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# DEFENCE WHITE PAPER PROJECT

## FINLAND THE GOVERNMENT'S DEFENCE REPORT 2021

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## About the Author

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# Introduction

Finland's Government Defence Report is the primary source of information on the country's defence policy guidelines and defence capabilities. The Government Defence Report of 2021, adopted in a government plenary session on September 9, 2021, outlines Finland's defence strategy till the end of the decade, i.e., 2030.

The security environment surrounding Finland has grown increasingly unstable since the release of the last defence report in 2017. Power competition, the weakening of the rules-based international system, and the growing threat of military force and new weapon technologies contribute to this unstable operating environment. Finland's proximity to the Baltic Sea region, which has seen heightened military activity in recent years, has further underscored the need for the country to maintain robust national defence capabilities, focussing on defence readiness and rapid-reaction units, despite the lack of any imminent direct threat.

The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, just months after the 2021 defence report was published, provides a valuable opportunity to analyse the extent to which Finland's current defence strategy aligns with the evolving security realities and test the flexibility of the report. This analysis can yield important insights and recommendations to potentially inform future updates to Finland's defence policy and capability development plans through 2030.

## Land Defence

The Finnish Army's focus on improving its firepower and strike capability in the ongoing decade will be powered by the procurement of new armoured personnel carriers and anti-tank weapons, as well as an upgrade of its CV-9030 infantry fighting vehicle fleet. Since 2021, these promises have manifested into action. Concerning the procurement of armoured vehicles, Finland made a purchase of 91 Patria 6x6 armoured vehicles in 2023 and made an additional order of 40 vehicles in 2024.<sup>1</sup> These orders followed a test of three pre-series vehicles as part of a collaborative effort

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<sup>1</sup> "Patria 6x6 Armoured Wheeled Vehicle, Finland," Army Technology, March 13, 2024, <https://www.army-technology.com/projects/patria-6x6-armoured-wheeled-vehicle/?cf-view&#38;cf-closed>.

between Finland, Latvia, Sweden, and Patria.<sup>2</sup> The Patria 6x6 carrier, chosen as the carrier system for Latvia, Sweden, and Germany, not only functions as troop transport but is also suitable for company command, medical evacuation, and other combat support roles.<sup>3</sup>

To enhance their anti-tank capabilities, the Finnish Defence Forces have procured additional M72 MK2 Enhanced Capability Lightweight Anti-Tank Weapons, the most common anti-tank weapon in the Finnish Army, worth 58 million euros from the local defence firm Nammo Lapua. They have also purchased the NLAW (Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapon) worth approximately 35 million euros from Saab.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the upgrade of the CV-9030 fleet is powered by BAE Systems, who will be upgrading the fleet of CV90s in the Finnish army from 2022 to 2026.<sup>5</sup>

The surveillance and targeting capabilities are planned to be enhanced with light Unmanned Ariel Vehicles (UAV) and new night vision equipment. Moreover, some ageing artillery is to be replaced with more mobile and powerful systems. Further, Finland is cognisant of CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear) threats and aims to counter them by purchasing CBRN defence and camouflage systems and individual soldier equipment. The army also had plans to extend the range of the heavy multiple rocket launchers beyond the existing 80 km by employing new ordnance. Following this plan, the army's MLRS (multiple-launch rocket system) fleet was upgraded using the M270A2 systems in 2023.<sup>6</sup> The project, carried out by Lockheed Martin, will extend the range from 80 km to 300 km.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Juster Domingo, "Finland Buys 40 More Patria 6x6 Armored Vehicles," The Defense Post, January 5, 2024, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2024/01/05/finland-patria-6x6-vehicles/#:~:text=The%20Finnish%20Defence%20Forces%20are,up%20to%2070%20more%20carriers.>

<sup>4</sup> Joe Saballa, "Finland to Procure More Light Anti-Tank Weapons for \$56 Million," The Defense Post, September 27, 2022, [https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/09/27/finland-anti-tank-weapons/?expand\\_article=1](https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/09/27/finland-anti-tank-weapons/?expand_article=1). ; "Saab Receives NLAW Order from Finland," Saab, February 23, 2023, <https://www.saab.com/newsroom/press-releases/2023/saab-receives-nlaw-order-from-finland#:~:text=Saab%20has%20received%20an%20order,product%20deliveries%20planned%20during%202024.>

<sup>5</sup> "Finland Upgrades CV90 Fleet, Extending Capabilities into the 2030s," BAE Systems, July 27, 2021, <https://www.baesystems.com/en/article/finland-upgrades-cv90-fleet-extending-capabilities-into-the-2030s>.

<sup>6</sup> "Finland Modernizes M270 Launchers to Increase Army's Long-Range Fire Capacity," Defence Industry Europe, December 24, 2023, <https://defence-industry.eu/finland-modernizes-m270-launchers-to-increase-armys-long-range-fire-capacity/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Multiple Launch Rocket System (M270)," Lockheed Martin, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/products/m270.html>.

The Finnish Army has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to enhancing its capabilities in the face of the evolving security landscape. The plan is well-encompassing of modern systems and shifts in the operating environment and was also successfully implemented, positioning the Finnish Defence Forces well to meet the evolving security challenges of the current decade and beyond.

## Maritime Defence

At the centre of the Finnish Navy's strategy in the Government Defence Report is the Squadron 2020 project. The project aims to deliver four Pohjanmaa-class multi-role corvettes between 2022 and 2027 which will replace the four Rauma-class missile attack craft and two Hämeenmaa-class minelayers.<sup>8</sup> The vessel objects of the corvettes will be constructed in Finland, whereas the combat systems will be purchased abroad.<sup>9</sup> The Pohjanmaa corvettes are set to feature anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare suites, as well as minelaying capabilities. They are also designed to possess the ability to operate a medium-sized helicopter and unmanned maritime systems. This project will form the backbone of the Finnish Navy and set a benchmark for modern naval capabilities.<sup>10</sup> The construction of the corvettes began in October 2023 by Rauma Marine Constructions and is set to be finished by 2029.

In addition to the Squadron project, the Finnish Navy plans to introduce a new anti-ship missile system that will be installed on the Pohjanmaa-class corvettes, anti-ship missile batteries, and Hamina-class vessels. The anti-missile systems will facilitate a rapid reaction to the threats Finland may face. Torpedo systems, which are underwater ranged weapons, will be added to the Pohjanmaa and Hamina-class vessels, strengthening the anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare capability of Finland. The addition of these systems to the already strong naval vessels in the Finnish Navy will ensure readiness and well-roundedness in its functioning. Further, the minelaying capabilities of Finland will see an improvement as the technology is intended to be

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<sup>8</sup> "The Finnish Navy – 'Leaner and Meaner,'" European Security & Defence, February 14, 2020, <https://euro-sd.com/2020/02/articles/16171/the-finnish-navy-leaner-and-meaner/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Squadron 2020 Replaces the Vessels the Navy Will Decommission," The Finnish Defence Forces, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/en/squadron-2020#:~:text=Squadron%202020%20is%20a%20project,at%20sea%20all%20year%20round>.

<sup>10</sup> "The Finnish Navy – 'Leaner and Meaner,'" European Security & Defence, February 14, 2020, <https://euro-sd.com/2020/02/articles/16171/the-finnish-navy-leaner-and-meaner/>.

modernised and the Pohjanmaa-class is set to replace the Hameenmaa-class of minelayers.

A strong navy is crucial to ensuring Finland's security, as the country has a long coastline with multiple islands. With narrow straits and shallow waters, corvettes will be the most functional in the Finnish Navy. Therefore, although dealing with a delayed timeline, the Pohjanmaa-class and the addition of the anti-ship missile systems and the Torpedo systems will substantially add to the strength of Finland's defence and enhance its security.

## Air Defence

The strategies of the Finnish Air Force during the given period will be part of the HX program, which aims to replace the Hornet fleet, Finland's current fleet of fighters whose lifespan will end by 2030, with new multi-role fighters by 2025. Finland entered into a procurement contract with the United States for this purpose and chose Lockheed Martin's F-35A Lightning II aircraft.<sup>11</sup> The fighters will enter into service in 2025 and achieve full operational capability by 2030.<sup>12</sup> The F-35A, which is unprecedented in tactical fighter aviation with an integrated airframe design, gives the F-35 a significant advantage over 4th Generation aircraft in Finland's unique operating conditions.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the procurement of surface-to-air missile systems will increase high-altitude interception capacity and the volume coverage of ground-based air defence. Drone threats have been on the rise in recent years, with malicious actors using increasingly sophisticated unmanned aerial vehicles. As a result, there is a growing need for the development and deployment of effective counter-drone capabilities to mitigate these emerging threats. The Government Defence Report recognises this and commits to improving counter-drone capabilities. To aid these systems, a Recognised Air Picture (RAP), which shows a complete listing of all aircraft in flight within a particular airspace, is crucial to ensuring rapid reaction to drone threats. The development of integrated intelligence, surveillance, and command and control systems is also

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<sup>11</sup> "The F-35 Programme to Yield Capability to the Entire Defence System," The Finnish Defence Forces, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/en/hx-fighter-program>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "F-35: The Best Choice for Finland," Lockheed Martin, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://www.f35.com/f35/global-enterprise/finland.html#:~:text=When%20it%20comes%20to%20deterring,the%20pilot%20home%20to%20safety>.

part of this commitment.

Air defence has become increasingly critical in the modern era as adversaries continue to develop and deploy a wide range of aerial threats, from advanced aircraft to tactical missiles and unmanned aerial systems. The air defence domain has seen a proliferation of cutting-edge technologies, including sophisticated radar systems, interceptor missiles, and integrated command and control networks, which are essential for detecting, tracking, and neutralising these varied airborne threats. As the air defence challenge continues to evolve, nations like Finland are taking proactive steps to modernise and enhance their air defence capabilities, recognising the vital importance of maintaining robust and adaptable air defence systems to safeguard national sovereignty and security.

## **The Significance of Local Defence**

Developing a strong local defence is Finland's response to growing broad-spectrum influencing. Broad-spectrum influencing is a systematic attempt to shake the foundations of the target country's defence capability, combining various methods over a long period of time. It has a severe impact on the societal fabric of the country, affecting the country's internal security, its international position, psychological resilience, state leadership, and the willpower of its people. The Local Defence, if implemented successfully, will create a national network that is versatile and can respond quickly to minor threats by utilising the local knowledge and civilian skills of reservists more effectively.

The development of local defence will be done by transforming most of the regional forces into local forces and delegating new tasks with a raised standard. Further, they will be called in for more refresher training and voluntary training exercises to enhance the skills of the local forces. This will create an increase in units that can be used for combat in rapidly escalating situations and enable active participation in the workforce. Thus, the 2021 report aims to develop a national network of defence cooperation by utilising reservists.

## **Other Reforms in the Defence Forces**

The growing reliance of defence systems on digitalisation, information, and space has prompted

a more comprehensive national security approach in Finland. The Defence Forces now oversee military cyber defence as part of broader cyber security efforts, aiming to protect their systems and critical infrastructure from state-sponsored cyber threats through advanced monitoring and coordination with partners.

Parallel to this, information defence has gained importance, requiring the forces to develop tools for monitoring the information environment and responding to malicious influence operations in harmony with other authorities. Space defence has also emerged as crucial, as activities across society depend on space-based systems. Developing space situational awareness through cooperation is key to safeguarding against space-based threats. Thus, the Finnish defence strategy addresses cross-domain challenges in the digital, information, and space realms.

The Finnish Defence Forces have also developed a comprehensive set of joint capabilities across intelligence, command and control, logistics, special operations, and long-range firepower, which are used in a centralised and coordinated manner across all domains to achieve operational objectives. Maintaining and further developing these joint capabilities, including through enhanced command and control systems, communication networks, information systems, and logistics support, is a critical priority in the 2021 Defence Report.

The foundation of every defence force is its soldiers. Therefore, the Finnish government is committed to maintaining and strengthening its conscription system as the foundation of the national defence while also exploring ways to modernise and improve it. This includes enhancing the training and selection processes, increasing the participation of women, improving reservist training, and using new technologies and digital services to better engage young people in national defence efforts. The overarching goal of the 2021 strategy is to ensure conscription continues to provide a capable and motivated military reserve that can effectively defend Finland across all security scenarios.

## **Defence Cooperation**

Finland's defence cooperation has seen a monumental shift since 2021. While its bilateral relations with Sweden and Norway remain strong as ever, the country transformed from a



militarily non-aligned state to a NATO member country. However, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, compelled the country to apply for official NATO membership, along with their closest ally, Sweden. The ensuing sections will cover the details of Finland's relations with other countries and organisations.

## **European Union**

The Finnish government sees deepening security and defence cooperation within the European Union as a crucial means of strengthening the EU as an independent global actor and security community. Finland actively supports the development of the EU's common defence policy and is prepared to provide and receive assistance under the EU's mutual assistance and solidarity clauses. Towards this end, Finland participates in key EU initiatives such as PESCO and the European Defence Fund, which create new avenues for cooperation in developing national defence capabilities and the underlying industrial and technological base.

Finland believes the EU must define a clear strategic ambition for security and defence, which it is helping shape through the EU's Strategic Compass process. The goal is for the EU to become a globally credible actor capable of carrying out independent crisis management operations if needed. To achieve this, Finland advocates for systematically connecting security and defence priorities with other relevant EU policy domains, such as military mobility, hybrid and cyber threats, new technologies, and climate change. Closer cooperation between the EU and NATO is also seen as increasingly important for addressing the multifaceted challenges facing Europe.

## **NATO**

Until its membership, Finland developed its partnership with NATO based on its premises and interests, effectively utilising NATO's partnership tools and cooperation programs to strengthen its national defence capabilities. It maintained an amicable partnership with the organisation, taking part in exercises and crisis management operations to develop its military capabilities and interoperability with partners. Despite this close cooperation, the partnership never included any security guarantees or obligations arising out of the provisions in Article 5 of the NATO Charter.

Notably, the 2021 report mentions that maintaining national room for manoeuvre and freedom of choice is integral to Finland's foreign, security, and defence policy, which includes retaining the option to potentially join NATO in the future. Consequently, on May 18, 2022, Finland submitted its application for NATO membership, following which, on April 4, 2023, it gained membership status.

With a spending of almost 2.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on the defence sector, Finland was already well set to be a part of NATO, which requires countries to spend a minimum of 2% of their country's GDP on their defence. Finland has actively showcased its military capabilities and expertise through its participation in NATO exercises and operations. It has contributed to large-scale NATO exercises such as Steadfast Defender, which hosted 20,000 soldiers from Nordic countries.<sup>14</sup> Through its participation in NATO's Baltic Air Policing, leading the Arctic Challenge 2023 exercises involving 150 aircraft, and engaging in cyber defence training with NATO allies like the UK, Norway, Sweden, and the US, Finland is proving its ability to be a valuable ally in NATO.<sup>15</sup> Its navy and air force are also set to participate in NATO's collective peacetime missions, demonstrating the practical implications of Finland's potential NATO membership.<sup>16</sup>

Finland's unique geographical position would provide the Alliance with critical geostrategic access to defend the Baltic Sea and Gulf of Bothnia regions.<sup>17</sup> Finland's accession would bring NATO closer to key Russian strongholds in the St. Petersburg and Kola Peninsula areas, enhancing the Alliance's ability to monitor and respond to security threats in these strategically important areas of northern European.<sup>18</sup>

The alliance has also enhanced Finland's bilateral ties with the United States. Finland and the United States signed a bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA), which ensures access and support arrangements for U.S. troops, equipment, and military bases if Finland requests

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<sup>14</sup> Jason C. Moyer, "Finland's Remarkable First Year in NATO," Wilson Center, April 3, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/finlands-remarkable-first-year-nato>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

assistance from the U.S. or NATO.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, Finland's NATO membership has been mutually beneficial, serving as a crucial pillar of support for both Finland and the Alliance during these increasingly unstable times, given the growing security threats posed by Russia.

## **Bilateral Relations**

Sweden, Finland, and Norway have been deepening their defence cooperation in recent years to strengthen regional security. Sweden was similar to Finland in that it was non-aligned until the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While Finland's membership was ratified in April 2023, Sweden did not achieve full membership status until March 7, 2024, during which Finland repeatedly emphasised the necessity for Sweden's NATO accession to conclude. The two countries established close bilateral defence ties with the aim of enhancing the security of the Baltic Sea region and the defence capabilities of both countries. Their cooperation covers all situations, from peace to crisis and war, and includes operational planning, information sharing, logistics, and defence industry collaboration. The two countries have set no limits on the depth of this partnership, which is designed to enable combined defence measures in any circumstances.

Norway has also become a key partner for Finland, with the two countries expanding their bilateral defence cooperation, including in areas such as policy dialogue, interoperability, military supply chains, and joint training. Additionally, Finland, Sweden, and Norway have established trilateral defence cooperation, seeking to create the prerequisites for joint military operations in times of crisis and conflict, complementing their work within the broader NORDEF framework.

Finland's defence cooperation extends beyond the Nordic region, with the United States being a particularly important partner. Finland views its defence ties with the U.S. as crucial for improving its defence capabilities and contributing to European security, given the U.S. commitment to the continent. Bilateral cooperation covers a wide range of areas, from policy dialogue and information exchange to joint capability development and enhanced

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

interoperability, with a strong emphasis on new technologies and U.S. expertise in this domain. The NATO membership, which enabled a DCA between the two countries as mentioned in the previous section, also adds to the defence cooperation between the two nations.

## Conclusion

Finland's 2021 Government Defence Report outlines a comprehensive and forward-looking strategy for strengthening the country's national defence through 2030. The Finnish Defence Forces are commended for their meticulously crafted plan and their successful implementation of ambitious procurement and capability enhancement programs across the land, maritime, and air domains.

Notably, Finland's defence strategy exhibits a keen awareness of the importance of cross-cutting capabilities, such as cyber defence and space situational awareness, positioning the country to effectively address evolving security threats. Perhaps most significantly, the strategy has demonstrated Finland's willingness to remain flexible and adapt to shifting geopolitical realities, as evidenced by the country's decision to pursue NATO membership.

Finland's defence strategy serves as a model for how nations can proactively shape their security architecture to meet the challenges of the 21st century. By combining meticulous planning, a steadfast commitment to capability development, and the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances, Finland has positioned itself as a reliable and capable security partner in an increasingly complex global environment.

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