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## 6. Peaceful Foreign Policy and Remembrance of War Effort. The Conceptualisation of Willingness to Defend in Finland and its Connections to Previous Armed Conflict, 1960s-1989

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Warfare of today differs from that of the past, as most people have little direct contact with the armed forces and the waging of war is often left to a small voluntary group of highly trained professionals. As researchers Lars Mjøset and Stephen van Holde argue, the forming of an ‘intimate connection’ between citizen-soldier and nation-state represented a moment of transition from older recruitment models, including that of compulsory military service.<sup>2</sup> In recent times, more states—especially in the West—have ended mass mobilisation of the people for purposes of defence, relying increasingly on technologically sophisticated methods and trained volunteers. Simultaneously, conflict has become an event in which the boundaries between war and peace are increasingly difficult to determine, as the military historian Hew Strachan argues.<sup>3</sup> Even in the absence of an existential threat to the sovereignty of most states in Europe, societies and states continue to have a connection to war, present in the history of past military conflicts. New generations learn from past military conflicts in a way that affects future war-related expectations, and national politics of memory can sustain a major connection to past military conflicts as sources of national narratives and indeed, of identities. In fact, as researcher Hylke Tromp underlines, expectations of individual behaviour are linked to established values and norms.<sup>4</sup>

It is the purpose of this paper to examine the connections between previous military conflict (the Second World War) in discourse and Finland’s societal perception of defence and a willingness to defend. This attitude is revealed in the Finnish concepts: *maanpuolustustahto* or *puolustustahto*, rendered roughly in English as a ‘willingness to defend the country’ or, in the latter, an ‘overall willingness to defend’. At the same time they express a particular attitude and a decidedly political concept in their connotation. In current research, a focus on attitudes is most often associated with questions of morale, but in a small country which is not a member of a military alliance, the role of the public toward defence has become more prominent.<sup>5</sup>

The primary sources employed in this paper include parliamentary debates of the Finnish Parliament between 1960 and 1990 and selected newspaper articles from *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Ilta-Sanomat* and *Tiedonantaja*. Of these, the first was the most circulated newspaper, the second was a tabloid paper and the third was a newspaper of the Finnish Communist Party. The methodological design involves critical and qualitative reading of source material in which the

concepts *maanpuolustustahto* and *puolustustahto* act as key reference points and key search terms of digitised data. Selection for the period of analysis stems from the launching of the Advisory Board for Defence Information (ABDI) in 1962, the body advocating particular political attitudes and the subsequent political debates that heralded a completely new situation when the Soviet Union began to disintegrate in the end of 1980s, with implications for Finnish foreign policy. I will supplement the existing knowledge on defence will as a socially constructed narrative and conceptualisation by offering more insights into how history matters.<sup>6</sup>

Concepts such as glory and honour may have been of major significance in some moments of history, but, as historian Jeremy Black suggests in his work on why wars occur, understanding how specific individuals and groups interpret concepts entails asserting what these ideas meant in decisive situations.<sup>7</sup> Risto Sinkko, a Finnish scholar who has studied the Finnish willingness of defence especially in connection with military conscription, argues that in Finnish society everyone is confident in claiming that they understand the meaning of the concept *maanpuolustustahto*, although there is currently no particular definition of it.<sup>8</sup> Practices of war remembrance play a role, not only in processes of mourning the casualties, but, also in defining approaches to death in war and to its heroic nature. War commemoration also relates to identity building, in which a state may have a vested interest. The public visibility of war-related symbols and events influences societal positions towards dominant memories.<sup>9</sup> I argue that historical examination of the language related to an armed conflict provides an avenue to explore the attitudes in society towards armed conflict.

## **References to past military conflicts in political discourse**

I will start by analysing how politicians employ discourse related to connections between past armed conflict and the concept of willingness to defend. The focus on emphasising the will of citizens originates in the 19th century and in the Finnish national awakening, when the will of the people became a more prominent political theme and illustrated, in terms of defence, the requirement of a small nation and, since 1917, of an independent state, to survive. The Winter War of 1939-1940 between the Soviet Union and Finland, the Continuation War of 1941-1944 between Finland and Soviet Union and the Lapland War of 1944-1945 between Finland and Germany are all part of the national historical, even canonical, narrative that is broadly shared among the nations.<sup>10</sup> Historian Paul Fussell is one the authors who have shed light on the impact of past conflict to coming generations, with an analysis of the literature on war. Fussell demonstrates how older myths are dissolved and how new myths relating to war come to the fore.<sup>11</sup>

Past military conflicts did indeed offer a logical point of reference for discussions on national defence, but the discourse on defence was influenced by polarised political views in which the radical political left was openly critical towards military defence. After 1945 and until late 1980s, the leftist Finnish People's Democratic League was able to gain a significant foothold in Finnish politics, and their Members of Parliament (MP) were able to influence national

defence expenditure as well as political attitudes towards defence in general. The 1948 Agreement of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance between Finland and the Soviet Union provided the cornerstone of Finno-Soviet relations that also influenced Finnish defence, as did the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, by imposing both expectations and restrictions regarding defence capabilities. In the Finnish Parliament, the 1947 Finno-Soviet treaty provided key political arguments, especially for the right-wing politicians more inclined to support military defence, as it required Finland to oppose any use of Finnish territory for a third-party attack against the Soviet Union. Treaties implied the way in which political discourse utilised the concept of willingness to defend, by defining what actually constituted a politically acceptable form of willingness. As historian Johanna Rainio-Niemi has shown, the Finnish foreign policy needed the use of conceptualisation surrounding willingness to defend to proclaim its neutrality in a credible manner.<sup>12</sup>

According to the parliamentary debates, the 1960s and 1970s featured discourse on willingness to defend in a manner that constantly focused on defining it as a source of national strength. This differed from the attitudes that had enabled co-operation with Nazi Germany in 1941-1944, and references associating willingness to defend with conflicts at that time were sparse. In this period of polarised parliamentary discourse, left-wing politicians often portrayed military defence as an anachronistic institution, whereas right-wing politicians drew attention to the Finno-Soviet Treaty and its defence obligations.<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of Defence also publicly emphasised the role of willingness to defend as a political message, as the belief that ‘other states’ trust in our willingness to defend’ was pivotal in supplementing the defence capabilities of the Finnish Defence Forces. Therefore the view of the Ministry, expressed in 1967, placed considerable emphasis on individual attitudes and mentalities to participate in national defence. In fact, the creation of a state body (the forerunner of ABDI) in 1963 to promote willingness to defend was proof of a major effort on the part of the government to influence public attitudes.<sup>14</sup>

War-related sacrifice emerged as a salient theme. It was not until the 1970s that the question of war veterans arose, in the form of public expenditure on their retirement benefits. In terms of willingness to defend, the issue of treating war veterans of past conflicts was seen as a relevant issue and even as a manifestation of the abilities of the nation to prevail in time of crisis.<sup>15</sup> The scepticism of the radical political left against attaching too much importance to the war veterans’ benefits prompted some left-wing MPs to condemn the issue as too ‘bloodthirsty’ (*hurmahenkinen*), in which discourse tried to point negative attention to any aspect that might involve glorification of past military effort. In 1970 this characterised their critical approach to war against the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1970s, the Finnish Rural Party’s MPs started to differentiate between ‘healthy’ willingness to defend and other—more aggressive, nationalist—forms of willingness. The MPs of that party argued for a neutral foreign policy, and the discourse did not incorporate experiences of war into political arguments, except when the nation commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the Winter War, for instance.<sup>17</sup> Here the outbreak of the Winter

War was offered as a negative precedent of a situation in which the state had not invested enough resources in defence capabilities, putting enormous strain on the will of the people.<sup>18</sup>

To sum up, only a handful of MPs referred to ‘willingness to defend’ in connection with armed conflict during the period studied. Next we will look at the newspaper material to illustrate that war was more present in relation to ‘willingness to defend’ than the parliamentary discourse might have given reason to assume.

### **Other public discourses and the Second World War**

If the Finnish press coverage is studied, ‘willingness to defend’ is present in different forms of military commemoration as a general basis and in relation to military parades and other public manifestations involving the military or military history. Here past military conflict provides a logical connection to the national identity surrounding the sense of public will that prevailed in difficult circumstances, especially in 1939-1940, and again in 1944. In 1939, the Soviet Union launched its major offensive against the Finnish positions, resulting in a major retreat of Finnish troops, but the Finnish front was able to hold out against the advancing Soviet forces. In the public narratives on war, issues such as human sacrifice and landscapes connected to the Second World War constitute logical points of reference due to their role in national war-related heritage in Finland, too.<sup>19</sup> However, as seen in the political discourse, such references were usually lacking, as the attention of politicians was focused more on current issues, such as defence capabilities. Other discourses, however, reveal a different way of talking about past military conflicts.

All the newspapers studied, regardless of whether they catered to left-wing or right-wing views, had a special connection to the commemoration of the Second World War, with the key divide stemming from their approach to willingness to defend. Where newspaper coverage dealt with national parades held on Finnish Independence Day on 6 December or other military parades, the more right-wing or centrist newspapers usually remembered to quote speeches that used wording related to willingness to defend. A key source of inspiration for soldiers and civilians participating in the commemoration of the Second World War referred to the mandate of wartime commander-in-chief and subsequent President, Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, regarding the need for Finns to maintain their ‘sacrificial willingness to defend’ (*uhrivalmis puolustustahto*). This notion underlines the role of sacrifice in the Finnish discourse on past military conflict. Through sacrifice, individuals dedicated themselves entirely to the defence of the nation and the country, producing a symbol of inspiration for later generations that was expected also to be clear to foreigners.<sup>20</sup>

In many ways, the public discourse was not separated from the discourse of the Finnish Parliament; outside the parliamentary chamber politicians often gave speeches involving the concept of willingness to defend. Examples include the unveiling of war-related memorials, for example that in honour of the Battle of Summa (1939-1940). Other examples include discourse on how successful fighting indicated a strong willingness to defend. A similar idea was

associated with honouring the end of the Winter War and related events. Reservists' associations were seen to be of particular significance here.<sup>21</sup>

The right-wing and centrist discourse employed the idea of willingness to defend as a healthy incentive, if attached to a foreign policy of neutrality. They simultaneously maintained that such an idea has a clear connection to past armed conflicts as war experience showed that the people were ready to stand by the state, and thus its foreign policy, if a crisis occurred. Therefore the conceptualisation of the willingness to defend had two meanings, which did not compete as they supported each other and, in fact, occasionally coalesced.

To add a third meaning, the general commentary related how present-day society provided incentives to individuals to protect the country; this formed a frequent part of everyday commentary related to willingness to defend. It was especially notable in the discourse when the government launched specific courses to educate the political and societal elite about the objectives of security policy (conceptualised to combine both foreign and defence policies into a single state policy).<sup>22</sup> Chronologically speaking, a modest change in ideology started to occur in the mid-1970s.

In the left-wing narrative, the Second World War was viewed through two intertwined perspectives: a critical approach to the Continuation War of 1941-1944 that was conceived of as a right-wing aggressive plot, and on the other hand, a commemoration of the Soviet Union's struggle against Nazi Germany in which socialist ideology was able to prevail over aggressive militarism.<sup>23</sup> This discourse excluded the role of willingness to defend and replaced it with the will to maintain peace, associating peace with post-war international treaties. In response, left-wing criticism attacked the predecessor of ABDI for being too right-wing. This was part of their effort to promote their ideology. Their longer-term goal was to have a so-called 'peace law' enacted during the 1970s, effectively condemning any form of speech or propaganda attached to aggressive foreign policy or promoting war as an instrument or indeed, even as a positive event.<sup>24</sup> If enacted, the law could have been used to curb public discourse treating the legacy of the Second World War in a patriotic manner. This legislative effort, however, failed to gain majority support.

As a result of left-wing discourse, even more centrist figures started to disengage from this willingness to defend from war. For instance, in 1974, Foreign Secretary Ahti Karjalainen, while speaking at an event arranged by military reservist associations, underlined that willingness to defend is not connected to the 'war drums', but should be understood in the context of Finland's security policy.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, on the other side of the political spectrum a discourse connecting defence will and past armed conflict continued; here the treatment of war veterans continued to be a key topic.<sup>26</sup> By the 1980s, left-wing criticism had mostly faded. Instead, the formation of ABDI in 1975 increased its individual-based education programmes with less emphasis on military defence. Moreover, the political discourse surrounding the willingness to defend focused on the importance of maintaining levels of 'defence will'. This rose to a high level in the early 1980s, according to the ABDI.<sup>27</sup> Still, as

Prime Minister Harri Holkeri outlined in 1989, when the Winter War was memorialised. It served as a reminder of what could happen, but only if the nation acted as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

At the core of the Finnish discourse on willingness to defend are the competing ideologies of the Cold War period. Here commemoration of the Second World War offered the centrist and right-wing figures frequent opportunities to emphasise the memories of the nation, but also to point out what could happen if Finland were to be drawn into a new war. Here defence, and particularly manifestation of a will to fight against an armed aggressor if necessary, also served as foreign policy instruments for a small, neutral European state. Therefore the intimate connection between the people and defence had to be maintained for the purposes of survival and, on the other hand, to commemorate war-related sacrifices and bolster nationalism.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Mjøset and S. van Holde, 'Introduction', in *The comparative study of conscription in the armed forces*, L. Mjøset and S. van Hold (eds.), Stephen. *Comparative social research*, vol. 20, New York, JAI, 2002, p. xiv.

<sup>3</sup> H. Strachan, 'Introductory essay: the changing character of war', in *Conceptualising Modern War*, K. E. Haug and O. J. Maas (eds.), London, Hurst, 2011, pp. 1–25.

<sup>4</sup> B. West and H. Aarons, 'War memory, national attachment and generational identity in Australia', *Journal of Sociology* Vol. 52, No. 3, 2016, pp. 586–604; T.G. Ashplant, G. Dawson and M. Roper, 'The politics of war memory and commemoration' in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, Michael Roper et al. (eds.), London, Routledge, 2000), pp. 3–85; H. Tromp, 'On the nature of war and of militarism', in *War. A cruel necessity? The Bases of institutionalized violence*, R. A. Hinde et al. (eds.), London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 1995, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> See S. Wessely, 'Twentieth-Century Theories on Combat Motivation and Breakdown', *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006, pp. 269–286 and T. Häkkinen, M. Kaarkoski and J. Tilli, 'Maanpuolustustahto ilmiönä, käsitteenä ja tutkimuskohteena', in *Maanpuolustustahto Suomessa*, Teemu Häkkinen et al. (eds.), Helsinki, Gaudeamus, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> K. Laitinen and A. Nokkala, 'Suomalainen asevelvollisuus - historiaa, haasteita ja tulevaisuutta', *Puolustusministeriön julkaisuja* Vol. 1, 2005, Helsinki, Puolustusministeriö, 2005, pp. 39, 67.

<sup>7</sup> J. Black, *Why wars happen*, London, Reaktion Books, 1998, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> R. Sinkko, *Maanpuolustustahto asevelvollisen ja palveluksen onnistumista selittävänä tekijänä*, Helsinki: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, 2015, pp. 8–9.

<sup>9</sup> Ashplant et al., 'The politics of war memory and commemoration', pp. 3–16.

<sup>10</sup> T. Kinnunen and V. Kivimäki, 'Johdatus koettuun sotaan', in *Ihminen sodassa. Suomalaisten kokemuksia talvi- ja jatkosodasta*, T. Kinnunen et al. (eds.), Helsinki and Jyväskylä, Minerva, 2006, p. 13; S. Ahonen, *Suomalaisuuden monet myytit*, Helsinki, Gaudeamus, 2017, pp. 134-154.

<sup>11</sup> P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 336-362. See also discussion by J. Bourke, 'New military history', in *Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History*, M. Hughes et al. (eds.), London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 258-280.

<sup>12</sup> J. Rainio-Niemi, *The Ideological Cold War. The Politics of Neutrality in Austria and Finland*, Routledge, 2014, pp. 1-6, 64.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Valtioapäivät 1982, *Pöytäkirjat 4, Istunnot 122-150*, Helsinki, 1983, pp. 3998, 4001.

<sup>14</sup> Puolustusministeriö, *Maanpuolustuksemme tienviitat*, Helsinki: Puolustusministeriö, 1967; Rainio-Niemi, *The Ideological Cold War*, p. 131.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Valtioapäivät 1970. *Pöytäkirjat I, Istunnot 1-60*, Helsinki: Valtion painatuskeskus, 1971, pp. 594, 598, 590.

<sup>16</sup> Valtioapäivät 1970, *Pöytäkirjat I*, pp. 592, 595.

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- <sup>17</sup> E.g. Valtiopäivät 1974, *Pöytäkirjat II, Istunnot 45-75*, Helsinki, Valtion painatuskeskus, 1974, pp. 1330, 1340, 1342, 1535; Valtiopäivät 1979. *Pöytäkirjat 2, Istunnot 49-95*, Helsinki: Valtion painatuskeskus, 1979, p. 2233.
- <sup>18</sup> E.g. Valtiopäivät 1975 II. *Pöytäkirjat II, Istunnot 48-78*, Helsinki: Valtion painatuskeskus, 1976, pp. 1551-1552.
- <sup>19</sup> P. J. Raivo, “‘This is where they fought’ Finnish war landscapes as a national heritage”, in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, Michael Roper, Graham Dawson and T.G. Ashplant (eds.), London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 145–164.
- <sup>20</sup> C. G. E. Mannerheim, *Muistelmat*. Lauri Hakulinen and Matti Sadeniemi, Eino Nivanka, and Maijaliisa Auterinen (trans.), Helsinki, Otava, 2008, p. 732; T. Tepora, *Sinun puolesta elää ja kuolla. Suomen liput, nationalismi ja veriuhri 1917-1945*, Helsinki, WSOY, 2011, pp. 254–257; Editorial: ‘Kuulkaapas kenraalit...’, *Ilta-Sanomat*, January 5, 1983, p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup> ‘Summan taistelujen muistomerkki Hämeenlinnaan’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 13, 1961, p. 5; ‘Talvisodan päättymisen muistojuhlissa Turussa 3000 miestä’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 15, 1965, p. 11.
- <sup>22</sup> ‘Asenteiden taustat’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, December 27, 1964, p. 4; ‘Maanpuolustustahto kuuluu osana rauhanpyrkimykseen’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, July 19, 1965, p. 3; Pekka Suvanto, ‘Henkisen maanpuolustuksen kehitys’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, November 30, 1969, pp. 8, 22.
- <sup>23</sup> Editorial: ‘Äärioikeistoa vastaan’, *Tiedonantaja*, May 15, 1971, p. 2; ‘Sotajuhlat jatkuvat’, *Tiedonantaja*, October 14, 1971, p. 7.
- <sup>24</sup> N. Torvalds, ‘Oikeistolaiset järjestöt, osa 4’, *Tiedonantaja*, June 20, 1972, p. 6; Valtiopäivät 1973, *Liitteet I-XIII A*, Lak.al. n:o 28., Helsinki, Valtion painatuskeskus, 1973, pp. 66-67.
- <sup>25</sup> ‘Oikea puolustustahto ei ole hurraa-henkeä’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 5, 1974, p. 14.
- <sup>26</sup> J. Martinkari, ‘Olemme unohtaneet rintamamiehet’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, February 9, 1975, p. 11.
- <sup>27</sup> ‘Maanpuolustustahto’, Findikaattori, accessed November 14, 2018, <https://findikaattori.fi/fi/77>.
- <sup>28</sup> ‘Harri Holkeri laskee kaikki suomalaiset keskiluokkaan’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, August 22, 1989, p. 11.