SUPO 2022

# Yearbook

# 2022


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# Finland's national security is characterised by a war in Europe

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, the threat of hybrid influencing in Finland, invitee status at NATO and other changes in the security environment were key issues in the work of Supo in 2022.

**Antti Pelttari**
Director of Supo

The exceptional nature of 2022 has been evident in the work of security authorities. Aggressive behaviour by the Russian state remains the single greatest threat to Finland's national security. That is also why Russia is the central theme of this yearbook.

The tensions in our security situation highlight the need for reliable intelligence. Policymakers must have accurate situation awareness regarding Finland's security and associated threats. Supo gathers, analyses and reports intelligence that Finland's state leadership cannot obtain from other sources. Such intelligence is important and unique, and I believe this is now even more profoundly recognised than before.

The mission of Supo as an intelligence service is to anticipate potential developments and describe alternative futures to policymakers. Among the articles in this yearbook, we feature a scenario analysis outlining the possible repercussions of Russia's war on its internal affairs.

While intelligence is usually classified, the USA issued a rare public release of its intelligence prior to the Russian invasion. Even though the public disclosure of Russia's plans did not prevent its attack on Ukraine, the publication of intelligence united the West in a swift and decisive response to Russian aggression. I believe that such carefully considered public disclosures of intelligence will from now on be a permanent feature in the toolbox of governments. It is an instrument that also Finland should keep in mind.

The major assault launched by Russia on a neighbouring country changed the foreign and security policy debate in Finland overnight, leading to Finland claiming its so-called NATO option. Though there was no change in Supo's evaluations of Russia, we modified our communications. Threats are now being discussed more explicitly. Frank discussion of threats helps businesses, organisations and individuals  prepare for them.

We must also bear in mind that a public discourse revolving around threats, the energy crisis caused by Russia's actions, as well as high inflation are all likely to raise public concern. It is an unfortunate fact that the fears and concerns of people living in Finland can also be used in a damaging way to unsettle our national unity. Mutual trust is a strength of Finnish society. The more united society is, the better it can withstand difficult times.

The Russian threat to Finland is directed above all at civil society. Various forms of hybrid influencing, such as cyber threats and information influencing, were highly evident last year. Special attention was also paid on protecting the critical infrastructure that is necessary for society to function. An article in this yearbook sheds some light on our related work from the perspective of the energy sector.

The EU countries and the USA imposed strict export controls and sanctions on Russia in response to the war of aggression. The impact of these measures can already be seen in Russia, which is seeking to evade them in many ways. Finnish businesses may also be used to circumvent export controls, so they should be made aware of the risks.

The national debate on joining NATO and Finland's invitee status were viewed by Supo as periods in which Russia might especially seek to influence policymaking in Finland. Fortunately, these problems have not materialised to date.

The threat of espionage, on the other hand, has continued for a long time and remains tangible. Not only Russia, but also China, and certain other countries, seek to gather information by spying and use it to their own advantage and to the detriment of Finland. Supo's decades-long experience in counterintelligence has proven invaluable, enabling us to undermine the human intelligence operations of Russia in Finland significantly during 2022. Supo also has special expertise in combating espionage in the cyber environment.

The past year brought a new collaboration forum for Supo, with invitee status at NATO making us part of the organisation's civilian intelligence community. Even though our collaboration with the security and intelligence services of many countries in the alliance was already deep, Finland's invitee status at NATO has brought new elements into our daily work.

China is a major power whose influence on global politics is also reflected on Finland. Our in-house expertise on China helps Supo interpret the actions and developments of China, and to combat its undesirable influence in Finland. The need for this expertise became evident when the war suddenly disrupted economic relations with Russia and raised concerns in Finland about European dependence on China.

Even though Russia has remained the principal focus of attention over the past year, the threat of terrorism has not evaporated. For that reason, this yearbook also includes the familiar terrorism threat assessment. The greatest threat of terrorism in Finland is still posed by lone operators or small groups motivated by extreme right-wing ideology or radical Islamism.

This yearbook seeks to give the reader a peek behind the scenes and a glimpse of the work of our people in the unusual year 2022. I would also like to thank everyone at Supo for their valuable contribution to Finland's national security. Finland is beginning to reap the benefits of investing in national security through the work of Supo.

# What's next? Supo foresees alternative scenarios on the effects of the Russian war of aggression

Supo analysts have formulated four possible scenarios on how the course of the war will affect Europe and Russia in the short term. Internal developments in Russia have a significant impact on Finland's national security.

The Russian war of aggression has significantly affected the security policy situation in Europe. We do not know all the consequences as the war in Ukraine may progress along highly diverging lines, even in the short term.

As an intelligence service, Supo seeks to anticipate any developments that will affect Finland's national security. This predictive analysis supports the decisions of Finnish policymakers and specialists in foreign and security policy.

Supo analysts have formulated four potential scenarios related to the impacts of the Russian invasion on the internal development of Russia over the next two years. None of these scenarios is likely to materialise precisely, as reality is always more complex than any projection. Foresight is therefore not a matter of foretelling, but of examining a variety of potential futures.

The purpose of the scenarios set out in this article is to help envision various futures.

The four scenarios have been prepared by applying the methods of futures studies, and their joint purpose is to cover the broadest possible range of varying development trajectories. Some of these trajectories are less likely than others. The following scenarios are not listed in any order of assumed likelihood.

## Shocks or otherwise surprising events

Besides these scenarios proper, we must also consider the possibility of significant unexpected events. These surprising but highly influential developments may also be characterised as shocks. They include an entirely novel global crisis, such as a new pandemic or a terrorist attack that sparks a new conflict, which may divert international attention and resources, reducing the desire to support the Ukrainian defensive struggle.


## Prolongation of the war

In the first scenario, the war in Ukraine continues into 2025 with neither Russia nor Ukraine achieving a military solution. The fighting has settled into a war of attrition in which both sides are still suffering significant losses.

The Russian administration has retained its stability, even though ongoing losses in Ukraine and the sustainability of the economy give the national leadership growing cause for concern about continued public support.

Russia lacks high-performance troops and weapon systems. It has been unwilling to take risks, such as those of a full military mobilisation. On the other hand, Ukraine has sustained a dogged defensive struggle.

The West has continued to support Ukraine, but this support has not been sufficient to resolve the war in Ukraine's favour. As 2025 arrives, it is even more uncertain how support from the West will continue.

There are no realistic prospects of a peace agreement at this time.

## Ukraine prevails

Supported by a united West, Ukraine has expelled Russian forces from its territories by 2025. The Ukrainian military success is due not only to its own fighting spirit and military prowess, but also to even stronger support from the West.

The failure of Russia, on the other hand, is explained by its inability to increase investment in military measures in Ukraine. The Russian leadership is unwilling to take the risks involved in such measures as a full-scale military mobilisation. There is growing discontent in Russia due to the losses experienced in Ukraine, a crisis in the financial market and a decline in living standards.

Russia's worsening losses increase its desire to escalate the situation even further.

The Russian withdrawal from Ukraine causes difficulties for the Putin administration, leading to a shift of power, though not to a revolution. A new national leader emerges from within the power apparatus.

## Russia occupies Ukraine

In this scenario, Russia occupies nearly the whole of Ukraine by 2025. A fragmented West has been unable to provide enough support to Ukraine. The energy crisis and inflation are among the factors that erode the desire to support Ukraine in the West.

Russia's continued systematic destruction of civilian targets and the heavy losses suffered by Ukraine ultimately have a decisive impact on national morale. The Ukrainian defence falters, and Russia is able to occupy most of the country. A Ukrainian resistance movement continues to fight the occupying forces throughout the country. More Ukrainians flee the occupying regime, arriving in other European countries.

The military success and achievement of the political goals of the invasion have boosted public support for the Russian administration and for its foreign policy. The Russian economy has nevertheless been suffering due to a state of emergency. The standard of living in Russia has continued to deteriorate, and there are even signs of a humanitarian crisis in the poorest regions.

The central government of the Russian Federation systematically monitors the mood of the people, taking a heavy-handed approach to repressing expressions of opinion.

Russia redeploys armed forces to its borders with Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, with an increased risk of war between NATO and Russia. The occupation of Ukraine is a painful defeat for the West. Relations between Russia and the West have collapsed, with some countries breaking off all diplomatic relations with Russia.

## An uncertain peace

The hostilities end in a ceasefire agreement before 2025 that leaves Ukraine divided according to the location of military front lines at the time. The agreement emerges from the losses experienced by both sides, the impression that no military solution is likely, and the influence of external actors on both sides of the conflict.

Western military support for Ukraine has begun to erode. The unity of European countries is breaking and a sense of war fatigue afflicts the people. On the other hand, the Russian leadership has concluded that continuing a fruitless conflict could pose an existential threat to its own regime.

Ukraine cedes its eastern and southern regions to Russia. This solution is seen as a great tragedy, but the price of continuing the war is considered too onerous.

The credibility of Putin's continued leadership has been undermined, and he is sidelined from power soon after 2024.

# Russia seeks to evade export restrictions in many ways – Finland also a target

The impact of export restrictions is already visible in Russia, which is seeking to circumvent them using complex supply chains and third country intermediaries. The Finnish business community should also be aware of the risks.

The EU Member States and the USA have imposed exceptionally strong export restrictions on Russia due to the war of aggression that began in February 2022. The sanctions have led to a shortage of various materials and components that Russia needs to maintain its military capability.

Russia is applying increasingly diverse sanctions-busting efforts to make up for the growing shortage. Finnish businesses are also the targets of attempts to circumvent restrictions.

Russia is currently subject to a wide range of sanctions due to the war. These export bans include the products and technology that are used to maintain Russia's military machinery and its manufacturing capacity. Besides these restrictions, the EU countries have imposed numerous other countermeasures against Russia, such as individual sanctions and import bans.

## Operating conditions have changed in a material way

From the perspective of Supo, this phenomenon already began in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and war broke out in eastern Ukraine. The first wave of sanctions against Russia was imposed at this time. Due to its location, Finland has traditionally exported a great deal to Russia, and cross-border traffic has been busy. This has accordingly made Finland one of the countries through which Russia seeks to evade sanctions.

Operating conditions nevertheless changed substantially following the start of a large-scale war of aggression. The European Union and the USA have significantly tightened sanctions against Russia, leading to a fall in all exports to that country. Circumventing export restrictions via Finland has become more difficult, as efforts were previously made to send restricted products and technology as part of normal exports.

Russia is actively searching for new routes for its purchases. Its sanctions-busting efforts include disguising the true purchaser behind long supply chains and shipping through third countries. These procurement operations use both individual businesses and purchasing networks as channels of required technology into Russia. The purchases are not necessarily always clearly linked to Russia.

It is evident that the sanctions imposed by the Western community are already affecting Russia. The country is already experiencing a shortage of components required in the technology sector, and of parts needed in the shipbuilding and aerospace industries.

Even when Russia is able to procure certain products by evading export restrictions, the sanctions may also affect whether there are enough of them available and how much they cost. Russia cannot replace everything.

## Finnish expertise is of interest to Russia

Finnish businesses and universities have a great deal of internationally recognised expertise and sophisticated technology. For example, various electronic components, measuring devices, machine tools, optics, maritime technology and quantum expertise are of interest to Russia.

Russia also seeks to acquire export-controlled dual-use products from Finland. Dual-use refers to technology or products that are suitable for both civilian and military applications, or for developing weapons of mass destruction.

Finnish businesses and universities should pay particular attention to unusual procurement efforts or contacts. The reputation and operations of an unwary Finnish organisation may be harmed if its technology or products end up in projects that support the Russian armed forces. The business itself may become a target of sanctions if it works with operators that are already subject to Western sanctions.

One of the functions of Supo is to acquire information on efforts to send export-controlled technology or products from or through Finland to foreign countries. Supo also works to secure the operating conditions of Finnish businesses. Its export control work involves close national and international collaboration with various public authorities and businesses.

This work has been significantly facilitated by the new intelligence legislation that took effect in 2019. Supo is empowered to monitor activities that may jeopardise national security, even if they do not satisfy the essential elements of a criminal offence. This now enables an earlier start to the intelligence gathering process.

# National Terrorist Threat Assessment 2023

The threat of terrorism in Finland remains elevated, corresponding to level two on the four-point scale. Supo has identified far-right and radical Islamist operators who probably have the desire and capacity to carry out violent attacks. Supporters of these ideologies pose the most likely threat, either as individuals or in small groups. Attacks remain unlikely in the short term.

Supo finds that the threat of terrorism in Finland remains at level two on the four-point scale. The most likely threat of a terrorist attack comes from lone actors or small groups advocating far-right or radical Islamist ideology. The ideological flexibility of persons remains a key emerging trend, with no necessary loyalty to any particular organisation.

Some 350 individuals are identified targets of counterterrorism operations in Finland. The list of CT targets is not permanent, and people are continuously added to and removed from the list.

## The threat of far-right terrorism has grown stronger

Racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia are typical factors highlighted in far-right ideology internationally. Inspiration from previous attacks, the impression of a threat to the white population and idolisation of terrorism online are characteristic features. The extreme right in Finland also shares such views. Supo has identified some individuals who support and sympathise with far-right terrorist activities. Lone individuals and small groups on the extreme right pose a significant threat of terrorism in Finland. The threat of violence particularly targets representatives of ethnic and religious minority groups and those politically active persons that are perceived as ideological opponents. Other parties viewed as enemies in far-right ideology are also potential targets.

Supo has identified some individual right-wing extremists who left Finland for the Ukrainian war zone. Participation in the conflict will also increase the likelihood of radicalisation of these Finnish individuals.

Networking on social media platforms, disseminating propaganda and promoting violence are integral to the activities of the extreme right in Finland. Some Finnish people also have links to Siege culture, in which supporters of white supremacy incite terrorist violence and race war to overthrow the prevailing social order.

Activists associated with the Nordic Resistance Movement, which was disbanded in 2020, have continued similar activities in new formations. While organised far-right movements do not currently pose a terrorist threat, they establish a potential breeding ground for radicalising individuals.

### Growth in violent radicalisation of young people online

Violent and ideologically non-aligned radicalisation of young people online is a key emerging trend internationally, with several European countries preventing attacks planned by underage perpetrators. An online environment that idealises terrorism and declares the necessity of political violence gives supporters or followers of radical ideology a radicalising growth platform and a community that can serve as a cause or inspiration for engaging in political violence. The terrorism situation in Finland often follows international trends.

## The threat of radical Islamist terrorism is unchanged

Supo has identified some individual supporters of radical Islamist ideology with the capacity and motivation to mount a terrorist attack. Most of the CT targets remain supporters of radical Islamism. The threat of an attack primarily arises from individuals and small groups. Police in Finland apprehended a man in December 2022 on suspicion of training to commit a terrorist offence. Radical Islamist materials were found in his possession.

The most likely approach to mounting a terrorist attack linked to radical Islamist ideology will be a simple one, and will target the civilian population or authorities in public places. Acts or events that are perceived as offensive or hostile to Islam, such as burning the Koran or taking military action against terrorist organisations in a conflict zone, are likely to increase the threat of a terrorist attack in the short term.

### An interest in weapons and explosives is still highlighted on the extreme right

An interest in weaponry has emerged internationally as a feature of the extreme right-wing operating environment in recent years. Far-right terrorists have favoured the use of firearms in their attacks, but explosives have also been used. A substantial cache of firearms and explosives was found in the possession of a small group of right-wing extremists in Kankaanpää, Finland in 2019.

A growing interest in improvised weapons has also been noted among the extreme right internationally. Several cases have come to light in Western countries in which supporters of extreme right-wing ideologies have sought to acquire or manufacture firearms by means of 3D printing technology. This interest probably at least reflects the online dissemination of instructions for making such weapons.

The principal measures taken in Finland to support radical Islamism concern the transfer of funds and the spread of ideology online. Dissemination and consumption of propaganda mainly occur via encrypted instant messaging applications and chat groups. Attacks are incited against such targets as those representing a different faith or sexual minorities. Individuals radicalised online may follow the propaganda of several radical Islamist terrorist organisations, with no clear allegiance to any particular one of them.

The foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon continues to affect the radical Islamist operating environment in Finland. There are still some individual supporters of radical Islamism with links to Finland living in the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq. It is unlikely that networks of those who have returned from conflict zones or individual returnees will be inspired to engage in terrorist operations in Finland in the short term.

Radical Islamist terrorism globally is mainly concentrated in unstable regions such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and the Sahel. The importance of sub-Saharan Africa as an operating zone for al-Qaeda and ISIL is growing rapidly. Al-Qaeda has secured greater operating room in Afghanistan due to its close relations with the Taliban regime. The death of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in July 2022 has very probably not reduced the threat posed by the organisation.

## The threat of other terrorism is minimal

The terrorist threat posed by the extreme left and by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Finland remains minimal. The PKK and its supporters focus in Finland on fundraising and influencing activities. The far left in Finland mainly focuses on anti-fascist activism and supporting the activities of the PKK. Far-left activities in Finland are mainly non-violent, while operations that support violence are primarily directed outside of Finland. PKK operations in the Middle East are aimed at Turkey and Turkish targets.

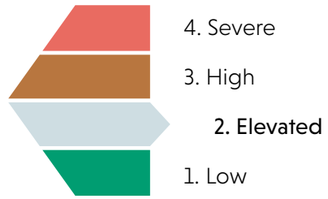
Anti-government movements in Finland have generally been non-violent. For example, opposition to measures related to COVID-19 have focused on arranging demonstrations.

## Assessment of short-term trends in the terrorism outlook for Finland

The threat of terrorism will probably remain at level two (elevated) on the four-point scale. The most likely threat of a terrorist attack in Finland will continue to be posed by individuals or small groups supporting extreme right-wing or radical Islamist ideologies. People with a background of violent crime will probably have the most significant capacity for terrorist violence.

The online environment enables adoption of ideas from many ideological directions, and in that context it is not necessary for individuals to commit to the activities of a single organisation. Online radicalisation is likely to reach younger age groups.

Unlicensed weapons spreading from the Ukrainian war zone are likely to increase the capacity of extremists in Europe for violence. Individuals will probably continue travelling to Ukraine and other conflict areas.



# Supo in figures in 2022

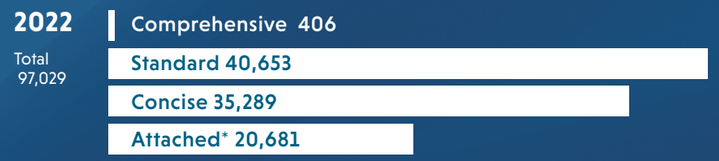
## Personnel

Average age
**42.8y**

Employees with academic degree
**66.3%**

Employees in total
**525**

## Security clearances

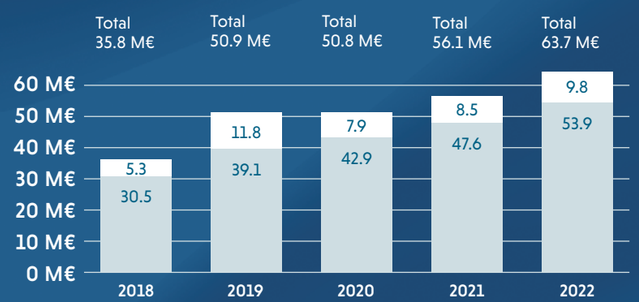



*A new vetting is not always needed when an invidual's duties change.

A new application may be appended to previously conducted vetting that is still in force for the individual concerned.

## Financing used by financial year

(million euros M€)




Realised income of the financial year.

Budget financing used during the financial year (including the use of appropriations carried over from the previous year).

# Supo's core duties

The Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (Supo) counters threats to Finland's national security and provides unique intelligence to prevent threats in advance.

## Supo produces intelligence information to support decision making

Supo s duty is to produce forward-looking and relevant intelligence information to state leaders and partner authorities to support decision-making. Intelligence is often the only way to obtain information about new threats.

Intelligence is collected through operational work, national and international cooperation and open sourc es. Foresight is a vital step in intelligence analysis.

Intelligence-based reports on phenomena relating to national security are produced for state leadership, min istries and agencies. Supo also produces threat assess ments for police, other authorities, and occasionally also for companies performing critical security-of-supply functions.

## Supo counters terrorism

Supo:

- conducts intelligence operations with a view to detecting and preventing terrorist offences
- counters terrorist attack plots against Finland
- is responsible for exchanging international counter terrorism intelligence
- serves as an operational specialist organisation in relation to terrorism
- develops, maintains and promotes national situational awareness related to the threat of terrorism
- monitors the nature of activities conducted by domestic extremist movements and assesses whether these activities pose a threat to national security

## Supo counters espionage

Supo:

- counters foreign intelligence activities directed against Finland and preventing damage caused by them
- counters illegal human intelligence and influence operations conducted by foreign powers against Finland
- counters espionage conducted by foreign powers against Finland on data networks
- prevents the dissemination or transit of technology, devices and expertise required for making weapons of mass destruction from or via Finland
- maintains situational awareness and reports on phenomena or projects that endanger Finland's national security

## Supo grants security clearances

- Supo conducts all Finnish security clearance investi gations, with the exception of investigations within the defence administration.
- The security clearance procedure seeks to prevent activities that endanger national security or signifi cant private economic interests.
- Supo also conducts facility security clearance in vestigations, and issues opinions on citizenship and residence permit applications and other subjects.

# 2022 – an exceptional year for Supo staff

The Russian invasion of Ukraine brought questions of national security back to the top of the public agenda. Supo staff members tell us how the war affected their work in 2022.

## "It is important to understand why Russia behaves in certain ways"

**Senior Analyst Suvi Alvari observes that it took a while for the impacts of the war to take shape. It is essential from an intelligence perspective to perceive the reasons for Russia's actions.**

"I was reading the news in Russian on my phone while sitting on the metro travelling to work when the war broke out. I was nervous about how people would react if they saw it. Monitoring Russian-language sources is also an essential part of our work as analysts.

A pile of work came tumbling out when I logged into my office computer. A great many messages came in over those days. Besides our Finnish clients, there was growing interest in Supo from our international partners.

On the other hand, pressure had already been building up in January and February before the war began. The situation clarified when the invasion began, but only momentarily. It took a while to appreciate the true overall impacts of the outbreak of war and how fundamentally the world changed.

We immediately set about envisioning various scenarios and considering which essential aspects had to be included in our next report to the highest echelons of national government. For example, what if Kyiv were to fall?

It is often in the nature of intelligence to go into detail. Though some aspects will emerge in the public domain at a later time, some will not. Analysts must examine things with optimal objectivity and from various points of view. It is important to understand why Russia behaves in certain ways."

## Supo reports on the future

**A Senior Analyst was urgently activated when the war began. Supo's mission in this crisis was to report on the future.**

"I was on duty when the invasion of Ukraine began, receiving a call about the start of the war that very morning. The call came as no surprise, as by that point it seemed clear that war was about to break out. We had been monitoring the crisis for a long time, and I recall that the possibility of Russia making a misjudgement and launching an attack had come up in conversation.

We swiftly completed our first working report on the subject. Though it was highly concise, we did state the broad repercussions of the invasion.

I then addressed a Supo staff meeting concerning the situation in Ukraine. This was a pure coincidence, as the meeting had already been arranged at a considerably earlier time. The exceptional nature of the situation was evident from the questions asked by staff members. The invasion had made them consider the threat of war to Finland as well.

I have been working in central government for many years. When a crisis begins, the state administration usually sets about maintaining an ongoing scenario. At Supo, by contrast, we immediately seek to minimise the time that we spend reporting on current developments. Our mission is to look ahead and envision the nature of broader impacts that the war will have on Finland in the longer term.

One memorable moment in an exceptional year came when I was speaking at an event arranged at the Finnish Parliament in the spring. The Parliament building, the people and the state of the world gave me a feeling of involvement in witnessing things that portended a historically significant event. My presentation discussed influencing by Russia and phenomena arising from the war.

My remarks were warmly received and the MPs seemed knowledgeable, with plenty of questions to ask. Some MPs were exhibiting clear signs of concern. Interest was shown in safeguarding policymaking related to NATO membership, and in security issues more generally. The tone of my presentation was reassuring."

## We began talking about the Russian threat explicitly

**Head of Communications and Public Affairs Milla Meretniemi remarks on how the war changed the way in which people in Finland talk about Russia.**

"The Russian invasion of Ukraine changed the way people in Finland talk about Russia overnight. This was also evident at Supo. While always willing to discuss espionage and influencing, we did not previously give interviews about the threat posed by Russia to Finland.

It is telling that most of the calls that we received in the early days of the war were about Finnish people who had gone to Ukraine, which represented a rather marginal phenomenon. The media hardly considered that they could ask us about Russia. Our role as an intelligence service was also not yet familiar to everyone.

Obviously there was nothing new for us in acknowledging that Russia is Finland's most significant national security threat. We also gained more manoeuvring room in public debate when Finnish policymakers began talking about the Russian threat more explicitly.

On 7 March we published a column by Supo Director **Antti Pelttari** stating that Russian activities pose the greatest threat to Finland's national security. This was a couple of weeks before we published our yearbook. The press conference concerning the yearbook really focused solely on assessing the threat posed by Russia. We then discussed this subject throughout the rest of the spring.

The circumstances were subject to conflicting pressures, as we also had to reassure people and get the message over that the authorities were in charge of the situation. Many people in Finland were really scared when the war broke out. We often played such a reassuring role during this exceptional year. Occasionally we had to rebut the worst threat scenarios that were entertained in the public arena."

## "We must be prepared for non-military threats"

**Demand for information from Supo grew significantly when the war began. Head of Cabinet Saana Nilsson explained the situation to policymakers at several events.**

"Spring 2022 saw us arranging a huge number of meetings for politicians in varying capacities. A great many requests came in. Many were concerned over issues such as what kind of threats Russia might pose for Finnish politicians. It was more important than ever for Supo to provide support to policymakers.

A group of ministers from one of the governing political parties invited me to address a hearing in early March at which I made three key points. Firstly I stressed that we were not only facing a military crisis. Military preparedness was understandably uppermost in the public debate immediately after the war began. I pointed out that Finland should also be prepared for other threats, such as espionage and influencing.

I also observed that the process of formulating the Finnish policy position on NATO would be the main focus of interest for Russian intelligence. I told the ministers that these circumstances would make them targets

of espionage. Finally, I noted that the attention of Russia was currently focused on Ukraine at that time. From a security perspective, this provided a window of opportunity for preparations.

A lot of questions followed, as at all other events during the spring, and getting away from such hearings was never easy. You could tell from the demeanour of the politicians that they understood how pressing the issues were.

In this meeting the group of ministers posed several questions at once, so I quickly jotted them down to help me remember to answer them all. The uppermost question concerned how Finland should use its window of opportunity while Russia was distracted in Ukraine.

Policymakers are always hoping that we would provide optimally concrete specialist assessments. The actual decisions have to be made by politicians themselves."

## "The Russian intelligence services seek to exploit people's weaknesses"

**The Russian invasion led to a rise in the number of security clearance vetting investigations conducted in Finland, explains Ilkka Hanski, Head of the Vetting Department.**

"Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequent decision of Finland to seek membership of NATO, Supo found that the operating environment and threats had changed or clarified in the long term. We assessed how Russia would react to an application for NATO membership. Though the reactions were ultimately moderate, we had no way of knowing this in spring 2022, so we prepared for everything.

We contacted several key businesses and organisations in the spring with a view to verifying that their security culture and arrangements were appropriate to the new circumstances. We called attention to the good practices that should normally be applied. It was necessary to attend to data security and to ensure that security clearances were up to date.

We worked with some organisations to assess in greater detail how they could improve their security arrangements. For example, we asked them to evaluate which of their functions were the most critical. We noted that individuals working in certain positions should undergo more extensive security clearance vetting than had previously been conducted. On the other hand, I pointed out that the circumstances should not lead to overreach, for example by discriminating against Russians in Finland.

Our message was evidently received and understood, as the number of applications for security clearance vetting increased by around 15 per cent in 2022. There were 17 per cent more inquiries regarding foreign interests than in the preceding year. We had to reorganise our operations and hire additional staff.

It is vital for us to ensure our national resilience. Seeking to infiltrate organisations by various means is an established approach used by Russia. The Russian intelligence services seek to exploit people's weaknesses. Naturally security clearance vetting will not detect anyone's intention to commit a criminal offence, but it can be helpful in other ways, such as by finding factors that could expose a person to coercion.

We may be satisfied on the whole that security vetting clearances have been completed relatively widely for people who work with national security in Finland, and that these are also kept up to date."

## Outbreak of war brings even closer cooperation with the Border Guard

**A senior Supo detective working in Lappeenranta explains that the proximity of the Russian border is evident in daily work. Collaboration between public authorities increased still further after the war began.**

"I work at the regional office of Supo in the south-eastern city of Lappeenranta. We collaborate continually and very closely with the Border Guard on a daily basis. The proximity of Russia and the international border affects our work here in many ways. Our location is convenient, only twenty kilometres from the border. We can drive there very quickly if necessary.

We receive many tip-offs from the Border Guard. They know precisely what kind of questions are of interest to Supo. Collaboration was stepped up when the war started. We swiftly formulated a profile of points to look out for in relation to individuals seeking to cross the border.

Our team carefully considered how to respond when the Russian military mobilisation began in September. We decided to interview people coming across the border. Many of our staff can speak Russian. We gathered information on such issues as the nature of the refugee situation over the border, and on the current internal mood in Russia.

Drawing on long experience working at Supo, I considered that while many people crossing the border are escaping, there may also be some whose mission is to gather intelligence on how things are done here. It is our job to find such individuals among the crowd.

While the authorities were initially braced for a larger number of arrivals, it soon became clear that the increase would not be so great. Many people who crossed the border soon continued on to other countries or returned to Russia.

Cooperation between the Border Guard, the police, the National Bureau of Investigation, the customs, the Finnish Immigration Service and the Finnish Defence Forces is a really important asset. Though quite few in number, we can be highly effective when we work together."


## Drone swarms proved to be luminist artworks

**The number of tip-offs received by Supo grew significantly with the Russian invasion. A senior Supo detective explains that such tip-offs have even been the start of major cases.**

"My team receives tip-offs from members of the public and from other Finnish authorities. Our job is to assess and process the calls that come into Supo.

The number of such calls grew substantially in 2022. We saw a big jump in the number of tip-offs right after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, with four times as many contacts in March 2022 as in January of the same year.

Global events and international news coverage affect the calls that we receive. If your e-mail inbox is full when you come to work in the morning, then your first impulse is to check out the latest media coverage to find out what has just been reported. The tip-offs that came in suggest that some people began to express suspicion and concern over matters that had seemed completely normal before the Russian invasion.

Drones were the subject of a very lively public debate in the autumn, involving many influential members of society who are active in social media. Even a single tweet from a very prominent individual about drones or critical infrastructure would manifest for a couple of days as a peak in the number of tip-offs that we received. We directed such calls to the police authorities that are primarily responsible for controlling unmanned aviation.

The flood of incoming communications was huge during peak periods, with nearly all of our time spent receiving such information. While we naturally did also receive some serviceable information, this was accompanied by such episodes as multiple reports of rapidly moving drone swarms that investigation subsequently revealed to be works of luminist art.

It is quite understandable that outsiders have difficulty in discerning which events and observations will be helpful to Supo, and we are always pleased to receive tip-offs from members of the public, various organisations and other public authorities. Such tip-offs have even provided the initial impetus for major cases."

# Finland's accession to NATO also boosts civilian intelligence

Finland's participation at NATO meetings as an invitee has also opened doors for Finland to work with NATO civilian intelligence, which plays an important role in alliance policymaking.

The first thing that many people think of in relation to NATO is military collaboration. Indeed, maintaining the credible defence capability of member countries is the key function of the alliance.

NATO security cooperation, however, reaches beyond purely military issues. Nowadays, countries face a wide variety of challenges. As a result, NATO member states cooperate to, for example, combat both terrorism and hybrid threats. Furthermore, the daily work of the alliance includes discussing challenges posed by issues such as emerging technologies and climate change.

## Supo participates in the work of the NATO Civilian Intelligence Committee

Civilian intelligence plays an important role at NATO. Alliance collaboration in the field of civilian intelligence takes mainly place in the Joint Intelligence and Security Division (JISD), which in turn serves the needs of the civilian and military intelligence committees. NATO members are represented on these committees by their civilian and military intelligence services.

Supo has been comprehensively involved in the work of the civilian intelligence committee since Finland secured invitee status at NATO in summer 2022. One function of the civilian intelligence committee is to provide information that supports NATO policymaking. The security and intelligence services of the allied countries are involved in the work of this committee, collaborating to combat security threats to NATO, such as counter-terrorism and counter-espionage.

Sharing intelligence is an essential aspect of this work. International intelligence cooperation relies very strongly on mutual trust.

While European Union policymaking and cooperation are already second nature to Finnish public administration, European intelligence cooperation lies beyond the competence of the EU. Even though international cooperation is very tight-knit in the world of intelligence services, the NATO Civilian Intelligence Committee is a new form of cooperation for Finland.

For Supo, the accession process has meant discovering and internalising new practices. The accession process also involves a great deal of crucial but often invisible work related to information security and ICT.

On the other hand, Supo also continues to perform its previous roles. Since 2010, Supo has had the statutory role to advise and assess other authorities and Finnish business life in fulfilling NAT O security requirements.

## NATO analysis benefits Finland

This collaboration did not begin from zero. Many NATO countries are long-term and close partners of Finland in the intelligence world, and Supo has been well received by the NATO intelligence community.

All aspects of Finland's future NATO membership are by no means apparent so far, and it will be intriguing to see whether Finland's membership will bring even deeper bilateral intelligence cooperation with already familiar partner countries.

Finland has already gained a great deal by joining the alliance intelligence community. The analysis provided by NATO has proved useful and is used in Supo's reporting to policymakers in Finland.

NATO also has expectations of Finland. For example, Finnish counter-intelligence expertise is highly prized. While many countries relaxed their counter-intelligence efforts at the end of the Cold War, Finland did not follow suit.

Finland is joining NATO at a time when the Russian invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the importance of the defence alliance. The future membership of Finland and Sweden is also a major development for NATO, coming at a highly sensitive time in terms of security policy.

# Security of supply worked well in an exceptional year for Finland's energy sector

Even though 2022 began in challenging circumstances, Finland's energy security remained stable. The production and distribution of energy are so critical to society that they are also attractive targets for hostile fearmongering.

The key functions of Finnish society would not run without electric power. Potential disruptions to energy production and distribution affect the functioning of society more acutely and widely than breakdowns in many other critical sectors. This explains why possible threats against the energy sector arouse fears so readily.

Such concerns have been raised in the context of the Russian invasion, with the dismantling of energy reliances at times leading to uncertainties about the availability of energy. In addition, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine has raised fears of Russia harming energy infrastructure or even staging a military escalation elsewhere in Europe.

Explosions on the Nord Stream gas pipelines in September 2022 also highlighted concerns about the vulnerability of the energy infrastructure in Europe. The consequences of the Nord Stream pipeline sabotage on the availability of energy in Europe were ultimately quite minimal, and no individual state was targeted. The explosions did not occur in the territorial waters of any country, but in a marine economic zone. They served above all as a deterrent with a minimal risk of escalation.

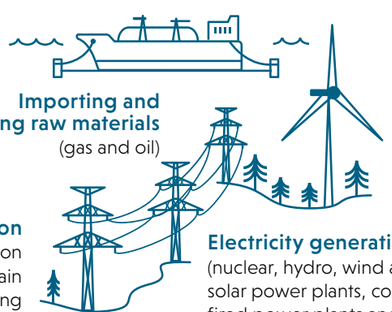
"The explosions illustrate that individual infrastructure components can be vulnerable to sabotage, or to malfunctions arising from cyber operations. Outcomes such as crippling the energy infrastructure of an entire society are nevertheless more difficult to bring about," explains Supo Senior Analyst **Lotta Hakala**.

Hakala points out that, on the whole, the energy sector has done well from the point of view of security of supply, despite a shaky start to 2022.

## Electricity networks are still working in Ukraine

The Russian attack on Ukraine has demonstrated that an electric power grid can hold up well even when subject to active cyber operations, or when the country is the target of a war of aggression. Even before the large-scale war that began in February 2022, Russia was highly active in targeting cyber operations against the Ukrainian energy infrastructure. Hakala notes that longer-term damage and power cuts were, ultimately, only brought about as a consequence of the  physical attacks that occurred in the end of the year.

### The Finnish energy sector



**Importing and processing raw materials** (gas and oil)

**Electricity distribution** (high-voltage distribution networks and the main power grid connecting local electricity companies)

**Electricity generating** (nuclear, hydro, wind and solar power plants, coal-fired power plants and backup power plants)

**What is critical infrastructure?**

Critical infrastructure refers to services that are essential to the functioning of society. These services include, for example, those of the energy sector, health care and water supply system, in which malfunctions or outages would immediately affect the normal operation of society.



"Even these strikes have not completely paralysed Ukrainian electricity distribution. While the state of the power grid varies across the country, electricity distribution is still working in such regions as Kyiv, the capital city, even though that city has been the target of very intense attacks with power outages continually occurring."

In practice, it is difficult to paralyse an entire nationwide power grid.

Even though limited and temporary disruptions in electricity distribution can be achieved, Supo currently considers it unlikely that another state would seek to incapacitate the Finnish energy sector. Physical sabotage, in particular, would not be possible without an intrusion into Finnish territory, which in turn would require for the perpetrator to have an interest in significantly escalating the current security policy situation.

## Russia's ability to influence the energy situation in Europe is declining

High energy prices and uncertainty give Russia influencing opportunities in Europe. It is typical for Russian influencing efforts to exploit social conflict.

On the other hand, the ability of Russia to use energy cooperation as a means of coercing European countries has declined as a result of Russia's war of aggression, with Europeans progressing in their own efforts to disengage from energy dependency.

"Russian energy exports largely comprise fossil fuels whose importance will decline in the long term. This will further reduce the ability of Russia to exert influence," Hakala remarks.

## The threat of spying on critical infrastructure has increased

Russia is seeking technical details regarding the critical infrastructure in Western countries in order to target critical infrastructure if conditions escalate. Russia is also seeking details about the potential weaknesses in the Finnish energy sector. The threat of foreign intelligence operations against critical infrastructure has grown.

Supo provides expertise to businesses in assessing the threats of state actors against critical infrastructure, both directly and by producing information for the National Cyber Security Centre.

"Supo engages in continual dialogue with businesses in the energy sector. The exceptional situation this year has not affected this long-sustained basic work," Hakala says.

While cyber threats are now particularly relevant for companies in the energy sector, risks related to human intelligence should not be overlooked. It is important to ensure the security of employees. Supo conducts security clearance vetting of private sector employees working with critical infrastructure, where necessary.

Security work has long been standard practice in the energy sector precisely because these operations are so critical. Energy sector businesses are among the most competent in safeguarding against cyber threats. However, even with the most meticulous preparation it is still not possible to discount all threats.

# Russia forced to direct espionage efforts into the cyberspace

2022 was an exceptional year in the cyber environment as well. The Russian invasion has highlighted the role of cyber espionage.

News broadcasts were already reporting on how Russia was concentrating its forces near the Ukrainian border months before the February 2022 invasion. Similar preparations were also seen online. Even before the war, the volume of Russian cyber activity targeting Finland decreased as resources were focused on Ukraine. The unusually peaceful period in Finnish networks continued during the early stages of the invasion.

By the summer it was nevertheless already evident that this lull in cyber activity had come to an end for us. Russian cyber activity in Finland began to pick up, returning to its normal level, and by the second half of 2022 Russian cyber espionage efforts targeting Finland had become even more active than before.

## Finnish targets subject to continuous cyber espionage efforts

One effect of the Russian invasion has been to highlight the importance of cyber espionage. Traditional human intelligence operations have become more difficult for Russia, with many European operators severing their links to Russian counterparts. At the same time, Russian intelligence officers have been expelled from Western countries.

Russia has also been forced to use other information-gathering approaches in Finland. Finnish public authorities and businesses are regularly targeted by Russian cyber espionage efforts. Finland's foreign and security policymaking is the principal target of Russian interest. The threat of corporate espionage is also growing, as sanctions have hampered Russian access to cutting-edge technology and the country is endeavouring to launch manufacturing operations in place of Western imports.

Even though Russia now tops the agenda of public debate also in the field cyber espionage, it is not the only party that seeks to spy on Western countries. China has exceptionally substantial resources for cyber espionage, and there have been no significant changes in its activity. Its interests now include the security policy situation in Europe.

## Russian intelligence services have extensive resources for cyber espionage

State-sponsored intelligence operations seek carefully selected secret information, so they have to select their targets in ways that differ from the approaches employed by common criminals. Intelligence services have access to substantially more time and resources than ordinary criminals, and also to more experienced operators and more versatile tools.

Russia seeks to focus its cyber operations precisely, and to determine the vulnerabilities of the target in advance. Intelligence services often do prior background work on the organisations and individuals that they select as targets. Cyber espionage is not always aimed directly at the target proper, but may instead focus on individuals who are close to the selected target person and at subcontractors of target organisations.

The methods of Russian cyber espionage vary, with operators applying such approaches as phishing messages, software vulnerabilities and supply chain attacks. Poor security practices, such as weak passwords, may also expose a target to hacking.

State-sponsored intelligence essentially seeks to evade detection so that information can be gathered for as long as possible. The perpetrators take pains to cover their tracks, and their operation is multi-staged and subtle. The operation tries to evade the attention of security operations centres, and may originate from an address in the country concerned or in a third country.

Accessing an information source is nearly always the primary goal in cyber espionage. Sometimes systems can be quite strongly interfered, leaving a large number of system log entries. Besides gaining access, the goal in such cases may be to demonstrate the intruder's cyber capabilities and to serve as a deterrent to the target country.

## Data security cannot depend on a single user

Organisations can substantially reduce risks by applying good data security practices. It is essential for system administrators to attend to data security continually, as they have primary responsibility for the security of their systems and of the data stored in them. It is also important to choose reliable suppliers and subcontractors.

Data security is an ongoing process. Software must be kept current with security updates. The monitoring capacity of the system should be maintained in order to detect whether anything unusual occurs. Log data should be collected systematically, as it helps in investigating whether a system has been compromised.

Administrators must construct systems that are able to withstand malicious activity. It can be very challenging for an ordinary person to recognise a professionally crafted phishing message, for example. Users should nevertheless take care to use strong passwords and two-factor authentication. It is also wise to exercise a healthy degree of caution regarding the senders of electronic communications and the attachments and links that are included in messages.

Public authorities provide support in data security work. Supo works with domestic and international partners to combat cyber threats. The most important Finnish partners of Supo in combating cyber threats include the National Cyber Security Centre, for which Supo also produces information. The website and networks of the Cyber Security Centre provide excellent instructions for improving system security.

The importance of managing cyber security throughout society will only increase in the future.

# Trust by Finns in Supo has remained strong

Supo surveys public perceptions of its work on an annual basis. The latest survey was conducted between 21 November and 2 December 2022, based on a sample representing the population of mainland Finland aged between 18 and 79 years.

A vast majority (91%) of the public in Finland indicate either a high or at least fairly high degree of trust in Supo. Two respondents in five (42%) report a high degree of trust, and one respondent in two (49%) reports a fairly high degree of trust.

Trust in Supo has slightly grown since last year's survey and the result is the second best in the survey's ca. 20-year-long history. Only one respondent in a hundred does not trust Supo at all. When the results are examined according to different background variables - such as age, education, employment status, and political stance - differences between groups are rather small. In all groups, the vast majority trusts Supo.

In the survey conducted as telephone interviews, the respondents were also asked to assess how well Supo has performed its functions. Four respondents in five assessed that Supo has carried out its functions either very well (17%) or fairly well (63%).

The same survey also looks annually at how well people living in Finland know the functions of Supo, which changed to some extent following the introduction of new intelligence legislation in summer 2019.

The best-known Supo functions are gathering intelligence on threats to national security, countering terrorism and preventing espionage targeting Finland. More than 90 per cent of respondents identified these Supo functions. More than 85 per cent of people in Finland also know that Supo distributes intelligence to the President, Government, and public authorities, and almost 80 per cent of the respondents know that Supo conducts security clearance vetting of people appointed to key positions.

Foreign intelligence is a new function of Supo, and was the least well known (72% of respondents). There has been little change in survey findings since last year.


- high 42 %
- fairly high 49 %
- no opinion 4 %
- not very high 4 %
- none at all 1 %

A total of 1,003 interviews took place, and the margin of error is ± 3 percentage points.

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