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MA thesis

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**10 Years of Nordic Defence: The Correlation between Perception of Threat  
and Ambition for Defence Cooperation in the Nordic Council 2009-2018**

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## **Abstract**

Defence and security have during the last decade become an increasingly important part of the Nordic cooperation that traditionally has been defined mainly by the absence of these questions on the agenda. In my thesis I will look at ambition for Nordic defence cooperation and how the changed perception of Russia after 2014 has affected the ambition for it in the Nordic Council. Theoretically I rely on Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory with the expectation that more perceived threat leads to more alignment. The choice of the neorealist approach is justified by first looking at the core of why nations align and then conceptualizing the Nordic cooperation in defence as a form of alignment. The empirical part of the research consists of a cross-temporal comparison of ambition for Nordic defence cooperation in the international debates of the annual sessions of the Nordic Council before (2009-2013) and after (2014-2018) the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, which has been defined as a turning point in the Nordic and European security environment. This turn should imply a higher perception of threat in the debate. Using thematical grouping of the data I identify patterns that help me measure the correlation between perception of threat and ambition for Nordic defence cooperation in Nordic parliamentary cooperation. By observing the data, I show that the level of perceived threat for the period 2009-2013 is low and the ambition for regional defence cooperation is high, while the level of perceived threat 2014-2018 is high but the ambition for regional defence cooperation low. I also present other variables inductively drawn from the data that might explain the changes in the level of ambition better than the changed level of threat.

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## 1 Introduction

Norden<sup>1</sup> is often said to be the most integrated region in the world. Apart from the active inter-parliamentary and -governmental cooperation Nordic unity is deeply rooted in civil society and the everyday life of many. The active social connection has been the central driving force for the institutional integration: border barriers are brought down to make intra-Nordic mobility easier, cultural and personal connections are sustained through cooperation in the civil society and NGO's, and the region tries to gain leverage in global forums by speaking with a common voice.

While Norden has been a forerunner in e.g. equality, sustainability, and welfare the story is very different when it comes to questions related to security and defence. One could say that one of the defining features of the Nordic cooperation has been the absence of hard questions on the agenda. This has however changed. Now, for the first time, defence and security is not only actively discussed in a Nordic context but also becoming an important area of integration in the region. First fuelled by the economic crisis in 2008 Nordic cooperation took a special defence turn in 2009, marked by the release of the Stoltenberg report and the creation of NORDEFECO (read more in chapter 2.4). The Nordic defence agenda has after 2014 gained a new political motivation with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula: security (Iso-Markku, Innola, & Tiilikainen, 2018; Saxi, 2016).

The strong interest in security has been clearly visible also in the Nordic Council, where defence has become an increasingly central theme after 2009. But while Nordic cooperation has been explored through a wide variety of data, no focus has been given to the Council as a security actor by others, which leaves the parliamentary Nordic dialogue unexamined. The Nordic dimension of national security strategies is discussed in e.g. Iso-

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<sup>1</sup> I will throughout my work refer to the Nordic countries using the Scandinavian word *Norden*, which does not only encompass the geographical area that the five nations (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and three autonomous regions (the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands) constitute, but rather the cultural, societal, and political unit that they today form. Note that the term Norden also emerged only in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the awareness that Iceland and Finland were not part of Scandinavia.

Markku et.al (2018), showing variation in the importance given to it. In the 2009 yearbook of the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers, a collection of interviews with top politicians reflecting on the future of Nordic cooperation (with a focus on foreign and defence policy) was published (Funch & Schou-Knudsen, 2009). The Stoltenberg report has also been analysed thoroughly e.g. by Archer and Fägersten et.al. (2010b; 2019). The Nordic Council has however been ignored in the research, perhaps because of its traditionally informal nature and asecuritized agenda. But as defence policy has gained more importance in the Council (which is no less highlighted by parliamentarians themselves) should the Council be considered a regional security actor? Looking at the inter-parliamentary dialogue I can examine political development over time, taking the temperature on the ambition over a longer period. Instead of listing what has succeeded or failed in the field I can analyse what has politically driven it forward. This will help constructively deepen and diversify the Council's role in defence and security questions.

Theoretically I will rely on Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory (1987). Walt suggests that a perception of threat leads to a balancing reaction in the vicinity of the threat. The Russian activity after 2014 fulfils all the factors that define a threat: i) aggregate power; ii) geographic proximity; iii) offensive power; and iv) aggressive intentions (Walt, 1987, p. 22), and can therefore be perceived as a threat in the region. According to his theory, the reaction to a perceived threat is either internal or external balancing (Walt, 1985, 1987). In most cases a nation's own capabilities to balance a threat are limited and thus we often see alignment as a balancing mechanism. While traditionally focusing on alliances, Walt's theory is applicable to all forms of alignment that bring more security to a nation. Looking at the Nordic security horizon, we see a very divided landscape when it comes to security guarantees: three members have allied with NATO and three are members of the EU. Despite this split the Nordic countries all have valued the added capabilities that the Nordic defence cooperation, which is not a formal alliance, but a loose form of alignment, brings to upholding regional stability and security. Nordic cooperation is a way to improve defence capabilities in the region e.g. through joint exercises, shared infrastructure, and a shared system of territorial monitoring and patrolling. The Nordic cooperation has even stronger security implications for the non-NATO states Finland and Sweden, who often mention regional cooperation as an alternative to the still quite unpopular NATO-option. While not being an alliance, the

Nordic cooperation is a way of improving the national and regional security for all nations, who have experienced drastic cuts in military spending and capabilities after the Cold War. As the Nordic cooperation is seen as improving regional security it can be considered a form of alignment, and therefore the theoretical assumptions of Walt's theory should hold true for it.

The rising perception of threat in Norden should have implications on the ambition for Nordic cooperation, especially since it has been a popular form of cooperation ever since the defence turn in 2009. With the new motivation for cooperation should come more ambition to develop it. I intend to research this development in the parliamentary context of the Nordic Council.

My research question is *How has a changed level of perceived threat changed the ambition for Nordic defence cooperation in the Nordic Council?* The hypothesis is that the correlation is positive, meaning a higher perception of threat leads to higher ambition for alignment, which would follow the expectation of the Balance of Threat theory.

I will research the defence and security discourse in the Nordic Council international debates of the annual sessions 2009-2018 and see how the perception of threat in the debate has changed after 2014 and whether it has influenced the level of ambition to intensify Nordic defence cooperation. My interest lies in a ten-year period that starts with the creation of NORDEFECO and the release of the Stoltenberg report in 2009 and is divided by the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia. The factors of perception of threat and ambition for Nordic defence cooperation will be operationalized and by using thematical grouping of the data I will identify patterns in the debate that I will use to measure the levels of the two variables. I will make a cross-temporal comparison between the levels of ambition for defence cooperation before and after 2014.

Before defining my research in detail, I will give a short overview of the developments of Nordic cooperation with a special focus on security and defence issues to give a historical context to the current cooperation. In the theory chapter that follows I will discuss the concept of alignment and conceptualize the Nordic defence cooperation as alignment. Then I will proceed with presenting the theoretical framework that I base my research on.



After presenting the methodology and data for my research I will begin the analysis. For this part I will do a thematic analysis of the data to identify patterns and dominant themes in the debate, and by doing that measure perception of threat and ambition for regional defence cooperation in the Council sessions. By comparing the two periods I will show how perception of threat has affected the ambition for cooperation. Finally, I will present the conclusions that can be made from the analysis and discuss the findings of my research in a broader context.

I would like to express my special gratitude to my supervisor Thomas Linsemaier for his irreplaceable help with my work, Matilda af Hällström for early inspiration and help with the research on Nordic defence questions, my wife and best friend Diana for always being there to support me. I also want to thank Eoin McNamara from the University of Tartu and Lt. Col. Joakim Paasikivi from the Baltic Defence College for help with finding literature.

## 2 The Historical Context of Nordic Security and Defence Cooperation

Modern Nordic history is considered a schoolbook example of peaceful coexistence and the exceptional level of integration and cooperation is a leading example for other regions in the world. This view is depicted no less by Norden itself: “peace has become a veritable brand within the region, marketed not least through the Nobel peace prize and the region’s various nation-branding strategies” (Browning & Joenniemi, 2013, p. 483). Despite many successes in integration after the Second World War, Nordic cooperation has been full of setbacks and challenges, especially in the realm of security.

Norden has because of its location been thought of as a marginal region from the very beginning. Since the end of the Scandinavian imperial age in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Norden has been considered different from continental Europe: the region was non-Catholic, non-colonial and non-imperial, and avoided involvement in most major European conflicts (Hilson, 2008). Being in the European geographic periphery has, however, not detached Norden from Europe. The region has become independent from the European core while absorbing ideas and implementing them in a more suitable form. Indeed, the most “Nordic” ideas, that have historically shaped the nations are all inherently continental:

Lutheranism (indeed Christianity in the first place), absolutism (modified with great success in Sweden; always much weaker in Denmark, but able there to carry through effective reforms when it followed the late-18<sup>th</sup> century “enlightened” version), and the principle of the freedom of the seas (favored first by the Dutch and the British and then adopted by Denmark and Sweden as the legal basis for their neutral commerce) were all taken up from Europe further south. (Parker, 2002, p. 364)

The geographical and ideological marginality has been utilized well by the Nordic countries from medieval times up till this very day and has been an important factor of the distinct political and societal development.

### 2.1 Period of Negative Peace in Norden

The Nordic region<sup>2</sup> certainly has enjoyed an impressively long era of internal peace: after the peace in Kiel in 1814, which put Norway under Swedish rule until 1905, no wars have

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<sup>2</sup> Note that after Sweden lost the Finnish war 1808-1809 against the Russian Empire, the territory of Finland was handed over and therefore Finland was much detached from the “Nordic community” until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term Norden also emerged only in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the awareness that Iceland and Finland were not part of Scandinavia.

been fought between Nordic nations. Norden became an area of negative peace, meaning an area absent of war but without a common structure actively upholding the state of peace (Webel & Galtung, 2007, pp. 30–31). Despite the state of peace, the few attempts for a common security structure have been unsuccessful. The downright failure of a Nordic security dimension is perhaps best marked by the botched promise by Swedish King Karl XV to send 20 000 men to aid the Danes against the Prussian invasion in the Second Schleswig War in 1864 (Westberg, 2013, p. 61), leaving deep wounds in the trust between the two nations. This scepticism and mistrust towards each other saturated intra-Nordic relations until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In spite of the trust issues, and the absence of a common security structure, several disputes and conflicts were resolved peacefully and without the break-out of war, “despite the political dynamite of the issues at stake” (Browning & Joenniemi, 2013, p. 489):

[T]he absence of war hardly meant the existence of an unproblematic and positive peace. Such incidents included Norwegian independence in 1905, Finland’s and Sweden’s dispute over the sovereignty of the Åland islands (1918–1921) and a territorial dispute between Denmark and Norway over Greenland. There were others besides. (ibid.)

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned a new page in Nordic cooperation, in which the countries found each other as natural partners in international cooperation and developing the persisting state of peace in the region. The Nordic joint neutral stance during the First World War can be considered the first step in foreign policy cooperation, an area that grew wider and deeper during the interwar period through mutual endeavours in e.g. the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (af Hällström, 2016).

## **2.2 The Cold War: The Golden Era of Nordic Cooperation**

The roots of the Nordic Council lie in the failed attempt to create a Scandinavian defence league in 1948. After the war, Sweden invited Denmark and Norway to create a common defence union, which would have freed the countries from military affiliation with the United Kingdom and the United States. However, neither Denmark nor Norway considered the planned union strong enough to deter hypothetical Soviet aggression (Saxi, 2013, pp. 61–62). Hard security guarantees were instead found through other means. Denmark, Iceland, and Norway became founding members of NATO, Sweden proclaimed its policy of non-alignment and Finland, bound by the YYA-treaty (the

Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance) with the Soviet Union in 1948 tried its best to keep one foot in the West without antagonizing the Soviet Union. This split in security strategies is still the most defining feature of the security spectrum in Norden.

Despite the failure of the defence league, the ambition to drive Nordic cooperation forward in other areas remained strong. During a meeting of the Nordic Inter-parliamentary Union (the Nordic group within the Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU) in 1951 Danish Prime minister Hans Hedtoft proposed the creation of an organization where Nordic parliamentarians could regularly meet for consultation together with the governments. In 1952 this idea became reality when Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden together formed the Nordic Council (Nordic Council of Ministers, n.d.-c).

The Nordic Council is the inter-parliamentary structure of Nordic cooperation which today meets annually during the session in Autumn, a thematic session in Spring and in working groups in between sessions. The goal of the Council is to deepen integration in the region, find common solutions for common challenges and establish personal bonds between the parliaments of Norden. The Nordic Council lacks juridical power but is a central institution when it comes to Nordic integrational initiatives. For the uninitiated in Nordic affairs, the institution with most resemblance to the Council is perhaps the European Parliament (EP).

Hans Hedtoft was elected the first President of the Council at the first annual meeting in Copenhagen, February 1953. Finland was able to join in 1955 after Josef Stalin's death, when Khrushchev's Thaw eased Soviet pressure on Finnish foreign policy. Many of the early initiatives served as models for later EU-policies: a passport union was created in 1952; a common labour market in 1954 and a convention on common social security in 1955. All resemble EU-policies of today (Nordic Council of Ministers, n.d.-c). Discussions on creating a customs union and a common market were simultaneously held in Norden and in the EU, and it was agreed upon in 1959 that negotiations were to be ended on the Nordic level.

The Nordic Council of Ministers was formed in 1971. Following negotiations on tighter economic cooperation a committee of ministers had already been established in 1960 to streamline the work. A similar committee was also established to handle questions on development aid. Apart from these committees the Nordic cooperation was

dependent on the informal conferences on parliamentary level in the Council (Nordic Council of Ministers, n.d.-b). A secretariat for the Council of Ministers was created in Oslo in 1973 and after that the cooperation has only widened and deepened.

The Council of Ministers is today not one council but is composed of 11 different topical councils, e.g. finance, environment and climate, and gender equality. The Nordic prime ministers are responsible for Nordic co-operation. Responsibility for the day-to-day work is delegated to the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation and to the Nordic Committee for Co-operation (Nordic Council of Ministers, n.d.-a).

Despite these successes, the road has been, as Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme expressed it during the Council session in Copenhagen in 1971, ‘cornered by grandiose failures’ (ibid.). The fact that the Nordic Council was born out of a failed attempt to agree on the “big questions” – foreign and security policy, has saturated the development of Nordic cooperation. While there was a silent agreement that these questions would not be on the Council’s agenda, cooperation was successful on another front: peacekeeping missions.

After the devastating Second World War the Nordic countries found each other in a gradually more structured and meaningful cooperation. The Nordic voice echoed in international affairs and peace building efforts, which “was dependent on the availability of international institutions that provided arenas for small states to act as mediators and bridgebuilders” (Westberg, 2013, p. 62).

Being Nordic became more than an adjective referring to the region, it became a brand that was central to Nordic identity-building and was globally presented as a best practice that could be copied and implemented in other regions. The notion implied exceptionality, being ‘peace-loving and rational’ while Europe was in a constant struggle to keep tension low and conflict away (Browning, 2007, p. 27). The Nordic countries were branded as bridge-builders between the East and the West: “Nordic identity was dependent on the competition between capitalism and communism, offering a third way” (Wæver, 1992, p. 77). The peace-driven foreign policy resulted not only in the development of a Nordic “peace-industry” with “state-sponsored development of peace movements and peace research institutions in each country”, but in a stable anti-militarist stance to international affairs, advocating the avoidance of military force at all cost and that international disputes should be resolved through diplomacy and always resort to the

UN or international law if possible (Browning, 2007, p. 32). Finnish President Urho Kekkonen exemplified this stance in his address to the UN General Assembly in 1961: “We see ourselves as physicians rather than judges; it is not for us to pass judgement nor to condemn, it is rather to diagnose and to try to cure” (quoted in Browning, 2007, p. 33). The special position between the West and the East (not only geographically, but ideologically) was perhaps best exemplified by the organizing of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Helsinki 1975 which resulted in the Helsinki Accords, that aimed at improving the relations of the Cold War blocks.

While the Nordic cooperation did not encompass defence and security, common peacekeeping missions introduced a military aspect to the otherwise pacified cooperation. The successful model of Nordic peacekeeping missions consisted of four elements:

An institutional framework made up of regular meetings between the Nordic ministers of defence and a number of working groups; a series of joint special UN peacekeeping courses for officers; national standby forces which generally consisted of volunteers recruited at short notice on an individual basis and deployed in the field with only a few weeks of preparation and a minimum of logistical support; and finally a high willingness to provide personnel for UN operations. (Jakobsen, 2006, pp. 381–382)

The high ambition to contribute to such a mission is clearly visible in numbers too. Out of 13 UN peacekeeping missions during the Cold War the Nordic countries took part in 11 and as much as 25 % of the total troops were Nordic, not to forget that the first two Secretary-Generals of the UN were Norwegian and Swedish respectively: Trygve Lie and Dag Hammarskjöld (Jakobsen, 2006, p. 382). A strong Nordic presence at the top of the UN did undoubtedly affect the support for UN policy and missions positively, but Jakobsen lists five factors that make the Nordic involvement in the peacekeeping mission “all but inevitable: (1) suitability; (2) common interests; (3) distinct national interests; (4) high overlap between national interests and values and UN goals and ideals; and (5) the narrative of success” (2006, p. 382). Jakobsen specifies that all four Nordic countries filled the criteria for UN peacekeeping missions, the first of the factors listed above:

[A] potential contributor had to fulfil four conditions. First, with rare exceptions such as the UK in Cyprus, permanent members of the Security Council could not contribute troops – to avoid local conflicts becoming part of the superpower confrontation. Second, a potential contributor could not come from the region in which the conflict was taking place nor be thought to have a special interest in the conflict at hand. Third, it had to be acceptable to the host government. Fourth, a

contributor had to be able to provide units at short notice that were capable of defusing conflicts peacefully without the use of force. (Jakobsen, 2006, p. 382)

The success of the Nordic peacekeeping model during the Cold War is both motivated by the special interest and brand that the Nordic countries cultivated in international politics at the time and the trust towards Norden that was given by the international community.

### **2.3 The Nordic Frost After the Cold War**

The end of the Cold War and the triumph of global liberal economy meant that Nordic integration was not only slowed down, but practically ended all together. The marginal position that had been an advantage during the Cold War was now a threat. The special position of Norden as being lower tension and more detente-oriented than Central Europe (Wæver, 1992, p. 79) was lost due to the changed political order, and Norden turned from an frontrunner to an outsider. One could think that the release of tension in Europe would have been greeted with joy in Norden, as the Nordic model now became the new norm. Instead, the early 1990's were marked by what could be described as panic, and perhaps later, optimistically, as confusion (Wæver, 1992, p. 78). This tumult lead to politicians looking past the Nordic dimension to Europe and beyond.

An even deeper division in security solutions emerged in the wake of this confusion. Referenda on EU-membership were organised in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, with the result of Norway rejecting it and instead focusing even stronger on NATO-cooperation and Finland and Sweden joining the EU and quickly finding their role in European cooperation, rather than in Norden. Security was a one of the major factors that spoke for an EU-membership, especially in the Finnish discourse. The Atlantic/European division in Norden was deepened and Nordic integration was put aside.

Note that the division is rather fluid in nature. Norway and Iceland were integrated into the EU through the European Economic Area (EEA) and contributed to the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), while Finland and Sweden gradually have integrated themselves into NATO (while not actively aspiring for full membership). Swedish and Finnish troops have more than often been seen next to NATO-forces, during the mission in former Yugoslavia as an example (Archer, 2010a, p. 4). Politically a NATO-option is still generally unpopular in both Finland and Sweden. The active

participation in NATO-operations and the changed security environment has however slowly turned the opinion, especially in Sweden.

## **2.4 A New Dawn for Nordic Cooperation**

Nordic cooperation was left in the margin long into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The financial crisis of 2007-2008 however exposed weaknesses in European integration that the Nordic countries were deeply involved in. Around the same time, Russia started showing signs of a change in its political course. Its military spending rose (along with the military reform in 2008, read more in e.g. Nichol (2011)), and the public discourse became more challenging towards the US-dominated world order, the 2007 Munich security conference speech by President Vladimir Putin as perhaps the most evident example of this. In 2008 the Russo-Georgian war broke out, to which the Western response was incoherent and weak, putting European and Western normative predominance under critique.

More importantly, Nordic national defence forces had undergone a structural change after the Cold War, specializing in international peace enforcing tasks rather than total defence. The economic crisis of 2008 hit the defence sector especially hard. These aspects meant a lot of challenges to Nordic defence which barely could keep up the needed critical mass:

As a result small states are now approaching the point at which they will find it increasingly difficult to retain ‘balanced’ and ‘full-fledged’ armed forces with the full range of ‘normal’ military capabilities. As the armed forces shrink in size, some of their military capabilities become so small, they are no longer cost-effective, and may not even be technically viable. When this happens, the capability is said to have gone below ‘critical mass’ (Saxi, 2011, p. 17)

These changed premises served as tinder for the return of regional politics in Norden, this time with an unorthodox focus – defence and security. The earlier cooperative activities that already took place within Norden were divided into several frameworks that in 2009 were combined through a Memorandum of Understanding, which marked the creation of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO) (Järvenpää, 2017). NORDEFECO has since become the main forum for defence cooperation and allows, among other things, biannual meetings between the Nordic Ministers of Defence. Since the establishment of NORDEFECO, cooperative integration has advanced rapidly, perhaps because of the political acceptability of Nordic cooperation



and the strong support by the people for initiatives within a Nordic framework (Andreasson & Stende, 2017; Järvenpää, 2017).

The cooperation is still going through a phase of trial and error and is in search of its final form. However, the basis for the cooperation lies in the long period of intra-Nordic peace, tradition of peaceful conflict resolution, successful cooperation in other fields and institutional integration on both political and non-governmental levels. In the following chapter I will present the two things that re-defined the defence cooperation in 2009, institutionalizing it and forming a kind of first vision for the cooperation: the creation of NORDEFECO and the publishing of the Stoltenberg report.

#### **2.4.1 Nordic Defence Cooperation, NORDEFECO**

The static or decreasing defence budgets and the rising costs of keeping up credible national defence did not add up and caused concern already before the creation of NORDEFECO. In 2007 a joint study published by the Swedish and Norwegian defence forces outlined a partnership which would make it possible to maintain a full range of military capabilities and not fall under the critical-mass, while also saving money in the total defence expenditure (Saxi, 2013, p. 68). The following year a similar report issued by the Swedish, Finnish, and Norwegian defence forces “outlining 140 areas of military cooperation, about 40 of which were to be initiated by the end of 2009” (ibid.). This report painted an frank picture of the future of Nordic national defence capabilities if cooperation would not be deepened: “We face two options: either to share capabilities with strategic partners on a bilateral or multilateral basis or to face a future with fewer capabilities” (cited in Saxi, 2013, p. 68). These reports resulted in the institutionalized cooperation, the “prelude” to NORDEFECO, called Nordic Defence Support (NORDSUP) (Dahl, 2014, p. 4). NORDSUP became the third format of Nordic defence cooperation to exist. Earlier cooperation was coordinated through the 1994 Nordic Armaments Cooperation (NORDAC), focusing on procurement and questions related to military materiel; Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Peace Support (NORDCAPS) through which peace enforcing missions that were put through in cooperation with NATO were coordinated (ibid.). To simplify the organization, these three separate structures were in 2009 put under one single umbrella: NORDEFECO.

The Nordic countries were not alone in trying to solve the challenges of weakening defence capabilities that followed the growing economic pressure national

defence forces faced. Both the EU and NATO “encouraged smaller groups of member states to push ahead with defence integration in what were referred to as ‘cluster groups’” as the integration progress in the large and mixed organizations themselves would be much slower (Saxi, 2013, p. 69).

NORDEFECO is built on a rather loose structure, which has been the ambition from the beginning. With no physical headquarters or even an office, cooperation proceeds in “true Nordic style, through a non-bureaucratic system of networking and regular meetings between ministers of the five countries” (Dahl, 2014, p. 5). Meetings are held at least twice a year, with the Baltic colleagues also taking part in the autumn meeting (the so called NB8-format is a common practice in Nordic cooperation and includes the five Nordic countries and the three Baltic countries). The presidency of NORDEFECO rotates annually, and the presiding country decides on the focus area for the year. The relevant minister (the Minister of Defence, or Minister of Foreign Affairs in the case of Iceland) of the presiding country presents the annual report of NORDEFECO as an introduction to the debate on defence during the session of the Nordic Council. While not officially being it, the Nordic Council can be considered the parliamentary supervisor of NORDEFECO.

Another distinct feature of NORDEFECO is that despite all initiatives being open for all the members, not everyone is required (nor is it expected) to join every single project from the beginning. From the smorgasbord of programs and projects that are initiated, members are free to pick and choose to participate in those that they have particular interest or gain, or feel they can contribute to (Dahl, 2014, p. 6). This means that most initiatives start out as bi- or trilateral, with others perhaps joining in at a later stage. Finland and Sweden are represented at the core of almost every project, while Iceland, lacking a defence force of its own, does not have a lot to contribute in most of the initiatives (ibid.).

Some concrete steps worth mentioning are the increasingly frequent and intensive cross-border trainings (in all branches of the military), the exchange of information on maritime and air surveillance and the continued and developing cooperation in international operations. The cooperation on the joint procurement front has been less successful than the joint exercises and informational exchange. Several projects have been put in motion, but most have grounded. In most cases the needs of each participating

country have not met, but the importance of transatlantic relations have also played part in e.g. Danish and Norwegian fighter jet acquisitions (Saxi, 2016, pp. 72–73).

In the core of recent development are especially Finland and Sweden. The cooperation between the two is concrete and intense and includes common battle groups (Regeringskansliet, 2015), the strategic depth initiative that allows Finnish fighters to use Swedish airbases in times of crisis (Chang, 2018) and both countries intensifying the cooperation with NATO (Eellend, 2016). Moving closer to NATO has removed many of the obstacles that Nordic cooperation earlier faced when involving both members and non-members in the projects.

#### **2.4.2 The Stoltenberg Report**

As shown earlier, defence and security cooperation in Norden has not emerged from the blue, but rather evolved over time. In the late 2000's the increased cooperation was not only apparent with the creation of NORDEFCO, but a remarkable step was also taken with the Stoltenberg report, commissioned by the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs in 2008 and published in 2009. The goal of the report was to “draw up proposals for closer foreign and security policy cooperation between the Nordic countries” (Stoltenberg, 2009, p. 5). The result was thirteen initiatives that would move the Nordic countries towards the desired goal. The proposals are not strictly related to defence, but rather all-encompassing foreign and security policy measures.

However, the defence aspect is central to the report, even “the initiative for the report came from the armed forces, which saw their budgets being cut and new defence systems becoming more expensive” (Archer, 2010b, p. 49). One possible solution for this, as discussed under the NORDEFCO chapter, was deepened international cooperation (regional alignment). Nordic cooperation was valued by all Nordic countries because of the existing good chemistry between Ministers and officials, the political support that reached across the political spectrum (Saxi, 2011, p. 64) and a steady and strong support among the people (Oxford Research, 2010).

Stoltenberg's proposals were of a different nature, some more concrete than others and some politically more controversial than others (for the full list, read Stoltenberg (2009) or Archer (2010b, p. 51)). What was considered the most controversial suggestion was number thirteen, which was a Nordic declaration of solidarity:

The Nordic governments should issue a mutual declaration of solidarity in which they commit themselves to clarifying how they would respond if a Nordic country were subject to external attack or undue pressure. (Stoltenberg, 2009, p. 34)

The rationale behind this was the challenges to national defence that nations face under division of labour. As integration deepens, states would specialise instead of maintaining every sector of national defence. This leads to a weakening of the total defence, which requires a mutually binding agreement on how to act if one of the parts were to be under external attack or pressure (Stoltenberg, 2009, p. 34). Stoltenberg's thirteenth suggestion raised scepticism in the NATO countries. Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre pointed out that article 5 of NATO was and will remain the main guarantee for security, that the foremost commitment was to the main security providers of the region, the EU and NATO: "it is not feasible to sign up to something that conflicts with commitments to the two organisations" (Hansen, 2009, p. 51). Globalisation and Europeanisation were still dominant ideas in the Nordic elite discourse in the immediate time after the release of the report, which is visible in the collection of interviews about Nordic defence that the Nordic Council of Ministers published just after the release of the Stoltenberg report (Funch & Schou-Knudsen, 2009), from which the quote by Støre is taken. Despite eventual scepticism and long deliberations, a declaration of solidarity was signed by the Nordic Ministers of Defence in Helsinki 2011, however in a much more vague and less ambitious form than Stoltenberg originally had in mind (Dahl, 2014, p. 5). While the solidarity clause itself is surprisingly strongly worded, the "text preceding it emphasizes natural and man-made disasters, cyber and terrorist attacks", which reflects the security environment of the time it was written (Fägersten et al., 2019, p. 20) but did not imply the solidarity of a stricter form of military alignment.

A 2019 analysis reassessing the Stoltenberg goals shows that only three of the proposals have been implemented in a Nordic context. Most proposals are partly implemented or implemented in a broader (or bi-lateral) context which still leaves room for a broader Nordic implementation. Three of the proposals have not at all been implemented (Fägersten et al., 2019).

### 3 Theoretical Framework

The correct conceptualization of the Nordic cooperation is important in order to apply the theories of alignment on my case. In the post-Cold War environment, a strict theoretical focus on traditional alliances leaves most of the modern, learner forms of alignment unresearched, despite them following the same principle of existence as the alliance – increasing security through cooperation. By defining Nordic cooperation as a form of alignment I can use theory to better understand the mechanisms of ambition to develop the cooperation.

After conceptualizing the Nordic defence cooperation I will discuss the neorealist approach on alignment, based on Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory (1987), that builds on Kenneth Waltz's Balance of Power theory (Waltz, 1979). The Balance of Threat theory suggests that an accumulation of perceived threat should provoke a response of either internal or external balancing in the vicinity of the source, which also serves as my theoretical assumption.

#### 3.1 Alliance Versus Alignment

Alliance theory has traditionally, as the name suggests, a focus on alliances. In its strictest sense, Glenn Snyder defines alliances as “formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership” (Snyder, 2007, p. 4). An alliance is a formally defined and have military or security purposes (in most cases these are defensive, but they can also be formed with offensive intentions, like the 1940 tripartite pact). Alliances are also formed exclusively between states, and are aimed at states outside this agreement (Snyder, 2007, p. 4). During the Cold War, this rigid understanding of alignment “dominated both the actual geopolitical landscape and the scholarship of Strategic Studies, the exemplars have been NATO and the Warsaw Pact” (Wilkins, 2012, p. 60). However, Wilkins points out that this bipolar Cold War alliance system “may represent a set of never-to-be-repeated circumstances” (2012, p. 61), which is affirmed by Snyder: “the large alliances of the post-1945 period (...) are exceptions, associated with the brief bipolar structure of world power” (Snyder, 2007, p. 12).

As the core reason for alliances and other, looser forms of alignment is the same, which is gaining more security through cooperation, the expectations of Walt's theory of balancing (Walt, 1987) hold true for other forms of alignment too. Ignoring the various

forms alignment takes today limits the use of the theory and therefore our understanding of alignment.

Looking at the different forms of cooperation, alignment, and alliances in the world both historically and in modern times, a broad spectrum of collaborative frameworks can be identified. Defining every form of defence collaboration as an alliance is seldom true to the actual nature of the cooperation but this is practically what has happened, as most of alignment theory has been filtered through a Cold War prism (Wilkins, 2012, p. 57).

The new standard of security cooperation after the Cold War is not that of a formal alliance. Even NATO, which often serves as the archetype of the traditional alliance, has changed its nature and purpose (e.g. Hellmann & Wolf, 1993; Schimmelfennig, 1998). Theoretically, this means that a broader focus is needed to understand the jungle of security relations. Snyder points out that our discussions “must not be limited to formal alliances (...) What we really want to understand is the broader phenomenon of ‘alignment’ of which explicit alliance is merely a subset” (Snyder, 2007, p. 123).

In the core of all the forms of alignment is one common denominator: alignment should increase capabilities that increase security. Alignment happens when states seek to enhance security and their own capabilities are not enough to combat security threats. The core of every form of alignment is this assumption. Like modern security challenges, modern alignments are more than often multidimensional and “capable of comprehending the new, non-military, security challenges that increasingly confront states and their allies” (Wilkins, 2012, p. 56). While the core is the same for every form of alignment, the detailed nature of them varies: “every ‘coalition’ or ‘strategic partnership’, for example, will be unique with regard to purpose, membership, formalisation, scope, cohesion, capabilities, and duration” (Wilkins, 2012, p. 59).

The perceived security value of Nordic cooperation is especially clear in the cases of Finland and Sweden, who have not surprisingly also been in the core of Nordic integration. The two have traditionally been reluctant on a membership in NATO and have argued that the bi- and multilateral Nordic solutions could be a less controversial alternatives to NATO. After 2014 the opinions on NATO has become more diffuse, the opposition slowly losing ground. The division between parties that advocate for and talk

against NATO is now much clearer in both countries, however with a larger pro-NATO political base in Sweden. This political split is also reflected in the Nordic Council.

Despite Denmark, Iceland and Norway enjoying the security guarantee of NATO, Nordic cooperation has offered them a possibility to increase own capabilities and decrease dependence on the USA, therefore increasing their security autonomy.

### **3.2 Theorizing Alignment**

My analysis will rely on neorealist alignment theory and more specifically, Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory. I will first, however, introduce Kenneth Waltz's Balance of Power theory on which Walt's theory is based. While the neorealist approach to alignment was born under the polarized alliance circumstances of the Cold War, it should apply to other forms of alignment that are more central to the study of post-Cold War security cooperation, as the same core reasons and processes apply for the formation of these.

The question of whether to align and with whom is in the core of alignment theory which will serve as the main theoretical framework of my research. Aligning seldom happens in a status quo but rather as an answer to a change in a country's or regions perception of threat (Walt, 1985, 1987) or a change in the balance of power (Waltz, 1979) in its proximity. Sometimes a question of aligning is a question of continued existence, an answer to sudden threats, other times it is a precautionary measure to ensure long-term security or e.g. to get a share of the spoils of a victorious war. Some would suggest that nations align e.g. because of shared values or identity (Barnett, 1996; Schimmelfennig, 1998) or mutual co-dependence (Hellmann & Wolf, 1993). Building on neorealist argumentation it has also been proposed that nations align because of different interests (Schweller, 1994) or for status (Pedersen, 2018).

The neorealist theory of International Relations, pioneered by Kenneth Waltz (1979), has been central in defining modern neoliberal alliance theory and has left a strong mark of the Cold War international order in the understanding of alliance formation. In my work I will focus on the balance of threat theory, which is defined by Stephen Walt in his book *The Origins of Alliances* (1987), which builds on Waltz's theory. I will present these theories before moving forward with the methodology of my research.

### 3.3 Explaining Alignment: Balance of Power

Kenneth Waltz's, considered the father of neorealism, attempt on explaining why nations choose to align is one of the most prominent of our times. His explanation, that alignment reflects a balancing behaviour, that nations align to balance against a stronger power (1979). Waltz's explanation serves as a theoretical base for later discussions on alignment and therefore I will start by presenting his original Balance of Power theory.

Waltz presupposes that states act in a self-help system and "at a minimum seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination" and try, using i) internal and ii) external means to maximize gain and achieve their goals (Waltz, 1979, p. 118). The internal methods consist of increasing economic abilities, military strength and develop more clever strategies while the external ones include strengthening one's alliance or weakening the opposing one (ibid.). Security is in the core for Waltz's understanding of this anarchistic world order. That is why he has studied security and alliance formation in depth: "In anarchy, security is the highest end. Only if survival is assured can states safely seek such other goals as tranquillity, profit, and power. (...) The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their position in the system" (Waltz, 1979, p. 126).

With limited resources, nations cannot act alone in this self-help system, but are also interdependent, especially when it comes to security. Waltz sees changing power relations and balancing the changes, as a natural state of international relations: "Unbalanced power, whoever wields it, is a potential danger to others" and "leaves weaker states feeling uneasy and gives them reason to strengthen their positions" (Waltz, 2000, pp. 24–25).

Balancing a growing power can be done internally or externally. Internally a nation could increase its own capabilities to even out the changed power relations. Small nations might not have enough means to answer to a larger nation's military build-up and therefore tend to rely on external balancing by allying with others. External balancing means losing autonomy, which is not preferable. A state would then prefer internal balancing, but this is not always possible, and to ensure continued security one must then consider external balancing. In the next chapter I will present the two modes of external balancing that neorealists identify.



### 3.3.1 Bandwagoning and Balancing

A focal point of the balance of power theory is with whom a state aligns when met with the need for external balancing. Theoretically, there are two proposed ways to choose between: bandwagoning with the stronger, adversary power or balancing the adversary power by allying with other weaker states. Aligning with the adversary might seem counter-intuitive but can be reasoned in two ways according to Stephen Walt: “By aligning with the threatening state or coalition, the bandwagoner may hope to avoid an attack on himself by diverting it elsewhere. Second, a state may align with the dominant side in war in order to share the spoils of victor” (Walt, 1985, p. 8). Bandwagoning however leaves little room for bargaining and influence and there is little guarantee that policy decisions will not cause further aggression or consequences. As bandwagoning is a considered risky, states tend to prefer balancing (Walt, 1985).

In Nordic context, the restrained Finnish relation with the Soviet Union during the Cold War is a textbook example of a nation ending up bandwagoning with a threatening neighbour:

Small states bordering a great power may be so vulnerable that they choose to bandwagon rather than balance, especially if their powerful neighbor has demonstrated its ability to compel obedience. Thus Finland, whose name has become synonymous with bandwagoning, chose to do so only after losing two major wars against the Soviet Union within a five-year period. (Walt, 1985, p. 11)

In the Finnish case the Soviet influence infused not only the nation’s military alignment, but practically all policy areas that could be of interest to the Eastern neighbour, which coined the term Finlandization, which Walt refers to in the citation above.

A nation can however also choose to align with a weaker side, against the stronger power which brings us to the concept of balancing. Balancing and bandwagoning are often compared in sharp contrast (Walt, 1985, p. 4; Waltz, 1979, p. 126). Balancing, instead of bandwagoning, has according to Walt two benefits. First, a state that bandwagons with the hegemon has no choice but to trust that the hegemon has no further bad intentions. Second, joining the weaker side will give more influence to the state as they are more direly needed there (Walt, 1985, p. 6).

Balancing should be preferred, if aligning with the weaker side offers credible deterrence against the larger power that threatens the state. If there is a choice, secondary states flock to the weaker side as it is the stronger one that proposes a threat. If the

coalition that is formed is strong enough to deter the threat of the adversary, the states are both safer and more appreciated on the weaker side (Waltz, 1979, p. 127).

Bandwagoning and balancing also imply very different pictures of how relations in the international political world is constructed:

If balancing is the dominant tendency, then threatening states will provoke others to align against them. Because those who seek to dominate others will attract widespread opposition, status quo states can take a relatively sanguine view of threat. (Walt, 1985, p. 13)

[A] bandwagoning world is much more competitive. If states tend to ally with the strongest and most threatening state, then great powers will be rewarded if they appear both strong and potentially dangerous. (Walt, 1985, p. 14)

While serving as a good foundation to our understanding of alignment, the Balance of Power theory is not unchallenged. The most known development of the Waltz's theory is Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory that I will discuss in the next chapter.

### **3.4 Explaining Alignment: Balance of Threat**

Stephen Walt refined the understanding of power balance by proposing a new theoretical theory known as the Balance of Threat (first defined in his 1985 article *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power* and more deeply discussed in his 1987 book *The Origins of Alliances*). As power is not the only explanatory factor for aligning, Walt's theory pinpoints other, more important reasons behind the formation of alliances. By theoretically focusing solely on power, many coalitions remain unexplained as "states may balance by allying with other strong states, if a weaker power is more dangerous for other reasons" (Walt, 1985, p. 9). The coalitions against Germany in the two World Wars serve as a good example to this: while the total military power of the allies was greater than that of Germany, they were "united by their common recognition that German expansionism posed the greater danger" (Walt, 1985, p. 9). In Nordic context Norway, Denmark and Iceland decided to become founding members of NATO, balancing against a (calculated in aggregate power) weaker, but more threatening Soviet Union.

The focus should according to Walt be on the perceived threat rather than power, and he lists a total of four aspects that affect this: 1) aggregate power; 2) geographic proximity; 3) offensive power; and 4) aggressive intentions (Walt, 1987, p. 22). I will give a short summary of what Walt means with these.

*Aggregate power* is what traditionally has been looked at when a degree threat has been measured. Power in this sense is the sum of total population, industrial and military capabilities, resources and technological development (Walt, 1985, p. 9). Limited power (measured with the beforementioned definition) means limited possibilities to pose a threat to others. A powerful nation is however not only a possible threat, but also an attractive ally: "States with great power have the capacity either to punish enemies or reward friends" (Walt, 1987, p. 23).

*Proximity of power* means that the geographical proximity of nations should be considered when measuring the possible threat they pose. As the ability to project power declines with distance, a state that is nearby should be considered a more probable threat than one far away. The response of a proximate threat can be either balancing or bandwagoning, which will produce either "alliance networks that resemble checkerboards" or spheres of influence (Walt, 1985, p. 11).

*Offensive power* mean capabilities that are perceived as not being only defensive. A large military force, that exceeds the needs of national defence will pose a greater threat than reasonably sized forces that are upheld for defensive purposes (Walt, 1985, p. 11).

*Aggressive intentions* are considered "especially crucial" to whether a nation will be perceived as a threat or not and how alliances form (Walt, 1987, p. 25). Even a nation with limited capabilities can act in a threatening manner and trigger a response from others, which most likely will be balancing rather than bandwagoning. Walt summarizes this position neatly: "if an aggressor's intentions are impossible to change, then balancing with others is the best way to avoid becoming a victim" (Walt, 1985, p. 13). With aggressive intentions there is no guarantee that the nation will stay safe even after bandwagoning, like the acceptance of the Soviet ultimatum to establish military bases in Estonia and Latvia that eventually lead to a full occupation in 1940. If balancing is not a viable option, there is no single solution that guarantees survival when facing a powerful adversary with hostile intentions.

## **4 Methodology**

In this chapter I will discuss the methodology of my research. First, I will present the research design of my thesis, then I will clarify what data I will use and how I will analyse it. Finally, I will operationalize the factors of perceived threat and ambition for Nordic defence cooperation.

### **4.1 Research Design**

The empirical part of the research consists of a cross-temporal comparison of ambition for Nordic defence cooperation in the Nordic Council international debates before (2009-2013) and after (2014-2018) the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. This event marks a turning point in the geopolitical stability in Europe and the Baltic Sea Region. This is when I expect a change in the level of perceived threat. By analysing the level of perceived threat and ambition for defence cooperation, the period before 2014 is compared with the period after to see how the changed perception of threat has affected ambition for defence cooperation. I will be looking at this correlation with the theoretical expectation that the period with a higher perception of threat should have a more ambition for cooperation. In addition to measuring the variables that I have deductively taken from the Balance of Threat theory I will also identify other possible explanations that can be inductively drawn from the data that could explain the changes in ambition for defence cooperation. While not strictly following my theoretical framework, openness to other relevant factors that might explain the changes in ambition in defence cooperation help building a more complete picture of the development that I examine.

### **4.2 Data**

My intention is to compare the level of perceived threat and ambition for Nordic defence cooperation in the Nordic Council between 2009 and 2018 and see whether i) a changed perception of threat after 2014 is observable ii) whether the level of ambition for defence cooperation has changed and iii) whether there is a theoretically expected correlation between the two. If the correlation is absent or negative (which would contradict the theoretical expectation) I will discuss other possible explanations for this that can be inductively drawn from the data.

The Nordic Council is the inter-parliamentary structure of Nordic cooperation. In my research I will use data from their annual autumn session which is the top meeting of

the year. I will analyse the point of international debate in the sessions<sup>3</sup>. The meeting point goes under slightly different names and structures depending on the year but consists of at least a presentation by one of the Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers. Each presentation is followed by an open debate. This meeting point might also include presentations from special working groups and discussions on proposals brought to the meeting. As the international debates can be thematically broad, I choose to focus only on the discussions that relate to defence and military security and leave out discussions on e.g. civil security, immigration, and environmental protection. Usually the international debate is given around 2-3 hours of time and the transcribed debates consists of some 20000 words per year. Floors are usually limited to two minutes with one-minute replies. The debate consists of the natural mixture of long and short replies that is typical to any debate of e.g. national parliaments or the EP. My data encompasses a ten-year period which begins in 2009 with the defence turn in Nordic cooperation discussed earlier and ends with the latest council session in 2018<sup>4</sup>.

The Council consists of national parliamentarians, but the main division is that of the parliamentary groups which means that the Council setup is close to the European Parliament or a national parliament. The groups that are represented<sup>5</sup> in my data are the Conservatives (K), the Centre group (M), Social Democrats (S), the Nordic Green Left (NGV) and Nordic Freedom (NF). In my data analysis I will mark the parliamentary group of every speaker using the abbreviations marked in brackets<sup>6</sup>. I also mark every speaker's nation of origin in brackets with their country codes, Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), Iceland (IS), Norway (NO) and Sweden (SE).

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing the minutes from most of the (especially early) meetings are not freely available due to an update of the Council's webpage, but I was given digital access to all the material needed from the secretariat of the Council.

<sup>4</sup> Note that the Defence Minister's report and the defence debate was not held in 2017 due to no Ministers of Defence being present at the plenary session. The Foreign Minister's report was however presented with the following debate held in normal fashion.

<sup>5</sup> Some national parties are without a party groups, but none of these are represented in my data.

<sup>6</sup> While neorealist theory does not take domestic politics or ideological learning in consideration, but the party group affiliation of each speaker is included to recognize ideological patterns in the debate that later can help understand alternative explanations that can be drawn from the data.

In the first part of the analysis I will look at how Russia is portrayed in the debate, what motivates the cooperation, and whether the focus is regional or international. These aspects of the debate make up the factor of perceived threat in the data. In the second part of the analysis I will look at the most prominent themes of discussion related to defence and see whether there is ambition to deepen and develop Nordic cooperation or whether other forms of cooperation or alignment are preferred. I will discuss the operationalization of the factors in the method chapter.

I will use thematic pattern recognition in the data to identify the dominant themes of the debate. During the first skimming of the data I have inductively constructed certain categories that are prominent. In the proper readings I have marked the themes and looked for patterns in the two periods that I compare. A changed pattern signifies a change in the variable that the pattern represents. A pattern of economic argumentation, global focus and a positive perception of Russia e.g. signifies a trend of low threat perception, and a persistent will to develop certain policy areas signify ambition for defence cooperation. If relevant I, however, also mention anomalies in these patterns, e.g. when a speaker is concerned by regional insecurity in a period that otherwise is defined by patterns of low threat perception. Single remarks do not however change the prominent patterns or the overarching phenomenon but mentioning them makes the research more transparent.

### **4.3 Operationalizing**

To connect my theory with the data I will have to operationalize the theoretical factors. This means that I will have to clarify how the central concepts are visible in the debate. The variables I will operationalize here are perception of threat and ambition for Nordic defence cooperation. These two variables consist of thematical sub-categories which will be explained in this chapter.

The level of perceived threat is operationalized by looking at three thematical patterns: how Russia is portrayed in the debate, what the motivation for cooperation is and where the focus of operations lies. High threat is indicated by a perception that Russia is an improbable partner, it has destabilized the region, or that the state poses a direct threat. High threat perception is also indicated by advocating cooperation motivated by security and by having a regional focus on operations.

Low perception of threat is marked by statements perceiving Russia as a partner, a good neighbour, or a neutral actor in the region. Low threat perception is also indicated by economically motivated cooperation and a global focus on operations.

Ambition is conceptualized at three levels: high, medium, and low (or negative). High ambition is operationalized by concrete calls or propositions for changes in cooperation or security policy and direct support for initiatives that would lead to deeper cooperation and integration. The themes are inductively drawn from the data and organized into patterns and analysed. Statements which simply compliment or highlight the importance of cooperation implicates medium ambition and the preference of a status-quo as this does not imply a need for change (I leave most of these cases out as they are quite frequent and homogenous, and therefore not very interesting for my research). Downplaying the role of regional defence (e.g. favouring development aid or peacebuilding instead or other security guarantees like NATO or national defence) implies low ambition.

Being interested in possible alternative explanations for a changed level of ambition, I use the same data to inductively identify other variables (than threat) that explain a change in ambition but do not fit the expected theoretical explanation of my research.

I choose to not limit my analysis to propositions only related to NORDEFECO's activity but choose to include all possible areas that relate to defence, e.g. the Council's role or factors in national security that might limit cooperation (e.g. NATO-membership). I do not use discussions that not directly relate to defence in my analysis. Discussions related to e.g. civilian sea patrol, border controls, forest fire fighting or immigration is only used if they are directly presented as an alternative to or more important matter than defence.

## **5 Analysis**

In this section I will first analyse the level of perceived threat and level of ambition for Nordic defence cooperation 2009-2013 and then do the same for 2014-2018, following the research design and operationalization presented above.

### **5.1 The Perception of Threat in the Nordic Council 2009-2013**

To measure the perception of threat in the Council I will compare the role of Russia in the debate before and after 2014, when a change would be expected due to the annexation of Crimea and the Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine. As a part of the operationalization of threat, I will also analyse whether a change has happened in the focus of the defence cooperation from global to regional. A more regional focus would suggest that there is a threat in the region that must be balanced, in contrast to the peacekeeping and international focus that traditionally has defined Nordic defence cooperation and would indicate global responsibility. The last point that I use to define the level of threat is economic arguments for defence cooperation, as the early defence cooperation is said to emerge mainly from the challenges the Nordic defence forces faced after the 2008 economic crisis. My expectation is that the perception of threat will be low during the period 2009-2013, the focus of the cooperation being on international missions and motivated by economic savings.

#### **5.1.1 The Perception of Russia**

The role of Russia in the pre-2014 debates is, as expected, rather trivial and is mostly connected to the partnership between Norden and Russia that is institutionalized e.g. through bilateral Russo-Nordic projects, the Northern Dimension of the EU, the Arctic Council, and the Barents Regional Council. However, on a few occasions the relations to Russia are problematized, and the Russian campaign in Georgia in 2008 is even brought up in the debate a couple of times. These examples should be considered exceptions and do not get traction in the debate.

The importance of keeping an open dialogue with Russia is pointed out at a few occasions in the debates before 2014 and highlighted especially when discussing the mutual forums (the Arctic Council, Northern Dimension etc.) and Nordic activities in Russia (e.g. the office of the Council of Ministers in Saint Petersburg). The connection that Norden has established with Russia through Norden's activities in Russia is highly valued in the discussions. This cooperation aimed at strengthening the civil society and



healthcare, fighting corruption and trafficking, and journalistic cooperation mainly in north-western Russia. In 2011 an updated three-year strategy for this cooperation was presented as part of the debate by Karin Åström (SE, S), and she proclaimed that ‘now history has given us the opportunities to build a similar cooperation [like the one between the Nordic countries] with the Russian Federation, especially with the parts of Russia that are geographically close to Norden’ (Nordic Council, 2011). While this perhaps is the most vibrant case, many more echo the importance of the Russian cooperation. Elisabeth Vik Aspaker (NO, K) says in 2013 that in its cooperation with Russia the Nordic Council of Ministers wishes to create a foundation for a stronger bond between neighbours that will result in stability, security and development in northern Europe (Nordic Council, 2013). Hans Wallmark (SE, K) also applauds the mobility between Norden and Russia, with around 12 million border crossings between Russia and Finland and about 400 000 between Russia and Norway annually. He welcomes that people build contacts with each other, which builds trust (Nordic Council, 2013).

However, Wallmark also point out that there is another side to the coin: that Russia pressures Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldavia through its foreign policy and that Norden should stand up for the common values and invite these countries to join the western community (Nordic Council, 2013). It is also Hans Wallmark that in 2009 highlights the importance of Nordic regional defence capabilities by referring to Russia’s campaign in Georgia in 2008 (Nordic Council, 2009). Wallmark’s comments are unique in their upright tone. The only other mention of Georgia is done in 2010 by the representative of the Baltic Council Trimivi Velliste in his address, pointing out that “old threats” do not necessarily disappear when new security threats appear (Nordic Council, 2010).

In the Defence Minister’s report of 2012, Foreign Minister Villy Søvndahl (DK, S) (who acted as a stand in for Defence Minister Nick Hækkerup (DK, S)) rather cryptically mentioned that ‘important problematizations connected to the near abroad and the relationship to Russia was discussed’ at the Foreign and Defence Ministers’ meeting in Bodø (Nordic Council, 2012), without specifying what these could have been. Later in the debate he points out that Norden has a problematic relationship with Russia in certain areas, e.g. the issues with democratic development, and the limitations in free speech and the right to demonstrate, but also points out that there are several areas where the

cooperation is good (the Arctic Council as one example) and that upholding the contact is crucial (ibid.).

In the time before 2014 Russia does not take a central role in the Nordic foreign policy and defence debate. Russia is mainly seen as a neighbour, that despite its flaws serves as a good partner in many institutions that formalises the cooperation. There is hope for steady development in the areas in which Russia struggles and Norden is promoting positive change by keeping an open dialogue and investing in projects in north-east Russia. While Russia's intervention in Georgia is mentioned a few times as a threatening example, it does not seem to change the general positive attitude towards Nordic cooperation with Russia. To further investigate the perception of threat in the selected period, I will now compare regional with global focus of the defence cooperation.

### **5.1.2 Regional Versus Global Focus of the Defence Cooperation**

I also use the comparison between regional and global focus of the defence cooperation as an indicator whether there is a perception of regional threat in Norden. The defence cooperation could be developed on a global framework, focusing on UN peacekeeping missions and other international campaigns. If the focus shifts towards regional defence, it indicates that the regional security environment has changed and that the focus of the cooperation should change. This distinction is important, as the form of cooperation differs if the focus changes. A global focus is closer to the "traditional" approach to defence cooperation in Norden while a regional focus indicates a changed reasoning behind the cooperation and is slightly more controversial in the Nordic context.

The global focus of the defence cooperation is quite subsequent in the pre-2014 debates. In the 2009 Defence Minister's report Jyri Häkämies (FI, K) points out that the Nordic defence cooperation is not an alliance, but a supplement to Nordic international activity in e.g. the UN, EU and NATO, and applauds the long tradition of cooperation in international crisis management and peacekeeping missions, the operation in Afghanistan as one example (Nordic Council, 2009). The same year Robert Walter, President of the European Security and Defence Assembly (ESDA/WEU) initiated an extensive debate on the European Battle Groups with the question "Will we ever use a battlegroup, or will they forever remain on the shelf as a good idea that never saw its day?" (Nordic Council, 2009). The discussion is a good and concrete example of a larger understanding of the defence cooperation.

A regional approach to defence cooperation raises protests amongst those who otherwise would support cooperation. Line Barfod (DK, VSG) openly objects to Nordic rearmament and rather calls for a focus on peacebuilding efforts with the argument that the Nordic countries are not under any threat of military intervention (Nordic Council, 2010). Paavo Arhinmäki (FI, VSG) continues by stating that the Nordic countries always have and should continue to be superpowers of peacekeeping but that the current armament strategy (at least in Finland) is not aimed at peacekeeping but on fighting wars (Nordic Council, 2010). Similar arguments are used in Oslo in 2013 by Árni Þór Sigurðsson (IS, VSG) in a discussion on the surveillance of Icelandic air space, during which he states that there is no immediate threat to Icelandic air space and that it is a NATO operation disguised as Nordic cooperation. He bluntly concludes his remark by saying that Carl Bildt (Foreign Minister of Sweden) and Erkki Tuomioja (Foreign Minister of Finland) are always welcome to Iceland, but that if their purpose is to have their air force join a military exercise, they should stay home (Nordic Council, 2013). Christina Gestrin (FI, M) however points out that ‘geographical regions in Europe will grow more important’ and that despite rising costs ‘Norden cannot be a military void and therefore military dismantling is not an option’ (Nordic Council, 2012).

The focus of the defence cooperation in Norden during the pre-2014 period is predominantly on global peacekeeping and missions carried out under the UN. The EU battlegroup framework also gets some attention, as does the air surveillance of Iceland. The air surveillance discussions should however be seen mainly through the lens of ambition to work with the proposals of the Stoltenberg report and as an answer to the withdrawal of the US Icelandic Defence Force in 2006, not as a response to a rising threat in the region.

As I have shown that the perception of threat is low and defence cooperation has a strong global tendency in the pre-2014 period, I will continue with analysing the ambition for cooperation in the same period.

### **5.1.3 Economic Arguments for Deeper Defence Cooperation**

It is commonly understood that the main motivator for defence cooperation in the early days was economic as opposed to military threat after 2014. I will therefore also look at the economic argumentation for defence cooperation in the debate and see whether there

is a change visible. A predominant economic argumentation for cooperation would signify a lower perception of threat.

Apart from having a global focus in his 2009 defence report, Jyri Häkämies (FI, K) subsequently uses economic argumentation for a deepened cooperation. He brings up economic effectivity in resource allocation and procurement, and points out that every country faces the challenge of maintaining a modern and cost effective defence in times when costs increase and resources shrink (Nordic Council, 2009). Kent Olsson (SE, K) uses similar argumentation when presenting the resolution on defence cooperation the same year. Olsson also counters Line Barfod's protest against "military rearmament" by saying that it is not a question of rearmament but about 'a more effective use of the money we have' (Nordic Council, 2009).

In 2010 Cristina Husmark Pehrsson (SE, K) points out that the background and incentive for the successful defence cooperation is obviously economic (Nordic Council, 2010). Foreign Minister Lene Espersen (DK, K) says that the economic crisis of 2008 and the challenges of globalisation call for deeper regional cooperation (Nordic Council, 2010).

Similar argumentation about the cost-effectiveness of cooperation is quite substantial in the 2011 debate but becomes less frequent in 2012 and 2013, perhaps due to the impact of the economic crisis slowly declining. Cost-effectiveness seems nevertheless to be the most frequent argument for a deeper defence cooperation in the time between 2009 and 2013. In the next chapter I will analyse the ambition for cooperation in the same period.

## **5.2 Ambition for Defence Cooperation in the Nordic Council 2009-2013**

I will measure the ambition for defence cooperation by looking at the most prevalent topics present in the debates. These include the willingness to follow through on current projects (e.g. listed in the Stoltenberg report), change the framework of the Council or Council of Ministers in favour of more defence and foreign policy, and change the nature of the cooperation (e.g. by formalizing it or making it more binding).

Status-quo or negative ambition is most commonly also noticeable through these same topics, but also by emphasising the importance of Nordic peacebuilding efforts, climate, economic stability, and any other topic that is juxtaposed against a deepened

defence cooperation. Most of these instances are connected to the perception of threat in the region and therefore discussed in the previous chapters.

### **5.2.1 Nordic Air Surveillance Over Iceland**

The discussion on a Nordic air surveillance of Iceland (which is one of the points in the Stoltenberg report) was heated in 2012 when Sweden and Finland had set in motion the plans of air surveillance exercises in Iceland. As earlier pointed out, the plans provoked negative response from some Icelandic representatives, but also confusion by the actual role of the two countries. For some representatives, the clear distinction between exercise and actual partaking in the surveillance was important and it raised questions in the debate. Kimmo Sasi (FI, K) points out that taking part in the surveillance would show that Nordic solidarity reaches further than words to which Ari Jalonon (FI, NF) replies that the Finnish stance for partaking in air missions in Iceland is in no way unanimous (Nordic Council, 2012). Simo Rundgren (FI, M) later adds that he does not consider that Finnish involvement in air surveillance activities in Iceland would bring any added value to the Nordic cooperation (Nordic Council, 2012). As stated in the previous chapter, Christina Gestrin (FI, M) openly supports Finnish and Swedish partaking in the missions by referring to both the Stoltenberg report and the importance of regional defence. She argues that this would be the next step in fulfilling the Stoltenberg proposals, a way to save money and a good opportunity for Sweden and Finland to gain competence in air surveillance. Strengthening the Nordic defence cooperation is also a goal of the government, she says, and is there for not as dramatic of a proposal (Nordic Council, 2012).

### **5.2.2 The Stoltenberg Report**

The Stoltenberg report gets a lot of attention in the early debates and mostly serves as tinder for a call for more cooperation. However, there are those who are more careful with their ambition. Erkki Tuomioja (FI, S) begins the 2009 international debate by complimenting the report and concluding that many of the proposals are already under implementation, whereas some are more problematic. He does for one not think that the question of partaking in the air surveillance of Iceland is applicable for all Nordic countries and that the solidarity declaration will be hard to implement into legally binding documents. He also points out a couple of shortcomings in the report: that economic questions are not discussed (which were especially pressing after the 2008 financial crisis)

and implies that EU cooperation should be discussed more, as it is ‘the central security guarantee’ for Norden and especially Finland (Nordic Council, 2009). He also would have liked more focus on questions related to the Arctic and Baltic Sea (which are mentioned in the report). Judging by this input, Tuomioja would prefer steering away from traditional defence and military issues in the report (leaving them to the EU) and keeping Norden focused on the more traditional areas of economic and environmental security.

Erkki Tuomioja’s floor in 2009 is followed by Jonas Gahr Støre (NO, S), who has a clearly more ambitious tone towards the Stoltenberg report. He points out that the report set goals for 10-15 years ahead, much further than any government can, and has raised a discussion on matters that are of importance to Norden. He calls for the parliamentarians to also take the debate home, and continue it on both a national and Nordic level (Nordic Council, 2009). Sinikka Bohlin (SE, S) agrees with Gahr Støre on the importance of cooperation in foreign and defence politics but points out that it is not included in the Helsinki agreement that sets the outlines of Nordic cooperation. She asks whether there are plans to attend to this shortcoming. Gahr Støre agrees that this is an issue that should be addressed perhaps through a revision of the agreement, which is something that has been done before (Nordic Council, 2009).

In 2013 in the earlier mentioned remark about Russia pressuring its neighbours, Hans Wallmark (SE, K) asks if Norden perhaps would get a Stoltenberg 2.0 or even 3.0 version in the future (Nordic Council, 2013).

Apart from these concrete remarks about the Stoltenberg report, many more mention it when discussing proposals. It clearly did raise, as Mantas Adomenas of the Baltic Assembly put it in the 2009 debate, “excited interest of unprecedented level” (Nordic Council, 2009), and the implementation of the Stoltenberg proposals seem to enjoy a broad support. While some of the more controversial points (e.g. the Icelandic air surveillance and the declaration of solidarity) do raise protests, those who protest might in the next minute refer to the report when underlining the importance of e.g. common sea patrolling. The report seems to be an important document for validating or emphasising proposals and is used both left and right in the debates.

### **5.2.3 Nordic Declaration of Solidarity**

The Nordic declaration of solidarity is the last point in the Stoltenberg report and is brought up consistently in the early international debates in the Council. The willingness

to sign such a declaration is quite substantial in the years before it happened 2011. After 2011 the declaration, which was the perhaps most controversial of Stoltenberg's proposals, is seen as a sign that development is fruitful. The support for a declaration is often coupled with a call for concrete action to back the paper up. Erkki Tuomioja (FI, S) e.g. states in the 2011 Foreign Ministers' report, 'the declaration of solidarity will be followed by practical measures' (Nordic Council, 2011), a statement that is repeated several times during the 2011 debate.

Jonas Gahr Støre (NO, S) discusses Nordic solidarity in the 2010 debate. Formally, he says, Nordic EU countries has a stronger solidarity with a South-European country than with Norway, and Norway a stronger solidarity with South-European countries through NATO than with Sweden and Finland. This conundrum raises the question whether the Nordic countries should discuss what solidarity means in these times (Nordic Council, 2010). He refers to a recent comprehensive cooperation agreement signed between France and the United Kingdom and calls for Nordic agreements on defence and foreign policy to be just as modern as Nordic agreements on other issues (ibid.).

The solidarity clause is also problematized by Isabella Jernbeck (SE, K) who supposes that there is a will to stand up for each other in the case of foreign aggression, but no guarantee that this will happen. She wonders whether a binding solidarity clause is even possible without every country being a NATO member but points out that Norden in any case should be prepared to defend its own territory without US aid (Nordic Council, 2010). She says that this is not only in Nordic interest but that the US will start requiring this. She also wishes that Nordic air surveillance over Iceland and the Baltics would become reality, as it would show that the will is real. Kimmo Sasi (FI, K) follows the same logic as Jernbeck when he in 2012 points out that the common air surveillance of Iceland shows that the Nordic declaration of solidarity works in practice and urges the Finnish parliament to approve the policy (Nordic Council, 2012).

#### **5.2.4 Changes to the Council or the Council of Ministers**

One concrete way of deepening defence cooperation would be formalizing the way the Council or Council of Ministers deal with the topic. The current form of an annual parliamentary debate, with the Presidium having the issues on their table between sessions implies less importance than the more traditional areas of cooperation that have

a separate Ministerial Council and perhaps working group in the Council. Institutionalizing this policy area would imply significance, and thus proposals for this mark high ambition for cooperation.

Kent Olsson (SE, K) emphasises the importance of the new area of cooperation and comes with a proposal for the next step in developing it: the appointment of a rapporteur that would have societal security, defence and foreign policy on their table and aid the Presidium in these issues (Nordic Council, 2009). In the same session, the Conservative group submitted a resolution calling for deeper cooperation in defence and foreign policy, which was approved with the votes 47 for, 8 against and 2 abstentions (ibid.).

The creation of a parliamentary or ministerial body in Norden that would handle foreign and defence policy is proposed quite frequently. Kent Olsson brought forward one such proposal and in 2010 two such proposals are made: the first by Cristina Husmark Pehrsson (SE, K), who calls for the creation of a Ministerial Council and the second by Árni Þór Sigurðsson (IS, VSG) who instead proposes a working group within the Council to be created (Nordic Council, 2010). Christina Gestrin (FI, M) points out in 2012 that the next logical step in deepening the cooperation would be the formation of a Ministerial Council (Nordic Council, 2011). In 2012 the representative of the Presidium Kimmo Sasi (FI, K) says that the creation of a Ministerial Council has been discussed with the Foreign Ministers and the Presidium but is currently not a focus area. Instead he emphasises the importance of good informal contacts (Nordic Council, 2012).

The informal structure of the defence cooperation is brought up on other occasions too. Marit Nybakk (NO, S), representative of the Presidium, says in 2013 that it might be a prerequisite of NORDEFECO that it lacks a permanent structure, that it is a meeting place where the Nordic countries can meet on every level, and therefore the Presidium sees the defence cooperation as smooth and dynamic even without a Ministerial Council (Nordic Council, 2013).

### **5.2.5 Discussions on a Finnish and Swedish NATO-Membership**

The national split in security strategies, mainly meaning the differences in relations to the EU and NATO has traditionally been a non-debatable issue in the Nordic Council. This is stated several times annually. It is usually brought up as a statement of facts, often in the context that Nordic cooperation works well despite the split. In the data for 2014-2018



the question is not considered un-debatable anymore, but the first instance of the possibilities a Finnish and Swedish NATO-membership would bring to Nordic cooperation is briefly discussed in 2013 and I consider it worth mentioning, despite it not being as broad of a discussion as the other topics that I have brought up from this period or the discussions after 2014.

The discussion is initiated by Isabella Jernbeck (SE, K) who urges Carl Bildt (K, Swedish Foreign Minister) and Carl Haglund (M, Finnish Defence Minister) to start a serious debate in their respective countries on the pros and cons that a NATO-membership would bring. She argues that in times of crisis, NATO-members Denmark and Norway would be in a different situation regarding security assurance than Finland and Sweden (Nordic Council, 2013). Erkki Tuomioja (FI, S) answers by mentioning the Nordic declaration of solidarity and the solidarity clause of the Lisbon treaty, and that perhaps Iceland and Norway could sign this with a similar agreement that they have for the Schengen area (*ibid.*). Carl Haglund says that NATO-memberships would allow for deeper Nordic cooperation on many levels but reminds that it is a highly political question in both Finland and Sweden, and that he thinks much is achieved despite the different security solutions and that this is the starting point for the cooperation (*ibid.*).

### **5.3 Summary of 2009-2013**

The international debate in the Nordic Council sessions in 2009-2013 had a focus on Nordic participation in international peacekeeping missions and the economic pressure on defence forces was a central motivator for increased cooperation. Russia is sporadically mentioned but apart from a few exceptions its role in the debate is a neighbour and a partner, not a regional threat.

The level of ambition to deepen and broaden the cooperation in defence is high and mostly motivated with fulfilling the aims of the Stoltenberg report. Most initiatives are directly connected to the goals of the report, the Nordic declaration of solidarity and Nordic air-surveillance of Iceland being the two most debated topics. Several propositions to change the format of Nordic foreign and defence debate. Formalizing the process in the Council through the creation of a Parliamentary or Ministerial Council, or a working group dedicated to these questions is proposed several times on the initiative of every political grouping. This shows that there is a consensus of the importance of these questions.

In short: the ambition for cooperation 2009-2013 is high while the level of perceived threat is very low. The defence cooperation has a strong economic reasoning and an international focus. The completion of concrete questions regarding defence is mainly motivated by the completing of the Stoltenberg goals. Some concrete propositions of changing the format of defence and security questions in a Nordic context is also brought up. The possibility of a Finnish and Swedish NATO-membership is only discussed briefly once in 2013 and is otherwise considered a non-negotiable part of the cooperation.

#### **5.4 The Perception of Threat in the Nordic Council 2014-2018**

Using the same analytical framework as in the 2009-2013 period, I will now measure the perceived level of threat in the Council in the period after the annexation of Crimea. I will start by looking at the role of Russia, which I expect to have changed from a neighbour and partner to a regional threat. I will then again look at the global versus regional focus in the debate, which I also expect to have changed from the previous period. Finally, I will look at the economic argumentation for defence cooperation and see whether it still dominates the debate, or whether factors related to regional security and stability have taken over.

##### **5.4.1 The Perception of Russia**

Even at a quick glance on the post-2014 debates you can clearly see that Russia's role in it has changed. The mentions of Russia in the early debates was quite sporadic and mostly connected to the cooperation programs that Norden engaged in. After 2014 Russia is quite consistently mentioned as a destabilizing factor in the region, which has become the norm in most of the western debate. Especially in 2014-2015, one could with slight exaggeration say that every second speech related to defence is opened by something like Defence Minister Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide's (NO, K) summary of the situation in her 2014 report: 'Russian aggression against Ukraine and the ongoing conflict has changed the picture of security politics in Europe. This has implications for our relation to Russia, for the security in the Baltic Sea and the development in our near abroad' (Nordic Council, 2014). Because of my limited space I choose not to bring up every time the annexation is mentioned in this manner but focus on the more concrete and straightforward mentions of Russia. The frequent mentions of destabilizing Russian action do imply an unsurprising new norm in the Nordic security discourse.

While most speakers mention Crimea and Ukraine as the central destabilizing events, Hans Wallmark (SE, K) also mentions the growing amount of military exercises, presence and violations of territory in air, sea and ‘probably under water’ (Nordic Council, 2014), referring to the alleged submarine observations in Swedish territorial waters in 2014. He also mentions Russian violation of Estonian airspace and an ‘Estonian policeman [who is] kidnapped and is on Russian territory’ (ibid.). In the events he sees a pattern, that he thinks will be the new norm.

In the 2015 foreign policy report, Minister Timo Soini (FI, NF) concludes that the Ukrainian crisis has shifted the focus of the security debate towards a more traditional, narrow understanding of security, that geopolitics are back (Nordic Council, 2015). Foreign Minister Børge Brende (NO, K) mentions that the security threats that Norden faces are larger than ever after the fall of the Berlin wall and probably more complex than during the Cold War (ibid.). In the same year, Hans Wallmark calls for speakers being more precise in their language, that it is Russia’s action against Ukraine that is behind the worsened state that is the new norm in the region (ibid.).

Foreign Minister Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson (IS, M) says in the 2014 foreign policy report that Norden wishes for a broad and constructive cooperation with Russia, but that it is impossible under the current circumstances. It is Russia’s action in Ukraine that lies behind this and the lack of respect of intergovernmental relations that Russia has shown with it (Nordic Council, 2014). Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist (SE, S) reminds that one should never forget the violation of international law that the annexation of Crimea was when proposing a dialogue with Russia and that if this position is forgotten you stand on very slippery ice (Nordic Council, 2015). I will discuss dialogue more in-depth under the chapter for ambition.

#### **5.4.2 Regional Versus Global Focus and “New Threats”**

In this chapter I will analyse whether the common defence efforts have a regional or international focus after 2014, and whether a perceptible shift from global to regional has happened as expected. As earlier mentioned, a shift towards regional defence would indicate that defence cooperation is considered as an answer to a threat. A global focus in this period would indicate that the main concern is still international responsibility in missions carried out by e.g. the UN, the EU and NATO.

There are sporadic mentions of the international cooperation in the post-2014 debates, but it is not in the centrum anymore. Fighting the Islamic State (ISIS) and the war in Syria are two of the issues brought up, but the participation in the UN mission in Mali is another example of Nordic international involvement during the period. Erkki Tuomioja (FI, S) says that the Nordic countries are well respected in international peacekeeping operations due to their expertise and experience. He adds that Nordic countries, in contrary to superpowers, do not have any geopolitical goals or hidden agenda in their operations but only strive to find sustainable solutions to conflicts in a way that reduce human suffering (Nordic Council, 2015). Martin Lindegaard (DK, M) points out that there never have been as many and deep international crises than right now and calls for Norden to take a more active role and concrete efforts to answer these (Nordic Council, 2014).

The discussions with a regional focus in the post-2014 debate are mostly connected to the perception of threat discussed in the previous chapter and therefore I will not repeat the arguments in this chapter. There seems to be a consensus that the regional security environment (mainly related to the Baltic Sea Region, but also Norden or Europe) has worsened due to Russian action in Ukraine. The most concrete example of this is Hans Wallmark's (SE, K) reference to Russian violation of borders and the military build-up in the Nordic region cited in the previous chapter. Wallmark also comments on Russian airplanes flying over the Baltic Sea with transponders turned off (Nordic Council, 2015). Carl Haglund (M) also focuses on dangerous air activity, referring to incidents where Russian planes flew dangerously close to civil aircrafts with transponders turned off (Granlund & Lindberg, 2014), but also is relieved that these incidents have become more rare (Nordic Council, 2015).

Danish Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen (M) mentions Russia's harsh violations of the international rules-based order and that Russian action has consequences right by the Nordic borders and in the Baltic Sea, pointing at armament in the region and the 'large military exercises without proper warning and transparency' (Nordic Council, 2018).

An interesting new phenomenon is the increased role of hybrid and informational warfare in the debate. Hans Wallmark (SE, K) refers to "lies and propaganda" being used as tools (Nordic Council, 2014) and Børge Brende (NO, K) is concerned about of

propaganda, social media and cyber technology taking over traditional means of warfare (ibid.). Kristian Jensen (DK, M) emphasises the importance of countering Russian propaganda within the NB8 framework with the Baltic states (Nordic Council, 2015).

It is however not a black and white story. Christian Juhl (DK, VSG) brings up western responsibility in the propaganda warfare, claiming that western sanctions and other policies have strengthened Vladimir Putin, that the Russian people were demonstrating and ready to remove Putin from power before this conflict was started and that western “counter-propaganda” provokes Russia to answer with its own “counter-propaganda” (Nordic Council, 2015). Erkki Tuomioja (FI, S) point out that the militarization of the Baltic Sea Region also reflects in media, that ‘propaganda and bellicose rhetoric flourishes’ not only in Russia, but also in some of the Nordic media (Nordic Council, 2016). This claim raised irritated responses from Wille Rydman (FI, K) and Hans Wallmark (SE, K).

Cyber warfare is also mentioned several times as one of the current challenges, e.g. by Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen (DK, M) who mentions ‘Russia’s aggressive cyber behaviour and influencing campaigns’ as a mutual challenge (Nordic Council, 2018) or Ketil Kjenseth (NO, M) who asks about the Nordic cyber cooperation in 2016 (Nordic Council, 2016). Defence Minister Peter Christensen (DK, M) answers him that the cyber domain is gaining more importance in defence politics and refers to NATO naming cyber as a fifth domain of operations (ibid.). Ville Skinnari (FI, S) mentions that Finland has strong cyber capabilities and points out the importance of knowing who owns the cyber companies and the infrastructure (ibid.). Laura Huhtasaari (FI, NF) also joins the discussion in 2016 by pointing out that the level of knowledge is high but it could be higher, but the main shortcoming is that the number of experts is too low. She calls for more cooperation in the area (Nordic Council, 2016).

These concerns seem to reflect a new tendency in the perception of threat, that the possible challenges are not as strongly related to traditional regional threat with “tanks on the border”, but rather to a broader spectrum of “new threats”. The concern for these new threats has not come out of the blue but are in the debate clearly connected to Russia’s aggressive activity in recent years.

There is a stronger regional focus in the defence debate which in most instances directly relates to Russia’s activity in Ukraine. The Nordic discourse pretty much follows

the general western discourse after 2014 and does not really reflect a specific concern for the regional security in Norden, considering that Hans Wallmark (SE, K) is the only one that specifically points out the aggregation of military activity in the Baltic Sea Region and the instances of Russian violation of territorial borders. The growing concern for hybrid warfare and cyber threats seems to be more dominating than the concern for military aggression in the region. The concern for hybrid, informational and cyber threats are nevertheless strongly linked to Russian aggression in Ukraine and other recent activity.

### **5.4.3 Economic Arguments for Deeper Defence Cooperation**

As I mentioned in the analysis of the data from 2009-2013, economic factors started to lose importance after 2011. This trend continues in the post-2014 period to the point that economic arguments are next to non-existent. The only two clear instances of economic concerns are from 2014 and 2015. In 2014 Christina Gestrin (FI, M) says that the crisis in Ukraine has reminded us that peace and stability is not given anymore and that the cost of defence is a burden for the economies of the Nordic countries. She however points out that Norden cannot be a military vacuum and that dismantling is not an option (Nordic Council, 2014). The other instance of economic argumentation is Erkki Tuomioja (FI, S) listing economics as one of the three reasons for defence questions being welcome in the Nordic Council. He says that all Nordic countries struggle with keeping the economy in balance and being able to perform more with resources that rather decrease than grow (Nordic Council, 2015).

The general tone of the international debate in the Council has changed clearly after 2014. The mentioning of Russia as a destabilizing actor in the region has become a new and universally recognised norm. However, there is a substantial decrease of this discourse in the years 2016-2018 and here mainly sporadic statements of the worsened security environment in the region are found. My conclusion is that the perception of threat was high during 2014-2015 but the data shows that it was not considerably higher in 2016-2018 compared to 2009-2013.

## **5.5 Ambition for Defence Cooperation in the Nordic Council 2014-2018**

In this chapter I will perform a similar analysis of ambition as I have done for the first period. While I will have a quick look at the topics discussed in the earlier debates, I will mainly focus on the new central themes of the debate and look at how they reflect

ambition. The topics that are most actively discussed in the post-2014 debates are a possible NATO-membership of Finland and Sweden, and an increased dialogue with Russia. These are the two most prominent themes that relate to answering the security challenges in the region. While it could be argued that the dialogue with Russia should be discussed as a part of the perception of threat, I see it mainly as a tool for countering the threat which is universally acknowledged. This finding indicates that the reaction to an increased perception of threat that was expected from the perspective of the Balance of Threat theory, which would be more alignment, is substituted by a call for de-escalation through dialogue. The expected outcome of more alignment is only applicable in the case of Finland, Sweden, and their relation to NATO.

### **5.5.1 Discussions on a Finnish and Swedish NATO-Membership**

Defence strategies and alignments have usually been strictly a national matter and non-negotiable in a Nordic context. The early defence debates are infused with statements of how well Nordic cooperation in defence is doing despite the split foreign and defence solutions. NATO and EU membership has been a non-issue in the Council, or some would even say that it has been a strength. It is therefore not surprising that the question of a NATO membership for Finland and Sweden is not brought up, or hardly touched upon, by the NATO members in Norden. It is mostly a national discussion in a Nordic forum, clearly reflecting the political division in Finland and Sweden when it comes to NATO. The question obviously raises objection and concerns for a security dilemma evolving in the region, that more NATO presence would provoke Russia and therefore decrease security in the region. I will discuss the objections after first covering the pro-NATO discussions.

#### ***Support for a Finnish and Swedish NATO membership***

I will first present the positions for a Finnish and Swedish membership in NATO. A membership is generally seen as a national security guarantee, but in many instances the non-membership of Finland and Sweden is considered an obstacle for a deeper Nordic cooperation. The opposition and support for a membership follows the left-right division and NATO-stances in national politics, so it is worth keeping a look at which political group the speakers represent. I also want to repeat that most of the debaters are Swedish and some Finnish.

Hans Wallmark (SE, K) says in 2014 that he sometimes gets asked by his Danish and Norwegian friends, even by social democrats – why Sweden is not a member of NATO – which he thinks is a very relevant question and asks for an interest based evaluation of a NATO membership to be made in Sweden (Nordic Council, 2014). He later adds to the discussion by saying that the fact that Denmark, Iceland, and Norway have not requested to step out from NATO shows that they have drawn correct conclusions about the current state in the region (ibid.). In 2015 Wallmark points out that out of the first four speakers two are from Finland and two from Sweden, which he says tells something about how important defence and security politics are for these countries, perhaps because of them not being NATO members (Nordic Council, 2015).

Wille Rydman (FI, K) mentions in 2016 the reports on a NATO membership made in Finland and Sweden (both published in 2016) and asks Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström (SE, S) whether they could be evaluated together. She replies that the reports can enrich the debate, but that it will not change Sweden's stance on security policy based on a strengthened defence force, deepened cooperation and non-alignment (Nordic Council, 2016). Staffan Danielsson (SE, M) says that the bilateral cooperation with the US is being deepened and that Sweden is almost a member of NATO already, as a very active partner. He asks whether a full membership would be easier and less dramatic than a deepened bilateral cooperation (ibid.). Wallström replies that 'we cannot let the Russian threat make us change our security policy doctrine. It would be downright dangerous.' (ibid.) She instead emphasises broad cooperation as a security guarantee.

Pål Jonsson (SE, K) asks Danish Defence Minister Peter Christensen (M) whether the NORDEFCO cooperation could develop if Finland and Sweden would be members of NATO (Nordic Council, 2016). Christensen answers that he is happy that the Nordic cooperation works so well despite every country not being in the alliance but says that it would definitely change the role of NORDEFCO if they were. He concludes by remarking that while he has a lot of good things to say about NATO, he does not want to meddle in what neighbours decide about being members of any alliance (ibid.).

Hans Wallmark (SE, K) is in 2017 again the initiator of the NATO debate by saying that a Finnish and Swedish membership would increase Nordic and European security (Nordic Council, 2017). Erkki Tuomioja (FI, S) answers that he supports Margot Wallström (who is a NATO opponent) in this question.



Anders Samuelsen (DK, M) calls for deeper cooperation between the Nordic countries and within the international order, not only where everyone partakes but also where this is not the case. He clarifies that when it comes to security policy it mainly means NATO, where he hopes for a deeper cooperation through the NATO plus two-format (Nordic Council, 2018). He also mentions the EU and the UN as important forums. Pål Jonsson (SE, K) brings up the NATO non-membership again in 2018 when saying that Norden needs a long-term cooperation based on solidarity both during peace and in the event of war but that this would require Finland and Sweden to be willing to try the conditions for a NATO membership. He concludes that Nordic cooperation that is not anchored in NATO would be ‘ineffective in the best case and dangerous in the worst case’ (Nordic Council, 2018). Norwegian Defence Minister Frank Bakke-Jensen (K) replies that he respects the countries different choices of defence cooperation and that the Nordic cooperation works well but that it does indeed limit the cooperation that some countries are in NATO and some are not (ibid.).

### ***Opposition to a Finnish and Swedish NATO membership***

It should not come as a surprise that the eager pro-NATO statements presented in the previous chapter did not go unchallenged in the sessions. Some of the statements in this chapter overlap with the discussion on developing the dialogue with Russia, but I try to keep the argument concise and avoid overlaps.

In 2014 Simo Rundgren (FI, M) presents that Finnish foreign policy is based on dialogue and concludes that he does not see a NATO membership increasing the security in his country (Nordic Council, 2014). Ari Jalonon (FI, NF) answers Hans Wallmarks (SE, K) remark on a membership (cited in the previous chapter) by saying that it is up to each nation to decide on the question of NATO and one should not focus on it too much. He thinks that Nordic defence cooperation should be discussed in a way that the NATO factor does not get too big of a role and instead focus on e.g. common procurement and in that way increase security during a possible crisis (Nordic Council, 2014). He compares the NATO question to e.g. conscription, in which each nation has its own system and preference (ibid.). Håkan Svenneling (SE, VSG) also refers to Wallmark when saying that he does not believe that NATO is Sweden’s way, nor Finland’s. He argues that this would only raise the tension in the region and thus make the difficult situation even more difficult. He believes that the focus should be turned towards Norden to increase security

in the region and says that he agrees with Wallmark in this matter (Nordic Council, 2014). Erkki Tuomioja (FI, S) also joins the discussion and says all Finns are very happy with the Nordic defence cooperation which ‘builds on respect for the different choices (...) made regarding [their] relation to NATO or the EU’ and that the introduction of the NATO question to this debate most certainly would undermine the almost unanimous support that Nordic defence cooperation has in Finland and elsewhere. He also comments that he does not see any need for or interest in a common NATO evaluation, and that he has understood that the Swedish government shares this view (Nordic Council, 2014).

Simo Rundgren (FI, M) asks Norwegian Defence Minister Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide (K) in 2014 whether Finland’s and Sweden’s non-membership in NATO somehow make common military exercises more difficult, to which she answers that the exercises work fine despite this split (Nordic Council, 2014). She insists that that they have not experienced any problems related to this and that the cooperation on the contrary has intensified over the last years and will continue to do so (ibid.). Søreide repeats this opinion in 2018 (now in the role of Foreign Minister), saying that during her years as Defence and Foreign Minister she has seen how the Nordic cooperation has deepened, how security politics has gained importance, and how the affiliations to different organisations has become less and less problematic. She is especially pleased with Finland’s and Sweden’s cooperation with NATO, mentioning the 2018 Trident Juncture exercise in Norway in which the two took part as a great example of this cooperation (Nordic Council, 2018). Lotta Johnsson Fornarve (SE, NGV) also refers to Trident Juncture when showing her concern for a security dilemma arising in the region. She asks whether there is an ‘imminent risk that such a gigantic NATO led operation contributes to send the wrong signals to the world, that it instead of increasing security increases the tension in our region and contributes to an increased arms race’ (Nordic Council, 2018).

Laura Huhtasaari (FI, NF) shows her gratitude to Danish Defence Minister Peter Christensen (M) saying that there should be no pressuring to join or go out of NATO or the EU. She says that the Nordic Council should focus on the forms of cooperation and leave the rest to national politics (Nordic Council, 2016).

### **5.5.2 Dialogue as an Answer to Threat**

In the foreign and defence debates in 2009-2013, the cooperation projects of Norden with Russia were as important as the development of defence cooperation. During this period

Russia was rarely seen as a threat (as shown in earlier chapters) but mainly as a partner in the common projects and in institutions. In this chapter I will show that the re-establishing of a dialogue with Russia is one of the most prominent reactions to the changed perception of the former partner. I do not understand this as a factor that defines the relation but a reaction to a threat, a tool to stabilize the region. A focus on diplomatic tools steers away from traditional military answers to a threat, which would be balancing through armament or alignment.

The tone of the 2014 debate is quite pessimistic as expected. But even now the Foreign Minister of Iceland Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson (M) wishes in the annual foreign policy report to maintain a broad and constructive cooperation with Russia both on an European and global level, but says that it is impossible under the current circumstances (Nordic Council, 2014). Danish Foreign Minister Kristian Jensen (M) emphasises the contact with Russia in Arctic matters in his 2015 report, which Timo Soini (FI, NF) also does in his reply (Nordic Council, 2015). Höskuldur Þórhallsson (IS, M) says that Norden cannot turn back to the relation with Russia to what it used to be, but that the cooperation should continue in any case. He recalls a recent meeting with representatives from Russia which he says was successful even though both parties agreed that the relation is more muffled, or “more realistic” as he also defined it (Nordic Council, 2015).

A presentation of the Nordic Council of Ministers report on relations to Russia was discussed during the 2015 international debate. Kristina Persson (SE, S), who was the presenter, mentions that despite the challenges (mainly referring to Norden’s Saint Petersburg office closing after being registered as a foreign agent (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2015)) the cooperation and dialogue must continue. She says that this position has been presented to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a meeting in October and that Norden is open for discussion to solve the situation and hopes that Russian authorities are too (Nordic Council, 2015). These concerns are echoed in all replies to Persson’s report, e.g. by Kjell-Idar Juvik (NO, S) who condemns the Russian activity in Ukraine but says that the situation must be answered by balancing the global security situation and continue to develop good relations. Persson notifies that the worsened relations that followed the annexation of Crimea and the troubles that Norden has encountered in Saint Petersburg and Kaliningrad should not be mixed, that they are two different things (Nordic Council, 2015).

In the 2016 international debate the will to strengthen the dialogue with Russia is again quite consistent. Foreign Minister Timo Soini (FI, NF) mentions it in his report, as does Foreign Minister Margot Wallström (SE, S) while Kåre Simensen (NO, S) emphasises it in two replies. Firstly, he mentions that the dialogue has a too small of a role in the public discussions when it comes to Norden's relation to Russia and refers to his home region in northern Norway, where a cross-border connection to Russia is an ordinary matter (Nordic Council, 2016). He later asks Defence Minister Peter Christensen (DK, M) how much space dialogue and diplomacy has in the Nordic cooperation and in NATO, referring to the challenges from Russia (ibid.). Christensen replies that the contact is obviously not the same as after the fall of the wall because of a lack of trust. He however believes that to secure the population there must be a capability and will to protect but also a have a bridge of dialogue (ibid.)

Christensen is also the one who presented the 2016 Council of Ministers report on relations to Russia in which he concludes that the overall relation to Russia has not become better, but that the Council of Ministers hope to continue practical cooperation with Russia, while standing by the fundamental principles that Norden and the West holds against Russia (Nordic Council, 2016). The report is answered with gratitude. Jan Lindholm (SE, M) interprets that the ambition to continue developing the relation with Russia is high. He says while many has mentioned Russia as the big threat, increasing cooperation still seems to be a priority, which he thinks is a good thing (ibid.).

### **5.5.3 Other Proposals that Signify Ambition**

In this section I will mention other topics and proposals that signify ambition but that do not form a consistent thematical pattern in the data.

The Stoltenberg report is barely discussed or even mentioned in the post-2014 data. In 2016 Eva Kjer Hansen (DK, K) asks Foreign Minister Timo Soini (FI, NF) about the progress with the Stoltenberg goals. He answers that the overall progress has been really good but that there is no time to give a fully satisfying answer to the question (Nordic Council, 2016). In 2018 Wille Rydman (FI, K) asks on the behalf of the Presidium whether a Stoltenberg II report could be necessary, to which Defence Minister Frank Bakke-Jensen (NO, K) says that he does not see added value another report would give the NORDEFCO cooperation and that the concrete everyday work is more important (Nordic Council, 2018). Bertel Haarder (DK, M) asks in 2018 whether the Norden should

complete the work with the 13 Stoltenberg proposals, referring to the embassy cooperation that has remained one of the least developed points of the report (Nordic Council, 2018).

Marit Nybakk (NO, S) praises the Nordic cooperation in defence and says that it must be based on capabilities, not rhetoric, and points out that the 2011 declaration of solidarity might not be enough anymore (Nordic Council, 2014).

Juho Eerola (FI, NF) asks in 2018 whether Norden could develop common exercises and activities for military reservists, to which Frank Bakke-Jensen (NO, K) answers that much is done in the area already (Nordic Council, 2018), not specifying what it is that is done.

## **5.6 Summary of 2014-2018**

In the 2014-2018 foreign and defence debates Russia's role has changed from a neighbour and partner to a destabilizing factor and regional threat. The perception of threat in the debate is much higher than in the previous period. The threat level is also marked by a stronger regional focus and the very limited space international cooperation gets in the debate in comparison with 2009-2013. Another central change is the concern for "new threats" in the debate: cyber, hybrid and informational threats gain more attention than traditional military threats in the region.

The rise in the perception of threat in the Nordic debate is however not reflected in the ambition for cooperation. A lot of attention is given to the possibilities of a Finnish and Swedish NATO-membership and how the dialogue with Russia could be developed. Traditional military cooperation does not get as much attention as the concerns for new threats.

The national debates in both Finland and Sweden are (as e.g. Carl Haglund points out in the 2013 debate) polarized when it comes to NATO, with public opinion being primarily against it in Finland and clearly divided in Sweden. The political split follows the same socialist-conservative pattern that is visible in my data too. The 2014 annexation of Crimea however gave good incentive to bring the question up in a more supportive environment – Norden. Parliamentarians that support a membership draw upon a Nordic aspect in their argumentation. Examples of this are the inquiries whether a NATO-membership would allow for deeper Nordic cooperation and Hans Wallmark asking why Swedish social democrats do not follow their Nordic colleagues in supporting NATO

(Nordic Council, 2014). The post-2014 perception of threat allowed for Nordic leverage to be used in a question that is nationally highly sensitive.

From the data that I have researched it would seem like the overall ambition for Nordic defence cooperation is lower after 2014 than before, which is exceptional considering the theoretical expectation of my research. There is, however, a correlation between the perception of threat and ambition for alignment with NATO for the nations that are not members of the alliance.

## 6 Summary

In my thesis I have looked at ambition for Nordic defence cooperation and how the changed perception of threat after 2014 has affected the ambition for it in the Nordic Council. Conceptualizing the Nordic cooperation as alignment, and relying on Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory and the expectation that more threat leads to more alignment, I have studied the minutes of the international debates of the annual sessions of the Council 2009-2018 to see whether this correlation is observable in Nordic parliamentary cooperation. By observing the data, I can conclude that for the period 2009-2013 the level of perceived threat is low and the ambition for regional defence cooperation is high, while the level of perceived threat 2014-2018 is high but the ambition low.

The early debate was defined by many concrete proposals of different nature on how to intensify and develop the cooperation, with a mostly economic argumentation supporting it and a global focus on operations. Russia is generally perceived as a partner or neutral actor in the region. Most of the development propositions were linked to the proposals of the Stoltenberg report.

The later period 2014-2018 was marked by consistent references to Russia as a de-stabilizing and threatening actor and the focus of operation was mainly regional. The ambition to develop the defence cooperation was much lower than during the first period. The preferred Nordic answer to the perceived threat was dialogue with Russia, which is a more typical Nordic response to conflict. Nordic cooperation against "new threats", like cyber-, hybrid- and informational threats also sparked ambition. A notable phenomenon was the intensive debate for a Finnish and Swedish NATO-membership in the Council. Next, I will discuss the wider implications of these findings and the limitations of my research.

My research question was: *how has a changed level of perceived threat changed the ambition for Nordic defence cooperation in the Nordic Council*, and the answer that I can draw from the analysed data is that unlike what Walt's Balance of Threat theory (1987) would suggest, the ambition for Nordic defence cooperation was lower during the time of high perceived threat than it was during period of low perceived threat. The question is: what explains the high early ambition for defence cooperation and what is the

reason for the higher perception of threat not leading to a higher ambition for regional alignment?

The data shows that the early ambition is not linked to threat. Looking at how the parliamentarians argued for a deepened regional defence cooperation, it clearly was the 13 proposals of the Stoltenberg report that gave the parliamentarians political guidance and incentive to develop the cooperation. Almost every thematical discussion that formed a consistent pattern in the data of the first period of analysis is related to the report, not to mention the broad discussions on the report itself.

Another probable factor explaining the early ambition is the excessive enthusiasm for the new field of cooperation, something that is also pointed out by Saxi as an explanation to why the early ambition eventually toned down: “there was a large gap between positive rhetoric and real political will when it came to Nordic defence cooperation” (Saxi, 2016, p. 77). Nyhamar makes a similar notion about the ideologically driven cooperation in the early years: “Nordic security cooperation in the past was usually advocated by *Nordists* who viewed it as a good in itself, without linking it to current security policy or strategic challenges” (Nyhamar, 2019a, p. 9). The thematical pattern of willingness to change the Council’s format in favour of more foreign and defence questions 2009-2013 and the high interest for debating new threats in 2013-2018 (which have been constantly up in public debate the last years) also follows the same logic of early enthusiasm.

As the main argument for cooperation in the early period with a low threat perception was hope for economic savings (which, however, have not been as extensive as was predicted (Saxi, 2016)), and the focus was mainly on global operations which was a familiar approach to Nordic defence, the early cooperation could be ambitious without risking political tension at home or in the region. It was business as usual. This is also noted by Fägersten et.al. in the presumption that “the less tense geopolitical situation in 2009 may have created an environment conducive to more innovative proposals” (Fägersten et al., 2019, p. 21). With a higher perception of threat, the ambition toned down, which is visible in the pattern of favouring dialogue as an answer to perceived threat after 2014. This is another possible variable explaining the results of my analysis.

However, with the changed theme of the defence cooperation, from economy to security, the debate in the Council after 2014 becomes uncertain and awkward. The



speakers retract to a less controversial, familiar, call it Nordic, approach to threat – dialogue. Parliamentarians certainly value the cooperation in defence but lack the knowledge or guidance for the discussion environment to be more productive 2014-2018. The Stoltenberg report offered them this after 2009. The low ambition during the period of high perceived threat also implicates a disbelief for Nordic cooperation as a credible security guarantee, whereas the intensity of the NATO-membership debate for Finland and Sweden would imply that NATO is perceived as one.

As the question of a Finnish and Swedish NATO-membership was one of the most prominent topics of discussions in the debates of 2014-2018, the theoretical expectation of my research held true for the nations lacking the security guarantee of NATO. A higher perception of threat caused a balancing reaction but balancing with NATO was preferred over Nordic alignment, which indicates that when it comes to national security, NATO is considered a stronger security guarantee than NORDEFECO. Nordic cooperation is often presented as an alternative to NATO in the debate, but the argumentation is that it would be a low-tension solution, where as NATO would incorporate a security dilemma in the region, causing more insecurity. In the Council debate, Nordic cooperation is only presented as a secondary option, as a counterargument to the support for NATO, rather than a priority in times of high perception of threat. This notion would be very different when looking at e.g. national debates, public opinion, or the views of defence experts. My data shows just one side of the coin and is rather linked to ideology than the actual role of NATO as a limiting or enabling factor in Nordic defence. A proper analysis of this would help clarify the preconditions for developing NORDEFECO. The international debate in the Nordic Council shows that the role of NORDEFECO as a security factor in the region, especially vis-à-vis NATO, is still uncertain. Not putting one against the other is however the most productive starting point for the discussion, as the two frameworks rather supplement than contradict each other (Nyhamar, 2019a). It seems from the debate that there is no common understanding of what NORDEFECO is or what it could or should be and it seems that the cooperation is still looking for its purpose, but developing it on a parliamentary level would require more guidance and clearer visions for the possibilities a Nordic dimension could offer to the regional defence structure.

As the ten-years of NORDEFECO and the Stoltenberg report have been turbulent, with successes, failures and a changed regional security environment, the cooperation has

had a difficult time finding its place in the national and regional security regimes. I have focused on how the changed perception of threat has changed the ambition for cooperation during this period but have not focused on whether the decrease in ambition could be connected to NORDEFECO simply becoming more pragmatic. Whereas everything seemed possible in 2009, some aspects of the initial vision (like joint procurement) have proven to be difficult and even ineffective (Järvenpää, 2017; Saxi, 2016). While a rationalization of the cooperation probably has toned down the eagerness in the Council, it is still surprising that no reaction to the changed perception of threat is visible in my data. It should be acknowledged that a turn from *Nordism* to pragmatism requires a lot more knowledge of the field if parliamentarians ought to continue productively discuss matters of defence and security.

If we consider that the cooperation has pragmatized and the regional security environment has stabilized for time being, now is the time to start properly researching the future scenarios of NORDEFECO and set up clear boundaries and goals for the cooperation. This includes the synergy between NORDEFECO and NATO (e.g. how much NORDEFECO can develop without all participating states being members of NATO), what possible scenarios Norden might have to answer to under this new security norm (Nyhamar, 2019b) and who has what kind of role in the development of the cooperation.

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