International Journal of Business and Quality Research

https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJBQR
E-ISSN: 2985-9468

Civilian Power In National Defence Sweden's Model Of Integrated Societal Security

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Abstract

This article examines how Sweden integrates and mobilizes its civilian population as a core component of its revitalized Total Defence strategy in the 21st century. Building on concepts from Clausewitz's Total War, and Holling's Resilience Theory, the study analyzes Sweden's shift toward a whole-of-society defence model capable of responding to hybrid, cyber, and infrastructural threats. Using a qualitative research method supported by a systematic literature review, the analysis reveals three key mechanisms of civilian mobilization: strengthened civil–military coordination, structured preparedness education, and the incorporation of voluntary organizations and private sector infrastructure into defence planning. The findings show that Sweden's Total Defence now functions as an adaptive societal ecosystem in which civilians contribute directly to national resilience. This approach demonstrates how modern defence strategies can transform societal readiness into a strategic advantage.

Keywords: Sweden, Total Defence, societal security, civilian mobilization, resilience, civil–military cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Sweden's approach to national defence has undergone significant transformation over the past century, shaped by geopolitical shifts, societal changes, and evolving security threats. During the Cold War, Sweden adopted a comprehensive Total Defence (Totalförsvaret) model that integrated military and civilian preparedness into a unified national security system. The principle was based on the belief that all sectors of society government agencies, private industry, municipalities, and citizens shared responsibility for national survival (Bergman, 2021). This included civil defence shelters, food reserves,

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E-ISSN: 2985-9468

conscription, and continuity mechanisms for critical infrastructure. Larsson (2020) explains that Swedish total defence culture normalized the idea that "society itself is a defence resource," making civilian participation an institutionalized expectation rather than an exceptional measure. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Sweden downsized many defence structures during the 1990s and early 2000s, reflecting broader European assumptions that interstate conflict had become unlikely. Military units were disbanded, civil defence agencies reorganized, and readiness planning reduced.

Sweden represents an analytically significant case for examining civilian power in national defence because its socio-economic profile makes extensive societal mobilisation theoretically unexpected. Sweden is an advanced economy with a population of approximately 10.6 million and a median age of around 41 years (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2023). It consistently ranks among the highest globally in human development, income equality, education, and life satisfaction (OECD, 2023a). Sweden is also one of Europe's most digitalized societies, with more than 95 percent of households connected to the internet and extensive reliance on digital public services (OECD, 2023b). Conventional security assumptions suggest that affluent and technologically advanced societies are less inclined to accept collective defence obligations requiring civilian preparedness or sacrifice. However, Sweden also faces structural vulnerabilities because more than 60 percent of critical infrastructure including electricity distribution, telecommunications, transportation, and food logistics is operated by private actors and dependent on digital systems (MSB, 2019).

Sweden's security reorientation accelerated as emerging threats increasingly targeted societal functions rather than territorial integrity alone. The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency identifies cyberattacks, foreign information influence operations, and supply chain disruptions as primary national risks (MSB, 2020). These vulnerabilities were reinforced by the 2017 Stockholm terrorist attack, foreign disinformation campaigns, and systemic stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sundelius & Eldeblad, 2022). Consequently, Sweden shifted its preparedness policies toward protecting "functions essential to society" (MSB, 2020).

Geopolitical developments further intensified this reassessment. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 fundamentally altered Sweden's threat perception, leading to the reinstatement of Total Defence Planning in 2015 and the reintroduction of conscription in 2017 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021). Defence spending increased from approximately 1.0 percent of GDP in 2014 to more than 2.0 percent by 2024 (SIPRI, 2024). Sundelius & Eldeblad argue that these reforms reflected recognition that effective defence requires both military capability and societal resilience,

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E-ISSN: 2985-9468

especially in an era of hybrid threats and grey-zone tactics. Sweden's experience demonstrated that military power alone cannot ensure national integrity without informed citizens, resilient infrastructure, and trusted institutions.

This recognition encouraged the development of an all-hazards approach integrating civil and military responses while expanding national defence toward societal resilience. For Sweden, societal security does not replace total defence but reframes it. The emphasis on civil–military cooperation, public communication, and infrastructure protection reflects the belief that contemporary crises require coordination across all sectors. Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency (Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar), operational since 2022, illustrates how safeguarding public perception and countering foreign information influence are now considered essential defence components. As threats increasingly blur the line between peace and conflict, Sweden positions civilians not as passive stakeholders but as active contributors to national security.

The reinvigorated total defence model repositions society as a strategic resource. MSB's preparedness campaigns, including the 2018 redistribution of the brochure "If Crisis or War Comes," emphasize household readiness in food, water, communication, and first aid. The document explicitly frames civilian preparedness as a contribution to national security. Meanwhile, public–private partnerships in energy, telecommunications, transportation, and logistics acknowledge that most critical systems in Sweden are privately owned, requiring collaborative defence planning (Petersson & Mattsson, 2019). Sweden's application for NATO membership in 2022 further reflects the strategic importance of integrating societal resilience with collective defence structures. Thus, Sweden's contemporary approach illustrates a synthesis between classical total defence principles and modern societal security requirements.

Previous research on Sweden's defence transformation is extensive yet fragmented. Bynander and Nohrstedt (2019) examine Sweden's crisis management evolution and highlight the growing role of municipalities and agencies in coordinating non-military emergencies. Larsson (2020) explains how total defence thinking persisted through agency networks and research centres despite reduced military spending. Sundelius and Eldeblad (2022) demonstrate how Sweden combines classical defence principles with modern crisis paradigms, emphasizing civilian involvement at all preparedness levels. Additional research by Engström (2020) and the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) explores hybrid threats and national vulnerabilities, reinforcing arguments for whole-of-society resilience.

Despite these contributions, existing literature often treats military and civilian preparedness as separate rather than integrated domains. There is limited systematic analysis of how civilians are mobilized and how this mobilisation contributes to broader

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defence objectives. Research frequently emphasizes institutional reforms or historical narratives while paying less attention to practical mechanisms such as public communication strategies, readiness exercises, and civil–military coordination structures. Furthermore, although scholars acknowledge the significance of psychological defence and information resilience, empirical analyses of their implementation remain limited. Thus, there is a need for research that explicitly conceptualises and evaluates civilian power as a strategic component of national defence rather than merely a supportive or symbolic one.

The evolution of Sweden's defence model raises a central question: **How does Sweden integrate and mobilize its civilian population as a strategic component of national defence within its contemporary societal security framework?** While Sweden's security institutions highlight the importance of civilian readiness, resilience, and cooperation, academic literature has yet to fully analyze how these components function cohesively within the broader total defence system.

This research seeks to fill that gap by examining civilian roles not as peripheral elements but as integral assets in the defence architecture. The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to describe the mechanisms through which Sweden mobilizes and integrates civilian actors including households, private companies, and local governments into defence planning; (2) to analyze how these mechanisms reflect the combined logic of Total Defence Theory and Societal Security Theory; and (3) to assess how civilian capacity contributes to national resilience and strategic deterrence.

The benefits of this research are both theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, it advances understanding of how modern states operationalize whole-of-society defence concepts in the context of hybrid threats and transboundary crises. Empirically, this research provides insights for countries seeking to strengthen civil defence structures, including Indonesia with its Sishankamrata doctrine emphasizing citizen participation in national defence. By analyzing Swedish experience through defence and security studies theories, this study contributes to cross-national learning and strengthens frameworks for societal resilience. Ultimately, the research highlights the strategic value of civilians as agents of security, not merely recipients of state protection, and demonstrates how modern defence requires mobilisation beyond the military sphere.

Theory and Concept

Clausewitz's Concept of Total War

Carl von Clausewitz remains one of the most influential military theorists in strategic studies. In *On War* (1832), he explains that war is fundamentally an extension of politics by other means. Clausewitz's concept of Total War refers to a theoretical condition in which the

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full resources, energy, and moral will of a state are mobilized to defeat an adversary (Clausewitz, 1976). Although he acknowledged that real wars rarely reach this "absolute" form due to political constraints and human limitations, the concept established the idea of war as a whole-of-society effort. Total War integrates political leadership, military force, economic capacity, and societal resolve into a unified framework. Clausewitz also emphasized that civilian morale, political unity, and social cohesion constitute the moral forces of war, often more decisive than material power. This perspective aligns closely with Sweden's Total Defence model, where the military is only one component of broader societal mobilization.

Clausewitz further highlights the interdependence between war and society, arguing that political objectives determine the means and methods of warfare. In Sweden's context, the political objective of safeguarding societal continuity reflects this premise. Sweden's reinvigorated Total Defence adapts Clausewitz's theory to modern hybrid threats by incorporating cyber readiness, civil preparedness, psychological defence, and critical infrastructure protection. Rather than focusing solely on conventional military operations, Sweden broadens defence into societal domains. Clausewitz's emphasis on mobilizing the whole nation therefore provides a theoretical basis for understanding why Sweden integrates civilians into national defence.

Clausewitz's theory also offers interpretive tools for analyzing civilian mobilization as a strategic asset. In *On War*, he identifies the "people" as one pillar of the paradoxical trinity alongside the military and government (Clausewitz, 1976). The people represent passion, resilience, and collective will, shaping the intensity and sustainability of conflict. This trinitarian model corresponds directly with Sweden's Total Defence doctrine, which distributes security responsibilities among government agencies, armed forces, civil institutions, private actors, and citizens. Sweden's initiatives ranging from household preparedness campaigns to the reactivation of conscription demonstrate the principle that national defence depends on both material and immaterial forces. Civilian preparedness, including emergency supplies, crisis communication, and participation in resilience networks, reflects the Clausewitzian view that societal participation strengthens deterrence and national survival.

Resilience Theory

Resilience Theory was introduced by ecologist C. S. Holling in "Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems" (1973). Holling defines resilience as the capacity of systems to absorb disturbances while maintaining core functions (Holling, 1973). Unlike stability, which focuses on equilibrium, resilience emphasizes adaptation, reorganization, and

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recovery after shocks. Although originally developed in ecological studies, resilience theory has increasingly influenced national security and defence scholarship in response to complex and interconnected threats.

An important contribution is Boin, Comfort, and Demchak's *Designing Resilience: Preparing for Extreme Events* (2010), which applies resilience thinking to crisis management and national security governance. The authors argue that modern threats such as terrorism and infrastructure failures are characterized by uncertainty, cascading effects, and cross-sectoral interdependence. They define resilience as the ability of governance systems to coordinate, adapt, and maintain functionality during extreme disruptions, extending Holling's ecological insights to state-level crisis response.

David Chandler further developed resilience as a framework for contemporary security policy. In *Resilience: The Governance of Complexity* (2014) and *Security Through Societal Resilience* (2019), Chandler explains that states increasingly define security not through eliminating threats, but through strengthening societal adaptability and self-organization. His work is particularly relevant because it demonstrates how resilience shifts responsibility from centralized state control toward distributed societal actors, including civilians and private infrastructure operators.

At the institutional level, NATO formally integrated resilience into defence planning through *Resilience and Article 3* (2016). NATO defines resilience as the ability of societies to resist, absorb, and recover from major shocks while maintaining essential functions. The policy operationalizes resilience across civilian sectors such as energy, communications, transportation, and governance, reinforcing the strategic importance of civilian preparedness and societal robustness. Modern interpretations of resilience emphasize robustness, adaptability, and transformability (Folke et al., 2010). However, Holling's theory provides limited explanation regarding how resilience is intentionally constructed through political authority, governance arrangements, and civilian legitimacy in national defence contexts.

Sweden's societal security model closely aligns with Resilience Theory because it seeks to maintain critical societal functions including transportation, communication, energy, and healthcare under severe stress. The shift from a strictly military understanding of defence toward an all-hazards approach reflects the transition from stability to resilience. In Sweden's Total Defence system, resilience is operationalized through civil preparedness campaigns, interagency cooperation, and infrastructure redundancies. The integration of households, private companies, municipalities, and national agencies into defence planning reflects Holling's logic that resilience emerges from networked systems with distributed capacities.

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Sweden's civil defence duties and public education campaigns aim to cultivate adaptive capacity at the societal level. By preparing citizens to maintain basic needs during disruptions, Sweden strengthens resilience against both natural disasters and hostile actions. In this context, resilience becomes not merely a defensive attribute but a proactive national strategy. Resilience Theory also explains how Sweden conceptualizes societal mobilization as a form of strategic deterrence. Resilient systems reduce vulnerability by increasing their capacity to absorb, adapt, and reorganize in the face of shocks, thereby reducing the effectiveness of hostile disruption.

Sweden's emphasis on infrastructure redundancy, decentralized governance, and civil–military coordination reflects this resilience-based security model. According to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), resilience exists when "society continues to function even under severe pressures," making disruption less effective as a hostile strategy (MSB, 2020). Resilience Theory also highlights the importance of social capital and public trust, both essential for crisis communication and psychological defence. Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency demonstrates this investment in societal resilience.

Furthermore, Sweden's systematic crisis evaluations, public reporting, and policy adaptation reflect Holling's principle of adaptive learning. Through continuous evaluation and institutional adjustment, Sweden strengthens its ability to respond to emerging threats, consistent with the concept of transformability. Together with Clausewitz's notion of mobilizing societal will, Resilience Theory provides the analytical foundation for understanding Sweden's transformation into a modern societal-based defence system, where civilian readiness functions as a core strategic capability rather than merely a supporting role.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research method to examine how Sweden integrates and mobilizes civilian capacity within its Total Defence and societal security framework. Qualitative research is appropriate because the topic involves social processes, institutional practices, and policy mechanisms that cannot be captured through numerical measurement alone. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative inquiry allows researchers to explore complex, context-dependent phenomena through textual interpretation and conceptual analysis. In the context of this study, qualitative methods enable the examination of defence doctrines, government policies, agency reports, and scholarly literature to identify patterns of civilian mobilization. This approach is essential for understanding how Sweden operationalizes broad concepts such as resilience, societal security, and total defence, into actionable practices. Through qualitative analysis, the study can interpret

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meaning, trace institutional developments, and evaluate how theory informs policy within Sweden's national defence system.

Qualitative research also facilitates the integration of multiple theoretical lenses, including Clausewitz's Total War, Indonesia's Sishankamrata, and Holling's Resilience Theory. As Maxwell (2013) explains, qualitative design supports flexible, iterative inquiry that allows researchers to establish meaningful connections across complex conceptual frameworks. This is particularly relevant when analyzing Sweden's defence model, which spans military, civilian, political, and infrastructural domains. By employing qualitative methods, the study interprets policy documents such as Sweden's Defence White Papers, MSB guidelines, and municipal preparedness plans to uncover how civil responsibilities are institutionalized. This interpretive process reveals how Sweden embeds civilian participation within broader defence objectives and how these practices evolve in response to emerging threats. The qualitative method therefore provides the depth and flexibility needed to analyze Sweden's integrated societal defence from multiple angles.

The study applies a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to collect, evaluate, and synthesize existing research on Sweden's societal defence, civilian mobilization, and resilience-based security strategies. According to Petticrew and Roberts (2006), SLR provides a structured and transparent method for identifying relevant literature, reducing bias, and generating evidence-based conclusions. This technique is well suited for examining Sweden's defence model, as scholarly discussions on total defence, societal security, and civilian resilience are dispersed across multiple disciplines, including security studies, crisis management, and public policy. The SLR process for this study includes defining inclusion criteria, identifying primary sources (academic articles, government documents, defence analyses), and synthesizing findings to trace conceptual and institutional developments. This allows the research to systematically compare historical, theoretical, and contemporary perspectives on Sweden's civilian integration in defence.

Using SLR also ensures that the analysis is grounded in verifiable and diverse data sources. As Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou (2016) argue, systematic reviews enhance analytical rigor by integrating heterogeneous literature into a coherent interpretive structure. In this study, the SLR process incorporates peer-reviewed journals, Swedish government publications, MSB reports, FOI research papers, NATO assessments, and scholarly work on resilience and total defence. This enables triangulation, cross-validating information across independent sources to strengthen the credibility of findings. The SLR approach also supports thematic coding, allowing the research to identify recurring patterns such as civil–military cooperation, household preparedness, infrastructure resilience, and hybrid-threat responses. Through these synthesized insights, the study provides a

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comprehensive understanding of how Sweden mobilizes civilian capacity as part of its modern defence strategy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reintegrating Society into Total Defence: Sweden's Strategic Shift

At the outset of this research, this paper asks to what extent the civilian population is strategically integrated and mobilised by the Swedish government in response to the security environment surrounding the country. In responding to this question, this paper argues that Sweden's reinstatement of Total Defence after 2014 constitutes a deliberate strategic reorientation rather than a reactive policy reversal. After the Cold War, Sweden reduced military and civil defence capabilities based on the assumption that large-scale interstate conflict in Europe was unlikely. However, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the deterioration of the European security environment exposed the limitations of this mindset, prompting Sweden to reassess its defence foundations (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021).

The strategic rationale for reinstating Total Defence was grounded in the recognition that modern threats increasingly target civilian systems rather than military forces alone. Swedish national risk assessments identify cyberattacks, information influence operations, and supply chain disruptions as primary risks because they undermine essential societal functions such as energy distribution, healthcare, public administration, and public trust (MSB, 2020). Empirical evidence reinforced this concern. In 2022, distributed denial-of-service attacks targeted Swedish banks, media outlets, and government websites following Sweden's NATO application, illustrating how civilian infrastructure can be exploited for geopolitical coercion below the threshold of armed conflict (ENISA, 2023). Since over 95 percent of Swedish households depend on digital public services, disruptions produce systemic consequences beyond their technical scale (OECD, 2023).

Public perception and societal participation therefore became central elements of Sweden's contemporary Total Defence strategy. Following the Crimea crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, surveys by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) showed growing public support for preparedness and resilience as shared national responsibilities rather than solely military tasks. This societal acceptance enabled the institutionalization of civilian involvement through legal obligations, preparedness programs, and coordinated defence planning. The Swedish Total Defence Service Act and related regulations provide the legal basis for mobilizing civilian labour, assigning responsibilities to municipalities and private infrastructure operators, and integrating voluntary defence organizations into national contingency planning. Through this framework, civilian participation is

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systematically organized within state-regulated defence structures rather than occurring spontaneously.

The government reinforces this integration through continuous communication, education, and preparedness exercises. Public campaigns such as *If Crisis or War Comes*, national exercises, and cooperation with schools, municipalities, and civil society organizations cultivate a defence culture in which resilience is understood as a collective civic responsibility. At the operational level, local governments, healthcare systems, transportation operators, emergency agencies, and private infrastructure providers are integrated into coordinated defence planning. Consequently, Sweden's reintegration of society into Total Defence reflects a deliberate effort to transform civilians from passive recipients of security into organized participants within a comprehensive defence posture.

From a resilience theory perspective, these developments revealed that Sweden's vulnerability lay not only in military limitations, but also in the adaptive capacity of civilian systems under stress. Holling's resilience framework conceptualises security as the ability of systems to absorb shocks, reorganise, and maintain essential functions rather than prevent disruption entirely (Holling, 1973). Swedish defence planning increasingly reflected this logic. In 2015, Sweden formally reinstated Total Defence Planning, reintegrating civilian authorities, municipalities, and private infrastructure operators into national defence structures (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021). The reintroduction of conscription in 2017 further symbolised a renewed social contract between state and society. By prioritising societal preparedness, institutional coordination, and civilian participation, Sweden sought to increase the cost of coercion for potential adversaries without escalating militarily. Thus, civilian mobilisation functions as a strategic enabler that strengthens deterrence, sustains essential functions during crises, and operationalises resilience as a core dimension of national security.

Strengthening Civil–Military Synergy Through Institutional Coordination

Civil–military synergy has become the cornerstone of Sweden's modern Total Defence because the armed forces alone cannot address contemporary threats. Since 2017, the Swedish Defence Commission has emphasized that "civil defence is indispensable to military defence," requiring coordinated planning and integrated response capacity (Swedish Defence Commission, 2017). Hybrid threats, cyberattacks, disinformation operations, and critical infrastructure sabotage increasingly target societal vulnerabilities rather than military frontline units. Since more than 60% of Sweden's critical infrastructure is privately owned, effective defence requires coordination among the armed forces, municipalities, national agencies, and private companies (MSB, 2019).

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Institutionally, Sweden has developed mechanisms such as the National Council for Civil Defence, integrated contingency planning cycles, and joint exercises involving the Swedish Armed Forces (Försvarsmakten), MSB, the Police Authority, and regional health boards. Sundelius and Eldeblad (2022) argue that this model combines historical civil–military principles with modern crisis governance. This synergy reflects Holling's resilience framework, where adaptive networks strengthen systemic resilience, while also paralleling Clausewitz's notion that war mobilizes society, government, and the military simultaneously.

One major indicator of strengthened coordination is the expansion of national exercises. Aurora 17 mobilized 19,000 participants, including military units, municipalities, emergency services, and infrastructure operators (Försvarsmakten, 2018). Aurora 23 expanded participation to 26,000 actors and included cyber units, energy companies, and communication providers (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023). These exercises simulate hybrid attack scenarios involving both kinetic and non-kinetic threats. According to the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), such exercises improve inter-organizational communication and crisis adaptation skills (Westerlund & Holmquist, 2021).

Similarly, Totalförsvarsövning 2020 (TFÖ 2020) tested municipalities' abilities to maintain healthcare, logistics, emergency services, and governance during national disruption. More than 400 organizations participated, demonstrating how Sweden institutionalizes civil–military cooperation across multiple levels (MSB, 2021). These exercises reduce "friction" through preparedness and embody resilience principles of continuous learning. Sweden also incorporates voluntary defence organizations (Frivilliga Försvarsorganisationer), whose membership exceeds 100,000 trained civilians in logistics, crisis communication, medical support, and home guard functions (Swedish Home Guard, 2022).

Another critical component is the development of shared information systems and situational awareness platforms. Following the 2017 ransomware attack targeting transportation systems, Sweden expanded secure communication networks such as Säkra Kommunikationen to enable encrypted real-time coordination between the Armed Forces, MSB, municipalities, and infrastructure operators. In 2021, Sweden established the National Cybersecurity Centre (NCSC), integrating the Armed Forces, the Security Service (Säpo), the National Defence Radio Establishment (FRA), and civil agencies into coordinated threat analysis structures (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021). These systems strengthen resilience by enabling rapid cross-sector coordination during cyber and hybrid incidents.

Cooperation has also been strengthened through regional and municipal mechanisms. Sweden's 21 regions and 290 municipalities carry primary responsibility for

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healthcare, emergency services, and local preparedness. MSB requires annual Risk and Vulnerability Analyses (RVA) to identify infrastructure weaknesses and cascading risks (MSB, 2020). These assessments are integrated into national defence planning and shared with the Armed Forces. Municipal cooperation with military units is institutionalized through regional military districts (Militärregioner), which coordinate training and crisis response. Bynander and Nohrstedt (2019) demonstrate that regional coordination significantly improved response effectiveness during the 2018 wildfires, which required cooperation among emergency services, the Armed Forces, and international partners.

Sweden's NATO accession process has further accelerated civil–military integration by aligning Swedish systems with NATO's Resilience Baseline Requirements and Article 3 commitments. NATO requires member states to maintain resilience in energy supply, transportation, communication, and continuity of government (NATO, 2021). Sweden's existing Total Defence model already corresponded with these requirements, but NATO integration has deepened cooperation in logistics, infrastructure protection, and intelligence-sharing. Joint exercises with Finland, Norway, and NATO forces have strengthened interoperable logistics chains and cyber defence protocols (NATO, 2022). As Sundelius & Eldeblad (2022) note, Sweden's Total Defence revival is increasingly embedded within regional and international security ecosystems, extending civil–military synergy beyond national borders.

Operationalizing Civilian Power: Mobilization Mechanisms in Sweden's Total Defence

Sweden operationalizes civilian power through a multi-layered mobilization system integrating individuals, institutions, and infrastructure into defence planning. One of the most prominent mechanisms is the reactivation of mandatory conscription in 2017. Under this system, both men and women participate, reflecting efforts to expand personnel capacity and reconnect citizens with defence obligations. By 2023, Sweden increased annual conscript intakes to 5,000 trainees, with plans to expand to 10,000 by 2030 (Försvarsmakten, 2023). Beyond strengthening military readiness, conscription reinforces the Total Defence norm that every citizen has a role in national security.

Conscription is complemented by the Swedish Home Guard (Hemvärnet), which consists of over 22,000 volunteer personnel trained in logistics, surveillance, rapid response, and infrastructure protection (Swedish Home Guard, 2022). These volunteers maintain civilian careers while contributing to national defence, bridging civilian society and the armed forces. This structure reflects Clausewitz's concept of mobilizing the moral and social energies of the population while aligning with Holling's resilience framework by distributing adaptive capacity across society.

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Operational effectiveness is also sustained through institutional coordination and integrated governance. Sweden's crisis management system follows the principles of responsibility, subsidiarity, and similarity, meaning institutions retain the same responsibilities during crises as in peacetime (MSB, 2021). Operational authority remains decentralized to municipalities and sectoral agencies, while strategic coordination is supervised by MSB and the national government. Since 2015, Sweden has increased funding for civil preparedness, cyber defence, emergency logistics, and infrastructure resilience as part of a whole-of-society defence strategy (Swedish Government, 2020). Nevertheless, challenges remain due to bureaucratic fragmentation and the autonomy of Swedish administrative agencies. Sundelius and Grönvall (2021) note that coordination delays may occur during rapidly evolving hybrid crises requiring simultaneous civilian and military responses.

Sweden also modernized public communication systems through emergency websites, coordinated information dissemination, and cell broadcasting alerts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these mechanisms demonstrated the importance of trusted communication for societal stability. Preparedness education contributes to a cultural shift in which civilians view themselves as active contributors to national security.

Civilian mobilization is further operationalized through 18 officially recognized voluntary defence organizations involving more than 100,000 active members (Swedish Ministry of Defence, 2022). Organizations such as Lottorna, the Swedish Red Cross, and the National Federation of Voluntary Motor Transport Corps provide capabilities in medical support, logistics, communication, and evacuation. Research by FOI (Holmquist & Westerlund, 2020) shows that these organizations strengthen resilience by enhancing local preparedness and enabling rapid mobilization. Their role during the 2018 wildfires demonstrated how voluntary groups can support crisis management under regional coordination.

A further mechanism involves integrating private infrastructure operators into defence planning. Since more than 60% of Sweden's critical infrastructure is privately owned, companies are required to conduct risk assessments, maintain continuity plans, and participate in national exercises (MSB, 2019). Platforms such as the Swedish Security and Preparedness Network (FSPOS) coordinate banks, telecommunications firms, energy providers, and transportation companies. Cyber intrusions targeting Swedish infrastructure demonstrate that private systems are now frontline defence domains (FOI, 2021). Sweden's integration of private sector actors transforms infrastructure from vulnerability points into resilience assets.

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Finally, Sweden promotes community resilience at the municipal level. Municipalities are legally required to conduct annual Risk and Vulnerability Analyses and develop contingency plans for healthcare, water supply, and emergency services. During the 2023 Storm Hans floods, municipalities, volunteers, emergency services, and military units coordinated evacuation and infrastructure protection through structured command and coordination mechanisms (Swedish Civil Protection Report, 2023). Operational leadership remained under MSB, while municipalities retained local responsibility under the principle of subsidiarity. This demonstrates that civilian participation becomes strategically effective when supported by clear command structures, inter-agency coordination, and state oversight embedded within Sweden's Total Defence system.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Sweden integrates and mobilizes its civilian population as a strategic component of national defence within its contemporary societal security framework. To address this research question, the study employed Carl von Clausewitz's concept of Total War and C.S. Holling's Resilience Theory as its primary analytical foundations. Clausewitz's perspective contributed to understanding how national defence extends beyond military institutions by emphasizing the importance of the people, the state, and the military as interconnected elements within national security. Meanwhile, Holling's Resilience Theory provided a framework for analyzing how societies adapt, absorb, and recover from disruptions through flexible and decentralized systems. Together, these theories enabled the study to assess Sweden's Total Defence model not only as a military strategy, but also as a societal resilience framework that integrates civilian capacity into national preparedness and crisis response.

The findings demonstrate that Sweden's revitalization of Total Defence in the 21st century reflects a comprehensive transformation in the understanding of national security. Faced with hybrid threats, cyber disruptions, disinformation campaigns, and growing geopolitical uncertainty in Europe, Sweden has reconstructed a defence system that treats society itself as a strategic asset. Civilian participation is institutionalized through conscription policies, voluntary defence organizations, municipal preparedness systems, public communication programs, and integrated civil–military coordination mechanisms. Rather than positioning civilians as passive beneficiaries of security, Sweden incorporates them directly into preparedness structures designed to maintain continuity during crises and support national defence operations. This reflects Clausewitz's notion that the strength of a nation during conflict depends not only on military force, but also on the collective mobilization and cohesion of society.

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E-ISSN: 2985-9468

The study further finds that Sweden operationalizes civilian power through institutional continuity, coordinated governance, and resilience-based planning. The principles of responsibility, subsidiarity, and similarity ensure that government agencies, municipalities, and emergency institutions maintain consistent operational roles during both normal and crisis situations. This continuity minimizes confusion and strengthens responsiveness during emergencies. At the same time, Sweden's resilience-oriented approach emphasizes adaptability, decentralization, and societal preparedness, which are central components of Holling's Resilience Theory. Through preparedness education, voluntary participation, infrastructure protection, and inter-agency coordination, Sweden develops a societal structure capable of absorbing shocks while maintaining essential state functions. The integration of private sector operators, local governments, and defence institutions within unified planning systems further demonstrates how resilience is embedded across multiple levels of governance.

Ultimately, Sweden's contemporary Total Defence model illustrates how national resilience can be transformed into a strategic defence capability. The Swedish experience shows that effective national defence in the modern era depends not solely on military strength, but also on the preparedness, adaptability, and participation of society as a whole. By integrating civilian institutions, communities, and state structures into a unified defence framework, Sweden has created a model of societal security capable of responding to both conventional and non-conventional threats. As Sweden strengthens its position within the NATO security environment, this whole-of-society approach becomes increasingly significant for both domestic defence and collective security cooperation. Therefore, Sweden's Total Defence system provides an important example of how civilian mobilization, institutional resilience, and coordinated governance can function together as essential pillars of contemporary national defence.

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