Comprehensive resilience systems for state defence.
A report on the Dutch and Swedish contexts

Diana M. Popa

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Table of Contents

Introduction 2
Choice of sources and approach 3
Contextualizing resilience and will to defend 5
The Dutch and Swedish contexts 8
Degree of digitalization and innovation profile 10
Constructing narratives 15
The military - civilian relation 16
Psychological, cultural and historical factors 23
Network strength 27
Closing remarks 28
References 31

Summary

Recent geopolitical tensions and a fluid geopolitical context have made it clear that European countries need to ramp up their defence spending and develop comprehensive plans for the defence of their physical and cyber space, with the redundancy or complementarity character of these plans in relation to existing NATO and EU equivalents being debated. The present report reflects upon the increasing need for enhancing whole of society, whole of government approaches to building societal resilience in the face of increased geopolitical threats, reflects on the current status of these plans in Europe, and emphasizes the importance of psychological resilience, the will to defend and the civil – military relationship in these comprehensive plans. Digitalisation levels, country innovation profile and population digital literacy are all interconnected elements in a comprehensive resilience system. The importance of official narratives in countering disinformation and building population psychological resilience is presented. Existing but scattered theoretical frameworks, policy initiatives and programmes are revised and two categories of factors - hard and soft - are proposed for distinguishing the different conceptual elements of population resilience. The analysis combines technological, historical and psychological factors, looking at the effects of their intersectionality and their causality relationship. Against the current and evolving threat landscape, resilience maturity profiles are investigated in two contexts, namely the Netherlands and Sweden. Good practices are presented and implementation recommendations are put forward.

Key words:

- **Resilience.**
- **Psychological resilience.**
- **Will to defend.**
- **The Netherlands.**
- **Sweden.**
- **Military – civilian relation.**
- **Digitalisation levels.**
- **Built-in resilience.**

Introduction

Acumulating geopolitical tensions within Europe and its proximity and the potentially overspilling effects of other global conflicts due to global interconnectivity have driven European countries and regional supranational organisations to ramp up efforts to strengthen their resilience in the face of crisis. The war in Ukraine has put the subject of national resilience on top of European governments agendas, with new federated initiatives being developed, such as the EU preparedness union strategy (EU, 2025) and preexisting ones being evoked and elaborated upon, such as the NATO resilience requirements as set in article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty and subsequent initiatives, such as the Resilience Reference Curriculum (NATO, 2025). In addition to these, nation states work actively on developing and strengthening their own resilience programmes, in order to deter and defend against increasing threats. The Dutch Government for example, has developed a structured approach for reaching its objectives regarding a society that is resilient towards military and hybrid threats (Dutch Ministry of Justice, 2024), in alignment with the federated initiatives of NATO and the EU, but also in response to its own internal and external security posture. European outliers regarding maturity of resilience programmes, both in terms of timespan and comprehensive character of addressed measures are noted in the Scandinavian region, with Sweden being a notable case, known for her “If crisis or war comes” campaign, which includes medium to long term measures for also developing the populations’ will to withstand hardship and actively contribute to the defence effort. Resilience preparedness and government campaigns across Europe are thus diverse in levels of maturity, with some countries having more advanced practices of developing and sustaining population resilience, through constant messaging on the topic coming from governments.

The development of the war in Ukraine has incentivized EU countries to strengthen their efforts towards reaching higher resilience levels, in parallel with initiatives for strengthening the defence sector. International organisations such as NATO and the EU call for more attention and budgets being dedicated to active and passive defensive measures and more assertive messaging is being put forward by NATO in order to align public

expectations and reactions, emphasising the need for switching to a war mindset, a message expressed and reiterated by NATO's secretary-general (Parool, 2024). Developing this mindset is not only about being prepared for crisis, conflict or war in terms of subsistence possibilities, but also developing population resilience in the face of adversity, including psychological resilience. This last point is one of the most challenging objectives to achieve, with previous research going as far as labelling the will to defend as the "*elusive X factor"*. Identifying the current status of population psychological resilience and developing plans for enhancing it is of interest for governments that need to be able to predict how the general population will behave during a crisis, what its resilience span is, what its weaknesses are and how these can be addressed. Insight into what populations are willing to do to actively defend their countries, how to enhance willingness to defend as well as how to optimise resilience thus become high agenda points, giving governments the opportunity to refine their *whole of government* and *whole of society* approaches for crisis and conflict preparedness.

Choice of sources and approach

Before mapping the context of the analysis and presenting the identified context specific challenges, the present section gives an overview of the elements taken into consideration in the analysis and the reasoning behind doing so. While including multiple factors, sectors of society and government from a whole of society, whole of government approach when formulating resilience policy recommendations and action plans, the present report proposes a combination of hard and soft factors and focuses on the - up to now - less researched psychological factors - will to defend and population resilience. In doing so it considers how the military – civilian relation at country level, sense of identity and permeability towards foreign influence and manipulation campaigns (FIMI) feed as direct and indirect variables into the concepts of will to defend and population resilience when facing conflict, (hybrid) threats or war.

Additional conceptualisation clarifications are needed. Dedicated literature distinguishes between military will to fight and national will to fight (Conable, 2022). Not addressing here the will to fight in the context of active military duty, the national

will to fight is defined as "the determination of a national government to conduct sustained military and other operations for some objective even when the expectation of success decreases or the need for significant political, economic, and military sacrifices increases" (Conable, 2022: 154). The author also distinguishes between willingness to fight and willingness to act, the latter being more directed at resilience, risk taking, or vulnerability to influence.

The present report extracts from the framework proposed by Conable et al. (2018; 2022) regarding factors influencing the will to fight the top two layers (categories) of factors, namely: the state and society, and integrates them in the framework of analysis by grouping them into *hard* and *soft* factors. These layers include cohesion and national identity and the civil – military relation. Therefore, in the present analysis, the following hard and soft factors are considered, looking at different national and societal levels:

Hard factors:

- degree of digitalisation and connectivity;
- a country's innovation profile;
- technological infrastructure;
- threat landscape (geopolitical);

Soft factors:

- digital literacy;
- democratic values;
- psychological factors, including collective memory;
- governance structures;
- national identity and forms of cohesion;
- civil – military relationship.

While some of these factors have been previously addressed on their own, their convergence in a multilayered framework and extensive interpretation is what this report proposes as added value to the existing literature on the topic. The analysis also takes into consideration the effects streaming from the intersecting character of these factors. Another novel perspective of the report is represented by the focus on the civilian – military relation within society and in the peace – conflict continuum. In these pursuits, the research includes relevant literature review, recent policy documents and briefings from national and international institutions, examples of international best practices and lessons learned as well as analysis of government messaging in media outlets

and public reactions to governmental policies and proposals. The latter are included in order to map public reactions towards top down initiatives, identify potential resistance points and put forward recommendations for a comprehensive approach towards resilience building and maintaining.

Contextualizing resilience and will to defend

In order to break down the elements of the analysis, a definition of resilience must be assumed. In the context of national security, resilience is described as: "Society's ability to be prepared for, resist, absorb and/or achieve a new state of equilibrium after a disruption" (Eken et al., 2024: 2). Resilience is also an element that is easier to observe in its absence than in its presence. In other words, the effects of lack of resilience are harder felt and more visible in different degrees of disruption than are the effects of resilience maturity.

Currently, many governmental resilience programmes focus on absorb and recover measures, on material factors, protection of critical infrastructure and its resilience in terms of having alternatives in place. Most visible or known measures within resilience campaigns focus on practical measures such as subsistence in situations of crisis, advice on stockpiles for different time periods and basic first response measures in case of different emergency situations or disasters.

Aligned with calls aimed at individual initiatives for resilience, the societal or aggregated scale is addressed through calls for switching from *just in time - just enough* logistic supply chains, that are not suited for war conditions, to medium - long term self-sufficiency approach and capability in order to respond to peek demands, aligning with NATO's style of preparedness (NATO, 2025) that particularly emphasis the energy domain.

Also from the resource resilience perspective, additional factors that need to be considered in a comprehensive national level resilience plan, especially for calibrating resources to estimated needs, include the health status of the population and population demographics. Lessons learned in this regard can be drawn from the debut of the Covid pandemic in Italy, when hospitals and the healthcare system were overwhelmed by the number of deaths among the older population and from other national disasters such as fires with massive casualties requiring the activation of supranational cooperation

mechanisms, like the EU's emergency response mechanism through which member states can receive support in case of calamity after its activation. Additional factors to be considered in resilience programs regarding resources are the length of food and energy supply chains, existence of alternative suppliers and national or regional bargaining power through critical assets.

Developers and implementers of resilience programmes are also forced to address organisational and legal aspects that are needed for enabling programme implementation, including assigning roles within specific organisational structures in cases of crisis and overcoming current legislative and regulatory barriers by changing legislation and smoothing cooperation between responsible entities of the ecosystem. These can be linked with the effort needed for advocating in favour of defence priorities where conflict of priorities make resilience plans difficult to implement, as detailed in the section on the military – civilian relationship.

Other factors that require consideration in a comprehensive approach are the general level of trust at country level (enabling social capital), trust in one's own government and trust in technology in general. These influence digital consumption and either reliance on government to act as gatekeeper in the digital realm or an inclination to individual due diligence. Resilience needs trust and paradoxically high levels of general trust can have a negative impact on risk levels, as citizens trust that their government will address threats and therefore rely on government institutions to do so. Not least, societal resilience differs among countries due to the diversity of threats which influence the unity of the population in addressing these challenges.

Coming to the elusive *X factor* - the willingness to fight – this has been less researched and is at this moment the most difficult to explicitly address in country level programmes. Existing research indicates that currently there is no comprehensive and generally agreed upon way to *quantify* the will to fight and other psychological factors (Eken, 2024). The willingness to fight, or rather the psychological readiness to fight, is arguably influenced by historical and sociodemographic factors. This makes it also an interesting factor to be analysed in a comparative perspective. Conceptualisation and operationalisation of the many different layers of the 'will to

defend' and closely related concepts, such as the relationship between the civil society and the military require careful analysis and contextualisation. Several surveys investigate *if* citizens are willing to defend their country (e.g. Persson & Widmalm, 2023), but comparatively fewer analyses exist where the concept is explored in depth. In depth investigation regarding the nuances of the concept and its understanding should include questions such as:

- What are people exactly willing to defend? (the NATO-area, the EU, their country, their city, their neighbourhood, their family);
- How are they willing to contribute? (participating as military on the frontlines, taking on a supporting role close to the frontlines, staying at home but still contributing to the war economy etc.)

In the case of active combatants, existing research shows how specifically addressing the importance of the will to fight increases its perceived importance (Conable et al., 2018) and presumably its manifestation levels, and therefore ex-ante awareness campaigns are crucial for building the willingness to fight. It might seem obvious, but willingness to defend does not equal preparedness to defend (Swedish Herald, 2024). As is the case with other phenomena, what people say they would do and what they actually do can differ greatly.

Population resilience and will to defend (Olsson, et al., 2021) have an additional role in the total defence approach. The total defence approach also relies on enhanced human terrain analysis and expresses the idea that the success of the armed forces in accomplishing their mission is co-dependent on population resilience and the will to defend. The absolute importance of this factor is demonstrated in classical intelligence analysis such as the case of the Vietnam War, as reported by the CIA evaluations. This is one of the reasons for which, given the current geopolitical context in Europe, policy makers and government representatives need to dedicate special attention to the military – civilian relation when constructing and consolidating their whole of government, whole of society approaches to resilience.

The Dutch and Swedish contexts

Resilience programmes need to be country and context specific, given the backgrounds that states have and threats that they face. These can be complimentary to supranational organisation's initiatives such as NATO and the EU, but need to be specific nonetheless. There are good practices to be transferred and lessons to be learned from early adopters of developed and tested resilience programs, such as the European Nordic and Scandinavian states, both in terms of success stories and postmortems.

The present report proposes a cross-country comparative approach into the status of resilience programmes and government plans for enhancing population resilience, taking the Netherlands and Sweden as case studies. The Dutch - Swedish comparison is of particular interest, with both commonalities and specificities that can be learned from, as detailed in the following.

Cooperation between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and countries in the Hanseatic region on the topic of resilience has increased in recent years (Ministry of Defence, 2024), being a theme that brings countries closer for exchanges of best practices and reinforcement of resilience trends. Resilience is a high priority on the Dutch government's agenda: it is expressively addressed in the Government executive programme (2024) and officially declared "a crucial theme for the government" in 2024's Throne Speech (Royal House of the Netherlands, 2024). The fact that it is also identified as a priority by the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Services (AIVD, 2024) indicates the dangers that lack of resilience might pose to society as a whole, given the potential for conflict.

The Netherlands is transitioning towards higher societal resilience, with government plans and awareness campaigns on resilience preparedness in full swing (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2024; House of Representatives, 2025). These include: messaging campaigns for switching from just in time, just enough forms of consumption to more resilient forms of subsistence, including at individual and household levels, having emergency packages in house and provisions for self-sufficiency for the first days of a crisis. The Dutch Ministry of Defence has also launched a new department focusing on resilience, following a whole of society strategy, to

investigate how to best involve Dutch society in preparing for conflict.

Despite the fact that the Netherlands has been a NATO member since its existence, public policies and programs targeted at population resilience and visibility of the theme of conflict readiness are less mature than their Swedish equivalents. Reasons for this include a different geographical threat proximity and conflict of priorities.

As for Sweden, she has a systemic approach for war preparation and population resilience (Fjäder & Schalin, 2024) built in time of peace that at the moment includes:

- Legislative initiatives (The Total defence service act);
- Dedicated structures (e.g. the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency);
- Initiatives for reinforcing population preparedness and resilience: "If crisis or war comes" pamphlet distributed nationwide).

Here, maturity of resilience programmes and total defence programmes are already high. Current and future research and policy should therefore address questions of:

- What effect does joining NATO have on the population resilience and will to defend?
- What does resilience build-up mean in this context?
- How can resilience be heightened in an already mature pattern of resilient behaviour?
- How should governments enable sustainability of alertness and readiness levels and reinforcement actions?
- Is there an optimal threshold regarding visible actions taken by governments to facilitate population resilience that does not lead to panic or accusations of warmongering?

Even in such resilience mature environments, research must continue for calibration in relation to the changes in the threat landscape. Analysing these trends in the year(s) following Sweden's joining of NATO is an additional point of interest. Further research is needed into how resilience attitudes and programs and the will to defend are shaped by the post-NATO accession of Sweden, focusing on

article 3 of the Treaty (NATO, 2024) – layered resilience and the impact of NATO' Allied Joint Doctrine (2022) on these plans and collective resilience as part of a state's national security.

Comparatively, as mentioned above, in the Netherlands, only recently has the government explicitly addressed societal resilience in its public discourse and policy plans. Drawing on best practices examples from the Scandinavian states (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2024) it is relevant to observe the speed with which resilience programmes can be built, similar levels of readiness and alertness can be reached and gaps between different European states can be closed.

Sweden, although having only recently joined NATO, has a high reported willingness to defend. Comparatively, being protected by NATO for decades, the willingness to defend in the Netherlands has been long reported as being low. However, more recent studies show that the Dutch willingness to fight spiked to 49% (Sie et al., 2024). In respect with willingness to engage in conflict, studies show that the Nordic states are more inclined to engage in conflict than the Netherlands (Eken, 2024). These differences can be explained by the early deployment of governmental total defence strategies, historical factors, as well as the geographical or perceived proximity of external threats, or by pivotal events.

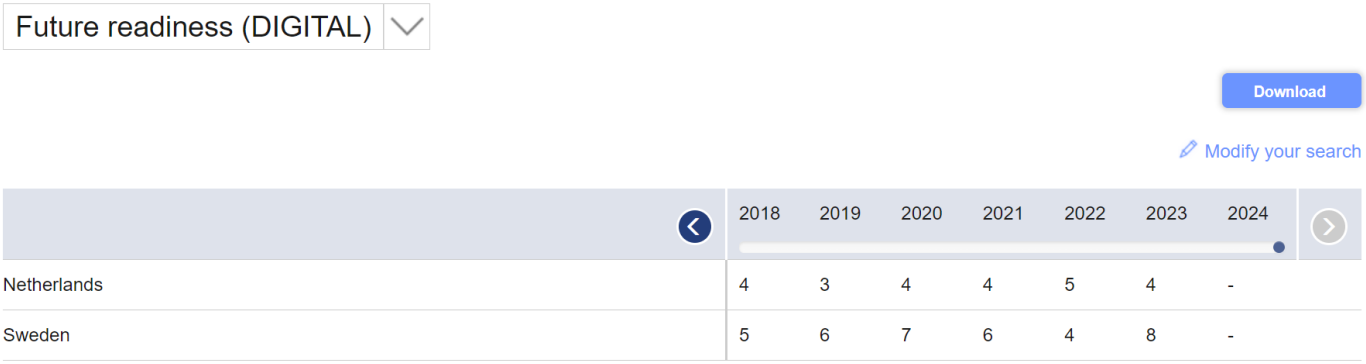
Degree of digitalization and innovation profile

The digitalisation level, innovation profile and general population digital literacy level represent constituent factors in resilience programmes, the first two being what I characterised as "hard factors" and the latter being a "soft factor". A high innovation profile and digitalisation level can constitute pull factors for obvert or subversive conflict as much as geographical proximity or geopolitical context, as they draw the attention of threat actors looking to destabilize democratic states leading in the global competition for technological autonomy or supremacy. High levels of digitalisation and mature innovation profile add thus to the attractiveness of a target.

Democracies are often digitally advanced societies, where freedom of speech and constant social and mass media access and consumption are combined. This can become a facilitator for foreign actors wanting to penetrate different social structures and infrastructures. Democracies

preparing for countering hybrid threats and foreign interference are increasing societal resilience through whole of society and whole of government approaches, in which public, government authorities, private companies, knowledge institutions, and civil society are actively engaged.

Both the Netherlands and Sweden rank high in terms of digitalisation and innovation levels, with digital competitiveness including measures on knowledge, technology and future readiness according to the world competitiveness rankings (IMD, 2024). In Sweden, in the future readiness category (Figure 1), the criterium for *Adaptive attitudes* went from the 8th place in 2019 to the 10th in 2023, while in the Netherlands the same criterium went from the 9th place in 2019 to 6th in 2023, indicating adaptive behaviour to changing trends and morphing patterns.



	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Netherlands	4	3	4	4	5	4	-
Sweden	5	6	7	6	4	8	-

Figure 1. Future Readiness. The Netherlands and Sweden.
Available at: https://worldcompetitiveness.imd.org/customsearchresults/consolidatedresult#

Sweden also has the profile of an early technological adopter, being ranked as one of Europe's most innovative countries and a testbed for disruptive technologies (UK S&I, 2024). Sweeden has a high digitalisation index but according to Swedish researchers, lags behind when it comes to open data, factor that is influenced by resistance of the population to publicly share data, lack of integrated data infrastructures and of national guidelines (RISE, 2024). The same research mentions that Swedish legislation is not yet adapted to the new possibilities that AI entails, indicating again the relevance of legislation as enabler or inhibitor of comprehensive resilience programmes.

In regards to the Netherlands, the country is the vital hub in Europe's logistical physical and virtual networks, has a key position in the global supply chain for advanced technologies and holds critical assets in the semiconductor industry which also serve in the defence sector (Eken, 2024), making it an interesting target for foreign actors.

An increase in the level of open and covert threats against its economic security has been reported in the Netherlands (NCTV, 2023) as observed trends show state-sponsored interference impacting the social and political stability. Examples of sectors that are specifically targeted are the knowledge and innovation sectors, where attempts of influence and destabilisation are conducted through FIMI campaigns and through more concrete actions such as requests for collaboration, influencing collaborations, attempts to control partnerships or more broadly aggressive cyber campaigns. Countries with a high knowledge and innovation profile see a higher level of such attacks against them and have in reaction developed dedicated structures and programmes to counter these threats.

Foreign interference and manipulation campaigns can thus be targeted against the general population or against specific strategic sectors, with effects that have the potential to be felt indirectly or at a later moment. The Netherlands is a good example for how government structures have proactively and quickly developed policies, structures and implemented measures for countering state sponsored foreign interference campaigns, with dedicated programmes for the educational and economic sectors. Special units were developed for the protection of scientific and economic knowledge, such as the *Contact Point for Knowledge Security* and the *Contact point for Economic Security for Enterprises*. These entities act as second or third line of defence, offering practical guidance and tailored advice to institutions and organisations on questions ranging from what are the main threats regarding cybersecurity or the regulations on export control, what to watch out for when working with a foreign knowledge institution or when selecting new personnel, to how to make an evaluation of the risk profile of a certain country, how social media is used for spying, what are the requirements for acquisitions and fusions, or the recommendations for business trips regarding protection of knowledge and IP. The number of requests

that these government structures receive from individuals, organisations and institutions asking for concrete advice regarding the perceived threats to their activities coming from foreign powers has seen a constat increase. While there is an increased sense of the perceived danger, what is needed is concrete ex-ante advice on deterrence measures to be implemented, drawn from specialized intelligence on the real threat landscape (not just what the public perceives as such), public awareness raising based on lessons learned from previous (cyber) attacks and also public information campaigns on what the government does in order to counter foreign action interference, as a form of reassurance mechanisms (FD, 2024). The Dutch Intelligence Agencies recommend strengthening resilience at sector level through a comprehensive set of measures, and sectors ranging from government to critical infrastructure providers, knowledge institutions and private sector (AIVD, 2024). This view is backed by military perspectives of addressing industry resilience as part of societal resilience (NATO, 2025).

Hybrid interference has simultaneous and overlapping manifestations. In addition to disinformation, other forms include clandestine diplomacy and technology and trade used as leverage (bargaining power through critical assets), all done so that the interference action remains under the radar or obvert, which makes it difficult to detect and therefore to actively prepare against it. This is also the grey zone of warfare – adversaries staying beneath the threshold in order to avoid detection and not determine a counter reaction from the other party. Countering these phenomena needs to be part of comprehensive resilience programmes, that thus must include both digital resilience and psychological resilience.

With state and non-state actors having aggressive cyber programmes, cyber-attacks and disinformation are already making their way into Dutch households, undermining the fabric of society (Ministry of Defence, 2024). Strengthening societal and digital resilience is therefore included in the Netherlands national security strategy that addresses 12 points of action for a resilient democracy.

Influencing campaigns can also be easier undertaken through digital means and can easier be sustained in time and diversity. Threat actors can thus influence population trust in the government and willingness to fight against external aggression through

manipulations of perceptions. The digital space thus becomes a factor to be considered when planning for long term population resilience against different forms of conflicts and threats. National and supranational organisations with defensive attributions acknowledge this danger. NATO for example, in its revised Artificial Intelligence strategy, ascertains the need for protection against adversarial use of AI and minimisation of adversarial AI enabled information and interference operations (NATO, 2024, b). These have the potential to "demobilize and demoralize societies and militaries in times of conflict as well as lower trust in institutions and authorities of importance to the Alliance. These issues could raise profound implications for the Alliance" (NATO, 2024, b: 15).

Digitalisation also introduces vulnerabilities in the military sector, as critical infrastructure and command and control capabilities can be subject to attacks. With the exponential increase of technological developments for defence purposes, pressure is being put on military organisations to keep up with the advancement of technology and the technological mass needed for deterrence purposes. States are thus developing alternative measures to fill any technological and capability gaps. The Dutch Ministry of Defence for example, set forward plans for investing in the innovative private sector under a Security Fund, in order to overcome the current pressure on the defence industry, invest proactively and benefit from the latest technological innovations.

The need for a whole of society, whole of government approach is thus underlined by multiple arguments. Threats do not manifest themselves against a single segment: neither crisis, nor threats or attacks are sequential or single targeted. Neither should measures and initiatives aimed at building resilience be conducted in a compartmentalised, sector specific fashion, following a strict civil – military divide or focus on inter-agency cooperation. The military - civilian relationship, its *sweet* spots or conflict points are important in the resilience equation for several reasons, as presented in the dedicated section of the report.

Digitalisation and innovation levels are reflected not only in terms of advancement of the technology sectors, volumes of media and technology consumption and literacy level, but also in another aspect relevant for the topic here presented, namely the control that the state has over

its cyber space and its level of digital and technological autonomy. At government level, the capabilities to completely cut off the internet and to control online communications are also relevant for controlling cyber threats. In this regard, the Netherlands and Sweden have similar capacities, with a rather low score of 1.62 and 1.31 respectively, on a scale from 1 to 4. Frontrunners in this regard are Spain, Denmark and Estonia, with scores above 3.5 (Coppedge et al, 2024). Aside from the question of capability, it is also relevant to know whether populations support these measures in times of crisis, as they touch upon fundamental rights such as the freedom of media and freedom of expression. Prior messaging from the government structures on the need for such measures would contribute to faster and easier acceptance.

This brings forward the issue of official messaging as a form of anticipatory action and narrative construction for shaping behaviour, discussed in the following section.

Constructing narratives

Disinformation is used to divert attention and exploit weaknesses or internal fault lines within the society – social, economic, political or economic (Deppe, 2023) and influence social sentiment (Ministry of Justice and Security, 2024). Malign activity, bellow the threshold or grey zone conflict conducted by foreign actors influence social cohesion and resilience, and as such must be addressed with countermeasures in campaigns for strengthening population resilience.

In addition to concrete and planned actions for building population resilience, a strong national narrative needs to be constructed for facilitating a mental collective change (AIV, 2024). Constructing this narrative also requires making the threats known, since deterrence needs to be visible in order to be effective. The importance of narratives is paramount for shaping public opinion and for public resilience, as narratives can be used for both defence and offence purposes. For example, in the Nord Stream case, contradictory narratives were used for creating confusion at multiple levels (international, national and local).

In parallel with investigation of threats that might have a psychological effect on the population, reinforcing narratives around core values represents an additional line of defence. Representative in this regard in terms of messaging, timing and conciseness is the quote in the Swedish

brochure "If crisis or war comes": *If Sweden is attacked by another country, we will never give up. All information to the effect that resistance is to cease is false.*

Care should be taken when conducting this reinforcement exercise, considering the risk of polarisation and extremism. In building resilience, similarly to combating disinformation, the "playing the long game strategy" is needed. However, in the context of rising threats, this build-up must be accelerated and sustained. One way to develop targeted context specific resilience programs is to early involve the population together with the government and armed forces in the design of national security plans and resilience. This builds resilience proactively and raises awareness levels at the same time, while early addressing any fears (AIV, 2024) in a whole of society approach to collaboration and mobilisation. Expert recommendations (AIV, 2024) also include developing national security courses, after the Finnish model, and a broader dissemination of these in different stakeholder groups.

Literacy levels play a role in the ease with which foreign influence campaigns can be successfully conducted. As previously mentioned, trust in government and high levels of overall trust make it so that the population is less inclined to questioning the periodicity of the messaging reaching it through different channels. While this valuable social fabric woven and strengthened in time and by collective history should not be undermined, it must be accompanied by constantly reinforcing critical inquiry and digital skills. Overall digital literacy and critical thinking are important in order to be able to critically assess an act of digital communication and to choose between different media channels.

The military - civilian relation

The reflections on the military – civilian relation addressed in this report are subsumed under two perspectives: first, the blurred line that in practice can take shape during war, and second, the pre-conflict relation at society level between the military and civilian part of the population. Regarding the first point, a grey zone area arises regarding the degree of involvement of civilians in active combat. Civilian involvement in combat or contribution to it doesn't come without external critical inquiry. Active war theatres such as the one in Ukraine, where civilians can live feed information on surveying drones in data capturing apps that are then used for

defence purposes by the military have given rise to questions regarding the limits between civil and military personnel under international humanitarian law. This dilemma has seen different forms of manifestation in the past, with strategists like Clausewitz defending the idea in "On War" that "however much pains may be taken to combine the soldier and the citizen in one and the same individual, whatever may be done to nationalise wars". The dilemma has taken however new, more complex forms, given the intricate questions of human – machine intertwining relation in modern warfare. Therefore, the current challenge is not only a legislative one, in terms of delineating military and civilian forces when engaging in combat, but in practice it is also a strategical one, in terms of proactively developing resilience initiatives and simultaneously adapting legislation to the changing threat and geopolitical landscape. As things currently stand on this point, international legal harmonization needs further analysis. An additional complicating factor is the blurring of the line between war and peace, with Europe being characterized in public media as "not at war but not in peace either", with the grey zone of warfare being more and more prominent.

Since defence ultimately resides under the sovereignty of each nation state, despite being part of an integrated alliance such as NATO, nation states develop own defence strategies depending on their own security posture and thereat landscape. Capitalizing on such strategies needs context adaptation, including addressing population inclination towards engaging in conflict. The feasibility of the measures set out in national defence programmes in terms of building population resilience are affected by hard factors such as physical environment space and legal room for manoeuvre (Dutch Ministry of Defence, 2024) and also by less visible but durable factors like the military - civilian relation. I shall address these two categories of factors in the following.

The military – civilian relation has a direct effect on the national will to fight in democratic societies (Conable, 2022) and has potential to influence timelines for adoption of resilience measures. It is also considered a high durability impact factor on the willingness to fight (Conable, 2018) and as such a relationship that requires nurturing.

The premiss of building resilience within the population assumes an original position of levelled or neutral ground upon which

resilience can be built. However, in some contexts, there is also a matter of population opposition or resistance that first has to be countered in order to allow for resilience building. Such forms of resistance can come either from *a priory* ideological positions or from conflict of priorities, such as land or airspace use conflicts. If governments find it challenging to change to a mindset of risk acceptance (Eken et al, 2024), envisioned population resistance towards efforts needed for resilience building measures are an influencing factor in this regard.

Thus, in addition to concrete efforts needed for resilience, there is also the matter of conflicting priorities that influence the acceptance levels of any defence related initiatives. Conflicting military – civilian priorities are to be found in both the Dutch and Swedish national settings analysed here. In Dutch context, a clear example of resistance is due to conflict of land priorities. Here, both high military (Rob Bauer in NOS interview, 2024) and civilian officials have been recommending building up of resistance within the Dutch population in order to be better prepared against future threats, observing a current weakness in the level of population preparedness for crisis or conflict. Aligned with broader EU and NATO discussions of dedicating more budget for military purposes, the Dutch defence sector has received additional budget in the newly formed cabinet, together with a multi-dimensional development strategy (Ministry of Defence, 2024). This action plan of the Ministry of Defence, entitled "Space for Defence" (*Ruimte voor Defensie*) includes the construction of new defence purpose sites (military airports, munition depos, military bases and shooting ranges) and has been meet with opposition by the provinces where the future military sites would be constructed. Civilians raise accusations of noise pollution from airplanes or increased road traffic due to the activity of the military site in the proximity. This perceived noise pollution by the civilian population is what the US army calls "the sound of freedom", antithesis underlying the difference in perspectives and priorities between civilians and the military. In the Netherlands, additional conflicting priorities come from citizens who fear they will be deprived of farming or construction land or that military traffic and activities in the area will interfere with their activity. This resistance has determined the Defence state secretary to go on a national tour in

the fall of 2024 in order to address civilian concerns and obtain province support for the "Space for Defence" initiative. Campaigns are being recommended by decision makers and politicians regarding public messaging to counter the negative position vis-a-vis "having defence in your backyard" (former minister of Justice and Security Yeşilgöz, 2025), by focusing on the positive aspects of the closeness between the military and the civilians in cities and regions. In response to initial opposition reactions, a spatial – environmental - economic analysis has been commissioned in order to scientifically ground the official argumentation, with the associated criticism of the inherent delay that this will have on the start of the implementation measures. Land, noise and CO2 quotas therefore have to be negotiated for defence, as in democratic states the population has to "buy in" defence and resilience strategies, since motivation plays a key factor in long term support. These positions have also been criticised as a manifestation of a "culture of restrictions" or "culture of rules", where right- and left-wing politics clash in their views over national and international priorities.

Relevant to this debate is the distinction between the support for the national military and the support for investments, in terms of budget, manpower and public attention in international military alliances such as NATO, with population support being higher for the first category and linked to the question previously mentioned: What is one willing to defend and support? (the span of military support or engagement). In the Netherlands, initiatives of strengthening support for military forward facing initiatives or support for enhancing power projection such as involvement in NATO include a "NATO tour" – a series of debates and events, with high representatives of NATO taking the stage to bridge priorities and topics of concern (Openrijk, 2025). These initiatives can serve a nudging function in the direction of building up willingness to defend or to fight. Another measure for stimulating the support of the population towards the military is encouraging private investments in the defence sector, in addition to the public ones, such as investment of pension funds in risky assets in the defence sector (NPO Buitenhof, 2025; Financial Times, 2025) that up to recently was not done. This overlaps with a previous general reticence of investments

in the defence sector (often streaming from value infused beliefs), being seen as supporting military action representing either aggressive posturing or involvement in conflicts that were far from one's own territory.

If visible markers of military presence have been contested in the last decennia in Europe, based on political or ethical positions towards the need for military preparedness, presence or continuation, lessons can be learned from the war in Ukraine on the way markers of military presence become seamlessly embedded within city structures and accepted by the civilian population. Here, visual (and acoustic) military presence has become stable part of the structure of cities and road infrastructure and accepted by the population. Camouflage fatigues, while obviously being visible in civilian life (on streets, in cities) are not perceived as alterity or separate military position, in a context where an entire country is at war and the boundary between military and civilians becomes in practice blurred.

Similar discussions on population resistance to initiatives around military objectives and re-purposing of the living environment have been taking place in Sweden: one regarding the expansion of a shooting range and the time intervals in which it can be used, given, among other factors, noise pollution, and another on the growing usage of wind power, which comes into conflict with the army's interest of having unobstructed manoeuvrer air space. This stands to show how resource scarcity at national level influences strategies for obtaining population support and building resilience and why resilience programmes must be context specific, both in terms of history and geography.

Plans for resilience must thus also consider the built environment, its intersection with geographical factors and population characteristics. Resilience elements can be built in the city if this factor is considered in the design phase, and arguably, some cities present structural characteristics that better facilitate resilience. Spatial capital can play a role in building or facilitating population resilience, understood as capacity to withstand crisis, conflict or hardship. Analysing cities case studies from different countries in contemporary and historical perspective, looking at historical determinism, understood as city history shaping moments and also corelating with population density is of relevance for future development of the built environment, with resilience in the

face of conflict, crisis or war in mind. High population density represents a challenge for governments looking at resilience plans, given the pressure on critical infrastructure, services and subsistence means. Drawing on learnings from current conflict areas on how city design reacts to conflict and how conflict leaves its mark on cities is useful for plans of embedding resilience within the constructed space. Conflict preparedness initiatives include construction of new buildings for defence purposes or restoring of disaffected ones. Learning from post-conflict reconstruction efforts, governments deciding on urban development with resilience in mind can indicate their stance towards conflict, positioning themselves either towards restauration to pre-conflict status or reconstructing in anticipation of future conflict. Reconstruction cases in Israel are examples of the latter, with both efforts to aestheticize military infrastructure and reconstruction indicating the acceptance of parametrization of state of conflict. Visible indicator of this is the phenomenon of migrating from constructing of shelters at community level in the 60's and 70's to individual shelters in the present day (Dainese & Stanicic, 2022). In this regard, governments currently look into the rehabilitation of existing but often disaffected network of bunkers. Finland for example, has kept 50.000 cold war civil defence shelters functional that can receive 85% of the population. In the Netherlands, a relative wide network of such bunkers exists, some of which are visible – such as the Atlantic wall line on the coast of the North Sea, and open for visiting during "Bunker day". As of January 2025, Norway's government has been reported to plan for resuming construction of bomb shelters in reaction to the war in Ukraine (The Kyiv Independent, 2025). While building such new constructions might not be feasible or at least not a priority for all EU countries, the rehabilitation of existing spaces is a more practical step towards resilience building. Through visibility campaigns for these locations, awareness can be raised and resilience measures can be further elaborated in an indirect matter. From Finland comes another example of government measure taken to prepare the population for conflict, namely the opening of 300 new gun ranges for people who are interested in training, in addition to the reported 670 ones that are already active (Business Insider, 2024). This initiative is aligned with the idea that "when you need to know how to shoot or swim and you

don't, it's too late" (Sweden Herald, 2024). Another initiative that serves as indicator of the preparedness for conflict and a measure of building up resilience from Finland is that of the opening of 300 "crisis stores" that will be open only in time of crisis and are supplied with the basic good that the population needs. This comes in addition to the reported state owned grain stores, who's location and size remain secret (Sweden Herald, 2025).

Of fundamental importance to the acceptance of these measures is the perception of the need to counter an immediate threat. In this regard, nuances regarding perceptions of threats to national identity as being either far away or an existential war play a fundamental role in population acceptance, either immediate or gradual. Recent reiterations of the principle "Armies fight battles, nations fight wars" come to mind here. Should the conflict or threat be perceived not as one of national interests, acceptance most likely will be low or slower. However, little research exists regarding what citizens are willing to do in preparation for the crisis, thus *before* the crisis has manifested itself. In the case of Sweden, the scale of willingness and preparedness to protect is developed in answer to the official policy that the Swedish population has a duty to contribute to the country's total defence and that "everyone […] can be called up to assist in various ways *in the event of the threat of* war and war" [emphasis added]. This demarcation implies different engagement levels. At the same time, it requires a gradual escalation of proactive actions in response to enhanced hostilities that need prior build-up or reinforcement. Recent surveys have also shown that threat perception has little or no explanatory value on the will to defend in the Swedish context, but factors such as gender, trust and political orientation do (Persson & Widmalm, 2023).

Differences in declared levels of the willingness of fight can be explained by several factors and should always be considered in their dynamic character. Strong expressed country attachment can be explained by multiple and different causes: proximity of threats shaping internal cohesion against a common visible enemy or the strength of the collective identity. Onderco et al. (2024) make the case that patriotism is a factor influencing willingness to fight and resilience. Recent polls in Germany and more broadly across Europe (Politico, 2024) also indicate a low willingness of the young generation to

engage in armed conflict, even if the threat would be to their own country, a phenomenon worrying politicians and policy makers who are working on action plans for increasing the willingness to fight and to defend. In a similar vein, in the Netherlands, public opinion queries among the young generation indicate that the willingness to fight is higher than the willingness to die in combat (Brink, 2025). In the Netherlands, the concept of preparedness to die [in combat] - *sneuvel-bereid* - has been brought forward in recent public debates (NPO, 2025, a; b), investigating the willingness and length of potential involvement in a potential conflict. Within the military itself, the concept is linked with the motto of the Dutch military "Protect what we cherish" (*Bescherm wat ons dierbaar is*). Noteworthy here is also the dynamic dimension of the expressed levels of the willingness to fight, that can oscillate as influenced by national or international shaping events.

These examples can be placed on a spectrum ranging from seed initiatives serving for preparedness for conflict, nudging function in building resilience to determining a switch in the mentality of the population in regards to a possible conflict, but are insufficient for overall population psychological resilience. For solid resilience, additional factors need to be considered and addressed, as presented in the following.

Psychological, cultural and historical factors

Psychological resilience is considered an outlier within the realm of resilience analysis, that mostly focuses on material factors, which are also easier to plan for (Eken et al., 2024). The willingness to fight is arguably the most difficult factor to operationalize, measure and plan for (Conable at al., 2019). Willingness to defend and actively prepare for participation in eventual hostilities is not only shaped by manifest top-down resilience campaigns, but is also influenced by "soft" factors such as cultural and historical aspects, national identity, feeling of belonging or historical grievances.

Psychological, historic and cultural factors influence people's willingness to fight, an essential element of resilience. A country's resilience and psychological defence capabilities must cover a broad spectrum of conflicts, including severe crises and war (Palmertz et al, 2024). Psychological resilience (the X factor as some name it)

embodies the populace's readiness to defend their nation or adhere to directives during crises (Eken et al., 2024) and is specifically addressed in the new edition of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency - MSB brochure "If war or crisis comes." These "soft" elements have been traditionally studied in the context of conflicts in the physical realm. Nowadays however, the cyber domain has opened a new battle ground in both the digital and physical domain, changing modern day warfare and exacerbating grey zone conflicts. As the digital realm is purposefully used in cognitive warfare, it has changed the traditional boundaries of war. Acts of aggression are currently not limited to the territorial integrity of the state, but manifest themselves as hybrid threats, and sometimes in unassuming ways, targeting population psychology. Cognitive warfare, enabled by technological means, is a key element in offensive and defensive postures of state actors. In active combat, the population's will to continue fighting is an important factor for resilience. In destabilizing the adversary, cognitive warfare is used by altering how a target population thinks and how it acts in order to redirect the populations behaviour towards the adversary's interests. Cognitive warfare is meant to create social effects in a certain society and also affects reaction capabilities during a crisis. The population's impermeability to foreign influence is a constituent element of whole of society defence, as civilians can represent a liability for national defence if easily manipulated. Population resilience is needed more than ever and information and psychological operations are thus an important part of national defence strategies. Deploying timely initiatives to build this resilience is paramount, as willingness to fight is key for engagement in combat. Paradoxically though, resilience plans assume the temporality of conflict, on different time scales and include variants of timelines. From the perspective of the willingness to fight, temporality is most likely desirable, since a time horizon makes willingness to resist more acceptable for the population. In the same time, resilience needs time and proactive measures to be built up in the population *prior to the outbreak* of a conflict. Resilience programs also have to take into account the time needed for population resilience to be build-up in a sustainable manner. Resilience and willingness to defend require build up, through constant

interventions and messaging. Timing is therefore important. Medium to long time preparation is needed. Early televised examples are the campaigns in the 50's and 60's of what to do in case of nuclear attack. Current campaigns focus rather on written forms. It is too late to address willingness to defend and population resilience after a conflict has started given that (among other factors) prolonged conflict can impact willingness to fight, as the population might develop other coping mechanisms. For example, daily repeated air raids in Kiev determining air alerts and calls addressed to the public to run for shelter are considered to target the psychology of the population, rather than having a tactical role in terms of hard military gain. After 3 years of conflict also, population de-sensibilisation to the air sirens is reported upon, again showcasing the need for careful consideration of how psychological resilience must be considered in comprehensive resilience programs. Active war theatres reflect the importance of accumulated psychological resilience. Strengthening resilience for long term conflict contributes to delaying or avoiding (if possible) reaching a breaking point in population willingness to withstand hardship or manifest actively resistance in case of active conflict. Conable (2024) makes the case of the importance of the psychological profile in the case of the Russian historical experiences shaping the current position in Russia's war in Ukraine. Understanding the historical and cultural contexts influence in peoples' will to fight is a key factor both in building one's own defence and in knowing how to defeat the enemy (Conable, 2024). Such as in the case of the war in Ukraine, it becomes then a matter of priority whose population first loses the will to fight – the opponents or one's own or that of one's allies.

Psychological resilience must also include resilience in front of foreign information and manipulation campaigns, as explained in the previous sections. These can influence the population's willingness to defend or fight. Testimony of this is the inclusion in the MSB brochure "If crisis or war comes" of the visually emphasised message: *If Sweden is attacked by another country, we will never give up. All information to the effect that resistance is to cease is false*. This messaging stands to counter envisioned disinformation campaigns and to build a national identity around the primordiality of protecting the country and willingness to defend. Lessons

regarding resistance to foreign information campaigns are to be learned also from the Eastern countries of the former communist bloc. States formally in the USSR's sphere of influence are better prepared against Russian foreign influence. Experiencing life under the communist regime or in the USSR sphere of influence has better prepared the population for resistance to manipulation or political extremism, in the sense of cognitive dissonance or what is "double think" in Orwellian terms, where public and private discourses and beliefs are separated as means of survival strategies. Because under communist rule this strategy was played out by most individuals of society, leading to a general double life in terms of manifested and real beliefs, it became a forming experience, also affecting future generations and structures. As memory shaping events become collective memory, in the former USSR sphere of influence there is a natural distrust towards messaging from Russia. A relevant example in this regard is to be found in the repeated warnings of the European Eastern states regarding the intentions and imminence of the threat posed by the Putin regime before the start of the war in Ukraine, warnings that political analysts found post-factum to be well founded and yet wrongly ignored by Western states. East European states were much more familiar with the true nature of the danger posed by the Putin regime and yet their repeated warnings were ignored due to a perceived less important geo-political position at the time. The collective memory reflecting the experience of life under undemocratic regimes and life behind the iron curtain is a factor to be considered when analysing population resilience in the face of FIMI. Anticipated population resistance is an important factor in state actors calculating decisions on military or covert actions. Such was the case of the 1980-81 Polish crisis, when the USSR anticipated that rather than seeing an insurmountable military resistance in Poland, as had been the case in Czechoslovakia, the population resistance would be much stronger and long lasting, factor which would have led to high costs long term for administrating the invaded territory (CIA, 1981). The anticipated subversion activities from the local population towards the occupier's economic activity would have made USSR aid necessary, again raising the costs of holding the taken territory (Michaels, 2024). This is an example of population resistance overweighing the gains of a

successful military intervention and the importance of sound "ground knowledge". Population resilience is also reflected in social cohesion, as explained in the following section.

Network strength

Existing rifts in the social fabric of a country are factors that have to be considered for both resilience and the will to defend as: 1. threat actors can exploit these rifts in order to destabilize democracies and 2. they contribute to the sense of collective identity, which is an element influencing the willingness to defend.

The role of the collective identity and its (possible) tensions with pluralism in democratic systems should also be investigated in order to identify the (possible) impact of internal structural cleavages on collective identity and subsequently on the willingness to defend. In the social sciences field, research has shown that social engagement and network size influence individual wellbeing and success chances in normal conditions (Granovetter, 1973). When considered in resilience programs, these can be factors in the equation determining the timespan of individual and group resilience in crisis, as it builds psychological and resource resilience. Resilience plans also have to incorporate forms of social capital dominant in different demographic groups: bridging social capital representing links between different groups and bonding social capital representing in-group strong links (Putnam, 2000). What form of social capital is most useful for resilience in case of crisis should further be analysed and tested by research. Multicultural or diverse societies might face additional challenges when it comes to the build-up of resilience within the population, due to different socio-economic and psychological profiles. The structure of networks (social capital) within a society is thus an important factor for both broader military strategy and specifically for societal resilience. Diverse networks (the strength of ties) facilitate access to information and resources, which for long term resilience are essential. From a military or strategic perspective, ground knowledge – that is knowledge about the opponents' cultural norms, power and social networks, cultural norms etc. has been a factor taken into the equation in calculations in military context. This is knowledge that goes both ways: in terms of enhancing one's own defence capabilities and being able to use that knowledge of the

opponents' position for own gain. Obtaining intel as to where the opponent might draw new capabilities from and ways of reasoning and acting have long been a factor used in military preparedness and combat theatres, notably in the controversial Human Terrain System deployed by the US army in theatres in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As mentioned above, national identity is a factor taken into consideration in resilience and willingness to fight calculations and campaigns. This is influenced by historical factors, but feeling of belonging can be a shaping factor. Here again, the previously mentioned quote from the MSB brochure is relevant, indicating the collective positioning towards conflict. Looking at the case of the Netherlands, the feeling of identity is relevant given the polder model, which accommodates diversity and silos - what once was called the "pillarization" of society. Identity is a factor with high durability impact on the will to fight (Conable et al., 2018). This factor is of importance for targeting resilience programs in relation to differences in social network types and types of links. In the Netherlands, in cities such as Amsterdam, the majority – minority definition is being contested by researchers (see for example the works of Crul). The allochthon - autochthon demarcation has been officially abolished, and characterization of population groups is most objectively done in terms of individuals with or without migration background. On the backdrop of this diversity, the question of correctly analysing willingness to fight at population level - as a whole - comes up. Rather than looking at the whole, willingness to fight in multicultural societies should be analysed in the context of specific characteristics of population groups and consider any historical grievances that might influence degree of involvement.

Closing remarks

This report presented elements that should be considered by governments when planning and implementing comprehensive resilience campaigns as response to the current threats and increasing conflict levels within and in the proximity of Europe. The report also brought together factors that have been identified in the literature as having an impact on resilience and the will to fight, and different existing conceptualization frameworks in a novel, multi-layered conceptualisation. The report reviewed the wide range of factors that

need to be considered when planning comprehensive resilience programmes, showcasing how a wide range of diverse factors influence the willingness to defend, from hard of structural factors to soft ones.

If Sweden and the Nordic states have built their resilience levels in years, in the current geopolitical context states must implement enhanced similar programs in order to best be prepared for the potential of conflict escalating into war or present day wars overspilling over borders onto EU and NATO territory. Developing respond and recover answers in case of crisis or manifest conflict is easier, given enough resources and considering constraints, then it is to plan for such responses in the case of hybrid warfare or cognitive warfare. The new grey zone type of warfare is more difficult to prepare for, manifesting itself at levels that remain under detection or under conflict thresholds. It is also much more difficult to build population resilience for such hybrid conflict. If dedicated security services have insight into threats, outside interference included, they cannot overtly disclose everything that would facilitate or enable population resilience. Additionally, resilience programs, while aiming to rapidly achieve targets, must consider conflict directed messaging fatigue within the population, as over messaging could prove counter effective. Gradual or scenario based approaches are better suited for resilience building, with simple measures such as having “three days” emergency packages in house as a good start for initiating the wider reflection on population resilience. In a more complex approach, governments should also analyse any fault lines within their societies, weather these are social, technological or economic, that could serve as entry points for disruptive foreign actions. Reflecting on own sense of history and including identity shaping stories contributes to stronger cohesion and willingness to defend. When developing resilience campaigns and disseminating results publicly in order to showcase and strengthen results, governments and public bodies should manifest caution in regards with the publicly available data on governmental predictions and plans for resilience, since open statements such as “Country X has the autonomy or the capability to withstand one month in case of conflict” can influence an aggressor’s plans.

One final point regards the subject of the costs incurred for building resilience. In

the new political economy, one must always answer questions on: What is the cost of something? What must be prioritized? In the case of building population resilience, the question is:

What is the cost of inaction?

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About the author

Diana M. Popa is independent researcher and CEO at Red Sky 4. With over 17 years of experience in academia, she has authored numerous scientific articles. Recent research focuses on resilience as part of defence programmes, emerging disruptive technologies, in particular Artificial Intelligence in high risk areas, including defence.

diana.m.nl@ziggo.nl

Red Sky 4
The Hague, 2554 GX
The Netherlands
www.redsky4.nl
Redsky4@ziggo.nl