



## Joanna Grzela

PhD, Associate Professor, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4341-947X>

# Finland's readiness for comprehensive national defence

## Introduction

Finland has long been following the comprehensive security strategy creating a network of cooperation between authorities, businesses, organisations, and citizens. Finland's defence, which constitutes a vital element of a broader concept of security, integrates the military instrument, civil authorities, and national capabilities. The security environment in Finland has deteriorated in the recent years. The main destabilising factor is Russia's policy of power and military activity. Moreover, the cyber environment and hybrid threats have grown and therefore, the preparedness of the whole society is required to maintain and develop the state's defence ability.

The following article aims to present the concept of national preparedness for comprehensive national defence and to study practical steps of achieving comprehensive security in Finland. The research problem is how preparedness for comprehensive national defence is conceptually understood and institutionally organised in Finland. In relation to the main research problem, the following research hypothesis was formulated: in Finland, comprehensive security results from the activity of different institutions, involving not only the authorities, but also the armed forces, non-governmental organisations, and local communities. In practice, it means that relevant actors cooperate so as to be prepared in case of threats. This requires taking into account a wide spectrum of military and non-military aspects of the state's security and the principles of crisis management. Solve the research problem was possible thanks to the following research methods: historical, system and comparative analysis as well

as the interpretation of the results of analytical and synthesising works, which brought closer the relationship between the results of the author's research and analyses with theoretical assumptions, allowing for the verification of the research problem and the hypothesis.

## The background of Finland's preparedness and resilience

Finland is a small state with the population of 5.3 million, a modern welfare system and a high standard of living, and whose economy is based on advanced technologies. Finns are proud of their highly developed system of healthcare, schools, and the level of education. Finland is a stable and well-functioning state. It is highly ranked for its democracy, freedom of speech, the rule of law, transparency, the level of education, and socio-economic equality. For the last four years, it has been positioned as the happiest nation in the world.<sup>1</sup> In the Fragile State Index (compiled annually by the Fund for Peace), Finland has been year by year recognized as the most sustainable country.<sup>2</sup>

The economic prosperity and the perception of social equality helped to instil trust among Finns. In international surveys comparing the level of people's trust in institutions such as the police, legal system, government and the media, Finland consistently takes top or near top positions. The high level of trust may result from the model of social care based on equality and the universal right to main services, which prevents the society from being separated into "we" and "you". This gives Finland's leaders a solid foundation for building foreign and security policies based on cooperation and dialogue.

Finland forms a symbolic political, religious, cultural, and economic border between Eastern and Western Europe. Despite its peripheral location, it has always been in the centre of events which have defined contemporary Europe. The strategic choices of Finland's authorities concerning foreign and security policies have depended on its geographical location and historical experiences.<sup>3</sup> Security is the most important of all Finnish national interests, which in practice means the protection of the country, its citizens, and public institutions. Sharing a 1300-kilometre border with Russia, Finland has always been closely tied with its eastern neighbour. Due to both geography and history, Finnish relations with Russia are exceptional in Europe. At the same time, the Finnish perception of Russia as a threat dominates in the security policy of this Nordic country.

<sup>1</sup> Happiest Countries in the World 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/happiest-countries-in-the-world> [accessed: 22 February 2022].

<sup>2</sup> Fragile States Index, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data> [accessed: 21 February 2022].

<sup>3</sup> M. Grzybowski, *Finlandia. Zarys systemu ustrojowego*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2007, *passim*.

To understand Finland's concept of security and its citizens' approach to national preparedness, one needs to understand the idea of *sisu*.<sup>4</sup> For Finns, *sisu* has a mystical, almost magical meaning. This Finnish term can be translated as strong will, determination, perseverance, and rational acting in the face of adversity (or in tasks which might seem daring or hopeless). *Sisu* is not momentary courage, but the ability to sustain courage. This word defines the Finnish character. It is a way of thinking that what needs to be done, will be done, regardless of the costs. For Finns, *sisu* is the backbone, readiness, courage, resilience, and endurance. It has the power which overcomes difficulties and leads to the goal, which allows them to stand up and move forward. *Sisu* reflects determination and tenacity. The term has existed for centuries, but it became most popular after the Winter War of 1939, when the Soviet Union invaded Finland.<sup>5</sup> Finns faced a powerful enemy then, and won against all odds, preserving their independence.<sup>6</sup> After the war, Finland honourably paid its reparations to the USSR, avoiding further threats to its independence.<sup>7</sup> This war experience strengthened Finland's resilience and helped to prepare for the hybrid war characteristic for the Cold War and the post-Cold War era.

During World War II, when the entire society was forced to defend their existence, the foundations of the doctrine of total defence were established. After the war it was thought that together with the development of modern and more powerful weapons, future armed conflicts would have a wider scale. By the government's decision of March 1957, the Defence Council was appointed, which was to serve as a planning and advisory body to the president in the matters of national defence. The decision of the Council initiated courses of national defence run at the War College in Helsinki and local courses in provinces. The trainings had a huge impact on the

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<sup>4</sup> The term derives from the word *sisus*, which in Finnish means "bowels", "intestines", "viscera". In 1745, Finnish Bishop Daniel Juslenius (a well-known Finnophile and an enthusiastic advocate of Finnishness) defined *sisucunda* as a place in human body from which all strong emotions come.

<sup>5</sup> The story of Finland's victory over the Soviet Union in the Winter War of 1939 talks about numerous Finnish soldiers who showed tirelessness, creativity, ability to attack on skis, and even to carry bicycles on their backs if they were forced to operate in diverse terrain.

<sup>6</sup> Lt. Col. Rainer Kuosmanen, Deputy Commander of the Guard Jaeger Regiment, warned: "we are strong enough to make sure that whatever happens around us, the possible enemy has to think very deeply, would they like to take all those casualties, starting an operation against us?". Quoted in: T. Schultz, "Finland wins admirers with all-inclusive approach to defense", 4 October 2017, DW.com, <https://www.dw.com/en/finland-wins-admirers-with-all-inclusive-approach-to-defense/a-40806163> [accessed: 19 February 2022].

<sup>7</sup> J. Nylund, *Sisu: The Finnish Art of Courage*, London: Octopus Publishing Group, 2018, *passim*; K. Pantzar, *Odnależć sisu. Fiński sposób na szczęście przez hartowanie ciała i ducha*, transl. by M. Rabsztyn-Anioł, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2018; J. Adamczewski, M. Obrębska, "Sisu – emocja kulturowa, schemat poznawczy czy słowo klucz do tożsamości Finów?", *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2018, pp. 51–63.

development of the defence doctrine, mainly through educating the society. Planning and defence trainings gained a new foundation based on a new concept of war and total national defence. It was assumed that the comprehensive concept of national defence should encompass political, administrative, military, psychological, economic, and civil defence tasks. On 26 June 1967, the Defence Council approved the document titled *Maan puolustuksemme tienviitat* (Guidelines for National Defence), which can be considered the first official declaration of Finland's defence doctrine. It postulated that the civilians (citizens, private enterprises, and non-governmental organisations) should be included in the national defence system, and all sectors of the economy and the government should be involved in the process of defence planning. By merging military and civilian functions, Finland's sovereignty, living conditions, and the security of its citizens were comprehensively protected against internal threats as well as threats from other nations.<sup>8</sup> National defence was based on the territorial system. The basis of the Finnish concept of defence was compulsory conscription. In the 1970s, it provided approximately 700,000 trained reservists. The drawback of the system was that suitable weapons and equipment were sufficient only for a small part of the mobilised army. The majority had at their disposal only used weapons of war and the Finnish economy was too weak to provide good equipment for the armed forces.<sup>9</sup>

## From the total defence doctrine to comprehensive security strategy

After the end of the Cold War, Finland failed to initiate a defensive transformation. Although it started to build interoperability with NATO and participated in crisis management operations, the main goal of the Finnish Defence Forces had always been the defence of its own territory. Finland consistently maintained the basic postulates of the defence doctrine formed in the 1950s and 1960s, based on the concept of total defence whose main aim was to establish and maintain a military force capable of deterring any potential aggressor from attacking the Finnish territory or exerting military pressure on Finland. Its main principles are as follows: military non-alliance, general conscription, territorial defence, training the conscripts for the needs of military units, dispersed mobilisation, and readiness to respond to military threats.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, unlike other European countries, Finland decided to maintain a sizeable army. While the Nordic neighbours switched to lighter, voluntary military forces, adjusted to expeditionary peacekeeping, the Finnish Army held large reserve forces. The command and administration system of the armed

<sup>8</sup> P. Visuri, *Evolution of The Finnish Military Doctrine 1945–1985*, Finnish Defence Studies Series no. 1, Helsinki: War College, 1990, pp. 41–45.

<sup>9</sup> P. Salminen, *The Impact of Arms Technology on Military Doctrines*, Finnish Defence Studies Series no. 5, Helsinki: War College, 1992, p. 46.

forces corresponded to the altered security environment. The troops were divided into regional and operational, of which the former were to include around 250,000 personnel, and the latter – 100,000. The purpose of national defence was to eliminate security threats from the territory of Finland. The emphasis was placed on the security of electronic communication and information systems, preventing infectious diseases, radiation, and chemical hazards. In 2007, the tasks of national defence were defined. The first and fundamental task was military defence of the country's territory and independence. Maintaining reliable ability of defence was a priority in order to prevent and repel a military attack on Finland. The second task was to support other authorities in their tasks related to security. The third one was participation in international crisis management.

Currently, Finland is one of the few European countries in which a military conflict has been considered a potential threat (with varying degrees of intensity). For that reason, territorial defence is a permanent solution, and the country maintains relevant defence capability. Finland constantly develops its forces and adequate military potential. It has one of the largest armies in Europe (the Finnish Defence Forces have 280,000 personnel. The reserve personnel comprise 900,000 citizens). After mobilization, the forces consist of three levels: operational forces (32,000 personnel), regional units being the fundament of territorial defence (96,000 personnel) and local soldiers (32,000), whose task is to protect military objects and critical infrastructure. The Finnish doctrine of total defence means that every entity must train regularly and is assigned a combination of ordinary and extraordinary powers needed to function in every situation. As Finland is not a member of any military alliance, it must be ready to defend the territory on its own. The Finnish conscription generates sufficient resources for the army, navy, and air forces to operate effectively in critical situations or at war. Under the Constitution of Finland every citizen is obliged to participate in national defence. Men aged 18–60 are subject to compulsory military service (women can apply voluntarily). They must undergo armed or unarmed military or non-military (civil) service.<sup>10</sup> The military service includes conscription service, supplementary training, additional services, and service during mobilisation. Having completed the training, the conscripts are transferred to the Finnish Defence Forces reserve (during that time each reservist is liable to participate in refresher exercise for 80–150 days, while officers and non-commissioned officers – for 200 days).<sup>11</sup> The message addressed to the conscripts reads: “You are the best person to defend our country.” The Finnish Defence Forces develop this slogan as follows: “Finland needs your effort because you

<sup>10</sup> Depending on the type of training military service lasts 165, 255 or 347 days. “Conscription – a Finnish choice”, The Finnish Defence Forces, <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/en/finnish-conscription-system> [accessed: 13 February 2022].

<sup>11</sup> J. Grzela, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa państw nordyckich*, Kielce: Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego, 2019, pp. 244–245.

are the best person to defend our country, our independence, and our territorial integrity.”<sup>12</sup> In effect, approximately 80% of men complete the military service and this is one of the highest conscription rates in the world. The aim of such model of conscription is to “produce troops with good combat efficiency and skilled and capable personnel for placement in the wartime units of the Defence Forces.” Moreover, it helps to “maintain basic readiness and the capability to raise readiness when necessary.”<sup>13</sup>

Conscription is an important part of Finnish defence, but there is more and more emphasis placed on increased preparedness. That means shifting the emphasis from the conscript training to gaining better combat readiness from the mobilization forces. Therefore, the competences of the Finnish Defence Forces are raised through complementary training. The training system (which is divided into basic, further, and continuing) consists of trainings for conscripts, reservists, and salaried workers, and is then developed as part of a general system of social education and training. Every year, the Finnish Defence Forces train 21,000 conscripts and approximately 18,000 reservists. The Border Guard (whose active personnel constitute 3800 males and females) also participate in national defence and are an important part of Finland’s defence system. The border units or a part of them can be incorporated into the defence forces by the President’s decision if required by defence readiness.

An essential part is played by voluntary organisations of defence training. Their active role in maintaining combat readiness and the will to defend the country are important for the country’s defence capability.

## The security strategy for society as a tool to harmonise national preparedness

In 2017, Finland’s government announced the Security Strategy for Society, which extends the concept of total defence to include the civilian aspect. Its aim is to harmonise the principles of preparedness across various administrative branches. The principles form the concept of comprehensive security, in which all the vital functions of society are jointly safeguarded by authorities, businesses, organisations, and citizens. They refer to the readiness of response and effective crisis management in various incidents and emergency situations at the central, regional, and individual level. Although the country’s authorities emphasise that the Finnish society is safeguarded, there can be circumstances which may disrupt the life of many citizens. From this perspective, security and preparedness are not only the state authorities’ tasks. Comprehensive security is everyone’s responsibility: decision makers’,

<sup>12</sup> “Conscription – a Finnish choice”, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Conscript 2022: A guide for getting prepared for military service*, The Finnish Defence Forces, 2022.

authorities', non-profit organisations', business operators' and, above all, individuals'. The society's security depends on everyone. Regardless of the cause of the crisis, the authorities, private sector, civil society, and individuals must collectively ensure the continuity of certain functions. Individuals play an important role, as individual crisis planning is part of the resilience of society as a whole. Each person ought to be prepared for all types of emergency situations such as power or telecommunication failures. Individual crisis planning helps the authorities in emergency situations since the means are often insufficient to help all those in need and must be allocated to the most urgent matters.

Cooperation between various actors is thorough and permanent. The Finnish strategy presents a model of cooperation in which all relevant actors share their knowledge and analyse information concerning security, prepare joint plans and trainings. The authorities, organisations, and companies plan their preparedness, adapting emergency scenarios to their operational environment. Moreover, close cooperation between the Police, Customs Service, Border Guard, and Defence Forces means that all areas which could be taken advantage of by potential aggressors are merged. The efficiency of this is tested and developed through preparedness training organised by ministries, regional administration, municipalities, and various organisations.

Trainings held by National Defence Courses are an important element of comprehensive security. Both military and civilian leaders have the opportunity to be trained at national and regional defence courses. Their purpose is to provide an overview of Finnish foreign, security and defence policies, to improve cross-sector cooperation in critical situations, and to create the network of contacts between people working in different fields of comprehensive security. Resilience trainings prepare the country's military and civilians for severe frost conditions and deadly enemies.

Functioning of the system and the efficiency of the strategy implementation are monitored by the Security Committee (which has a secretariat in the Ministry of Defence), which is also responsible for monitoring the training.

The Security Strategy was drafted jointly by the authorities, organisations, and representatives of business community. Moreover, citizens also had an opportunity to propose their ideas and contribute to its final shape.

The Strategy identifies seven basic functions of society which underlie the wide, cross-sector character of preparedness which must be protected under all circumstances. These functions are as follows:

- leadership (i.e., ensuring effective cooperation between the central government and the local authorities, business operators, non-governmental organisations, research institutions, universities and society as well as civil-military cooperation; adequate legal solutions, clear division of responsibilities, duties and powers, transparent decision-making processes, situational awareness and the mechanism of crisis management);

- psychological resilience (it is the ability of individuals and society to survive and recover from a crisis. Psychological resilience is expressed in the citizens' will to defend their country's independence, and their determination to maintain livelihood and security in all situations. Resilience can be defined as the ability to resist and survive a hostile attack thanks to society's defence readiness, inaccessibility of the territory to the enemy, and the support of the armed forces by various state structures. Building resilience is a tedious, yet a necessary task to achieve the nation's ability to defend itself in many areas. This resilience must be integrated with everyday life of the society before it is put to the test. Finland's resilience derives from its experiences and history. It has developed naturally as a matter of national survival. Living in the shadow of the Soviet Union and forming the relations with the difficult neighbour while guarding its own independence and national identity has never been easy. However, it would not be possible without a thriving society, proud of its identity and the position in Europe and the world);
- functional capacity of the population and services (comprehensive security system is designed to maintain basic functions of the welfare state in exceptional situations, in cases when e.g., electricity and water supplies are needed. Moreover, it refers to the well-functioning system of patient database, blood banks, social services, continuity of education for children and young people);
- economy, infrastructure, and security of supply (refers to the safety of airports and seaports, the supply chain of construction and industrial materials. It covers two types of tasks related to the security of critical infrastructure and the security of key branches of production and services. The former refers to the energy sector (production, transmission, and distribution), communication systems, financial services, transport and logistics, water supplies, maintaining and building infrastructure and waste management. The latter refers to food supplies, medical care, industrial production and the production and services for the armed forces. The hallmark of Finland's concept of comprehensive security and national defence is the focus on the security of supplies.<sup>14</sup> This results from the fact that most of the country's imports and exports are (approximately 90%) by sea. In this context, Finland can be compared to an island. The continuity of ship traffic is essential for the society to function properly. Finnish passenger ships are an important complement to cargo traffic in terms of security of supplies);
- internal security (it is a complex component of the comprehensive security strategy, covering various tasks: from countering organised crime, carrying out

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<sup>14</sup> Ch. Salenius-Pasternak, "An effective antidote: The four components that make Finland more resilient to hybrid campaigns", *FIIA Comment*, no. 19, 2017, [https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/comment19\\_finland.pdf](https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/comment19_finland.pdf) [accessed: 11 February 2022]; P. Szymański, "New ideas for total defence: comprehensive security in Finland and Estonia", *OSW Report*, no. 3, 2020.



- maritime rescue operations, maintaining public order and security, civil defence, to preventing proliferation of mass destruction weapons);
- defence capability (which aims to maintain the ability to deter the use of any military force against Finland. It includes military capabilities, the nation's will to defend their country, involvement of public administration and international military cooperation);
  - international and EU activities (from the perspective of Finland's comprehensive security system, the ability to obtain international support in case of a natural disaster, crisis or military conflict is of key importance. Cooperation with international organisations also strengthens the country's preparedness. The aim of networking international defence policy is to build broader defence capabilities. Building a network within the structures of the European Union, the OSCE, the Nordic defence cooperation, partnership with NATO and in bi- and multilateral formats ensures both international political assistance and military compliance required to provide and receive aid. International networks facilitate sourcing of materials and the security of supplies and provide opportunities for cooperation in the field of industry, research, and technology).<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

Finland's comprehensive approach to providing security of the population is viewed as a model for Europe. The Security Strategy for Society is an important building element of this approach. It covers all levels and social entities, significantly extending the meaning of security. By implementing the Strategy, Finland has become the leader in building national preparedness for contemporary challenges and threats. President Sauli Niinistö emphasises that Finland has spent the century of its independence mastering the art of self-reliance. In Finland, preparedness is more than an approach, it is also an ability fostered and, most importantly, supported by the whole society. In this context, it is worth noticing that Finns' outstanding characteristic is a strong will to defend their country against threats. About 70% of Finns regularly respond "yes" (and 30% say "no") to the question: "If Finland were attacked, should Finns, in your opinion, take up arms to defend themselves in all situations, even if the outcome seemed uncertain?"<sup>16</sup>

The clearly defined process of preparedness and management structure ensure that all activities at each organisational and administrative level are closely coordinated. The model of a comprehensive view of integrated responses to emerging threats, in

<sup>15</sup> The Security Strategy for Society, Government Resolution, 2 November 2017, The Security Committee, Ministry of Defence, [https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YTS\\_2017\\_english.pdf](https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YTS_2017_english.pdf) [accessed: 11 February 2022].

<sup>16</sup> Willingness to defend the country, <https://findikaattori.fi/en/77> [accessed: 11 February 2022].

which authorities, enterprises, non-governmental organisations and citizens work together to protect functions essential to society, is exceptional. It is a laboratory of best practices aimed at strengthening national resilience to contemporary threats. The complex approach to security makes it possible to maintain social functions, promote the well-being and security of citizens and protect national independence.

The Finnish concept of comprehensive security is part of the philosophy of a modern functional model of a country's management, based on political and social consensus. The key to maintaining this process lies in a pragmatic approach to the relationship between the state and its residents, and in well-functioning public administration, based on values such as equality and transparency. Finland takes pride in its government's integrity and transparency. Citizens pay taxes honestly and abide by the commonly accepted rules. The authorities' decisions are undisputed and followed. Trust is an important asset which gives the government a mandate to act. To build it, the governmental structures and practices must be known and understandable for the citizens. This may, in turn, help to reach an agreement on how to deal with many challenges and threats.

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### Abstract

Finland has long been following the comprehensive security strategy creating a network of cooperation between authorities, businesses, organisations, and citizens. Its comprehensive approach to providing the population's security is viewed as a model for Europe. Finland has become the leader in building national preparedness for contemporary challenges and threats. This preparedness is more than an approach, it is also an ability fostered by the whole society. Most importantly, such an approach is widely supported in society. This comprehensive approach to security makes it possible to maintain social functions, promote the well-being and security of citizens, and protect the nation's independence. The aim of the article is to present the concept of national preparedness and to analyse practical ways of achieving comprehensive security in Finland.

Key words: Finland, national preparedness, security, comprehensive strategy