance of comprehensive security – the concept of security that covers challenges such as climate change, scarcity of energy and water resources, population issues, terrorism, diseases, cyber-attacks, military threats, etc. – is once again called upon as the foundation of Finnish security policy (ibid.). The report thus takes a wide approach to analysing Finland’s security environment, underscoring the interconnectedness of security challenges and the need for collaborative, forward-thinking approaches to ensure comprehensive [global] security (ibid., passim.). In other words, explicitly national security issues are not raised to limelight, following

the report's conclusion that Finland's present security environment is stable (ibid., p. 14).

However, military defence is argued an integral part of comprehensive security, and while military threats posed directly to Finland are perceived as low, such are not categorically ruled out (ibid., p. 14-15). Finland's military non-alignment is highlighted, but the role of international cooperation is underscored for a two-fold reason: (1) it increases Finland's national defence capability, and (2) it bolsters deterrence (ibid., p. 15). Moreover, the EU's solidarity clause – mutual military and civilian assistance between other members – is highlighted, as well as the EU's, NATO's, and NORDEF's roles as key platforms for Finland's defence cooperation (ibid.). In addition, the role of bilateral cooperation with the United States is stated to be of primary importance in defence materiel cooperation (ibid.).

4.2.1 The rise of military dimension of security

The report emphasises the increasingly interconnected and globalised world's implications for international environment, security-related challenges, and cross-border threats, which are frequently multidimensional – requiring, like in 2009, the utilisation of comprehensive concept of security (Government of Finland, 2012, p. 17). The report identifies and discusses several global trends derivative threats (see chapter 1. *The Security Environment, Security in the Global Transition*), but when shifting the lens to national security threats perceived, the results are scarcer. Moreover, this holds also because the report does not provide a specific chapter, subsection, or thematic introductions to potential security threats Finland faces, making it difficult to identify and analyse explicitly national security threats.

The overarching thematic security threat lies inherent in the key role of “comprehensive concept of security”, which underlines the importance of society's preparedness for emergency conditions and serious disruptions, and the securing of society's vital functions through collaboration between the authorities, the business community, organisations, and citizens (ibid., p. 91). In other words, this overarching theme implies that all potential phenomena affecting society's vital functions are interpreted as national security threats. However, the report concludes that “Finland faces no specific or immediate security threats”, but the country is “increasingly dependent on international well-being, stability, and security, and Finland's security

challenges arise from a wider international setting” (ibid., p. 26). Thus, it is appropriate to derive the main international security threats perceived in the document, which are six, and allocate their most evident substantive dimension(s) of the concept of security.

1. Armed aggression (military dimension):

The report states that while the probability of armed aggression against Finland is low, it cannot be categorically excluded, because a wider regional or European conflict is perceived as potentially extending to Finland (ibid., p. 77).

2. Cybersecurity (economic, military, and human dimensions):

Cyber threats are stated to pose a wide-ranging and serious challenge to comprehensive security, as information security violations, cybercrime, and cyber-attacks can be used as means of political and economic pressure – even alongside traditional military force (ibid., p. 97).

3. Weapons of mass destruction (all dimensions implicit):

The report perceives chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons as global security threats (ibid., p. 48). Especially the nuclear and biological weapons are regarded as growing concerns, with the latter perceived even as one of the greatest global security threats (ibid.). However, no explicit mentions or implications for Finland are made.

4. Infectious diseases (human dimension):

Dangerous infectious diseases are stated to pose a serious international security threat, and combating natural or intentionally spread contagious diseases is recognised to require close cooperation and preparedness among civil and military authorities (ibid., p. 25). However, Finland is not explicitly mentioned.

5. Terrorism (human dimension):

The report identifies international terrorism as a security threat, but in the context of Finland, the threat is regarded as low (ibid., p. 26-27). However, due to increasing threat of terrorism in Finland’s neighbouring areas, the report states

that Finland, too, must actively monitor the threat and institute preventive measures (ibid.).

6. Climate change (all dimensions - if conflict = potentially military ones):

The report makes no explicit mention of Finland, but recognises that wide-ranging ecological impacts of climate change, including threats to human security such as food insecurity, water scarcity, energy shortages, economic impacts, and dangers to critical infrastructure, as well as the potential for increased conflicts over resources are possible (ibid., p. 19). Moreover, the Arctic region is brought forward in this latter context, indirectly tying the potential threats closer to Finland (ibid.).

4.2.2 Solidarity instead of bilateral objectives with Sweden

The report makes a total of 30 references to Sweden throughout the document, which is a significant increase from the previous 2009 report (nine references). The “spirit of solidarity” is highlighted as a “natural” for Nordic cooperation in the field of foreign and security policy, and Sweden is primarily analysed through her unilateral as well as European declarations of solidarity (Government of Finland, 2012, p. 69). Moreover, Sweden is discussed in the subchapter *3.2 The security and defence policy of Nordic countries, and security cooperation* as part of a wider Nordic framework of cooperation (NORDEFECO), rather than bilaterally, and Sweden is regarded as the “key player in Nordic cooperation” (ibid., p. 71).

Even though Finland and Sweden’s close security policy relationship is highlighted, as well as Sweden’s security policy guidelines (ibid.), the report does not present any security or defence political objectives for Finland’s bilateral cooperation with Sweden. The report makes over 100 references to security policy “objectives”, “goals”, and “aims”, yet all those references which discuss Finland’s cooperation pursuits deal with the EU (especially CSDP), NATO, UN, Nordic and Arctic regions, or United States as frameworks for international cooperation (ibid., passim.). The main objective set for Finland’s international cooperation is maintaining and developing military capabilities, thus stating Nordic defence cooperation as important for the creation, maintenance, and use of national and shared capabilities, and that of associated *modi operandi* (ibid., p. 85). This includes further objectives in honing

cooperation in defence training, crisis management operations, and capabilities for joint operations both at home and in Finland's neighbourhood (ibid.). Moreover, this cooperation is argued to improve interoperability, which facilitates more effective cooperation in training and exercises, surveillance missions, procurement projects and crisis management operations (ibid., p. 78), which could all be interpreted as also covering the bilateral cooperation with Sweden, but this is not explicitly mentioned.

4.3 Deteriorating security environment and European solidarity

The next Finnish governmental security and defence policy report analysed here is titled "*Government's Defence Report*" from 2017, which denotes not only by its title change to previous reports – an evolution from 'Finnish Security and Defence Policy Report' to mere 'Government's Defence Report' – but also by its significantly shorter length in comparison to its predecessors, 37 pages vis-à-vis 121 pages in 2012 and 142 pages in 2009, a peculiar focus evolution. This is because the report marked the first time it was issued separately from the government's *Foreign and Security Policy Report*, which was issued in 2016 (Ministry of Defence, *Puolustuselonteot*, 2024). The report was approved in the Government's plenary session on 16th February 2017, and it is a continuation of the Foreign and Security Policy Report (ibid.).

Moreover, as the defence report is composed with the focus on changes in the military operating environment, including direct references to bilateral cooperation with Sweden, and the foreign and security policy report from 2016 is composed for evaluating Finland's operating environment, presenting areas of focus, and the objectives of Finland's security policy (Government of Finland, 2017), it is deemed necessary to include both documents in this analysis. This allows for the extraction of the national security threats perceived, and an exhaustive analysis of bilateral cooperation objectives set for Finnish-Swedish cooperation. Moreover, the two analysed documents at hand denote a significant development in the categorisation of threats and objectives into clear thematic subsections (especially in the foreign and security policy report 2016)

4.3.1 The rise of military threats and expanding human security issues

The defence report outlines one key national security threat in the potential use of military force against Finland, due to the increasingly complex nature of war

(Government of Finland, 2017, p. 5). Regarding the substantive dimension of the concept of security evident in this threat, is the military dimension *par excellence*. In addition, the defence report perceives four more security threats, albeit not explicitly national, and concludes that should threats to security emerge in the country's vicinity or elsewhere in Europe, Finland could not remain an outsider (*ibid.*, p. 15). This again highlights the broad and comprehensive approach to security prevalent in the previous reports, as well as Finland's interconnectedness and solidarity to European security. The four additional threats perceived, and their respective substantive dimensions most evident, are as follows:

1. Scientific and technological challenges (all dimensions implicit):

Advances in science and technology present additional challenges to preparedness against threats (*ibid.*, p. 9), albeit specific examples are not provided in the text.

2. Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats (all dimensions implicit):

Wide-ranging CBRN threats are noted as persisting, implying potential risks from chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear sources (*ibid.*).

3. Cybersecurity threats (military, economic, and human dimensions):

The increasing importance of the cyber domain is highlighted, with cyber operations potentially used for political objectives (*ibid.*). Society's vital functions are exposed to cyber-attacks due to digitalization, dependency on trans-border IT networks, and system interdependencies and vulnerabilities (*ibid.*).

4. Psychological Operations (PSYOP) (economic and human dimensions):

Alongside cyber-attacks, PSYOPs are mentioned as targeting critical infrastructure, industrial plants, political decision-making systems, and citizens both in neighbouring countries and in Finland (*ibid.*).

Moving on to the Foreign and Security Policy Report from 2016, the report claims that due to recent changes (e.g. Crimean annexation by Russia) in Finland's operating environment, the European and Baltic Sea regions' security has deteriorated (Government of Finland, 2016, p. 11). Moreover, the report highlights global trends being an integral part of Finland's operating environment in an interconnected world,

entailing risks and threats for Finland (ibid., p. 9). Also, the membership of the EU is highlighted through the impossibility of Finland remaining an outsider to European security threats, bound by the EU's solidarity clause (ibid., p. 17 & 20). Eight security threats emerge as significant, explicitly discussed thematic security threats listed below with their respective substantive dimensions most evident.

1. Military threats (military dimension):

The report states that the transformed security situation in Europe and the Baltic Sea region directly impacts Finland, which is why the use or threat of military force against Finland cannot be excluded (ibid., p. 11).

2. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (military and ecological dimensions):

The report underscores the resurgence of nuclear weapons and their role in security policies, highlighting their renewed significance on the agenda (ibid., p. 14). Additionally, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including associated hazardous materials and knowhow, poses a considerable threat (ibid.). Also, emerging weapon technologies, notably missile defence systems and conventional precision-guided weapons are viewed as increasing risks (ibid.).

3. Russia (military dimension):

The report states that Russia has shifted away from cooperation-based security thinking and instead challenges the European security system (p. 14), which could be interpreted as an indirect threat to Finland in that Finland's commitment to European security is underscored throughout the report. This is also highlighted by identifying Russia's unpredictable internal and foreign policy development vis-à-vis the deteriorating security situation in the Baltic Sea region (ibid., p. 18).

4. Hybrid threats (economic and human dimensions):

The report identifies wide-ranging hybrid influencing against society as emerging threat, especially as part of the EU's efforts to counter such and introduces e.g. the (then) forthcoming establishment of a Finland based centre of excellence which focuses on hybrid threats (ibid., p. 26).

5. Non-state actors (human dimension):

The report states that Finland is actively preparing to address the international activities of numerous non-state actors and their potential ramifications for both internal and external security, notably focusing on countering the actions of terrorist organizations and networks, whose violent activities may pose a threat to Finland (ibid., p. 26).

6. Climate change (ecological and human dimensions):

The report discusses climate change, and its wide-ranging implications for global security, as a universally recognised threat (ibid., p. 9). Moreover, interlinked security threats to climate change induced ramifications to international security are perceived in population growth, accelerating urbanisation, migration, poverty, youth unemployment, food security, and scarcity of resources (ibid.).

7. Polarisation (human dimension):

The report perceives the mounting polarisation of societies as a growing risk, which increases the vulnerability of western democracies and undermines international cooperation (ibid., p. 9).

8. Epidemics and pandemics (human dimension):

Merely stated as security threats without further elaboration (ibid., p. 9).

4.3.2 Bilateral cooperation with Sweden enjoys a “special status”

The two reports analysed here reveal a significant change to the analysis of Finland and Sweden’s bilateral cooperation, when compared to the previous reports. Even though concrete references made to Sweden are fewer in numbers – 6 in the defence report and 13 in the foreign and security policy report (vis-à-vis 30 references in the previous 2012 report) – the references made are more straightforward and clearly categorized. Both reports include either a specific subchapter devoted for the bilateral relations (*chapter 5.2 Deepening cooperation with Sweden and the other Nordic countries*, in the Foreign and Security Policy report) or a specific paragraph devoted to the assessment of the bilateral cooperation (in *chapter 4.2 Development of defence cooperation* of the Government’s Defence Report). Both reports state clear objectives for the bilateral cooperation with Sweden.

The Government's Defence Report states that "the bilateral cooperation with Sweden enjoys a special status", especially from the standpoint of Finland's defence capability and threat prevention (Government of Finland, 2017, p. 6). The report also highlights that Sweden has returned the focus of its armed forces from crisis management to defending its own territory (*ibid.*, p. 8). The bilateral cooperation with Sweden is based on three core objectives:

1. Strengthening the security of the Baltic Sea region,
2. Strengthening the defence capabilities of both countries, and
3. Deepening of their mutual cooperation to facilitate operational planning in all situations (*ibid.*, p. 18).

These core objectives are exemplified by the inclusion of protection of territorial integrity and exercising the inherent right of collective self-defence pursuant to Article 51 of the UN Charter. (*ibid.*). Moreover, no predetermined limits were set on the deepening of the bilateral defence cooperation (*ibid.*).

The Finnish Foreign and Security Policy report states that Finland and Sweden share a value basis and the same security environment, and the security policy cooperation between the two is ever more focused, also in a NATO partnership context (Government of Finland, 2016, p. 12-13). This report likewise highlights Sweden's "special status in Finland's bilateral cooperation" and repeats the same three core objectives as stated in the Defence Report (*ibid.*, p. 21). However, the report sets out one additional and concrete bilateral policy objective: preparation for the joint use of civilian and military resources (*ibid.*).

These objectives presented represent a clear development from the previous reports. Whereas in the 2009 and 2012 reports, Sweden is predominantly positioned through a wider Nordic cooperation framework, this report marks the first time that clear objectives are exclusively set for the bilateral cooperation with Sweden. In other words, this could be interpreted as a sign of increasing security and defence political rapprochement based on concrete visions of future developments.

4.4 Increased broad-spectrum influencing and the blurring line between normal conditions and conflict

The 2021 defence policy report issued by the Finnish Government is titled the same as its predecessor: “*Government’s Defence Report*”. The report was approved in the Government’s plenary session on 9th September 2021, and it follows the same division of labour as its predecessor – it provides the defence policy guidelines for maintaining and developing Finland’s defence capability, while being based on the *Government Report of Foreign and Security Policy* issued in 2020 which examines Finland’s security policy environment and presents the goals and priorities of Finnish security policy (Government of Finland, 2021). Thus, again, both documents are analysed here to derive the exhaustive data on set policy objectives for bilateral cooperation with Sweden, as well as the national security threats perceived.

Moreover, the inclusion of both documents is again deemed necessary because both documents include direct references and elaborations of both the bilateral cooperation objectives with Sweden, as well as on security threats perceived. In addition, kin to the previous policy reports from 2016 and 2017, the presentation and discussion of the bilateral cooperation objectives are again neatly executed in a coherent and systematic manner, in both reports. What is less organised are the security threats, which are again absent of thematic subsections or chapters devoted for their coherent introduction in a national security perspective, instead, the threats are discussed rather passim throughout the documents. Compared to the policy reports from 2016 and 2017, the length of these documents is nearly twofold. The former’s combined length were 71 pages, while these 2020 and 2021 reports total in 119 pages, reflecting the “increased broad-spectrum influencing against Finnish society” (ibid., p. 8).

The overarching focus of Finland’s security and defence policy, from an international cooperation perspective, remains the EU and the solidarity thinking therein (ibid., p. 11). Both reports highlight the centrality of international cooperation, especially within the EU, EU-NATO cooperation, and bilaterally, as part of Finland’s national defence capability development. Also, Finland’s partnership with NATO is highlighted as increasingly important for the same reason (p. 42).

4.4.1 Military dimension of security as the primary concern

The defence report states that the international situation is increasingly tense, and Finland must prepare for the use or the threat of use of military force against it, albeit Finland is not under immediate military threat (Government of Finland, 2021, p. 8). This threat's substantive dimension is, again, the military dimension par excellence. Moreover, as this perceived military threat constitutes the main national security threat, the report outlines that the engagement of the resources of the entire society, as well as all domains, allows Finland to strive to prevent the military threats posed against it (*ibid.*). The report proceeds to outline six additional security threats as follows (most evident substantive dimensions of each in parentheses):

1. Broad-spectrum influence (military dimension):

A threat perception that includes hybrid influencing and the open use of military force, of which the latter is perceived, from Finland's national defence perspective, the most severe methods of broad-spectrum influencing (p. 18).

2. CBRNE threats (military, ecological and human dimensions):

The report discusses chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive threats to refer to incidents (incl. armed use) caused using CBRNE agents, as well as incidents caused by the misuse of expertise related to them (*ibid.*, p. 60). Moreover, national health security is mentioned as a key dimension here (p. 28).

3. Space-based threats (military, economic and human dimensions):

The report acknowledges that space defence serves to safeguard both national defence operations and broader societal interests against threats originating from space, while also ensuring the uninterrupted functionality of space systems and critical services essential for society under all circumstances (*ibid.*, p. 34-35).

4. Cybersecurity threats (military, economic and human dimensions):

The report outlines that threats to the cyber operating environment primarily encompass cybercrime, which poses a significant risk to the overall cybersecurity of society (*ibid.*, p. 26-27).

5. Russia (military dimension):

Russia's aims of sphere-of-influence-based security regime in Europe, coupled with its central tool of the use of military force, is perceived as a military threat (p. 13). Additionally, the report perceives the decreasing threshold for using low-yield tactical nuclear weapons as a threat, when discussing great power competition, and right before analysing the Russian threat (ibid.).

6. Threats related to technological developments (military, economic and human dimensions):

The report perceives evolving technology and digitalisation enabling the use of new means of influencing, which may endanger functions vital to society and threaten critical infrastructure (ibid., p. 14). Digitalisation, AI, and sensor technologies significantly shape military capabilities, with a rising number of autonomous systems enhancing military functions, necessitating human-machine collaboration - which is why effectively countering potential threats posed by these systems are imperative (ibid., p. 48).

Moving on to the Foreign and Security Policy Report from 2020, the perspective of Finland remains the same as it did in the earlier reports from 2016 and 2017 when it comes to security threats: as a member of the EU, Finland could not remain an outsider should any threats to security emerge in Europe (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2020, p. 10). Moreover, the report states that “the main objective of the Finnish foreign and security policy is to strengthen security in Finland, in our vicinity, in Europe and in the world, and that all these levels are important, and they are interlinked” (ibid., p. 25). The global problems affecting the whole world are viewed as ever larger in scale and multidimensional in nature (ibid., p. 12). Coupled with the notion that “the line between normal conditions and different types of conflicts, ultimately military conflicts, has become blurred” (Government of Finland, 2021, p. 14)., denotes a degree of difficulty in exhaustive analysis of security threats. Thus, the [national] security threats perceived in the document can again be expected to derive mainly from international developments, rather than Finland being explicitly targeted by various threats.

The main overarching security threat perceived in the report is the use or threat of use of military force against Finland, albeit the threat is not immediate (ibid., p. 25-

26). Alongside this threat, the report proceeds to perceive the following set of security threats:

1. Climate change-related threats (ecological and human dimensions):

The report acknowledges climate change as a global challenge that bears interlinked security threats in biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, destruction and fragmentation of habitats, overconsumption of natural resources, extreme weather phenomena, and scarcity of water and food, which are all seen to contribute to forced migration, human rights issues, and increased instability and conflicts (ibid., p. 12). Moreover, epidemics and pandemics are also perceived as security threats interlinked to climate change (ibid.).

2. CBRN threats (military, ecological and human dimensions):

The report discusses the proliferation of biological weapons and countering chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats in the frameworks of health security (ibid., p. 44), as well as military security – weapons of mass destruction (ibid., p. 49).

3. Terrorism (human dimension):

The report states that Finland must implement measures to address international terrorism due to its spillover effects on international security, stability, and conflicts, as well as its direct threat to national security and crisis management (ibid., p. 36).

4. Hybrid influencing (military, economic and human dimensions):

The report perceives that hybrid influencing has evolved into a more significant security threat, characterized by diverse methods aimed at exploiting vulnerabilities to achieve specific objectives (ibid., p. 14). These methods encompass political, diplomatic, economic, military, informational, and cyber influence, often implemented covertly to allow for plausible deniability (ibid.).

5. Threats related to technological developments and communications networks (economic and human dimensions):

Technological advancements, including digitalization and AI, present new security threats, such as cyber vulnerabilities and the potential for injurious activities. Examples of these are the undermining of democracy, freedom of speech and protection of privacy (ibid., p. 42). The convergence of communications networks, critical infrastructure, and emerging technologies like 5G heightens the importance of information security and necessitates comprehensive understanding and preparedness to address evolving security risks (ibid., p. 15-16).

4.4.2 Bilateral cooperation with Sweden to cover peace, crisis, and war

The two reports analysed here present a steep increase in the positioning of Sweden, when compared to the previous reports. Sweden is again analysed, in both documents, under its own explicit subchapter (*4.4.2 Bilateral Defence Cooperation – Sweden* in the Defence Report, and *4.1.2 We emphasise our special relationship with Sweden and Nordic cooperation* in the Foreign and Security Policy Report). The Foreign and Security Policy report makes a total of 20 references to Sweden, while the Defence Report makes 24. The basic line of Finland's foreign and security policy is argued to rely on "bilateral relations, cooperation, and influencing within the European Union, and the rules-based international system and multilateral cooperation under international law" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2020, p. 10).

The main objective of Finland's foreign and security policy is "to strengthen Finland's international position, to secure its independence and territorial integrity, to strengthen Finland's security and prosperity and to ensure that the society functions efficiently" (ibid., p. 10). Moreover, an important objective of the Finnish foreign and security policy is "to take national action and to engage in international cooperation in order to prevent the emergence of armed conflicts and situations endangering Finland's security and society's ability to act, and Finland ending up a party to a military conflict" (ibid.). Sweden's position as Finland's closest bilateral partner is strong, and the cooperation between the two is described as intense, wide-ranging, covering all sectors, and deepened without any pre-set restrictions (ibid., p. 21). The defence cooperation includes operational planning for all situations, foundations for

military cooperation and combined operations in all circumstances, and it covers times of peace, crisis, conflict, and war (Government of Finland, 2021, p. 44).

Based on the core policy objectives mentioned above, the Defence Report lays out these three sets of objectives for the bilateral cooperation with Sweden:

1. To strengthen the security of the Baltic Sea region, and the defence of Finland and Sweden (ibid., p. 44).
2. Deepening cooperation in areas of situational picture cooperation, common use of logistics and infrastructure, Host Nation Support arrangements, surveillance and protection of territorial integrity, and defence industry and materiel cooperation (ibid.).
3. The objective of trilateral cooperation between Finland, Sweden and Norway is to create prerequisites to execute military operations in times of crisis and conflict, which adds to the bilateral defence cooperation between both Finland and Sweden, and Finland and Norway (ibid., p. 45).

The Foreign and Security Policy report repeats the same objectives as laid in the Defence Report, apart from the defence industry and materiel cooperation, and it formulates the first objective as strengthening the defence “capacities” of both countries, instead of the “defence” of Finland and Sweden (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2020, p. 29). Additionally, the report states a wider objective for the deepening of not just defence, but also foreign and security policy cooperation with Sweden – “without any predetermined limitations” (ibid.).

5 Sweden's security and defence policy 2009-2022

5.1 The emergence of solidarity

The unilateral solidarity declaration presented by the Swedish government was officially recorded for the first time as part of defence policy in the report titled "*Ett användbart försvar*", submitted to the Riksdag on March 19th, 2009 (Hugemark, B., 2012, p. 9). The report was submitted to the Riksdag conveniently after the Swedish ratification of the Lisbon Treaty that took place in November 2008, which reinforced the message of mutual assistance among member states. According to Sweden's new solidarity policy, the Swedish armed forces were now called upon to have the ability to both provide and receive military assistance (Nünlist, C., 2013, p. 4).

Key elements of the report include reforms related to the operational usability, flexibility, and utilization of the armed forces, as well as the proposal for Sweden's military defence to be carried out alone and together with others, and the promotion of security in Sweden, in its neighbouring areas, and beyond (Government of Sweden, 2009, p. 8). The report does not specifically address who these other actors are, who are expected to assist Sweden in times of need but refers generally to other EU member states through the solidarity clause of the Lisbon Treaty, as well as more broadly to the Nordic countries, and the opportunities provided by bilateral cooperation arrangements to contribute to the promotion of the country's security (ibid., p. 9). Moreover, the report was based on an analysis produced by the Ministry of Defence in December 2008 on the events of the Georgian war (ibid., p. 14), and the report also refrains from ruling out the possibility of direct military threats to Sweden in the future (ibid., p. 28).

5.1.1 Human dimension of security as the primary concern

The perceived national security threats that the report puts forward are rather scarcely detailed. Moreover, the security threats outlined in the report have not been analysed or assessed according to any clear thematic division among different threat areas/sources. Instead, the proposal emphasizes the need for a "broad perspective" to security threats, characteristic of the entire analysis (Government of Sweden, 2009, p. 28). As a result, the report's analysis of perceived security threats appears somewhat chaotic, merely discussing a set of potential threats in a relatively

unorganized manner. However, the identification of specific threats is particularly linked to concerns shared by the EU, UN, and NATO regarding terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, failed states, and asymmetric threats (ibid., p. 20). For example, the issue of Iran's nuclear weapons is recognized as a multilateral security challenge (ibid., p. 22). Regarding the concrete (potential) national security threats, the report outlines seven security threats as follows (each threat's most evident substantive dimension in parenthesis):

1. Cross-border cooperation related threats (economic and human dimensions):

Multilateral cross-border cooperation, trade, and integration are seen, on the one hand, as factors promoting Sweden's security, but on the other hand, also as sources of new threats: individual local conflicts can have global consequences due to globalization (and integration), which also enables security threats stemming from, for example, economic crises and the threats posed by transnational non-state actors (terrorism) to Sweden's security (ibid., p. 27-28).

2. Armed conflicts (military dimension):

Regional armed conflicts and their potential escalation effects are seen to continue to compose a potential threat to Sweden's security (ibid., p. 28).

3. Climate change (ecological and human dimensions):

Climate change is stated to constitute one of the most severe security threats that bears implications for human security and basic living conditions (ibid.).

4. Pandemics (human dimension):

Merely stated as a potential threat for Sweden's security (ibid.).

5. Environmental disasters (ecological and human dimension):

Merely stated as a potential threat for Sweden's security (ibid.).

6. Society's dependence on information technology (economic and human dimensions):

The report states that threats to Sweden's ever more IT-dependent information society pose "a part of the wider threat picture" (ibid.).

7. Russia (military dimension):

The threat posed by Russia is recognised but viewed as directed towards the Commonwealth of Independent States rather than Sweden's immediate vicinity (ibid., p. 24-25). However, Russian interests related to the events in Georgia in 2008, as well as those concerning Ukraine and Belarus, are seen as potentially destabilizing - especially within NATO, less so within the EU (ibid., p. 25).

5.1.2 Nordic and European solidarity over bilaterality with Finland

Finland is mentioned in the document a total of only six times. It is clear, therefore, that Finland's positioning in the document is quite limited. References to the Nordic countries appear more often, with almost each one related to shared Nordic values, discussions on increasing Nordic (defence) cooperation, or Sweden's unilateral solidarity declaration (Government of Sweden, 2009, *passim.*). Thus, Finland's positioning (or lack thereof) can be seen as part of a broader Nordic and European framework emphasised, as mentioned in the document's reference to the "broad Nordic community of values" in reference to the Stoltenberg report (ibid., p. 26).

The only concrete reference to cooperation with Finland is related to Sweden's international training cooperation framework for its armed forces, where Finland, together with Norway, receives a special mention in the government's proposal for possible further development of trilateral cooperation (ibid., p. 84). However, this objective is not purely bilateral in nature, nor does the report elaborate on it further with the objective's potential details. Thus, no objectives for bilateral cooperation with Finland were presented.

5.2 The comeback of total defence (*totalförsvaret*)

The second document examined here is the Swedish government's security and defence policy report titled "*Försvarspolitisk inriktning – Sveriges försvar 2016-2020*", which was presented to the Riksdag on April 23rd, 2015. The concept of total defence (*totalförsvaret*), familiar from the Cold War era Sweden, made a comeback in this 2015 report, despite being deemed unnecessary in the 2004 report (Britz, M., 2016, p. 2). The government states in the report that the security situation in Europe has deteriorated due to Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and therefore proposes increasing the country's defence capability against armed attack (Government of

Sweden, 2015, p. 1). The report was based on previous Riksdag's Defence Committee reports titled "*Vägval i en globaliserad värld*" (from 2013) and "*Försvaret av Sverige – Starkare försvar för en osäker tid*" (from 2014), which, together with the changed security situation, constituted to the report taking a significant step towards a more traditional territorial defence policy and away from the operational development focused on international crisis management that dominated previous years (ibid., p. 6).

Moreover, the document states that Sweden's defence capability ought to be primarily directed towards the defence of its own territory, but it should also be seen as part of the stability and security community in Northern Europe (ibid., p. 1). The government believes that Sweden, with the opportunity and responsibility to influence the development of the Baltic Sea region, should deepen its bilateral and multilateral defence and security cooperation, with particular importance placed on cooperation with Finland (ibid.). Other general and strategic security political priorities set in the document include increasing the readiness capacity of societal structures and key institutions, enhancing training activities, developing the Home Guard's operations, addressing longer-term personnel resource issues, and further developing the defence capabilities of submarines and the air force (ibid., p. 2). These broad strategic priorities, coupled with the total defence concept reintroduced and inherent in the above priorities, makes for a significant paradigm shift from the previous 2009 policy.

5.2.1 Military dimension of security topping the charts

The government outlines four thematic security threats in the report: (1) influence campaigns and information warfare, (2) threats related to cybersecurity, (3) terrorism, and (4) weapons of mass destruction (Government of Sweden, 2015, p. 40-42). This report identifies, categorizes, and analyses security threats clearly in their own separate subsection titled "Thematic Security Threats." Thus, the threats have become more concrete and focused compared to the previous 2009 report, where the threats were not categorized thematically in any way.

The increased security threat posed by Russia to Sweden's neighbouring areas is widely evident in the document, even though it is not explicitly outlined as a separate thematic security threat. Moreover, in the analysis of thematic security threats,

Russia is not directly mentioned as a potential actor behind the threats, although, for example, in the case of influence campaigns and information warfare, the narrative of the report leaves little room for interpretation regarding the possible source of these threats. Next, we can examine these thematic security threats more closely, and allocate their most evident substantive dimensions perceived.

1. Influence campaigns and information warfare (military, economic and human dimensions):

The government outlines that various influence campaigns and operations are a significant security threat to Sweden and its neighbouring countries, aiming to influence state leadership, the population, or specific target groups (ibid., p. 40). For example, social media, forged documents, fake news, and various covert operations are identified as tools of the broader phenomenon of information warfare and influence operations (ibid.). The extent and complexity of the threats are emphasized due to the broad nature of the phenomenon, which even poses a security threat to Sweden's national sovereignty: in political, diplomatic, economic, and military means, both open and covert, are considered part of the phenomenon (ibid.).

2. Threats related to cybersecurity (military, economic and human dimensions):

The government outlines that the interfaces between different dimensions of security threats also blur within the framework of cyber security threats, and that the goal of a potential cyber-attack may be to support the attacker's political, diplomatic, economic, and military actions, threatening the state's freedom of action and sovereignty (ibid., p. 41). The report outlines that a cyber-attack can also be considered an armed attack if it causes physical damage, and a cyber-attack can be seen as proportionate to a conventional armed attack due to its effects on critical IT infrastructure and societally important functions (ibid.).

3. Terrorism (military, economic and human dimensions):

The report presents, with numerous examples from the 21st century (such as New York, Paris, Stockholm, and Norway's Oslo and Utøya), that regional separatist organizations, terrorist groups, and individual terrorists constitute a global security threat (ibid.). The security threat posed by terrorism is outlined as a

dimension of threat linked to developments in cyber security; the development of the cyber domain is seen in the future to enable a wider range of methods to carry out terrorist acts, thereby increasing societal vulnerability – when targeting society’s critical functions (ibid.).

4. Weapons of mass destruction (military, ecological and human dimensions):

The government identifies chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons as dimensions of threat in the context of weapons of mass destruction. The risk assessment for each type of weapon is classified as low, especially in Sweden's nearby areas, but the report does not rule out the possibility of a nuclear conflict even in Sweden's vicinity (ibid., p. 42). The development and use of chemical or biological weapons are classified as a lower risk, although the government acknowledges the risk of critical knowledge related to the production and use of such weapons falling into the hands of "non-state actors for undesirable use", which, citing the example of the Syrian civil war, is recognized as a broader security threat (ibid., p. 41-42). The security threat posed by nuclear weapons is seen as politically more significant, especially concerning tactical nuclear weapons, and in the military doctrines of states outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which are considered to increase uncertainty and the risk of miscalculations (ibid., p. 42).

5.2.2 Bilateral cooperation with Finland “particularly important”

The government states the solidarity declaration as the basis for security policy objectives, as well as the deterioration of the security situation in Europe, especially due to the increased military security threat posed by Russia (Government of Sweden, 2015, p. 46-47). Although a direct military threat against Sweden is not considered likely, according to the government's view, its risk has increased (ibid., p. 46). Based on these views, the report puts forward three central security political objectives as follows: (1) Sweden’s defence capability is to be strengthened, (2) Sweden's bilateral and multilateral defence and security cooperation should be deepened, and (3) Sweden should continue its active participation in international civilian and military operations within the frameworks of the UN, EU, NATO, and the OSCE (ibid., p. 46-47).

Finland is thus not concretely mentioned in these objectives but could be interpreted as written into them indirectly through both countries' integration within the international organisations emphasised, as well as being one of the central bilateral security and defence cooperation partners for Sweden. However, when it comes to Finland's concrete positioning, references to Finland are made a total of 30 times. The change from 2009 is thus significant in this regard, as Finland has even been allocated its own subsection in the security policy analysis section titled "*Countries and Regions*" (ibid., p. 23-24). The change is significant also because right from the first page of the report ("*Main Content of the Proposal*"), the report emphasizes the importance of cooperation with Finland as "particularly important", and that the deepening of bilateral and multilateral cooperation is important – "especially with Finland" (ibid., p. 1). Deepening the cooperation with Finland is thus an overarching objective set, as the government sees significant value in the cooperation and great opportunities for "far-reaching cooperation in all combat forces and other areas, such as secure communication between the countries" (ibid., p. 24).

Moreover, the key security policy objectives for the deepening of international cooperation within the frameworks of the EU, UN, NATO, and OSCE, are seen to align with Finland's corresponding objectives (ibid., p. 23-24). Finland's willingness to develop Nordic defence cooperation and closer NATO partnership together with Sweden is also identified (ibid. p. 24). The government continues to strengthen this common security policy approach by proposing the deepening of cooperation between Finland and Sweden within the framework of preparing for the joint use of civilian and military resources, ensuring territorial integrity, and utilizing and reinforcing the right of self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter (ibid., p. 24).

In sum, the objectives set for bilateral cooperation with Finland could be summarized in three explicitly discussed objectives: (1) continued alignment on shared security policy objectives, (2) further deepening the bilateral cooperation, especially in the framework of preparing joint use of civilian and military resources, and (3) joint development of Nordic cooperation and NATO partnership.

5.3 The possibility of armed attack against Sweden no longer ruled out

The third document examined here is the Swedish government's security and defence policy report titled "*Totalförsvaret 2021-2025*", which was presented to the Riksdag

on 14th October 2020. The report includes suggestions for comprehensive objectives in total defence, new goals for military defence and civil protection, guidelines for the direction of military organization, and changes to defence force organization and legislation (Government of Sweden, 2020, p. 1).

In addition, the report includes the government's assessment of general security policy development, as well as a long-term defence and security policy assessment, including international defence cooperation (*ibid.*). The report claims that the security situation in Europe and Sweden's neighbouring areas has continued to deteriorate, and the possibility of armed attack or its threat against Sweden can no longer be ruled out - hence, the government justifies the need to further strengthen Sweden's overall defence capability (*ibid.*, p. 26).

The focus in the development of total defence is set on defence planning and sizing to be able to respond to an armed attack against Sweden, including other types of military operations on Swedish territory (*ibid.*, p. 27). Additionally, the report states that total defence must have the strength, composition, command, readiness, and endurance to act as a deterrent to attack attempts and other actions utilizing Swedish territory, thus serving as both a preventive and peacekeeping concept (*ibid.*). The underlying principle behind this view is the government's decision that the country's total defence should be able to manage a security crisis seriously affecting society in Europe and Sweden's neighbouring areas for at least three months, including wartime for part of this time (*ibid.*).

Although the government emphasizes Sweden's military non-alignment, Sweden's military-strategic position is seen as strongly linked to the surrounding area and the influence zone of Northern Europe in the event of a crisis (*ibid.*, p. 58-59). Based on this, the primary security policy framework highlighted for Sweden is the EU and a security policy based on solidarity in the European and transatlantic context (*ibid.*, p. 27). At the centre of this internationally collaborative policy is also Finland, with which defence cooperation is seen as being in a "special position and to be further deepened" (*ibid.*).

5.3.1 Russia as the “main architect” behind deteriorating security environment

The report includes a specific subchapter (5.1.10) devoted for the analysis of security threats, titled “*Tematiska säkerhetsfrågor*”. The chapter outlines five thematic security threats in the report: (1) hybrid threats, (2) cybersecurity threats, (3) weapons of mass destruction, (4) terrorism, and (5) security threats caused by climate change (Government of Sweden, 2020, p. 61-67). Similarly to the previous 2015 report, the security threat posed by Russia is again broadly recognized in the report, but without its own mention as one of the thematic security threats. For example, Russia is recognised as the “main architect” behind the deteriorating security situation in Sweden’s vicinity (ibid., p. 33), but not as one of the thematic threats posed explicitly to Sweden. The Russian threat also appears either explicitly integrated or at least implicitly present in most thematic security issues such as hybrid, cyber, and weapons of mass destruction-related security threats. This explicit presence of Russia is also a clear departure from the previous strategy, where Russia's role was not directly mentioned by name in the analyses of thematic threats.

Next, we can examine these thematic security threats more closely, and allocate their most evident substantive dimensions perceived.

1. Hybrid threats (military, economic and human dimensions):

The government presents hybrid threats as a key security threat to the state and society of Sweden (ibid., p. 61). The report defines hybrid threats as a combination of one or more means (external opinion influencing, disinformation, influence operations and campaigns, infrastructure attacks, military operations, etc.), which primarily target the functionality of civilian society and political decision-making in a manner that undermines democratic processes and freedom of action (ibid., p. 61-62). The blurring of the boundary between peace and war caused by hybrid threats is seen in the presentation as a key motive for increasing the readiness capacity and enhancing cooperation among various institutions and authorities in society, including international cooperation within the framework of the EU (ibid., p. 62). Western democratic societies, characterized by freedom of expression and open economies, are particularly vulnerable to "exploitation attempts by antagonist actors", and society’s digitalization and dependence on information technology are mentioned as specific vulnerabilities to influence

attempts (ibid., p. 61). Russia is directly mentioned as an example of an actor utilizing hybrid threats in its doctrine (ibid.).

2. Cybersecurity threats (military, economic and human dimensions):

The government states that Sweden's security and economic well-being increasingly rely on digital solutions and technological advancements, but the spread of digital solutions, and the growth of data create significant risks and vulnerabilities for authorities and society (ibid., p. 63). For example, many critical systems for maintaining societal functionality, such as electronic communication, shipping, aviation, the electrical grid, industrial control systems, and the financial system, are vulnerable to cyber-attacks even during peacetime (ibid.). State-sponsored actors and state-supported entities are identified as the primary antagonistic cyber threats, whose motives include supporting political, diplomatic, economic, and military influence methods against the target country's freedom of action and sovereignty (ibid.). Thus, the report considers cyber-attacks to potentially have the same magnitude of impact as conventional armed attacks (ibid.). The differing views between Western countries and Russia and China regarding the operational rights in cyberspace are seen as obstacles to creating norms and regulations for international cyber operations (ibid., p. 63-64).

3. Weapons of mass destruction (military, ecological and human dimensions):

The report states that compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has weakened, hence, issues related to nuclear weapons in countries such as Israel, Iran, India, Pakistan, and North Korea are identified as broad global security threats, with direct implications for European security, particularly due to the deteriorating relations between Iran and the United States (ibid., p. 64-65). In addition, Sweden and its neighbouring areas are perceived to face a nuclear threat from Russia's accelerated modernization of its nuclear arsenal and its withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with the United States (ibid., p. 64). International agreements banning chemical and biological weapons are also endangered and weakened, which is why the government emphasizes the importance of revitalizing efforts to uphold these agreements as the significance of weapons of mass destruction grows internationally, although they are not seen as posing a direct threat to Sweden (ibid., p. 65). Within the framework of chemical

weapons, the government once again points out the Russian dimension, albeit sometimes implicitly, as a credible actor, particularly following the Salisbury 2018 assassination attempt (the Skripal case) and the poisoning of Alexei Navalny in 2020 (ibid.).

4. Terrorism (human dimension):

The terrorist threat against Sweden is considered to have increased and is attributed to both Islamist and far-right extremism (ibid., p. 66). The government outlines that the far-right extremist community in the country consists of individuals, groups, and organizations that view violence as a legitimate means to change the societal order, aiming to achieve an ethnically homogeneous society and/or a governance system based on ethnic origin (ibid.). On the other hand, the Islamist terrorist community comprises individuals and groups who support a violent ideology, considering terrorist attacks against Western targets, including Sweden, as legitimate (ibid.). The government identifies a common factor in the activities of both terrorist groups: the international networks influencing their backgrounds, which is why international multilateral cooperation is seen as crucial in combating terrorism, both within the EU and NATO frameworks (ibid.).

5. Security threats caused by climate change (military, ecological and human dimensions):

The negative impacts of climate change on people's basic living conditions are seen as a global security threat, with both direct and indirect consequences (ibid., p. 67). Direct effects are identified as floods, droughts, extreme weather conditions, and sea-level rise, which are expected to create significant pressures both in Sweden and globally (ibid.). Indirect effects are recognized as refugee flows from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia towards Europe and Sweden, as well as competition for natural resources such as water (ibid.). These factors are assessed to potentially lead to new climate-induced conflicts, even armed ones (ibid.). Therefore, the government assesses that the security threats arising from climate change will extend to Sweden and its neighbouring areas in the future, including the Arctic region, where the increasing military presence of Russia, China, and the United States accelerates tensions (ibid.).

5.3.2 Bilateral cooperation with Finland a central part of Swedish security strategy

The report makes references to Finland a total of 57 times, which is quantitatively almost twice as much as in the previous report from 2015 (30 references).

Qualitatively, the document once again takes a significant stance regarding Finland, as the government states that Sweden's defence policy stands on two pillars, one representing the country's own national defence (total defence), and the other representing Sweden's international defence cooperation - in which Finland holds a "special position" that is advocated for further deepening (Government of Sweden, 2020, p. 27-28). Finland is thus metaphorically positioned as a central part of one of the two standing pillars on which Sweden's defence policy stands, forming a crucial part of Sweden's security strategic thinking. However, the report also emphasizes that Sweden's international, regional, and bilateral defence cooperation does not entail mutually binding defence obligations (despite the solidarity declaration), instead, they complement existing cooperation within the EU and NATO (ibid., p. 28).

Nevertheless, Finland is positioned in the report both directly in its own subsection (*Finland*) discussing Finland's role, and throughout the document with various references to Finland's position in Swedish security policy thinking, concerning both regional, European, and broader international cooperation frameworks. According to the report, the cooperation between the countries has deepened significantly during the years 2016-2020, and the report strongly advocates for the development of joint operational planning between Sweden and Finland "as far as possible" (p. 28). The main objective of operational cooperation planning is to enable operational activities during peacetime, crisis, and war, as well as the joint use of military resources in various scenarios, if so decided (ibid., p. 72). This goal may be taken as the main overarching objective set for the bilateral cooperation. Moreover, this objective of deepening cooperation encompasses a total of five additional objectives that may be derived from the report:

1. Operational cooperation: the main objective is to enable joint operational action during peace, crisis, and war. This includes clarifying the forms and regulations required for military operational cooperation, particularly in territorial surveillance and defence of territorial integrity (ibid., p. 72).

2. Legislative support: the government proposed a new law (*proposition 2019/20:110 Operativt militärt stöd mellan Sverige och Finland*) for operational defence cooperation with Finland, empowering the government to make decisions regarding the provision and receipt of operational military support within the framework of cooperation (ibid.).
3. Enhanced military interoperability: the government aims to review the possibilities of preparing certain Swedish ground forces to operate in Finland during crises, imminent war, or war if both parties find it appropriate (ibid.).
4. Enhanced unit command and personnel exchange: cooperation between Swedish and Finnish units should continue to develop with the ambition to increase coordination between units and mutual personnel exchange to enhance understanding of work methods and doctrines (ibid.).
5. Hybrid threat cooperation: The report sees potential for Finnish-Swedish cooperation in areas relevant to hybrid threats, including collaboration with the Helsinki-based hybrid centre (ibid., p. 73).

These objectives thus aim to strengthen and expand the security and defence cooperation between Sweden and Finland, enhancing their mutual capabilities and preparedness to address various security challenges and threats. In sum, these objectives point to a steep increase in bilateral objectives set for the cooperation with Finland, when compared to the previous report(s).

6 Findings

The main goal for the analysis was to derive the necessary information from the data to provide qualitative answers to the qualitative research questions posed:

1. “What kinds of security and defence political threat perceptions did the changing regional security dynamics invoke in Finland and Sweden, particularly in light of Russia’s increasingly aggressive neighbour politics, since 2008?”, and
2. “What roles did the Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation play in the security and defence policies of Finland and Sweden during the period under study?”

Drawing from small states and shelter theory (SSST) adopted for this thesis, which assumes small states, like Finland and Sweden, to need external political, economic, and societal shelter to survive and mitigate the disadvantages of lacking material capabilities (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 195), the hypothesis was drawn in that Finland and Sweden have sought shelter in their bilateral security political cooperation during 2009-2022 amidst the simultaneously worsening security environment. Following the research questions, and the theoretical and methodological frameworks applied, the evidence for testing the hypothesis was drawn from the perceived national security threats and the set policy objectives for Finnish-Swedish cooperation in the documents probed. By weighing the frequencies, content and causalities between the threats, the dimensions of security therein, and the bilateral objectives, the hypothesized process ought to be able to be tested.

Starting with the findings from the analysis of Finland’s security and defence policy developments in the studied timeframe, a summarized view of the threats perceived, as well as the set objectives for bilateral cooperation is compiled for later review in comparison to the Swedish developments. The findings will also function as producing answers to both research questions.

The 2009 report displayed a tenuous effort in the positioning of Sweden, as no objectives were set for the bilateral cooperation at all. However, the report perceived a total of eight national security threats in (1) border security, (2) terrorism and international organised crime, (3) threats to the functioning of the economy, (4) threats to the functioning of the infrastructure, (5) issues related to population, (6)

infectious diseases, (7) environmental challenges and climate change, and (8) major accidents and natural disasters. When it comes to the substantive dimensions of the concept of security explicitly evident in the presentation of these threats in the document's language used, the overall results place the human dimension as the primary concern, matching with 7/8 threats (all but threats to the functioning of economy). Both the economic and ecological dimensions of security matched with 3/8 threats, respectively, while the military dimension was absent entirely.

The 2012 report displayed a significantly increased positioning of Sweden in terms of references made to Sweden and Sweden's security political guidelines, however, no bilateral cooperation objectives were set in this report either. The report perceived six national security threats in (1) armed aggression, (2) cybersecurity, (3) weapons of mass destruction (WMD), (4) infectious diseases, (5) terrorism, and (6) climate change. When it comes to the substantive dimensions of the concept of security explicitly evident in the presentation of these threats in the document's language used, the overall results place, again, the human dimension as the primary concern, matching with 5/6 threats (all but armed aggression). The second most evident dimension was now the military (4/6 threats), followed by the economic dimension (3/6 threats). The ecological dimension was the least evident (2/6 threats).

The 2017 (Defence Report) and 2016 (Foreign and Security Policy Report interlinked) reports displayed yet again a significant development in the positioning of Sweden, marking the first time that concrete objectives were set for the bilateral cooperation with Sweden. Four objectives were identified: (1) strengthening the security of the Baltic Sea region, (2) strengthening the defence capabilities of both countries, (3) deepening of their mutual cooperation to facilitate operational planning in all situations, and (4) preparation for the joint use of civilian and military resources.

The reports perceived a total of 12 national security threats in (1) threat of military force against Finland, (2) scientific and technological challenges, (3) CBRN threats, (4) WMDs, (5) Russia, (6) cybersecurity, (7) hybrid threats, (8), non-state actors, (9) psychological operations, (10) climate change, (11) polarisation, and (12) epidemics and pandemics. When it comes to the substantive dimensions of the concept of security explicitly evident in the presentation of these threats in the documents' language used, the overall results place, again, the human dimension as the primary concern, matching with 9/12 threats (all but the military force against Finland,

WMDs, and Russia). The military dimension emerged, again, as the second most prominent security dimension (6/12 threats), followed by the economic (5/12 threats) and ecological (4/12 threats) dimensions of security, sharing the same order as the previous 2012 report.

The 2021 (Defence Report) and 2020 (Foreign and Security Policy Report interlinked) reports displayed yet again a significant development in the positioning of Sweden as Finland's closest bilateral partner, as no pre-set restrictions to the security and defence cooperation are set. The reports outline three objectives: (1) strengthening of the security of the Baltic Sea region and the defence of Finland and Sweden, (2) deepening the [security and] defence cooperation in areas of situational picture cooperation, common use of logistics and infrastructure, Host Nation Support arrangements, surveillance and protection of territorial integrity, and defence industry and materiel cooperation, and (3) adding to the bilateral defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden from the trilateral cooperation of Finland, Sweden and Norway, which aims to create prerequisites to execute military operations in times of crisis and conflict.

The reports perceived a total of 10 national security threats in (1) military threats, (2) broad-spectrum influencing, (3) CBRNE threats, (4) space-related threats, (5) cybersecurity, (6) Russia, (7) threats related to technological developments and communications networks, (8) climate change, (9) terrorism, and (10) hybrid influencing. When it comes to the substantive dimensions of the concept of security explicitly evident in the presentation of these threats in the documents' language used, the overall results place, for the first time, the military dimension as the primary concern, matching with 8/10 threats (all but climate change and terrorism). The human dimension of security is now the second most evident (7/10 threats), followed by the economic (4/10 threats) and ecological (2/10 threats) dimensions.

Moving on to Swedish security and defence policy reports, the same logic of summary follows below.

The 2009 report displayed a very limited positioning of Finland and introduced no policy objectives for the bilateral cooperation with Finland. The report discussed seven [potential] national security threats in (1) threats related to cross-border cooperation, (2) armed conflicts, (3) climate change, (4) pandemics, (5)

environmental disasters, (6) society's dependence on information technology, and (7) Russia. When it comes to the substantive dimensions of the concept of security explicitly evident in the presentation of these threats in the document's language used, the overall results place the human dimension of security as the primary concern, matching with 5/7 threats. All three other dimensions were equally prominent, with 2/7 matches each.

The 2015 report displayed a significant development to Finland's positioning, both quantitatively in direct references as well as qualitatively by marking the first time that explicit policy objectives were set for the bilateral cooperation with Finland. The report outlined three objectives in (1) continued alignment on shared security policy objectives, (2) further deepening the bilateral cooperation, especially in the framework of preparing for joint use of civilian and military resources, and (3) joint development of Nordic cooperation and NATO partnership. The report perceived four national security threats in (1) influence campaigns and information warfare, (2) cybersecurity, (3) terrorism, and (4) WMDs. Moreover, the increased security threat posed by Russia to Sweden's neighbouring areas is widely evident and discussed in the document, and while it is not explicitly outlined as a separate thematic security threat, it is implicitly narrated as a potential actor behind influence campaigns and information warfare. Thus, Russia is counted as the fifth security threat perceived.

When it comes to the substantive dimensions of the concept of security explicitly evident in the presentation of the four national security threats in the 2015 document's language used, the overall results place both the human and military dimensions as the primary concerns, matching with all four threats. However, if the Russian threat was included, the military dimension could rise to limelight, given that the Russian threat be interpreted through the military dimension. As the report has not explicitly done so in a national security context, the above findings will remain a tie. The second most prominent security dimension is the economic (3/4 threats), leaving the ecological dimension (1/4 threats) the least prominent.

The 2020 report displayed yet again a significant development to Finland's positioning, as it called for deepening of the bilateral cooperation with Finland "as far as possible" to enable joint operational activities during peace, crisis, and war. In addition to this overarching vision, the report presents five objectives for the bilateral cooperation in (1) clarifying the forms and regulations required for military

operational cooperation, particularly in territorial surveillance and defence of territorial integrity, (2) legislative support for operational defence cooperation, empowering the government to make decisions regarding the provision and receipt of operational military support within the framework of cooperation, (3) reviewing the possibilities of preparing certain Swedish ground forces to operate in Finland during crises, imminent war, or war, for enhancing military interoperability, (4) increasing coordination between Finnish and Swedish units and mutual personnel exchange to enhance understanding of work methods and doctrines, and (5) collaboration with the Helsinki-based hybrid centre for increased hybrid threat cooperation.

The 2020 report perceives five national security threats in (1) hybrid threats, (2) cybersecurity threats, (3) weapons of mass destruction, (4) terrorism, and (5) security threats caused by climate change. Moreover, Russia is again broadly recognised as a security threat, but without its own mention as one of the thematic security threats. For instance, Russia's role as the "main architect" behind the deteriorating security situation in Sweden's vicinity is explicitly stated. Thus, as with the previous report, the threat of Russia is clearly hinting towards the military dimension of security concerns, but as it is left out of the report's list of explicit security threats posed to Sweden, the Russian threat is included but not allocated with explicit substantive dimensions of security due to the lack of such data linked directly to Sweden in the report. However, when it comes to the substantive dimensions of the concept of security explicitly evident in the document's language used regarding the above five threats, the overall results place the human dimension as the primary concern, matching with all five threats. The second most prominent dimension is the military (4/5 threats), followed by both the economic and ecological dimensions matching with 2/5 threats, respectively.

These above summarised threat perceptions lay the answers especially to the first research question of what kinds of security and defence political threat perceptions the changing regional security dynamics invoked in Finland and Sweden, particularly in light of Russia's increasingly aggressive neighbour politics, since 2008: increasingly military, complex, and interlinked in nature, while emphasising the human security concerns continuously.

Next, the two cases are brought to a comparison to provide knowledge on the security political rapprochement, and further answers to the research questions, via

examining the compatibility of (1) the security threats perceived, (2) the dominant substantive dimensions of security, and (3) the bilateral cooperation objectives set. The comparison of these categories of data ought to demonstrate the changes in and development of the security and defence political rapprochement between Finland and Sweden, which ultimately translates, or does not translate, to evidence of bilateral shelter-seeking when later posed against the core theoretical premises of small states and shelter seeking theory.

1. Security threat developments compared:

2009: Finland perceived eight threats, and Sweden perceived seven. The common threats were five, in (1) climate change, (2) pandemics/infectious diseases, (3) natural/environmental disasters, (4) society's dependence on IT/threats to infrastructure, including IT systems, and (5) border security/cross-border cooperation at certain interfaces.

2012: Finland perceived six threats, while Sweden perceived five in 2015. The common threats were three, in (1) cybersecurity, (2) terrorism, and (3) WMDs. Moreover, at certain interfaces the threats of armed aggression (Finland) and Russia (Sweden) could count as the fourth common threat, to cut corners.

2017 (+ 2016): Finland perceived twelve threats, and while compared to the Swedish policy of 2015 (to allow for comparison of the respective 2020/2021 policies below), The Finnish policy from 2017/2016 unequivocally met with all five Swedish threats from 2015, showing significant rapprochement in threat perceptions.

2021 (+ 2020): Finland perceived ten threats, while Sweden perceived five. All five Swedish threats were met in the Finnish policy, if the Swedish WMDs threats are interpreted as corresponding to that of Finland's CBRNE threats, which can be justified through the Finnish elaboration on CBRNE agents' armed use included.

In sum, the comparison of security threat developments between Finland and Sweden reveals notable commonalities across various threat categories over the years, especially in areas of hybrid threats, climate change-related threats and WMDs. The alignment is also evident in the steady rise of compatibility between 2009-2015, and full compatibility in terms of Swedish threat perceptions reciprocated in their Finnish counterparts between 2016/2017-2021. This could be

interpreted as rapprochement in terms of perceived security threats and security situational awareness.

2. Substantive security dimension developments compared:

When it comes to the substantive dimensions of the concept of security evident in the security threats analysed, in both countries' policies, the least prominent substantive dimension has been the ecological dimension. In the Finnish policies, it has been the least of concerns throughout 2009-2021, albeit on par with the economic dimension in 2009. The same holds in the Swedish policies, except in 2009, when the ecological dimension was on par with the military and economic dimension of security, behind the human dimension.

The second least prominent substantive dimension of security has been, for both countries, the economic dimension. In the Finnish policies, the economic dimension rose from being least prominent in 2009 to being the third most significant in 2012-2021. In the Swedish policies, the economic dimension ranked third in all reports analysed, albeit sharing the spot with the military and ecological dimension in 2009, and with the ecological dimension in 2020.

The remaining two substantive dimensions of security reveal some minor differences between Finland and Sweden. The Swedish policies placed the human dimension of security at the top throughout 2009-2021, albeit on par with the military dimension in 2015. Conversely, the Finnish policies placed the human dimension at the top in 2009-2017, and second by 2021, behind the military dimension.

In the Finnish policies, the military dimension of security rose from absence in 2009 to being the second most prominent between 2012-2017, and ultimately to the top by 2021. Conversely, in the Swedish policies, the military dimension peaked in 2015, being second in 2020 and 2009 (albeit sharing the position with the economic and ecological dimensions in 2009). However, it must be noted that the analysis of the Swedish policy report from 2020 lacks the inclusion of the Russian threat from this perspective, which could, if included and interpreted from a military dimension, lift the military dimension to share the top spot with the human dimension.

The comparison thus denotes significant similarities between the two countries, and how they perceive the substantive dimensions of security threats, differing slightly in

only the military dimension where Finland demonstrated a steady rise in prominence of military security from absence to the top of the list between 2009-2021, whereas in Sweden, the military dimension has been consistently occupying the top two spots. This could be interpreted as further consolidating evidence of the security political rapprochement through aligned understanding and interpretation of threats amidst the changing regional security dynamics, albeit the military dimension experiencing a more pronounced change in Finland than in Sweden.

3. Developments in bilateral cooperation objectives compared:

The years between 2009-2012 showed no bilateral cooperation objectives set from either country, hence the comparison starts from 2015 onwards. Here, it must be noted that starting from the Swedish policy from 2015 onwards, including the Finnish policies from 2016/2017, the above discovered full compatibility of threat perceptions in terms of mutually shared security threats has prevailed. Moreover, the above discovered mutually reflective perceptions of the dominant substantive dimensions of security have also prevailed since 2015-2016/17. The bilateral objectives set by Finland and Sweden can thus be posed not just against each other but against the shared pool of security threats with great supportive value.

The Swedish objectives from 2015 called for continued alignment on shared security policy objectives, further deepening the bilateral cooperation - especially in the framework of preparing for joint use of civilian and military resources - and joint development of Nordic cooperation and NATO partnership. The Finnish objectives from 2016-2017 called for strengthening the security of the Baltic Sea region and the defence capabilities of both countries, deepening of their mutual cooperation to facilitate operational planning in all situations, and preparation for the joint use of civilian and military resources.

The objective of deepening cooperation is reciprocated on both sides, especially in terms of joint use of civilian and military resources. The Swedish objective of continued alignment on policy objectives seems to also be reciprocated and further elaborated in the Finnish objective of strengthening the defence capabilities of both countries and facilitation of operational planning in all situations. The Swedish objective of joint development of Nordic defence cooperation and NATO partnership may also be interpreted as reciprocated by the Finnish emphasis on strengthening the

security of the Baltic Sea region, as both contexts share much of the same security environment. This shows rather evident of mutual understanding and efforts made to further security political rapprochement. However, it must be noted that the documents are issued at different times, thus, broader generalisations may be difficult to derive. In sum, these common objectives could be interpreted to answer the perceived regional threats posed especially by Russia, cybersecurity, hybrid threats, and non-state-actors/terrorism through the harnessing of both civilian and military resources for joint use – denoting preparedness for an onerous effort in tackling such complex threats.

When it comes to the 2020 objectives, Sweden called for (1) operational cooperation to enable joint action during peace, crisis, and war, (2) legislative support via a proposed law empowering governmental decision-making in operational defence cooperation, (3) enhanced military interoperability through reviewing possibilities for Swedish ground forces to operate in Finland, (4) continued development of cooperation between Swedish and Finnish units to increase coordination and personnel exchange, and (5) collaboration in addressing hybrid threats with the Helsinki-based hybrid centre.

The Finnish objectives from 2020/2021, on the other hand, called for (1) strengthening security in the Baltic Sea region and defence of Finland and Sweden, (2) deepening cooperation in situational picture cooperation, logistics, infrastructure, Host Nation Support (HNS) arrangements, surveillance, protection of territorial integrity, and defence industry and materiel cooperation, and (3) fostering trilateral cooperation among Finland, Sweden, and Norway (FISENO) to facilitate military operations execution during crises and conflicts, complementing bilateral defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden.

The Swedish objective of operational cooperation to enable joint action in peace, crisis, and war, seems to be reciprocated by the Finnish objective of fostering SENOFI-cooperation to facilitate joint operations during crises and conflicts. The Swedish objectives of legislative support and enhanced interoperability appear to be reciprocated by the Finnish objectives of deepening cooperation in logistics, infrastructure, and HNS arrangements. Moreover, the objectives of continued/deepened/strengthened security and defence cooperation are well compatible also in increasing coordination, personnel exchange, and collaboration in

several ways, denoting a high level of mutual demand for increased rapprochement. Even though some of the objectives are unmatched explicitly by their counterparts, this ought not to be taken as being mutually exclusive, on the contrary, the policies seem to present mutually inclusive and nuanced variations of objectives that denote high overall demand for bilateral cooperation. Moreover, this becomes evident when posed against the mutually shared security threats in the 2020/2021 policies, especially in answering to hybrid threats, cybersecurity threats, military threats, and the threat posed by Russia as explicitly narrated in the former two threats' contextualisation in the Swedish policy from 2020.

In sum, the policy objectives set for the Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation appear highly compatible, demonstrating mutually reciprocated understanding and demand for bilateral cooperation, which grew over time. The objectives set appear also highly compatible, timely, and causally informed when it comes to meeting the security threats perceived by both countries, as the security perceptions and dimensions of security therein are greatly aligned. Moreover, the increased number of objectives, their level of detail, as well as their reflectiveness to the overall alignment appear to demonstrate a visible development of the security political rapprochement between Finland and Sweden during the increasingly deteriorating security environment in 2015-2021. Thus, the answers to the second research question of what roles the Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation played in the security and defence policies of Finland and Sweden during the period under study, may be coined from above: The role grew from being rather marginal between 2009-2012, while witnessing a steady rise to utmost importance between 2015-2021.

Moreover, this comparative analysis of security threat developments, substantive security dimensions, and bilateral objectives between Finland and Sweden underscores a remarkable alignment and mutual understanding, reflecting a significant progression towards similar views on threats, dominated by both human and military security concerns, and security political rapprochement over the studied period (2009-2022), thus coining the answer also to the first research question.

This above demonstrated evidence must then be tested against the core theoretical premises deployed under SSST. The theory assumes that small states' shelter-seeking is guided by both domestic incentives (inherent lack of material, cultural and economic capabilities due to small size) and geopolitical restrictions to shelter

options (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 215). The geopolitical restrictions in this case could be taken to denote the proximity and activity of Russia as one of the main sources of growing instability for Finland and Sweden's security environment, as well as the military non-alignment of both countries placing them geographically between NATO countries and Russia. The shelter options for Finland and Sweden have thus been few in their immediate vicinity – namely each other, which supports the idea of bilateral shelter-seeking as viable. But when it comes to the three sectoral shelters available – the political, economic, and societal – the role of the EU must also be highlighted as providing institutional, economic, and military shelters against outside threats (Bueger, C., & Wivel, A., 2018, p. 173). The role of the EU has been extensive on both countries' policies towards international security cooperation throughout 2009-2021.

Due to the data selected for this study, a limit to exploring economic and societal shelter-seeking evidence is obvious. But when it comes to the political shelter, which assumes small states' inability to mobilize large forces and sustain military campaigns for longer periods – lacking a buffer against external threats (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2017, p. 4), Finland and Sweden appear to have addressed this issue by setting objectives for e.g. deepening bilateral cooperation in joint use of civilian and military resources, and for operational cooperation to enable joint action during peace, crisis, and war. Joint action during war would unequivocally translate to addressing the ability to mobilise larger forces and the longer ability to sustain battle.

Moreover, SSST posits that small states inherently possess less diplomatic power, deriving from small populations and militaries (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018), which can be posed against the Finnish-Swedish objectives for joint development of Nordefco and NATO partnership, and the strengthening of the Baltic Sea region's security. Finland and Sweden can be interpreted to address their lesser diplomatic power in seeking backing from joint (bilateral) cooperation in areas that require extensive diplomatic assets, such as the addressing of Baltic Sea region security or cooperation with NATO. This claim can be further backed by assuming small states to naturally gravitate towards alliances (or bilateral alignment in this case) precisely because of their inability to protect their interests from external military threats alone (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 196-197). The deepening of Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation to cover all domains, operational

situations and without pre-set restrictions to its deepening, denotes that the bilateral rapprochement is visioned very far and wide. This type of “patronage” is precisely what SSST would assume small states pursuing, when addressing their inherent vulnerabilities, since patronages (and alliances) work to ensure small states become militarily as powerful as the combined force of their patrons (Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S., 2018). Political shelter also encompasses the intertwining of common interests among the members of the shelter, e.g. a political union (Thorhallsson, B., & Stude Vidal, T., 2023, p. 205), which could in this case be interpreted as Finland and Sweden, when engaging political shelter-seeking bilaterally, would be more likely to receive backing from each other in times of need.

In seeking political shelter, which comprises of the above-mentioned categories of military capabilities, diplomatic assets, and the reinforcement of international law and norms (the EU in this case) that come with patrons and international organisations, small states mitigate political problems (ibid.). The findings of this study thus point towards Finland and Sweden having deployed a specifically political (military, diplomatic) shelter-seeking strategy in their bilateral security and defence cooperation over the time-period studied. The increased level of rapprochement as evidenced by the consistent alignment of perceived threats, corresponding security dimensions, and mutual objectives, suggests a deliberate move towards seeking shelter through bilateral security cooperation. This strategic response emerges against the backdrop of a deteriorating security environment, a reality acknowledged by both countries in tandem with their evolving cooperation efforts.

Lastly, coincidental or not, the Russian war in Georgia in 2008, Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and subsequent full scale invasion war against Ukraine in 2022, have occurred simultaneously as Finland and Sweden have grown closer together, yet it is important to note that the Russian aggression has not contributed to the rapprochement alone, as evidenced by the plenty of other and more explicitly detailed security threats discussed in the documents analysed.

7 Conclusions

This thesis set out to examine security and defence political rapprochement in the form of a bilateral shelter-seeking strategy hypothesized as evident in the case of Finland and Sweden drawing increasingly close to one another in terms of security and defence cooperation between 2009-2022. During these years, the security environment of Finland and Sweden witnessed a steady worsening due to factors such as climate change, cyber and hybrid security issues, and the increased aggression displayed in their neighbourhood by Russia since 2008. This thesis took its departure from posing two research questions that derive from the research problem of examining how Finland and Sweden, as small states, have attempted to navigate the worsening of their security environment; what kinds of threat perceptions the changing regional security dynamics invoked in Finland and Sweden, since 2008, and what roles the Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation played in the two countries' respective security and defence policies between 2009-2022.

Drawing from small states and shelter theory (SSST), the findings of the analysis of Finnish and Swedish security and defence policies may be concluded as follows. Firstly, Finland and Sweden witnessed a steady rise of compatibility in their shared threat perceptions between 2009-2015, and full compatibility since 2016-17. In other words, the two countries gradually aligned their interpretations of what kinds of security threats are posed against them, demonstrating rapprochement in terms of perceived security threats and security situational awareness.

Secondly, Finland and Sweden demonstrated a striking level of commonality between their perception of substantive dimensions of the concept of security, i.e. the specific domains in which security threats are being observed. The only divergences appeared in their slightly varying concerns on the human and military dimensions of security, of which the former witnessed a rise from total absence in 2009 to topping the charts in 2021, whereas in Sweden the military dimension was constantly in top two concerns. Thus, also the understanding of specific security threat domains perceived as most prominent was likewise strikingly similar between the two countries.

Thirdly, the set policy objectives for Finnish-Swedish bilateral cooperation demonstrated a mutual understanding and demand for bilateral cooperation – debuting on both sides as of 2015 (in Sweden) and 2016/2017 (in Finland). The set

objectives align well with the security threats perceived by both countries, indicating a timely, compatible, and causally informed response that bolsters the political shelter-seeking strategy as interests intertwine. Additionally, the increased number and detailed nature of these objectives reflect a notable development in the security political rapprochement between Finland and Sweden during the studied period (2009-2022).

Lastly, as hinted above, political shelter-seeking could be argued evident in the case. Finland and Sweden, facing limited shelter options due to geopolitical restrictions and their small size, have strategically pursued political shelter through their bilateral security cooperation. This is evident in their joint objectives to deepen military and diplomatic ties, aligning with the SSST's notion of small states seeking patronage to enhance their military capabilities and diplomatic influence. Against a backdrop of a deteriorating security environment exacerbated by events like the Russian aggression, their concerted efforts towards mutual objectives underscore a deliberate move towards seeking shelter in their cooperative partnership.

The contributions of this study were twofold: (1) contributing to small state studies in international relations theory through the deployment of SSST in a previously untouched case – especially regarding the behaviour of small states in response to security threats, and (2) producing knowledge on the previously untouched research problem of mapping Finland and Sweden's bilateral security cooperation's role as a source of shelter in their navigation amidst a deteriorating security environment as small states. In addition, the study could be argued to have contributed to informing policymakers of bilateral cooperation as a means of enhancing national security in Finland, Sweden, and beyond.

The limitations of this study include, but are not limited to, three points: (1) the study's applicability to other contexts may be limited due to its focus on Finland and Sweden, and security and defence policies only, (2) potential data constraints could restrict the depth of analysis, and (3) establishing causality between bilateral cooperation and perceived threats may be complicated by various other influencing factors, such as economic considerations and domestic politics that could complicate the attribution of outcomes solely to shelter-seeking. This is why further analysis on this subject is needed also in other policy areas, beyond the scope of this study.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Coding scheme

The coding scheme of the content analysis in this study deploys the below categories. To aid in the search of accurate frequency counts, also the below detailed synonyms were used when probing the texts for relevant content related to each category.

1. 'Security threat':
 - a. Synonyms: threat, security challenge, risk, vulnerability.
 - b. Description: references to perceived threats to national/regional security, including military threats, hybrid threats, cyber threats, and other non-traditional and multidimensional security challenges.
2. 'Finland' and 'Sweden':
 - a. Synonyms: Finnish, Swedish, Finnish-Swedish, finns, swedes.
 - b. Description: instances where Finland and Sweden refer to each other in the context of security and defence policies, including statements of support, coordination, or cooperation.
3. 'Objectives for bilateral cooperation':
 - a. Synonyms: goals, aims, objectives, targets, priorities.
 - b. Description: descriptions of the specific objectives or goals set for bilateral cooperation between Finland and Sweden, including joint projects, policy initiatives, or strategic objectives.

By coding the data according to these categories and their respective synonyms, this study aims to systematically analyse the security narratives present in the policy reports and identify key trends, patterns, and policy priorities related to bilateral cooperation, perceived security threats, and the role of Finland and Sweden's bilateral cooperation in meeting the perceived security threats.