

SUPO





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Intelligence is a global growth industry

A thorough and permanent change has occurred in Finland's security and operating environment. Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine and a heightened superpower struggle reflect a period of transition in global power structures. The rule-based world order that served Finland's interests well has been seriously challenged. The old rules are crumbling, with new ones yet to emerge. In place of transparent cooperation, relations between states now emphasise confrontation and aggressive measures, espionage and hostile influencing.



Teemu Turunen
Acting Director of the Finnish
Security and Intelligence Service

The loosening of common rules has heightened the importance of intelligence and security services, both in competition between states and in cooperation between them. The status and influence of states increasingly depend on the operational effectiveness of their intelligence services, on the kind of information that they receive, and on their ability to apply that information. Intelligence has sadly become a global growth industry.

Intelligence diplomacy refers to the use of intelligence in achieving foreign policy objectives, to its goal-oriented disclosure, or to sharing intelligence for the benefit of partner countries. The release of intelligence prior to the Russian attack was important not only for Ukrainian preparedness, but also in establishing unity among Western countries and as a backdrop to Finland's accession to NATO.

SUPO operates in this world of intensifying confrontation, playing the same game as the three-letter power agencies of authoritarian states, but by different rules. Finland needs a strong security and intelligence service that has the ability, capacity and resources to work under radically altered operating conditions without compromising the rule of law.

The activities of Russia remain the biggest threat to Finland's national security. Russia views Finland as an unfriendly country, and as a target for espionage and broad influencing. It is worthwhile preparing for malicious activity, both now and in the long term. SUPO has particularly highlighted elevated threats related to the cyber world and critical infrastructure. Weaponised migration is also an easy way for Russia to keep Finland on its toes.

While Finland managed to undermine the operational opportunities for Russian human intelligence last year through counter-intelligence work, expulsion of intelligence officers and a strict visa policy, the intelligence operations of our eastern neighbour should not be underestimated. Individual Finnish citizens in Russia could also be subject to duress, espionage charges or confiscation of assets. Unscrupulous hostage diplomacy for the purpose of prisoner exchanges has become an

instrument in the toolbox of authoritarian states.

The status of security and intelligence services in China has been further reinforced. Breakthrough technologies into new fields have become increasingly important as the superpower struggle has intensified. The future belongs to the controller of artificial intelligence, with supremacy in quantum technology providing a key to unlock the secrets of opponents. R&D requires huge volumes of data collected by many applications around the world. While digitisation has connected the world in an unprecedented way, associated vulnerabilities are emerging as competition intensifies and rules change. The superpower struggle has already expanded into new areas: the importance of space is growing, as is that of the Arctic region.

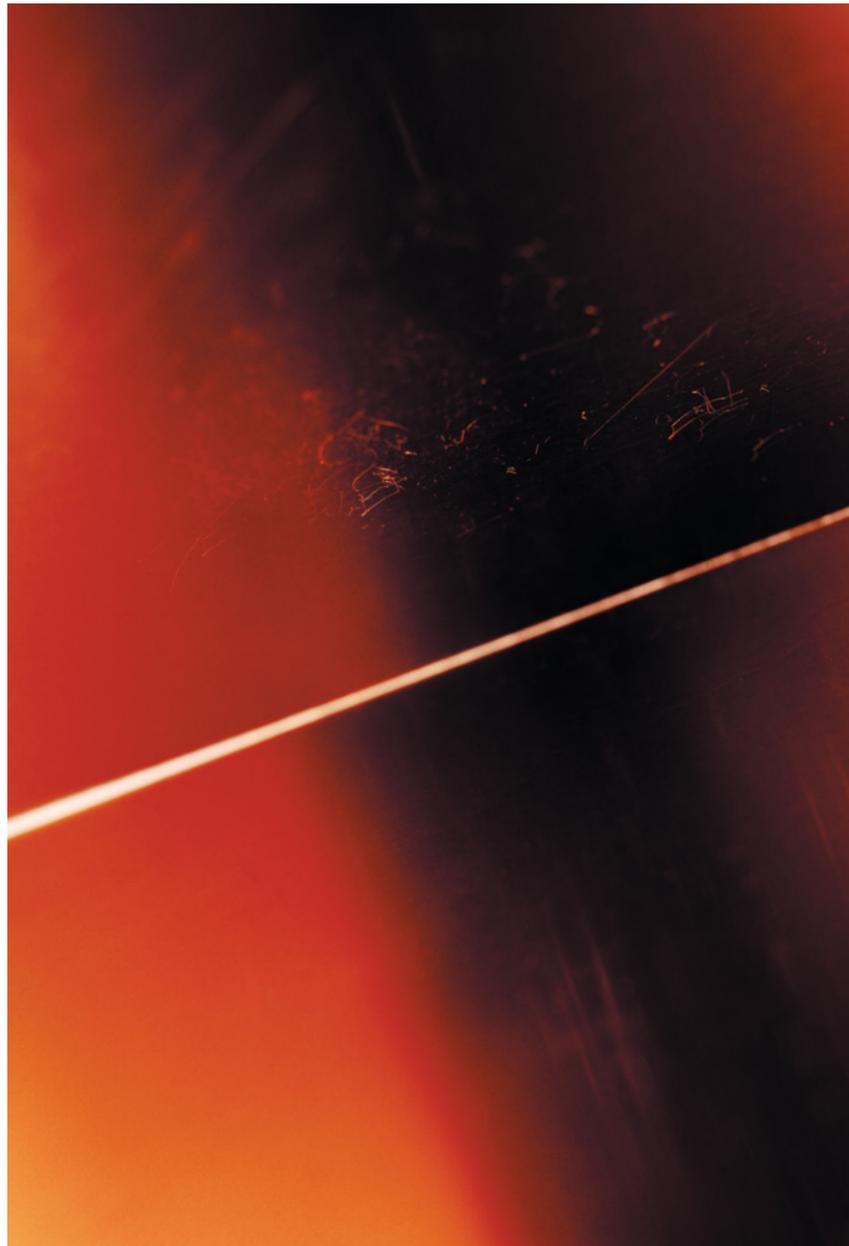
Waves of tension in the Middle East are also hitting other parts of the globe, with a real danger of violent escalation. The threat of terrorism has grown in the Nordic countries, and even Finland is not immune to these developments.

Amidst unsettling developments, we should bear in mind that the people of Finland enjoy a rather good standard of security. Public solidarity and determination in Finland have only strengthened as threats become more visible. Finland is well prepared under the circumstances, with NATO membership providing protection against the most serious threats. Finland remains a model country for democracy and the rule of law. We can rely on the measures taken by public authorities.

While a strong rules-based world order is in our interests, Finland must also be alert when the rules change. This is no brief and transitory phenomenon. We must update our mindset, legislation and preparedness for malicious *mala fide* operating conditions. Our opponents are ruthless and ready to exploit our weaknesses.

The functions of SUPO include seeking information on the secret plans of opponents, preventing their implementation, and maintaining the security of Finland and its people. We are of no use to top-level government unless we produce relevant intelligence. We are of no use to the nation unless we maintain the integrity of intelligence.

Russia is increasingly dependent on China, but what does this mean for Finland's national security?



As an intelligence service, Supo seeks to analyse superpower relations from the perspective of Finnish national security. Particularly since the Russian invasion, it has carefully monitored the trend in relations between China and Russia.

The job of intelligence includes seeking to understand key players in international politics in order to assess them with optimal precision. There are many actors in international politics, and their mutual relations affect global security in a wide variety of ways.

Superpower relations are now so strained that the need for information is continually growing. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has also had important repercussions in international politics. One crucial question has been the effect of the war on relations between China and Russia.

The relationship between these two major powers is an obvious example of an area in which developments can have national security implications for Finland. The role of Supo as an intelligence service is to provide predictive assessments on such issues. The purpose of intelligence information is to help Finland's foreign and security policy leaders to navigate in a complex world.

China is cautiously backing Russia

Supo assesses that China and Russia have common goals that they jointly promote when this serves their interests. Both are seeking to undermine the position of Western countries, and especially the USA in international arenas.

China is cautiously backing Russia in practice. Trade between these two countries has increased significantly during the war. Russia has been forced to direct its exports to China, and its dependence on China has grown considerably. Chinese exports to Russia have also increased. The continuing stability of Russia is important to China, but Russia clearly needs China more than the other way round.

Since the Russian invasion, China has sought to present itself as a neutral party. It talks about respecting the sovereignty of independent states, meaning Ukraine. By appealing to neutrality, China also seeks to strengthen its hand as a leading figure in developing countries.

On the other hand, China recognises Russian security concerns and stresses their legitimacy. It shares the Russian view that the USA and NATO have come too close to Russia in Europe.

The main issue for China ultimately concerns the impact of the war on Sino-American competition. Many other issues are subordinate to this question. It is important for China to at least ensure that the war does not reinforce the international status of the USA.

The heightened importance of NATO as a result of Rus-

sia's war of aggression is accordingly a negative development from the perspective of China, which views NATO as an instrument of US foreign policy. It does not wish to see NATO becoming stronger or operating in its own locality.

What is the special contribution of Supo?

Newsrooms, think tanks and many other actors have closely monitored Sino-Russian relations since the invasion. A great deal of public, high-quality information is available on this subject, which is not exceptional nowadays.

Technological progress has enabled mass media and individuals to produce new kinds of information, challenging intelligence services to clarify their role. These intelligence services – including Supo – must consider the special contribution that they can make.

The key difference between intelligence services and other actors lies naturally in the field of secrets, with covert information gathering and international information exchanges giving the intelligence services access to information that is not otherwise available.

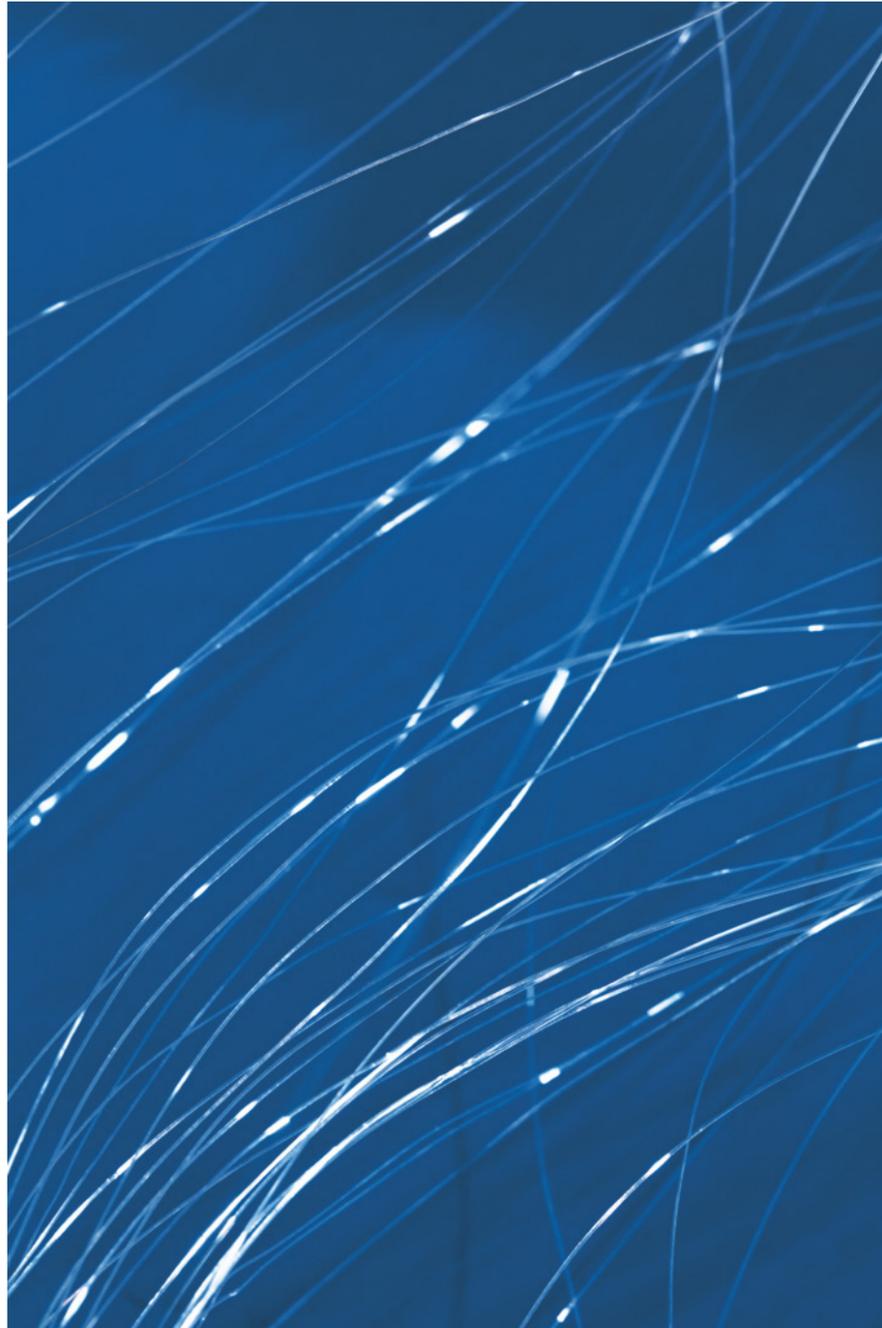
The role of Supo is to supply clear and reliable analysis that serves as a basis for decisions taken by policymakers. While information from Supo may sometimes confirm interpretations that circulate already in the public domain, intelligence information may also contradict these popular views.

The job of Supo is to analyse the world from the perspective of Finnish national security

While the scale of resources available to major intelligence services for gathering information on Sino-Russian relations obviously outweighs that of smaller services like Supo, no other entity is dedicated to gathering information and analysing threats specifically from the perspective of Finnish national security.

The impact of NATO membership provides one example of this. The expansion of NATO in Northern Europe is undesirable from China's point of view, and Finland's membership is arousing a new kind of interest. The key issue for China concerns whether NATO membership will bring about any change in the attitude of Finland towards China.

Finland must learn to live with active Russian influencing



While the activities of Russia are the most significant threat to Finnish national security, Russia's main focus is elsewhere than on Finland in the immediate future.

Finland must learn to live in a new situation where poor relations with Russia are the norm, owing to Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and its efforts to foment discord in Europe. Russia interprets Finnish NATO membership and its participation in the sanctions jointly imposed by Western countries as a unilateral decision by Finland to weaken relations.

Russian influencing operations targeting Finland will probably become more active than the measures that the Finnish public was accustomed to before the Russian war of aggression. Russia has already communicated its dissatisfaction with Finland's amended foreign and security policy by taking such measures as closing the Finnish consulate in St. Petersburg and changing the procedures of its border authorities on the Finnish frontier.

Even though Russia will be more of a challenge than before, the situation of Finland is in no way exceptional. Many European countries have already been facing similar conditions for a long time.

As a country sharing a common border with Finland and conducting a war in Europe, Russia is the most significant threat to Finnish national security. Its main concerns nevertheless remain elsewhere than in Finland, and no military threat is likely in the near future. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has also weakened its own ability to exert influence in Finland and Europe.

Russia is not an all-powerful influencer

Though sometimes portrayed in public debate as a peerless influencer that pulls strings and weaves detailed plans spanning decades, Russia is not especially adept at developing new methods of influencing or carefully targeting its operations.

Russia often acts and then watches to see what happens. It also does not always understand Western societies, readily overlooking easy points of influence. Russia is often unable to anticipate the reactions of Western countries effectively.

The influence of Russia should nevertheless not be underrated. It remains quite proficient at seizing opportunities and turning them to its advantage. It is common

for Russia to gather crumbs of benefit almost by accident, often merely by causing uncertainty and confusion.

To Russia, the world looks threatening

To understand Russian influencing, it is essential to appreciate the world view of the Russian state leadership. The core of this mentality is that Russia is a great power. The truth, by contrast, is that Russia will inevitably decline in international importance. Russia is a rapidly deteriorating economy that relies on oil while the rest of the world is transitioning to renewable energy sources.

It nevertheless seeks to be treated as important. Russia believes that, as a superpower, it is entitled to greater rights as a state than other countries. At the same time, the world looks threatening and challenging from the Russian perspective.

These principles also underlie the Russian view of Finland. While bordering countries are important, Finland is not Russia's main concern. Russia views international relations as a zero-sum game for major players, in which small players are always controlled by others. If Russia does not exert influence, then someone else will.

It is easy for people in Finland to forget that Russia also perceives threats emanating from Finland. It seeks to control everything that comes across the long international border – EU influencing, Western propaganda and other aspects that are considered to oppose the interests of the Russian state leadership.

Russia seeks to influence policymaking

Russia influences on several levels. Sometimes the goal is to send a message or to establish a deterrent. The other extreme is a significant and tangible weakening of national security. Finland has so far largely been a target for messaging and efforts to create deterrence.

The ultimate goal of such operations is always to influence policymaking by steering it in the desired direction or by such means as seeking to limit the scope of national leaders to make decisions.

Foreign intelligence has improved Finland's ability to collect information

The mission of Supo is to acquire information on threats to Finland. Such information is nowadays also acquired from beyond the borders of Finland.

Supo has been authorised to acquire information from abroad for nearly five years, and it has exercised this right actively and successfully. Despite the very long-term nature of this development work, we may already observe that access to foreign intelligence has significantly enhanced the conditions and ability of Supo to provide intelligence to top-level government in Finland.

Supo is engaged in acquiring information of importance to Finland's national security, irrespective of whether that information is in Finland or abroad. The ability to collect information abroad is essential for national security, as all of the details relevant to the most serious threats affecting Finland are not usually otherwise available.

Foreign intelligence is demanding by nature, and it is accordingly used for the most critical issues on which corresponding information cannot be otherwise obtained. The targets of foreign intelligence must remain secret to protect operations.

Foreign intelligence is an essential and crucial element in the work of all intelligence services, as it is often practically the only way to acquire necessary details that the target of information gathering actively seeks to protect.

Supo always complies with Finnish law

Supo has been building its foreign intelligence capacity ever since new intelligence legislation took effect in 2019. Capacity building is a long-term process that calls for continuous learning and refining of operations.

A wide selection of tools may be applied in foreign intelligence, as Supo has practically the same range of lawful instruments available for use abroad as it has in Finland. Information may be gathered from abroad

either openly, or using covert means. The decision on the method applied always depends on the most appropriate and effective means of obtaining information.

Foreign intelligence work is guided by the same principles as other Supo operations. Supo engages in foreign intelligence to protect Finland's national security. On the other hand, such aims as promoting the economic or commercial interests of Finland are not a basis for acquiring intelligence information. The intelligence operations and interests of a small country clearly differ from those of superpowers.

Supo always complies with Finnish law when conducting foreign intelligence operations. All of its operations are carefully regulated and monitored – including foreign intelligence. The Intelligence Ombudsman may access all Supo information, including information related to foreign intelligence. Decisions on foreign intelligence are always made by the Director of Supo.

Foreign intelligence must be protected

Foreign intelligence is ineffective without a high degree of protection and confidentiality. Supo may accordingly disclose very little about its operations and information gathering abroad. Foreign intelligence functions cannot be carried out successfully and efficiently unless operations can be protected or conducted covertly.

All details of Supo foreign intelligence work are of interest to potential targets of information gathering, and to those who would seek to disrupt or prevent successful information gathering by Supo.

Supo must conceal its successes in order to enjoy continued success.



National Terrorism Threat Assessment 2024

The threat of terrorism in Finland is elevated, corresponding to level two on the four-point scale. There are probably far-right and radical Islamist operators in Finland with 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.

Some 350 individuals are identified targets of counter-terrorism operations in Finland. The list of target individuals is not permanent, with people continually added and removed on the basis of ongoing evaluation work. A heightened threat of far-right terrorism is also evident among the targeted individuals.

Some far-right violent terrorist projects have come to light in Finland

Lone individuals and small groups pose the most significant threat of far-right terrorism in Finland. The threat of violence particularly targets representatives of ethnic and religious minority groups and political actors who are perceived as ideological opponents. Other parties viewed as enemies in far-right ideology are also potential targets. Far-right terrorists have favoured the use of firearms in their attacks, but explosives have also been used.

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 idealising of terrorism online are also characteristic features. The far right in Finland also shares such views.

The first terrorist convictions related to far-right ideology were handed down in Finland in 2023 when the District Court of Päijänne-Tavastia sentenced three men to imprisonment at the end of October for offences committed with terrorist intent. The Deputy Prosecutor General brought charges in January 2024 in the case of a small far-right group that had operated in Kankaanpää. Two of the six defendants were charged with a terrorist offence.

Supo has identified some individual right-wing extremists who left Finland for the Ukrainian war zone. Some of them have returned to Finland. Participation in a conflict zone will also increase the likelihood of radicalisation of people in Finland.

Even though supporters of the ideology also meet in

person, networking on social media platforms, disseminating propaganda and promoting violence remain integral to the activities of the far right in Finland. People who may carry out violent activities or incite individual actors and small groups to violence are particularly linked to the operating context known as Siege culture.

The number of combat sports clubs associated with far-right ideology increased in Finland last year. The communications of these clubs is aimed at a wider audience than merely individuals with a far-right mentality. While organised far-right movements do not currently pose a terrorist threat, they establish a potential breeding ground for radicalising individuals.

The threat of radical Islamist terrorism remains unchanged in Finland

The most significant threat of radical Islamist terrorism is posed by ideologically inspired and radicalised individuals and small groups. 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 incidents that are perceived as offensive or hostile to Islam, such as burning the Quran or military action taken against terrorist organisations in a conflict zone, are likely to increase the threat of a terrorist attack in the short term.

A conviction for training to commit a terrorist offence was handed down for the first time in Finland in April 2023 when the District Court of Helsinki sentenced a Spanish citizen who had lived in Finland to a suspended term of four months' imprisonment. The individual was deported from Finland in August 2023.

The principal measures taken in Finland to support radical Islamism concern the transfer of funds and the spread of ideology online. Encrypted instant messaging applications and chat groups are the main vehicles for disseminating and consuming propaganda. Individuals



radicalised online may follow the propaganda of several radical Islamist terrorist organisations, with no clear allegiance to any particular one of them.

The threat of a terrorist attack in Europe motivated by radical Islamism has intensified over the past year. The key factors behind this increase are desecrations of the Quran in Europe and the conflict between Israel and the terrorist organisation Hamas arising from the attack carried out by the latter in October 2023. Individuals or parties representing other religions or sexual minorities are also targeted in propaganda. The growing threat elsewhere in Europe has not significantly affected the threat level in Finland.

The foreign fighter phenomenon continues to affect radical Islamist operating conditions, both in Finland and in Europe. Nobody arrived in Finland from the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq in 2023. Some individual supporters of radical Islamism with links to Finland are still living in these zones. 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. Terrorist organisations operating in conflict zones also seek to mount attacks in Western countries. The importance of especially sub-Saharan Africa as an operating zone for al-Qaeda and ISIL has been growing rapidly. Violent terrorist activity by ISIL also increased last year in the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq. The conflict between the terrorist organisation Hamas and Israel has also activated other radical Islamist actors operating in the Middle East.

The threat of other terrorism is low

The threat of terrorism posed by the far left in Finland is low, with its operations in Finland mainly focusing on anti-fascist activism and support for the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Far-left activities in Finland are mainly non-violent, while operations that support violence are primarily directed outside of Finland.

The threat of terrorism from the PKK in Finland remains low. The PKK and its supporters focus in Finland on fundraising and influencing. PKK operations in the Middle East are aimed at Turkey and Turkish targets.

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 comes from lone operators or small groups advocating far-right or radical Islamist ideology. People with a previous background of violence will probably have the most significant capacity for violence. The online environment enables adoption of ideas from many directions, and does not require commitment to the activities of a single organisation. Radicalisation in Finland will probably also increasingly affect minors in the short term.



Supo in figures in 2023

Personnel

Employees in total **588** Average age **42.4 y** Employees with academic degree **69.2 %**

International correspondence

22,000 international messages (sent and received)

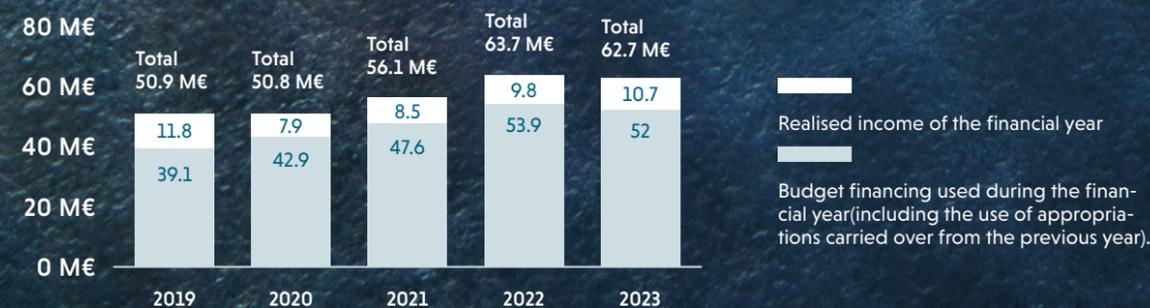
Security clearances



* A new vetting is not always needed when an individual'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€)



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 sources. Foresight is a vital step in intelligence analysis.

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

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 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 grants security clearances

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

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Supo was set up at the dawn of the Cold War, and the threats nowadays are the same

Supo turns 75 this year, and countering the threat of the USSR and later of Russia has always been a key element in its work. While many contemporary threats remind us of the early years of Supo, the position of Finland has changed substantially.

This year it will be 75 years since Supo began operating as a wholly reformed security police agency in Finland. The mission of this new special police department was to impartially safeguard the lawful state and social order of Finland by exposing treasonous projects directed against it.

The very name of the agency declared a departure from its predecessors, the National Investigative Police and the State Police (Valpo I and II) that, in the turbulent early decades of internal and external policymaking by the young republic, had evolved into a police agency that was not only secret, but even politically partisan.

The operating environment of the new agency in 1949 were dominated by familiar themes. The USA and the USSR had begun their Cold War superpower policy confrontation a couple of years earlier. While officially positioning itself as a neutral country under the 1948 Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance signed with the Soviet Union, Finland remained in the vanguard of the West behind the scenes. The most important function of Supo in relation to external threats was to disclose and combat espionage operations of the Soviet Union.

This work bore fruit in the 1950s, especially on the eastern border of Finland, where Soviet border forces and military intelligence actively recruited Finnish border zone residents as agents. Some Western intelligence service operatives were also caught up in this dragnet. The geographical location of Finland attracted NATO countries as a base of operations in espionage targeting the Soviet Union.

Powers and politics limited Supo operations

The Cold War was also reflected in Finland's internal security. The focus of surveillance was long directed at communists, whom the Finnish government still feared would seek to subvert democracy and establish a dictatorship with the support of the Soviet Union.

Attention was also paid to the activities of the Finnish People's Democratic League and the Communist Party of Finland, because the USSR was initially believed – and ultimately also known – to have used these political parties as instruments of its influencing operations in an effort to tie Finland into its own sphere of interest, both politically and economically. The Communist Party of Finland also gave Soviet intelligence a channel for monitoring Finnish politics in real time.

Supo nevertheless lacked the authority to intervene in such political intelligence and influencing operations by the Soviet Union in Finland. The only effective countermeasure, a public and open debate on the dangers of Soviet intelligence in Finland, was not possible under the 1948 Agreement.

Is history repeating itself?

Now 75 years later Supo continues its work to defend Finland's national security. The operating conditions of the agency are once again dominated by an escalating global confrontation between East and West, and by strained superpower relations, this time between the United States and China.

The security scenario in Europe also experienced another enduring change two years ago when Russia launched a major war of aggression against Ukraine. Climate change and poverty pose challenges of their own, forcing the migration of more and more people as debate on a crisis in democracy escalates both in the USA and Western Europe.

Finland remains between East and West geopolitically, and unlawful Russian intelligence and influencing operations are still the greatest external threat to its national security. Domestic extremist movements have also returned to the foreground of internal security, with particular growth in the threat posed by the extreme right in recent years. Ideas of violently overthrowing the democratic social order and replacing it with a dictatorship have similarly made a comeback.

So history seems to be repeating itself with regard to the operating conditions of Supo. This also indicates that the need for intelligence and security services that combat threats to state or, in modern terms, national security is (sadly) always with us. It is only the details of such threats that evolve over time.

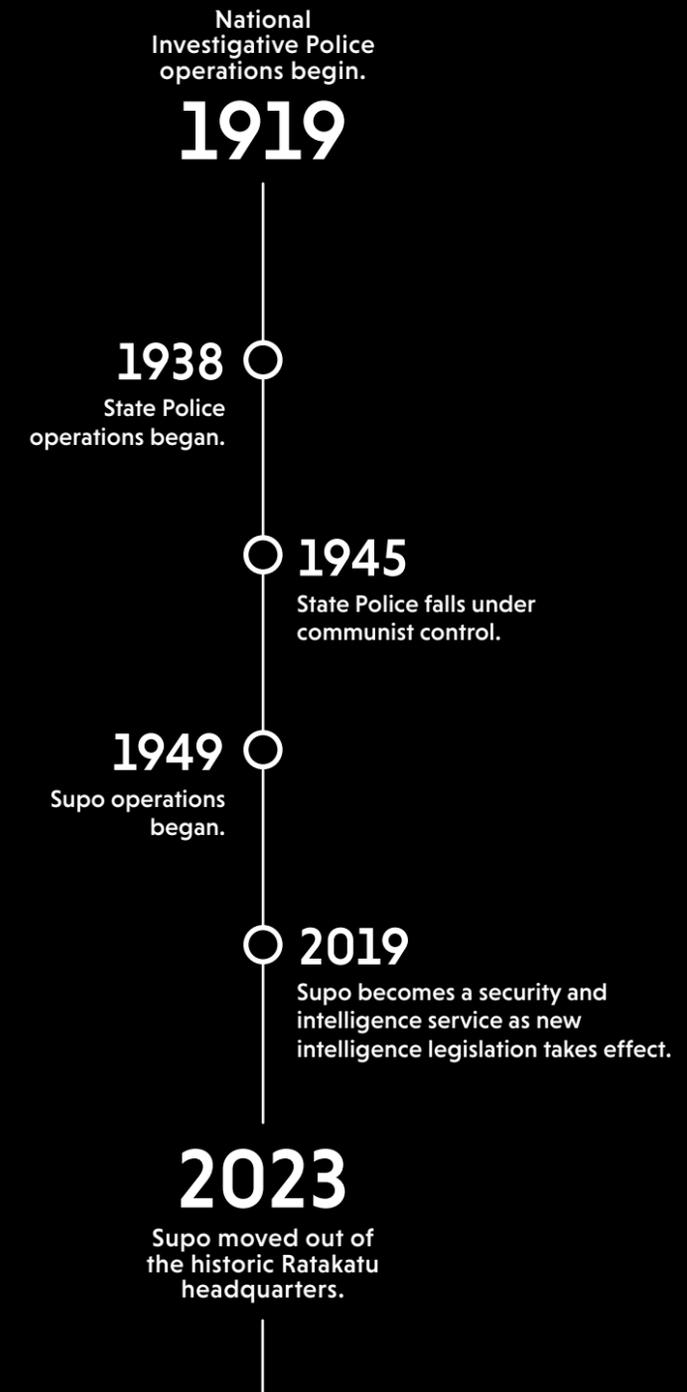
The position of Finland has changed substantially

A significant change has nevertheless occurred in Finland's foreign and security policy position. As of 2024, Finland has officially aligned with the West, both through EU and NATO membership, and through a defence cooperation agreement with the USA and close JEF cooperation with the United Kingdom.

While this new position provides security, it also brings new responsibilities. Following its evolution into a security and intelligence service in 2019, Supo now responds to these responsibilities by gathering proactive intelligence, especially in support of foreign and security policymaking by top-level national government in Finland, but also to meet the needs of Finland's allies.

The ability of Supo to speak frankly and openly about threats to Finland's national security is also new, and is especially important at a time when the means of hostile information influencing are nearly limitless.

Mari Luukkonen
Suojelupoliisin historiasta väitellyt
Supon erityisasiantuntija



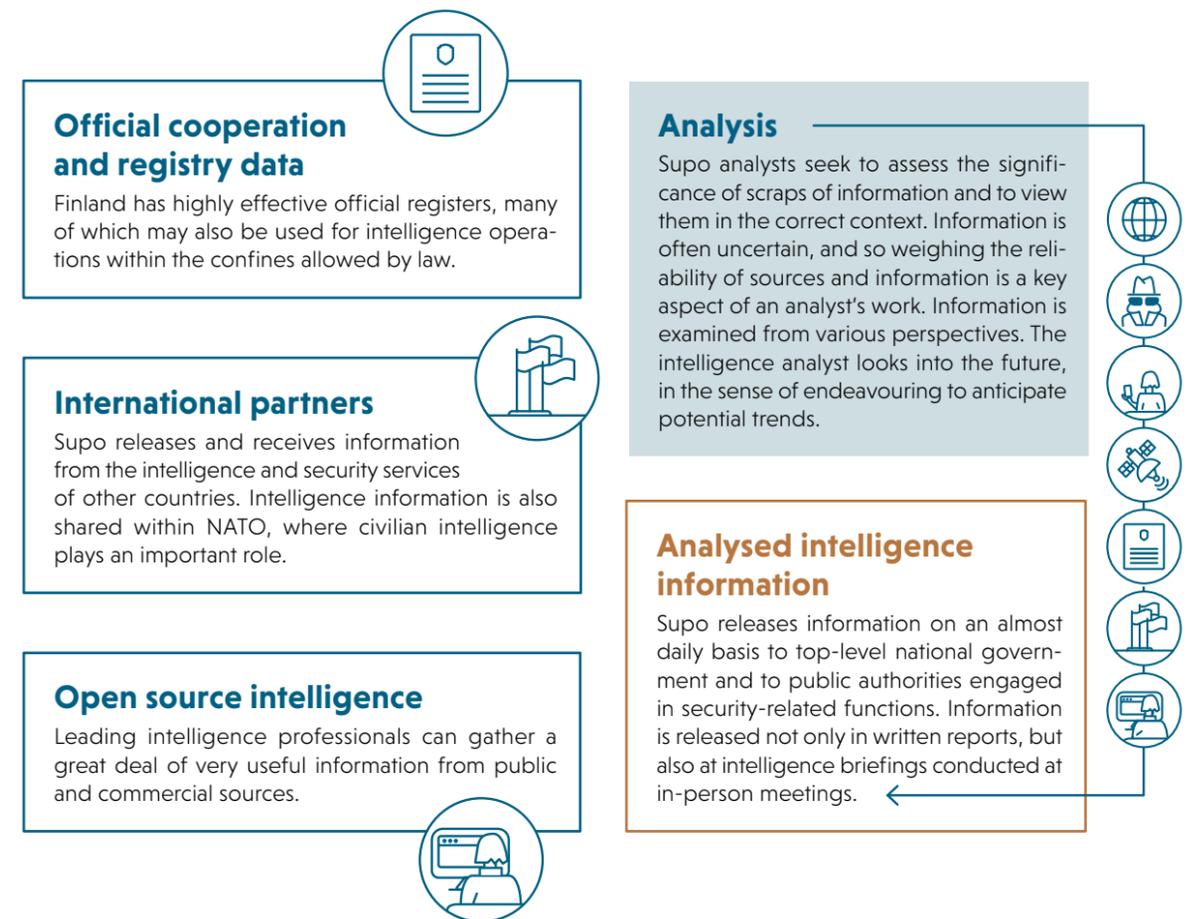
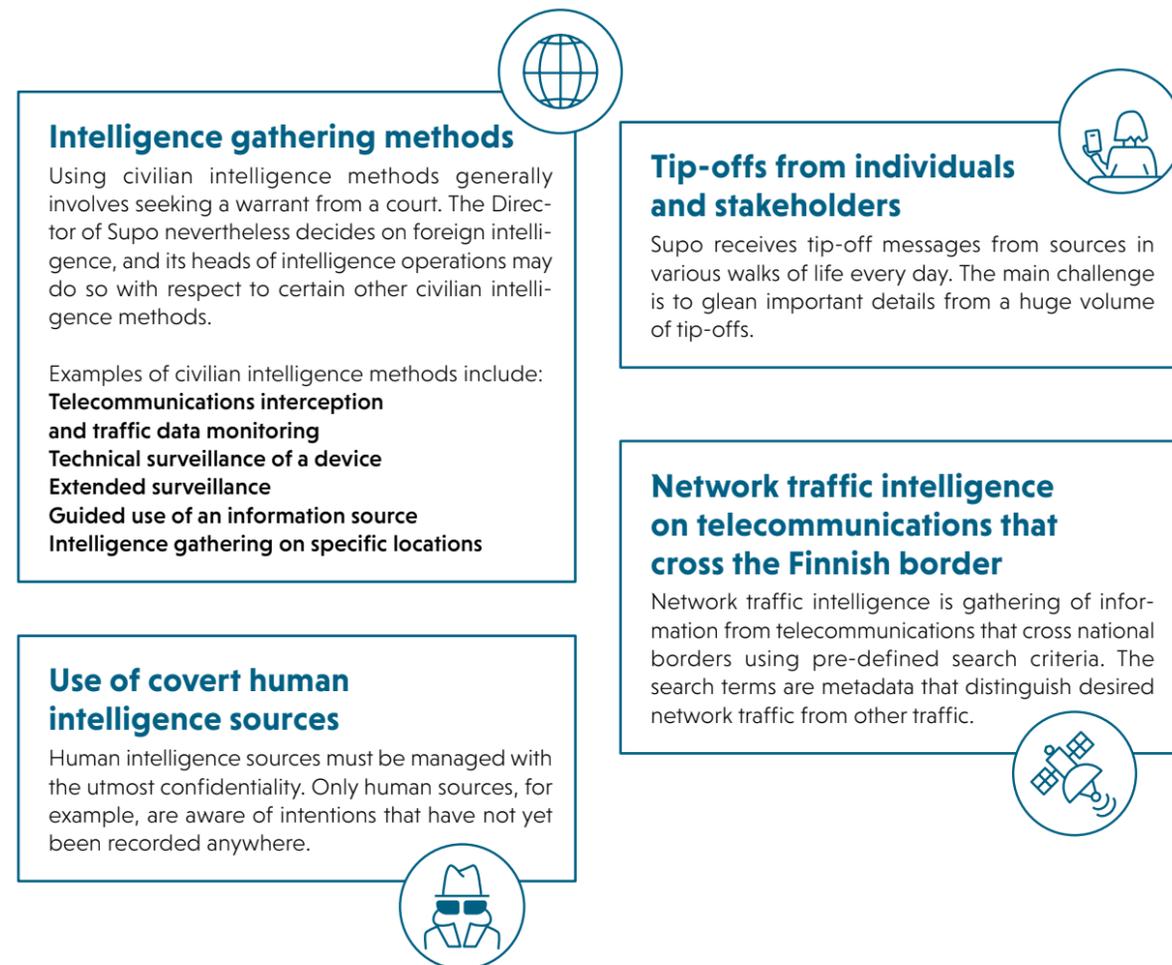
This is how intelligence is compiled

Supo gathers information from a wide range of sources, processing data fragments into valuable intelligence information.

The role of Supo as an intelligence service is to acquire intelligence information. This information is intended to serve policymaking by the government and public authorities in matters that concern the security of Finland. Supo only acquires information about phenomena that affect national security, meaning the most serious threats to Finland. Information gathering is based on threats that

are defined in legislation.

The various approaches applied for acquiring information are mutually complementary. Supo analysts process gathered information into analyses and assessments for top-level national government. Intelligence information is ideally unique and predictive – and helps policymakers navigate a complex security environment.





Creativity and critical thinking are essential skills in open source research

A capable open source analyst can find useful information in archives, news and even propaganda. Supo increasingly invests in open source intelligence.

A creative and curious, but also critical mind is what you need when conducting open source intelligence at Supo. Open source intelligence (OSINT) means using information available from public sources in intelligence work.

The range of potential information sources is huge, including social media, news, satellite images and educational materials. Satellite images can verify events that have already occurred, while news media may report the time and place of some relevant event.

“Open source intelligence work is an innovative undertaking, because information may be gathered using a wide range of approaches and may even be found in very surprising places, such as archives. Even old information, for example about people, can sometimes prove surprisingly useful,” explains one anonymous senior analyst working in open source intelligence, whom we shall call **Petra**.

Open source intelligence has a long heritage. The importance of this field has only grown more crucial in recent years, as digital sources increasingly provide more information in novel forms. Supo is also increasingly investing in open source intelligence.

You have to know how to disagree with yourself

A great deal of information is available from public sources, even in autocratic states. Relevant details can often be gleaned from statutes and statistics alone. Even propaganda may provide relevant insight into the mindset of leaders in a foreign state or radical ideological groups. Critical thinking is always essential in intelligence work.

“While there is a great deal of noise on social media, even here we may find important nuggets of information. What matters is how the information is processed,” explains senior analyst specialist **Veli-Pekka Kivimäki**. “It is essential to remain critical. This means not getting obsessed with any particular point of view, and remaining willing to disagree with yourself.”

Useful sources will vary according to the phenomenon being studied. When considering terrorism, we typically

seek information on individuals, groups, or their ideology and propaganda. When endeavouring to understand the behaviour of states, the particular question may lead us to study everything from editorial media to satellite images.

Planning and operational protection are required

Anyone can gather a great deal of information from open sources nowadays. The collection work of Supo always serves the information needs of the customer and Finnish national security. Intelligence operations are also carefully planned, requiring a systematic study of detail. The truth sometimes turns out to be less exciting than conclusions drawn in public debate.

The work of a public authority is always prescribed by law, meaning that more restrictions apply than is the case when a layman searches for information online. Browsing individual social media profiles, for example, may readily be interpreted as the kind of surveillance that requires a formal warrant.

“We cannot just snoop around people’s profiles on a whim – and we wouldn’t even want to. Intelligence work must always have some objective. Mere curiosity is not enough,” Petra explains.

Firm statutory grounds are always required for using intelligence methods. We generally seek information by other means in the first instance, such as from open sources where possible. Open sources often provide the quickest and cheapest way to gather information while minimising intrusion into privacy.

“Information may be more readily available from open sources, with no need to apply the most intrusive methods in all cases. On the other hand, there may be less open source information available on such topics as the plans and intentions of foreign powers,” Kivimäki notes.

Good forward planning and precise objectives are crucial in open source intelligence. It is also necessary to give careful consideration to protecting your own information searches in intelligence work, as online information retrieval always leaves some kind of trace.

There is no intelligence without high-quality analysis

The importance of top class analysis has grown in recent years, with Supo enhancing its analytical functions accordingly.

On receiving new information, an operational analyst at Supo must address a wide variety of questions. Is the information source reliable? Are the details credible?

Supo's mission is to produce meaningful intelligence information. There may be very little information available on some occasions, whereas at other times there is plenty of material, but it is characteristically inconsistent. Reality is messy, and it is not always easy to judge what information is important and what is not.

Only after undergoing careful analysis does information become intelligence. The work of analysts really is crucial in many aspects of producing intelligence information.

Analysts play a significant role in Supo information gathering

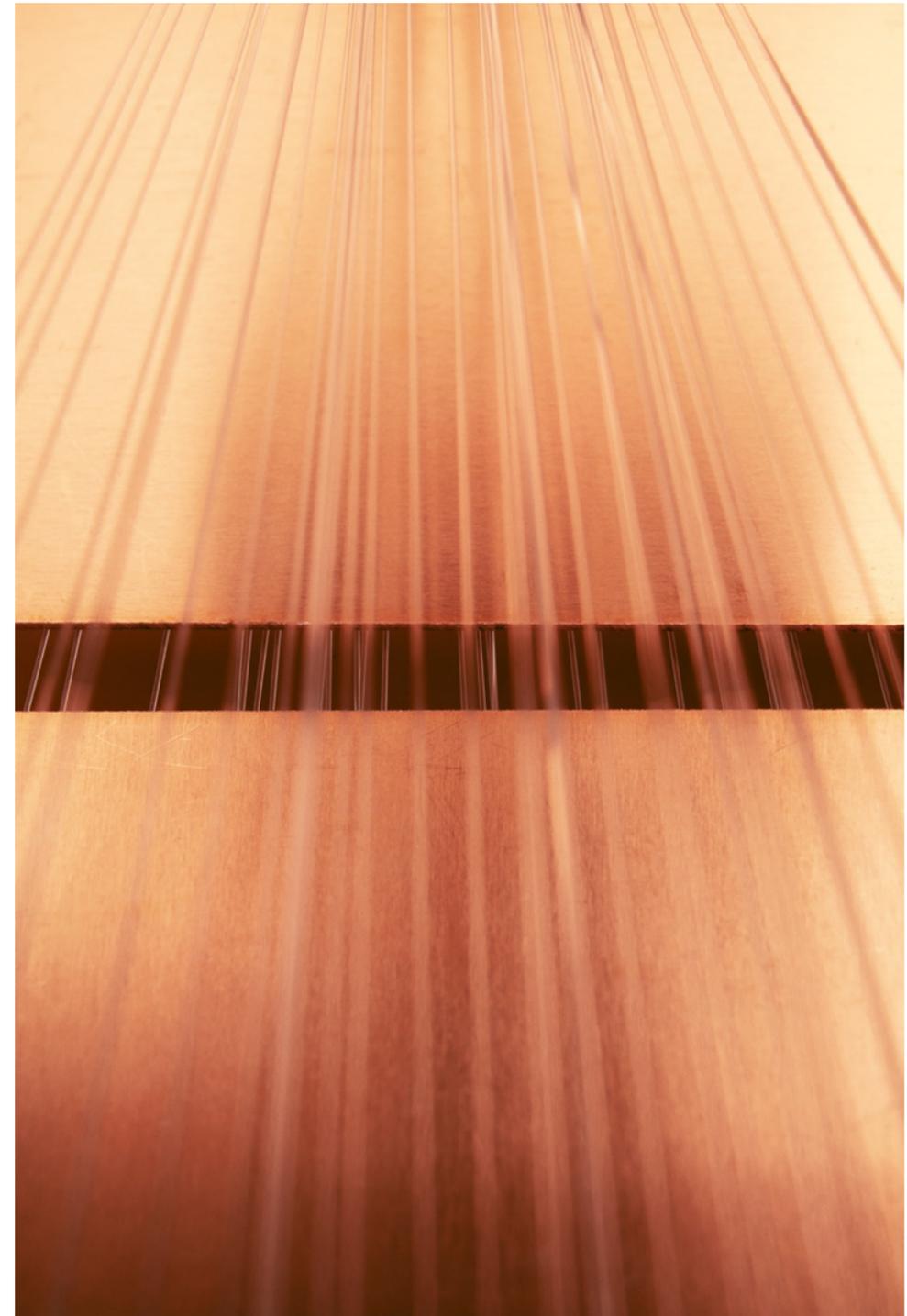
Operational analysts at Supo are closely involved in information gathering, helping to direct this work. Operations typically have some kind of target or set of targets on

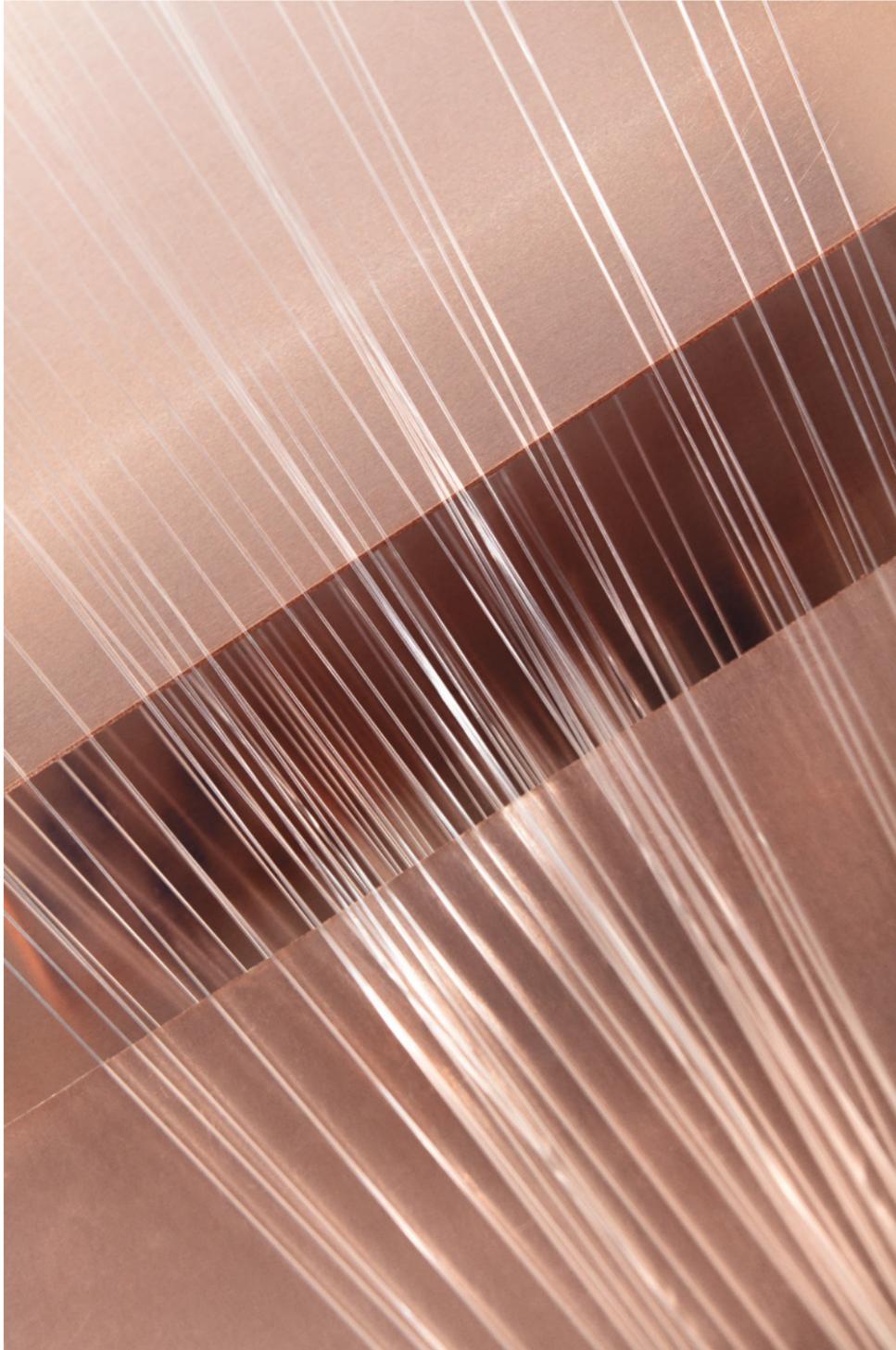
which information is gathered. Operational analysts usually examine things on a very concrete level, for example by analysing the networks of target individuals. They continually evaluate the information gathered in intelligence operations.

Supo also applies internationally tried and tested methods of intelligence analysis, which seek to reveal various kinds of bias in thinking. For example, hypotheses are used in analysis work, to bring transparency and structure to analysis.

Analysis of competing hypotheses is a frequently used method. Several hypotheses are formulated as a basis for analysis, with efforts then made to refute them as further information is gathered. The hypotheses are finally tested by multiple analysts and, ideally, whatever ultimately survives this process is the most probable hypothesis.

Analysts must sometimes conduct red teaming, considering the mindset and objectives of the target. There are also specific analytical techniques for testing this perspective.





Analysis is conducted from many points of view

There are many levels of Supo analysis. While operational analysts are engaged in practical information gathering, the job of tactical analysts is to combine information from various operations and other sources. They also direct operational information gathering, and maintain such resources as the national terrorism overview.

Strategic analysts seek to draw conclusions on a broader level concerning the overall significance for national security of information gathered in Supo enquiries and from other sources. Strategic analysis anticipates and directs information gathering to meet the information needs of top-level government and to illuminate its blind spots.

What is special about Supo analysis work?

One special feature of Supo's strategic analysis work is an ongoing dialogue with policymakers. Even though the actual analysis must always be independent, intelligence information is produced to serve the information needs of top-level government.

These needs are reviewed in annual discussions with leading politicians and public officials that enable formulation of priorities for civilian intelligence. Supo staff use these priorities to derive more detailed intelligence questions for investigation. These questions seek to serve the information needs of top-level government.

Analysts play a key role in formulating intelligence questions, which may be refined, for example, through brainstorming by several analysts. Intelligence work is always teamwork involving collaboration between analysis, information gathering and operations management.

Supo has enhanced its analysis work

The intelligence community has stressed the importance of high standard analysis in recent years. Technological progress has eroded the traditional monopoly on various means of information gathering that was formerly enjoyed by the intelligence services of old, and Supo has recruited a significant number of analysts. From the perspective of analysis itself, it is essential for analysts to come from diverse backgrounds and Supo has hired university graduates in very diverse fields, journalists and individuals from other branches of state administration as analysts in recent years.

Analysis work and associated training at Supo have been enhanced, becoming increasingly professional and systematic.

Some cognitive biases in intelligence

The mirroring effect

Projecting one's own views onto those of another party, because people tend to regard their own thoughts and actions as rational.

Groupthink

Adapting to a group outlook without forming or expressing any view of one's own, because maintaining good team spirit is considered more valuable.

Competing hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

A group is planning to attack a critical infrastructure target and is capable of doing so.

Hypothesis 2

The group is planning to attack a critical infrastructure target, but is unable to do so in the short term.

Hypothesis 3

The group is not planning to attack any critical infrastructure target.

A regional presence is important for Supo information gathering

Both intelligence operations and terrorist activity may be encountered in various parts of Finland.



"You should be working on getting information that others cannot or don't know how to acquire" is how experienced Supo staff member **Kari** describes his work in Eastern Finland. The information that is so vital to Supo is hard to acquire without a local presence on the ground, so comprehensive representation in various parts of Finland is essential for Supo operations.

Supo is continually engaged in ongoing intelligence operations throughout Finland. Regional offices play an important role in Supo information gathering, because their staff are familiar with local operators and conditions.

These offices are located in Joensuu, Kuopio, Lappeenranta, Oulu, Rovaniemi, Tampere, Turku and Vaasa. They provide bases for handling almost all Supo functions locally.

The threat of intelligence or terrorism is not confined to the Helsinki region

A local presence also enables a rapid reaction. If some point of interest to Supo is near the eastern border, for example, then the location can be reached quickly and familiar border officials will assist.

"We are more likely to get early warning of developments. We wouldn't necessarily be able to tackle incidents if we always had to start out from Helsinki, for example," Kari explains.

It is also a lot more difficult to find information sources when working remotely.

Foreign intelligence operations may target various parts of Finland. There is critical infrastructure in every municipality and city. Research projects or key businesses of interest to foreign espionage can be found all over Finland.

The threat of terrorism is similarly not confined to the largest population centres. The Internet plays an increasingly important role in radicalisation, meaning that operations are not bound to any particular place.

People may contact Supo with minimal formality

All Supo offices receive alerts or tip-offs from public authorities, businesses, universities, and other sources. Specialist partners can often provide a valuable overview of phenomena in their fields. They may be well positioned to notice changes – for example, if businesses with a particular profile approach with partnership proposals.

Supo also receives valuable information from members of the public. Kari explains that the threshold for contacting Supo is low. Failing to receive some essential detail is much more serious than having too much information.

"Observations and tip-offs reported in concrete terms are especially useful, as they make it easier to pursue further investigations. So instead of merely telling us about a suspicious vehicle near a critical infrastructure site, for example, it would also be helpful to record key details, such as the colour and registration number of the vehicle," Kari explains.

People in Finland trust Supo

Supo surveys public perceptions of its work on an annual basis. The latest survey was conducted between 20 November and 2 December 2023, based on a sample representing the population of mainland Finland aged between 18 and 79 years.

An overwhelming majority (90%) of the public in Finland expressed either a high or at least fairly high degree of trust in Supo. Two respondents in five (40%) report a high degree of trust, with half of all respondents (50%) reporting a fairly high degree of trust.

Public confidence in Supo has remained at the same level as in previous years, with the latest findings ranked as the third best in more than two decades of such surveys. Only one respondent in a hundred does not trust Supo at all. Disparities between various groups remain quite minimal after adjusting the findings for various background variables, such as age, education, professional status and political views. The vast majority of people in all groups trust Supo.

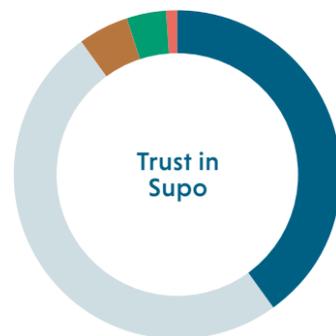
The telephone interview survey also asked respondents

to assess how well Supo had discharged its functions. Four respondents in five felt that Supo had managed its work either very well (19%) or fairly well (61%).

The same survey also includes an annual review of how well people living in Finland know the functions of Supo, which changed to some extent when new intelligence legislation took effect in summer 2019.

The best-known Supo functions are gathering intelligence on threats to national security, combating terrorism and preventing espionage targeting Finland. More than 90 per cent of respondents identified these Supo functions. A slight increase over the previous year was found in public awareness that Supo provides intelligence to the President, Government and public authorities (87%), and that it conducts security clearance vetting of key public appointees (83%).

As a new function of Supo, foreign intelligence was the least well known aspect of its work (71%). There has been little change in survey findings since last year.



- high 40 %
- fairly high 50 %
- no opinion 5 %
- not very high 4 %
- none at all 1 %

The survey was conducted by Verian (formerly Kantar). A total of 1,004 interviews were arranged, and the margin of error is ± 3.1 percentage points.



