



Constructing Capabilities
Military Strategies of Small States in an Age of Transition:
Examining the Influence of Strategic Culture

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Master's Thesis 30 ECTS (hp)

Political Science with a focus on Crisis Management and Security

Master's Programme in Politics and War

Autumn 2023

Supervisor: Kjell Engelbrekt

Word Count: 19 952

Abstract

Scholars tend to approach small states' military strategies in terms of restraints and opportunities in the external security environment, largely overlooking the influences of a state's domestic particularities. This thesis aims to explore how the theory of strategic culture, regarded here as an inherent, domestic context in which strategy is formulated, can add nuance to such realist analyses of how small states build and adjust their defence capabilities. Through a comparative case study design and a qualitative content analysis method, this thesis examines the adjustments in Denmark and Sweden's military strategies following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the central similarities and distinctions between those. The influence of strategic culture on the respective states' strategies is examined based on three foundational elements, dominant threat perception, approach to strategic partnerships, and geographical patterns and strategic exposure. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that the neorealist perspective of adjustments in small states' military strategies can indeed be complemented with a view of the states' unique strategic cultures, particularly with regard to the differences between the two empirical cases. Most notably, such a view allows for a deeper understanding of distinctions in the underlying rationales which guide the development, organisation and mission of the respective states' Armed Forces.

Keywords: Strategic culture, neorealism, military strategy, defence planning, small state security, Sweden and Denmark.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

After the Cold War, the military defence of nearly all Western countries was radically transformed. A primary indication of this new era was a process of internationalisation of the states' force projection, labelled by Matlary and Østerud as a “denationalisation of defence” (2007: 3). The Nordic countries became notable examples for these transformations. Despite distinctions in their defence postures and strategic priorities, these states all altered their objectives for national defence and significantly reduced their military expenditures throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. In no Nordic state did this move towards a “post-national military” occur to a larger extent than in Denmark and Sweden. The two countries' military volumes underwent radical downscaling during this timeframe, and the focal points of their national defence shifted towards expeditionary force and internationally deployable units. The historical-Cold War focus on territorial national defence was thus in both countries replaced, primarily by increased participation in peace-keeping operations within international frameworks (Matlary and Østerud, 2007: 3-5).

This large-scale, while non-uniform, transformation in defence policy, enabled by the peaceful environment of the post-Cold War, can be regarded as having been under revision during the past decade. Increased Russian aggression towards Ukraine, culminating with the invasion of 2022 has transformed the security environment in which the Nordic states operate. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 has been regarded as an important starting point of this deteriorating situation, and this essentially led to preparations for armed conflict in the region after decades of strategic neglect (Wither, 2020: 61). Since then, a transformation in the countries' defence posture and strategic objectives has been underway, exemplified by large-scale reinvestments in defence as well as the reconsiderations of states' historical alignment positions (IISS, 2018). The denationalisation of defence which so distinctly characterised Denmark and Sweden's post-Cold War strategies has as a part of this trend been placed under revision. National armed forces have since 2014 increasingly sought to regain the ability of fighting inter-state wars and overcome gaps in capabilities resulting from decades of prioritising crisis management operations and reducing military volumes (Hagström Frisell and Pallin, 2021: 13). Consequently, the Nordic states have begun to reorganise their armed forces, re-

emphasising territorial or regional defence, and deepened cooperation within international frameworks to achieve improved military capabilities (Wither, 2020).

1.2. Research Problem

Against this background, it is apparent that military strategies and defence policies are continuously under construction and that their formulation is unavoidably influenced by the external environment. The neorealist school in International Relations in that sense emphasises that a state's change in defence strategy is primarily driven by their assessment of the international system and the security environment. This theory focuses on how a small state, more specifically, is inherently vulnerable in this system and that its behaviour is determined by the constraints and opportunities imposed by the material environment (Bailes et al., 2014: 26-27; Glenn, 2009: 523). However, while neorealism is notably instrumental for understanding small states' strategy formulation, this theory arguably overlooks deeper nuances in how military strategy is formulated. A nation's defence capability, for instance, is a term that is centrally linked to realist scholarship as these are considered as determining a state's power within the international system. According to this definition, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland are all regarded as 'equal', third ranked states in terms of capability (Edström et al., 2019: 19). What can be supplemented and to an extent problematised in this claim is that these states do have different strategic aims as well as defence postures, which lead to distinctions in how they adjust their political priorities and military capabilities due to alterations in the external environment.

This thesis, while not seeking to reject realist convictions concerning motivations behind a state's military strategy, examines the influence of underlying domestic factors in this formulation, by using the theory of strategic culture. As strategic culture highlights the inherent ideational features of actors, this thesis attempts to add nuance to the understanding of how states, and notably small states, generate their strategy in times of geopolitical uncertainty. Thus, it underlines the assumption that decision-making processes and strategic choices in matters of defence are not solely based on present-moment calculations of the external environment, but are rather steeped in the domestic beliefs, traditions and preferred methods of operation which the state holds (Macmillan, 1995). Glenn has, for instance, emphasised that in order to conduct detailed foreign and security policy analysis, much

can be gained from examining alternative explanations of state behaviour and strategic outcomes, by supplementing realism with considerations of strategic culture (Glenn, 2009).

This theory has largely been used to study strategic transformations regarding the use of force, notably concerning decisions of Nordic countries to participate in international peace operations in the early 2000s, but it has not been analysed in terms of specific defence planning priorities or the organisation of military capabilities. Moreover, although scholars have emphasised that 2014 represented a decisive turn in direction in the Nordic states' military strategy, there is an overall lack of literature on the more precise strategies which have been developed over the past decade. As significant alterations have taken place in the past years, this thesis deems it relevant to analyse the post-2014 strategies of these states and examine the ways in which strategic culture holds supplemental analytical value to realism in understanding strategic adjustments in turbulent times.

1.3. Research Questions and Aim

This thesis empirically centres on the comparison between Denmark and Sweden's formulation of their post-2014 national military strategies. It takes as a starting point that the Russian annexation of Crimea presented a strategic shock for both countries which brought back traditional security concerns and thus led to increased urgency for reassessments of and adjustments in their national defence postures. These are developments which notably resulted in a vast increase in defence budgets following decades of cuts and have seen a reinstatement of traditional military-based threats. From that, it examines the central adjustments in their strategies, to what extent these can be understood from the neorealist lens and how these have been influenced by the respective countries' strategic cultures.

Empirically, the focus will therefore lie with the similarities and distinctions between the countries' adjustments, primarily with regard to their overarching strategic aims and allocation of defence resources. As military strategy is prominently conceptualised in terms of ends, means and ways, this research aims to structure the analysis accordingly. While it is given that both countries emphasise the strengthening of military capabilities as their end goals, this can be problematised and nuanced. Furthermore, the means and ways are in this project understood in terms of the central balancing acts amounting to a country's military capability, that can shift and transform over time according to policy prioritisation. These balances can primarily be conceptualised as between territorial

and expeditionary defence, between the Army, Navy and Air Force, and between quality, quantity and readiness.

In this regard, the thesis will aim to answer the following research questions:

- 1) *How have Sweden and Denmark adjusted their military strategies after 2014, and what are the main similarities and differences in the countries' strategic adjustments?*
- 2) *To what extent can the similarities and differences be understood from the neorealist lens?*
- 3) *In what ways can the similarities and differences be understood from the perspective of strategic culture?*

1.4. Structure of Thesis

The following chapter provides an overview of the existing, largely realist-dominated research on the overarching topic of military and defence strategy, small states and military strategy, and lastly, the Nordic states and their changing defence postures. Subsequently, the theoretical framework is presented. This section highlights the scholarly debate on strategic culture, as well as how this theory is understood in this thesis, introducing the specific sub-beliefs which guide the analysis further. This is followed by a presentation of the research design, notably the method and material used in conducting the analysis. The thesis then moves on to the analysis, consisting firstly of an empirical examination of the main adjustments in the two countries' military strategies after 2014. The similarities and differences in these strategic adjustments are consequently scrutinised, and then analysed through the neorealist view. Lastly, the findings will be examined through the lens of three distinct features of strategic culture, dominant threat perception, approach to strategic partnerships, and geographical patterns and strategic exposure. The concluding chapter discusses the findings, reflects on contributions and limitations, and suggests areas for further research.

2. Previous Research

2.1. Military and Defence Strategy

The conduct of war remains, in our contemporary era, one of the most significant acts of the state (Sloan, 2012: 1). As evidenced by ongoing conflicts in various parts of the world and as of 2022 in Europe, the present day sees no shortage of organised armed violence and rising tensions among great powers in the international system (Layne, 2020: 42). Military-based threats to nations, which in turn require a military response, thus continue to be prevalent alongside the parallel rise of less traditional threats impacting the security of citizens. As Sloan has argued, the concept of strategy and strategic thinking remains notably imperative in facing the threats which are of military nature (Sloan, 2012: 1). Our ability to operate within and respond to a future of marked complexity, turbulence and uncertainty has in this sense been considered largely dependent upon effective strategic thought (Foster, 1996: 111).

Conceptualisations of strategy are however by no means so a product of our current time. In fact, the canon of classical writings on strategic theory date from ca. 490 BCE (Gray, 2010: 1). Along with Sun Tzu and Thucydides, Carl von Clausewitz has widely been considered as the most notable thinker on strategy and war, and most discussions on the topic still take his masterpiece, *On War*, as their starting point (Sloan, 2012; Paret, 1986; Gray, 2010; Handel, 2001). While the definition of strategy and what it encompasses has remained subject to debate, Clausewitz's understanding of it as the "use of engagement for the purpose of the war," has been markedly influential (Sloan, 2012: 1; Brands, 2023: 1). This conceptualisation has been developed further and the most common definition now centres on the use of organised armed force to achieve military goals for political purposes (Gray, 1999b; Paret, 1986). Essentially, the Clausewitzian problem is thus how to "make force a rational instrument of policy rather than mindless murder" (Betts, 1997: 8). According to Betts, the field of strategic studies is of notable importance, as it forces precisely this problem of how to integrate war and politics in a rational manner (Ibid).

Clausewitz thereby framed modern strategic thinking in terms of an 'ends-means' paradigm. According to this belief, because of the scarcity of resources, the most appropriate military means need to be selected for the political ends in view to be achieved (Posen, 1984: 13). Strategy-makers furthermore are required to choose the most suitable ways enabling them to use the available means

to achieve predetermined objectives (Gray, 2010: 1). From this viewpoint, military strategy thus consists of a harmonious balance between military goals (ends), military-strategic concepts and actions (ways), and military resources (means) (Edström et al., 2019). Scholars such as Collins (2002) and Edström et al. (2019) have been instrumental in using the ends-means-ways paradigm as the established features of strategy.

From this, there exist various understandings of the distinction between military- and defence strategy, while security strategy is generally believed to encompass all elements relating to the security of the nation and its citizens (Rickli, 2008: 307). Rickli for instance claims that military strategy has a broader meaning than defence strategy, as the latter solely refers to the defence of the national territory, while Edström et al. conceptualise defence strategy as more inclusive, due to its further encompassing of alignment strategy and strategies for force generation (Rickli, 2008; Edström et al., 2019). This thesis will adhere to the latter's definition of military strategy as that primarily focuses on the state's internal efforts to further its interests by creating, developing and using military force (Edström and Westberg, 2020a: 1).

2.2. Small States and Military Strategy

A part of the present-day scholarship on strategy has claimed that although the concept may be viewed as universal and eternal in its logic, analyses of states' defence strategies should acknowledge the discrepancies in the sizes and resourcefulness of states, as this leads to differences in their interests and choices of strategic means (Edström and Westberg, 2020a). Therefore, it is essential to consider small states' military strategy in distinct terms, as these entities' strategies, and policies, naturally differ from that of medium-sized states or great powers, and therefore they cannot be treated as the same. In this regard, as Thorhallsson et al. (2019) have argued, the theoretical literature on small states which largely assumes that those states operate according to the same reasoning as great powers, fails to sufficiently capture their behaviour. Nevertheless, the question of what strategies small states choose to develop to navigate changes within the international system has been subject of academic debate for decades (Vaičekuskaitė, 2017).

Efforts to understand small states as political entities began during the Cold War, while scholarly attention on the subject increased substantially due to the proliferation of small states in Europe in the post-Cold War era (Inbar and Sheffer, 1997; Goetschel, 1998). The definition of a small

state, however, continues to be debated. Scholars, especially those from the realist tradition, have been instrumental in underlining definitions based on quantifiable factors such as national economy and population, as well as military capability (Vital, 1971; Katzenstein, 1985). From this assumption, the early literature on the subject largely focused on small states' relationship to the power they possess, notably highlighting their limited role within the international system and relations with larger states. (Keohane, 1969; Rothstein, 1968; Fox, 1959). As this scholarship has evolved, it has brought further subjective elements and less traditional variables. A relational perspective has for instance been developed which claims that states may be powerful in one relation, while simultaneously being weak in another, thus underlining the importance of the spatio-temporal context within which the small state exists (Thorhallsson and Wivel, 2006). This view thus moves away from the definition of small states which focuses on their quantifiable power possession to a one that is qualitative and rather captures how a small state usually acts in a number of different power configurations simultaneously (Archer et al., 2014: 9).

The qualitative characteristics of small states further highlight the needs, challenges and opportunities, which can be especially helpful in better understanding their foreign- and security policy strategies (Vaicekauskaitė, 2017). Small states, or as they were labelled as throughout the 20th century, "weak powers," have namely been recognised to be more sensitive to changes in the external environment, depend on support from other states to a larger extent, and more subject to threats to their own survival (Mouritzen, 1991; Edström and Westberg, 2020b: 193). Due to this reality, small states are required to behave differently from medium-sized states and great powers. Consequently, as Loo argues, while the concept and fundamentals of strategy, as creating and using force for achieving national interests, remains the same, the application and implementation of strategy differs fundamentally between small and larger states (Loo, 2008: 4). Their behavioural context is distinct for instance as they need to be able to quickly adjust to changes in their external environment, such as increased tensions between great powers or breakdowns of collective security systems. Furthermore, as a result of this inherent vulnerability, they have to concentrate their resources more effectively and on short term matters (Edström and Westberg, 2020b: 193).

A particular focus within existing research on small states' security strategies is that as a result of their vulnerability and problems of survival, they essentially rely on the security assurances of larger states and alliances, as they are unable to sufficiently ensure security for themselves. This can be considered as the inherent security dilemma of small states which has resulted in them seeking 'shelter'

from larger powers, whether this is military, political, economic or societal shelter (Thorhallsson, 2019; Steinsson and Thorhallsson, 2017). However, research has also shown that small states do not only seek shelter but also status in the international arena (Mariager and Wivel, 2021; De Carvalho and Neumann, 2015). Thereby, they can compensate for limitations in size and capabilities by exerting influence on global politics. This literature emphasises that due to the insecure reality of small states, status, and essentially to be seen, is even more important to them than for larger states. They then achieve this status by making themselves useful to the great powers and by assuming responsibility for issues in international security, by striving to be acknowledged “as a good power” (De Carvalho and Neumann, 2015: 1-2). Thus, it aims to show that the strategies of small states do not solely rely upon the shield which they are passively granted. Rather, that their relations with larger states moreover depend on an increase of their own foreign policy action space and strengthening of their standing as a loyal ally and cooperative partner (Mariager and Wivel, 2021: 106).

While the existing literature on small states’ foreign and security policy strategy is considerably large and growing, there is a lack of scholarship dealing specifically with the transformations in military strategies and defence planning of those states. Furthermore, although new research has emphasised the emerging challenges small states face due to current developments in the security environment and global politics, it tends to emphasise non-traditional hybrid threats (relating to terrorism, cyber-attacks and climate threats), rather than hard power threats relating to increased militarization and great power competition (Brady and Thorhallsson, 2021).

Lastly, it should be noted that although this discussion on small states has focused on the commonalities between them and their strategies, these are by no means all the same but rather vary distinctly depending on domestic and international circumstances (Steinsson and Thorhallsson, 2017). Thus, a nuanced analysis should aim to understand these specificities and not approach small states as an entirely uniform category despite their similar contexts and realities.

2.3. The Nordic States and their Changing Defence Postures

The five Nordic countries, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland, have long and often been grouped together within international relations. As mature democracies with a strong civil society and state structure, they share deep ideational and moral commonalities, as well as similar national interests. Furthermore, they are not only all small states with a shared reliance on security cooperation but also

operate within the same regional state system and are thus linked by positionality in the international arena. However, while these similarities may predict their military and defence strategies to be characterised by a common approach, this has been far from reality (Archer, 2014: 95; Matlary and Østerud, 2007: 3). Rather, their policies and strategies have been developed according to marked distinctions in national motivations and priorities. This has thus resulted in strikingly different defence postures, as well as international alignments (Edström and Westberg, 2020a; Edström et al., 2019: 2).

The Nordic states have been the subject of analysis for many scholars studying small states and the developments of their defence and military strategies. This body of literature has notably studied the countries' approaches to international security cooperation, and more specifically in frameworks such as NATO, the European Union and NORDEF (Bailes et al., 2006; Forsberg, 2013; Dahl, 2021). Scholarly attention has moreover focused on the individual countries and aimed to identify similarities and differences in their overarching post-Cold War defence and military strategies (Wither, 2020; Gebhard, 2018). Participation in military operations, as a distinct feature of the Nordic countries' military strategies, have furthermore been a primary issue of scholars in the field (Jakobsen, 2007; Edström and Gyllensporre, 2014; Jakobsen et al., 2019). The focus of this body of literature has consequently been on strategic choices relating to the use of force in expeditionary settings and in cooperation with other states or international frameworks.

Most notably in the Danish case, scholars have paid primary attention to the unprecedented military activism and 'super Atlanticism' which characterised the country's post-Cold War strategy (Mariager and Wivel, 2021; Mouritzen, 2007). It has been emphasised that being a trustworthy member of NATO remained Denmark's primary end goal, and in order to reach that the country had to transform its Armed Forces accordingly and specifically develop expeditionary capabilities. Hence, as Mariager and Wivel argued, both status and shelter seeking marked Denmark's strategy during the time (2021, 104). As Lundquist has claimed, due to decades of focusing on operations outside of Europe, Denmark has faced the problem of restrained capacity to act in case of a high-intensity conflict in its vicinity (2021: 17).

The Swedish post-Cold War strategy, while less activist in orientation than the Danish one, has furthermore been conceptualised in terms of the dismantling of the country's Armed Forces and its abandonment of the total defence approach which had characterised the defence structure throughout the Cold War (Wither, 2020: 61-65; Christiansson, 2020). Moreover, with the integration of the previously largely autonomous state into international frameworks, as well as a new

prioritisation of international crisis management and civil preparedness, the first line of defence was evidently abroad (Archer, 2014: 100). The post-2014 strategy, as in the Danish case, has been granted less focus. Previous literature has emphasised this reintroduction of national security in relation to a military antagonist, and how especially after 2014 Sweden began to take steps towards reorienting its Armed Forces to a territorial focus (Wieslander, 2021: 36).

In summary, scholars have largely focused on this evolutionary view in their analysis and examinations of how the Nordic states' strategies have taken different directions throughout the decades. While many scholars do emphasise a change of direction after the shock of 2014, they tend to focus on the bigger picture of overarching security concerns, rather than the more specific strategies aimed at achieving enhanced capabilities. Moreover, these states' post-2014 strategic adjustments have most prominently been examined from a small state-realist perspective, emphasising external influences (for instance by Wieslander, 2021 and Edström et al., 2019), which in this essay is aimed to be complemented through the theory of strategic culture.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. The Strategic Culture Debate

The theory of strategic culture has been used within security and strategic studies to analyse behaviour and decision-making through a cultural lens which emphasises the actors' underlying assumptions and beliefs. At its core, it thus essentially aims to capture and centralise the actor's identity with regards to foreign, security and defence policy (Doerer, 2016: 285). The concept was developed by Jack Snyder in his 1977 study of the differences between Soviet and American nuclear strategies. He claimed that each of the countries' policymakers had been socialised into distinctive ways of strategic thinking, which he approached as a unique "strategic culture," and which could explain why their respective strategies differed despite operating within the same geostrategic environment. He defined strategic culture as "the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation [...]" (Snyder, 1977: v-8).

This perspective aimed to challenge the dominant, ahistorical and systematic frameworks of the time, which primarily emphasised external and material factors as drivers behind states' strategic behaviour and foreign policy decisions. The introduction of cultural approaches brought forth the assumption that national interests are not strictly objectively determined but are generated through multifaceted processes on a domestic level. Hence, factors such as political culture, historical experiences and national identity were granted focus in accounting for states' international behaviour (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2006: 9; Biehl et al., 2013: 10). Although strategic culture has gained considerable momentum within security studies literature throughout the past decades, there exists no uniform understanding of what the concept should be defined as, how it should be approached academically or whether it in fact qualifies as a theoretical model (Lock, 2010: 685). Rather, the scholarship on strategic culture can generally be distinguished according to four generations each holding their own competing understanding of the concept.

Colin Gray, together with Snyder, was particularly influential within the first generation. Gray's research built upon that of Snyder to examine why different nation-states approached strategy making, questions about war, and military force, in such distinct terms (Gray, 1981). He conceptualised strategic culture as the *context* in which strategic behaviour, and more specifically behaviour pertaining

to the use of force for political purposes, is formed. Strategic culture then not only shapes this sort of behaviour but is itself moreover a constituent of it. Similarly to Snyder he understands the concept as “socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, habits of mind, and preferred methods of operation that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community that has had a necessarily unique historical experience” (Gray, 1999b: 51). Thereby, in addition to highlighting the constructivist (national) ideational features in understanding security policy, he more specifically places geography and historical experiences at the forefront of shaping the strategy making process. This inherent strategic culture thus cannot but influence and guide strategic and operational choices of states, providing a milieu in which strategy is produced and debated (Ibid, 55).

The second generation, as opposed to the first, made a firm distinction between strategic culture and strategic behaviour on the one hand, and between declaratory and secret doctrine on the other (Neumann and Heikka, 2005: 8). Notable within this generation is Klein’s work on the superpowers through a Gramscian lens, conceptualising culture as an instrument of hegemony (Klein, 1988). This generation has been less influential in the overarching debate and will thus not be of consideration in this thesis.

The third generation has been labelled as the “analytical school,” primarily bringing forth a positivistic alternative to the analytical and methodological approach of the first generation (Zaman, 2009: 73). Alastair Johnston has been most influential in this regard. He considered the first generation’s conceptualisation, as the dominant approach to strategic culture, to be both under-determined and over-determined at the same time. This, in his regard, led to an inability to produce concrete causality between strategic culture on the one hand, and behaviour on the other. To address this, he offered a falsifiable and observable definition of the concept, which aimed towards a more rigorous methodology of empirical testing. Strategic culture has in this view thus be seen as an independent variable, the effects of which could be systematically measured (Johnston, 1995).

The more recent fourth generation emerged in line with developments within constructivist theory which devoted its attention to the dynamics of identity formation and seeks to provide attention to the nuances within the national strategic cultures, namely by highlighting the subcultures existing within the state. Competition amongst these subcultures is thus seen as a potential source of change in the nation’s strategic culture (Libel, 2020). This generation furthermore is not of notable relevance to this thesis, and it is evident that the most prominent debate still remains between the first and third generations.

3.2. Conceptualising the Theory

As has been highlighted, there is no universal definition or conceptualisation of strategic culture. However, it is prominent that scholars understand it as influencing behaviour through its inherent norms, “limiting the options the actor can imagine as solutions to a given problem” (Angström and Honig, 2012: 671). Moreover, according to another logic, strategic culture has a more indirect influence as it contributes to how a certain situation is understood by policy makers and the concepts steering their discussion on the situation (Ibid: 671). This thesis will primarily be directed by the first understanding, as it follows Gray’s interpretive conception of strategic culture as a specific context in which strategic behaviour is formed. As this context is inherent within the bounds of a national community it unconsciously shapes key decision-makers in that environment and thus their strategy formulation. With regard to military change, these cultural norms thereby regulate action by defining what choices are appropriate and effective. Hence, it is believed that the possibilities and limits of military change are not only determined by conditions in the external environment but also influenced by internal norms (Howlett and Glenn, 2005: 122).

Biehl et al. moreover suggest certain acknowledgements which need to be considered in a researcher’s conceptualisation of strategic culture (2013: 12). The first is who the ‘carriers’ of strategic culture are, and in this thesis, these are considered to be the highest decision-making experts and political elite in the respective countries. Secondly, strategic culture is here considered to be monolithic, and while sub-cultures may exist, they are required to engage with the dominant thread that is reflected in policy practice and elite discourse. Lastly, the question is whether strategic culture itself changes. This essay holds a persistent view of the concept, as the analysis aims to explore how this underlying and established culture influences transformation in strategic behaviour. While this culture may change, particularly after shocks and drastic transformations, that change could be the subject of further research relating to the topic, while not being a topic of study in this thesis (Ibid: 12).

The foundational elements of the theory, which are brought forth by the first generation but largely remain agreed upon by other scholars as well, are that historical experiences, as well as geographical factors are of central importance. These will therefore be used as overarching characteristics of the state’s strategic culture, further guiding considerations of the other elements influencing strategic decision-making. This thesis is moreover influenced by Doeser (2016), Biehl et

al. (2013) and Angström and Honig (2012) and their ways of interpreting strategy by taking culture and historically preferred methods into account. They namely identify specific elements of strategic culture which are considered to have the highest impact on the strategic decision in question, and which they then delimit their analysis to.

While this thesis is influenced by previous research on strategic culture, it aims to adjust the theory to create a distinctive framework that can be used to thoroughly analyse the empirical cases concerning strategic decisions of defence planning and military transformation. Through this adaptation, it moreover aims to contribute to the theoretical development of strategic culture. This particular framework thus includes the following elements, interwoven with historical experiences, which are arguably considered to have the largest impact on a state's organisation of military capabilities.

Dominant threat perception: This feature has been utilised by scholars of strategic culture to interpret which threats have been regarded as most prominent and dangerous within a certain timeframe (Doeser and Eidenfalk, 2019: 7). A state's dominant threat perception usually consists primarily of who the threat stems from, for instance a specific state or non-state actor, and what should be protected, e.g., the state's own territory, other territories, or alternatively global values such as human rights (Ibid, 7). In this analysis, this feature primarily concerns the extent to which Russia has been perceived as a dominant threat in the state's underlying mindset, and whether a direct threat to the state's territory is perceived, as this is considered influential to examining particularly the extent to which territorial defence has been prioritised.

Approach to strategic partnerships: This element has furthermore been notable in how scholars conceptualise strategic culture, although it has rather been formulated in relation to preferred partners for participation in international operations (Doeser, 2016; Doeser and Eidenfalk, 2019). It is in this thesis emphasised that for small states, specifically, their standing within cooperative frameworks and strategic relationships are crucial for how a state's military capabilities are formed and what aspects are prioritised in strategic adjustments. For instance, states which are firm members of a defence alliance are able to focus on more niche and expeditionary strategies, while small states that are non-members are required to develop more foundational territorial defence postures (Rickli, 2008). This examination additionally considers these aspects in relation to defence industry, and whether the state

has remained more independent or dependent on other nations in ensuring materiel production. It is thus assumed that these stances influence both the overarching rationales guiding military strategy as well as more specific choices concerning procurement.

Geographical Patterns and Strategic Exposure: Although geography is considered an integral feature of strategic culture, such characteristics have not been analysed by scholars as a specific part of the theory influencing strategic decisions. Nevertheless, inspiration for this section is largely drawn from Edström et al.'s examination of the Nordic states' military strategies (2019). In this thesis geographical patterns are considered to be mostly influential concerning what branch of the Armed Forces is prioritised, and it is thus most helpful in understanding the means and ways of military strategy. This is particularly important to examine during times when resources are being re-allocated due to strategic adjustments. Notably, it is assumed that states will emphasise resources that can cover their perceived points of geographical exposure to the largest extent.

4. Research Design

4.1. Comparative Case Studies

This research will be conducted through the employment of a comparative case method. This method is an umbrella term which encompasses a range of qualitative research techniques that are used for both theory building and theory testing, involving comparisons between specific classes of events, or cases. What characterises this approach is that it isolates either differences or similarities between cases in order to validate or construct theories about generalisable phenomena (Brancati, 2018: 199-200). These techniques notably include the method of difference, developed in the nineteenth century by John Stuart Mill, in which similar cases are compared where the outcome is different. This method thus centrally aims to compare social and political systems that share a number of common attributes as a way to neutralise certain differences by keeping them constant, while highlighting the varying factors under study (Moses and Knutsen, 2007: 96-97).

A comparative small-N case study is considered particularly suitable for this analysis as it centrally aims to investigate the value of strategic culture as a theoretical framework. This study method then provides a research design capable of examining this phenomenon of interest in a study across sites and scales, offering a more nuanced view than provided by traditional approaches to case study research (Barlett and Vavrus, 2017: 6). Therefore, this type of cross-cutting analysis offers an excellent basis for observing not only the similarities and differences between the two cases but moreover how the theoretical foundation transpires across both empirical examples.

4.1.1. Case Selection

Comparative case studies rely on the strategic selection of cases (Moses and Knutsen, 2007: 95). There are two main approaches to case selection, as introduced by Przeworski and Teune and inspired by Mill's method, the most similar systems design and most different systems design (1970). The former's logic lies in selecting cases that share many relevant characteristics but differ in one crucial aspect, while the latter selects cases that are different in most regards and only similar on the primary explanatory variable of interest (Halperin and Heath, 2017: 218-221). As this thesis aims to investigate the influence of the differing strategic cultures on the respective outcomes in strategy, the two empirical cases were chosen on the basis of a most similar systems design.

As Matlary and Østerud argue, the Nordic states represent an ideal site for comparative analysis with regard to defence strategy, as they share a wide range of similarities, but striking distinctions remain in their defence postures (2007: 3). While Denmark and Sweden share many characteristics in terms of regime type, wealth, and social structure, as the Nordic states all do, they have mainly been chosen as cases for this analysis due to an important *commonality* in their post-Cold War military strategies. These states can namely be regarded most similar in terms of the abandonment of territorial defence and emphasis on internationalisation out of the Nordic states. Therefore, these countries both face the task of quickly having to adapt to the altered security situation by adjusting their military capabilities, in order to be able to meet and respond to high-intensity conflicts in their vicinity.

The differences, on the other hand, can largely be recognised in terms of historical experiences as well as more specific factors relating to the underlying context within which military strategy is developed, features which this thesis conceptualises as part of the state's distinct strategic culture. As this research follows the most similar systems design, the shared characteristics are thus not the central focus point but rather the unique, inherent features which differ between the states. Overall, the case selection was thus driven by the logic of seeing how distinctions in their strategic culture inform variations in the adjustments in military strategy.

4.2. Method

4.2.1. Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is a research method which involves systematic analysis of text and information, used to address research questions and hypotheses (Bass and Semetko, 2021). This method is deemed suitable to this thesis as defence strategies are outlined in text form, mainly in governmental white papers, and more specifically as it enables the researcher to concretely analyse the content in terms of elements derived from the theory. While content analysis was originally developed exclusively for quantitative approaches related to positivistic paradigms, this has moved to encompass more interpretive, qualitative approaches (Graneheim et al., 2017). Qualitative content analysis, in that sense, is primarily a method used to describe the meaning of qualitative data through the assignment of successive parts of the material under study to content-related categories that share meaning. Its

overarching purpose is namely to organise and extract meaning from the data that is gathered and to draw realistic inferences from it (Bengtsson, 2016: 8). All content analysis thus relies on coding to “systematically break down, categorise and describe the content of sources” (Boréus and Bergström, 2017: p.).

This type of method can either be used in an inductive or deductive manner (Bass and Semetko, 2021: 57). This thesis uses a deductive approach as the categories are pre-determined based on previous research on conceptualisations of strategic culture, and as the purpose of the examination is mainly to evaluate the theory. The elements of the theory deemed most relevant (as stated in chapter 3.2), then constitute the categorisation matrix and consequently structure the main parts of the analysis. As this categorisation has been developed, the next step of this approach is that the data is received from the content and is then coded according to those elements (Elo and Kyngnäs, 2008: 111). This step will be outlined in the following section.

4.2.2. Operationalisation of Theory

As Angström and Honig have claimed, there are different ways to use strategic culture theory, based on methodological considerations of how the concept can be made measurable (2012: 670). Some scholars treat it as an independent variable, in accordance with the fourth generation and Alastair Johnston and emphasising a direct causal link with behaviour, and others as an intermediate variable, seeing it as a filter through which other elements influence behaviour. Finally, in line with the first generation, some consider strategic culture to imply a constructivist approach where a distinction between an independent and dependent variable cannot be made (Ibid: 670-671). This thesis follows this constructivist approach, as it views strategic culture as both shaping behaviour, and itself being constituent of it, as according to Colin Gray’s understanding (1999b). In that sense, the central elements of the state’s strategic culture will not be operationalised as independent variables directly causing the outcome in military strategy, but rather as *constitutive concepts*. These concepts thus essentially produce norms which limit and direct the options actors see as possible solutions to given problems, leading to preferred methods of operation.

The purpose of this operationalisation is to build on the understanding of the theory to construct a framework for data collection and organisation, so that a thorough comparison can be conducted, and the states’ strategic cultures can be empirically observed (Dahllöf, 2022: 19). In this aim, it is considered helpful to describe the elements in terms of questions, which then can be

answered through the coding derived from the sources. Examples of the operationalisation of the three elements of strategic culture are highlighted in table 1.

Table 1: Operationalisation examples.

Elements of strategic culture	Description	Examples of codes derived from content
Dominant threat perception	<p>To what extent has escalated Russian aggression been perceived as threatening to the state?</p> <p>Are there other dominant threats identified by the state?</p> <p>Who/what should be protected from the dominant threats?</p>	<p>“An armed attack against Sweden cannot be ruled out” (Swedish Defence Commission, 2023: 1).</p> <p>“There is a need to further develop NATO so that the Alliance can deal with future threats, including the serious threat from Russia” (Danish MFA, 2023a: 11).</p>
Approach to strategic partnerships	<p>To what extent has the state prioritised relations with alliances or larger powers?</p> <p>How significant has international cooperation been for the state’s defence industry and organisation?</p>	<p>“NATO remains the cornerstone of Danish defence and security policy” (Swedish MoD, 2018: 2).</p> <p>“Denmark is dependent on foreign defence equipment” (Danish Government, 2021: 8).</p> <p>“The ability to maintain national integrity and independence [in defence industrial domains] is vital” (Swedish MoD, 2020: 128).</p>
Geographical patterns and strategic exposure	<p>How has the state’s geographical position shaped its perceived strategic exposure?</p> <p>How has the state’s strategic depth and natural defences shaped its defence thinking?</p>	<p>“Through its geographical position in the Baltic Sea, the island of Gotland is of strategic importance for Sweden.” (Swedish MoD, 2015: 3).</p> <p>“Denmark stands out on the maritime world map as a leading seafaring nation” (Danish Government, 2021: 11).</p>

4.3. Material

The empirical analysis will largely be based on defence decisions and reports published by the governments of Denmark and Sweden. These agreements contain declarations of substantial increases in military spending, and deliberations on how this financing will be spent to increase will strengthen the state's defence posture. The Danish Defence Agreement for 2018-2023 will be most instrumental for analysing the country's post-2014 military strategy, along with notable supplemental agreements which have been added to these overarching strategic documents. In the Swedish case, the governmental bill "Totalförsvaret 2021-2025," is of primary importance as it outlines the government's recent assessment on strengthened military defence. For both countries, the websites of their respective Armed Forces furthermore contain informative sources on strategic priorities, tasks and plans which will be used in the analysis. These primary sources will be complemented by literature published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), or the Danish Institute for International Studies, for example, that assist in framing the issues at hand. These sources combined enable an examination of the most prominent considerations of the Swedish and Danish policy elites regarding their strategy formulations, as well as the elements constituting their strategic culture.

5. Analysis

5.1. Denmark's Post-2014 Military Strategy

Ends

The year of 2014 represented a turning point for Denmark not only due to Russia's annexation of Crimea, but the year also marked the end of the ISAF-operation in Afghanistan, which had heavily engaged the Danish Armed Forces for over a decade. The altered external circumstances, and post-2014 security situation in Europe as a result of these events did indeed have ramifications for Denmark's military strategy (Szymański, 2018: 2; Edström et al., 2019: 192). Notably however, instead of focusing purely on its own territorial defence as a result of external transformations in the international scene, the country adjusted its strategic objectives to the changes and re-prioritisations taking place within NATO. The state's overarching aim throughout the years of 2014-2023 has thus been to achieve enhanced regional deterrence and contribute to the collective defence posture of the Alliance (Danish MoD, 2018).

NATO's overarching concern in the post-2014 security environment has been the limited readiness characterising member states' Armed Forces, along with their limited capacity for large-scale, conventional operations and rapid response (IISS, 2015: 59). Therefore, as a result of the altered security situation, NATO's aim would move from "being deployed to being prepared" (IISS, 2015: 58). This turn had vast consequences for the primary aims of the Danish military strategy and the subsequent reorientation of the country's Armed Forces. As the Danish Defence Agreement of 2018-2023 demonstrates, the strengthening of "Denmark's contributions to NATO's collective deterrence and defence" was prioritised as the Armed Forces' foremost aim (Danish MoD, 2018: 1). The more recent Danish Foreign and Security Policy of 2023 continues to highlight this objective, which showcases the continuation and urgency of contributing to the alliance's joint security and shouldering a share of the responsibilities involved in reaching that goal. In the Danish case, this change was reflected in a new emphasis on its own neighbourhood, as it has been underlined that "the Danish Armed Forces must make a significantly greater contribution to NATO's defence and deterrence in the immediate neighbourhood of the Kingdom of Denmark" (Danish MFA, 2022a: 60).

The Danish security interests in the Baltic Sea Region and the High North were moreover sharpened throughout the year of 2014 as a result of increased Russian aggression, and these interests

have remained a priority throughout the period examined (IISS, 2014). It is worth noting that Denmark's participation in international operations has remained a significant emphasis of its post-2014 military strategy, although it may be claimed according to the Defence Agreements from 2013-2017 on the one hand, and 2018-2023 on the other, that this emphasis has decreased (Danish MoD, 2012; Danish MoD, 2018). Thus, while international crisis management, particularly concerning counterterrorism, has remained important in Denmark's military strategy, the main alteration in strategic goals has concerned NATO's prioritisation of stronger regional deterrence and strengthened preparedness. Ultimately, the state therefore hopes to reach a greater balance between the more established international missions and the newer contributions to NATO's collective defence, and it organises its military capabilities according to that end goal.

Means

The most distinct means to reach the end objectives of the Danish post-2014 military strategy and to operate within the deteriorated security environment has been the commitment to a substantial increase in the Armed Forces' budget. In 2018, the Government agreed to raise the annual defence budget increase from DKK 800 million in 2018 to DKK 4.8 billion in 2023, thus resulting in a vast acceleration of the budgetary increase which begun in 2014-2015 (Danish MoD, 2018; Danish MoD, 2019). The Government's most recent budgetary plans entail investments amounting to approximately DKK 143 billion during the period of 2024-2033, a development which has been called a "milestone for Danish defence and security" (Danish MoD, 2023). The state's defence budget is thus expected to reach 2% of its GDP, a key goal of NATO member states, no later than by 2030. This trend represents a large-scale alteration from the defence agreements prior to 2014 which solely emphasised reductions in funding (Danish MoD, 2012).

The central means to be allocated to the effort of strengthened military capabilities has been the development of a deployable brigade of approximately 4,000 supplementary troops, comprising new and strengthened capabilities such as more battle tanks for operations, additional artillery and ground-based air defence. This was the priority area of the 2018 Defence Agreement and was explicitly aimed at not only strengthening the Danish Army's fighting power but moreover contributing to NATO's strengthened deterrence and readiness. Furthermore, when not fully deployed, the brigade's units could be deployed individually, enhancing for instance the ability for participation in international missions (Danish MoD, 2018). Further initiatives concern strengthened naval capability,

largely by equipping frigates with air defence missiles, and by providing the Navy with sonar equipment which can both track and combat submarines. Improved maritime area air defence is considered essential to credible collective defence and deterrence, and both that area and a strengthened anti-submarine warfare capacity are deemed central to fulfilling NATO's force goals. Concerning Air Force capabilities, the Government most notably endorsed the acquisition of 27 F-35 fighter aircrafts in 2016. The decision is considered to ensure Denmark's ability to deploy combat aircrafts in international missions, as well as ultimately contribute to NATO's defence of Allied territory (Danish MoD, 2018).

Ways

Denmark's new focus on the Baltic Sea Region can be identified as a central way in which it aims to achieve strengthened contributions to NATO's new initiatives and strategic priorities. Particularly, the Alliance's approach of 'Enhanced Forward Presence' (EFP), formalised at the 2016 Warsaw Summit and which emphasises deterrence and defence of NATO territory, for instance focuses on deploying multinational battlegroups to the Baltic States and Poland (IISS, 2017: 66). Denmark has since 2018 contributed by deploying soldiers, staff officers and materiel mainly to Estonia as part of the initiative (Danish Armed Forces, n.d.a). Moreover, the establishment of the Danish-led NATO Multinational Division North headquarters in Latvia, which reached full operational capability in 2023, has been the country's way of filling a gap in the Alliance's command structure in the Baltic states (Danish Armed Forces, 2023a, Frederiksen, 2019). The headquarters have been regarded by the country's former Defence Minister as "a reflection of Denmark's strategic focus on the Baltic region" (Frederiksen, 2019: 35). This focus has furthermore been reflected in Denmark's contributions to NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission and its regular deployment of frigates to NATO's standing naval forces, further increasing the Alliance's presence in the region (Danish MFA, 2023b; Danish Armed Forces, 2022).

NATO's renewed emphasis on the maritime domain is furthermore centred on the North Atlantic and High North. This focus is meant to add credibility to the EFP strategy, and notably aims at detecting and facing increased submarine activity from Russia (IISS, 2019: 77). The deployment of Danish frigates in the North Atlantic, a new activity for the country, is meant to monitor ship and air traffic and ultimately strengthen the Danish effort in the area (Danish Armed Forces, 2020), and participate in NATO's standing naval force (Danish Armed Forces, 2023b). Denmark has further emphasised its intent to increase its Arctic presence, however, its efforts in the region are part of a

long tradition and thus do not represent as large-scale of a turn in strategy as its presence in the Baltic region (Danish MoD, 2018). Moreover, Denmark's decision to end its opt-out of the European Union's Defence Agency in 2022 can also be seen as a way of contributing to strengthened regional security, as well as of striving towards a balanced and enhanced NATO through more equal burden sharing with the EU (Danish MFA, 2022a: 42).

On another end, concerning the maintenance of international missions as an integral part of the Danish post-2014 military strategy, Denmark has continued its efforts for counterterrorism and the stabilisation of weak states (Frederiksen, 2019). Since 2014, the state has militarily contributed to the fight against ISIL (Operation Inherent Resolve) and the NATO Mission Iraq since 2018 (Danish Armed Forces, n.d.b). Afghanistan moreover remained a priority as a critical out-of-area operation until the Resolute Support Mission ended in 2021. Although Denmark to an extent maintains an expeditionary posture, it is clear that its efforts after 2014 have shifted primarily to securing NATO's eastern flank in the Baltic Sea Region (Danish Armed Forces, n.d.c).

5.2. Sweden's Post-2014 Military Strategy

Ends

As has duly been noted in previous research, Sweden dismantled its traditional total defence structure following the Cold War. This policy was reversed in 2015 when the Government tasked the Civil Contingencies Agency and the Ministry of Defence to jointly develop a proposal for total defence, representing a transition in which the Armed Forces would resume focus on national tasks. In fact, the most important priority of Sweden's defence policy from 2016 to 2020 was to "increase the operational warfighting capability of the Armed Forces," as to ensure the collective force of the nation's total defence (Swedish MoD, 2015: 1; Swedish MoD, 2017: 40). The most recent Government bill on Total Defence for 2021-2025 indeed echoes the sentiment that "the present wartime organisation is not designed to counter an armed attack and acts of war on Swedish territory" (Swedish MoD, 2020: 101). The bill overall demonstrates that the core task and aim for the Swedish defence is the development of a renewed and re-organised wartime organisation, starting from 1 January 2021 and gradually to be completed during the 2020s. Therefore, the document also includes the overall focus to be followed during the period of 2026-2030 (Swedish MoD, 2020: 100; 7).

A comprehensive reinforcement of the state's military defence was hence in order. The operational capability, readiness and endurance of the organisation is most notably to be strengthened, as the defence's primary goal was the ability to "defend Sweden against armed aggression" (Swedish MoD, 2020: 87). The objective was stated more precisely that Sweden should be able to counter an attack, even one of surprising nature, and that it should be possible for the wartime structure to perform mobilisation throughout an ongoing attack. The assertion of the territorial integrity of the nation and safeguarding of sovereign rights are relatedly stated as overarching goals for the military defence, further demonstrating the turn towards defence of the national territory from international security considerations (Swedish MoD, 2020: 102; 85). This strong territorial priority and reinstatement of the total defence which has developed since 2014 has widely been considered "a historic makeshift change" in the country's military and defence strategy (Edström et al., 2019: 182).

Means

The first initiatives of budgetary increases, amounting to approximately SEK 7 billion for the national defence were announced in 2014, reversing a two-decade long trend of cuts in funding for the organisation of the Armed Forces. Reallocations of funding were furthermore made from international missions financing towards the funding of trainings and readiness (Swedish MoD, 2015: 4). It is clear that enhanced preparedness and capability had supplanted efficiency as the primary guiding aim of the defence structure. Overall, the Armed Forces' budget for the period of 2016-2020 received an additional SEK 17 billion compared to the previous period. This budgetary increase was first and foremost intended for reinforcements on a regional and national level, centrally focusing on preparation for wartime scenarios (Swedish MoD, 2015: 3-4). The most substantial investments throughout that period were thus concerning the 'basics' of the defence force primarily in terms of material and logistics, as well as training and exercises. Further funding was allocated for instance to an additional motorised battalion, upgraded battle tanks, air defence capabilities and naval modernisation. Furthermore, the re-garrison of Gotland has remained an investment priority since 2014, through for instance the re-establishment of regular army units permanently based on the island (Swedish MoD, 2015: 4).

The Defence Bill of 2021-2025 further highlighted the need for considerable financial resources, as well as a long-term approach to infrastructure and personnel planning in achieving the reconstruction of military defence capabilities, showcasing escalated urgency for reaching the end

objectives of strengthened capabilities (Swedish MoD, 2020: 12). Between 2023 and 2024 these appropriations are to be increased by over SEK 27 billion, amounting to a 28% increase. The most recent estimation is thus that Sweden will reach NATO's 2% of GDP target already in 2024 (Swedish MoD, 2023a). In order to increase the operational capability of the combat units, all parts of the Swedish Armed Forces which have tasks in the event of heightened alert have been organised as wartime units, further demonstrating the commitment to enhanced readiness (Swedish MoD, 2020: 100). Conscription was moreover reintroduced in 2018 in order ensure complete wartime units and coordinated exercise training (IISS, 2019: 150; Swedish MoD, 2020: 100). In terms of the other branches of the Armed Forces, capabilities of the Navy were specifically to be reinforced to be able to counter an attack in the Baltic Sea, and hence a new amphibious battalion on the west coast was proposed and the submarine division developed (Swedish MoD, 2020: 107). Nevertheless, the Air Force remained the dominant service in terms of development and the largest part of the defence-materiel budget has been allocated to the development and production of new Gripen JAS-39E aircrafts (IISS, 2019: 81). Future capabilities have been considered dependent upon such key procurement projects (IISS, 2017: 161; Swedish Armed Forces, 2021).

Ways

Efforts to realise the mentioned aims of increased war-fighting capabilities, enhanced readiness, as well as sustainability of the Armed Forces, have fundamentally propelled a considerable increase in large-scale defence exercises. Notable examples of those have been the Aurora 17 and Aurora 23, in which all branches of the Swedish Armed Forces, as well as military units of partner countries participated. The primary importance of the latter exercise was seen in the reinforcement of the collective capability to respond to an armed attack on Sweden, reflected in the Armed Forces' statement that "we defend Sweden together with others" (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023a). The state has not only conducted more national exercises but has participated in NATO exercises such as the Neptune Strike 23, aimed at strengthened maritime defence of the Baltic Sea Region (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023b). Interconnected with this emphasis on maritime defence is the re-garrison of Gotland which played a central role in achieving the state's strategic priorities, as detrimental to Baltic Sea, and thus Swedish security (Edström et al., 2019: 170; 289). Furthermore, the Swedish Navy Headquarters have been estimated to return to its Cold War vast, underground location of Muskö on the country's

eastern coast close to Stockholm, a placement which should offer increased freedom of manoeuvre and resilience even if the state is under attack (Swedish Armed Forces, 2019; Crouch, 2019).

Moreover, Sweden's application for NATO membership, as well as increased cooperation within the NORDEFECO framework, are in this analysis regarded as central ways to achieve the state's aims of enhanced readiness and strengthened capabilities (IISS, 2017: 161). Preparations for NATO accession have been a primary element of Sweden's defence planning since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These include the strengthening of command support systems which are interoperable with NATO's and measures enabling the country to join the integrated air and missile defence system (Swedish MoD, 2023b). Strong commitment to NATO has furthermore been professed by the current defence minister, stating that Sweden is "willing and able to contribute to the security of the Alliance in the most effective way, be it NATO's enhanced Forward Presence, air policing or NATO's standing maritime forces" (Jonson, 2023). Moreover, the deepening of bilateral defence relationships, most prominently with Finland but also with the United States, has been a prevalent theme since 2014. This was reflected for instance in the signing of a statement of intent for closer cooperation on interoperability and exercises in May 2018 (IISS, 2019: 150). Overall, the ability of the Armed Forces to operate together with other states and organisations has increased throughout the timeframe, as a way to realise the state's overarching defence aims (Swedish MoD, 2020: 100).

5.3. Similarities and Distinctions

The findings of the analysis conducted above will in this section be examined in terms of their similarities and differences, with the aim in mind of further uncovering patterns of how small states alter their military strategies as a result of transforming security environments. It can be confidently confirmed that the primary alteration of both states was, as has been argued priorly in this thesis, to be seen in a geographic re-orientation, as international peace-keeping missions had constituted the dominant focus of both Sweden and Denmark's military strategies prior to 2014. While both countries moved towards centring on stability in their near environment and both significantly re-financed their defence sector, there are marked distinctions to be recognised in what exactly they aimed to achieve and how they estimated these ends could be reached.

Importantly for this comparison, the 2014 annexation of Crimea and increased Russian aggression, although it did result in ramification of Denmark's military strategy, did not provide any

new reasoning for the mission of the Danish Armed Forces (Edström et al., 2019: 188). The overarching rationale in fact remained the desire to be a loyal ally within NATO, and changes in the Alliance's strategy were automatically adopted as the main objectives of the Danish military strategy. This was mainly seen in the state's priority of the Alliance's strengthened regional collective defence and deterrence measures, and at the same time, a remaining (while decreased) priority was granted to international peace-keeping operations. Therefore, in the Danish case the change in military and defence strategy can rather be conceptualised as a 'regionalisation' due to NATO's re-prioritisation and increased focus on deterrence against Russia, rather than a 'territorialisation' which rather characterised Sweden's strategic adjustment. Thus overall, status and shelter seeking was maintained as the overarching post-2014 strategic rationale. In the Swedish case, the strategic transformation was starker, firstly in terms of logic. While Denmark maintained its 'dedication to NATO' rationale, Sweden's logic shifted entirely towards the idea that an armed attack on Swedish territory was could not be ruled out, as it had previously been. The aims of the country thus were to reinstate the nation's total defence it had priorly abandoned and strengthen the core territorial capabilities of the Armed Forces. Consequently, the international dimension in that sense was abandoned to a greater extent than in the Danish case. Overall, while a commonality in both countries was their overarching strive towards increased readiness, deterrence and improved capabilities, they aimed to achieve such in different ways.

With regard to the means, a primary observation was the marked similarity between the countries in that they both begun a substantial increase in their defence budget by 2014, reversing decades long of reductions in funding. In both cases a vast acceleration of the budget increase also took place after 2019-2020, which signals heightened urgency for the countries' respective aims in both cases. Concerning the allocation of resources as a consequence of those budgetary changes, however, an overarching difference was that Denmark's reinforcement of the Armed Forces was not only meant to strengthen the country's warfighting capabilities but was arguably more decisively meant to fill gaps in NATO's command. The development of a deployable brigade as a primary investment project, in addition to maritime area air defence capabilities and extensive procurements for the Air Force, can be understood as examples of this trend as these were mainly meant for deployment in NATO's efforts. In Sweden's case, a magnitude of the investments was made in the foundational parts of the defence in order to re-organise the wartime organisation as a whole, although a priority was granted to maritime capabilities and the Air Force. This focus on the 'basics' of the military structure,

coupled with a substantial increase in exercises and training, shows that Sweden has been more focused on re-building essential competences and preparedness for its territorial defence, while Denmark largely organises its capabilities in terms of what it can contribute to NATO.

A commonality between the two countries has nonetheless been the geographical focus on their neighbourhood and the Baltic Sea Region in particular, although these have been based upon different reasonings. Sweden's investment in the area has particularly been seen through the re-garrison of Gotland, which is considered of central importance to the country's national defence and security in their near environment, while Denmark's re-orientation towards the area has been a part of NATO's new priorities as a result of Russian aggression. A notable convergence between the two states has furthermore concerned their ways of achieving their objectives through a dedication towards international defence cooperation. Denmark's form of dedication to NATO, however, does not amount to a strategic alteration, while Sweden's move towards greater interoperability with the Transatlantic Alliance has more commonly been considered to represent a novelty in the country's decision-making.

5.4. The Neorealist Lens

It is worthy to this analysis to shortly explore the extent to which these similarities and distinctions can be understood from the prominent realist lens, as this can demonstrate what shortcomings may be filled when solely taking such a view into account, and thus ultimately in what ways strategic culture may complement the examination. It is firstly important to recognise that realism is, as Stephen Walt has so prominently highlighted, by no means a single theory or unified research programme (Walt, 1997: 932; Walt, 1998: 31). This thesis will for the above stated purpose use neorealism, advanced by Kenneth Waltz, as his work has been notably influential and prominent for analysing modern developments in the international arena, and as this framework brings most starkly out the contrast between the external (neorealist), and internal (strategic culture), influences (Mouritzen, 1997: 66).

Neorealism concentrates on the effects of the international system and its anarchical nature, which constitutes the main determinant for state behaviour (Waltz, 1979: 88-89). Waltz's central assumption in that sense is that external pressures and structural constraints are the primary cause of adjustments in the strategic decision-making of states. States, as unitary actors in this system, consistently seek their own preservation and maintenance of their security, and they must rely on the

means they themselves are able to generate to do so (Ibid: 105-111). This international interest must hence be served by all states, and the national interests remain automatically subordinate to that. Due to this focus of neorealists on the effects of the overarching international system, unit level characteristics are largely neglected. This means that domestic character and interest of the state, its ideological commitments, internal intentions and interactions, are omitted (Ibid: 80).

In this view, small states with limited resources, are subject to greater worry about their survival and this worry conditions their behaviour to a greater extent than for larger powers. As a result of this dilemma, if such states consider their position within the system to be threatened, their options to increase their military capabilities are mainly to either balance against, or bandwagon with, more powerful rivals (Walt, 1998: 31; Waltz, 1979: 126). By solely looking through the neorealist lens, one would firstly assume that the military strategy of small states such as Denmark and Sweden would change as a result of increased aggression from a larger and more dominant power such as of their eastern neighbour, Russia. Their changes in strategy would thus be driven by the concern of ensuring their own survival in structural transformations, and furthermore as small states, they would only have limited room for manoeuvre due to their prevailing security dilemma. Such changes, as according to Walt, would largely be seen in either balancing or bandwagoning behaviour against the emerging, threatening power (Walt, 1985). A prominent neorealist assumption would be that both Denmark and Sweden would in the post-2014 landscape, either balance against the emerging Russian threat by aligning with the United States and its bloc of Western countries, or bandwagon on the side of Russia.

Thus overall, as has been claimed at the beginning of this thesis, the neorealist paradigm is instrumental in accounting for the fact that change has occurred in the states' strategies due to an alteration in the security landscape. Furthermore, the theory laid the ground for predicting that Denmark and Sweden could both balance against Russia by aiming for closer defence cooperation with NATO, and this structural claim perhaps most prominently explains Sweden's NATO membership aspiration (as furthermore demonstrated by Wieslander, 2021). However, and most significantly to this examination, the diverging elements in the strategic behaviour of Sweden and Denmark could not be fully understood by solely looking through the neorealist lens. Through its dependency on external opportunities and constraints in the material environment, the theory namely does not account for the dynamics in individual states' decision-making or variations in their military capabilities. Hence, its insights would only reach so far as to expect Denmark and Sweden to adjust their strategies in the same way, not accounting for specificities between the two. It has in fact been

argued, for instance by Edström et al., that while small states must reactively adopt and adjust to the external environment, there is still room to manoeuvre (2019: 194). This individual room for manoeuvre is essentially what neorealists, in their neglect of unit level characteristics, overlook. It is hence argued here, along the lines of Desch, that strategic culture may supplement neorealist assumptions by contributing a more detailed and thorough account of changes in the military strategy of small states (1998).

5.5. Strategic Culture and its Influence

As has been priorly argued in this thesis, strategic culture has primarily been used to examine these countries' post-Cold War strategies, marked by participation in international military operations and relatedly their approach to the use of armed force. In examining the theory's influence on the formulation of Sweden and Denmark's post-2014 strategic adjustments, and notably the similarities and differences with regard to those, focus is placed on the three most prominent elements of domestic particularities, which are moreover shaped by their historical experiences. Assuming that these varying but interconnected factors have influenced the formulation of the states' respective strategic adjustments and thus organisation of military capabilities, this adds nuance and depth to the neorealist account of the issue.

5.5.1. Dominant Threat Perception

Analysing how the two countries' dominant threat perceptions have influenced deviations and similarities in their military strategies after 2014, firstly requires a view of how these perceptive dimensions have developed since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, in the years following 1991 and up until the mid 2000s, the dominant threat perceptions of Sweden and Denmark were largely similar, at least upon first look. Both countries concluded following 1991 that threats to their respective territories had largely disappeared, a stance which has been seen as deviating from their other Nordic neighbours, Norway and Finland, that perceived a longer-term territorial uncertainty (Pettersson and Lunde Saxi, 2013: 777; Archer, 2014: 99). Thus, throughout this time, while the countries did not predict any direct military or invasion threats to their own territories, focus shifted to the international arena and concerns mainly arose regarding transnational threats stemming from globalisation, such as

terrorism and organised criminality (Edström et al., 2019: 74). This stance allowed Sweden and Denmark to turn away from territorial defence and towards seeking expeditionary capacity.

In seeking a more detailed account of the perceived threats during this significant timeframe, however, it is worthy to note that Denmark begun emphasising these international threats earlier and arguably to a greater extent than Sweden. This was seen by a strong worry about developments in NATO's neighbourhood and especially the Balkans, as well as about weak and failing states and challenges relating to the rise of non-state actors such as terrorist groups, even prior to 2001 (Danish Defence Commission, 1997; Edström et al., 2019: 74). For Sweden, however, these issues were not as starkly at the core of its threat analysis and only at the turn of the century after 2001 did the state begin the transformation in priorities for its Armed Forces. Importantly, a significant degree of uncertainty regarding the newly established Russian state lingered in the Swedish Government while this was not addressed as a worry in the post-Cold War defence concerns of Denmark (Swedish Government, 1999). Although the dominant national threat perception was formally shifted from Russia to transnational threats after 2001, this reluctance to discount the Russian threat prevailed in the political discourse of the time (Edström et al., 2019: 99). Thus, although a shift from territorial to transnational threats clearly occurred in both countries, nuances in their perceptions during that time do contain differences that are important to consider.

The fact that Sweden remained cautious of the security implications surrounding Russia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while Denmark made a more immediate turn towards international threats, can partially be traced back to a fundamental difference in the countries' historical experiences. Namely, as Sweden has considerable experience of wars and conflicts with Russia (although the state has not been at war since 1814), it has been claimed that history has taught Sweden that "Russia was her natural enemy" (Howlett and Glenn, 2005: 122). As a consequence of this, the country's security and defence policy had been anchored in the Baltic Sea region for centuries (Edström et al., 2019: 104). Denmark's strategic culture, on the other hand, has rather been influenced by the experience of occupation during the Second World War, and threats to the Danish state have historically rather come from their southern border than from the East. Furthermore, objective geographical characteristics are influential, as "even modest distance from Russia diminishes threat perceptions," and as Sweden is closer in proximity to Russia this has naturally contributed to their stronger worry of the threatening power (Crowther, 2023: 12).

Another marker of this historical difference is how Sweden perceived the 2008 Russo-Georgian War as a strategic shock, while this passed entirely under the radar of Danish politicians. For Sweden, this event already set into motion a renewed idea of Russia as a military threat and consequently a focus on regional defence priorities (Edström et al., 2019: 121;140). Then, in the immediate years following Russia's annexation of Crimea, it became clear to Sweden that the Baltic Sea region had once more emerged as a high-tension area, and this notably influenced the focus on the re-garrison of Gotland (Swedish MFA, 2016). Furthermore, Sweden's 2020 Defence Bill came to show above all that Sweden was greatly worried about increased Russian presence in its neighbourhood as well as the re-instated prospect of an armed attack on Swedish soil (Swedish MoD, 2020). Rebuilding the Armed Forces as a reaction to this perceived threat of direct armed aggression thus moreover included the state's strong emphasis on exercises and training, foundational capabilities and the prioritisation of Gotland. This perception of exposure furthermore contributed to Sweden's aspiration to closer relations with NATO. It has in fact been recognised that a small state's decision to remain outside of alliances is only sensible when the state's territory is strategically irrelevant and not perceived to be under threat (Edström et al., 2019: 31).

While Denmark did also perceive the annexation in 2014 as a strategic shock, the country was furthermore preoccupied by developments in the Middle East and specifically the rise of the Caliphate, which were simultaneously considered threatening to the state's interests (Danish Government, 2018; Edström et al., 2019: 173). This threat perception furthermore influenced the state's maintained focus on participation in international operations. Moreover, although Russian military build-up has remained a concern since 2014, an increasingly aggressive Russia has rather been conceptualised as a threat to NATO's collective security and neighbourhood, and not to its own territory, a stance which the state has maintained up until 2023 (Danish MFA, 2023a; Theussen, 2023).

Ultimately, these discrepancies in the two states' dominant threat perceptions can be considered as an influential source of how they adjusted their military strategies following 2014. Most prominently, it can be argued that as Sweden has a historical memory of extensive conflicts with Russia and Denmark does not, the former state is more perceptive to Russian military build-up and thus is more likely to respond to such a development by upscaling its foundational territorial defence capabilities and national preparedness to a more notable extent. Moreover, as Denmark's threat perception was oriented towards international issues earlier and to a greater extent than Sweden, its expeditionary posture has a firmer base. Thus, while the Danish state has begun focusing more on its

immediate neighbourhood due to Russian aggression, it also maintains its priority of participation in international missions and more than anything in NATO's collective defence efforts.

5.5.2. Approach to Strategic Partnerships

It is argued in this thesis that a fundamental variation in the strategic culture of Denmark and Sweden is furthermore to be traced back to their differing stances in terms of long-term partnerships with other states, and the value they attribute to such relationships and alignments. In that sense it is firstly important to note that both Denmark and Sweden have distinctively demonstrated their international commitment throughout the past two decades. They have indeed both become characterised as cosmopolitan states which have centrally identified themselves as actors in the international system and are thus more likely than provincial-oriented small states to internalise external developments by adjusting national priorities (Edström et al., 2019: 192). This identity has arguably contributed to how swiftly and thoroughly both these states made transformations in their military strategies following external events since the end of the Cold War, as well as after 2014. Nevertheless, there remain marked nuances in their historical identities and in their preferred methods of aligning themselves within the international system.

Denmark became a founding member of NATO in 1949, during a domestic climate of perceived vulnerability, fear of abandonment and a need for security guarantees against the rising Soviet Union (Petersen, 1987: 11). This decision can furthermore be placed in the context of Denmark's World War II legacy, where neutrality failed to ensure protection and international assistance was not provided, leading to the country's quick occupation. As Rynning has further argued, the Cold War period enabled increased political ambition in Danish policy makers to affect the international environment, despite a lack of means given the country's size (2013: 85). After 1989, this activism was set into motion and the state's level of eagerness to engage internationally only grew in the following decades. In the words of former Foreign Minister Møller, Denmark had by 2006 made it into "NATO's first division," representing not only a strategic actor but perhaps more importantly a loyal and hard-working ally (Ringsmose and Rynning, 2008: 58). Even prior to the year of 2001, Denmark's regard of the United States as its most important ally and the high priority it granted to the Atlantic Alliance was an essential part of the state's strategic culture. From that, it has been claimed that this long-term overarching motivation of Danish policy makers to meet US wishes and demands can indeed be considered a fundamental driver of its extensive military engagements (Mariager and

Wivel, 2019). Moreover, in the 1990s Denmark remained most proactive with regard to the Baltic States, promoting their quest for NATO membership and seeing itself as a “pioneering state” in the area, demonstrating continuity with post-2014 emphasis on the Alliance’s efforts in the region (Archer, 2014: 103).

In the central Danish foreign and security policy documents published since 2014, a recurrent theme is the commitment to the USA, as Denmark’s remaining “most important security policy ally” (Danish MFA, 2023a: 7). Assuming greater responsibility in NATO under American leadership, and maintaining the strong transatlantic bond is in fact considered the “cornerstone of efforts to protect Danish security interests” (Danish MFA, 2018; Danish MFA, 2022b). It can be argued that these ties have only strengthened through crises where Western interests are threatened, notably with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but moreover with Russia’s annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine. Throughout time, loyal contributions and membership to the Alliance has even been presented as a strategic end in itself, as furthermore was reflected in the Danish defence strategy of 2018-2023 (Danish MoD, 2018; Edström et al., 2019: 74).

Furthermore, the state’s defence industry, as a fundamental part of national security, is both privatised and internationalised to a great extent. The organisation of the Armed Forces is largely dependent on foreign developed equipment and hence, close collaboration is prioritised with Denmark’s most important partners and allies, particularly the United States. This creates interdependencies, and the Government has furthermore emphasised the choice of partnering with the US on the procurement project of F-35 fighter aircrafts for the Danish Armed Forces, as an essential mean to its end goals (Danish Government, 2021: 7-19). The post-2014 strategic emphasis on NATO’s collective defence and deterrence can considering these factors be overall considered influenced by the Danish eagerness to live up to expectations of the United States and continue to show itself as a ‘top member’ within the Atlantic Alliance. Therefore, there was no large-scale transformation in the underlying logic of Denmark’s strategy.

An integral difference is to be seen in comparison with the Swedish approach to such partnerships as part of the country’s strategic culture. While Denmark emerged as a pragmatic cosmopolitan state after the Cold War, openly prioritising its relations to the Western great power, Sweden had during that time rather been considered idealistic and driven by normative ambitions for international peace and security. During the Cold War, Sweden’s policy had not only been characterised by its self-acclaimed non-alignment, or ‘neutrality,’ but the dominating vision in society

regarding defence matters was a so-called *People's Defence*, founded in 1948. This concept emphasised strong national Armed Forces and a defence structure which prevented any part of the country from being given up without high, living resistance from the people (Åselius, 2005: 30). Self-reliance and a high degree of autonomy were fundamental to Sweden throughout this time, further seen in its homegrown defence industrial base which remains of significant importance to the country until this day.

Indeed, although Sweden's industrial market is becoming more internationalised, "the ability to maintain national integrity and independence" in the defence industry is considered vital (Swedish MoD, 2018: 28). The organisation of the Armed Forces has to a large extent been directed by this industrial base which is capable of meeting most of the state's equipment needs (IISS, 2019: 150). Notable examples of this are the JAS Gripen procurement project which played an essential part in the post-2014 efforts to strengthen capabilities, as well as the country's important submarine systems, which are produced domestically and are specialised for Baltic Sea conditions (Christiansson, 2020: 188; Lundmark, 2022: 408). Producing its own defence materiel, having the ability to defend itself and not having to rely on partners for military support was integral to Sweden's Cold War rationale, in contrast to that of Denmark which firmly relies on its partnerships in these crucial aspects. Therefore, it has been argued that while globalisation drove the country to assume a more prominent role internationally and rather defend Swedish moral values than its territory, traditional self-defence and relying on its own military capabilities has long remained important in the Swedish strategic culture (Ruffa, 2013).

Furthermore, it must be noted that the Swedish non-alignment concept, while deeply rooted in the country's self-image, contains inherent complexities and its interpretations are in constant evolution (Ruffa, 2013: 343). The importance of international defence and security cooperation has now been prioritised for decades, and while the country's partners firstly remain the Nordic states, and then the European ones, Sweden has been in close formal cooperation with NATO since 1994 and has since then regarded its ties with the Alliance "of fundamental importance for the development Swedish defence" (Swedish MFA, 2016: 5). Moreover, the state's relationship with the US has been regarded vital to developing Swedish military capabilities and improve its overall security, and "rapidly developing," as has been seen in increased training cooperation (Ibid, 5). Indeed, these relationships have been based upon strong trust for decades. Ultimately, although formal military non-alignment remained prominent, Sweden has for decades continued to foster a growing transatlantic bond

through collaboration with NATO and the US, often using this collaboration as a way to reach its goals, such as with participation in international peace-keeping operations after the Cold War (Murphy, 2021: 153-157).

It can hence overall be claimed that, as traditional self-defence is a significant element in the Swedish strategic culture, it felt natural for the state to aim to reinstate its total defence with conscription and strengthened foundational capabilities. Neorealist arguments are furthermore influential in seeing that the worsened security situation did require Sweden to develop its relations with stronger powers to achieve those objectives (Swedish MoD, 2023c). Nevertheless, it can be argued that such a decision was not exactly a novelty, as the state had done so priorly to reach other objectives not caused by external pressures, although it had never gone so far as to apply for NATO membership. In the case of Denmark, however, its approach to strategic partnerships contains a more direct link to its post-2014 strategic adaptations. As the country has historically perceived its sense of security to be intertwined with that of other states, Denmark has to a much larger extent than Sweden aimed to not only tie itself to larger powers within the system but prove themselves as an essential contribution to their defence efforts.

5.5.3. Geographical Patterns and Strategic Exposure

Although geography can in many ways be intertwined with the other two features of strategic culture evaluated priorly, it may be helpful to consider the influence of specific geographical features in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the means which Sweden and Denmark strategically adopted to achieve their objectives. Most prominently, this concerns the allocation of resources as a result of budget increases and which branches of the Armed Forces have been prioritised over others. This acknowledgement thus follows Gray's argument that geography in strategy can primarily be found in the organisation of the Armed Forces according to environment in combat, in terms of land, sea and air (1999a: 170).

In this sense, it is instrumental to examine whether the country has sea or land power nexus and how its strategic depth and natural defences shape the defence thinking. The cases of Denmark and Sweden contain marked differences in these regards. These positional factors influence for instance how vulnerable the states are to sea, land or air attacks and thus what resources they are most likely to place emphasis on. Denmark in this regard has no strategic depth as well as no natural defences, which furthermore led to it being occupied within hours during the Second World War. The

country, however, has sea power nexus and is not land locked, which provides it with a precondition for amphibious focused units in the Armed Forces (Edström et al., 2019: 26). Indeed, Denmark has long emphasised sea resources and in the words of its Government the country “stands out on the maritime world map as a leading seafaring nation” (Danish Government 2021: 11). This focus is moreover due to how all the Danish territories taken together (Denmark, Faroe Islands and Greenland)¹, have the fourth longest coastline in the world, which imposes particular requirements for the Armed Forces and specifically the Navy (Ibid, 11). Furthermore, Denmark’s strengthened maritime role in the High North as part of NATO’s re-prioritisation is to a large extent related to the Danish long-standing relation to Greenland and the country’s ‘natural’ role in the Arctic (Danish MoD, 2018: 10)

Maritime security furthermore plays a large part in Sweden’s strategic mindset. Sweden’s north-south strategic depth implies that it is vulnerable to air or sea attacks, while it would be difficult to take over its territory with land forces. Additionally, any country that seeks to attack Sweden from land is required to first pass through Finnish and Norwegian territory (Edström et al., 2019: 26-27). Therefore, it would be expected that the Air Force and Navy would be prioritised, particularly in the events of greater threat to the territory, as has been perceived increasingly after 2014. Indeed, throughout the heights of the Cold War Sweden’s Air Force was one of the largest and most sophisticated in the world and the country deployed some 20 submarines in the Baltic Sea (Andersson, 2007: 135). The state has notably maintained its strong focus on the Air Force after 2014, particularly in terms of national procurement projects. Both Sweden and Denmark after 2014 furthermore emphasised the naval branch of its Armed Forces, as has been clarified in the first part of this analysis, with Sweden primarily concerning its upscaling of capabilities for territorial defence and Denmark in terms of its contributions to NATO’s re-adjustment efforts, focusing on immediate neighbourhood and the maritime area. However, in the latter case the main focus remained the development of a deployable brigade, which could rather have been influenced by the former two features of its strategic culture, threat perception and particularly its aim to contribute as a loyal ally to the US.

The focus on maritime security, however, does have its base in both Sweden and Denmark’s distinct geographies and strategic cultures. The Government of Denmark notably recognises that the

¹ Greenland and the Faroe Islands are constitutive of the Kingdom of Denmark and are thus under Danish military protection. This protection falls under the Joint Arctic Command, with headquarters in Nuuk (See: NATO, 2023).

state must be able to control straits, ensuring that allies can access its territory by sea, and in that sense, NATO considers Denmark's territory as a transit and deployment area (Danish Government, 2021: 11). Denmark's position at the south shore and the entrance of the Baltic Sea is strategically placed in the event of at sea conflict, and thus this entrance needs to be controlled by friendly powers (Edström et al., 2019: 27). Consequently, the state's renewed focus on the maritime area as part of NATO's collective defence is logical from the standpoint of Denmark's geographical pattern.

Sweden's territory is, similarly to Denmark, of strategic significance to any power aiming to establish air and sea domination in the central and southern part of the Baltic Sea. In that sense, the state's long eastern coastline and particularly the southern side, as well as Gotland, are of primary importance. After the entry of the Baltic states and Poland into NATO these parts of the country have further increased in strategic exposure in the case of an armed conflict between Russia and NATO, which after 2014 became of palpable concern to Sweden (Ibid, 27). Gotland's strategic importance in such a situation is underlined, as Russia could deploy air defence systems on the island and thereby deny NATO to use the airspace over the Baltic Sea (Swedish MFA, 2016: 3). Thus, the establishment of a Gotland Regiment, as well as the re-operationalisation of the Muskö Naval Base, has been influenced by such considerations. Further to be noted is Sweden's western coastline, bordering the North Sea and the city of Gothenburg, the ports of which are strategically exposed (Edström et al., 2019: 26). Although the Baltic Sea remains emphasised in Sweden's strategic consideration, this recognition of territorial exposure influenced the perceived need for a new amphibious battalion on the west coast.

Overall, the distinct geographical characteristics of Denmark and Sweden have influenced their commonality in increasingly emphasising naval capabilities and prioritising the Baltic Sea region after 2014. This element of the countries' strategic cultures has furthermore influenced Sweden's efforts in modernising its Air Force, while it does not account for Denmark's emphasis on a deployable brigade, which can rather be understood through the two priorly examined features.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This section aims to reflect on the findings of the analysis with regard to the guiding research questions and in relation to previous research, as well as contemplate upon the study's limitations and contributions. Lastly, suggestions for further research pertaining to the topic will be provided.

This thesis has aimed to answer how Denmark and Sweden have adjusted their military strategies after 2014, as well as to what extent the similarities and differences can be understood from a neorealist lens, and subsequently how these can be conceptualised from the perspective of strategic culture. The empirical findings have demonstrated that the two states largely adapted their military strategies in distinct ways, particularly with regard to the underlying rationale guiding the declared mission and organisation of the Armed Forces. A more direct continuation of the post-Cold War logic was to be seen in the Danish case after 2014, while Sweden overturned its strategic rationale to a larger extent. Namely, the former continued to hold its loyal contributions to NATO as an end objective in itself and mainly adapted to the Alliance's reprioritisations, while Sweden aimed to reinstate its total defence structure and reorganise its wartime organisation, increasingly recognising that drastic moves needed to be made towards territorial defence. Thus, while both states begun centring on stability in their close vicinity, notably the Baltic Sea region, they did so according to diverging logics. Furthermore, although both states strived towards increased readiness and strengthened capabilities, they aimed to achieve that through different means and ways. Denmark's reinforcement of its Armed Forces through increased investments was in that sense not solely meant to strengthen the state's own warfighting capabilities but fill gaps in NATO's command in the state's neighbourhood. Sweden's investments were rather made in the foundational competences of its national wartime structure, coupled with training and exercises, while increased international cooperation was seen as a significant way to achieve its goals.

A primary aim of this thesis has nevertheless not only been to examine the empirical cases of Denmark and Sweden's respective adjustments of military strategy after 2014, but perhaps more significantly to investigate the relationship between neorealist considerations and strategic culture. This is largely reflected in the balance of the influences of external pressures and internal conditions. Namely, the 'return of realism,' as a result of increased great power competition and militarisation in our contemporary era, has emphasised how the self-preservation in an anarchic system guides a state's formulation of military strategy. Consequently, external circumstances which constrain this

preservation are expected to result in adaptations in a state's calculations of the most suitable ways it can use its means to achieve politically determined objectives, i.e., formulate their strategy. It has been emphasised in previous literature following the realist view that small states are particularly vulnerable to external developments and as a result of this security dilemma are required to adjust more quickly and distinctively.

This thesis took as a starting point that both Denmark and Sweden, as small states, altered their priorities and defence postures as a result of this external pressure. However, it has been argued throughout that the view of strategic culture may be supplemental to such a lens regarding the more specific alterations that are made. As this thesis has adhered to the first-generation scholarship of strategic culture, as inspired by Colin Gray, this claim has been made by underlining the ideational context within which such adjustments can be formed, as based on domestic beliefs and inherently preferred methods of operation. Examining such influence is fundamentally dependent upon employing a historical view and highlighting the specificities involved in a state's strategic mindset. It was found that important deviations exist in the two countries' strategic adjustments, which are not sufficiently to be understood through neorealism, as the theory largely neglects such unit-level particularities. Therefore, by analysing the empirical similarities and distinctions according to the influence of strategic culture, that gap was aimed to be filled.

Three features of the theoretical framework were identified as holding primary relevance to the formulation of small states' military strategic adjustments. Considering the first element, dominant threat perception, the findings demonstrate that the main distinction lies in Sweden and Denmark's perception of Russia as a significant threat. Sweden has historically perceived the state as a threat to the security of its neighbourhood and its own territory and such worries remained among the Government for longer following the Cold War. On the other hand, Russia is not prominent historical threat to Denmark, and Denmark rather regards its increased aggression as a threat to NATO's collective security. This factor influences strategic adjustments as Sweden becomes more likely than Denmark to strive towards securing its territory against armed aggression, which indeed remained a primary objective of the country's post-2014 strategy.

The second element, approach to strategic partnerships, was mostly instrumental for understanding how the value states attribute to such relationships affects their choices concerning their national defence postures and prioritisations. The most striking findings concerned Denmark's distinct strategic culture of committing itself to the United States and NATO, while Sweden has

historically rather emphasised independence and national integrity, both in its defence industry and posture of the Armed Forces. Due to Denmark's long-standing and firm commitment to these relationships, coupled with the conceptualisation of Russia as a threat to NATO's collective security rather than its own territory, it is not surprising that the state has chosen to follow the Alliance's focus on building collective deterrence. Denmark's emphasis on developing a deployable brigade is notably made comprehensible in that regard. It is furthermore argued that Sweden's emphasis on its territorial integrity after 2014, for instance embodied in the reinstatement of conscription, is influenced by its historical tradition of emphasising independence and democratic involvement in territorial defence. While it has been claimed that Sweden's aspiration for NATO membership has largely been influenced by neorealist considerations, this thesis has demonstrated that increasing cooperation with the US as a larger power in order to reach domestic objectives is not a novel development in the state's operations.

Lastly, the third element of geographical patterns and strategic exposure rather pertains to examining the influence of strategic culture on choices concerning which means the state chooses to employ to achieve their objectives. This has shown that while Denmark has followed NATO's re-prioritisations, both the countries' focus on the maritime arena and establishing increased presence the Baltic Sea region has been influenced by their respective geographical conditions at the entrance of the Sea and by aims of covering their main exposure points. Both countries' focus on developing naval capabilities, as well as Sweden's prioritisation of the Air Force, are in that regard influenced by this feature of strategic culture. This section mostly demonstrated that an analysis of the development of military capabilities, and notably the balances between the branches, is enhanced by considerations of geographical positions as well as more subjective elements of strategic exposure.

The overarching aim of this thesis has been to provide a comprehensive and focused view of the ways in which domestic conditions may influence strategic adjustments in times of external turbulence. The topic has not only contributed to research on strategic culture theory but moreover on small states' formulation of military strategy and what features drive the development of military capabilities. This moreover holds implications for the study of small states and how they operate within the international environment. These strategic formations and balancing acts are ultimately not only to be studied from the perspective of pressures and opportunities in the material environment, but moreover benefit from a view of a state's unique particularities.

6.1. Limitations

As this thesis concentrated on strategic adjustments, one of its central limitations was the inability to address elements of the countries' military strategies which are not parts of fundamental alterations resulting the altered security situation after 2014. For instance, it can be noted that the Arctic continued to play a significant role in Denmark's defence considerations. However, this was not seen as an adjustment but rather a long-standing continuation and thus this was not highlighted or analysed to the same extent as their turn to the Baltic Sea region. Nevertheless, Denmark's continued emphasis on international peace keeping missions was highlighted, largely for the purpose of comparison with Sweden. The topic of two states' military strategies is large and essentially had to be narrowed down to include the most significant elements of strategic transformation to match the purpose of the thesis.

Another limitation concerns the time period of the available empirical material. The most significant defence decisions by the respective countries' Governments which are used were published prior to the Russian invasion of 2022 and as large-scale alterations have taken place since then, the analysis was supplemented with additional website sources of the Armed Forces and Government bodies. At the time of writing this thesis, both states' governments are entering into a new period for defence agreements, and thus greater alterations in strategy may be made visible. It can be estimated that primarily Sweden's strategy considerations will see a fundamental change in the Defence Commission's 2024 defence agreement report. As the country moves towards NATO membership, decisions relating to defence and military matters are likely to be more dictated by such a process and the Alliance's demands.

6.2. Suggestions for Further Research

Following the upcoming publications of defence decisions, it may be interesting to conduct research on alterations in strategic culture of the Nordic states. Such changes have indeed been examined by researchers in the field, which then treat a state's strategic culture as the dependent variable or outcome of large-scale transformations in strategic rationales (e.g., Lantis and Charlton, 2011). In the Swedish case this may amount to a compelling examination as great changes remain underway in the country's logic behind the formulation of military and defence strategy, particularly exemplified by its aspiration to join a defence alliance. Such future research may furthermore benefit from more time passing from Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Another suggestion would be to analyse the influence of

domestic politics on adjustments in the Nordic states' military strategies. Such an analysis may concentrate on domestic political debates, political party oppositions and public opinion. Examinations of this kind have been conducted on foreign policy change prior to the alterations after 2014, for instance by Doeser (2011), but remain understudied after that. Domestic politics remains an important source of analysis for strategy formulations which was not sufficiently addressed in this thesis due to its scope and focus on the longer-lasting, inherent domestic particularities.

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