

Zeitschrift: ASMZ : Sicherheit Schweiz : Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitschrift
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Offiziersgesellschaft
Band: 175 (2009)
Heft: 08

Artikel: Finnish Defence Forces in transformation
Autor: Aikio, Harnu
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-358>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 18.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Finnish Defence Forces in Transformation

European armed forces are in transformation. Decreasing resources, changing threats, more international and global tasks, etc. are affecting drastically the development of the armed forces. Many countries are moving towards professional armies. Traditional conscription and mobilization armies often are history, many are abandoning the concept of the territorial defence and emphasizing capabilities in order to conduct operations abroad. Is this also true for Finland which has – due to the wars 1939 – 1945 – a long history in its conscription and territorial defence? Are the Finnish armed forces in transformation and if, where they are going?

Hannu Aikio

Colonel GS, Finnish Armed Forces, former Deputy Commandant of the Finnish National Defence University and Defence Attaché in China, Norway and Denmark. Currently faculty member at the Geneva based Center for Security Policy, seconded from Finland. Address: GCSP, avenue de la Paix 7bis, P.O.B. 1295, CH-1211 Genève 1. E-Mail: h.aikio@gcsp.ch

Are general conscription armies, territorial defence and large reserves still relevant in modern warfare, international operations and for the defence of the country? For Finland the answer is clearly yes. The following article is dealing with these issues taking into account the changing geopolitics, financial pressure and new tasks of defence commitments abroad.

Comprehensive defence

Finland's national defence is based on the idea of comprehensive defence. During the Cold War this was called the total defence concept. It gave a clear picture of the will of the whole society making its utmost in defending the country. Comprehensive defence refers to all of the military and civil activities through which Finland's sovereignty, living conditions and security of her citizens are safeguarded against any external threat. The object of comprehensive defence is to secure the vital functions of society under all circumstances with a coordinated action between different sectors of society.

The defence of Finland encompasses the entire of society by offering a possibility to use the resources of different sectors of society to maintain security. The idea is to coordinate the measures of the public and private sector as well as volun-

tary activities by its citizen in order to maintain a functional society under all circumstances.

The Government is responsible for ensuring that the comprehensive defence functions in all situations. The Cabinet Committee on Foreign and Security Policy deals with important matters related to total defence. Each ministry, government body and agency is responsible for the preparation and implementation of the comprehensive defence in its own area of responsibilities.

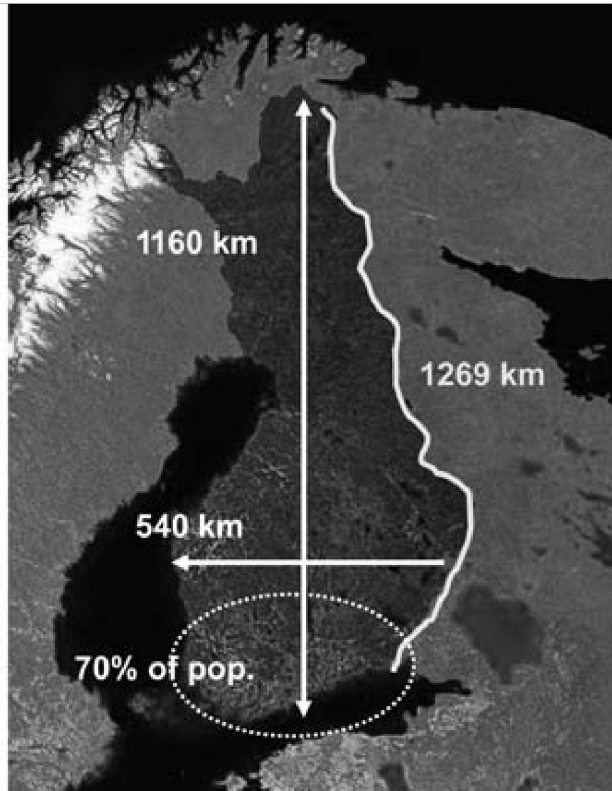
The object of comprehensive defence is to secure the vital functions of society under all circumstances ...

The Ministry of Defence is responsible for the overall coordination between different branches of government. The Security and Defence Committee, its Secretariat which is part of the Ministry of Defence, assists both the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Committee on Foreign and Security Policy in all matters related to comprehensive defence.

National Defence Courses, organized by the National Defence University prepare both, civilians and military persons in the leading positions of society, to act under the principles of the comprehensive defence. The courses seek to enhance the cooperation between different sectors of society and prepare participants for different tasks in order to secure the functioning of society under all conditions.

Finland

- Population of 5,4 million habitants centered in the south
- 338 000 square kilometres
 - 10% water
 - 69% forest
- 187 888 lakes
- 179 584 islands
- Cold winters and fairly warm summers



[1]

Geopolitical facts

Finland is situated between the 60th and 70th parallels of latitude. A quarter of her total area lies north of the Arctic Circle.

Finland is the sixth largest country and the most heavily forested country in Europe. The largest archipelago of Europe lies off its south-west coast.

The population of Finland equals to 15.5 inhabitants per square kilometer, 62% live in towns or urban areas and the rest in rural areas. Both, the population and the economy are centered in the triangle formed by Helsinki, Tampere and Turku.

The climate of Finland is marked by cold winters and fairly warm summers. In the far north of the country the sun does never set for about 73 days, producing the white nights of summer. In winter the sun remains below the horizon for 51 days in the far north. In summer the temperature quite often rises up to +20 Celsius or more and occasionally goes close to +30 Celsius in the southern and eastern parts of the country. In winter, temperatures of -25 to -30 Celsius are not uncommon in many areas. Finnish Lapland has the lowest winter temperatures.



[2]

[1] Geopolitical facts.

[2] Training under winter-conditions is still an integral part of readiness.

Finland's Geostrategic Location in Europe



[3]

Forests are still Finland's most crucial raw material resource, although engineering and high technology industries, spearheaded by Nokia corporation, have long been the leading branches of manufacturing. The industrial structure of Finnish exports has changed dramatically over the past few decades. The wood and paper industry accounted for well over half of exports less than thirty years ago. Now the paper industry is only one of three major export sectors, the others being electronics, metal and engineering. As for the country's general prosperity, the net wealth of Finnish households is at the average level of the member states of the European Union. Finland's GNP per capita in 2007 was around 33 800 euros.

Finland's geostrategic location in Europe

Geopolitics in the Far North are changing because of the global warming. The arctic sea is going to be accessible for nations around and disputes may arise on the natural resources. Other interests may emerge. The military presence in the area is going to be more visible than it used to be before, when the access between the two seas was not open.

The geostrategic environment around Finland leads to the conclusion that Finland should continue to perceive a traditional military threat as one possible threat scenario. As the

possible threats were evaluated, it was assumed that a threat is a combination of possible political intents and actual military capacities/capabilities.

The military capacity of a state changes rather slowly. The other factor, the political will or intent of a state leadership, is much more difficult to predict. In certain situations the political will can also change in a very short period of time. Therefore, in the long term Defence Planning the main factor to be evaluated is the military capacity of different states in the vicinity of Finland.

When evaluating non-governmental threats today, like terrorism, one also faces other sorts of problems. The *intent* is normally fairly well known and publicized. At the same time, however, the hostile *capacity* is much more difficult to predict and evaluate, because these new threats are normally not based on military capacities or means. They are rather results of civilian activities, they are civil products and equipment like computers, airplanes or the threats are simply people, mostly "civilians".

The general trends of the military operational environment in the vicinity of Finland are as follows:

- enlargement of Nato and the European Union. The coop-

eration between the two organizations has improved the security in the area

- the use of the military force in Europe is still possible (see the recent war in Georgia)
- the tasks of the military forces are concentrating on international crisis management operations (CMO)
- the strength of the armed forces is decreasing
- national defence efforts are diminishing, seeking support from the alliances

Basis for the Defence

Finland does not expect to face the prospect of military pressure or armed aggression outside the context of a wider international conflict.

As a basis for Finland's defence planning, the White Paper 2004 sets out the following three crisis and threat models:

1. *Regional crises* that may affect Finland
2. *Political, economic and military pressure* – directly or indirectly affecting Finland, and which additionally may include a threat of using military force
3. *Use of military force* in the form of an either strategic strike or a larger attack aimed at seizing parts of Finnish territory.

Additional to these, in cooperation with all government authorities and agencies, the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF) are preparing the support of the lead agencies in order to prevent and limit the use of asymmetric warfare against the society, such as terrorism.

The Government set out the clear guidelines for the development of the Defence Forces. The territorial defence system, general conscription and the defence of the entire national territory remain essential features of Finnish defence system.

The territorial defence system, general conscription and the defence of the entire national territory remain essential features of Finnish defence system.

Furthermore, national defence remains a core issue of defence, although the FDF seek to develop capabilities to join NATO – if such a political decision on this should be ever made sometime in the future.

The mobilisation strength of the Defence Forces has decreased to 350 000 in the year 2008. According to the Chief of Defence, Admiral Juhani Kaskeala, there are growing needs to further decrease the number of the mobilisation forces by another 100 000 troops. Finland should concentrate on well trained, well equipped and operational troops during the next 10–15 years.



[4]

Tasks of the Defence Forces

According the newly endorsed Act on Finnish Defence Forces there are three main tasks. These are, in the order of importance:

1. National defence
2. Support for non-military authorities
3. Participation in international operations

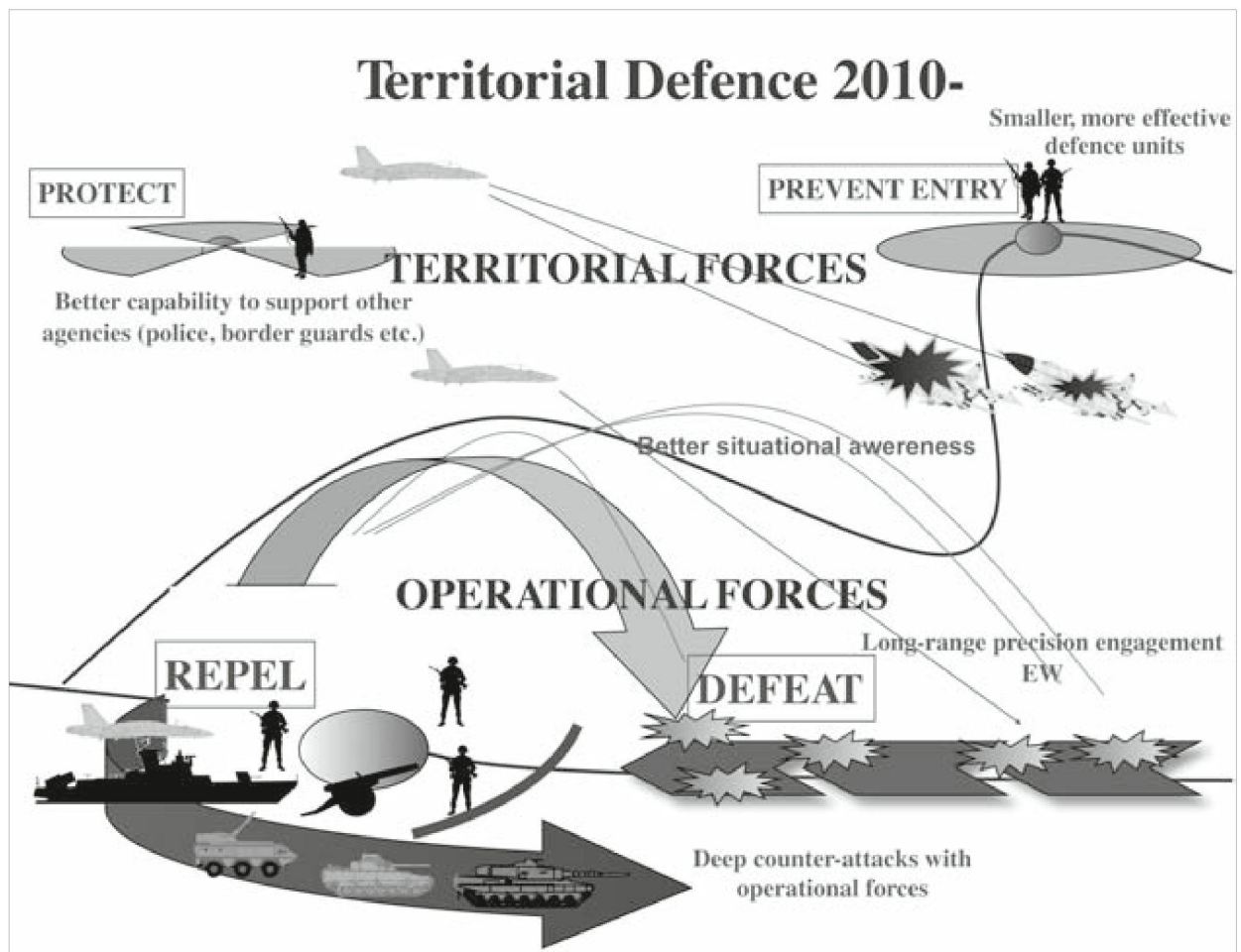
National Defence

The peace time strength should be reduced to 15 000 personnel, the Defence Forces are required to release unnecessary facilities and real-estate. The war time forces are divided into two basic categories: territorial and operational forces.

With the territorial forces, the aim is to establish smaller defence units to protect key installations and prevent entry into specific areas. These units will also have to support local authorities by protecting the vital functions of the society. In the process of developing the defence, it is essential to keep capable territorial forces.

[3] Three Russian centers of gravity.

[4] Admiral Juhani Kaskeala, Chief of Defence 2001–2009.



[5]

The main focus of the FDF is the development of the manoeuvre (operational) forces, being used in operations nation-wide. The aim of the manoeuvre forces is to repel and defeat hostile forces in Joint Operations. In the future, manoeuvre forces will get new capabilities that will enhance their situational awareness and capabilities. It will enable them for long range precision engagement with organic manoeuvre elements and appropriate fire support.

In early 2008, the command structure of the FDF has been changed. The major changes occurred in the Army where the number of headquarters had been reduced from 15 to 8. An all new Army Command has been created in central Finland in Mikkeli. This independent service HQ will have the total responsibility of all Army related issues.

The organisation and responsibilities of the Defence Staff have also been changed, so that there is a real joint Defence Command. These changes seek to improve the jointness between the services, the interoperability both domestically and internationally, as well as the use of the FDF national resources in order to improve the cooperation between military and civilian authorities.

Army

The total strength of the Army operational war time forces is approximately 60 000 soldiers. It will consist of three (3)

readiness brigades, two (2) jaeger brigades, two (2) mechanised battle groups, one (1) helicopter battalion, Special Forces units, air defence units and adequate combat support units.

The future integrated C4I (iC4I) system will enable free data transfer, processing and information management. It will be in place by 2012 covering all services and branches.

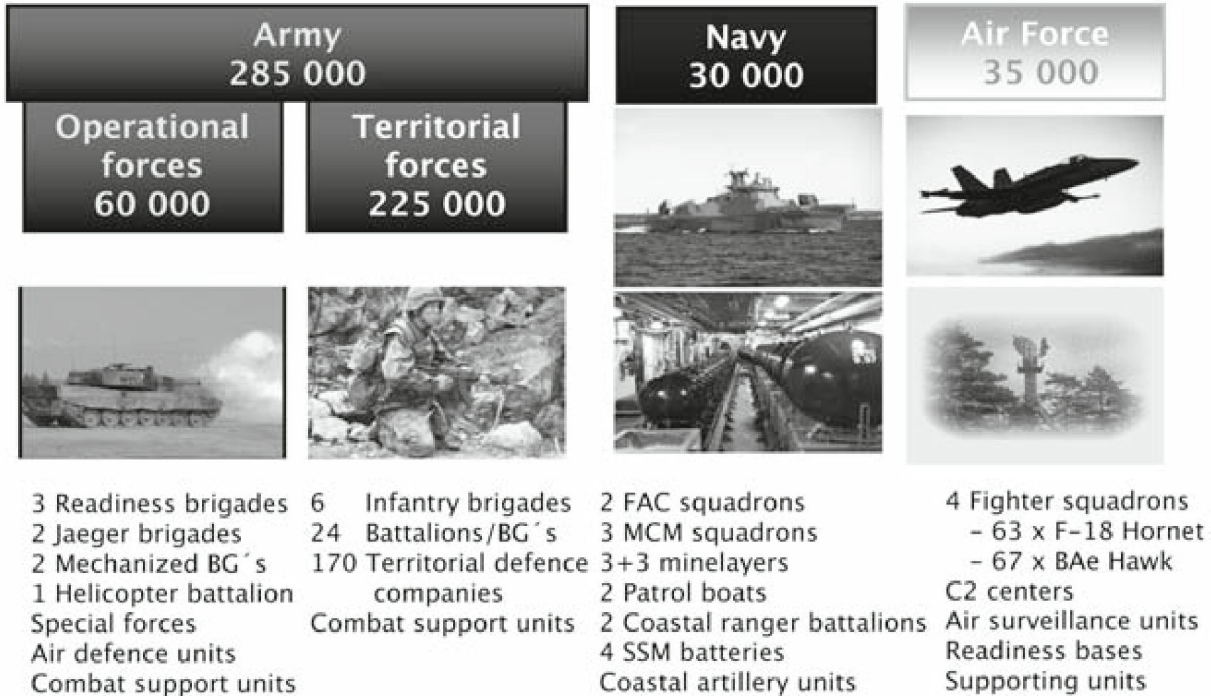
The iC4I system is in essence a system of systems that will have enhanced survivability through mobility and network redundancy and it will enable the near real-time C2 of all services as well as integrated sensor and weapon systems.

The main focus in developing the future Army are new capabilities for the protection of vital state infrastructure, for the army readiness brigades and for the air defence. There will also be a program to develop the Army's long range precision engagement capability (being a part of the Joint Strike Capability program).

Air Force

One of the major programs is to improve the capabilities of the F-18 Hornet and its systems with the Midlife Upgrade. This program is closely linked with the Joint Strike Capability.

Wartime Defence Forces 2008



[6]

Another development area is the Air Force's surveillance system which is one part of the iC4I system and Network Enabled Defence. The aim is to improve the fighter planes capabilities and their combat endurance by sensor integration and by procurement of passive sensors.

With regard to the ground support, the Air Force aims to improve its damage control abilities, its force protection and NBC capabilities.

Navy

The Navy is focussing on integrating its maritime elements into the joint iC4I systems. It also seeks a better ability to protect the sea-lines-of-communication and modern mobile coastal forces. The anti-surface warfare capabilities will be maintained on current levels.

The planned procurement includes new sea-mines; new fast attack and mine counter measure boats, a modernisation of existing fast attack boats and minelayers, as well as of its surface-to-surface missiles. New equipment for the mobile coastal infantry units and Navy Special Forces units will be procured.

Joint Strike Capability

Based on a study conducted by the Army Staff, the Joint Strike Capability should include:

- heavy rocket launcher systems (MLRS)
- artillery precision and canister ammunition and an
- air-to-ground capability for the F-18 Hornet.

The heavy rocket launcher system was delivered to the Army in early 2007 and the decision to add an air-to-ground capability to the F-18 is pending.

In order to develop the new capabilities which were described earlier, there is a continuous need to procure new material. Depending on priorities and budget limitations, it is important that each service gets timely its share.

The current main efforts were/are:

- 2005–2008: the development of army readiness brigades and helicopter system (NH 90), this program is slightly delayed
- 2009–2012: the development of the air defence, both with long range anti-aircraft missile systems and with the Air Force fighter system
- 2010–2012: the development of C4I systems. This will absorb around 20% of all the resources

[5] Two categories of forces and their tasks.

[6] The order of battle in wartime.

The Defence Budget

According to the Security and Defence Policy Report 2009, the aims of maintaining, improving and employing the defence capabilities can only be achieved with the 2008 real cost level defence appropriations, which were revised in line with cost increases caused by technological advances. In order to cover the needs, including inflation and risen costs, an annual increase of 2% in defence appropriations is required from 2011 on.

The following picture shows the breakout of the defence budgets 2007 and 2008, and how they are divided between procurement of material, salaries, operational costs, rents and international operations. The total budget equals to about 1,3% from the GDP (see figure 7).

Looking at how the available resources are divided between the developments of the two types of forces, one can easily see that the plan is to use approximately 90% of the procurement resources for the development of the future manoeuvre forces. Even though the territorial forces number around 250 000 troops, only 10% of the procurement resources are used for them.

Providing support to other authorities

The concept of securing the vital functions of the society (homeland security) is very much based on the cooperation between security authorities and other actors.

The resolution and strategy regarding the securing of the vital functions to society – based on the intergovernmental study – was approved for first time by the Government in November 2003. The revised Government resolution was then approved in November 2006.

The document is the basis for the interagency/intergovernmental approach in Finland. This strategy identifies 10 threat models (see figure 8):

- The first four correspond to the current daily activities, in other words to the normal circumstances, to the security situations which Finland must be able to handle with normal means and resources
- the next three are also ever present threats, but should they really occur, it would often cause special and disruptive large-scale effects to the society
- the last three models deal with even more extreme situations. They will always cause disruptive or extreme effects to the society.

These threat models form a common basis for the Finnish intergovernmental work and cooperation. They facilitate the common understanding and planning of each other's application of instruments when preparing an integrated solution to serious challenges and threats.

Homeland security

This same strategy has also identified seven vital functional areas which may challenge the society (see figure 9):

Each of these seven functions has been allocated to a specific ministry which has the coordinating role of all national efforts and assets. For example MOD coordinates the func-

tion of national military defence, the other ministries have a supporting role.

The first level of the hierarchy is that *National military defence* and *External capacity to act* form a basis for securing the vital functions against a threat from outside. The second level is to keep the vital functions within the society working, i.e. *Internal security* and *Functioning of economy and society*. And the last level is *Social and health care* and *Crisis tolerance* – forming the social and spiritual basis of the society.

The Prime Minister and his office are shown in the center of the picture. They are mainly responsible for the coordination and for the process as a whole. Common interministry exercises are testing the functioning of the model regularly. It

Exercising the cooperation and coordination are keys to success in the comprehensive defence of the country.

appears that the model has proven to be very effective and the division of labor makes it possible for each ministry to concentrate on its key functions and its core competence. Exercising the cooperation and coordination are keys to success in the comprehensive defence of the country.

International operations

Finland participates in International Crises Management Operations in order to protect common values, to defend Finland's interests and to develop interoperability as well as capabilities vital for the national defence.

The political input for developing the international crisis management capabilities are based on the White Paper 2004. The capabilities defined in the European Union Headline Goal 2010 are the reference list which serves as the basis for the development of the FDF's capabilities.

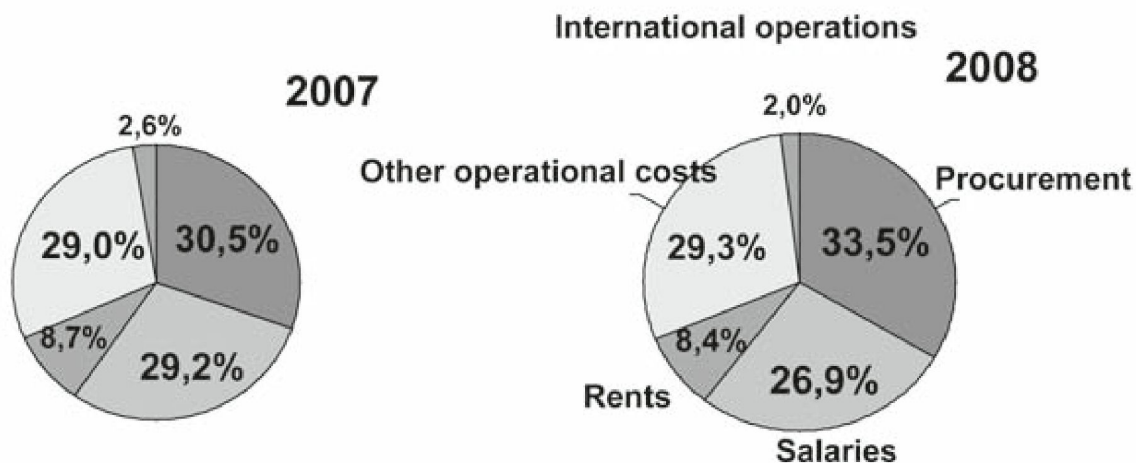
The membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace and working in the Planning and Review Process provide the tools to work with. Thus, the FDF use comprehensively all the tools available to develop their own capabilities. The EU sets the conceptual background and NATO the actual tools to create capabilities.

Through international exercises and certification procedures, the FDF formed a pool for all Finnish organizations to be used in international operations. Partnership Goals (PG) are the principal tools to create detailed information on interoperability, not only for international military crisis management capabilities but also for national defence. Currently there are 62 PG's selected and the focus is on High Readiness Capabilities.

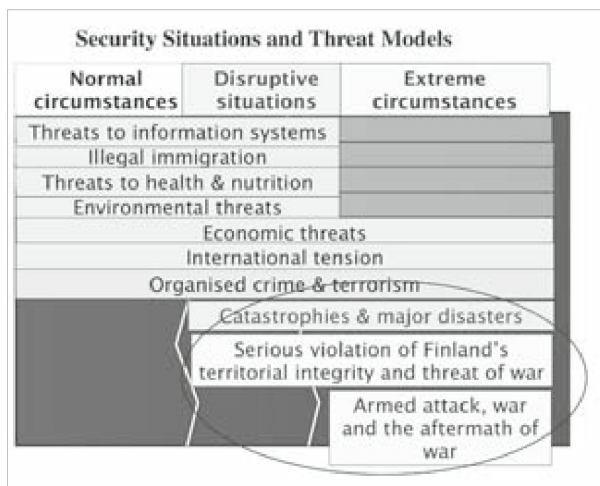
Finland has been a keen supporter for EU's Military Rapid Reaction Initiative from the outset. The need for rapid Response was already mentioned in the Helsinki Summit in 1999. However for Finland, the EU Battle Group (BG) Concept in many ways requires a new approach and thinking, not least within the Armed Forces.

Defence Budget 2007 - 2008

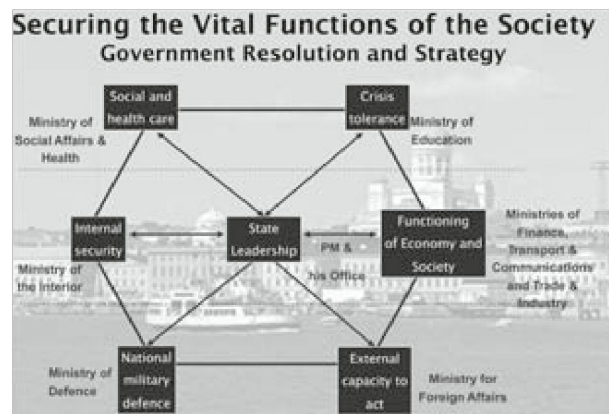
	2007	2008
Procurement of defence equipment	2 236 mn euro	2 419 mn euro
Operations costs	681 mn euro	810 mn euro
International Operations (MoD)	1 496 mn euro	1 561 mn euro
(+ MoFA's share)	59 mn euro (66 mn euro)	48 mn euro (56 mn euro)



[7]



[8]

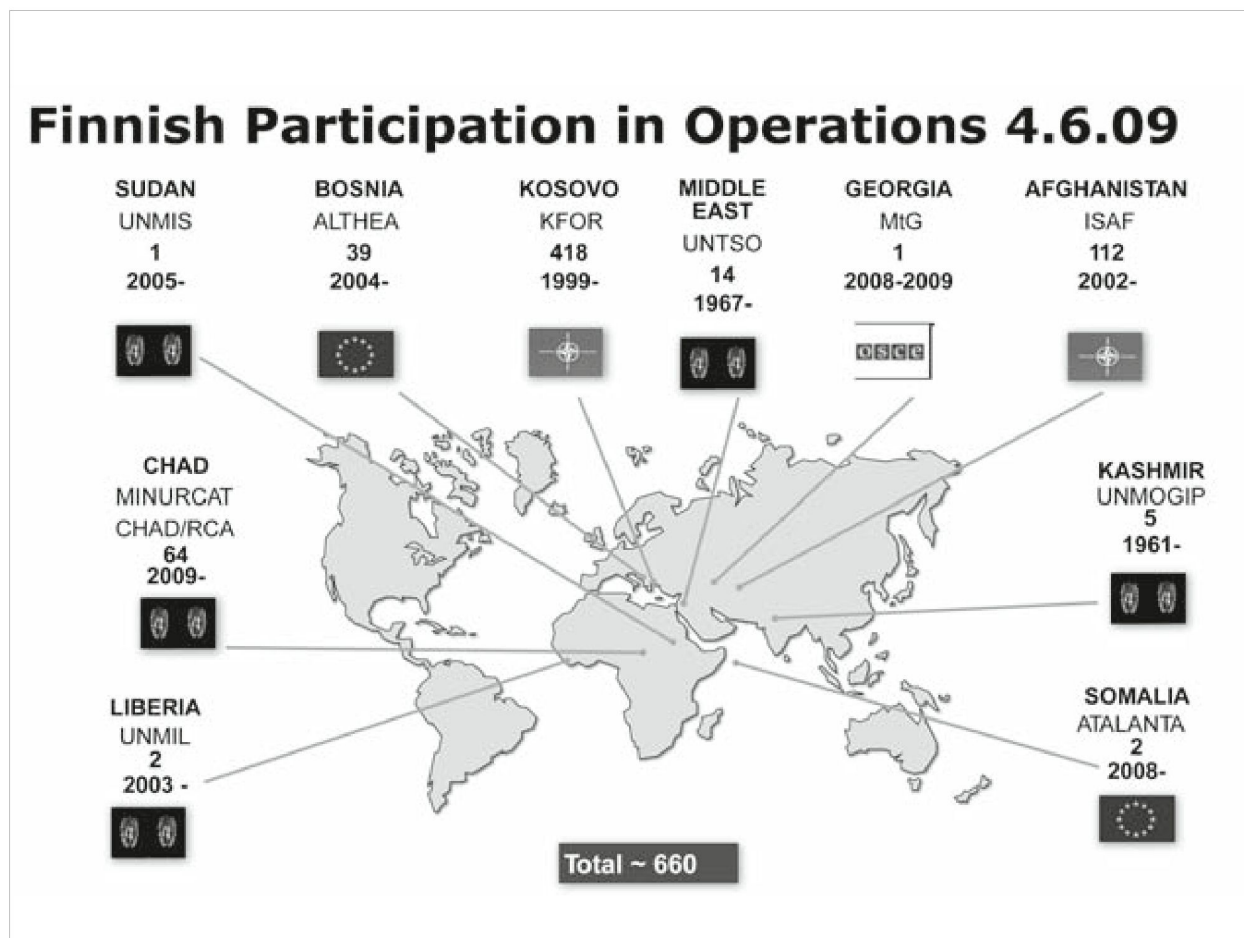


[9]

[7] The Finnish Defence Budget 2007–2008.

[8] The 10 threat models.

[9] The 7 vital functions of society.



[10]

As mentioned earlier, the Finnish Armed Forces are mainly based on general conscription and on mobilization of the reserves if the situation so dictates. The large pool of reservists is also the main source from which soldiers for international operations and tasks have to be recruited. So in Finland, with few exceptions, there are no standing forces as such.

A typical Finnish soldier, on average, is 25 years of age, with a good civilian and military education. The FDF annually take 25 000 conscripts into the services which is about 75% of the age group. On the waiting list are about 4 000 volunteers for international operations.

Because Finnish soldiers sign for missions abroad only on a voluntary basis, the FDF have to attract them. For instance soldiers applying for military Crisis Management Operations (CMO), need to know in advance when and where they have to deploy, and what the operation requirements are.

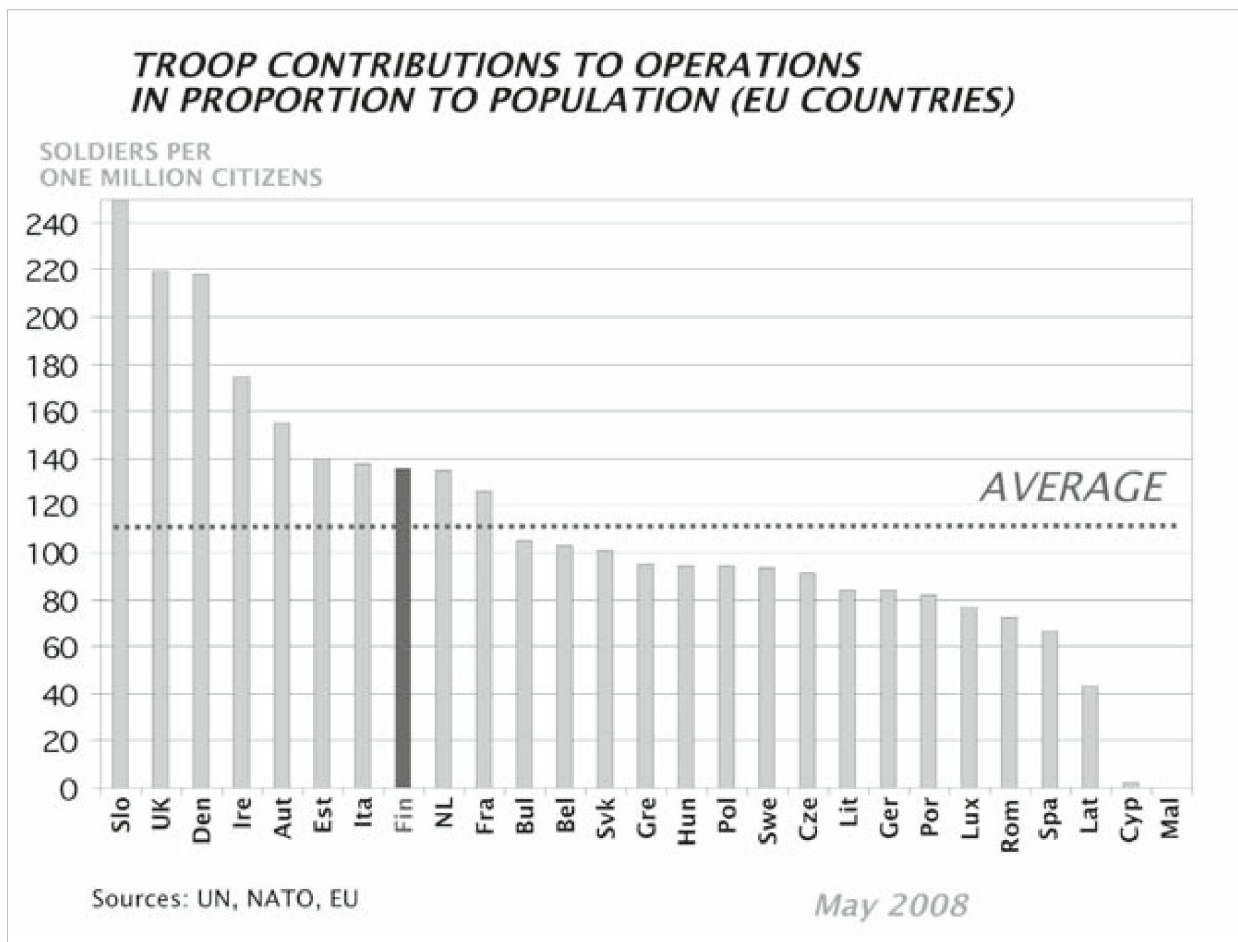
Higher readiness requirements and numerous geographical areas for potential deployments require new ranges of capabilities, new assets, more knowledge and improved training. In a nutshell, one has to start thinking more expeditionary.

One must also keep in mind that the new high readiness BG elements are and will be only a small portion of Finnish Forces trained and earmarked for international CMOs. The

BG is a specific form of Rapid Reaction Element and is one possible answer to the timely provision of the necessary military capabilities for an EU Rapid Response. In this context, a BG is defined as the minimum militarily effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations or for the initial phase of larger operations, able to operate for up to 120 days with relevant logistical support.

It is based on a combined arms, battalion-sized force reinforced with Combat Support and Combat Service Support elements deployable within 5–10 days. It will be based on the principle of multinationality and could be formed by a framework nation or a multinational coalition of member states. In any case, interoperability and military effectiveness have to be the key criteria. Finally, a BG must be associated with a forward (F) HQ and pre-identified operational and strategic enablers (e.g. air transport).

The FDF have already been running two parallel Battle Group preparations which have since been terminated (German – Dutch – Finnish BG and the Nordic BG in 2008). The next BG period in which Finland will participate is anticipated for 2011. The exact contribution will be determined in the near future.



[11]

The Finnish contribution to the German-Dutch-Finnish (DE-NL-FI) Battle group was approximately 160 soldiers, the main element being the Force Protection Coy. The other elements were staff officers, intelligence and electronic warfare elements and military police. In the Nordic Battle group the number of Finnish soldiers was approximately 220, consisting mainly of Combat Service elements.

About 200 of the MoD and FDF personnel carry out international duties in their daily work. Abroad, the FDF have about 250 regular persons of which about 185 are involved in peace-keeping tasks, 18 in military attaché offices and 45 serving in international HQs and as military representatives. About 500 FDF personnel attend international courses and seminars annually and 500 soldiers will participate in international exercises.

Nordic cooperation

The military co-operation between the Nordic countries is repeatedly an issue. On 16 June 2008, Finland, Sweden and Norway have finished a report on Nordic Supportive Defence Structures (NORDSUP). Areas of future cooperation include – among other things – joint equipment procurement, training, exercises and defence related research

The report clearly indicates that bilateral and multilateral co-operation strengthens the ability of the three countries to

safeguard their national and mutual interests. The defence of the three countries has many commonalities. Cooperation in many fields has long traditions. The countries are facing similar challenges like limited financial resources and decreasing operational capabilities.




In the report, there are nearly 140 possible items of cooperation in various areas. Some 40 areas were already initiated in 2009. One example is the common Nordic air and maritime radar picture, which will begin in 2009. Some of the areas of possible cooperation are listed in figure 12.

[10] Finnish participation in international CMO's.

[11] International troop contributions to CMO in proportion to population (EU).

Feasibility Study Findings

Areas for Possible Cooperation

LAND 	SEA 	AIR 
Quick Wins <u>Vehicle programs:</u> - MLU/MLI programs (LEO 2, CV90, SISU/PASI) <u>ARTY programs:</u> - Arthur and Archer <u>Other programs/Areas:</u> - R&D - Breaching - Bridging Flagships - MECHBAT 2020 - ARTY systems - MECHBAT 2030	Quick Wins <u>Sea surveillance</u> Naval exercises Flagships Mine clearance Strategic Sea Transport	Quick Wins <u>Exchange of RAP (ASDE)</u> -C2 exercises -CBA-training - Jet combat exercises Flagships <u>Exercises:</u> - GBAD (2012) - Evaluation (2010) <u>A-G Operations</u> - FAC (2009) - Close Air Support (2009) - Use of Shooting Areas (2009-10) <u>SAR</u> - NH-90 cooperation (2010+) - CSAR (2010+) <u>Material and Maintenance</u> - AMRAAM, LINK 16, SAC, AAR, Flight training

[12]

Common values

The Finnish minister of Defence, Mr. Jyri Häkämies, recently stated at the CSIS in Washington, D.C. that the threats and challenges to stability and peace are being global, complex and multidimensional. He also said that to cope with these, there were no set solutions, and that each country had different ways to face the new threats.

... threats and challenges to stability and peace are being global, complex and multidimensional.

A country like Finland for sure has a different way of facing the threats. But in the end, it aims at the same goals as others. To quote Mr. Häkämies: "We are there to stand up to protect our common values, to produce security and stability, and even to defend our national territory, whenever and wherever such threats emerge."

Finland seeks solutions from cooperation with the other countries, and one day it may perhaps even become a member of the NATO alliance. Nordic cooperation is a good example for burden sharing and perhaps in future also for common preventive actions.

Sources:

- *Finnish Security and Defence Policy, White Paper 2004*
- *Finnish Security and Defence Policy, Government Report 2009*
- *The Government Resolution on the Strategy for Securing the Functions Vital to Society (SVFS)*
- *Presentations of the Development of the Finnish Defence (various 2008)*
- *Progress Report, 16 June 2008, Nordic Supportive Structures (NORDSUP)*
- *Helsingin Sanomat, 18 June 2008; Growing need to have tighter cooperation between Nordic Countries in Defence (Article by CHOD Finland, Sweden and Norway)*
- *Defense News, 2 June 2008; Sweden Pushes for More Nordic Cooperation*
- *Speech by Minister of Defence Jyri Häkämies at CSIS in Washington 6.9.2007, Finland: Similar yet different*
- *Speeches by CHOD Finland Admiral Juhani Kaskeala in opening of the Defence Courses*
- *www.mil.fi*
- *All photos: Finnish Defence Forces.*



[13]

[12] Areas for possible Nordic cooperation (the individual flag indicates the country being responsible for coordination).

[13] A Finnish RAISU mine-clearing vehicle (SISU), often used in international operations.