

Analyzing Security Subregions: Forces of Push, Pull, and Resistance in Nordic Defense Cooperation

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Abstract

How can we best analyze security subregions? The most commonly used theory of regional security in the discipline of international relations, the regional security complex theory, focuses on large regions, such as Europe, Asia, or the Middle East. It pays less attention to smaller regions within these. This is unfortunate, because the security dynamics of these subregions often are a result of more than their place in the larger region. At the same time, the security of subregions cannot be reduced to a function of the policies of the states comprising them either. In short, security subregions are a level of analysis in their own right, with their own material, ideational, economic, and political dynamics. To capture and understand this, we need an analytical framework that can be applied to security regions irrespective of where and when in time they occur. The aim of this article is to offer such an analytical framework that helps us theorize the forces forging regional security cooperation, by combining external push and pull forces with internal forces of pull and resistance. The utility of the framework is illustrated through the case of Nordic security cooperation. It allows for a systematic mapping of the driving forces behind it and the negative forces resisting it. The Nordic region thus becomes a meeting point between global and national forces, pushing and pulling in different directions, with Nordic Defense Cooperation being formed in the squeeze between them.

Extrait

Comment pouvons-nous analyser au mieux les sous-régions de sécurité? La théorie de sécurité régionale la plus communément exploitée dans la discipline des relations internationales, celle du complexe de sécurité régionale, se concentre sur de grandes régions, telles que l'Europe, l'Asie ou le Moyen-Orient. Elle accorde moins d'attention aux plus petites régions qui les constituent. Cela est regrettable, car les dynamiques de sécurité de ces sous-régions résultent souvent de bien d'autres facteurs que leur place dans la région. Dans le même temps, la sécurité des sous-régions ne peut pas non plus être réduite à une fonction des politiques des États qui les composent. En bref, les sous-régions de sécurité sont un niveau d'analyse à part entière, avec ses propres dynamiques matérielles, idéationnelles, économiques et politiques. Pour capturer et comprendre cela, nous avons besoin d'un cadre analytique pouvant être appliqué aux régions de sécurité, quels que soient le moment et le lieu où elles interviennent. Le but de cet article est de proposer un tel cadre analytique qui nous aide à théoriser les forces forgeant la coopération régionale de sécurité en alliant des forces externes de poussée et de traction à des forces internes de traction et de résistance. L'utilité de ce cadre est illustrée par le cas de la coopération de sécurité nordique. Il permet une cartographie systématique des

forces motrices sur lesquelles elle repose et des forces négatives qui y résistent. La région nordique devient ainsi un point de rencontre entre forces nationales et internationales qui poussent et tirent dans différentes directions, la coopération de défense nordique se formant dans l'intervalle ainsi constitué.

Resumen

¿Cuál es la mejor forma de analizar las subregiones de seguridad? La teoría sobre seguridad regional de uso generalizado en la disciplina de relaciones internacionales, la llamada Teoría de Complejos de Seguridad Regional, se centra principalmente en grandes regiones como Europa, Asia y el Medio Oriente y presta menos atención a regiones más pequeñas dentro ellas. Este aspecto es desafortunado, ya que la dinámica de seguridad de estas subregiones suele ser el resultado de otros factores además del lugar que ocupan dentro de estas regiones más grandes. Asimismo, la seguridad subregional tampoco puede reducirse a una función de las políticas de los estados que integran. En conclusión, las subregiones de seguridad merecen un nivel de análisis propio, con sus propias dinámicas materiales, conceptuales, económicas y políticas. Para captar y comprender esto, es necesario un marco analítico que pueda aplicarse a regiones de seguridad independientemente del lugar y el momento en el que suceden. Este artículo tiene como objetivo ofrecer ese marco analítico que ayude a teorizar los factores que forjan la cooperación de seguridad nacional al combinar factores externos de tensión y conciliación con factores internos de conciliación y resistencia. La utilidad del marco se explica a través del caso de la cooperación de seguridad nórdica. Permite realizar un mapeo sistemático de los factores subyacentes de impulso y los factores negativos de resistencia. La región nórdica, por tanto, se convierte en un punto de encuentro de los factores internacionales y nacionales de tensión y conciliación en distintas direcciones, y en el cual que se forma la cooperación nórdica de defensa.

Keywords: regional security, Nordic, defense, theory,

Mots clés: sécurité régionale, nordique, défense, théorie,

Palabras clave: Seguridad regional, nórdica, defensa, teoría

Introduction

How can we best analyze security subregions? Regional security complex theory (RSCT)—the most commonly used theory of regional security in the discipline of international relations (IR)—focuses on large regions, such as Europe, Asia, or the Middle East (Buzan 1991; Lake and Morgan 1997; Buzan and Wæver 2003), with less attention paid to the smaller regions within them. While RSCT acknowledges the existence of these subregions (or *subcomplexes*)—such as the Maghreb, the Levant, the Balkans, or the Nordic countries—it does not aim to analyze the particularities of subregional security developments, or to explain “why security takes a particular form in this region or that, or what causes major changes” (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 84).

This leaves a theoretical gap that becomes particularly visible at the subregional level, where security dynamics are often the result of forces that go beyond a subregion's place within the wider territory. Nor—due to the impact of globalization, geopolitics, and other inter-

national forces—can the security of subregions simply be reduced to the policies of the states comprising them. In short, security subregions constitute a level of analysis in their own right, with their own material, ideational, economic, and political dynamics. Thus, if we are to understand how cooperation, conflict, stability, or instability evolves in a subregion, we need an analytical framework that can be applied irrespective of where and when they occur. The aim of this article is to offer—using the case of Nordic security—just such an analytical framework.

The article asks how we can best analyze the ups and downs of Nordic defense cooperation. What are the driving forces behind it and the negative forces resisting it? A simple analytical framework is developed to help us theorize these forces, combining external push, pull, and resisting forces with internal forces of pull and resistance. The Nordic region thus becomes a meeting point between global and national forces, with Nordic defense cooperation formed amid the push, pull, and stresses that take place between them. The analytical framework will help us understand these processes.

The first section discusses theoretical approaches to Nordic and regional security from the Cold War until the present day, which will be drawn upon in developing the analytical framework presented in the second section. The third section then demonstrates the utility of this framework in relation to the evolution of the formalized Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), which was established in 2009. The article concludes with a discussion of the framework's applicability to other security subregions.

Theorizing Nordic and Regional Security

The territory referred to as the “Nordic region” consists of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. As with other such regions, it has emerged as a result of long-term cultural proximity, close historical, economic, and social relations, and significant political cooperation (Østergaard 1997). On the flip side, the Nordic states have also fought wars with, and been conquered or ruled by, one another. Moreover, the region has been shaped over the centuries by the larger powers surrounding it, such as Russia, Germany, and the United Kingdom. As a result, the degree of closeness or Nordic identity has evolved over time (Østergaard 1997).

The five Nordic countries have, since the Second World War, chosen different international security and defense alignments, with Finland and Sweden remaining non-aligned, and Denmark, Norway, and Iceland becoming NATO members (Holst 1972).¹ These differences have made cooperation on defense matters somewhat challenging. Despite their geographical closeness, neither the NATO members nor Sweden and Finland have been able to forge close relationships with each other, with potential Nordic partners unwilling to rely on military assets that are not guaranteed in the case of war. Sweden and Finland have also had to be careful not to undermine their non-aligned status by building too close relations with the NATO countries.

In 1966, Arne Olav Brundtland famously depicted the Cold War security situation in Northern Europe as a *Nordic Balance*—a subsystem of the bipolar world between the Soviet Union and the United States (Brundtland 1966). This bipolarity provided the general frame for stability in the region, but political specificities among the Nordic countries also made it possible for each side to

“neutralize possible increased involvement by the other superpower” (Brundtland 1966, 30). Importantly, it was the Nordic states' self-imposed restrictive policies that made this possible. For instance, Norway and Denmark had policies of prohibiting permanent allied military bases or nuclear weapons on their territories. For Norway in particular, this “provided a visible assurance that Norway neither could nor would be used as an immediate stepping stone for attack on Soviet territory” (Brundtland 1966, 32), with the exact definition of this policy defined by the Norwegian government. Thus, Brundtland argued, the Nordic states could limit superpower engagement in the region. Nordic security was therefore more nuanced than merely being a subset of the global geopolitical strife between East and West.

The end of the Cold War and the evaporation of the constraining bipolar global security structure created both new dangers and new possibilities. On the one hand, new kinds of wars—driven, for example, by a desire for secession or by ethnopolitics—emerged, at least partly due to wider geopolitical shifts (Kaldor 2012). At the same time, new security arrangements came on the agenda, including various forms of “soft” security, such as human, societal, and environmental security. These security agendas gave center stage to non-military regional organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the EU. Analytically, this opened up new ways of analyzing security in a regional context.

Regional Security Complex

An early contribution in this regard was Barry Buzan's *People, States and Fear* (Buzan 1991). In it, he described Europe as a *regional security complex* (RSC) (Buzan 1991, 200). An RSC, he wrote, is “a group of states whose primary security concerns link them sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another” (Buzan 1991, 170). Given this rather strict definition, he regarded the Nordic region as a subregion in the European RSC. The non-aligned status of Sweden and Finland, contrary to the NATO membership of Norway and Denmark, meant the Nordic region did not meet the criteria of a security complex in its own right. Nevertheless, Buzan regarded cultural ties as a potential factor in identifying a security complex (Buzan 1991, 196), in principle opening up the possibility of identifying a Nordic subregion in the broader European security complex.

Morgan (1997), building on Buzan's work, argued that RSCs are a product of how neighboring states deal with regional security problems. For Morgan, an RSC

1 After joining the European Union (EU) in 1995, Sweden and Finland introduced the term “military non-alignment” instead of “neutrality.” Since 2007, Finland states that it does not belong to any military alliance (see Bergquist et al. 2016, 10, 45).

was not a fixed entity, but something that emerges as a result of politics. However, Morgan's approach to RSC was a negative one, addressing how states overcome regional conflicts. This placed limitations on the concept, as it did not allow for regional security cooperation initiatives driven by factors other than fear. As we shall see, NORDEFECO was initially designed by small states to share investments, logistics, and maintenance in order to save money, and thus retain military operability. This would, in other words, not "qualify" as an RSC under Morgan's definition.

Buzan, in co-authorship with Ole Wæver (Buzan and Wæver 2003), went on to further refine the RSC into an RSCT. RSCs, they argued, are made up of geographically proximate and thus security-interdependent states, and as subsystems may have mediating effects upon how global dynamics operate across the international system. Thus, they define an RSC as "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 44). In this way, they refined Buzan's original concept by bringing in securitization theory, thereby making the political process of creating amity and enmity the central point (Buzan, De Wilde, and Wæver 1998). The degree of security *regionness* is a result of these political processes.

Furthermore, they argued that beyond being an analytical concept, RSCs are also "socially constructed in the sense that they are contingent on the security practices of the actors" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 48). They may evolve and change over time, depending on what and whom the actors securitize. In other words, if actors (in most cases, states) develop sufficiently tight security interdependence, the region can "qualify" as an RSC.

Buzan and Wæver also stressed that RSC cannot simply be applied to any group of countries, again listing the Nordic countries as an example (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 47). The group needs to "possess a degree of security interdependence sufficient both to establish them as a linked set and to differentiate them from surrounding security regions" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 47–48). "Norden," according to this perspective, is not sufficiently differentiated from surrounding and more dominant security regions. Rather, Buzan and Wæver defined the EU and Russia as RSCs, with Europe a *supercomplex* consisting of these two RSCs (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 437).

Buzan and Wæver did, however, also talk about *sub-complexes*, as "a 'half-level' within the regional one" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 51), with "distinctive patterns of security interdependence that are nonetheless caught up in a wider pattern that defines the RSC as a whole"

(Buzan and Wæver 2003). Nonetheless, the example they offered was the Gulf and the Levant as subcomplexes within the Middle Eastern RSC. By comparison, Nordic security relations have been considerably less intense in recent decades.

In short, therefore, RSCT was designed for higher levels of analysis, focusing primarily on the components making up global security. Smaller subregions, such as the Nordic one, do not "fit" the theory, despite potentially having analytically and politically important security relations. Furthermore, as mentioned, the aim of RSCT is not to explain "why security takes a particular form in this region or that, or what causes major changes" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 84). Thus, even if from an empirical standpoint it can be argued that the Nordic states have dynamic security interactions, such as NORDEFECO, it is not the aim of RSCT to capture and analyze this. Rather, the ambition is to "assemble a global picture" through a minimalist theory (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 85).

That said, there are elements of RSCT that can be utilized in a study of subregions. For instance, Buzan and Wæver differentiate between four types of RSCs depending on polarity and the role played by regional, great, and global powers (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 55ff.): (1) standard; (2) centered; (3) great power; and (4) supercomplexes. When studying subregions, the impact of external powers is arguably even more relevant than in an RSC, as a subregion may consist entirely of small states. As will be returned to below, Edström and Westberg (2020a) have elaborated on this in their study of middle powers.

An alternative theoretical approach that can be applied to security regions is Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett's *security community* (Adler and Barnett 1998), which focuses on how international communities of trust are built. Inspired by Karl W. Deutsch, who first coined the term, they define a pluralistic security community as a "transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change" (Adler and Barnett 1998, 30). Peace, they continue, "is tied to the existence of a transnational community" (Adler and Barnett 1998, 31). Such a community requires shared identities, values, and meanings, many-sided relations, and reciprocity of long-term interests. In regarding security communities as socially constructed, Adler and Barnett share Buzan and Wæver's social constructivist approach. Such communities emerge or disappear over time through political processes, with Adler and Barnett proposing a three-phased approach, from *nascent* to *ascendant* to *mature*, focusing on the emergence of, among other things, institutions, organizations, and collective identities. However, while RSCT sees regions as subsystems within the global order,

security community theory appears less focused on the global dimension and how this impacts a security community. Though students of Nordic security and Nordic peace have been inspired by this line of theorizing when attempting to explain Nordic security evolution over time (e.g., see [Wiberg 2000](#); [Archer and Joenniemi 2003](#)), they have tended to ignore or put limited emphasis on external factors outside the Nordic region.

A Region-building Approach

Iver B. Neumann, in his book *Uses of the Other*, argued for what he called a *region-building approach* to study the genesis of the region(s) of Northern Europe ([Neumann 1999](#)). Inspired by Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism, Neumann argued that regions could also be imagined communities ([Neumann 1999](#), 115), and that by analyzing the political processes used by region builders to define a region in time and space, one can uncover their historical genesis as well as their historically contingent character ([Neumann 1999](#), 116). Various overlapping and competing regions may emerge, rise, and fall over time, such as Scandinavia, and the Nordic and the Baltic regions. In order for a broad political consensus to emerge on where these regions are (in terms of how far they stretch) and what they consist of (e.g., culture, economy, or security), several political processes, narratives, and policies must take place. In this way, according to Neumann, the rise and fall of a region can be analytically studied.

An interesting analytical move by Neumann was to place extant theories of region building in a continuum from *inside-out* to *outside-in*, with the former referring to theories building on the cultural, political, or other particularities of a region. At the extreme end would be eighteenth-century claims that the harsh Nordic *climate* determined Nordic culture, thus making it a unique sociocultural region. Deutsch's above-mentioned notion of security communities is also primarily an inside-out perspective.² For Deutsch, "the common cultural traits of the Nordic region have in themselves been strong enough for the region to transcend international anarchy" ([Neumann 1999](#), 118). Also, according to Neumann, Brundtland's Nordic Balance is predominantly inside-out, with the region's relative peace and stability primarily due to the Nordic states following clever policies, rather than down to deliberate superpower restraint. At the other end of the spectrum, outside-in theories emphasize the international system, great powers, and

geopolitics. Structural realism and military strategic studies are often associated with such outside-in perspectives. Among scholars from the region, the early twentieth-century political scientist Rudolf Kjellén is known for such a perspective, even if he held that "geopolitics" must be combined with "ethnopolitics" (the nation)—in other words, an inside-out perspective ([Tunander 2008](#)). Empirically, there is little doubt that the big European powers, such as Great Britain, Germany, and Russia, have often engaged the Nordic region with both troops and policies, and that the bipolar Cold War world impacted the region as well.

In short, both inside-out and outside-in perspectives are useful in analyzing the evolution of the Nordic region as a political entity. The degree of "Nordicness" will vary over time, so students must study the relevant policies, narratives, and processes to capture it. Furthermore, the same analytical tools may be useful for a more narrow study of Nordic security. To the extent that there exists a Nordic region (which arguably has not always been the case), the security dimension is but one of several elements, and probably not the most important. Neumann's region-building approach stresses that Nordic security, as is the case for the Nordic region more generally, has emerged historically through sociopolitical processes that ebb and flow over time. Arguably, we are now at high tide. Given recent developments in NORDEFCO and other areas, there are sufficient policies and practices taking place to legitimize a theoretically informed study of Nordic security developments.

Applying the inside-out/outside-in perspective to more recent studies helps illuminate their analytical emphasis. The implication of the shift from a bipolar to a unipolar system after the Cold War was that the low tension and peace enjoyed by the Nordic region was no longer unique. Subsequently, Norden had to redefine itself as part of Europe ([Wæver 1992](#)). Sweden and Finland joined the EU in 1995 and, with the continued enlargement of the following decade, the EU rapidly evolved as the main political force in Europe. Theories on European integration therefore also became more prevalent in the Nordic case, with Pernille Rieker, for instance, arguing that the "Nordic Balance is vanishing and being replaced by an ongoing process of Europeanization" ([Rieker 2004](#)). In other words, the EU had emerged as an outside-in force affecting the Nordic countries, making them adapt, learn, and socialize. However, Rieker found that it was only Sweden that had really changed its security policy, while the others adapted more instrumentally and kept (in the case of Norway and Denmark) their Atlantic security orientation. In short, she showed that identity, history, and security policy traditions still played an

2 See also Perri Joenniemi's discussion of Deutsch and the Nordic region in [Joenniemi \(1992\)](#).

important—to use Neumann’s terminology—inside-out role.

Studies and theories about Nordic security and defense matters became rarer in the 2000s, as security in Europe was increasingly regarded as being based on soft power and values. Armed forces in the Nordic countries faced drastic cuts and restructuring, with the focus now predominantly on international operations rather than national or regional security. As will be discussed further below, today’s NORDEFCO was largely born of these cuts, being an attempt to retain a minimum level of fighting power through shared force production, in other words, a predominantly inside-out perspective.

However, Tuomas Forsberg argued in 2013 that Nordic defense cooperation was not driven solely by cost-efficiency considerations, as changes in the security environment had “pushed the Nordic states closer together” (Forsberg 2013). Specifically, the reduced interest of the United States in Northern Europe, combined with Russia’s increased military capacity, contributed to the development of Nordic cooperation. Forsberg claimed that since “cost-efficiency, geography, values and identity are more or less constant factors, we need to look for other reasons to explain variation over time in the motivation for increased Nordic cooperation” (Forsberg 2013, 1175). In other words, the inside-out perspective must be complemented with an outside-in element to explain change.

The Return of Nordic Security Theories

With the Russian annexation of Crimea and warfighting in Eastern Ukraine from 2014 onward, Nordic security returned as a topic both politically and academically. An early contribution was Henrik Breitenbauch’s (2015) application of Buzan and Wæver’s RSC to the Nordic region. Breitenbauch defined Northern Europe as a sub-region of the Euro-Russian RSC but loosened the theoretical constraints somewhat, distinguishing between an outside-in “security region” and an inside-out “political region.” According to Breitenbauch, the former enables the latter: “A ‘security region’ (...) is shaped by external power relations and represents an exogenously given possibility for internal, regional cooperation. A ‘political region,’ in contrast, is the exploitation of such a possibility and the space provided by a security region” (Breitenbauch 2015, 114). However, Breitenbauch placed particular emphasis on the inside-out forces as the determining factor in Nordic security relations: “As the security region is shaped outside-in, the states involved are ‘thrown’ into their spatial context. It is an *inescapable* condition of their geopolitical being” (Breitenbauch 2015, 118, my

emphasis). This spatial and relational condition functions not only as a set of shackles, but “imperceptibly affects their outlooks” (Breitenbauch 2015).

The structural constraints in Breitenbauch’s approach can be challenged. For instance, it was far from certain that all European (and Nordic) states would unite as strongly as they did in their response to Russia after the annexation of Crimea. Compared to the mute response that greeted the Russian invasion of Georgia, the Western reaction this time was considerable. In other words, the political implications of events taking place outside the region are not a given. Instead, events must be interpreted and policies developed inside-out. While changes in external forces create new opportunities and delimit others, the primary explanatory factors for policy change can be located within the region. This was evident in the Nordic Balance of the Cold War, which involved significant Nordic push-back against external pressure; was visible in the post-Cold War period when some states joined the EU and others did not; and can be seen now in the differing responses of the various Nordic countries to the return of geopolitics.

These responses formed the starting point for a group of scholars contributing to a special section of *Global Affairs* in 2018 (Brommesson 2018). Their approach utilized the notion of “security cultures,” claiming that “the cultural argument should be placed within an eclectic understanding where states can depart both from rational calculations as well as normative persuasiveness in their foreign- and security policies, but both occurring within a cultural context” (Brommesson 2018, 357). This is predominantly an inside-out account of Nordic states’ security policies, built *inter alia* on the “security community” literature and “role theory.” However, the authors did not ignore the broader geopolitical outside-in context. “Russian recidivism,” writes Hyde-Price, “is arguably the primary factor: without the return of an increasingly authoritarian Russia committed to rebuilding its military capabilities and reasserting its great power prerogatives, it is most unlikely that the Nordic countries would have felt the need to focus on regional security and defence cooperation” (Hyde-Price 2018, 437–38). While the authors’ aim is primarily to broaden our understanding of national policy formulations through an empirical emphasis on the security cultures of the five Nordic countries, there is recognition that these are developed in a broader international and material context.

Edström, Gyllensporre, and Westberg (2019) and Edström and Westberg (2020c) have also analyzed the defense strategies of the Nordic states, asking how changes in their external environment have impacted their alignment strategies. They study how “four

potential external shocks” (the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Russian aggression against Georgia, Russian aggression against Ukraine, and the rise of ISIL) influenced the alignment strategies of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. On the one hand, they conclude, the external environment may have a significant impact on the Nordic states’ national defense strategies. On the other hand, states still have room to maneuver. The Nordic states chose different responses irrespective of their NATO alignment, with factors such as historical experience, military capacities, and threat perception also relevant.

Edström and Westberg (2020a, 2020b), inspired by RSCT, provide the latest contribution to theorizing Nordic security. In contrast to Buzan and Wæver, however, their interest lies in the policies pursued by states, and how regional circumstances play into this. The most elaborated of these studies analyzes the defense and military strategies of middle-power states across the globe (Edström and Westberg 2020a). In doing so, they argue that middle powers also matter to regional security, rather than simply the superpowers and great powers that RSCT primarily focuses on. Their analysis differentiates between four kinds of RSCs with various degrees of great power influence and penetration. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, they find that “characteristics relating to differences between RSC may enable or restrain middle powers from using the regional level as a force multiplier” (Edström and Westberg 2020a, 36). In other words, the behavior of a middle-power state is impacted by the type of RSC it is part of. Furthermore, and important to our discussion here, they conclude that states matter: “Our main argument is that analyses of alignment and military strategies of specific states have to acknowledge that states come in different shapes and sizes, and that states’ strategies for influence and security are affected by power asymmetries between small states, middle powers, great powers, and superpowers” (Edström and Westberg 2020a, 8). This supports the argument that the strategic orientation—and indeed foreign and security policies—of smaller states is shaped by both outside forces and inside responses.

Toward an Analytical Framework

The discussion above has demonstrated that a combination of outside-in and inside-out forces is an appropriate starting point for analyzing security dynamics in subregions, including Nordic security and Nordic defense cooperation. However, instead of using outside-in and inside-out to categorize theoretical approaches, as Neumann did, this article uses the terms to categorize the various forces impacting Nordic security policies. The

relative weighting of these forces may vary over time and according to theoretical preferences. Furthermore, the discussion has demonstrated that some of these forces are negative—imposing pressure on Nordic states—while others are positive, representing initiatives and opportunities. This applies to both outside-in and inside-out forces. Based on this, we can sketch out a simple framework for analysis of Nordic defense cooperation.

First, there are *outside-in pull forces*. These are international forces that provide the Nordic states with new opportunities—for example, EU enlargement and integration. Second, there are *outside-in push forces*. These may be negative forces constraining or limiting the policy options of Nordic states, such as the bipolar Cold War structure. However, such forces—for instance, Russia’s resurgence since 2014—can also serve to mobilize new security initiatives in the region as a response to the deteriorated security environment. Third, there are *outside-in resisting forces*, consisting of active policies from states outside the region that seek to undermine closer security cooperation initiatives. Fourth, there are *inside-out pull forces*, which encourage greater Nordic defense cooperation. This can take the form of shared culture, political will, or concrete projects such as the Stoltenberg Report (see below). Fifth, there are *inside-out resisting forces*, which are forces obstructing Nordic defense cooperation, such as foot-dragging in military–political bureaucracies or different procurement systems.

In addition to these four types of forces, we can distinguish between three levels of analysis. The outside-in forces are by definition global, Western, or European, and can be described as the *international level*. The inside-out forces can be separated into a national *political level* and a *bureaucratic level*. The latter may include both military and civilian staff working in public service. In the context of Nordic defense cooperation, they are likely to be predominantly military, though civilian staff in Nordic ministries of defense and foreign affairs have also played a role.

Taken together, we can illustrate the forces molding Nordic defense cooperation, as depicted in figure 1. Arguably, this analytical framework can bring us closer to understanding security policy developments in the Nordic region than, for instance, RSCT, as it allows for dynamics and change, with the various forces assigned more or less emphasis depending on the situation.

However, this analytical framework does not in itself *explain* developments—while it offers a systematic approach of studying Nordic defense cooperation, it does not attempt to tell us *why* certain forces are more dominant at different times or in particular cases. It is, in other words, not a theory, meaning it can be

Outside-in forces impacting Nordic defense cooperation			
	Pull	Push	Resist
International level	US bilateral engagement; NATO arrangements with Sweden and Finland (EOP, Host Nation)	Cold War great power rivalry; Russian military/political behavior after 2014	Russian “active measures” to preserve geostrategic status Quo



Nordic Defense Cooperation



Inside-out forces impacting Nordic defense cooperation		
	Pull	Resist
National political level	Culture; Stoltenberg Report; speeches; bilateral agreements; shrinking defense budgets	Identity; alliance commitments; non-alignment
Bureaucratic level	CHODs initiative; sector needs and opportunities (Cross Border Training)	Procurement rules, traditions and investment cycles; sector needs, requirements, demands and expectations

Figure 1. Forces shaping Nordic defense cooperation.

applied in combination with several epistemological approaches, provided they allow for both outside-in and inside-out factors. Hence, an orthodox structural realist approach would likely dismiss the relevance of inside-out forces, and therefore fail to see the utility of this framework. However, softer versions of realism—such as Breitenbach’s approach, or Edström and Westberg’s neoclassical realism—as well as constructivist and liberalist methodologies, should be able to draw on it as a means of providing more in-depth analyses and explanations of Nordic defense cooperation.

To illustrate the utility of this framework, the article next applies it to the birth and evolution of NORDEFECO, which—as will be demonstrated—was primarily initiated by inside-out forces from the bureaucratic level, though global-level external forces have also had some impact.

The NORDEFECO Case

The current rather formalized format of Nordic defense cooperation is a relatively new feature, dating back to December 2009 when the Nordic defense ministers officially established NORDEFECO as a cooperative structure, its primary purpose being to “produce national military capabilities in a more cost-efficient way by means of multinational cooperation” (Røksund 2011, 4). NORDEFECO built upon three existing Nordic frameworks for military cooperation, but these—as well as other preceding initiatives and projects—had been ad hoc, primarily bilateral in nature, and with less political buy-in than NORDEFECO.

Why was NORDEFECO established? Was it primarily a response to exogenous (outside-in) forces, or the

result of endogenic (inside-out) processes? Furthermore, as NORDEFECO evolved, did other, resisting, forces play a role? And how did increased tensions in Europe following the Russian incursion into Ukraine impact NORDEFECO? These are the questions this section will seek to illuminate with the help of the previously outlined analytical framework.

Inside-out Pull Forces: Bureaucratic Level

The Nordic defense cooperation that became NORDEFECO was the conclusion of a process that began in 2007 with the publication of the Norwegian–Swedish *feasibility study* (Norwegian and Swedish Chiefs of Defence 2007). It continued in 2008 with a Norwegian–Swedish–Finnish *progress report* (NORDSUP 2008). The driving forces behind these studies were the Nordic Chiefs of Defence (CHOD)—Sverre Diesen (Norway), Håkan Syrén (Sweden), and Pauli Juhani Kaskeala (Finland)—who had a shared concern regarding drastically reduced capacities in the Nordic armed forces (Saxi 2011, 49; Dahl 2014, 5; Westberg 2015, 104). The main argument of these reports was that—due to a combination of the increasing expense of military materiel and shrinking budgets—these countries could no longer sustain complete and balanced armed forces on their own. This posed a severe threat to operational capabilities, with several weapons systems and units nearing a critical level of sustainability.

The solution, they argued, was to develop shared force production and logistics, procuring the same materiel and trimming down each country's national base, support, and logistical structures in favor of more integrated solutions. This would require system similarity, including similar materiel and education. However, as stressed by Sverre Diesen, the purpose was not to build joint forces but to establish joint force production (Diesen 2011, 148). Norway, Sweden, and Finland thus aimed to cooperate closely on education and training, exercises, research and development, procurement of equipment, and participation in international operations (at the time, Denmark prioritized differently and stayed aloof; see Saxi 2011, 55–57). The nascent cooperation was considered challenging, demanding compromises and trade-offs, but it was argued that this was the only way to maintain “relevant and sustainable defence forces” (NORDSUP 2008, 2).

In 2008, a Norwegian–Swedish–Finnish working group identified as many as 140 areas of potential bilateral and trilateral defense cooperation (Saxi 2019, 663). Shortly after, the Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish ministries of defense agreed on a new organization,

the Nordic Supportive Defence Structures. This complemented two existing structures, the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support and the Nordic Armaments Cooperation. In 2009, these were merged into a single structure, and NORDEFECO was born (Saxi 2019, 664).

As NORDEFECO was largely initiated by the military itself (by the mentioned CHODs), it can be described as an *inside-out pull force*. It was a result of initiatives and ideas that emerged bottom-up, and was implemented through feasibility studies and working groups within the military–bureaucratic organizations. The facilitating external factors were reduced defense budgets (from the political level) and the rapidly growing expense of military materiel. However, these forces did not create NORDEFECO—though they constrained and undermined the status quo, they did not in themselves contribute to the Nordic initiatives.

Another example of an inside-out pull force from the bureaucratic or military level is the relatively successful Cross Border Training (CBT): the weekly air exercises between the air forces of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Since 2008, CBT has taken place in the territory around and above the Bodø, Kallax, and Rovaniemi airfields, and has been cost-saving as no extraordinary deployments or logistics have been necessary. It was initiated and executed on the military operational level prior to NORDEFECO's establishment, but has nonetheless been reported as a NORDEFECO success. The Arctic Challenge Exercise, a biannual air force exercise that emerged out of CBT, is a similar case. Over time, it has grown to include additional participants from several states, and in recent years has involved more than 100 planes. It is very much an initiative initiated and managed by the air forces themselves, and is loosely anchored in the framework of NORDEFECO (NORDEFECO 2019, 2020).

Inside-out Pull Forces: Political Level

The political appetite for enhanced Nordic cooperation was also important for the birth of NORDEFECO (Saxi 2011, 67). For most of the 2000s, security and defense policy was not high on the Nordic agenda. However, in 2008 the Nordic foreign ministers invited former Norwegian foreign minister Thorvald Stoltenberg to put forward concrete proposals aimed at enhancing Nordic foreign and security policy cooperation.

The Stoltenberg Report (Stoltenberg 2009) was delivered in 2009, and concluded that Nordic security cooperation had great potential in the following core areas: peace building, air surveillance, maritime surveillance and the Arctic, civil emergency preparedness, the foreign

services, and the military. The report also called for a declaration of Nordic security solidarity. The Stoltenberg Report's stated expectations on the military side drew on existing interactions and practical collaboration between the Nordic militaries as a means of achieving greater integration and spillover between different defense mechanisms.

In the years immediately after it was issued, the Stoltenberg Report served as a key constitutive document when it came to envisioning a joint Nordic security project. Nordic security and defense communities exhibited an almost euphoric enthusiasm for Nordic defense cooperation, with various new ideas and proposals inspired by the report. At the political level, proposals for joint force production and integration, a Nordic solidarity declaration, joint unmanned aerial systems, and suggestions to deepen cooperation in the defense industry, cyber, intelligence, and exercises were all championed (Søreide et al. 2015b).

In short, the rhetorical political ambition for Nordic defense cooperation was high in the years following 2008. More generally, however, the positive attitude toward Nordic security cooperation had been present much longer. Even before Norway and Denmark signed the Washington Treaty and joined NATO in 1949, there were serious deliberations about establishing a Scandinavian defense pact. This attempt failed due to diverging political priorities: non-alignment for Sweden contra a West-oriented alignment for Denmark and Norway. Security was also exempted from the agenda of the Nordic Council. Nevertheless, positive Nordic cooperation in other sectors probably made it easier to support enhanced defense cooperation when the time became ripe. The political pull force was therefore not key to NORDEFECO's establishment, but rather a basic precondition that was invigorated when other conditions (inside-out and outside-in) made this possible.

However, after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the political pull force became more important as a factor forging new initiatives in NORDEFECO. In a joint op-ed published in 2015, the Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, and Finnish ministers of defense, together with the Icelandic foreign minister, argued that after Crimea it was "no longer business as usual." The Nordic countries were now faced with "a new normality" (Søreide et al. 2015a), with the ministers arguing that their countries should meet this situation with solidarity and enhanced cooperation in order to improve their security. Furthermore, they stated that they should work toward being "able to act together in a crisis" (Søreide et al. 2015a).

A few years later, in a document entitled *Vision 2025*, the Nordic defense ministers declared they would "im-

prove our defence capability and cooperation in peace, crisis and conflict" (NORDEFECO 2018b). The extension of NORDEFECO into crisis and conflict was a significant step forward, paving the way for sixteen concrete security and defense cooperation targets aimed at regional security.

Following the events of 2014, NOREFECO became an important facilitator for high-level Nordic security policy dialogue on regional security developments (NORDEFECO 2015, 7). The Nordic states also took steps to exchange information regarding emergency planning and readiness (NORDEFECO 2015, 28). In 2016, secure communications via video links were established between the Nordic defense ministries, which allowed for more frequent and inexpensive day-to-day dialogue on classified matters (NORDEFECO 2017, 10). In 2017, the first tabletop exercise for senior military and defense ministry officials was organized, providing a setting for discussing simulated scenarios in the Nordic region. The aim was to strengthen NORDEFECO as "a forum for consultations and sharing situational awareness, also in a time of crisis" (NORDEFECO 2018a, 8).

Lastly, in September 2020 the defense ministers of Norway, Sweden, and Finland signed a "Statement of Intent on Enhanced Operational Cooperation" (Statement of Intent 2020), based on statements in *Vision 2025* regarding "cooperation in peace, crisis and conflict." The statement "outlines the common ambition of the Participants to be able and ready to conduct operations in crisis and conflict if so decided, noting that Norway plans to transfer command to NATO in crisis and war." More concretely, the states agreed to "explore the possibility for common operations planning in certain areas," while the military authorities were tasked with forming "a trilateral strategic planning group" to begin preparations for such planning. Given the political sensitivities in all three countries regarding binding commitments to, or outside of, NATO, this is significant. Norway's apparent need to reference NATO, and Sweden and Finland's acceptance of this, bears witness to a political desire to overcome formal obstacles standing in the way of achieving better common defense. This agreement therefore represents significant pull from the political level, which would have been unthinkable just a few years earlier.

In addition, a number of bilateral agreements have been signed among the Nordics in recent years. Sweden and Finland have built a particularly strong partnership along numerous dimensions, including exercises and training, surveillance, and maintaining territorial integrity. They have also taken measures to create the conditions for joint military action. Much of this is being driven at the political level, with the two defense

ministers reportedly meeting over 20 times in 2019–2020, and the two parliaments passing legislation allowing for swift military in support of each other in cases of crisis or armed attack (Lindroos and von Boguslawski 2020).

To sum up, inside-out push forces at the Nordic political level have been present for decades, but were constrained by Cold War strategies. While they played a secondary role in the inception of NORDEFECO, without the necessary political blessings the initiatives at the bureaucratic level would have failed. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the political-level pull forces increased significantly, with NORDEFECO also utilized for enhanced security cooperation at the political level. NORDEFECO thus became the vehicle for collaborative regional security.

Analytically, one could expand this inside-out category to encompass more than the day-to-day political processes discussed here. Given that politics and policies result from broader societal processes, the potential for deeper understanding is significant. Foreign policy analysis, a subfield within IR, has uncovered many of the push forces from lobbyists and bureaucracies that lie behind states' policy choices (see Hadfield, Smith, and Dunne 2016). Such studies have also revealed many resisting forces, which will be returned to below. Furthermore, constructivist studies of national identity and foreign policy have broadened the perspective and provided important contributions (Hansen and Wæver 2001; Brommesson 2018). Scholars with a (neo)classical realist orientation are also conscious of the relevance of such "internal" factors. Coming from such a realist position, Edström, Gyllensporre, and Westberg (2019) bring in elements such as "geographical characteristics" and "historical experience," describing them as "intervening variables" when explaining variations in Nordic defense strategies. Additionally, Colin Gray's many acclaimed studies of strategy include concepts such as "strategic cultures" to emphasize how attitudes and traditions within state armed forces impact strategic orientation (Gray 1999). Moreover, broadening this concept to "security culture" offers a means of capturing a wider political and cultural context in which security policies are formulated (Hyde-Price 2018, 439). In short, inside-out forces, in one shape or another, are compatible with various epistemological orientations.

Outside-in Push Forces: Russia

In the first years of NORDEFECO, outside-in push forces were weak. To paraphrase the terminology of Buzan and Wæver (2003, 62) and Edström and Westberg (2020a,

35), it may be said that the "global level power" penetration into the Nordic subregion was limited. Russia was no longer considered a security threat, in military terms at least. The post-Cold War period thus provided the Nordic countries with opportunities they lacked during the Cold War and the Nordic Balance, best illustrated by the Swedish and Finnish decision to join the EU. However, in terms of Nordic defense cooperation, the outside push forces were modest. Sweden and Finland participated in NATO operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan, but did not approach the alliance in other ways. The security situation in the Nordic-Baltic region was considered strong and stable, and NORDEFECO was therefore driven primarily by inside-out forces.

As mentioned, this changed with the Russian annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine. This shocked Nordic political leaders, as it did the rest of Europe. The blunt violation of the Helsinki Final Act and UN principles of international order made it politically impossible to continue relations with Russia as they had been before. Furthermore, continued Russian anti-Western rhetoric, unannounced snap military exercises close to the Nordic states, aggressive military air maneuvers in the Baltic Sea region, and trolling and influence campaigns convinced the Nordic leaders that Russia could no longer be regarded as a "partner" (Frear, Łukasz, and Kearns 2014). On the contrary, Russia again became the main point of reference when discussing the Nordic countries' military needs. Today, defense against potential Russian aggression is the defining factor of defense planning in the Nordic countries.

The Nordic states have come to regard Russia's unpredictability and its revisionist challenge to the post-Cold War European security architecture as the greatest challenge to their security. It is today a shared opinion among Nordic security practitioners that the new security situation faced by the Nordic states—the outside-in push forces—has become a key driver for Nordic defense cooperation, as illustrated in *Vision 2025*.

Outside-in Resistance: Russia

Even if Russian political and military behavior was a key push factor in reinvigorating NORDEFECO after 2014, it is unlikely this was Russia's intention. Contrary to the Kremlin's strategic objectives, Russia's warfare in Ukraine has cemented a negative attitude toward Russia and a positive attitude toward the West among the majority of the Ukrainian population, and a similar pattern can be seen among the Nordics. Years of carefully built regional cooperation between the Nordic states and Russia—including increased trade and

cultural exchanges—was more or less dismantled, or at least frozen, overnight in 2014. Sanctions replaced trade and security policies changed. These side effects/consequences of Russia's violent actions most likely ran counter to Russian geostrategic objectives regarding the Nordic region. At the same time, Russian leaders have, particularly since 2012–2014, considered themselves to be at war with the United States and the West, albeit using non-violent means (Jonsson 2019).

Hence, if we look at Russian policies directed at the Nordic states over recent years, they seem aimed at preventing or minimizing Swedish and Finnish rapprochement toward NATO and the United States. For instance, Kragh and Åsberg write that, through various tools often described as “active measures,” “Russian politicians and diplomats have proactively intervened in Sweden's domestic political affairs” (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 774). Furthermore, they uncover that

a number of pro-Kremlin NGOs and GONGOs have become operational in Sweden. In social media, troll armies are targeting journalists and academics, including the “hijacking” of Twitter accounts. Disinformation on NATO and suspected intrusions by foreign submarines have appeared in Swedish media, themes which were picked up by Sputnik, RT and other sources of Russian public diplomacy and broadcast to an international audience. Lastly, there exist examples of important target groups in Sweden, such as political actors, NGOs and newspapers, who wittingly or unwittingly have performed a role as interlocutors of disinformation. (Kragh and Åsberg 2017)

They conclude that the overarching goal of Russian policy toward Sweden “is to preserve the geostrategic status quo, which is identified with a security order minimizing NATO presence in the region” (Kragh and Åsberg 2017, 808).

In Finland, fewer attempts at influencing the population are apparent, though the media has reported what appears to be systematic acquisition by Russian interests of land and properties in key locations near strategically important facilities. In particular, properties owned by Russians in the Finnish Turku archipelago have created concern. One such property was reported to have “nine piers, a helipad, a swimming pool draped in camouflage netting and enough housing—all of it equipped with satellite dishes—to accommodate a small army” (Higgins 2018). Another had sophisticated communications equipment. The fear was that the Russian military may be the real owner of these properties. In 2017, more than 400 police officers and military personnel raided 17 Russian-owned properties in the region. Though

officially the operation was aimed at cracking down on money laundering, observers believed it also related to national security (Higgins 2018). Finland was among the first European states to express apprehension regarding Russian hybrid warfare, with such concern reinforced by subsequent Russian military and non-military activity (Pynnöniemi and Saari 2017). In short, Russian activity in and around Finland appears predominantly hostile and subversive, rather than driven less by good intentions. This, combined with continued Russian emphasis at the diplomatic level that Finland “upholds its military and political neutrality” (Lavrov 2020), points toward a Russia policy aimed at preserving Finland's status quo and signaling the consequences should Helsinki chose a different path.

Norway and Denmark have also been subject to tougher language from Moscow over recent years. As NATO members, they are increasingly criticized for being an extended arm of the United States, with almost all NATO activity in the region routinely criticized by Russia (Wilhelmsen 2021). Overall, Russia's overt and covert policy toward the Nordic states appears to be aimed at preventing the United States or NATO gaining a stronger role in the region, and undermining a united Western front against Russia. While such policies have not explicitly been targeted against NORDEFECO, they represent *de facto* attempts to counter military cohesion and cooperation between the NATO and non-aligned countries in the region.

In short, since 2014, a higher degree of external power (i.e., Russian) influence and interference can be seen in the Nordic subregion. These outside-in forces are significant, and play an important role in the processes shaping NORDEFECO. However, there is no direct causal link between Russian assertiveness and concrete new initiatives, or between Russian resistance and the absence of tighter Nordic defense cooperation. Nordic policymakers and practitioners have had to interpret Russia's behavior, draw their own conclusions, and design countermeasures. At the same time, they have been helped by other outside-in forces, in particular from the United States and NATO, which have sought to strengthen Nordic cooperation.

Outside-in Pull Forces: the United States and NATO

Several key allies of the Nordic countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, increasingly see the Nordics and the Baltics as comprising a single operational theater. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has stressed the importance of Nordic defense cooperation as a means of strengthening security in the

Nordic–Baltic region (Stoltenberg 2015), while in May 2016, US President Obama invited the Nordic prime ministers jointly to Washington for a US–Nordic summit and encouraged them to “stick together,” further advancing the Nordics as a common force (Harris 2016).

Nordic officials stress the importance of strengthening transatlantic ties in order to meet the post–Crimea security situation. This applies to both NATO members Norway and Denmark, and militarily non-aligned Sweden and Finland. As some have previously argued, Nordic cooperation is not perceived in any country as a viable security policy alternative in and of itself. Rather, it is largely agreed that Nordic defense cooperation is merely a supplement to NATO, the EU, and bilateral ties with the United States. Nordic cooperation can no longer be construed as neutralist, and is therefore *de facto* another vehicle for tying Sweden and Finland closer to the United States and NATO.

Sweden and Finland have both signed host nation support agreements with NATO, and have joined the alliance’s enhanced opportunities partnership. Swedish and Finnish troops are also contributing to the NATO Response Force, the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, and the French-led European Intervention Initiative, thereby—given Norway and Denmark’s participation in these formats—aligning the Nordic states more closely (Bredesen 2020; Fägersten 2020).

Strengthening transatlantic ties also means increased US involvement in Nordic exercises, with the above-mentioned biannual Arctic Challenge Exercise—which has become one of the largest air exercises—seeing a marked expansion in US and Western participation (NORDEFECO 2018a, 3, 6, 18). In 2018, Norway hosted NATO’s high-visibility Trident Juncture exercise, which involved around 50,000 troops from 31 nations, including Sweden and Finland. This also involved significant US troops, including the US aircraft carrier *Harry S. Truman*, and was the first US aircraft carrier group to sail north of the Arctic Circle since 1991. Major national exercises, such as Norway’s Cold Response and Sweden’s Exercise Aurora 17 and Northern Wind in 2019, have also involved large-scale participation from the United States and a number of European NATO states.

Increased US engagement in the region, including new bilateral agreements with Sweden and Finland, as well as the US Marines prepositioning equipment and conducting regular exercises in Norway, has also stimulated Nordic cooperation. Also, those championing a strong US and Atlantic orientation in Copenhagen and Oslo have been forced to follow in the United States’ wake when it has entered the Baltic Sea region. The outside-in pull factor is therefore significant. Both NATO

and the United States have offered the region concrete projects, bringing Sweden and Finland closer to NATO (and thereby strengthening Nordic collaboration) and to the United States. Great power engagement in the region has also served as a catalyst for regional cooperation.

Outside-in forces, both positive and negative, have undoubtedly been significant in shaping Nordic security and NORDEFECO. Nonetheless, it is important to note that despite the renewed importance of these outside-in forces, the new NORDEFECO initiatives have been developed inside-out. While outside-in push, pull, and resistance forces can enable and constrain, they do not in themselves define joint Nordic defense policies. Furthermore, internal obstacles may be just as challenging as those stemming from outside powers.

Inside-out Resistance: Political Level

It is well known, if not always admitted, that many Nordic security and defense cooperation initiatives over the last ten years have proven challenging, to say the least. When it comes to concrete projects, political will has been less enthusiastic than the rhetoric would suggest.

An example is Stoltenberg’s proposed Nordic declaration of solidarity, namely that “the Nordic governments could issue a mutually binding declaration containing a security policy guarantee. In such a declaration, the countries could clarify in binding terms how they would respond if a Nordic country were subject to external attack or undue pressure” (Stoltenberg 2009, 34). A declaration of solidarity was indeed passed in 2011, but its formulations were neither binding nor very explicit: “Should a Nordic country be affected, the others will, upon request from that country, assist with relevant means” (Nordic Declaration of Solidarity 2011). The rest of the declaration was similarly vague.

There has also been a general reluctance on the part of the Nordics to “stick together” as closely as the United States has at times desired. While most agree that greater unity would give more presence and influence, there remains a low-key “beauty contest” to be Washington’s number one Nordic ally. As a result, the Nordics keep a watchful eye on each other when it comes to, for example, invitations to the White House or official visits.

Denmark was the most reluctant partner in NORDEFECO’s first years (Wivel 2018), with Copenhagen’s political priorities primarily focused on Washington and NATO as “the only game in town” (Jakobsen 2006, cited in Saxi 2011, 55). Since 2003, Denmark’s strategic military orientation had been to move away from holding a balanced military force, abandoning certain platforms (such as submarines) in favor of developing “niche capacities” for international deployment with its

big allies (Saxi 2011, 45). As a result, Denmark opted out of many NORDEFECO initiatives. Also, Norway has over the years regarded Nordic cooperation as “nice to have,” but not fully necessary (Græger 2018). An Atlantic orientation has remained the priority for Norwegian politicians when it comes to “safeguarding Norwegian security and for international status-seeking” (Græger 2018, 372).

When it comes to concrete Nordic defense initiatives, some have been implemented with varying degrees of success, while others have hardly been implemented at all or seen slow progress and a lack of continuity, with some eventually grinding to a halt. In particular, cooperation on defense materiel has struggled, with NORDEFECO failing to achieve the intended system similarity, and therefore joint force production or harmonization of military needs. Procurement processes have remained national prerogatives, with planning processes based on national needs, priorities, procedures, and planning cycles (Saxi 2011, 75). There has never been sufficient political will to change this, which has at times caused significant crises in bilateral relationships, particularly regarding joint acquisition and procurement projects. In some cases, protection of national defense industries may also lie behind this reluctance (Bredesen and Friis 2019).

Following several failed bilateral procurement processes between Sweden and Norway, the political drive for NORDEFECO also cooled. In 2013, for instance, Sweden conducted an inquiry into its international defense cooperation, led by diplomat Tomas Bertelman (Bertelman 2013). The report argued that there was “too great a distance between positive political rhetoric and real political willingness regarding defence cooperation” (Saxi 2019, 670). In other words, insufficient political will existed to overcome the numerous obstacles preventing substantial Nordic defense integration.

Several projects are also limited by political-legal circumstances related to NATO membership. Many of NORDEFECO’s landmark agreements, such as the exchange of air surveillance data (NOECAS) and the easy access agreement, remain limited to peacetime. This limits their value when it comes to enhancing Nordic security, with many Nordic officials expressing a strong desire for the NOECAS agreement to be extended to times of crisis and even wartime. However, Swedish and Finnish military non-alignment, and the Norwegian preference for formal treaty-enshrined guaranties, has thus far made this difficult. Sweden and Finland have, though, found it somewhat easier to deepen their bilateral cooperation “beyond peacetime conditions” (Bringéus 2016, 14–15). The Nordic NATO states worry about becom-

ing dependent upon these arrangements, only to see their radar screens go dark and landing rights withdrawn in a crisis—for them, NORDEFECO is an addition, not an alternative, to NATO. Conversely, Sweden and Finland worry about losing—at least theoretically—their national freedom of action to keep out of a conflict (Bringéus 2016, 13; Dalsjö 2017).

In short, the Nordic states’ divergent strategic orientations have not changed as a result of outside-in push forces. Sweden and Finland remain non-aligned, while Norway and Denmark remain in NATO. This limits the extent and depth of possible defense cooperation. Despite the language of NORDEFECO’s *Vision 2025* referring to cooperation in “peace, crisis, and conflict,” certain red lines constrain Nordic defense cooperation. Until there is the political will for greater security interdependence among the Nordic states, this will remain the case.

Inside-out Resistance: Bureaucratic Level

The most challenging part of NORDEFECO has been joint procurement, with the Nordic countries making a number of failed attempts to jointly acquire important equipment systems. Nordic officials unanimously expressed disappointment and regret regarding the poor state of cooperation on the joint acquisition of materiel and the joint development of military capabilities. When NORDEFECO was established, “significant savings” were expected as a result of bilateral, trilateral, and Nordic procurement projects, and joint capability development (NORDEFECO 2011, 4, 12). However, many of these projects either failed to materialize or resulted in failure (Saxi 2016, 62–75).

In some respects, the Nordic bureaucratic level has acted as “spoilers” of various defense cooperation initiatives, despite strong political backing (Bredesen and Friis 2019). This is due to both bureaucratic mismatches and divergent industrial interests. Among the obstacles facing bureaucrats tasked with implementing Nordic defense cooperation are an absence of coordinated accounting and reporting systems, inconsistent practices in budget breakdowns of military spending, and varying public procurement legislation, specifications, and planning cycles. These issues complicate cost-saving measures, planning, and the potential for integration, in particular when it comes to procurement of defense materiel (Bredesen and Friis 2019). There may also be outright resistance toward a project within the ranks of military professionals. The bureaucratic level may therefore struggle to implement politically desired projects for a range of reasons, whether legal, organizational, or procedural. These factors were part of the reason why the joint Swedish – Norwegian artillery project “Archer” failed

(Bredesen and Friis 2019). Despite being launched with high political ambitions in 2010 and described as a “spearhead” of Nordic defense cooperation, Norway pulled out abruptly in 2013, when the bureaucratic level convinced the political level that it was not worth pursuing further.

Archer, along with several other failed Norwegian–Swedish joint projects, resulted in hurt feelings and even anger. Both sides have concluded that joint procurement projects are not advisable in the foreseeable future. In his 2015 defense review, Norwegian Chief of Defence Admiral Haakon Bruun-Hanssen stated that the Norwegian armed forces no longer considered multinational cooperation as the solution to economic challenges. Instead, he and other Nordic CHODs begun pushing for higher national budgets, aiming at more or less full-scale national defense structures, with minimum dependence on the platforms and materiel of neighbors (Bruun-Hanssen 2015). Thus, inside-out resisting forces prevailed.

Conclusions

The analytical framework proposed in this article has facilitated a structured assessment of Nordic defense cooperation, organizing the various forces shaping it into distinguishable categories and thereby making it easier to single out which forces have been more dominant than others, and how this may shift over time.

From this discussion, we have seen that NORDEFECO was initially driven inside-out from the military level, but with political support. However, the discrepancy between political speeches praising Nordic defense cooperation and practical results bears witness to significant resistance, both at the political level and at the military level. From 2014 on, outside-in push forces in the form of Russian assertiveness pressed the Nordics into shared concern for regional security. At the same time, outside-in pull forces from the United States, NATO, and others encouraged closer Nordic defense cooperation. Russia, meanwhile, tried to prevent this with negative outside-in resistance forces. Today, the inside-out political level has reinvigorated its focus on regional defense cooperation, introducing several new initiatives—implemented at the military level—aimed at enhanced regional security.

As mentioned, the analytical framework is not a theory, and does not explain why certain forces are stronger than others. Thus, the conclusions presented about the dominant forces shaping NORDEFECO today may very well change at a later stage. Despite being theory-neutral, however, the framework is premised on social change, making it incompatible with theories that highlight only structural outside-in forces, or theories that ignore the

international system in favor of regional or micro-level inside-out analysis.

A security subregion is forged in the space between the national and the international, with its degree of “real” existence (beyond romantic dreams) dependent on the success of regional projects such as NORDEFECO. Based on developments in NORDEFECO, it may be expected that the Nordic security subregion is here to stay for the foreseeable future. Even so, it would probably require a combination of dramatic outside-in and inside-out forces for Sweden and Finland to join NATO, or a Nordic defense union to emerge. At the same time, Nordic defense cooperation is growing ever closer, including common defense planning. As these processes continue to evolve, the analytical framework can help us track these developments.

The main utility of the analytical framework is in helping scholars identify which forces shape a subregion’s security cooperation over time, in turn helping explain the successes and failures of such cooperation. Thus, the framework can make an important contribution to understanding stability and instability, cooperation and conflict, in any subregion, with other potential cases including the Baltic Three, the Višegrad Four, and the Western Balkans.

A potential shortcoming of the framework is the absence of agency on the part of the object of investigation. In other words, if a subregion has formalized security cooperation in the form of a standing organization, one would expect this organization to influence the flow of events. The analytical framework presented here fails to take account of such agency. In the case study, Nordic Defence Cooperation was regarded as a dependent variable in the classical sense, without any ability to impact developments. Despite activities in areas of cooperation impacting end results, this simplification is arguably justified in the case of NORDEFECO given the absence of a standing secretariat or organization. Nonetheless, this potential shortcoming must be taken into consideration when applying the framework to other cases. If a subregional security organization is present, researchers should consider ascribing it positive and negative forces to account for the initiatives and obstructions it generates.

As with any analytical framework or model, the intention is to simplify analysis. Thus, the framework may be adjusted to a particular case as appropriate. The crucial point is that the framework fills a gap below RSCT and similar approaches, and above state-centered IR theories. In doing so, it brings security subregions into analytical focus, thereby contributing to a better understanding of subregional global politics.

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