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Civil Defence (Re)Emerged

A Multi-Level Perspective on Policy Developments in Post-Crimea Europe

Wrange, Jana

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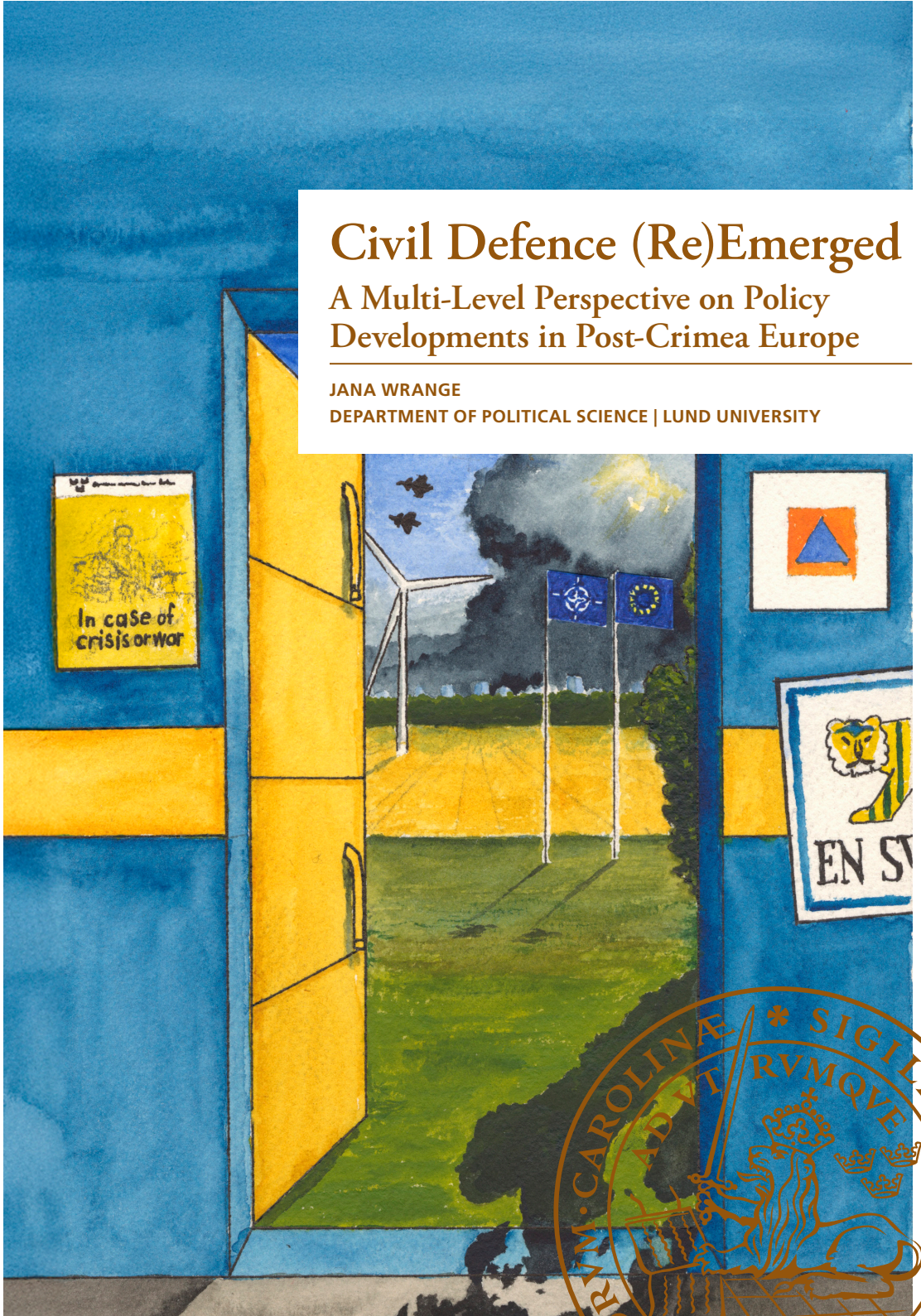
European security is in a transformative era, marked by various challenges, including Russia's hybrid tactics, the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, and ultimately its full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In response, European states and security institutions have been urgently modifying their defence policies. A key aspect of this shift has been the (re)emergence of civil defence – in some form or another – as an increasingly important strategy to alleviate the various threats to societies, including that of war. This dissertation explores the development of civil defence in this changing security landscape from a multi-level perspective, focusing on national, regional, and international levels. Covering the period from 2015 to 2024, it examines Sweden's civil defence policy, compares how Nordic and Baltic countries approach total defence, and analyzes the roles of NATO and the European Union in shaping civil defence efforts. In so doing, it maps the complex and simultaneous security policy processes unfolding across various contexts, while emphasizing the challenges of translating policy ideas into practice. It also evaluates the potential for stronger international cooperation in civil defence, especially within the EU and regional frameworks. Thus, through its four articles, the dissertation offers valuable insights into contemporary civil defence and provides a deeper understanding of how European states and institutions build resilience and enhance security in these uncertain times.

JANA WRANGE has a background in History and Political Science, with a focus on European Affairs, having studied at Malmö University and Lund University. She was employed at the Estonian Government Office during its EU Presidency in 2017. Her research and teaching interests include security and defence issues of small states and the EU, as well as intelligence analysis.

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A Multi-Level Perspective on Policy Developments in Post-Crimea Europe

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Abstract:

This dissertation examines the (re)emergence of civil defence in Europe in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. More specifically, it investigates the existing conceptions of civil defence and how these are shaped in a multi-level institutional context, focusing on the interplay between national, regional, and international levels. Through the lens of discursive institutionalism, the thesis emphasizes the dynamic relationship between ideas and institutions in shaping security policies, while revealing the limitations of ideational processes' impact on policy implementation. Drawing on a novel set of data from interviews conducted between 2020 and 2023, and extensive document analysis, the dissertation maps the evolution of Sweden's contemporary civil defence policy; the Nordic and Baltic states' approaches to resilience; and the role of NATO and the European Union (EU) in the development of civil defence. Conceptually, it advances understandings of civil defence, resilience, and strategic autonomy within contemporary security paradigms. It pushes the concept of civil defence beyond exclusively nuclear associations; critically analyzes the conceptualization of resilience within the total defence principle; and emphasizes the role of strategic autonomy in strengthening dimensions of civil defence, particularly within the EU. Collectively, the four articles in this dissertation contribute with insights into complex and simultaneous security policy processes taking place in multiple institutional settings, offering a unique snapshot of a transformative era in European security. They emphasize the challenges of translating policy ideas into practice and assess the prospects for enhanced international cooperation, including by underscoring the potential for the EU to serve as a central platform for civil defence collaboration.

Key words: civil defence; total defence; resilience; crisis preparedness; strategic autonomy; discursive institutionalism; security logic; socialization; strategic culture; security culture; Sweden; Baltic Sea region; European Union; NATO.

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A Multi-Level Perspective on Policy Developments in Post-Crimea Europe

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To my family

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List of Articles with Abstracts

Article I: Wrange, J. (2022). Entangled security logics: from the
decision-makers' discourses to the decision-takers'
interpretations of civil defence

Entangled logics, which attribute meaning to security, characterize the contemporary security field, bringing about broad comprehensions and ambiguous concepts. Civil defence has (re)surfaced as one such concept that is broadly conceived in the official discourses produced by decision-makers. Since security is ultimately enacted by practitioners, alias decision-takers, their interpretations of concepts significantly shape policy actions. Therefore, this article moves from decision-makers' discourses to decision-takers' interpretations and explores the divergent understandings of the concept of civil defence in Sweden. Applying a discursive approach to data gathered through official documents and interviews with 21 national agency representatives, organized under five societal sectors, it finds that two main interpretations emerge, across and within sectors. These are conceptualized as "territorial civil defence" and "societal civil defence", linked, respectively, to logics of "territorial security" and "societal security". These differences, as is argued, potentially challenge agency collaboration and eventual policy coherence in terms of policy aims, governance and venues for cooperation. Hence, the study highlights the complex constraints that contemporary security discourses set in the policy sphere. It concludes that in order to effectively meet and capture the complexity of contemporary security, disentanglement of the field's concepts, both in theory and in practice, is needed.

Article II: Wrange, J. (2024). 'Outsider' socialization: Sweden's
interactions with NATO in civil defence prior to membership

This study assesses the impact of NATO socialization upon an 'outsider' country, using Sweden in the area of civil defence as a case study. Relying on 33 interviews from 2020 and 2022 with civil servants from Swedish

government agencies, the article gives a unique empirical account of practitioners' perceptions on the interactions (or the absence thereof) with NATO prior to Sweden's NATO membership, covering a crucial phase under which the country knocked on the alliance's door. It expands the existing socialization literature by developing the 'outsider' perspective, while also contributing to the understanding of the impact of the socialization process on a practical level. To that end, the study develops a theoretical framework based on exclusion, interactions, incentives, and compatibility which serves to elevate the analysis that highlights challenges for 'outsiders,' while proposing subsequent strategies to mitigate them. Furthermore, it unlocks a discussion on NATO's role in national resilience of present and future member countries.

Article III: Wrange, J., R. Bengtsson and D. Brommesson (2024). Resilience through total defence: Towards a shared security culture in the Nordic-Baltic region?

This article investigates the defence policies of the Nordic and Baltic countries from the perspective of shared security culture. To that end, the article analyses conceptualizations of total defence and resilience in a comparative perspective and inquires into existing and prospective regional cooperation in this area, in order to determine to what degree there exists a common security culture based on shared norms and identities and manifested in practices of security cooperation. The study, which draws on 19 interviews with civil servants from the eight states of the region, shows that while there is fertile ground for a shared security culture to emerge, thus far, due to variations in conceptualizations, threat perceptions, and interaction preferences, only three Nordic states show clear signs of a shared security culture. The study contributes to existing research by situating the concept of resilience in (total) defence discourses; by expanding the theoretical work on security culture to an international context; and by offering a unique empirical account of the process of (re)building total defence policies in a region crucial to European security.

Article IV: Wrange, J. (2025). Strategic Autonomy: a 'Quantum Leap' Towards European Civil Defence

Immense challenges to European security in the last decade have fueled the European Union's search for strategic autonomy – its ability to act independently – and ignited a desire to make "a quantum leap forward on security and defence" (Borrell 2022). But varied understandings of strategic autonomy and its impact on the EU's foreign and security policy exist. This article posits that strategic autonomy implies a comprehensive approach to security that can be understood as a form of total defence, comprising both military and civil dimensions. Drawing on discursive institutionalism, it analyses the ideational power of total defence in security discourses from 2010–2024 in official EU documents and statements, to assess the impact of the concept of strategic autonomy on the development of European security and defence policy. The findings demonstrate that the idea of total defence precedes the (re)emergence of the concept of strategic autonomy. However, the latter has served as a catalyst for increasing European defence capabilities, primarily by intertwining the civil and military domains. The article concludes that the (re)emergence of strategic autonomy could constitute a 'quantum leap forward' in the EU's launch of a European Civil Defence.

Civil Defence (Re)Emerged

Introduction

Civil defence is back, yet undergoing substantive overhaul. Though after the Cold War it was "considered by many to be a relic of history, a curiosity or vaguely familiar target of ridicule" (Cronqvist et al. 2022a, p. 1), civil defence is – yet again – becoming increasingly important for alleviating the various threats to societies, including that of war. In that regard, it has (re)emerged – in some form or another – on the political agenda in many European states and institutions. But it is not the civil defence we knew that has returned. Once the embodiment of the totality[1] of the modern warfare of the twentieth century, civil defence was "primarily concerned with civilian responses to armed aggression" (Alexander 2002, p. 209), at the time focusing mainly on (nuclear) war threats in a solely domestic capacity[2]. This narrative continues to dominate academic scholarship on civil defence, which remains largely focused on its historical aspects and the lessons to be applied in its (re)emergence (Davis 2007, Biess 2009, Grant 2010, Cronqvist et al. 2022b).

Yet, the current era in which civil defence returns is much more complex, characterized by a comprehensive security landscape with various, often transboundary, threats. What is more, globalization and the rise of international institutions have led to increased interdependencies among states, played out in an intricate and entangled multi-level milieu. Therefore, it has become apparent that contemporary civil defence goes beyond purely military threats and national preconditions, assigning importance to transnational actors and

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[1] Although a contested term, the *total war* concept emerged to characterize late nineteenth and early twentieth century warfare (including the World Wars) for its extensive destructiveness, which exceeded the military domain and included civilian targets, calling for the mobilization of the whole of society (Aron 1981, Black 2006, Larsson 2019). To counter total war, the concept of *total defence* emerged, including both military and civil defence. The existence of civil defence became in itself "an expression of the totalization of war, which civil society was now asked to confront" (Bjoernsson 2022, p. 28). During wartimes, civil defence was mainly concerned with the organization of shelters, stockpiling, and alarm systems but remained essential even throughout the Cold War, focusing on the preparing for possible (nuclear) war.

[2] To be fair, although mainly national in their orientation, civil defence policies were historically also influenced by global arenas and actors, including informal ties between professionals of different states as well as institutions such as NATO, "that were central for the transnational circulation of ideas about civil defence" (Cronqvist *et al.* 2022a, p. 5, Bjoernsson 2023). However, as Cronqvist et al. (2022) note, the scholarly attention on these ties has been rather limited.

arenas. This raises the question of *how we can understand the developments of civil defence within the context of comprehensive security and multi-level institutional frameworks*. This conundrum has, thus far, received limited scholarly attention. The ambition of this thesis is therefore to offer new insights into precisely this underlying question.

There is no denying that European security is currently in a formative era. Accelerated by Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, European states and security institutions alike have been urgently modifying their defence policies. The general trend in this regard has been to opt for comprehensive strategies with both civilian and military features, defined by their all-hazards approach involving the whole of society in delivering security. For the Northern European states, that entails a (re)turn to total defence doctrine – "a whole of society approach to national security" (Wither 2020, p. 62) – and its co-constitutive elements of military and civil defence (Berzina 2020, Maskaliunaite 2020, Stiglund 2020, Larsson 2021, Larsson and Rhinard 2021). In Sweden, that implies a civil defence that comprises all civilian efforts that ensure the protection of the population, the functioning of society, and support for the armed forces in crisis or war (Lindgren 2015).

At the same time, commitments for regional security cooperation among the Nordic states have also been intensified (Møller 2019, Bengtsson 2020, Edström and Westberg 2020, Wither 2020, Larsson and Rhinard 2021, Brommesson et al. 2023). In the European Union (EU), this comprehensive approach can be observed through a discursive shift in its foreign and security policy, increasingly featuring concepts such as resilience and strategic autonomy, as well as through the rise in collective security initiatives that combine civilian and military fields (Wagner and Anholt 2016, Juncos 2017, Biscop 2018, Joseph and Juncos 2019, Helwig and Sinkkonen 2022). In the context of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), its leaders have made commitments to "continue to enhance our resilience against the full spectrum of threats, including hybrid threats", further reinforced in NATO's Strategic Concept of 2022 (NATO 2016, 2022, Frizzelle et al. 2022), while expanding the alliance's role in the European security architecture with two new Member States – Sweden and Finland – under its belt.

These are but a few illustrations of the many policy processes that were initiated at the time of the deteriorating European security atmosphere during the year 2014, although originating well before that, and further catalyzed by the various challenges that have come our way since. These include the global Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, growing geopolitical tensions, sabotages in the energy and cyber spheres, and ultimately the outbreak of a war on the

continent, with Russia starting a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022. All these events have highlighted the complexity of the contemporary threats and fueled an avalanche of simultaneous developments in various institutional contexts – national, regional, and international – further entangling these domains. Meanwhile, they have reinforced the importance of civil defence alongside that of the military, while setting new imperatives for civil defence policy developments, now in fast transition.

Research Aims and Approach

To meet the diverse demands of contemporary security in an efficient way, coherent (civil) defence policies are of outmost importance, which is why it is more crucial than ever to advance our understanding of what a (re)emergent civil defence entails in a comprehensive, multi-level setting. To cater for this ambition, this compilation dissertation has two, necessarily interlaced, aims. Firstly, it aims to investigate the existing conceptions of civil defence in national, regional, and European contexts. Secondly, it aims to demonstrate how these conceptions are shaped by the ideational processes taking place in multi-level institutional settings. Accordingly, and through their engagement with these underlying questions, the four articles in this dissertation testify to the complexity of contemporary (civil) defence policies and the entangled context in which these emerge, simultaneously considering the prospects for enhanced security cooperation, vital for the security of Europe as whole.

Theoretically, the dissertation departs from the presumption that ideas matter for policy development and that variations of the idea of civil defence can be found circulating on multiple, highly entwined, national and transnational arenas, all of which are defined by their own "set of rules, norms, expectations and traditions" – henceforth institutions (March and Olsen 1989, p. 5). Accordingly, it hypothesizes that various institutional settings potentially shape national civil defence policies and *vice versa.* This is considering, as per a discursive institutionalist perspective, that ideas – understood as beliefs held by individuals (Goldstein and Keohane 1993b, p. 3) – are shaped by institutional contexts but they can also change institutions, which correspondingly are perceived as "simultaneously constraining structures and enabling contracts of meaning" (Schmidt 2008, 2010, p. 4). Thus, through interaction – that is, in essence, processes of exchanging ideas (Checkel 2003) – on various arenas, policy practitioners are exposed to new beliefs that could influence their own perceptions and subsequently political actions (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993; Croft, 2000; Balzacq, 2011).

Yet, it is also important to keep in mind that the mere existence of ideas in a given community does not automatically translate into their influence on policy (Goldstein and Keohane 1993b, p. 11) as they need to be first internalized (Schmidt 2010). Only then can ideas be transformed into political reality by agents with institutional and political power, which in the literature are predominately considered to be the political elites – the decision-makers – that stand "behind every innovative institution" (Adler and Barnett 1998a, p. 43). That said, this dissertation posits that this also includes policy practitioners – the decision-takers – who are on the receiving end of the decisions that have been made and ultimately responsible for the enactment and implementation of these (Lipsky 1980). It argues that to further our understanding of how ideas *de facto* influence policies – or, more importantly, the conditions under which they do not – greater scholarly attention should be placed on the policy implementation level.

Empirically, the focus lies on Sweden's civil defence policy. This case is particularly fitting for the purpose of this thesis due to the current rebuilding of Sweden's historic total defence principle, consisting of military and civil defence, which is ongoing since the Government's decision of 2015. The explicit political ambition for the revival of civil defence was to entirely reconstruct the policy in line with the contemporary security situation, catering for a wide spectrum of threats (The Swedish Government 2015). In addition, Sweden's civil defence was to be built in collaboration with other states and organizations (The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency 2018, The Swedish Government 2020). As such, this case allows for the study of both the shape of a (re)emergent civil defence policy and the (transnational) interactions within this field. Therefore, the case of Sweden is, in various forms, represented in all four articles – in the first two as the case in point; in the third as part of a comparative analysis between Nordic and Baltic states; and in the fourth study as a member of the EU.

Methodologically, the thesis employs a qualitative, multi-level research approach, drawing on a novel set of primary data collected through interviews and document analysis. It mainly covers the period from 2015–2024, although the analysis in the fourth article extends back to 2010. While adopting this chronology presents certain methodological challenges – particularly given the ongoing evolution of civil defence, which makes it a moving target – the novelty of this dissertation lies in providing a unique snapshot of a crucial phase in the development of European security more broadly, and contemporary civil defence in particular. But, to better understand the current dynamics, it is essential to provide a brief genealogy of the (re)emergence of

civil defence, beginning with the Cold War period and leading up to the present context.

Situating the (Re)Emergence of Civil Defence in Theory and Practice

The Cold War Civil Defence

As a crucial part of the total approach to defence, civil defence has always existed in some form, though its modern manifestation began to take shape at the beginning of the twentieth century, which is also when the concept was coined (Vale 1987). The development of weaponry and warfare during the two World Wars spiked the significance of civil defence, and the academic debate surrounding it, as the notion became a central aspect of society. Subsequently, it developed into "one of the ordinary duties of citizenship", representing the core values of democracy by making national security a shared responsibility among citizens. It involved both men and women, although their roles remained distinct (Noakes 2012, p. 735, Van Lente 2022). Civil defence embodied "a set of ideas, activities and organizations intended to prepare civilians to face annihilation, to give some protection to civilians in wartime, and to reassure both civilians and members of the military that the home was not being left undefended" (Noakes and Grayzel 2012, p. 54). Accordingly, Enloe and McEnaney alike characterize civil defence discourse, during wartime and beyond, as a far-reaching militarization of everyday life and society (Enloe 2000, McEnaney 2000).

The academic inquiry into civil defence surged with the advent of the atomic bomb, as the focus shifted toward preparing for nuclear attacks (Davis 2007, Biess 2009), which is the narrative that continues to dominate civil defence conceptualizations to this day. The first states to adapt their civil defence strategies for nuclear threats were the ones who possessed the weaponry – the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (USSR) (Geist 2019). It took some time before the European states followed suit as fear of a nuclear attack surpassed the imagination of those who had just witnessed the Second World War and "when imagining war, people usually go by experience" (Bjoernsson 2022, p. 31). Post-war fear and anxiety became a key aspect of the collective memory in countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) and West Germany, significantly shaping their civil defence strategies, although their approaches and the attitudes of their citizens toward civil defence differed considerably (Biess 2009, Grant 2010). But the advancements in weaponry moving from the

atomic bomb to the hydrogen bomb in the early to mid-1950s, led to most nations implementing measures to safeguard their top military, bureaucratic, and political leaders in the event of an actual nuclear attack (Bjørnsson, 2022; Rajaraman et al., 2004).

What followed was a period marked by extensive planning for shelters, mass evacuations, and the management of public anxiety over nuclear threats, with the prevailing approach focused on preparation and communication, although states' approaches to these aspects varied. In Sweden, these efforts were combined in its total defence strategy, with civil defence focusing on comprehensive emergency evacuation planning, mandatory civil defence service, regular atomic air-raid drills, and the construction of large public shelters, to name a few, with the phrase "if war comes"[3] repeatedly emphasized in both the daily lives of citizens and in military and political discussions (Cronqvist 2012, Rosander and Olgarsson 2014). Largely drawing on the American model, Marie Cronqvist describes how the militarization of everyday life in Sweden surpassed that of many other countries. Notably, Sweden's civil defence budget per capita remained higher than those of major powers, including the USSR, the UK, France, and the US, even into the 1980s, which in itself is an interesting development due to Sweden's neutrality policy at the time (Cronqvist 2012).

However, Lawrence J. Vale argues that in the case of Switzerland, also a country with a long tradition of armed neutrality, it was precisely that identity that was driving the salience and success of civil defence policy as "non-alignment makes possible a highly individual national reaction to the problem of civil defence" (Vale 1987, p. 95). Thus, while the Swiss civil defence was developed following the four common (American) rationales of humanitarian insurance, deterrence, crisis management, and survival of the state; what contributed to Switzerland having the "most complete civil defence system in the world" was its neutrality; the central role of the armed forces; its general (total) defence principle; prosperity; as well as the question of possessing nuclear weapons, from which the Swiss decided to refrain (Vale 1987, pp. 94–100).

This highlights that for Cold War civil defence, the factors influencing its development were closely tied to national conditions, including financial resources, geopolitics, experiences with national disasters and warfare,

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[3] During the twentieth century, a pamphlet titled "If War Comes" was distributed to Swedish households in 1943, 1952, and 1961 and later added to the phone book. The tradition of a booklet, now titled "If Crisis or War Comes", sent to all Swedish households was revived by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency in 2018, with an updated version distributed in 2024.

domestic politics, and the presence of nuclear weapons (Vale 1987). In more theoretical terms, this could be explained by variation in of states' strategic cultures – an analytical lens that presumes "that different states have different predominant strategic preferences that are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree by the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites" (Johnston 1995, p. 34). Along these lines, states' approaches to civil defence are rooted in the total sum of ideas, perceptions, and beliefs that guide national policy elites in their policy action, confined within the national borders of states (Snyder 1977, Gray 1999, Neumann and Heikka 2005, Libel 2020).

Consequently, civil defence policies were predominantly built with national preconditions in mind, yet glimpses of the impact of transnational relations could be found too, not least in terms of the US impact on European civil defence policies. Many examples speak to that, from the general rationales behind the policy, to the US demand on European countries to increase defence efforts to counter expected Soviet aggression in Western Europe. This led, for instance, although with little political enthusiasm, to the launch of the Dutch civil defence organization (Van Lente 2022). However, more detailed country comparisons of Cold War civil defence are hard to come by (Vale 1987, Geist 2019), not to mention studies on the role of international institutions, limiting our existing knowledge of the impact of transnational arenas on civil defence development (Cronqvist et al. 2022a).

Notwithstanding, Iben Bjoernsson has made significant contributions toward filling this gap with her studies of NATO's influence on (Danish) civil defence planning during the Cold War, arguing that NATO provided a platform for idea circulation. This happened particularly within the framework of its Civil Defence Committee that was created in 1952, aiming "to be the forum where all technical and administrative aspects of civil defence could be discussed and in which common lines of action could be evolved" (see also Bjoernsson 2022, 2023, p. 221). However, she concludes that "again and again, aspirations for common goals and standards were thwarted by different outlooks and realities. A future war looked very different according to geographical circumstances" and the size of states, while civil defence remained seen as solely national responsibility (Bjoernsson 2023, p. 237). Therefore, there was a lack of interest in integration and the main ideas that were pushed through the NATO framework were those of the US, supported by the UK. Consequently, "civil defence guidelines really could be treated as an á la carte option," with Denmark picking some but discarding others (Bjoernsson 2023, p. 237). Concurrently, NATO membership appeared to

restrict the US as well as the UK from implementing extensive civil defence programs on their own as this could be interpreted as anti-alliance (Vale 1987, p. 124). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that NATO's influence on national civil defence developments remained restricted, though it did provide a platform for "much demanded knowledge circulation and exchange" (Bjoernsson 2023, p. 224).

The End of the Cold War (Civil Defence)

The end of the Cold War had a significant impact on the trajectories of international politics. First, it brought with it a shift in security thinking, broadening the threat spectrum and allowing for new perspectives to take root. Indeed, the relative absence of war at the time supported the rise of broader interpretations of security, shifting away from solely territorial (including nuclear) concerns to include other aspects, such as human, societal, economic, or ontological security (Buzan 1991, Buzan *et al.* 1998, Howorth 2004, Hansen 2006). That expanded the threat spectrum to include various crises and risks – from natural disasters to economic crises to terrorism. This expanded, crisis-oriented approach to security emphasized the need for crisis management strategies, where a crisis is viewed as a threat to the core values or vital systems of society that must be urgently prevented or resolved amid conditions of significant uncertainty (Rosenthal *et al.* 1989, Rhinard 2021).

As a result, the focus of what once were civil defence policies shifted to ensuring the functioning of government and civil society, maintaining critical infrastructure, and upholding basic values necessary for democratic governance (Sundelius 2005). To that end, conceptually, civil defence lost its relevance and was replaced by discourses of civil security, societal security, crisis preparedness and management. These policies were built on "the realization that it is not efficient or effective to manage civil emergencies such as floods and transportation crashes by military means … they tend to be rigid and authoritarian. Modern disasters are complex enough to require the utmost flexibility in their management" (Alexander 2002, p. 210) – leading to the demilitarization of the civilian domain, and the rise of many ambiguous policy concepts, such as resilience. Indeed, the crisis-orientation brought the concept of resilience to the core of states' contingency planning, which was now focused on preparing for future crises by enhancing resilience – generally understood as actors' ability to manage, resist, and recover from various shocks (Comfort et al. 2010, Brassett et al. 2013, Chandler 2014, Bourbeau 2017). In so doing, a seed was planted for the emergence of all-hazards approaches, favored by policymakers (Rhinard 2021).

Accordingly, in Sweden, the process of the discontinuation of civil defence in favor of crisis management came to its culmination in the beginning of 2000s, when the Government decided to suspend the agency[4] that had been responsible for coordinating civil defence efforts from 1986 to 2002, including stockpiling and shelters. Instead, a new crisis management agency[5] was created, while responsibilities were distributed from the central level to local authorities. Taken together with a defence commission report, this

> meant that the threat of invasion was effectively written off in favour of, not simply "peacetime strains", but crises such as asymmetrical attacks, major accidents, natural disasters, and other incidents to be captured by the proposed "all-hazards" approach. This, some declared, marked the "death" of traditional total defence. (Larsson 2019, p. 100)

Consequently, compulsory military conscription was abandoned, and territorial defence refocused on international security (Kronsell 2012). As for the concept of civil defence, it was neglected from security and defence discourses, to be replaced by crisis preparedness. Some of these decisions, such as that to "reform the agency system was in fact more or less reactionary to the development in the US field [9/11] and its transnational effects" (Larsson 2019, p. 101), highlighting the ideational influence of the US on the Swedish civil defence policy. Furthermore, ideas were exchanged between Swedish and Norwegian practitioners as their policy developments were held in parallel, leading to visible similarities in their approaches (but also significant differences). Enhanced Nordic collaboration in crisis management as well as counterterrorism was further encouraged by the Nordic Council, moving even beyond the region to the European context.

This is reflective of another shift in international politics after the Cold War. This has to do with the understanding of international political order, which since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 had centered on the sovereign state as the primary actor. At the end of the twentieth century, changes in states' physical boarders, rising domestic fragmentation and disintegration, and the considerable expansion of international connections and institutions led to the questioning of state autonomy and sovereignty in crucial areas, including that of security. To that effect,

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[4] In Swedish *Överstyrelsen för civil beredskap* (ÖCB).

[5] In Swedish *Krisberedskapsmyndigheten* (KBM).

intergovernmental and supranational institutions … have elaborated to a point where they are creating their own systems of rules and identities. Institutional complexity and the coexistence of different partial orders, each considered legitimate in its sphere, seem to have become permanent features of the international scene. (March and Olsen 1998, p. 946)

Thus, from these perspectives were born multi-level descriptions that enabled better explanation and understanding of the dynamics of international politics.

In the context of security, increasing attention was given to transnational interactions taking place in what could be described as security communities. States are integrated in security communities based on the principle of settling their conflicts by peaceful means, rather than by threat, or actual practice, of military violence (Deutsch 1957). These venues (re)gained scholarly attention alongside the broadening of security, as well as emphasis on the importance of shared norms and common identities in shaping the behavior of actors, and hence potentially also national security policies. Ranging from communities where the only expectation is that of peaceful transitions, to close communities of mutual assistance and collective governance (Adler and Barnett 1998c, Bellamy 2005), this community-theoretical presumption opened opportunities for studying the potential influence of transnational ideas on domestic security policy choices.

"The main engine behind the fostering of a security community in Europe has been the EU" (Ekengren 2018, p. 504). Therefore, it is no surprise that, in light of the transboundary characteristics of threats and the all-hazards approaches to security that surpassed the capacities of nation-states, growing scholarly debates were directed at the role of the EU and the integration within the civil security domain (Boin and Rhinard 2008, Comfort et al. 2010, Boin et al. 2013, Hoijtink 2014, Bossong and Hegemann 2015). In this regard, much potential was seen in furthering European integration in crisis preparedness and establishing stronger collective capacities. From that, civil security became closely linked to the EU's common identity and the shared perceptions of threats and risks that underpin its ambition to move towards a 'secure European community'. The EU's employment of an all-hazards approach to protecting its citizens demonstrated the movement of EU policies into fields that were once solely the competences of the individual Member States (Ekengren et al. 2006).

Translating crisis management ideals into practice came with many difficulties at the national level. As McConnell and Drennan describe, these approaches place large demands on resources, often at the expense of front-line services; require cohesion in threat perceptions; necessitate integration and synergy across various institutional settings; and demand active preparation

through trainings and exercises (McConnell and Drennan 2006). Adding a transnational layer to this only feeds the complexity and challenges of the practical implementation of such policies.

Hybrid Threats and Resilience

Russia's aggression in Europe – first in Georgia in 2008 and even more notably in Ukraine in 2014 – brought back territorial security concerns alongside a wide threat spectrum. Now the comprehensive European security landscape was often described in terms of hybrid warfare, which constitutes one of the central concepts in contemporary security theory and practice to this day. The threats within it are generally understood as

> multimodal, low-intensity, kinetic as well as non-kinetic threats to international peace and security [that] include cyber war, asymmetric conflict scenarios, global terrorism, piracy, transnational organized crime, demographic challenges, resources security, retrenchment from globalization and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. (Bachmann and Gunneriusson 2015, p. 78, Leed 2015, Weissmann *et al.* 2021)

Thus, the hybrid threat conception captures the broad range of modern warfare that takes place in 'the grey zone', blurring the boundaries between war and peace (Leed 2015, Ehrhart 2017, Wirtz 2017). The means used are both military and non-military, taking different forms – virtual, economic, environmental, and mediatized – altering threat perceptions yet again by bringing back the threat of military aggression to European security. This has resulted in substantive security policy amendments in many European states and institutions alike, aiming for comprehensive strategies with both military and civilian features.

The growing relevance of the civilian domain alongside the military for providing security can also be observed in the evolution of the concept of resilience. Although ambiguous through and through, the notion of resilience has entered the security and defence discourse in connection to mitigating hybrid threats (Prior 2018, Michaels 2024). To that end, "deterring hybrid interference requires a whole-of-society response whereby various societal actors build resilience capacities, support the state in maintaining preparedness, and ensure the continuity of vital societal functions and supply lines" (Wigell 2021, p. 53). Accordingly, resilience is perceived as an effective deterrent to hybrid threats, as constructing and sustaining resilient, credible, and capable governance increases the cost of hybrid aggression and lowers the

likelihood of its success. However, achieving this demands cooperation and collaboration among all relevant actors (Jackson 2019).

This resilience discourse has come to dominate the various comprehensive security strategies of European states, such as the total defence principle of which resilience is perceived to be the cornerstone (Wither 2020). It can also be found in the setting of international institutions, such as NATO, which works towards enhancing collective resilience alongside military capabilities (Jackson 2019). Indeed, in light of hybrid threats, Article 3 of NATO's founding treaty – dealing with national and collective resilience – has been elevated to the forefront as of 2016, when the alliance leaders agreed to its importance. To that end, they formulated seven baseline requirements[6] pointing to areas of particular need for enhanced resilience, with the aim of providing guidance for Member States' individual efforts (NATO 2016). These efforts are evaluated biannually by – what since 2022 is named – the Resilience Committee[7].

However, NATO's resilience guidelines are not legally binding the way the EU directives are. While resilience is not uncommon in the EU's discourse, the Union's demands on strengthening resilience have expanded significantly in light of hybrid threats. One illustration of this development can be found in the Critical Entities Resilience Directive (2022/2557), entering into force in 2023, which urged all Member States (and partners) to strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure to a wide range of threats. This is an updated version of the European Critical Infrastructures Directive from 2008, which only applied to the energy and transport sector, now expanded to cover a total of 11 policy areas (The European Union 2022). This has established the EU as a central actor for collective resilience building, an ambition that has been further elevated in the Union's quest for strategic autonomy in its security and defence policy (Bargués 2021).

The (Re)Emergent Civil Defence

It is against this backdrop that civil defence has (re)emerged in Europe. Most prominently observable in the Nordic and Baltic states, which implement a

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[6] These include: (1) assured continuity of government and critical government services; (2) resilient energy supplies; (3) ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people; (4) resilient food and water resources; (5) ability to deal with mass casualties; (6) resilient civil communications systems; (7) resilient civil transportation systems.

[7] Formerly known as the Civil Emergency Planning Committee.

total defence strategy integrating both civil and military aspects (Maskaliunaite 2020, Wither 2020, Zdanavičius and Statkus 2020), contemporary civil defence encompasses broad objectives. These objectives blend elements from Cold War-era civil defence as well as crisis management, with the overarching goal of safeguarding the resilience of state and society in crisis and war.

For example, in the case of Swedish civil defence, these objectives were first threefold: (1) to protect the civilian population; (2) to ensure the most important societal functions; and (3) to contribute to the capabilities of the military defence in the event of an armed attack or war in Sweden or its proximity. They were later expanded to include additional tasks: (4) to maintain a necessary supply; (5) to maintain society's resilience to external pressures and contribute to strengthening the will to defend; (6) to contribute to strengthening society's ability to prevent and manage severe strains on society in peace; and finally (7) with available resources, contribute to the ability to participate in international peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. All these capacities are to be developed in solidarity with other states and actors, most importantly the EU, other Nordic states, and bilateral relations, but also in relation to NATO (The Swedish Government 2015, 2020, p. 89).

Hence, contemporary civil defence is not quite like Cold War civil defence, nor is it solely a crisis-management strategy. What is more, it is no longer an exclusively national matter, as states are linked by transnational threats as well as institutional commitments, calling for collective efforts to tackle the demands of contemporary security. Yet, without common understandings, policymakers and practitioners alike are unable to consider and implement appropriate responses. Therefore, it is imperative to deepen our understandings of civil defence in various institutional contexts. As proposed by this thesis, this can be done through the study of interactive processes taking place in multi-level settings, highlighting the similarities and differences that play into the prospects for strengthening security cooperation and, accordingly, the security community of European states.

Correspondingly, this dissertation investigates the existing conceptions of civil defence and how these are shaped within a multi-level institutional context, focusing on the interaction between national, regional, and international levels. It highlights the dynamic relationship between ideas and institutions in shaping security policies while revealing the limitations of these on policy implementation. In so doing, it emphasizes the importance of studying policy enactment sphere to better understand the impact of ideational processes in the field of security, contributing with practitioner-focused insights. Empirically, the thesis maps the complex and simultaneous security

policy processes taking place in multiple institutional settings, with a particular focus on the evolution of Sweden's civil defence policy, the resilience strategies of Nordic and Baltic states, and the role of NATO and the EU in contemporary civil defence.

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the overarching theoretical foundations of the thesis and how they are embedded in the analytical concepts that inform the analysis of the individual papers. To that end, it begins by presenting the theory of discursive institutionalism, which serves as a principal theoretical framework, emphasizing the influence of ideas on policy development and the role of institutions in shaping these ideas. It then relates the conversation to the concept of security communities, where interactive processes between transnational actors are facilitated. Finally, it highlights one of these processes – socialization – by examining the conditions under which ideas become internalized or not, and thus their potential impact on policy.

Discursive Institutionalism

This dissertation departs form the ontological assumption that ideas matter for politics and thus for the development of civil defence in a multi-level context. It takes inspiration from the theory of *discursive institutionalism* that Vivien Schmidt perceives as "an umbrella concept for the vast range of works in political science that take account of the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed and exchanged through discourse" (Schmidt 2010, p. 3). This perspective is built on the grounds that ideas "shape how we understand political problems, give definition to our goals and strategies, and are the currency we use to communicate about politics" (Béland and Cox 2010, p. 3). To that end, ideas hold "claims about descriptions of the world, causal relationships, or the normative legitimacy of certain actions¨ (Parsons 2002, p. 48).

Accordingly, ideas can be categorized as either normative (also called principled) – consisting of beliefs about what is right or wrong; or causal (also called cognitive) – implying strategies on how to achieve objectives (Goldstein and Keohane 1993b, Schmidt 2008). Both these types can be found on three levels of generality – within (1) policy ideas that are concerned with specific policies; (2) programmatic ideas that underpin these policies; and (3) more general philosophical ideas containing worldviews that "undergird the policies and programs with organizing ideas, values, and principles of knowledge and society" (Schmidt 2008, p. 306). While the first two levels of ideas are discussed and debated on a regular basis, the latter tends to "sit in the

background as underlying assumptions that are rarely contested except in times of crisis" (Schmidt 2008, p. 306).

Along these lines, civil defence can be viewed as a policy idea that is grounded in programmatic ideas about security and threats that provide justifications for the development of civil defence policies, as well as philosophical ideas that underpin these perspectives. Within actors' construction of security, these philosophical ideas are shaped by complex social dynamics – such as national identities, culture, history, norms, and values – manifested both on national and international levels (Wendt 1992, Campbell 1998, Howorth 2004, Hansen 2006). As a result, when national security priorities, like civil defence, are shaped into policy, they are imbued with ideas and identities from both the international and domestic sphere, internalized at the policymaking level and framed by individual decision-makers through discourses (Sjöstedt 2013).

Hence, one way to investigate the existing conceptions of civil defence is by focusing on the discourses of security and what the underlying *security logics* are that influence policy outcomes. This is so, as "through the study of actual discourse with the use of the word security…a specific logic appears under the name security", which has its own characteristics, its own language, and justifiable moves (Wæver 1996, p. 107). Accordingly, security logics comprise "an intersubjective practice of meaning making that triggers a particular security-oriented mind-set and shapes the perception of both the nature of the problem and actions undertaken to deal with it" (Stępka 2022, p. 34). One way to capture this is by studying the interplay between discourses in the construction of identity, threat perceptions, and security practices (Barnutz 2010). This task is undertaken in *Article I* which accounts for the entangled security logics that characterize contemporary security and their role in the interpretations of civil defence among practitioners in Sweden.

Another central aspect in discursive institutionalism is that it maintains that ideas can be shaped by the institutional context in which they appear, which "happens through internalization. Actors think and speak on the basis of internalized rules, norms and frames" (Schmidt 2010, p. 1). At the same time, ideas can also shape institutions because of the interactive nature of discourses – understood as processes by which ideas are conveyed – enabling actors to reflect on institutional rules and persuade others to either change or maintain them (Schmidt 2008). However, "it is crucial for anyone working on ideas and policy to recognize that the delineation of the existence of particular beliefs is no substitute for the establishment of their effects on policy" (Goldstein and Keohane 1993b, p. 11). To this effect, internalization of ideas by political elites is a requisite.

Therefore, how ideas develop and become internalized, or not, in an institutional context, remains an important question. To examine this, Schmidt and Carstensen propose a framework for *ideational power*. They define ideational power as "the capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements" (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, p. 321). Within it, they distinguish between three types of ideational power: power *through*, *over*, and *in* ideas. Here, the first is about the persuasiveness of an idea; the second about the control and influence an actor has over an idea; and the third concerns "the authority certain ideas enjoy in structuring thought at the expense of other ideas" (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016, p. 329).

With an ambition to demonstrate the development and the internalization of – what could be viewed as – a civil defence idea within the EU, *Article IV* of this dissertation examines the ideational power of total defence in the Union's official security discourses, as found in official statements from 2010 to 2024. In so doing, it presents evidence showing that the mere existence of a total defence idea – encompassing both military and civil defence – within the EU, does not necessary lead to the equal development of both components. The article concludes that, within this specific institutional context, the idea of civil defence holds more power than that of the military aspect.

Security Communities

While ideas play a role in shaping the development of civil defence within a specific institutional setting – be it within a national community or within an international body such as the EU – the question remains: how to account for the (potential) impact of ideas a security policy across different institutional contexts? Applying an ideational lens to security politics has traditionally not received much attention, not to mention from an international community perspective, as security has been dominated by rationalist thought and state-centrism (Adler and Barnett 1998b). The Cold War civil defence and its development in national confines, as discussed earlier, serves as a case on point. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that Karl Deutsch's seminal work from the 1950s on the emergence of *security communities*, in which states are integrated to the extent that they will settle their conflicts by peaceful means, was initially not granted much further thought in academic circles. In his theory, he argued that through both material and ideational transactions between individuals, mutual trust is established, which in turn fosters a shared identity. This process leads community members to develop reliable

expectations of solving conflicts through peaceful means rather than the threat, or actual practice, of military violence (Deutsch 1957), parallel to the notion of stable peace (Boulding 1978, Bengtsson 2000).

The concept of security community gained renewed interest alongside the broadening of the security notion in the 1990s and increasing inquiry into the importance of shared ideas and common identities in shaping the behavior of political actors. Building on Deutsch's work, Adler and Bennet further developed the theory. In their endeavor, they identify three key characteristics of a security community: first, members share common identities, values, and meanings; second, various forms of transactions occur between members, with communities evolving through interactions in diverse contexts; and third, there are long-term interests and a sense of altruism that bind the community together (Adler and Barnett 1998a, p. 31).

However, the density of a security community can vary, ranging from the ones where the only expectation is that of peaceful transitions, to tight communities of mutual assistance and collective governance (Deutsch, 1957; Adler and Barnett, 1998a; Bellamy, 2005). While the emergence of a security community can be indicated by multilateralism, common threat perceptions, and changes in defence planning that do not include threats from those within the community; its tightest form is expressed through cooperative and collective security and a high level of military integration, as well as policy coordination and harmonization, and "a 'multiperspectival' polity – where rule is shared at the national, transnational, and supranational levels" (Adler and Barnett 1998a, p. 57).

As such, establishing international organizations may contribute to the development of security communities. Accordingly, institutions such as NATO and the EU could be perceived as embodiments of tight security communities. This is because they facilitate and encourage transactions by establishing behavioral norms, but they also serve as sites for processes of learning and ideational exchange, which enable the emergence of common identities (Adler and Barnett 1998a). In that sense, security policy collaboration could be better enabled within established institutions rather than through direct inter-state interactions due to the preestablished trust among members. To this testifies one of the interviewees of *Article I*:

> We have noticed how incredibly important it is with trust-filled relationships. Because they are really a key to getting something done. In the big EU projects, it is maybe a little bit easier because there is a bit clearer structure in terms of what should be achieved and so on. But when it comes to inter-state relations specifically, and when we get down to a little more specific issues, trust capital is the challenge. If you do not have those relationships, you don't get to take

part of the national developments that are happening in that country within this specific [civil defence] area. (Interview #1, 2020)

However, while the elaborations within security communities aim to foster mutual trust and identity, having these elements does not necessary lead to similar approaches to security among community members. One concept that has been used to make sense of states' security policy choices, particularly those of using military forces, is that of strategic culture. Originating from Jack Snyder's report from 1977 on Soviet nuclear strategies, *strategic culture* is defined as "the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other" (Snyder 1977, p. 8, see also Libel 2020). Thus, strategic culture is "concerned with the perceptions, beliefs, ideas and norms that guide national security elites in their task of sorting out strategic priorities for the hard core of a state's foreign and security policy" (Neumann and Heikka 2005, p. 6), which all together constitute a "a set of discursive expressions and narratives related to security-military affairs … rooted in socially constructed interpretations of history, geography, and domestic traditions" (Götz and Staun 2022, p. 482).

While states' strategic cultures are perceived as strictly domestic affairs, with national preconditions as the main sources, in a regional context certain similarities are to be expected. That is not least in terms of geography and history but also the size of states, shared values and political culture, or even membership in regional institutions such as NATO and the EU. These similarities enable alliances and enhance cooperation, perhaps best evident in the Nordic region (see Howlett and Glenn 2005, Edström and Westberg 2020). It is also important to note that strategic culture is not static. Instead, it can change over time or as a reaction to external shocks that influence strategies (Gray 1999, Edström and Westberg 2020). Here, Sweden's NATO membership would constitute an appropriate empirical example.

Yet, while the concept of strategic culture – linked to military concerns and mainly restricted to a domestic setting – serves as a useful lens for explaining the development of Cold War civil defence, it is too narrow in focus for the study of the (re)emergent civil defence and potential ideational convergence in a multi-level context. This is because of expanded conceptualizations of security and the growing importance of a resilience discourse, as well as increased interdependencies among states. To accommodate these aspects, *Article III* proposes an analytical framework for the study of a *shared security culture.* This framework builds on the concept of strategic culture and accounts for the convergences in the following, highly intertwined, areas:

conceptualization/priorities of how security is strengthened (what it is and how it is best managed); threat perceptions (worldview); overlapping identity (rooted in shared history, geography, and political culture); and interaction preferences (which reinforce shared norms and identities). This is applied to analyze the similarities and differences among the eight Nordic and Baltic states' conceptions of security, with a specific focus on resilience – a key objective for civil defence – whilst assessing the emergence of a shared security culture in this regional context.

The analysis of this article highlights, among other things, variations in the conceptions of civil defence among these eight countries while also providing evidence of the conditions under which civil defence policies converge – or not – among states. The main explanations for this are found in overlapping threat perceptions and identity, most evident in the cases of the Nordic three – Finland, Norway, and Sweden – which have the densest shared security culture in the region. What is more, the article reveals the diverse patterns of interaction within a regional context – ranging from bilateral and trilateral to multilateral forms, as well as spanning informal to formalized structures. These institutionalized interactions underscore the complexity of the contemporary security landscape and raise questions about the relationship between the processes occurring across these various domains and the existence of a shared security culture, in turn linked to the varying degrees of density of a security community.

Socialization

It is important to advance our understanding of how ideas are (potentially) shaped through interactions in various institutionalized settings. Accordingly, numerous attempts to capture what an interaction is, what it does, and how, can be found in the literature. These contributions deal with concepts such as 'social learning', 'deliberation', or 'persuasion', to name a few, which "all imply a social process through which agent properties and preferences change as a result of interaction" (Checkel 2003, p. 210). However, perhaps the most common one is *socialization*, which is a broad concept with a substantial history dating back to the 1950s when sociologists aimed to address the emergence of groups. To that end, the concept was defined "as a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community, the endpoint of which is internalization" (Dawson *et al.* 1977, p. 9). This interpretation has been adopted in the field of international relations, where studies on states' socialization, within the framework of institutional structures, have been the

subject of research for decades now (Alderson 2001, Thies 2003, 2012, Flockhart 2004, Checkel 2005, 2017, Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2006, Beyers 2010). Relating to discursive institutionalism, the socialization lens aids in examining the varying degrees to which institutional settings can shape ideas and, ultimately, policies.

The existing scholarship on socialization focuses on three intertwined aspects: 1) how interactions affect behavior, 2) how interactions are organized; 3) and what is the logic of interactions (Beyers 2010). Linked to the first aspect, broadly speaking then, socialization is an interactive process that may or may not lead to internalization – a necessary condition for ideas to influence policies, as discussed before. In this case, internalization "means that actors alienate from their old norms and values and that new understandings become part of one's self-understanding. This means that, once internalized, a norm no longer needs active enforcement and that norm-consistent behavior gains a status of taken-for-grantedness" (Beyers 2010, p. 913). The outcomes of socialization can vary from no internalization (hence no behavioral change), where the norms and practices of the group are not maintained once the individual leaves; to role playing, where the individual adopts pro-group behavior by learning and conforming to the group's expectations; to full internalization, where the norms and practices of the group are embraced, potentially even leading to a change in the individual's identity (Checkel 2017).

In terms of the second focus of the socialization literature, the main topics of interests here are the institutional conditions, and the formal/informal nature of interactions as well as their frequency. To that end, Johnston examines the effects of interactions on national versus international levels. He concludes that "it should not be surprising that the strongest allegiances are to the state and its definitions of interest" (Johnston 2005, p. 1026) because most interactions are taking place in primary institutions within states and thus actors' first ideas are shaped and internalized by these primary structures. Considering also the intensity of interactions, because of the time spent within the state as well as within specific policy groups, national-level socialization prevails over the international. This would explain the strong connection between the national level and the development of civil defence as well.

However, as established by now, there are also interactions taking place in international contexts and in these cases, too, the frequency of interactions is indeed important. The general reasoning is that the more actors engage with one another, the greater their exposure to each other's ideas, increasing the likelihood of influence. Additionally, as with learning, socialization is more likely to occur in informal, less politicized environments, and where the autonomy of national representatives is high (de Flers and Müller 2012).

This argument is particularly prominent in the literature that defines the process of Europeanization through the logic of socialization. In this context, it is argued that frequent meetings and ongoing interactions and collaboration between the European and national levels promote greater socialization, as they compel actors – in this case European state representatives – to consider the perspectives of their counterparts. Some examples are the Europeanization of the French military policy (Irondelle 2003) or the Europeanization of the Greek foreign policy (Economides 2005), where national actors had undergone a degree of socialization on the EU level. Another example is the Europeanization of Nordic security, under which an identity change could be observed in Sweden and traces of the EU's impact could also be found in Norway's security approach – even though it is not a member state – but less so in Denmark's case, indicating "that it is the level of participation in the EU structures that is of importance, not the form of the relationship itself" (Rieker 2004, pp. 385–386).

Similarly, Checkel claims that "it is arguably the quality of the contact – whether hectoring, deliberation, or hard-headed bargaining – and not simply its length that plays the central role in promoting change" (Checkel 2003, p. 210). This brings us to the discussion of the mechanisms or logics underlying interactions – the third aspect of socialization literature. The mechanisms identified are manifold, originating from both rationalist and constructivist perspectives, ranging "from coercion and bargaining all the way to persuasion and imitation" (Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2006, p. 2) or strategic calculation, role playing, and normative suasion (Checkel 2005). Moreover, the conditions under which interactions occur are also essential both to the construction of those interactions and the mechanisms driving them. These conditions include the formation of the group, particularly the dynamic between long-standing and new members (Flockhart 2004); the presence of rule promoters or norm entrepreneurs within the group (Beyers 2010, Lightfoot and Szent-Iványi 2014); and the existence of incentives for socialization, whether be they material or social (Schimmelfennig 2000). These are elements that are also reflected in the ideational power framework.

Just as institutions such as NATO and the EU are perceived as embodiments of security communities, they are also singled out as arenas for socialization (Flockhart 2004, Gheciu 2005, Schimmelfennig *et al.* 2006, Morin and Gold 2016). For example, military organizations have an opportunity to shape shared beliefs and threat perceptions through inter-state interactions via military exercises, and consequently set common doctrines at the strategic, operational and tactical level in the military (Frazier and Hutto 2017). In the EU context, committee structures foster interactions that potentially lead to

internalization of norms and emergence of collective identities that have an influence on domestic policies as well (Michalski and Danielson 2020). Consequently, the existing theoretical and empirical studies make it reasonable to hypothesize that socialization within various institutions potentially shapes even civil defence policy development.

With that said, the vast body of existing literature approaches socialization from an 'insider' perspective, taking for granted the access to the group as well as the willingness to socialize in the first place. Some exceptions can be found in studies on the Europeanization of the EU's candidate countries (Central and Eastern European states) or neighborhood countries in their pursuit for a place in the European community (Kelley 2004, Sasse 2008, Meyer-Sahling *et al.* 2016, Fagan and Sircar 2020), in which cases the socialization lens is used to explain the impact of European institutions on domestic actors and policy behavior. There are also studies on the 'outsiders' within a community. To this, Adler-Nissen illustrates how opting out of the European Monetary Union significantly affects the 'outsiders' (in this case, the United Kingdom and Denmark) that – although still EU Member States (at the time) – are often stigmatized, stereotyped, and marginalized within the community. As a result, they struggle to have a voice in discussions and decision-making, and face barriers to accessing crucial information – all of which are key factors in socialization – ultimately diminishing its impact (Adler-Nissen 2014).

Notwithstanding, in both examples, the incentives of future or existing membership, respectively, are still there. What is more, scholarly attention has mainly been directed at the decision-making level, centering around actors that constitute political elites with the authority to influence policymaking. Yet, to learn about the actual outcomes of socialization, the internalization of beliefs on this level is not a sufficient indicator as policies are implemented and enacted by actors that are at the receiving end of policy decisions (Lipsky 1980) – the practitioners or the decision-takers, as argued in *Article I*.

With these aspects in mind, *Article II* of this dissertation contrasts the two trends – the insider perspective and policymaking focus – in the socialization literature. Firstly, it adopts an 'outsider' perspective to socialization, based on the premise that outsiders are inevitably excluded from the community, which has significant consequences for interactions and their potential to shape policy outcomes. Secondly, it zooms in on practitioners' perspectives on socialization. This is done through the study of Swedish civil defence practitioners' perceptions of the interactions with NATO prior to the country's membership application. In so doing, the study emphasizes the consequences of exclusion on interactions, while suggesting potential strategies to overcome them, and highlights the limitations of interactions in shaping the practical

implementation of policies. Although framed within the scholarship of socialization, both of these findings fit within the theoretical scope of discursive institutionalism.

Research Design

The following section outlines the research design of the dissertation. It begins by explaining the qualitative multi-level approach adopted in the thesis, followed by the rationale for case selection on all three designated levels – national, regional, and international. Next, it discusses the discourse analytical approach applied to the data.

Qualitative Multi-Level Research

This thesis aims to investigate the existing conceptions of civil defence and examine how these are shaped within a multi-level institutional context. To achieve this, the research relies on a qualitative research design, "intended to understand, describe, and sometimes explain social phenomena 'from the inside'" (Kvale 2007, p. x). A qualitative approach is particularly useful for exploring the meaning of a specific phenomenon – such as civil defence – and for offering valuable insights into existing or emerging concepts – such as resilience – which can help explain policy behavior. Moreover, qualitative research presents the perspectives of the participants, focusing on the meanings they assign to the world rather than the meanings held by the researcher. This is especially valuable when there is a strong interest in gaining insights from the experiences of policy practitioners working with the implementation of policy strategies. At the same time, it seeks to incorporate multiple sources of evidence to offer a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the case at hand (Yin 2011), for which various methods of data generation are often combined – in this case interviewing and document analysis.

What is more, qualitative studies are able to account for the contextual conditions in which a particular phenomenon arises (Yin 2011). As previously noted, the conditions surrounding the (re)emergence of civil defence are complex, spanning multiple levels of institutional settings. To grasp its development across these various settings, a multi-level perspective is essential. This research approach, commonly used in implementation sciences, is valuable for studying intricate systems where multiple layers of context interact. It allows for an exploration of how ideas at different levels influence relate to one another (Lengnick-Hall *et al.* 2023). In this regard, a multi-level approach provides insights into the parallel processes taking place across

different contexts, which in this dissertation are categorized into national, regional, and international levels.

It is important to note that there is a significant and equally complex sub-national dimension to civil defence policies, where much responsibility is allocated to local municipalities and regional actors. That said, this dissertation does not engage with these sub-national features of civil defence and instead starts its inquiry into the development of civil defence policy from the national context, due to its underlying aspiration to shed light on the role of transnational institutional settings in national security policy development. Yet, the policy-practitioner focus employed in *Articles I* and *II* highlights the perceptions of actors at the receiving end of the policymaking process, which is relatable to the experiences of sub-national actors as well (for a sub-national perspective, see Bengtsson and Brommesson, 2023).

Employing a multi-level perspective in this thesis enables the examination of the complex phenomena of civil defence policies across different levels. Although civil defence policies are in no way limited to the European context, and are indeed (again) on the rise in other parts of the world too – such as in the US (Austin 2020) or Singapore (Matthews and Yan 2007), to name a few examples – the geographical emphasis of this thesis remains on our continent. As is hopefully clear by now, the primary empirical focus lies in the case of Swedish civil defence, but the multi-level approach applied also extends to other cases, such as the Nordic and Baltic states, constituting a regional context, and the EU (and to some extent NATO), representing the international dimension. The following is a discussion on the rationale behind the selection of these cases, while also addressing some of the empirical challenges and changes that have occurred since the initial case selection.

Case Selection

For most qualitative case study research, the selection of cases depends on pragmatic considerations, such as time, expertise, or language skills; or, it is "influenced by the theoretical prominence of a given case" (Seawright and Gerring 2008, p. 295). While valid justifications, methodological considerations must also be taken into account, as the choice of a case influences the agenda for studying it. Case selection typically serves a dual methodological purpose: to identify "a representative sample and a useful variation on the dimensions of theoretical interest" (Seawright and Gerring 2008, p. 296). In this dissertation, both aspects – the pragmatic and

methodological – have steered the rationale behind case selection on national, regional, and international levels alike.

National Level

Given the underlying interest, to study the development of contemporary civil defence policy, the methodological reflection in identifying an appropriate national case was to look for a representative one, with the theoretical prominence that enables the study of institutionalized interactions in multi-level context. While Nordic and Baltic states have, what can be considered, total defence policies[8] with a prominent civilian dimension, the Swedish civil defence was deemed most fitting for the national-level inquiry due to the explicit political ambition – as per the Swedish Government's decision from 2015 – to reconstruct the historic civil defence policy in line with the present security environment. This was perceived to be very complex and multidimensional and accordingly, the contemporary Swedish civil defence was to be built in solidarity and integration with other states and organizations, most importantly other Nordic states and the EU (The Swedish Government 2015, 2020). Apart from aligning well with the underling theoretical and empirical aims of this thesis, the choice of Sweden also had pragmatic justifications such as language sufficiency, access, and expertise.

However, the methodological approach to selecting a national context went beyond simply identifying a suitable country to focus on, as civil defence policy features various dimensions and actors. In addition to examining key players such as the central government (specifically, the Department of Justice) and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency[9], which is responsible for coordinating civil defence, it was necessary to identify other relevant actors for a more dynamic representation. Motivated by the theoretical aim to expand the focus from decision-making to include the experiences of civil defence practitioners – the decision-takers – the focus shifted to national civil defence agencies specifically tasked with ensuring of the functioning of society in times of crisis or war[10]. The selection of agencies within this group was guided by

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[8]Estonia and Latvia use the label 'comprehensive national defence'; Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden 'total defence'; Finland 'national comprehensive security'. Iceland does not have a military defence, and thus defence matters are covered in the National Security Policy.

[9] To be renamed to the Civil Defence Agency, as of January 1st, 2026.

[10] Previously, the concept used to describe 'an agency with a specific responsibility for the functioning of the society in case of crisis or war' was *bevakningansvarig myndighet*. Since

the task[11] assigned by the Swedish Government in 2019, which required 20 national agencies to analyze needs and propose necessary actions to enhance civil defence (The Swedish Government 2019). This directive helped identify the most relevant actors within the context of the Swedish civil defence for *Article I*. The same logic of following the Government's directives, albeit in the context of cooperating within the area of civil preparedness[12] (The Swedish Government Offices, 2021), was also applied to the selection of national agencies to focus on in *Article II*.

It is important to mention that since these studies were conducted, several changes have been made to the planning of Swedish civil defence and the agency structures surrounding it[13]. While it did not affect the role of the agencies that have been included in this dissertation, it did expand the relevant societal sectors and assign more responsibility to the leading agencies within their respective areas. This is important to bear in mind regarding *Articles I* and *II*, as a distinction between the roles of leading and supporting agencies is made in both studies.

Another significant change influencing civil defence came about with the new administration following the national elections in 2022, which represented a shift in power from a social democratic government to the right-wing bloc, with Moderate Party leader Ulf Kristersson elected as Prime Minister. With this new government came also the restructuring of government bodies, with two important consequences for civil defence: the policy area was moved from the competences of the Department of Justice to the Department of Defence, leading to a new ministerial portfolio – the Minister for Civil Defence.

However, 2022 will be remembered in Sweden and across Europe for more than just these reasons. It is also the year Russia began its full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24th. This triggered what is considered the

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2022, this concept was changed to 'an agency with a specific responsibility for civil preparedness', in Swedish *beredskapsmyndighet.*

[11] The directive in question is entitled '*Uppdrag till bevakningsansvariga myndigheter att inkomma med underlag för den fortsatta inriktningen av det civila försvaret'.*

[12] The document is entitled '*Raminstruktion för det svenska civila beredskapsarbetet inom ramen för Nato/PFF'.*

[13] As of October 2022, a new agency reform for civil defence and crisis preparedness was implemented. This reform was based on the guidelines from a 2021 government inquiry entitled '*Struktur för ökad motståndskraft',* which can be accessed here: https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2021/04/sou-202125/

most significant shift in Swedish security policy[14] in the last 200 years: Sweden's decision to become a NATO member. When Sweden, alongside Finland, submitted its application in May 2022, few anticipated that the succession process would take nearly two years. As a result, Sweden became a NATO member in March 2024. This development significantly impacted the ongoing total defence planning, meaning new preconditions for the development of civil defence as well. While the consequences of NATO membership for the Swedish civil defence fall outside the scope of this thesis, and will likely take years to fully comprehend, it is an important change that undoubtedly casts Sweden's civil defence case in a new light.

Regional Level

The rationale for case selection in the regional context, represented in *Article III*, was steered by empirical and theoretical ambitions. Empirically, the Baltic Sea region represents an arena on which the conflict between the West and Russia is especially evident, making it a strategically important area for European security. Theoretically, the area could be perceived as a security community (see for instance Bengtsson 2000, Mouritzen 2001), thus appropriate for the study of the (potential) emergence of a shared security culture in a regional context. This is because it comprises states with parallel – comprehensive – security policies, as well as seemingly similar national preconditions. Both aspects provide fertile ground for inter-country comparisons that could generate theoretical insights and highlight variations, as well as overlaps, among countries' conceptions of civil defence.

With that said, the focus in this regional level lies on eight states – the five Nordic countries and three Baltic nations. They all have total defence policies, are considered small states, and have been integrated into various, including Nordic–Baltic, forums of cooperation. However, within the Nordic–Baltic eight group, there are also several dividing lines. Conventionally, the states are often grouped into two categories – the Nordic states and the Baltic states – and rarely seen as a unified Nordic–Baltic collective. In *Article III*, we argue that this division oversimplifies the situation. The Nordic states have long been considered a group with shared characteristics such as history, size, geopolitical context, and public administrative arrangements, creating a strong foundation for a shared Nordic security culture. However, significant differences exist among

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[14] As per the Swedish Defence Commission's report from 2024 on the development of the military defence, entitled '*Stärkt försvarsförmåga: Sverige som allierad*', available here: https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/departementsserien-och-promemorior/2024/04/ds-20246/

them, particularly in their approaches to security, including institutional affiliations, defence reforms, and resilience strategies. After 2022, however, the Nordic states' security approaches have begun to converge.

The three Baltic states, on the other hand, might appear to have more favorable conditions for a shared security culture. They share a history of Soviet occupation, re-independence after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and simultaneous memberships in the EU and NATO. In parallel to these commonalities, the Baltic states differ in language, religion, and to some extent, geographical outlooks. Consequently, the Nordic–Baltic group presents a mix of similarities and variations in key theoretical factors. Thus, it is important to consider these eight states together, not least because of the increasing cooperation between them, making the development of a shared security culture more likely. Therefore, studying the Nordic–Baltic eight provides a valuable opportunity to explore the potential for overcoming differences and developing a shared security culture, driven by strong security incentives for cooperation.

International level

The motivations behind navigating possible cases on the international stage came primarily from the Swedish Government's policy guidelines on civil defence, as well as interview materials from previous studies. In both sources, the EU and NATO were singled out as the most relevant multilateral actors in this area.

When considering the level of integration in the respective institutions, *the EU* clearly stands out as there is no other international organization in the world with such influence in a regional context. The EU is a hybrid polity that governs the lives of European people in most areas, its jurisdiction placed above that of the nation states. However, when it comes to security and defence policy, it functions as a typical intergovernmental organization with decisions taken by unanimity in contrast to the qualified majority voting in other policy fields. It is also one of the very few areas where the common European policy comes secondary to national ones. In that sense, the level of integration in the security field is significantly less than in others.

Yet, in the case of comprehensive security strategies with an extensive civilian aspect that covers various societal functions, the EU's role in such policies in general, and within civil defence in particular, becomes an interesting question. Firstly, the EU's supranational competences in crisis preparedness and other areas such as energy, transportation, space, the single market, agriculture, and health – to name a few – make it a key player for

shaping these areas through EU regulations. Also, the concept of resilience is not a foreign one in this institutional context, figuring in various policy documents as well as in directives to Member States to be implemented – the most recent being the Critical Entities Resilience Directive (2022/2557), entering into force in 2023, urging all Member States (and partners) to strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure in 11 policy areas to a wide range of threats. Resilience discourse is also central in the Union's pursuit of strategic autonomy in various policy fields.

Correspondingly, the EU's increasing role in national developments has not escaped the interviewees of this thesis, especially from the regional context, who see the EU "carving a role for itself in the area [of resilience] … specially after Ukraine because the EU has really delivered in terms of being able to coordinate within the Union Civil Protection Mechanism" (Interview DK1, 2023), with the war pushing the EU "to take action, for example being engaged in arms delivery" (Interview EE2, 2023). Thus, the EU "are scaling up and I think they will never go back into being what they were" (Interview NO1, 2023).

Furthermore, the EU's increasing role in civil defence has been also linked to its "building capacities like stockpiling, etc." (Interview NO1, 2023), its "PESCO format that is good for defence cooperation" (Interview EE2, 2023), as well as its involvement in military mobility planning that is perceived as:

> really an EU issue. We need to fix that within the Schengen countries and within the EU more than we need to fix it among the Nordic countries…So, I think it's only natural that a lot of the elements of especially the civil side of the total defence get both ideas, strength, and opportunities from the EU cooperation. (Interview NO2, 2023)

Consequently, the EU was selected as a crucial case for the study of the development of civil defence at the international level, covered in *Article IV*. That said, the question remained how to best approach this case. The primary consideration was whether to study the EU as a single entity or focus on interaction between the national and European levels of policymaking, most fittingly with Sweden in focus in the context of civil defence. The choice of the former stems from the ambition of this thesis to provide conceptions of civil defence from various perspectives, as well as to highlight the parallel processes taking place on multiple settings. Therefore, the aim of *Article IV* is to grasp the EU-wide (discursive) developments that, once implemented, are affecting each member state.

More specifically, the choice was made to zoom in on the EU's security discourses in connection to its pursuit of *strategic autonomy* – its ability to act independently in pursuing strategic goals – a concept that has traditionally been

linked to military topics, but which has increasingly been applied in a more comprehensive manner (see Helwig 2020, Helwig and Sinkkonen 2022) – making it an interesting case for the study of the development of total defence ideas in this institutional setting. What made strategic autonomy particularly appealing were also the sentiments expressed by some of the respondents, most notably from the Baltic states, claiming that "we don't want this idea of strategic autonomy…it is basically weakening this transatlantic link, which is not good for us. And that's why we are very, very cautious and annoying allies within the EU defence area" (Interview LV1, 2023). Similarly, "on this strategic autonomy – we were very much dragging foot on that…because we say NATO first" (Interview LT2, 2023). But "it is hard lately to sustain that kind of position" (LV 1, 2023), also noting that concerning the EU's influence "in case of resilience, it is a good thing that EU has this legislative power" (Interview LT2, 2023).

These statements, however, together with official documents, pointed to another relevant international actor – that is *NATO*, where issues regarding crisis preparedness and resilience have increasingly gained prominence since 2016. During that year, the alliance leaders agreed to establish seven baseline requirements focused on resilience, a concept that was further cemented into collective defence planning in NATO's Strategic Concept, published in 2022. Furthermore, the Civil Emergency Planning Committee, under which NATO's crisis preparedness cooperation has been conducted, was renamed the Resilience Committee in 2022. Under this new structure, Member States' individual efforts to enhance resilience are evaluated and further recommendations provided biannually. However, unlike the EU's directives, NATO's approach to resilience is not legally binding, meaning "the majority in NATO [Member States] still looks to EU for resilience work. And we see that to some extent there are competing systems" (Interview NO2, 2023).

Also, the alliance is still mainly considered a military actor, and thus many perceive that "the civil defence or resilience aspect in NATO is not that big at the moment" (Interview DK2, 2023) and that "in hybrid situations, the EU is more helpful with their instruments than NATO. NATO is more or less still the hard security alliance, and this is not the situation where they can come and help us" (Interview LV3, 2023). Based on these views, combined with the conclusions drawn in *Article II* – a study on the perceived impact of interactions with NATO on Swedish civil defence – the decision was made not to broaden the scope of this thesis to include a standalone NATO case. Instead, NATO's perspective is integrated into the context of *Article II*.

That said, given the recent developments of Sweden and Finland – both countries with relatively advanced civil defence compared to other NATO

members – joining the alliance, along with rising security concerns in the Baltic Sea region, particularly related to the sabotage of underwater infrastructure, NATO's role in providing (civil) defence has taken on a new significance. Additionally, the impact of the Trump administration, which took office in January 2025, on the future of NATO remains uncertain. This underscores the need for further academic inquiry into the alliance's evolving role (in civil defence).

Discourse Analytical Approach

To capture the existing conceptions of civil defence and investigate how these are potentially shaped within the three levels presented above, this dissertation employs a discursive approach to data analysis. Accordingly, it foregrounds that these aims can be achieved through the study of language, as it is through language that meanings are constructed and perspectives on the world reflected (Hajer 2006). While there is no unified agreement on the definition of discourses, they can be understood as "systems of meaning-production rather than simply statements or language … systems that fix meaning, however, temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world" (Shepherd 2008, p. 20). Moreover, in Schmidt's understanding of discourses, they do not only encompass "the substantive content of ideas but also the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed" (Schmidt 2008, p. 305), assigning equal relevance to the idea within a discourse and the context in which it is communicated.

Schmidt differentiates between two types of discourses – communicative and coordinative. The former occurs between political actors and the public, while the latter takes place among policy actors. The focus of this thesis is primarily on coordinative discourses, originating from

> the individuals and groups at the center of policy construction who are involved in the creation, elaboration, and justification of policy and programmatic ideas. These are the policy actors – the civil servants, elected officials, experts, organized interests, and activists, among others – who seek to coordinate agreement among themselves on policy ideas. (Schmidt 2008, p. 310)

There are many elements included in the construction of discourses, such as a use of frames or storylines. In political science research in general and that on policy processes in particular, discursive approaches often focus on these elements with an aim to draw out the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and concepts with which policies are made but also enacted, both equally relevant

aspects in the underlying arguments of this thesis. Discourses include frames that are "underlying structures of beliefs, perception, and appreciation" (Schön and Rein 1994 p. 23). Further to that,

> frames can be compared to a pair of colored glasses through which one sees the world. Facts can appear different to individuals depending on which glasses one puts on. Socially constructing the problematic situation, a frame provides not only conceptual coherence, but also a direction for action and a basis for persuasion. (Kang 2022, p. 53)

In that sense, frames can be perceived also as logics that lie behind certain policy actions. Or in the language of discursive institutionalism, they are representative of programmatic ideas that hold both the cognitive and normative arguments that policies are built on (Schmidt 2008). An additional element in discourses is storylines, which produce fragments of narratives that reflect social realities. Within these, facts are interpreted and narratives constructed that, once established, are not easily disputed. Compelling storylines can thus shape policy processes and resource allocations, and wield political power (Fischer 2003). Although discourses can become more salient and long-lasting once institutionalized and imprinted into society, they are still bound to change over time.

Considering that a discourse "represents a certain state of debate on a political issue; it designates what is considered appropriate to say (or not) on a certain topic according to the agents involved in it; and, in doing so, it creates political reality" (Ostermann and Sjöstedt 2022, p. 101). As such, employing a discursive approach to data analysis in the individual studies of this dissertation involved a detailed exploration of how security issues were framed and what solutions were proposed by actors in various institutional settings. Furthermore, special attention was given to the terms associated with civil defence, such as resilience, (strategic) autonomy, capability building, threats, and comprehensive security, to name a few. Analyzing the meanings attributed to these concepts made it possible to draw inferences about the existing understandings of civil defence. Examining the language surrounding these topics helped identify both similarities and differences in interpretations, which were crucial for recognizing ideational convergences across different institutional contexts. The data to which this approach was applied is discussed in the next section.

Data Collection

The following discussion outlines the methods employed for data generation, focusing on interviews and document analysis. It describes the process of conducting interviews and selecting interviewees. Ethical and practical considerations, such as obtaining consent and addressing linguistic factors, are also discussed. In relation to document analysis, the section examines the selection process and how the documents were utilized within the relevant articles of the thesis.

Interviews

There are many reasons why interviews lie at the heart of much of social science research. For one, they allow researchers to gather a detailed description of individuals' experiences and views. Then, they enable researchers to probe for additional information or clarifications in their endeavor to understand the meanings and logics behind certain behavior. Furthermore, interviews offer flexibility to adjust and explore new insights as they emerge (Fujii 2018). For these reasons, interviews were used as primary data for much of the analysis, particularly in three out of four articles, of this compilation thesis. To that end, a total of 61 interviews were conducted during the years 2020, 2022, and 2023. Of these, 57 were held by the author of this dissertation.

Semi-Structured (Digital) Interviews

The interviews conducted were semi-structured, with a sequence of themes to be covered and questions prepared beforehand. To that, an interview guide was used on all occasions (interview guides for Articles II and III can be found in their appendices). One advantage of a semi-structured setting is that it allows for flexibility to adapt inquiries based on the information received as well as to pose follow-ups for clarification (Kvale 2007). Approaching the interviews in this manner leaves room for the emergence of fractions of narratives in which individuals organize and express meanings (Mishler 1986). This enables the researcher to draw inferences on their respective subject. In the case of this thesis, the overarching themes represented in all interview guides, albeit from

different angles, were the conception of civil defence and the interactions taking place within this field, both on national and international levels.

Seeing that interviews are most fruitful when there is dialogue and interaction between the interviewee and the researcher (Fujii 2018), the preferred way to go about them is to meet in person. This was certainly the ambition for this thesis as well. As such, for *Articles I*, *II*, and *III* in-person interviews were planned and schedule in 2020, 2022, and 2023 respectively. Yet, in the first two cases, these were changed to distance interviews due to Covid-19 restrictions at the time. During 2020, with the first wave of restrictions, the interviews were moved to Skype or held via phone (as by that time most digital platforms we know and use now were not fully developed yet). In 2022, after initial plans to meet in person, a new wave of restrictions led to interviews being held via Zoom or Teams instead. However, in 2023, most interviews were held in person (apart from the ones where in-person interviews were not feasible, such as interviews with respondents from Iceland).

Digital interviews come with a set of challenges that can affect the quality of data, many of which became evident in this case as well. First, there are technical issues such as poor audio quality, disturbances, distractions, and lack of a video option, which have an impact on the flow of conversation and researchers' ability to read visual cues (Lo Iacono *et al.* 2016, Thunberg and Arnell 2022). These issues were certainly part of the 2020 interviews when Skype or phones were used as the main platforms. Not only did the technical difficulties influence the quality of the conversation, but they also posed challenges to the recording and the transcription of the interviews. Especially challenging were the situations when the respondents did not consent to recording and extensive notetaking was needed during the phone calls. In these cases, although not that many, having access to video and visual cues would have likely helped to mitigate the issue, as the respondents would have noticed the constraint of writing and holding conversation simultaneously and perhaps slowed down the pace of conversation. Nonetheless, to remedy these issues, the possibility to ask for clarifications later, once transcriptions were finalized, helped to clear up uncertainties in the recordings, as well as fill possible gaps.

In 2022, though, most interviews were held through videoconference, enabling the reading of some visual cues as well as creating a more interactive environment. Also, the recording tools of these platforms were already much more developed with clearer audio (as well as video) quality. These subtle improvements and lessons learned from the 2020 experience were reflected in the quality and quantity of the material and transcriptions as well. However, a second challenge remained, that is the confidentiality surrounding the topic

which made some interviewees reluctant to speak to me in the first place, and moving in-person interviews to digital platforms certainly did not help the cause. Although digital means might be a better platform for sensitive topics as they give more control to the respondents who can decide whether they wish to have their video on or leave at any time (Jenner and Myers 2019, Thunberg and Arnell 2022), respondents might be more open to sharing when a genuine dialogue is established, allowing for more in-depth conversations and spontaneous exchanges.

Indeed, considering that much of the information regarding the planning of a national defence policy falls under secrecy, interviewees were cautious with sharing information, not least via the phone. However, it is to be noted that the interviewees showed high awareness of the boundaries regarding which information to share and what to withhold. This is reinforced by the fact that none of the initial interviewees withdrew their participation once the interviews were moved to digital platforms. And while some were more cautious than others, most were more than willing to share their experiences, both via digital platforms and in person.

It is also important to consider how the pandemic context may have influenced the data. If not so evident in the case of the 2020 interviews, by 2022 it was clear that the two long pandemic years had significantly altered the development of the Swedish civil defence. This was largely due to restrictions on in-person interactions, which led to distance work and the widespread use of digital platforms for meetings. This, as reflected by several interviewees, limited the possibilities to exchange information or enhance cooperation due to the secrecy of most operational aspects of civil defence planning that were not to be discussed through digital platforms. This applied both to national and international contexts. In connection to that, one respondent reflected about "not being invited to any [NATO] meetings for a while now … mainly because of Covid" (Interview #8, 2022), whereas another spoke of agency projects figuring out their potential cooperation with NATO that "have been delayed because of the pandemic" (Interview #6, 2022). That meant less access to the ideas circulating on and from NATO's institutional setting, which usually Sweden's representatives would gain through participation in meetings as well as informal exchanges held both nationally and in Brussels.

The Selection of (Elite) Interviewees

The selection of interviewees followed the rationale of elite interviewing, where elites are defined as individuals who have gained expertise on a particular subject – in this case that of total/civil defence – by virtue of their

position and their role in the community, and can influence their states' (civil defence) policy outcomes (Kvale 2007, Harvey 2011, Jervis 2017). However, gaining access to elites is notoriously a challenge, although, somewhat an exaggerated one. Regardless, there needs to be a strategy in place for how to approach potential interviewees. This includes doing preparatory background work to learn about the field and the people in it; making use of already existing contacts and networks; as well as not shying away from 'cold calling' or in this digital age, emailing (Ostrander 1995).

Considering that this dissertation is part of a larger research project on civil defence, gaining background information as well as entry points for initial contacts was enabled within the framework of the project, not least in the Swedish context. Furthermore, connections established through teaching at the Department of Political Science in Lund, along with networks of other scholars both in Sweden and abroad, were also unitized. For the international interviews, the author's professional background – interning for the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Estonian Embassy to Denmark in 2015 and working at the Estonian Government Office in 2018 – proved beneficial. These experiences provided both the confidence and relevant points of reference needed to approach potential respondents. Finally, countless emails were sent to both general and personal accounts, which often led to ongoing communication and ultimately helped identify the most suitable interviewees.

Although all were civil servants in various government bodies and varying capacities, the interviewees could be divided into two categories: a) those at the end of policy loop, responsible for the enactment of civil defence policy in various societal sectors (*Articles I* and *II*) and b) those at the central level of governance where policies are made and negotiated (*Article III*). To use the terminology of *Article I*, they are either decision-takers or decision-makers, a distinction that puts this thesis both in the sphere of policy implementation and that of policymaking. Collectively, however, all respondents constitute practitioners in the sense that they work with civil defence-related issues on a daily basis, making the dissertation a largely practitioner-focused one.

The first group of interviewees are all bound to the specific case of Sweden and include representatives of the Swedish government agencies that have a special responsibility to ensure the functioning of society in times of crisis or war (interview overviews for *Articles I* and *II* can be found in their appendices). Thus, they are civil servants working with various aspects of civil defence, both in national and international contexts. The positions represented, depending on the agencies' internal organization, include civil/total defence coordinators or special investigators, heads of security and crisis management units or departments, and the directors general in some cases.

The reason these practitioners were sought out was the ambition of both *Articles I* and *II*, to investigate the understanding of civil defence and interactions surrounding it in practice, that is, in distinction to what the official documents claim them to be. To reach this aim, use was made of the unique Swedish public administration system that assigns relatively large autonomy to its government agencies to not only influence decision-making but also exercise relatively great freedom when it comes to policy implementation (Hall 2016). This makes them of high relevance for the civil defence field, both on the national level and also in interaction with international institutions such as the EU and NATO. What is more, this unique governance system implies the need for and significance of coordination across agencies to make a coherent policy, exposing the ways in which interactions on the national level shape not only civil defence policy implementation but also its production.

As for the second group of interviewees, they belong to the central level of government, representing government bodies such as Prime Minister's Offices, and Ministries of Defence, Interior, Justice, and Foreign Affairs, as well as the government agencies with the main responsibility to coordinate civil defence (present in the Nordic countries). The reason for this selection is the focus of *Article III*, which deals with inter-state interactions on a regional level, in the Nordic–Baltic context. While still practitioner-centered, this study zoomed out from the national policy implementation sphere to an intergovernmental context where the main players are those on the central level of governance, making government representatives the most suitable interviewees to gain knowledge of the interactions and their impact taking place on the regional level. To that end, the respondents were asked to reflect on their understandings of their respective countries' security situation, total defence approach, and resilience, as well as their perspectives on the dynamics, prospects, and problems of regional cooperation in this area.

Ethical and Practical Considerations

Conducting interviews, not least via digital means, certainly calls for ethical considerations, which in this case were carefully drafted into a letter of consent that all the participants read and signed prior to interviews. As part of the initial correspondence with the interviewees, this document included detailed information about the project, their participation in it, as well as data management. It also stressed that the questions and topics covered during the interviews were of a general nature and concerned with their everyday experience and their interpretation thereof, and not linked to the operational or planning aspects of civil defence. Furthermore, they were also presented with

a choice to consent to the recording of the interview as well as an option to obtain the interview guide beforehand. In addition, to encourage as open and in-depth conversations as possible, all participants were granted anonymity. All this information was then repeated orally at the beginning of each interview, offering an opportunity to ask questions before starting the conversation.

There is also a practical consideration to be addressed, concerning the language used in interviews (applies also to documents) and their subsequent translations to English. For the sake of clarity, although not a native of Swedish, the author of this thesis has obtained language fluency after almost 14 years of living in Sweden. Thus, all translations from Swedish to English were made by the author. This also applies to international interviews, of which the majority were held in English, but some were in Estonian, which is the author's mother tongue, or Norwegian (which is closely related to Swedish).

Document Analysis

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of civil defence and the interactions taking place in various institutional contexts, the interview materials were complemented with additional sources. In methodological terms, this refers to triangulation, defined as mixing of multiple data sources or methodologies in order to diversify viewpoints and offer a more credible and nuanced account of the issue at hand (Denzin 1978, Olsen 2004). This approach is common in qualitative research, especially so in studies including elite interviews, where most often documents are used to complement interview material (Natow 2020).

In this dissertation, document analysis served as another venue for data generation, whether as a complement to interviews, as was the case in *Article I* and *III*; or as the main outlet, as in *Article IV*. Defined as "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic material" (Bowen 2009, p. 27), document analysis offers an alternative source to either verify, complement or challenge already existing knowledge. For instance, in *Article I*, documents were used to give context to the main interview material but also to compare and draw out the main divergences between the two sources, and in doing so, offer a more comprehensive interpretation of civil defence. In that case, three official documents were analyzed: the first was the government defence bill (Prop.2014/15:109) on the direction of Swedish defence policy for 2016–2020 and the other two were

reports from the Swedish Defence Commission: one on resilience[15] and the other on military defence[16]. The rationale for choosing these specific documents was that they needed to represent the official discourse of the Swedish Government, hence the choice to include documents that serve as the basis for government decisions, as well as the government's own proposition.

As for *Article III*, the number of documents analyzed was considerably larger, although the study relies mainly on interviews. Around 20 different documents from all eight Nordic and Baltic states, including the most recent government white papers and bills, national security strategies, and public reports from the countries of the region, as well as information from public websites, were used in the article either as direct sources or for background information. The approach to identifying relevant sources was to first conduct desk research and find the most recent government bills with open access by the respective office. However, in some cases these were hard to locate or identify, and thus interviewees provided useful guidance either by distributing the relevant document or pointing in the right direction.

In *Article IV*, documents constitute the only source for data, which derives from 74 sources spanning over the period from 2010 to 2024. These include official statements and documents from two of the EU's institutions – the European Commission and the European Council – dealing with the Union's security policy. The rationale behind the selection was mainly informed by the theoretical and empirical ambitions of the paper, to investigate the discursive developments within the EU's foreign and security policy discussions through a total defence lens (in connection to the concept of strategic autonomy). As was already known from the existing scholarship on this subject, the most relevant and frequently analyzed empirics are the openly published strategic papers – the EU's Global Strategy from 2016 and Strategic Compass from 2022 (and their follow-ups from 2019 and 2024 respectively). However, there are no studies that conduct such analysis through the same theoretical lenses, which is one of the motivations to include these documents in the study.

Furthermore, previous studies have also identified the State of the Union (SOTEU) addresses, delivered annually by the incumbent President of the European Commission since 2010, as valuable sources for understanding the Union's self-understanding and for tracing the evolution of this hybrid entity (Pansardi and Battegazzorre 2018, Molnár and Harnos 2023, see Lund Nielsen

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[15] Titled 'Resilience: The total defence concept and the development of civil defence 2021-2025', from 2017.

[16] Titled, 'The Swedish Defence Commission's white book on Sweden's Security Policy and the Development of the Military Defence 2021-2025', from 2019.

2024). Additionally, since these speeches are held annually (with the exceptions of 2014, 2019, and 2024), they offer a consistent and reliable data source for tracking the emergence of specific ideas within the EU context. To this end, 12 official transcripts of SOTEU, published by the Commission on its webpage, were included in the material.

In addition to these sources, the article also includes 58 conclusions from the European Council meetings held between 2010 and 2024, with heads of state or government present. These conclusions provide valuable insights into the collective discussions and decisions made during these meetings. The inclusion of this material was considered essential due to the intergovernmental nature of the security field, which places Member States in the driver's seat. By incorporating the collective perspectives of the EU Member States, the analysis offers a more nuanced narrative of the discursive developments in this context.

That said, other relevant documents could have included those from the Council of the EU, where specific groups, such as General Affairs or Foreign Affairs Councils, meet to discuss issue-specific topics. However, given the paper's focus on capturing the EU's comprehensive security thinking, which spans a wide range of policy areas, it was determined that including such documents would be an unfeasible undertaking for this project. As a result, a more generalized approach was taken in the selection of materials.

In all the three articles that operationalize documents, particularly the fourth one, these sources were studied manually, applying a discursive approach outlined earlier, with a focus on the various elements – defined also by the respective theoretical lens – that frame actors' conceptions of civil defence. While conducting the analysis posed no challenge in cases with a small number of sources, the Council conclusions required an initial step of identifying the most relevant ones. In this instance, Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to isolate the key sources through an extensive content search. Once identified, these documents were manually investigated, as with other cases, in alignment with the objectives of the respective study.

Conclusion

The aim of this concluding chapter is to explore the key contributions of this dissertation, rooted in the two intertwined research objectives of this thesis: to investigate contemporary conceptions of civil defence and to examine how these are shaped in a multi-level institutional context. The chapter will then provide summaries of the individual articles that constitute the foundation of this work. Finally, it will conclude with reflections on unresolved questions and future directions, suggesting possible avenues for further research.

Contributions

While each of articles in this dissertation makes contributions to its own respective field, they collectively encompass more general theoretical, conceptual, empirical, and practical insights. The following is a discussion of these contributions.

Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation contributes to the theoretical scholarship on the influence of ideas on policies and the interactive processes through which they are exchanged, offering new insights into the ideational processes that shape the development of contemporary security policies across multiple institutional contexts. Situated within the framework of discursive institutionalism, this literature highlights how ideas not only impact policies but are also shaped by, and possess the capacity to reshape, the institutional context in which they emerge (Schmidt 2010, 2008, Goldstein and Keohane 1993a). The potential for interactions to influence policy ideas within the security domain has been recognized in the literature on security communities (Deutsch 1957, Adler and Barnett 1998b), while divergences in existing ideas are often explained by strategic culture theories (Johnston 1995, Gray 1999, Libel 2020, Kartchner *et al.* 2023). To examine the extent to which institutionalized interactions shape ideas, the concept of socialization provides a useful analytical framework (Alderson 2001, Checkel 2005, Beyers 2010).

This dissertation integrates these literatures and identifies the ideational processes embedded in security policy making as well as the conditions under which different institutional settings either foster or hinder the shaping of

policy ideas. Accordingly, it shows how underlying logics of security impact interpretations of policy discourses, as well as how institutional settings – national, regional, and international – influence policy developments. In this regard, it shows how divergent policy understandings, each with own unique characteristics, challenge policy cohesion, prospects for collaboration as well as central coordination and steering. Moreover, it emphasizes the limitations of the socialization process under the condition of institutional exclusion, which obstructs interactions, incentives, and the alignment of policy ideas within a security community. Furthermore, it highlights the ideational power of different features of security policy ideas across various institutions, illustrating how their developments are influenced by existing institutional structures and the deeper ideational processes embedded within national, regional, and international contexts. In so doing, it maps the parallel, potentially contradictory, processes taking place in multiple settings.

That said, one of the key theoretical contributions of this thesis lies in its shift beyond the traditional focus on discourses on the policymaking level, which has often been the main emphasis of existing scholarship. Instead, it explores how these discourses are interpreted in the policy implementation sphere. In doing so, it reveals the challenges of translating policy ideas into practice, which ultimately influences their enactment. Thus, it underscores how institutional characteristics embedded in policy discourses do not always translate into policy implementation, as complex ideational processes occur within the practical sphere too, shaped by its own unique structures and deeper ideational dynamics. This also highlights how rapid shifts in policy discourses need not always carry ideational power in practice, primarily because of variations in their practical interpretations, which might delay the process of applying policy changes.

Conceptual Contributions

Furthermore, this thesis harnesses the conceptual architecture of several key concepts, contributing to the advancement of their respective fields of study. First, it offers new insights into the conceptualizations of *civil defence*, stripping it from exclusively nuclear associations and situating it within the context of contemporary security. Additionally, while most existing conceptions of civil defence in the literature rely on document-based research (Bourcart 2015, Austin 2020, Larsson 2021, Larsson and Rhinard 2021), this thesis offers a unique, first-hand perspective based on extensive interview material (along with documents) (for survey studies, see Bengtsson and Brommesson 2023, 2024), revealing the varied understandings of this policy.

These variations reflect different (for instance, societal or territorial) logics regarding what civil defence is and what it does, institutional varieties, as well as differing understandings of related concepts.

One such related concept is *resilience*. Traditionally linked to the crisis literature, resilience is increasingly framed within the context of security and defence policy (Bourbeau 2013, 2017, Chandler 2020, Tocci 2020). Often positioned as a central objective of a comprehensive security strategy, it emerges as a prominent concept throughout this thesis. Consequently, the study unpacks the notion of resilience, offering dynamic descriptions of its meaning within the scope of total defence. In particular, it distinguishes two key conceptualizations: one focused on the functioning of government and society in the case of crisis or war, and the other on the population's capacity to endure various challenges and resist external manipulation. While these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, they highlight a difference in focus – from the practical functioning of public services (state resilience) to the broader capacity for resistance within the population (societal resilience). Apart from emphasizing the link between resilience and civil/total defence, this dissertation also explores its role in the pursuit of strategic autonomy.

On this topic, there are varied understandings of the concept of *strategic autonomy* in the literature. Generally defined as an actor's ability to independently pursue its strategic goals and interests (Juncos and Vanhoonacker 2024), existing interpretations of strategic autonomy can be broadly categorized into conventional and global perspectives (Helwig 2020, 2022). This dissertation advocates for viewing strategic autonomy as a form of total defence, encompassing both military and civil dimensions. In doing so, it demonstrates how the concept has been described in the EU's security discourses and, within them, acted as a catalyst for strengthening the EU's defence capabilities in both civil and military spheres. However, in the latter case, these discourses primarily focus on the integration of civil and military sectors, rather than reinforcement of traditional military power. Thus, this dissertation argues that, although strategic autonomy had initially been closely associated with a military discourse, within the EU context it aligns more with civil defence conceptions than with military ones. This thesis thus offers an additional interpretation of the concept that is in line with civil defence thinking.

Empirical Contributions

This dissertation offers several empirical insights that are relevant to the broader understanding of security developments in Europe in multiple contexts. By covering the period from 2010 to 2024, it testifies to the impact

of multiple crises and challenges on national, regional, and international institutions. These include the perceived onset of the decline of European security order, triggered by Russia's aggressive actions, particularly in Ukraine in 2014, with the illegal annexation of Crimea marking the beginning of a conflict that ultimately escalated into a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and contributed to NATO's expansion. The two years of the global pandemic further underscored the resurgence of geopolitics and Europe's increasing dependencies. Additionally, the weakening of transatlantic relations under Trump's first U.S. presidency, with expectations of a continuation of this trend in his second term starting in 2025, is also a key factor in these developments. Accordingly, the thesis contains many empirical observations that can be summarized under the three categorized levels.

From a *national* perspective, this dissertation offers empirical insights into the development of Swedish security policy in general and its civil defence policy in particular. It testifies to the divergent conceptions of this policy following its revival in 2015, emphasizing the complexities of interpreting civil defence discourses and enacting them in practice. It also demonstrates how intertwined various institutions are within this policy. These findings expand beyond the case of Sweden, speaking to the broader challenges within contemporary civil defence policies and their implementation. Furthermore, the dissertation captures the existing sentiments toward NATO in the Swedish civil defence sphere prior to the country's application for membership in the alliance. In this sense, it documents a unique moment in the narrative of the Sweden–NATO relationship. Yet it also testifies to the general experiences of exclusion from communities and its consequences for the prospects of deeper cooperation. Furthermore, the dissertation offers individual insights into the total defence approaches of the eight Nordic and Baltic countries of the Baltic Sea region, while highlighting their similarities and differences.

Within a *regional* context, then, it maps the variations in security approaches and evaluates the existing and prospective regional cooperation, offering insights into overlapping interests and ambitions, and identifying possible pathways for further collaboration. Contrary to prevailing discourses of close integration between the regional states – typically distinguished as the five (or more often, four) Nordic countries and the three Baltic states – this study reveals the lack of integration in the security domain, specifically regarding approaches to (total) civil defence. In this context, it demonstrates how the three Nordic countries – Sweden, Norway, and Finland – share most similarities, while the three Baltic states, primarily united by their common Soviet past, exhibit distinct characteristics. Due to this shared history, the Baltic states tend to avoid the term civil defence, which evokes Soviet-era

associations, instead focusing on concepts like resilience and crisis preparedness.

On the *international* stage, this dissertation examines civil defence developments within NATO and the EU. Although NATO has not been studied as a standalone subject, the empirical findings of this thesis highlight its growing importance as a civil defence actor, particularly in relation to the seven baseline requirements that often serve as frameworks for national civil defence. It also underscores NATO's role in the European security architecture, emphasizing its central position within the military pillar of total defence in many Nordic–Baltic states, a role further reinforced in EU security discourses. Regarding the EU, the dissertation illustrates that, in the context of a broader conceptualization of civil defence, the Union's capabilities are seen as valuable assets for enhancing national civil defence strategies, especially evident in sectors such as transport and energy, which are increasingly governed by the Union. Given the EU's ongoing pursuit of strategic autonomy, this dissertation argues that there is a significant opportunity for the Union to establish a robust civil defence system.

Practical Contributions

This dissertation examines several dimensions of a security policy process, from policy formulation to implementation, and in doing so, sheds light on some more practical features in this process. First, regarding the formulation of key policy concepts, it highlights how diverse interpretations can arise when these concepts are broadly defined, posing challenges to coherence, coordination, and cooperation among actors on various level – within societal sectors, across them, nationally, and internationally. Second, it emphasizes the value of national agents of socialization in coordinating and managing expectations of the role of different institutional structures. This coordination, however, should extend beyond mere information exchange, ideally incorporating common trainings and workshops.

Third, the diversity of relevant international actors involved in civil defence can put a strain on small states with limited administrative resources, making it neither feasible nor desirable for such countries to interact in parallel forums. As such, reaching consensus on, and prioritizing, certain forums over others can foster deeper integration and cooperation. Given the EU's established role as a provider of civil security and crisis preparedness, along with its competence in regulating critical societal sectors across Member States, coupled with the uncertainties surrounding transatlantic relations, there is a clear opportunity for the EU to serve as the primary platform for civil defence cooperation.

Article Summaries

The four articles of this thesis collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of contemporary civil defence, particularly within the context of a multi-level institutional framework. Each article offers a unique perspective on how civil defence policies are conceptualized, enacted, and shaped by various actors and institutions. The following summaries illustrate how they do so, respectively.

Article I asks, how is the broad conceptualization of civil defence found in policy documents interpreted by civil defence practitioners in Sweden? The paper argues that the contested security logics that assign meaning to the notion of security, influence the ways in which policy concepts are interpreted and enacted in practice, potentially threatening the policy efficiency with which the various demands of contemporary security can be met. It then demonstrates, based on interview material, how divergent understandings of Sweden's civil defence emerge among practitioners, linked respectively to territorial and societal security logics, each manifesting distinct views on the aims, threat perceptions, and governance of this policy. This, as is argued, poses many potential problems for reaching coherence, challenging inter-agency collaboration, central coordination and steering, as well as choices for international cooperation. Through the study of Swedish civil defence, the article contributes with new insights into the practical challenges to the making of (civil) defence policy in the context of entangled security, and highlights the complex constraints that it sets on policy implementation.

Article II deals with the Swedish civil defence practitioners' perceptions of the interactions (or the absence thereof) with NATO prior to Sweden's membership in the alliance. By adopting an 'outsider' perspective to the theory of socialization, the article develops an analytical framework based on *exclusion*, *interactions*, *incentives*, and *compatibility*. This framework guides the analysis – based on unique interview data – of NATO's perceived role in the development of the Swedish civil defence policy. It finds that, in contrast to the discourses about NATO's significant role in the Swedish civil defence within the policymaking sphere, NATO has not really shaped the civil defence policy in practice due to the practitioners' experiences of being excluded from the NATO community. This in turn has affected (the quality of) interactions, incentives to engage, and compatibility between the policy developments on the national and community levels. The study thereby highlights the importance of the practical sphere to enhance our knowledge about the impact of interactions on security policies. This is in contrast to the currently dominant policymaking perspectives.

Article III asks, to what degree does there exist a shared security culture within the Nordic–Baltic group of states? It builds on the presumption that a shared security culture – expressed through common conceptualizations, threat perceptions, identity, and interaction preferences – facilies mutual understandings and deeper cooperation that is vital for the security of the region. It then moves to answer this question by analyzing the conceptualizations of total defence and resilience among the eight Nordic and Baltic countries in comparative perspective; and inquiring into existing and prospective regional cooperation in this field. The analysis, which builds on interview and document materials, reveals that despite assigning equal importance to having comprehensive defence policies, there are significant variations in conceptualizations as well as the implementation of total defence and resilience policies among the cases studied. These variations stem from divergent historical experiences, threat perceptions, geographical factors, and interaction preferences, all pointing to the limited degree of shared security culture among the countries. While most connections can be found between the Nordic Three – Sweden, Finland, and Norway – for the region, this poses constraints to establishing meaningful cooperation, highlighting the complexity and multifaced nature of total defence on the regional level.

Article IV investigates the trajectory of the EU's security policy through the lens of a total defence idea, comprising both military and civil dimensions; and assess the impact of the concept of strategic autonomy on the development of this idea. Drawing on an ideational power framework, it analyses the three dimensions of ideational power – power *through, over*, and *in* the idea – of total defence in security discourses from 2010–2024, as found in the EU's official documents and statements. The findings demonstrate that a European total defence idea precedes that of the (re)emergence of strategic autonomy, while the introduction of the latter concept has served as a catalyst to enhance both military and civil defence. However, while strategic autonomy has given new impetus to increasing European military capabilities, this has been done primarily in terms of intertwining the civil and military domains. Thus, the article concludes that the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy could be a 'quantum leap forward' in the EU's launch of a European civil defence.

Final Reflections

The (re)emergence of civil defence in Europe, particularly in the Nordic and Baltic states but also in international institutions, signals a fundamental shift in how societies approach security in a rapidly changing world. While the Cold

War-era conception of civil defence was narrowly focused on military threats, today's redefined civil defence is integral to comprehensive security strategies that recognize a wide array of transnational and hybrid threats. As states adapt to a more interconnected and complex security environment, the importance of cooperation within regional and international frameworks becomes increasingly evident. Through a multi-level perspective, this dissertation explores the evolving understanding of civil defence in national, regional, and European contexts, particularly emphasizing Sweden's reactivation of this policy. It highlights the importance of institutional dynamics and transnational interactions in shaping policy developments, underscoring how ideas, as shaped by different institutional contexts, play a critical role in the development of policies and for reaching collective solutions.

As the security landscape continues to evolve, so do the ideas of civil defence and its essential role in ensuring resilience against complex and multifaceted threats. Accordingly, many questions remain unanswered while new ones arise. Theoretically speaking, further insights on the practical interpretations of discourses, and the interplay between the ideational processes taking place in policymaking and implementation spheres, are worth exploring further. This is not only to deepen our understanding of the conception of contemporary key concepts but also to more accurately assess the different dimensions of ideational power and the impact of interactive processes on policies, including their enactment. This would significantly advance the research of ideational processes and enable policymakers and researchers to better foresee and explain policy trajectories.

Further investigations into the development of a shared security culture are also needed. The studies of this thesis have highlighted links between ideational diffusion as well as different forms of interactions (bilateral and multilateral, formal and informal) and the development of a shared security culture, but further investigation into these relationships would not only advance the theory of security cultures but also speak to the degree of density of a security community, simultaneously advancing both theories.

The expansion of NATO to include Sweden and Finland as members has brought with it many questions across various contexts. For the Swedish case, the impact of membership on the development of the civil defence policy remains to be seen and further studied. However, if the inquiries of this thesis provide any indication, these influences will not be drastic, at least not in the practical spheres of civil defence and not in the short run. The question remains also about the impact that Sweden and Finland's membership has on the development of NATO's capabilities in the field, as both states have relatively well-established civil defence policies compared to other alliance members.

Certainly, there is much room for them to shape the development of NATO's collective resilience efforts.

Furthermore, what Sweden and Finland's membership in NATO entails for regional cooperation also makes an interesting case, as it could, paradoxically, lead to closer cooperation among the Nordics as it provides a fruitful platform for planning for defence within one region of NATO. On the other hand, to avoid duplications and strains on small public administrations, NATO could become the preferred platform, potentially reducing the relevance of the established Nordic forums – or even the EU, which, at the same time, is increasingly establishing itself as security actor, not least regarding civil defence. Hence, what will Sweden and Finland's' NATO membership entail for integration in other institutional settings? Accordingly, additional research on how these developments shape the progress towards a shared security culture in the region is called for.

What makes these questions particularly compelling and relevant is the deteriorating nature of transatlantic relations under the second term of Trump's administration. A pivotal moment came in February 2025, when U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference caught many off guard, with a clear and stark message: Europe needs to do more for its own security. This shifts the focus back to the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy, casting it in a new light and intensifying the urgency surrounding the development of collective European military capabilities. However, as this thesis demonstrates, the discourse surrounding the enhancement of these capabilities has been a long-standing element of EU security policy. While external shocks have certainly amplified this discourse, triggering various initiatives, these efforts have largely been centered around integrating civilian and military sectors. Consequently, the EU has yet to make substantial progress toward a fully-fledged Defence Union, despite the strong rhetoric. Whether Trump's presidency will be the catalyst that shifts the deeper ideational underpinnings of EU Member States, or whether this moment too will pass without significantly altering the EU's defence trajectory, remains to be seen. What is evident, however, is that the EU's current defence framework is more aligned with fostering a robust Civil Defence Union than with establishing a true (Total) Defence Union.

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Scientific Articles