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# Nordic Mutual Strategic Interests – A First Assessment

Report from a workshop under the NORDSUP auspices

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## Sammanfattning

FOI Försvarsanalys arrangerade 20091014-16 en workshop för en ad hoc-tillsatt norsk-svensk-finsk arbetsgrupp under NORDSUP-samarbetets ram. Målet var att försöka identifiera gemensamma, nordiska strategiska intressen. Av olika skäl kunde inte danska eller isländska representanter delta. Resultaten som redovisas i denna rapport ska därför inte ses som representativa för danska eller isländska uppfattningar.

Metodologiskt skapades först en enkel taxonomi i tre nivåer: strategiska kärntressen ("core strategic interests"), aktuella strategiska intressen ("current grand strategy interests") och politisk-militära mål ("political-military objectives"). Därefter gjordes nationella presentationer av aktuella politiska deklARATIONER, strategier och andra liknande högnivådokument för att klargöra de olika nationella positionerna i centrala strategiska frågor. På basis av dessa nationella presentationer genomförde sedan arbetsgruppen en kollektiv analys av innehållet i dem och försökte identifiera de strategiska intressen som kan sägas vara gemensamma, dvs ömsesidiga och övergripande lika för alla de tre länderna. Slutligen gjordes några kvalifikationer av de framkomna resultaten beorende på vissa nationella olikheter i tolkningen.

Nyckelord:

Norden; gemensamma strategiska intressen; nordiskt samarbete; säkerhetspolitik; försvarspolitik; Sverige; Finland; Norge

## Summary

FOI Defence Analysis arranged a workshop for an ad hoc Finnish-Swedish-Norwegian joint working group under the NORDSUP umbrella on Oct. 14-16, 2009. The goal was to try to identify mutual, Nordic strategic interests. For different reasons, no Danish or Icelandic representatives were able to be present. The results should therefore not be regarded as taking Danish or Icelandic interests or views into account.

Methodologically, a taxonomy of “core strategic interests”, “current grand strategy interests” and “political-military objectives” was developed. Then, national presentations based on the major political declarations, bills and other ranking documents from each of the three nations were made. From these presentations, the working group collectively analysed the national presentations and tried to identify all interests in those that could be regarded – after interpretation – as “mutual”. Finally, some of the results were qualified due to certain national concerns.

**Keywords:** The Nordic states; mutual strategic interests; Nordic co-operation; security policy; defence policy; Sweden; Finland; Norway

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1	Methodology.....	6
1.2	Results.....	6
1.3	Mutual Core Strategic Interests.....	8
1.4	Mutual Current Grand Strategy Interests .....	8
1.5	Mutual Political-Military Objectives.....	9
1.6	Policy Implications for Nordic Co-operation .....	10
<b>2</b>	<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>12</b>

# 1 Introduction

In the NORDSUP framework, a need for an analysis of Nordic mutual strategic interests has been identified. Mutual cooperation among the Nordic countries might demand a common view of the strategic objectives of the countries involved. In the early summer of 2009, FOI Defence Analysis and the FoRMA project was tasked to organise a multilateral workshop focussing on the identification of common Nordic strategic interests. Initially, the working group was expected to contain representatives of all the five Nordic countries. Due to a set of circumstances, only representatives from Finland, Sweden and Norway were able to participate in the two-day workshop, which took place in Malmköping, Sweden (some 110 kms outside of Stockholm). This report describes that process and the results of the workshop.

## 1.1 Methodology

The working group was set up to find out, first, the distinct strategic interests of the three countries, respectively. The national strategic interests of most significance here are the strategic interests at the highest level of abstraction, or the generic, vital, national interests.

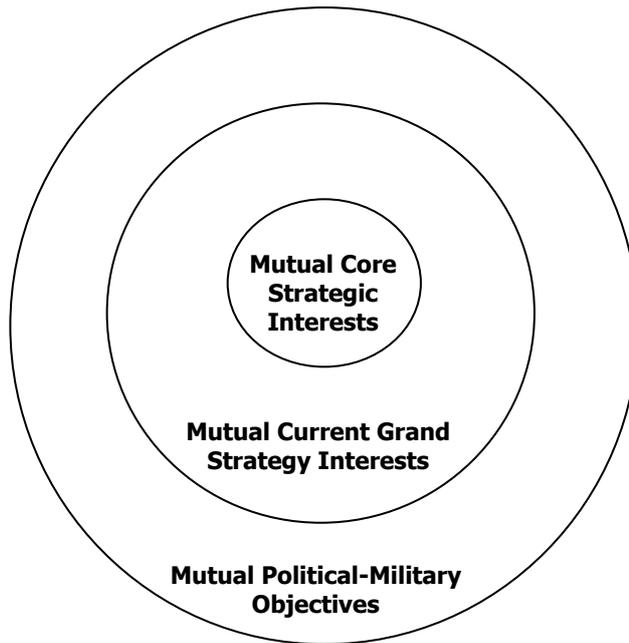
Written documents such as the prime minister's statements and reports and the like from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and/or Defence were used as sources, as well as government policy papers and constitutional texts. What the workshop participants were looking for were the most important strategic interests as defined by the most authoritative sources of the countries, respectively.

During the workshop, national presentations of the strategic interests of all the three countries were given by the participants. Secondly, the group was divided in two sub-groups, which were then tasked to "distill" the mutual interests from the set of national interests. Thirdly, the two sub-groups compared the results and a list of "agreed" mutual strategic interests was constructed, divided into three categories: core strategic interests, current grand strategy interests and political-military objectives. Finally, some of the concepts included in the list were "qualified", i.e. an additional discussion about them was held and some national, specific comments added to the final text.

## 1.2 Results

As was noted above, a simple taxonomy was constructed in order to arrange the different concepts found and interpreted in the official documents. One major problem in dealing with issues of this kind is that many concepts (like "goals", "interests", "strategic objectives" and the like) are both intertwined and possible

to identify as something else (such as “means”) on different levels of abstraction. During the workshop, the participants tried to get the concepts straight through a taxonomy of “core strategic interests”, “current grand strategy interest” and “political-military objectives”. The first category relates to concepts which are more or less permanent. The second category relates to concepts which are deeply integrated in the current grand strategies of the countries involved, but which might change, albeit in the event of very unexpected circumstances. The third category relates to concepts which are more concrete than the first two, but still objectives/interests in their own right – although they could also be regarded as means with which to achieve interests or objectives in the first and second categories. The following figure illustrates this taxonomy:



In the following, the identified mutual interests will be presented according to the three categories, and discussed briefly according to the deliberations of the working group.

### 1.3 Mutual Core Strategic Interests

The following core strategic interests were identified as Nordic mutual ones:

- Preserve independence and sovereignty (state survival, territorial integrity and freedom of action)
- Safeguard functioning national economies in a stable global economic system
- Preserving societal security (maintenance of vital societal functions)

All these three core interests appear, though in slightly different forms, in all the three countries' major documents. They are perhaps self-evident, but of fundamental importance for any understanding of strategic interests.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.4 Mutual Current Grand Strategy Interests

The following concepts were identified as Nordic mutual current grand strategy interests:

- UN-centred, rules-based international order
- The EU as vital vehicle of international action
- Strong transatlantic link (US, NATO - bilateral, multilateral)
- Stable Nordic neighbourhood (Baltic Sea, Baltic States-Russia, High North)
- Good relations with a stable Russia in a Europeanised setting
- Preservation and safeguarding of democracy and human rights.

This list of “current grand strategy interests” might also be regarded as quite self-evident from a geopolitical perspective. However, a few qualifications are necessary.

Looking at the concept of a “UN-centred, rules-based international order” it is common in e.g. Sweden to regard this as a “value-oriented” interest rather than a geopolitical one. However, for any small country it is of course a matter of self-

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<sup>1</sup> One qualification that can be made here is that the issue of “federalism” in a European Union context was briefly discussed during the workshop. Federalism is not a concept that is currently and officially promoted by any Swedish or Finnish politician in charge, but has been lingering in the debate about the future of the European Union for a while. A true federalist would argue that the desired end-state of a federal Europe would entail the loss of both independence and sovereignty of nation-states such as Sweden and Finland. However, since the issue seems to be very subdued in the current debate the participants chose to exclude the concept from the deliberations.

interest that other actors (such as much bigger countries) adhere to rules rather than the use of brute force. In the special case of Norway, this is even more important, since Norwegian control over its nearly 2 million km<sup>2</sup> of maritime exclusive economic zones is dependent upon international acceptance of the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea*. Since much of Norway's wealth comes from utilising the rich hydrocarbon and fishery resources of its maritime territory, the erosion of the UN centred international legal system upon which this control rests is considered the main threat to Norwegian interests.

Related to another concept, the relations with Russia, the perspectives differ slightly. All three countries underline the importance of a Europeanised approach to relations with Russia, including the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Northern Dimension of the EU.

However, from a Norwegian point of view, relations with Russia should as far as possible be organised in a multilateral framework.

From the Finnish perspective, relations with Russia should be conducted in a pragmatic way, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

In addition, Swedish documents make it quite clear that relations with Russia should be conducted partly depending on the Russian actions towards its neighbours. Also, in the Swedish perspective solidarity between the Nordic states is important in relationship to Russia.

## 1.5 Mutual Political-Military Objectives

The following concepts were identified as Nordic mutual political-military objectives:

- National defence capacity
- Promotion of security and stability in Northern Europe
- Support and strengthen the UN and the global multilateral order
- International co-operation (EU, NATO, UN, OSCE)
  - International crisis management co-operation
  - Joint civilian crisis management
- Develop the ability of EU and NATO to conduct crisis management operations in the Euro-Atlantic area, including in the Nordic Area (e.g. the Baltic Sea and the High North)
- Increased co-operation and interoperability with NATO
- Developing ESDP complementary to NATO
- Strengthen the transatlantic link
  - U.S.-European linkage central for international crisis management

- Keeping the U.S. interested in the Nordic region
- Nordic co-operation
  - Cooperation areas:
    - Policy
    - Capabilities (critical mass; defence economics)
    - International operations
  - Nordic-Baltic Sea-North Atlantic regional surveillance and common situational awareness
- Good relations with Russia
  - Instruments for the relations with Russia must be devised both multilaterally and bilaterally
  - The Northern Dimension and European Neighbourhood Policy of the EU, as well as the NATO-Russian council, are central tools for these relations
- Comprehensive approach to security (security is not just a military matter, neither nationally nor internationally)

As could be expected, this list of more concrete interests are also both longer and more detailed than the other two categories. In this case as well, a few qualifications are necessary.

For Finland, it is important to underline that the concept of a national defence capacity demands both a national credible defence capacity, a national willingness to defend the nation, a national territorial defence and the conscription system.

For Norway, national defence in terms of territorial defence is something that in all cases is done collectively within the context of alliance, i.e. NATO.

For Sweden, national defence in terms of territorial defence is to be conducted both unilaterally and together with others.

## 1.6 Policy Implications for Nordic Co-operation

The Nordic states have a great deal of shared strategic interests, particularly at the grand strategic level dealing with the current world order, the strengthening of the existing web of multilateral organisations, and desire for a stable Nordic neighbourhood and favourable developments in Russia. At this level of abstraction, the obstacles for effective cooperation are few.

However, some issues need further analysis, especially when attempting to implement grand strategy through setting concrete political and military objectives. The desire to retain credible national defence capabilities might put

limits on military integration in the Nordic area. Also, the lack of congruent membership in the most important European security organisations, EU and NATO, may limit Nordic ability to work together through them.

Despite these issues, the prospects for closer Nordic cooperation on security and defence issues should be very favourable, considering the level of shared mutual interests among the Nordic countries.

## 2 Appendix

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