

# Finland's NATO strategy

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# FINLAND'S NATO STRATEGY

STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE



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## FOREWORDS

Finland applied for NATO membership on May 17, 2022 – less than three months after Russia started its war of aggression against Ukraine. The NATO countries signed the accession protocol on membership on July 5, 2022, when Finland became an observer member. Finland became a full member of NATO on April 4, 2023.

The process was controlled, but fast. The long-standing political way of talking about Finland's NATO option became history when both the citizens and the political leadership turned in support of NATO membership in a few weeks in the spring of 2022.

At that time, Ajatuspaja Toivo and Wilfried Centre for European Studies published the collection of writings "Finland's NATO Spring 2022", recording the views of researchers and other experts on what membership would mean for Finland, how the process is progressing and what kind of historical change in our security policy is involved. Our publication produced new information to support political decision-making, which is our main task.

Now, two years later, we return to the NATO topic. What should Finland consider in its NATO strategy? What is essential from the point of view of Swedish or Nordic cooperation? How are the security policies of the EU and NATO interrelated, and what is happening in the Arctic region? Conscript service and, of course, Russia's perspective are also discussed in this work.

The publication is a cross-section of the security situation, it takes part in the discussion about Finland's role in NATO and it gives an opportunity to review and comment on the foreign and security policy reports that will be published later. Thanks to all the expert authors and thanks to Elina Riutta for her cooperation in editing the book.

In Helsinki on 31 May 2024

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# From national resilience to transatlantic crisis resilience

Pauli Aalto-Setälä

PAULI AALTO-SETÄLÄ



As I write this, Finland is celebrating its first anniversary as a member of NATO, and I have just returned from NATO headquarters where I had the opportunity to negotiate with NATO's technology and innovation leaders. It was somewhat surprising to see how Finland is regarded as a top expert in new technology and comprehensive security. This opportunity must be seized, not only for Finland but for the benefit of the entire alliance. The years spent waiting at NATO's doorstep have humbled us, a modesty we need to shed.

In the Parliament, Finland's NATO membership has primarily manifested itself in the fact that the foundations of the alliance, i.e., joint agreements, has already been negotiated. For instance, we have approved an agreement defining the legal status of other NATO forces on Finnish soil.

Even before Finland's NATO membership was finalised, it was clear that the alliance relationship would benefit both Finland and other NATO member states. The general messages are widely recognised: Finland will be an active contributor to security with its expertise, and thanks to NATO allies, Finland's preparedness no longer relies solely on national defence capabilities.

The first year in NATO has already shown that Finland's benefits do not end here.

## NATO's 360 degrees and Finland's concept of comprehensive security go hand in hand

The NATO summit in Madrid in 2022 received a lot of media attention, especially in Finland and Sweden, as we were the subjects of discussion.

What received less attention was the declaration made by NATO countries' heads of state, stating that from now on, NATO would adopt a 360-degree approach to security in all its operations.

The alliance is committed to preparing for all security threats, whether on land, sea, air, cyber environments, or space. At the same time, the security community acknowledged that energy and overall national resilience must be taken seriously as dimensions of security. As warfare becomes increasingly hybrid, preparedness must be at a commensurate level.

The timing of NATO's expression of will was excellent for Finland's membership. Finland's security concept has long been built on a unique model where threats to all vital functions are addressed in cooperation with all actors in our society.

The Security Committee operating under the Ministry of Defence illustrates this thinking with the so-called diamond model, where society's vital functions are understood to broadly cover not only defence capability but also mental crisis resilience, economy, supply security, and the population's operational capability. Security considerations that cut across the entire society provide extremely strong support in crisis situations to bolster national resilience.

## Threat of information influence

The World Economic Forum identified disinformation and misinformation as a great threat in the coming years. In information influence, the addition of false information, fear, and distrust belong to the arsenal of a hostile state actor. Weaponized migration, disabling telecommunications, and spreading false information are part of warfare.

We in Finland have coped reasonably well as a target of such sabotage, but worse may be in store. In terms of national defence spirit, we are among the world leaders, trusting authorities such as the police and army, and even ordinary citizens start blocking trolls while White Hat-hackers expose illegal activities.

Finland must continue to train in this field and actively offer its expertise to allied countries. A nasty story about an unpleasant issue or politician easily gets shares and likes.

FIGURE C

## Global risks ranked by severity over the short and long term

"Please estimate the likely impact (severity) of the following risks over a 2-year and 10-year period."

### Risk categories

- Economic
- Environmental
- Geopolitical
- Societal
- Technological

### 2 years

1 <sup>st</sup>	Misinformation and disinformation
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Extreme weather events
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Societal polarization
4 <sup>th</sup>	Cyber insecurity
5 <sup>th</sup>	Interstate armed conflict
6 <sup>th</sup>	Lack of economic opportunity
7 <sup>th</sup>	Inflation
8 <sup>th</sup>	Involuntary migration
9 <sup>th</sup>	Economic downturn
10 <sup>th</sup>	Pollution

### 10 years

1 <sup>st</sup>	Extreme weather events
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Critical change to Earth systems
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
4 <sup>th</sup>	Natural resource shortages
5 <sup>th</sup>	Misinformation and disinformation
6 <sup>th</sup>	Adverse outcomes of AI technologies
7 <sup>th</sup>	Involuntary migration
8 <sup>th</sup>	Cyber insecurity
9 <sup>th</sup>	Societal polarization
10 <sup>th</sup>	Pollution

### Source

World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2023-2024.

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[1 https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_The\\_Global\\_Risks\\_Report\\_2024.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2024.pdf)

Exaggeratingly, it could be said that in information influence opposing the government, the opposition is an excellent channel. The actors have roughly the same goal, although not the same motive. Behind the drumming could also be direct military intelligence. The French bedbug case is a good example. Russia spread a news story claiming that French bedbugs were a pandemic-like global problem. The bedbugs did not spread en masse around the world, but the fake news did.

## Finland as a high technology model country

Cooperation between Finland and NATO in the most promising high technologies is a symbiosis that needs to be accelerated. It has begun.

Last year, our government submitted an application to NATO for the establishment of innovation and technology test centres in Finland, and the application was accepted as submitted. Through NATO's DIANA project, intended to support and accelerate defence innovations, there are currently one business accelerator and two test centres in Finland. The business accelerator to be established at Finland's State Technical Research Centre in Otaniemi, Espoo, is especially intended for Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises and startups that wish to expand their business in the defence sector.

It is important that such companies receive needed early stage business development support. The Finnish defence technology march is also accelerated by the test centres enabled by the DIANA project at the University of Oulu and the State Technical Research Centre of Finland, VTT in Finnish. While VTT's test centre enables testing environments for cybersecurity communication as well as quantum and space technologies, the University of Oulu's test

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centre offers the opportunity to test the functionality of 6G network technologies.

NATO's DIANA activities are an excellent example of how much Finland benefits from NATO membership. Finnish defence solutions developed with NATO's support increase the global visibility of Finnish technology expertise and open entirely new business opportunities for our companies beyond Finland's borders.

We have the opportunity to build a strong brand within NATO as a developer of military-use technology, based on both our credible national defence and high technology expertise. Following Nokia's 6G expertise, we are already a superpower in advanced communication technologies, and we should further grow this position in the defence solutions business environment.

NATO's innovation fund focuses on financing deep tech companies. According to Finland's industrial investor Tesi, there are about 240 such companies in Finland. New companies and innovations are constantly emerging. Examples include high-performance batteries (Geyser batteries), radar-imaging satellites (Iceye), quantum technology (IQM), virtual and mixed reality (Varjo technologies), and scalable IoT applications for wireless networks (Wirepas).

## Finland as an active guideline demonstrator in NATO

The contributions Finland offers to NATO in terms of national defence capability, understanding comprehensive security, and as a high technology exporter provide us with a strong ally profile in the military alliance. This position also gives us the opportunity to influence NATO's strategic communication more broadly. My 30 years of experience in media and communication companies

assures me that we should also influence NATO's strategic communication. Finland's broad vision of societal security should also be ingrained in NATO's narrative.

So far, NATO has directed its messages especially to Russia. Throughout the Ukraine war, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has emphasized that NATO remains united alongside Ukraine against Putin's dictatorship and war of aggression. NATO has credibly communicated to Russia that there is no access to the territories of the allied countries. Russia does not question this as long as the common defence obligation brought by Article Five remains at the core of NATO's defence narrative.

However, I see that NATO still has work to do in its communication directed at its own citizens. This links to NATO's narrative as a guarantor of comprehensive security, an essential part of which is the resilience of citizens and institutions – national defence and the security of all Europe must not appear as a task somehow outsourced to military forces outside our own living space. Every NATO country's citizen can contribute to security with their daily activities, for example, on social media.

In Finland, comprehensive security and each citizen's responsibility for our common security are embedded in our citizens' DNA. This kind of thinking is also needed in those NATO member countries that do not have the military alliance's longest border with Russia. Understanding NATO and national defence tasks and an individual NATO country citizen's perception of their own role as a security creator are built during peacetime.

NATO should reinforce the basic message that NATO is the main deterrent against external threats in Europe. This is significant because Russia is trying to drive a wedge between European states through information warfare.

Increasing NATO's visibility in citizens' everyday lives does not mean scaring them with war; on the contrary: highlighting secu-

riety-related issues strengthens the understanding in Europe that control of our security is in our own hands. This is an important antidote to Russian information influence, which specifically focuses on scaring with future threat scenarios.

## Conclusion

The relationship between Finland and the allied countries is a symbiosis. Finland gained common defence and security with NATO membership. On the other hand, Finland has top expertise in comprehensive security and high technology, which benefits the entire military alliance. As targets of hybrid influence and information warfare, we are on the front lines. We can conceptualize our national resilience as transatlantic crisis resilience.

# The positive impacts of conscription on society's crisis resilience and preparedness

Marko Palokangas and Elina Riutta

MARKO PALOKANGAS



ELINA RIUTTA



The over-decade-long war in Ukraine by Russia has demonstrated that modern warfare increasingly involves non-military means and influences on the basic functions of society, which necessitate a more comprehensive approach to preparedness. Perceptions of modern warfare and the image of war are constantly evolving. It is not just about changing threats but also about the broad scope of warfare and its effects on societies, institutions, authorities, businesses, critical infrastructure, organisations, and all citizens. One function that contributes to preparedness skills is compulsory conscription.

## Preparedness as part of comprehensive security and national security

Managing comprehensive security, which includes maintaining society's vital functions, involves preparing for threats, managing disruptions and emergencies, and recovering from them. According to the Government's Defence Report, Finnish society's preparedness is implemented under the principle of comprehensive security, which means securing society's vital functions through the collaboration of authorities, businesses, organisations, and citizens.

Preparedness ensures the smooth handling of tasks and possibly necessary exceptional measures during disruptions of critical functions and emergencies. Readiness, in turn, refers to the state achieved through preparedness that allows for responding to various threats.

Self-preparedness is the activity of individuals and various communities aimed at preventing accidents and preparing to act in dangerous situations. Household self-preparedness is understood as individuals and residential communities preparing for situations where normal everyday life is disrupted. The obligation to prepare applies generally to both authorities and individuals, companies, and communities. The self-preparedness obligation applies to all citizens.

There are many ways to achieve preparedness and readiness, such as strengthening inter-sectoral cooperation between authorities and organisations, associations, and citizens. The best way to prepare for threats is through the combined efforts of all actors. Cooperation ensures that necessary tasks are completed, overlaps are avoided, and costs from operations are reduced. The goal is to harness the resources of all actors when society's security is threatened.

In preparedness, the aim is to anticipate rather than react. Planning for anticipation requires detecting weak signals and utilising foresight methods, research data, innovative experimental culture, and information and spatial data analyses. Monitoring changes in operational security environment and going through scenarios in exercises enhance readiness to act correctly in unexpected situations.

## National security covers society from communities to individual

War affects everyone when there is an attempt to influence a nation. This is also a lesson for our civil society. Matters must be faced with harsh realities. Hence, we need courage for preparedness. This means understanding real threat scenarios and taking bold actions accordingly to become more resilient. Each of us should consider as a citizen whether we are prepared for various threats and disruptions, such as scams in telecommunications networks or long disruptions like power outages and financial transaction interruptions. Do we know the locations of civil shelters? And do we have a 72-hour emergency kit in place?

The strength of the Finnish comprehensive security cooperation model is that it covers all levels and sectors of society. In addition to the state administration, authorities, businesses, regions, and municipalities, universities, research institutions, organisations, communities, and individuals form a comprehensive security network where information can be shared, common goals set, and cooperation committed to flexibly, as there is no pre-determined or strictly regulated single operating method, which provides operational freedom.

In Finland, municipalities, cities, and wellbeing services counties, as well as authorities, are required to prepare contingency plans. Public legal entities and operators have a statutory obligation to ensure the most disruption-free handling of tasks even in disruption and emergency situations. Preparedness also concerns businesses, as companies or sectors critical to supply security, such as the energy and food industries, are required to prepare contingency plans. Preparedness has been developed in several areas since World War II, such as civil protection, construction, food sufficiency, and the storage of critical raw materials like fuel, and also by incorporating preparedness obligations into legislation.

At best, individuals and citizens can be classified as security actors. Active citizens are a significant part of a crisis-resistant society. Individuals are increasingly important security actors in their choices and actions, as members of their families and local communities, because authorities' operations cannot cover homes in terms of preparedness. The ability of authorities and other security actors to take care of society's preparedness is limited, and therefore the preparedness of citizens and homes is an essential part of comprehensive security.

An individual's knowledge, skills, and security-enhancing attitude form the foundation of society's resilience, or crisis tolerance. Even individual citizens play an important role in self-preparedness and strengthening society's resilience.

## Congscription enhances civic skills

Congscription offers society a vast amount of diverse individual and communal expertise. Citizens who have completed military service or alternative civilian service participate in maintaining national security, especially in preparedness measures, either alone or as part of a community. Utilising this expertise in Finland's comprehensive security is a tremendous opportunity and resource, especially within the framework of preparedness and readiness. For instance, information influence can directly affect the will to defend the nation, and too much reliance cannot be placed on citizens' assumed media literacy.

The final report of the so-called "Siilasmaa working group" completed in 2010 was titled "Finnish Conscription".<sup>1</sup> Notably, the report's subtitle, "The foundation of defence, motivating for individuals and emphasizing positive societal impacts", excellently describes the core conclusion of the memorandum. Conscription has numerous societal impacts, one of the most significant and positive being the improvement of individual's civic skills, particularly from the perspective of preparedness.

The security training given to conscripts focuses on strengthening the knowledge and skills related to societal preparedness and everyday safety. The conscription system can also support other authorities and society's overall preparedness more effectively, for example, by encouraging conscripts to engage with other authorities after their active service period, such as regional and local preparedness organisations, emergency organisations, and volunteer activities. Preparedness organisations refer to the staff respon-

sible for readiness and preparedness in municipalities and cities, forming a local and regional preparedness organisation together.

Congscription and the reserve provide a channel for concrete action in promoting national defence. Additionally, voluntary national defence training organisations, as well as the active participation of companies and non-governmental organisations in defence activities, also contribute to national defence willingness and awareness.

From an individual perspective, military service develops both mental and physical capacity. During military service, one learns responsibility, social skills, mental resilience, and teamwork. These skills are learned throughout the service period in exercises and daily life in the barracks, with leadership training further deepening them. All the skills learned in service promote mental capacity and endurance.

Military service also prevents social exclusion and promotes public health, which serves the crisis resilience of the entire nation. The service period develops an individual's physical fitness long-term through physical training, fitness tests, and exercises, such as combat training, marches, and morning exercises. Military service provides the tools to maintain physical fitness and healthy lifestyles even in the reserve. Maintaining physical capacity directly impacts crisis resilience.

## NATO member states and conscription

Military alliance has not been seen to critically affect general conscription as Finland's defence solution. Alliance does not eliminate the need for comprehensive national defence, which can only be achieved through broad conscription and a large reserve. Training the reserve, in turn, requires skilled training personnel. Maintaining conscription as part of Finland's defence solution even as a NATO member supports the view that a credible national defence capability is required from a military alliance member.

Before NATO membership, its opponents argued that military alliance would dismantle the conscription system leading to a professional army. Many NATO member states have abolished conscription and transitioned to professional armies, resulting in negative impacts for both preparedness and society. Partially or entirely abandoning conscription in Europe, for instance, in Sweden, has led to reduced defensive capabilities due to cuts made for savings and a belief in peace.

The tightening security situation now requires many countries to rebuild their defence systems, which takes time and money. The topic has been covered in various media.<sup>2</sup> For example, Germany is considering reinstating conscription as a corrective move,<sup>3</sup> and last year Latvia passed a law reinstating men's conscription.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.itallehti.fi/ulkomaat/a/bab2208c-bfd2-4b4a-ac8c-fbfbcfeff25f>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hs.fi/maailma/art-2000010272019.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/latvia-ottaa-kayttoon-asevelvollisuuden-nuoriso-ei-ole-uudistuksesta-innoissaan/8669890#gs.8w27pc>

## How can we improve crisis resilience and preparedness?

It can be said that the perception of war, warfare, and various security threats is once again changing. This forces different authorities, as well as Finnish society, to seek and identify new preparedness measures. Finland's application to join the defence alliance NATO and the membership achieved in 2023 reflect the changing threat environment of our security landscape.

Means of achieving preparedness and readiness include utilising prevention, strong and concrete cooperation, and tightening inter-sectoral cooperation between authorities. This includes knowing regional and local actors, having functional cooperative relationships, and having standardized, tested, and practiced operating methods. Regular training with various authorities and partners maintains preventive cooperation. These partners include, for example, supply security-critical partners such as companies that provide services to authorities.

The best way to prepare for threats is through the combined efforts of various actors. Preparedness measures include contingency planning, continuity management, advance preparations, training, and readiness exercises. Preparedness is developed using feedback, audits, accident investigations, and other expert evaluations. The quality and impact of preparedness must be reliably assessed. Thus, the assessment process must remain part of preparedness planning.

## Summary

Compulsory conscription has proven to be the best method of preparedness for Finland, especially in terms of cost-effectiveness, as it allows for the largest possible army relative to the size of the population and the national economy to meet Finland's defence needs.

Conscription maintains national security and also develops individual's civic skills as well as mental and physical capabilities. Conscription also connects various societal actors, and the reserve it produces supports other authorities and society. Thus, the larger and more capable the reserve we have, the better the situation for preparedness and the whole society.

In addition to the primary responsibility for preparedness lying with member states, NATO could guide and advise those member states in a worse situation than Finland, on improving preparedness at the national level. While NATO emphasizes purely defensive dimensions and national obligations, it should also focus on societal resilience and encourage the maintenance of citizens' skills and national preparedness. Finland, as a NATO member, could emphasize this dimension and act as a training country for preparedness. Finland could also highlight its conscription model so that its best aspects could be adopted by other NATO member states.

Given the shrinking age groups, aging population, and workforce sufficiency identified through research, conscription needs to be reviewed for development.<sup>5</sup> Conscription should be further developed to cover more aspects of comprehensive societal security, for instance, by involving not only conscripted men but the entire age cohort. This could mean expanding conscription towards a broader national defence obligation. Civilian service as a service form should also be examined and developed from the perspective

of strengthening comprehensive security. The purpose of reviewing conscription is to build a conscription system that strengthens society's crisis resilience. The new Government's Defence Report will clarify the role of conscription as part of comprehensive security.

**5** Honkatukia, Juha: Miten kriseistä toivutaan? – Suomen talous epävarmuuden edessä. Artikkeli kirjassa Sodan usvaa II – sodankäynnin laaja-alaisuus, Marko Palokangas (toim.), Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, Sotataidon laitos, julkaisusarja 2: Tutkimusselosteita nro 27, Joensuu 2023; Honkatukia, Juha: Alueellisen resilienssin haasteita 2020- ja 2030-luvulla. Artikkeli kirjassa Sodan usvaa III – varautuminen, valmius ja nykyaineksen sodankäynti, Marko Palokangas (toim.), Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, Sotataidon laitos, julkaisusarja 2: Tutkimusselosteita, Joensuu 2024.

# Sweden, Finland and NATO

Ulla Gudmundson

ULLA GUDMUNDSON



Counterfactual history is always risky. But it is a safe assumption that if Finland had not decided to apply for NATO membership in the spring of 2022, then Sweden would not have done so either. The reasons for this are two: first, geopolitical realities in the Baltic Sea region and, second, Swedish public opinion.

Of course, Sweden, like Finland, is a sovereign state and takes its own decisions regarding security and defence policy. But such policies are not formed in a vacuum. They must take into account

the surrounding environment. Among professionals in the world of security and defence policy, there has long existed a broad consensus that Swedish NATO membership without Finland following the same course was unthinkable. Such a decision would have put Finland in an extremely uncomfortable position, facing anger and increased pressure from Russia with whom it shares a 1.344 km long border. Consideration for Finland has been, for decades, a strong motive for a continued Swedish policy of military non-alignment, aiming at neutrality in war.

## Slowly towards the alignment

Sweden and Finland share a long history and a long-standing military non-alignment policy. But there are important differences. Sweden is the only Nordic country to have escaped war in modern times (even Iceland was occupied, albeit by the British, not the Germans, in the Second World War). Geopolitical luck has left Swedes with the feeling of immunity: even if fighting rages all around us, we will escape unscathed. Finland has suffered in many wars between Russia and Sweden and fought two wars of its own in the 20th century against the Soviet Union. It has had to make painful sacrifices to maintain its sovereignty. During the Cold War, Finland had to navigate cautiously.

Finnish people are aware that the worst can happen. Security and defence have an existential dimension for Finns that has been lacking in the Swedish consciousness. Sweden in its less exposed position could permit itself an activist foreign policy, particularly since the 1970s. Military non-alignment became the platform for global engagement, most importantly in the field of nuclear disar-

mament, but also in the provision of asylum for political refugees. The feeling of non-threat has also played out in the NATO debate, which has been far more ideological and politically divisive than in Finland.

However, since the end of the Cold War Swedish and Finnish security policy have moved in parallel, and steadily closer to NATO. Both joined Partnerships for Peace (PfP), NATO's ingenious mechanism for cooperation with non-member states, at its inception in 1994. Sweden and Finland have taken part, over the years, in several PfP military exercises and NATO-led operations (Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan). Their partnerships have evolved to become, without doubt, NATO's closest with non-members. It could be said that Finland, with its stated "NATO option", i. e. for membership, has been one step closer.

But as late as 2014, two prominent diplomats with long experience in security policy, the Swede Mats Bergquist and the Finn René Nyberg, warned against abandoning the policy of non-alignment. It would, they argued, cause a huge strategic shift in Europe, and upset Russia unnecessarily. "Why change a strategic policy that, in Sweden's case, is 200 years old and is also deeply entrenched in Finland, if a new policy appears to raise more questions than it solves?".<sup>1</sup>

Swedish-Finnish bilateral defence cooperation has deep historical roots. In the interwar years, joint plans were worked out for the defence of the Åland islands and for mainland Finland. However, these defence plans contained no commitments, and in 1939, when war broke out in Europe, they were not implemented. But Sweden declared itself non-belligerent, not neutral, in the Winter War, and gave Finland considerable military support. 9000 Swedish volunteers fought along the Finnish forces.

<sup>1</sup> Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences, 2014-11-23

During the 2000s, important new steps were taken, also in a Nordic context. In 2008, a trilateral Swedish-Finnish-Norwegian agreement was signed on strengthened defence cooperation, Nordefco. Whereas there were some setbacks with Norway (particularly over Oslo's decision to buy American F35 fighter airplanes rather than Sweden's JAS Gripen), the Swedish-Finnish relationship moved ahead. In 2014, a bilateral action plan for deepened defence cooperation was adopted, driven by a growing sense of common interests. In Sweden's national defence plan for the years 2016-2020, cooperation with Finland is described as being of particular interest and increasing importance.

In 2018, the Swedish government decided that this should include operational planning and preparations for common use of civilian and military resources. A Swedish-Finnish marine battle group was set up. The air forces of both countries exercised together. The Swedish interparty Defence Committee declared the bilateral cooperation with Finland a top priority. In 2020, the Swedish Parliament adopted a law authorising "common operation acting (with Finland) in peace and war".

## The change of non-alignment policy

Russia's invasion of the Ukraine on 24th of February 2022 changed the security situation in the Baltic Sea region dramatically. When it became clear that Finland was moving towards applying for NATO membership, the question arose: what would happen to the bilateral defence cooperation if Finland, but not Sweden joined the alliance? This was a major factor pushing both Sweden's government and opposition in the same direction as Helsinki.

The sudden sense of danger also moved Swedish public opinion quickly towards support for NATO membership. Here also, Finland's NATO process was of immense importance. Many Swedes, particularly supporters of the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Greens, felt that the decision was rushed through too quickly without adequate time to reflect and without sufficient democratic anchorage.

The fact that Sweden's and Finland's NATO processes were seen as one, with political leaders of both countries in constant close consultation, helped to decrease, if not remove, anxiety. Sanna Marin, Finland's young and charismatic Social Democratic Prime Minister, in her jeans and leather jacket, impressed Swedes, as did President Sauli Niinistö's gravitas and dignity. Strangely enough, the question of Åland, a common Swedish-Finnish concern and important in the Baltic Sea context, was (to my knowledge at least) never raised in the Swedish public debate.

Finland is perhaps the Nordic country to which Swedes feel closest. Helsinki and Turku are popular holiday destinations. Quite a few Swedes have family roots in Finland. And of course, Finland is the only other country where our national language is spoken. The sense of not being alone, of moving hand-in-hand with Finland towards the momentous decision to abandon non-alignment was

psychologically of great importance. Thus, when cracks began to appear in the united Finnish-Swedish front there was confusion and irritation.

The journalist Britt-Marie Mattsson suspected a lingering Finnish resentment from 1991, when Stockholm decided to join the European Union without informing Helsinki.<sup>2</sup> The columnist Alex Schulman described his disappointment with Finland's decision to move ahead without Sweden as "being abandoned by your best friend".<sup>3</sup> One senior Swedish diplomat told me: "Finland should have waited for us and trusted the Americans". "The Finnish betrayal" was the title of a discussion programme on national TV (where Finland's ambassador, Maimo Henriksson defended the Finnish position calmly and courteously).

And by and large, there was understanding of Finland's decision. To professional analysts, it was clear that having Finland inside NATO was an improvement to Swedish security, provided that this situation did not continue too long. The assurances of Finland's leaders that the Finnish accession was not complete without Sweden's entry helped to soothe feelings.

Swedish media have followed closely Russia's reactions to Finland's joining NATO. Reporting has been extensive on the encouragement of large waves of immigrants, which has forced Finland to close all border posts with Russia, as well as on sabotage to gas ducts and computer cables in the Baltic Sea, where there are suspicions of Moscow's involvement.

The obligation that comes with NATO membership to accept nuclear arms as part of the alliance's defence doctrine is the part of NATO membership that has been hardest for Swedes to accept. Finland's law which prohibits the entry of nuclear arms onto Finn-

ish territory has been an argument for the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society to demand that a similar law be adopted by Sweden.

When I was deputy head of Sweden's NATO mission in the late 1990's, my Finnish colleague and I rarely had to compare notes before meetings. We knew that Sweden's and Finland's positions on just about every issue would be the same. Without doubt, now that both countries are alliance members, there will continue to be close contacts on both official and non-official levels as regards NATO policy.

The most urgent challenge, a common interest to both countries, will be how to support Ukraine's self-defence. Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson reacted coolly to President Macron's idea that sending ground troops to Ukraine "should not be ruled out". Conversely, Finland's foreign minister Elina Valtonen has expressed support for President Macron, stating that "in the long term, nothing should be ruled out".

<sup>2</sup> Göteborgs-Posten 2023-02-14

<sup>3</sup> Dagens Nyheter 2023-02-2

# From secure speed into the turbo gear: Finland and its new direction in Nordic defence cooperation

Iro Särkkä

IRO SÄRKKÄ



Being a strong advocate of Nordic cooperation for decades, Nordicism has become almost an intrinsic value for Finland. Since its inception, Finland became an active player in minilateral Nordic defence cooperation (NORDEFCO), while concurrently deepening bi- and trilateral ties with Sweden and Norway. After Finland's NATO accession in 2023, however, the question of the future role of Nordic defence cooperation is raised. In this article, I will discuss the past, present and future significance of NORDEFCO in Finland's foreign and security policy.

## Development of Nordic defence cooperation

The roots of modern Nordic defence cooperation go back to the post-World War II era, when the three Nordic countries Norway, Sweden and Denmark discussed establishing a Scandinavian defence union. However, these plans fell through when Iceland, Norway and Denmark joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as founding members in 1949. Sweden and Finland, on the other hand, chose neutrality and then military non-alignment.

During the Cold War, Nordic co-operation efforts were channeled into peacekeeping. The Nordic countries also became known as skilled peace negotiators. After the end of the Cold War, the Nordic peacekeeping model lived through a period of change with an emphasis on crisis management. The need for closer defence cooperation arose only in the second half of the 2000s at the initiative of Norway and Sweden and was motivated by the rising costs of modern defence equipment.

In 2008, Finland joined Norway and Sweden in concerted efforts to deepen in Nordic defence cooperation. The countries jointly published a feasibility study identifying 140 potential areas for closer defence cooperation. Based on this proposal, the Nordic Supportive Defence Structures (NORDSUP) was established to support the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS) and NORDAC (the Nordic Armaments Cooperation) structures focusing on armaments cooperation. A year later, the cooperation structures were merged into a single Nordic defence cooperation (NORDEFCO) and joined by Denmark and Iceland.

The real impetus for Nordic defence cooperation came a year later with the publication of the so-called Stoltenberg Report. In addition to defence cooperation, the aim was to deepen the politi-

cal dimension of NORDEFCO in the spirit of the Nordic Declaration of Solidarity. Following this, NORDEFCO was structured around five areas of defence cooperation: strategic development, capabilities, human resources and personnel, training and exercises and operations, with the objective of gaining cost-savings and improving operational effectiveness.

However, a key challenge for the cooperation were the diverging views of the five Nordic countries regarding the benefits of NORDEFCO. The three NATO member countries Iceland, Norway and Denmark felt that the military benefits of cooperation were significantly weaker than those of the militarily non-aligned Sweden and Finland.

## Nordic cooperation and NATO's collective defence

In more recent years, NORDEFCO has taken a new direction. This development has not been fully intrinsic but influenced by an external threat – namely Russia. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine and occupation of the Crimea in 2014, together with the increased conventional and hybrid threat of Russia in Northern Europe, all the Nordic members, understood the added value of a close-knit Nordic group.

On a practical level, Finland's, and Sweden's decision to remain outside NATO, however, proved to be a challenge. As a result, Finland and Sweden intensified operational defence cooperation bilaterally Finnish-Swedish Defence Cooperation (FISE), as well as trilaterally with the United States. Both countries also participated in other minilateral defence cooperation formats, such as the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF).

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and Sweden and Finland joining NATO, a new phase of Nordic defence cooperation began. Only now did all the political and military constraints to deepen Nordic defence cooperation disappear.

For Finland, this change is well expected, where faith in the Nordic defence brand has been strong for years. Against this backdrop, Nordic defence cooperation should now be developed within the framework of NATO.

All the five Nordic countries are fully integrated with NATO's defence plans, which means that the whole of Nordic Region can be comprehensively planned as one operational area. This is a significant development not only for the Nordic countries themselves, but the alliance as a whole.

NATO's northern flank, which after the Cold War was often a forgotten corner in NATO's defence planning has now reinstated its significance in the NATO's collective defence. Furthermore, the growing significance of NATO's northern flank is likely to be amplified by the growing competition between superpowers in the Arctic region, as well as the geostrategic interdependence between the Arctic and the Baltic Sea region.

## Nordic countries in NATO's command structure

The strategic importance of the northern region is underlined through NATO's Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) family of plans, in which all the Nordic countries are tied to NATO's northernmost regional plan. Similarly, NATO membership now enables setting joint capability targets as part of NATO's ongoing four-year defence planning process.

For the first time in NATO's history, all Nordic countries will also be tied to a common NATO command structure. The potential placement of Sweden and Finland under the Joint Forces Command (JFC) in Norfolk will deepen Nordic defence cooperation. Furthermore, it is foreseeable that service level operations will be planned and led from sub-regional tactical commands, of which Finland envisages to host a land component command, potentially under the Finnish Army Command.

Regionally focused training and exercises will also multiply. The Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish troops have already trained for years. Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO, will increase these activities across all the three services. The NATO-led Nordic Response exercise held in winter 2024 in northern Norway, Sweden and Finland is a good example of this.

In addition to exercises, operational activities between the Nordic countries take on a new meaning: they support NATO's collective defence not only in the Nordic countries but also in the Baltic region in the form of NATO's peacetime operations. Surveillance of Baltic airspace and participation in the Forward Land Forces (FLF) in the Baltic States are possible examples of the Nordic contribution to strengthening the alliance's collective defence and deterrence in the Nordic-Baltic region.

## Nordic countries and Finland's state identity

Before joining NATO, the Nordic countries formed possibly Finland's most important foreign policy reference group. Will this continue to be the case in the future, when the new Atlantist trend is competing with Nordicism? Definitely yes –Finland's state identity will continue to be built through the three key underlying factors of Nordicism: common values, operating culture, and Finland's geopolitical location in the High North. Finnish President Alexander Stubb might even call value-based realism based on a shared Nordic foreign policy agency.

Common Nordic values include respect for democracy, the rule of law, equality, human rights, and sustainability. In promoting normative security policy, the Nordic countries have laid grounds for a shared security culture and agency in global politics. This Nordic tradition has provided a formidable starting point for operating in the shared geographical space.

Without a shared value base and northern identity, the significance of the Nordic countries as Finland's most important foreign policy reference group would not be self-evident. Finland is unequivocally not only a Nordic country, but also a frontline state.

What hence distinguishes Finland from the Baltic countries is its cultural heritage in structuring foreign policy agency. This cultural capital of Nordic cooperation will continue to make the Nordic countries Finland's most central, familiar, and secure reference group in NATO.

## Expanding Nordic reference group thinking

Although Finland's and Sweden's NATO memberships have been much welcomed throughout the alliance, efforts to deepen Nordic defence cooperation have also caused some concern. Critical thinking about the cultural depth of Nordic co-operation has been expressed, for example in Estonia, for which closer Nordic defence cooperation could appear as a potential risk factor, dividing the Baltic Sea region.

The Nordic defence cooperation, however, serves the objectives of comprehensive security throughout the Nordic-Baltic region. In defence cooperation, this could mean, for example, creating a common vision of how the Arctic Ocean and the Baltic Sea can be combined into a common operating area. In addition, the Nordic countries should consider how NORDEFCO can be utilised in countering security threats of varying degrees, enabling all interested members of the alliance to cooperate. In this dialogue, other multilateral defence cooperation formats, such as the UK-led JEF format, should be flexibly used.

Finally, it is justifiable to ask whether Finland and the other Nordic countries should expand their reference group thinking to other regions that are geographically more remote. As a member of NATO, Finland should fully integrate itself with NATO's collective defence from a 360-degree perspective. This means understanding the ethos of common defence beyond the Nordic-Baltic region.

## Vision 2030 – the future of Nordic defence cooperation

Although the Nordic brand is already strong, further efforts are needed to strengthen it. Recent developments demonstrate that Nordic defence cooperation is finally accelerating into turbo gear. NORDEFCO's new vision for 2030 takes a significant stand on this.<sup>1</sup>

The Nordic countries will continue to deepen their cooperation cooperate in realm of security and defence. The new, medium-term objectives of Nordic defence co-operation now include planning and conducting joint Nordic operations, developing host nation support and military mobility, integrating defence planning into NATO at all levels and stages, as well as possible joint procurement of defence materiel and security of supply issues. Indeed, there are no longer any limits to deepening Nordic defence cooperation.

As capable, medium-sized NATO member, that makes a significant contribution to NATO's collective defence, Finland must now consider how its national interests can best be met within the improved framework of Nordic defence cooperation.

However, the importance of defence cooperation should not be seen as merely transactional, emphasizing quick-wins and benefits. Its real benefits maybe visible in the long term, and sometimes through unexpected course of events. For Finland, the benefits of Nordic defence cooperation can therefore only be measured when we live in the era of post-Nordic vision 2030.

<sup>1</sup> Vision for Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) 30.4.2024,  
[https://www.defmin.fi/files/5960/Vision\\_for\\_Nordic\\_Defence\\_Cooperation.pdf](https://www.defmin.fi/files/5960/Vision_for_Nordic_Defence_Cooperation.pdf)

# European Union and NATO – hand in hand or on each other's backs?

Ville Kaunisto

VILLE KAUNISTO



The accession of Finland and Sweden – two developed, financially stable, and Western-values-committed Nordic countries – to NATO has increased its member count to 32. Notably, among European Union member countries, only Ireland, Austria, Cyprus, and Malta remain outside of NATO.

The collaboration between NATO and the EU is already extensive and has deepened further over the past two years as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues. There are many reasons for cooperation, which has borne fruit in areas such as cybersecurity, military mobility, and counterterrorism.

Although both entities largely share the same members, the EU and NATO are very different in terms of competence and nature. In this article, I will introduce the main tasks and capabilities of these two organisations, their past and active cooperation, the threats they have faced, and the possibilities for broader cooperation in the future.

## Better together – why cooperation pays off

After the Cold War, NATO member countries faced an existential question: what is the purpose of this organisation now that the Soviet Union no longer exists? Russia seemed to be willing to cooperate with Europe and the United States. There was even talk of the possibility that Russia might seek NATO membership in the near future.

However, Vladimir Putin's defiant speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 marked a return to old-fashioned great power politics. The following year saw the start of the war in Georgia, seven years later Russia annexed Crimea and started the war in Eastern Ukraine. Despite this, many Western countries still saw Russia more as a competitor than as an enemy.

Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022, however, has definitively awakened the EU and NATO to a new – or old, depending on how one wishes to see it – security landscape in Europe.

The ongoing war has shown that both NATO and the EU have clear, independent, and mutually supportive roles in building and maintaining Europe's security architecture. Throughout the war, both have utilised their expertise in their traditional areas of strength – NATO in hard security and the EU in hybrid and economic aspects.

While the EU is a political and economic union, NATO was created as a defence organisation. NATO's task is to create a military deterrent and to build and maintain defence capabilities against the threat from Russia. NATO's strength is based primarily on hard security, which ultimately always relies on a nuclear deterrent.

Before the war, the European Union had profiled itself in foreign and security policy as focused on crisis management. In recent years, the EU has been forced to expand its scope to include expertise in hybrid, cyber, and counterterrorism. The EU has considerably more legislative and economic power compared to NATO, which has been utilised, for example, in imposing sanctions on Russia and supporting Ukraine financially or through joint purchases between member countries.

The European Union's main advantage is its core competence: the EU looks at issues from the perspectives of security, law, and economics. Especially in the fields of cyber and hybrid security, the EU's expertise is invaluable, as NATO views these areas from a defence perspective. By doing its fundamental work, the European Union can further strengthen not only the capabilities of individual member countries but also the entire union.

Many of these EU's basic actions support NATO in its mission. A prime example is military mobility, which helps NATO move its forces around Europe. Both NATO and the United States have supported the promotion of military mobility within the EU, and in 2021 the United States joined the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) structure as a third country outside the EU. NATO also benefits from the European Defence Fund and the procurement opportunities it provides.

The interests of the European Union and NATO are largely aligned. Broad cooperation strengthens both organisations and helps the Western economic and trade community respond to threats, including those posed by Russia.

## Internal tensions in cooperation

No organisation is without crises.

A clear example of internal tensions within the organisations is the long-standing territorial disputes between Greece and Turkey. A central issue is EU member Cyprus, whose northern part is under Turkish control. Turkey recognises Northern Cyprus, while Greece and the international community see the area as occupied. Greece and Turkey's other disputes over island ownership, maritime borders, and Mediterranean energy resources have occasionally led to airspace violations, among other things.

Greek and Turkish disagreements are recognised as a threat to NATO's internal cohesion and have forced attention to the possibility of conflict between two NATO countries, one of which is also an EU member. In this case, it's worth noting that NATO has provided a diplomatic framework for discussions between the two disagreeing countries. Hopefully, the 15-point de-escalation and cooperation agreement signed between Greece and Turkey in December 2023 marks a turn for the better.

At the same time, Turkey has also been a challenge for other NATO members. It is fresh in memory how Turkey, along with Hungary, delayed the membership processes for both Finland and Sweden. Additionally, Turkey's relations with Russia have caused headaches, including Turkey's decision to buy the S-400 missile system from Russia despite opposition from the United States and NATO.

Turkey's relations have also been tense with France. In Libya's second civil war, the countries supported opposing factions. In the civil war in Syria, the United States and France have supported the Kurds, while Turkey has fought against Kurdish forces. Turkey has also used large refugee populations as leverage in negotiating concessions from the EU.

Disputes within NATO countries demonstrate their different security priorities, for instance, in the Middle East and North Africa. Challenges have been caused not only by many regional conflicts and counter-terrorism operations but also by the relationships between member countries: some countries act visibly, others behind the scenes, some conciliating, and others provoking. While cultural and operational differences should not be feared or exaggerated, they still take their toll on NATO's unity, tarnish its image, and pose challenges to consensus-based decision-making.

Decision-making challenges are also evident in the EU. The most apparent challenge is Hungary, which has visibly challenged the EU's common value base with Viktor Orbán's long prime minister term that has led to increasingly warm relations with Russia. Likewise, various EU countries challenge common European policymaking without hesitation, following their respective election results – Poland and the Czech Republic in recent years, Slovakia, and Italy today. We must accept the inherent fluctuations of democracy in EU countries' national politics and still strive for a commonly signed, common aim policy.

The relationship between the European Union and the United States is a chapter on its own. Although the EU and the United States largely sign off on the same value base and approach to rule-based free trade, relations between the EU and the United States have not always been straightforward. Challenges over the years have included trade relations, climate policy, and technology policy.

In recent years, the United States' growing priority shift towards Asia has caused additional concern for EU countries. European defence has historically relied heavily on American military power. Russia's war of aggression slowed the transition of the United States to Asia and, metaphorically speaking, even gave Europe extra time to pull itself up by its bootstraps. This extra time, however, will not last indefinitely. Eventually, the United States will shift its focus primarily from the European front to the threat from China.

As a concrete but concerning example of the situation, China's anti-corruption programs have focused on the arms and military industry. The purpose of the anti-corruption program is to increase efficiency in arms production, which could even indicate a possible attack on Taiwan. Because the European Union has become a second-tier player in great power politics, it is essential for it to increase its strategic autonomy and defence capabilities to be able to respond to threats more independently, regardless of where the United States operates and who sits in the White House.

## Border security: at the threshold of common interests

Despite all the challenges, it is reassuring that the EU and NATO maturely understand their differences and appreciate the benefits of cooperation. A concrete example of such cooperation is border security. It is advantageous for both that our common borders are secure and that we can prevent the use of refugee flows as a weapon, smuggling, and hybrid threats.

EU-NATO cooperation in improving border security mainly consists of sharing information, joint exercises, and coordinating joint actions. Intelligence concerning terrorism or organised crime flows in both directions. As a result, each party gets a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing security situation at the borders.

EU-NATO cooperation on border security is ongoing. Joint exercises develop the compatibilities of member states. When a member state's border security is threatened, the EU and NATO can coordinate their actions to provide a quick and effective response – as was the case last autumn on Finland's eastern border. This

response may include sending joint operations, sharing resources, and providing mutual assistance to member states.

Border security cooperation is EU-NATO cooperation at its best and most concrete. Each party works with its strengths and best resources to promote stability, secure regional integrity, and address common security challenges. Few things in international politics are as clear an example of a win-win situation as this.

## Space cooperation: not just science fiction

Both the EU and NATO's latest strategies recognise the dimension of space cooperation.

Recent news about China and Russia's space projects has shown that space defence is not a distant future or science fiction – it is happening here and now. China and Russia speak openly about building a nuclear power plant on the moon. There has even been talk of the possibility that Russia would bring nuclear weapons into space and develop its weapon for destroying satellites.

These actions are, of course, contrary to the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which prohibits the placement of weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies and the use of celestial bodies for military purposes. However, Russia's actions in Ukraine have shown that it does not care about international treaties. The Outer Space Treaty also says nothing about anti-satellite technology or how the space between celestial bodies should be used.

The challenge of the area is increased by the location of communication and military satellites in low Earth orbit. If a country were to gain control of this area, it would have a significant military

advantage and could essentially act as the gatekeeper of outer space. Not to mention the possibility of individual ultra-wealthy people or large corporations controlling the area.

These examples show that we do not need a War of the Worlds to see that the threat from space is concrete. The EU and NATO have awakened to this threat and are committed to strengthening their cooperation in space matters. In Europe and the United States, it has been understood that responding to space threats also requires the private sector and commercialism. The US Department of Defence strategy will integrate commercial space technology into the national security architecture. NATO is building its space project in cooperation with commercial actors in the same way.

The European Union's goal is to help create a permanent space industry ecosystem and to secure the EU's strategic autonomy in space matters. EU member states cannot be dependent on other countries' technologies or raw materials. In an era of escalating great power competition, there are no guarantees that Russia and China would act any friendlier in space than on Earth's surface. The goal of the EU's new space strategy is for member countries to have the means to protect space operators and, for example, the data moving there from hostile actions.

An interesting question for the near future is the rise of space issues in political discussion. Will politicians stick to issues closer to voter's daily lives? Quick mastery of the topic is important, so we do not end up digging landline phones out of storage.

## NATO and EU together – a boxer without fists or the Bruce Lee of geopolitics?

The greatest challenge for NATO and the European Union today lies primarily in the conflict against Russia.

NATO and the EU are two of the world's most powerful organisations; an overwhelming economic capability combined with overwhelming military capability. Their resilience is at its peak, their experience base is excellent, and their ability to dodge and counter strikes is world-class.

Unfortunately, the situation is complicated by the fact that this top boxer does not know how to strike back effectively. Every missed opportunity to strike increases the opponent's desire to hit even harder. There is no more humanly and economically favorable time in sight to stop Russia – and thereby other challengers.

The master of martial arts and cultural icon Bruce Lee called his fighting method *jeet kune do*, "the way of the intercepting fist". Its purpose was to channel the opponent's strikes against him thoughtfully and to the right place.

The cooperation between the European Union and NATO has the ingredients for the *jeet kune do* of international politics. An asymmetric response, where the EU strikes and NATO protects, would be the best demonstration of effective cooperation in this world era and an action that, if successful, would underline the roles of both organisations on the geopolitical chessboard.

We must respect and be cautious about the Russian threat, but we must not be afraid of our own power either. Within the current strengths of the European Union and NATO and by working together, there is an opportunity to be the Bruce Lee of international politics, whom any opponent would think twice before attacking.

## Conclusion: common security, common threats

Both the EU and NATO have their internal challenges. However, their external threat landscapes are largely shared. These include Russia and China, as well as border security and space.

Common threats unite. Therefore, it is in the interests of both organisations to continue cooperation, such as in information exchange and training activities. However, the fact remains that internal challenges reflect on external security and vice versa. A joint ability to respond to external threats thus also covers internal divisions.

It's also worth noting that while NATO engages in defence cooperation, it does not have its own foreign policy like the EU. Although the EU has taken on a greater role in the security and defence sector, NATO's position remains unshaken as the foundation of its member countries' – and largely also the EU's – defence.

There is room to find a tighter and more unified stance in the ongoing war situation and the threat of its expansion. Displays of softness increase the risk of poor decisions in Moscow. We want to prevent this.

The goal of the European Union's actions is to strengthen European common defence capacity. This is also the aim of EU-NATO cooperation. Ultimately, the EU and NATO fit together like onion soup and crème fraîche, strawberry jam and Belgian waffle, or hot coffee and Irish whiskey – good on their own, but unbeatable together.

# NATO in the Arctic region

Kristian Suominen

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## Geopolitical significance of the Arctic region

The Arctic, defined as the area north of the Arctic Circle, is bordered by eight countries: the United States, Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.

During the Cold War, the geostrategic importance of the Arctic was emphasized, and the area became a focal point of superpower conflict. The shortest route for bombers and missiles between the Soviet Union and the United States passed through the Arctic region. NATO's focus in the area was to monitor Soviet activities,

especially nuclear submarines. The Arctic was considered a potential stage for conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. After the Cold War and the end of the Warsaw Pact, the Arctic was long considered a low-tension “High North, Low Tension” area. However, the situation has been changing over the past decade.

A significant factor behind the broader geopolitical change in the Arctic is climate change. It was previously estimated that the Arctic climate warms twice as fast as the global average. According to the latest research, the Arctic is warming four times faster. An acute change in the significance of the Arctic region is Russia’s aggressive war in Ukraine, potentially or even likely returning to Cold War dynamics.

## Effects of climate change on the region

As a result of climate change, the Arctic ice cover is disappearing, with significant geopolitical consequences. The melting of the Arctic Ocean allows for shorter sea routes between Asia, Europe, and North America, connecting nearly 75% of the world's population. Researchers estimate that the Northeast Passage will be free of summer ice by 2040–2045, enabling broader use of the route for maritime transport.

Today, 90% of all cargo is transported by sea, and the volume of shipments is expected to double over the next 15 years. Thus, the potential for Arctic maritime transport is significant over the next 20–30 years.

The Arctic regions are estimated to contain 30% of the world's undiscovered natural gas resources and 13% of oil resources, as well as rare earth metals worth approximately \$1.5–2 trillion in

Arctic Russia, including nickel, copper, gold, uranium, tungsten, and diamonds. The removal of ice cover practically allows for the more efficient exploitation of these minerals. Additionally, the region also has large untapped fish stocks.

## Stalled cooperation in the Arctic

The most significant cooperation body in the Arctic has been the Arctic Council, established in 1996. The purpose of the Council's establishment was to improve cooperation and coordination among the Arctic states. All eight Arctic states are members. The Arctic Council has primarily focused on “soft security” issues, such as environmental protection and the rights of indigenous peoples.

The Arctic Council does not have a specific security policy function. After Russia initiated its aggressive war in Ukraine, the other member states of the Arctic Council refused to cooperate with Russia, which held the chairmanship at the start of the war. The Arctic Council's activities have been stalled since the war began and are currently limited, as Russia is not participating. The future of the Council is uncertain without its largest and most significant member. The Council is trying to continue its activities in its working groups without Russian involvement.

## Competition for control of the Arctic region

The increasing strategic importance of the Arctic region described above has led the states in the area to invest in its control. Russia is the largest state in the region and has built new infrastructure on its territory to exploit natural resources, reopening numerous old or new military bases to support this.

In 2007, a Russian submersible ceremonially planted the Russian flag on the seabed of the Arctic Ocean to demonstrate the country's dominance in the Arctic region. The flag planting was about Russia's claim that the Lomonosov Ridge is part of the Russian continental shelf, and thus the area belongs to Russia. In January 2023, the UN recognised the ridge as belonging to Russia, but Denmark and Canada have also claimed the area.

The territorial dispute is currently ongoing. The territorial boundaries at sea are regulated by UNCLOS legislation. The United States has not ratified the agreement but is considering doing so. Russia has ratified the agreement but is considering withdrawing from it.

All Arctic states, except Russia, are NATO members. NATO has bases in the region, including in Alaska and Norway. The northernmost NATO base is in Thule, Greenland. It is estimated that Russia has a third more military bases in the Arctic than NATO. It is further estimated that it would take the West ten years to reach the same level with Russia in terms of military presence in the Arctic.

On the other hand, Svalbard, with its significant strategic location, has the world's largest satellite ground station under Norwegian control, capable of monitoring a vast area. In 2022, 1.5 months before the war in Ukraine, the communication cable between Svalbard and mainland Norway was cut. Sabotage, particularly from Russia, was suspected, but no evidence was found.

Russia leads in Arctic control and has actively conducted military exercises in the region. On the other hand, it is estimated that at the start of the war in Ukraine, Russia transferred up to 75% of its Arctic troops to the Ukrainian war zone. However, the strategically significant Northern Fleet, located on the Kola Peninsula and forming a key nuclear deterrent, remains fully operational. Russia has granted its nuclear energy company, Rosatom, bureaucratic authority to control maritime traffic on the Northeast Passage and has restricted the movement of military vessels on the route. For instance, Russia requires foreign vessels to provide 45 days notice to use the route.

The Arctic region can thus be seen as a competitive arena for control between Russia and NATO. Additionally, China is a potential and likely strong player in the area in the future. In 2018, China declared itself a "near-Arctic" state, despite its border being 1,500 kilometers from the Arctic Circle. China's interests in the Arctic likely align with those of other parties, including the need for raw materials, minerals, oil, and natural gas. China also benefits from the opening of the Northeast Passage to maritime traffic. Growing cooperation between China and Russia is also evident in the Arctic region. At least for now, there are no visible conflicts of interest between the two countries.

## The global political situation tightens in the Arctic

The strong warming of the climate is a background factor that will change the geopolitical status of the Arctic region in the long term. An acute factor of change is Russia's brutal war of aggression in Ukraine.

Since March 2022, the Arctic Council has suspended cooperation with Russia. The Council has attempted to continue its work with the seven other states, with talks mentioning an "Arctic Council 2.0". While some working group activities have resumed, Russia's absence remains a fundamental problem for the Council's continued work. So far, Russia has not announced its withdrawal from the Council.

The war in Ukraine also affects the Arctic region. The result may be a Cold War-like increase in tensions between NATO and Russia. Other acute conflicts, such as the Gaza War, also affect relations between major powers, which are involved in these conflicts at least in the background. Additionally, territorial disputes in the South China Sea and potential conflict between China and Taiwan influence the overall picture and the actions of major powers.

There is a growing sense of traditional security dilemmas worldwide, with many states increasing their military budgets. For instance, Germany, which historically has had a high threshold for maintaining and developing military capabilities, is now increasing its defence spending, including a €100 billion arms procurement fund. Chancellor Scholz described the situation three days after the start of the war in Ukraine as a "Zeitenwende", a turning point in history.

The near future of the Arctic region can be seen in two different scenarios. In the first scenario, if peace is achieved in Ukraine and the situation stabilizes, tensions in the Arctic may also decrease. Russia could potentially return to cooperation within the Arctic Council, where work on soft security issues could continue. This is an idealistic assessment of possible future events. The second possible course of events is that the Arctic becomes an area of confrontation again. Wars and conflicts around the world would reflect on the Arctic region, leading to a spiral of arms buildup and increased tensions. The latter assessment is more realistic than the first.

On a general level, political realism has long seemed to dominate international relations. This school of thought sees world politics as a continuous competition among selfish states competing for power and status in a global system without a centralized authority. Realism focuses on states as rational primary actors navigating a system shaped by power politics, national interest, security, and self-preservation. War is seen as an inevitable condition of world politics. Realism emphasizes the complex dynamics of the security dilemma, where actions taken for security reasons can inadvertently lead to tensions between states.

## Russia tests reactions in the Arctic

The geopolitical situation in the Arctic region depends on the development of interdependencies between major powers. Russia's goals in the Arctic are clear: it aims to dominate and control the area from its perspective. This is understandable, as it has 24,000 kilometers of Arctic coastline. Russia has shown in its war of aggression in Ukraine that it does not respect international agreements. On a smaller scale, this disregard has also been seen in the Arctic through hybrid operations. An example of Russia's attitudes or actions is the small-scale military parade it held in Norway's Svalbard in May 2023, apparently intended to create propaganda about Russia's position in the Arctic.

Russia is expected to continue hybrid operations in the Arctic. Through these actions, Russia can test the capabilities and readiness of NATO member states to monitor and respond to hybrid threats. However, it is unlikely that Russia would test the effectiveness of NATO's Article 5 in the Arctic through direct military actions.

## NATO is active in the Arctic

At the time of writing, the Pentagon is working on updating the U.S. Arctic strategy. The updated version of the 2022 strategy paper is expected to be published in the spring of 2024. The strategic direction of the United States is also reflected in the situation of NATO allies.

NATO is currently conducting military exercises in the northern European Arctic. The exercises are part of the Steadfast Defender series, which is the largest NATO military exercise since the end of the Cold War. Nordic Response was part of Steadfast Defender 2024, and it expanded from previous similar exercises to cover not only northern Norway but also northern Sweden and Finland. More than 20,000 soldiers from 13 countries participated in the exercise. Finland participated with over 4,000 soldiers, and Sweden with about 4,500 soldiers. This was Finland's first military exercise with other NATO countries.

NATO's activities in the Arctic are likely to remain significant in the future. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has been updating the Arctic Military Activity Tracker website for nearly four years. It collects data from open sources regarding military activities in the Arctic region. According to data illustrated on the map, activities have taken place, including Russian actions in the Bering Strait area.

However, most of the activities of Russia and NATO are concentrated in the Nordic region (Norway-Sweden-Finland) and the Norwegian and Barents Seas. Most of Russia's strategic nuclear submarines are based on the Kola Peninsula in northwestern Russia, at the Severomorsk base. The route of Russian warships to the Atlantic passes through the waters between Svalbard and Norway and through the GIUK gap (Greenland-Iceland-UK). The United States and NATO aim to monitor and control this movement of military vessels.

## Finland's NATO strategy should consider the Arctic: NATO Drone Centre of Excellence in Finland?

In the latest developments, Norway is opening a long-range drone base in Andøya. A couple of weeks after this news, the news agency Izvestia reported that Russia would build several long-range drone bases on its Arctic coast.

In addition to NATO membership, Finland, like Sweden and Norway, has a bilateral DCA defence agreement with the United States. The agreement regulates the United States access to several military facilities and areas across Finland and their use. This includes the pre-positioning of defence equipment and materials, as well as the entry and free movement of U.S. aircraft, ships, and vehicles.

Northern Lapland is highlighted as a key focus area in the DCA agreement. Of the 15 bases and training and storage areas included in the agreement, five are located in Lapland. The northernmost mentioned site is the Border Guard station in Ivalo, about 50 kilometers from the Russian border and at the same latitude as Russia's Northern Fleet base in Severomorsk.

Finland could benefit from developing cooperation by, for example, offering to build icebreakers for the U.S. Navy. Another possibility is the publicized effort to host NATO's Drone Centre of Excellence in Finland. For instance, Estonia has NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. Finland has also been proposed, and is likely to get, a NATO Army sub-headquarters, which has been planned for Mikkeli. NATO's presence in the north seems to be strongly increasing.

# Russian reactions to Finland's NATO membership and its changed geostrategic position

Sinikukka Saari

SINIKUKKA SAARI



It has become customary to note that the relationship between Finland and Russia has fundamentally changed since Russia launched its large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In reality, the cornerstones of the bilateral relationship had already started shifting slightly before that.

In December 2021, Russia issued an ultimatum and demanded guarantees from several Western countries regarding non-enlargement of NATO into Russia's neighbourhood. These draft agreements undermined the key principles of European security order such as equality and self-determination of sovereign states. Even though halting NATO's enlargement is a key goal for Russia, it hardly expected Western countries to sign the agreements. Even Russia

understood that this goal could only be achieved de facto: in practice, without formal agreements or signatures. Although the draft agreements merely served the Russian goal of offering a formal justification to start the war, they did undermine the very foundation of Finland's security policy based on the assumption that Finland could independently choose its security arrangements without external interference.

In all likelihood, the Russian leadership believed that a short and successful surprise war in Ukraine would be the most effective way to achieve a European security order serving Russia's interests. The Western countries would in practice have to accept post-factum the new Eastern European reality shaped by force – just as they had acquiesced to the illegal annexation of Crimea earlier. If Russia had managed to take Kyiv in just a few days, as Russia's leadership hoped, Russia's position in the European security architecture would have been considerably strengthened.

The risk of Finland and Sweden joining NATO as a result of the war may have been recognised in the Kremlin but not necessarily. Perhaps it was hoped that the deterrent effect of Russia's attack would be so great that the Nordic countries would refrain from applying for NATO membership. It is also possible that Russian leadership identified the risk of Finland and Sweden joining NATO as a result of the large-scale attack on Ukraine. If this was this case, Russian leadership consciously decided to take a smaller risk (Finland and Sweden's NATO memberships) in the hope of achieving a greater goal (victory in Ukraine).

Russia's gross miscalculations in its neighbourhood are not surprising but, in fact, rather typical. For instance, Russia's authoritarian system weakens its ability to recognise the accountability of democratic systems' leadership to their people. Furthermore, Russia's great power posturing prevents it from seeing that its neighbors perceive Russia's intimidation simply as coercion – and in practice that drives the neighbouring states to seek security elsewhere even more actively.

## Muted initial reactions

Even before Finland's NATO process began, Russia had repeatedly warned that Finland attaining NATO membership would create regional tensions and instability. If Finland joined NATO, Russia would have to respond to the membership with "military-technical" means, thereby, in fact, weakening Finland's security. Another narrative was to exaggerate Russia's friendly attitude towards Finland and the benefits Finland received from Russia. This narrative signaled that Russia's willingness to cooperate with its small neighbour was not a given but came with certain political conditions.

Finland anticipated widespread hostile activity from Russia particularly during the application period before official membership was instated. To minimise this risk, Finland negotiated and received unilateral security assurances for this period from key partners such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. During the application period, there were increased denial-of-service attacks coming from Russia but no major incidents that would have in any way threatened Finland's operational capabilities.

Russia's initial reactions to Finland's NATO membership were surprisingly muted when considering that halting NATO's enlargement is one of Russia's key foreign policy goals and that Finland and Sweden's memberships changed the entire geostrategic balance in Northern Europe.

The mildness of Russia's reactions was influenced on the one hand, by Russia's significantly weakened leverage in Finland and, on the other hand, by Russia's acute military challenges on the Ukrainian front during this period. Economic, political, and citizen-level cooperation between Russia and Finland had already collapsed due to the war and the EU sanctions, so Russia could no longer threaten to cut off relations.

Russian military countermeasures were also delayed for practical reasons. Faced with unexpectedly strong and capable Ukrainian military resistance, Russia had to move troops and heavy weaponry from military bases near Finland to the Ukrainian front. Generally, however, it was assumed that military reaction would occur at some point, depending on the pace of reconstitution of the Russian armed forces.

## Russian narratives about Finland

Three key narratives can be distinguished in Russian officials' comments after Finland's NATO membership: 1) Finland's NATO membership has little significance for Russia, 2) the United States and the collective West pressured Finland to join NATO, 3) Finland is behaving in erratic and irresponsible ways and its overreaction is creating instability in both the Arctic and the Baltic Sea theatres.

The first narrative that downplays the significance of NATO membership has been seen as a sign that Russia does not actually feel threatened by NATO. This interpretation is probably too simplistic. The trivialisation seeks to cover up Russia's political failure, and also indicates that beneath Putin's aggressive rhetoric lie also pragmatic political power calculations: when the geostrategic balance has actually changed, Russia needs to adapt to it, shift its goals and move on.

The second narrative about the United States' pressure on Finland reflects typical Russian thinking in which small countries are merely extras in the great powers' show. In Russia's view, small countries do not have independent agency in international politics.

In the third narrative, Finland is blamed for making an irresponsible decision that, according to Russia, reduces the security of all states in the region, including Finland. According to this narrative, Finland's

reaction to the war in Ukraine is completely disproportionate, as there is nothing similar between situations in Finland and Ukraine. There are no grounds for NATO membership, as Finland is completely safe as Russia does not pose a threat to Finland in any way. This storyline seeks to create rifts between different frontline states and undermine European support for Ukraine.

## Shoigu's plan kicks off

As the war has been going on for over two years, the dynamics have gradually changed. Ukraine's counter-offensive failed in 2023. At the same time, the Russian armed forces and economy have largely adapted to the sanctions and continuation of a long and large-scale war.

At the end of 2022, Russia's then-Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu announced a broad package of measures through which Russia would reform its armed forces and ensure its armed force's ability to wage an intensive long-term war. The reforms began swiftly at the beginning of 2023.

Since then, Russia has systematically increased the manpower of its armed forces and significantly raised its military budget and military production capacity. In addition to the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia signals internally and externally its readiness for a direct confrontation with NATO countries. This threat-scenario is used to justify increased military spending and the need to build massive armed force capabilities reminiscent of the Soviet era.

Furthermore, in June of 2023 Russia announced the re-establishment of the Moscow and Leningrad military districts, increasing their former size and strength of military capabilities. Essentially,

the Leningrad military district is specifically prepared for the NATO threat from Finland, and the Moscow military district for threats from the southern Baltic Sea and western Ukraine.

Russia's reforms and plans in the Leningrad military district are reactions to the changed geostrategic balance in Northern Europe as a result of Finland and Sweden's NATO memberships. These are the long-promised military-technical measures by the Russian leadership which, however, are not particularly threatening or aggressive in themselves. According to typical Russian military logic, its armed forces must respond to changes in regional balance.

## Pressure at the border

Russia also activated a hybrid front in November 2023. The Russian FSB's border guard service changed its border practices, allowing – and apparently also assisting – foreigners to pass on to Finland's border without the necessary travel documents.

The Finnish authorities reacted quickly to the arrivals, and the government decided to close the entire border between Russia and Finland at the end of November. The government stated outright that this was a Russian influence operation, which Finland does not accept.

As is often the case with hybrid operations, it is impossible to say precisely what Russia wants to achieve with its actions (that it denies). Most likely the actions signal dissatisfaction with Finland's NATO policy while simultaneously strengthening an anti-Finland and anti-West narrative for the Russian audience.

In Russia, Finland's decision to close the eastern border elicited various comments. One of the main messages from Russian offi-

cials was that this unilateral action by Finland – and more generally by the West – is a hostile measure aimed at isolating Russia.

The core of the message is to turn the situation on its head: Finland, which is reacting to the security threat created by Russia, is portrayed as threatening and irresponsible. Finland's policy is described as completely disproportionate relative to the number of asylum seekers, violating international norms, and anti-Russian in its intention. This is part of a broader narrative of an aggressive West threatening Russia, to which Russia must respond with military action and increased domestic control.

## The bigger picture

From Russia's perspective, Finland and its foreign policy are always part of a broader European context. Although Finland and Sweden's NATO memberships are undesirable developments from Russia's point of view, as a great power Russia assesses its victories and losses more intensely and over a longer period.

Russia aims to increase its influence through military action in its perceived sphere of influence, thus changing the basic principles and balance of the entire European security order over the long term. The threat Russia poses to Finland is related to this comprehensive long-term goal and not merely to single measures targeting Finland, such as hybrid influencing.

As a member of the EU and NATO, Finland's key task is to contribute to NATO's collective deterrence against Russia's aggression and to promote Ukraine's membership in both organisations. Such a policy advances Finland's own national long-term security most effectively.

# Russia's concerns and answers

Vladimir Milov

VLADIMIR MILOV



What changed in the disposition between Russia and NATO after the accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance? Moscow is clearly concerned with consequences of NATO's enlargement in the European North: Putin has threatened new NATO member states with deployment of troops and strike forces at their borders and established new Leningrad military district specifically with purpose to counter NATO at Russia's Northern borders. Where does all this lead to?

## Russia's concerns about NATO expansion

First, let's be clear: Russia's current "concerns" about NATO expansion are totally made up. There was a time when Russia was absolutely fine with NATO enlargement. At the joint summit with NATO in Rome on May 28, 2002, Vladimir Putin has signed the joint Rome Declaration with NATO, which stated that Russia and NATO are partners and no longer are adversaries.

At the time this summit was held, NATO enlargement has de-facto already happened: three countries of Visegrád Group (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary) were already members of NATO and were present at the Rome summit with Putin. Countries of Vilnius Group were on their way to finalise the process of their NATO accession, which happened two years later, in 2004. That same year, Putin again reiterated that Russia "Russia has not expressed any fears for its own security over NATO expansion" - direct quote from his joint press conference with ex-Chancellor of Germany Gerhard Schroeder in April 2004.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, on May 17th, 2002, Vladimir Putin held a joint summit with then-President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, who earlier declared Ukraine's course for NATO membership. Putin said that "Ukraine would not be left out of the process of interacting with NATO", and that "Ukraine had its own relationship with NATO and the final decision on their development rested with Kiev and Brussels".<sup>2</sup>

Russia had all the reasons not to fear NATO's enlargement. During the past three decades, hundreds of thousands of the U.S.

troops were withdrawn from the European continent. NATO fully respected its commitment under the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, where the member States of NATO reiterated that they have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members; no assault strike forces were ever deployed at the territories of new NATO member states either. Current difficulties with increasing weapons production and finding new weapons to be supplied to Ukraine to defend it against Russia's aggression clearly demonstrate that NATO was not preparing for a war with Russia.

The NATO enlargement "concerns" were clearly exaggerated by Russia for the purpose of forging a fabricated case justifying its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. More generally, the rift with the West and NATO emerged over the years due to Moscow's anger over the West's unwillingness to succumb to Kremlin's demands that post-Soviet states were denied their sovereign choices, and instead included into Moscow's "exclusive zone of influence".

So, NATO has nothing to be sorry for regarding its enlargement - as can be clearly seen now, it is the only factor so far that prevents further Russian military aggression beyond Ukraine. It is regretful that timely decision was not made in the previous years to provide NATO accession path for Ukraine - which arguably would have prevented the current war.

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/30678>

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/27067>

## Russia's reaction to NATO membership

Then there's a question about Moscow's possible reaction to Finland and Sweden joining NATO. No doubt that Putin sees this as his major strategic defeat and humiliation, a strategic change of balance in the European North to Moscow's disadvantage and will somehow try to retaliate. Comments from Russia's state-affiliated pundits<sup>3</sup> indicate that Moscow is very concerned that Finland and Sweden are relatively wealthy countries, net donors of security, who either have effective combat-ready armies or weapons systems; Russia clearly sees Finland and Sweden as worthy contributors to NATO's deterrence capability.

Big question remains, however, what can Russia do in the current circumstances. Its potent combat forces are mostly stationed in Ukraine and can't be withdrawn - otherwise Putin would risk losing the war. Military personnel stationed in Ukraine for 1,5-2 years without rotation is significantly worn out - one of the consequences of which are visible protests of wives of mobilized soldiers demanding their return home. New round of mass mobilization will bring serious problems: public opinion is overwhelmingly against it, there will be mass evasion and poor quality of newly mobilized personnel, mobilization will severely hit the labor market - while deficit of skilled workforce is already one of the most pressing economic challenges.

On the background of this, Russian military industries already operate near full capacity, often in three shifts, which still doesn't prevent depletion of the weapons and combat vehicles - which is

why Russia mostly resupplies the front through repairs and reactivation of old equipment, rather than new production. Expanding military output is difficult - neither Russia nor China and other Russia's allies produce important items of high precision machinery required for military production.

Because of this, Russia continues to heavily rely on Western technologies and component parts for weapons production and is actively importing equipment from the U.S. and Europe<sup>4</sup> and even Taiwan<sup>5</sup> to maintain production capabilities. According to Kyiv School of Economics, Russia imports a third of battlefield technology from western companies.<sup>6</sup>

In these conditions, it is very hard to imagine that Russia will be able to assemble sufficient military personnel, weapons and combat vehicles for a potential effective military assault on Finland or Sweden. This is why increased military and financial support for Ukraine remains crucial: the more combat potential of the Russian military is destroyed in Ukraine, the less risk remains that Russia will be capable of carrying out other large-scale military adventures.

<sup>3</sup> see, for instance: <http://cast.ru/comments/vstuplenie-finlyandii-i-shvetsii-v-nato-prineslo-rossii-sereznye-riski.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/22/russia-sanctions-weapons-ukraine-war-military-semiconductors/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2024/02/01/taiwan-russia-sanctions-cnc/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.intellinews.com/kse-russia-imports-a-third-of-battlefield-technology-from-western-companies-307476/>

## Russia's intimidation with information warfare

However, what Russia can do is ramp up information warfare and hybrid attacks. Putin's propaganda messaging is clearly targeted at public opinion and policymaking communities of Western countries, with one simple point: you need to back off from supporting Ukraine and cooperating with NATO, otherwise the war will come to your territories. Whether this will happen in reality or not is another question, but the purpose is to ignite wide circles of the society - from big business to traditional pragmatists and, particularly, left-leaning and "pacifist" groups - to stand against supporting Ukraine and against tighter military cooperation with NATO. It appears most likely that Putin's strategy vis-a-vis Finland and Sweden will prioritise disinfo and psychological operations aimed at raising public sentiment against closer military cooperation with NATO - okay, they joined, but let's try to prevent real military integration, Kremlin thinks.

Information warfare will be supported with hybrid attacks - anything from sabotage of critical networks in the Baltic Sea, to weaponising of migrants like we recently saw at the Russian borders with Finland and Norway, to directly sending covert groups to perform acts of sabotage inside NATO member state territories. The purpose is clear: to intimidate the society and political class into scaling back cooperation with NATO.

The only viable response to these "active measures" - as well as Russia's military threat to its neighbors, which has weakened due to Russian military being entangled in war with Ukraine but hasn't gone away - is to demonstrate readiness to respond. Putin's resources, albeit massive, are, nonetheless, finite. His military power is wearing out, his financial reserves are shrinking. His industries are still heavily dependent on Western technology and compo-

nent parts, which are being imported clandestinely - and can be cut off if there is political will to do so. His disinformation and sabotage campaigns can be effectively countered.

Although the standoff with Putin may be protracted, still, the West has all the tools and resources to win it. The alternative, however, is much worse: nations which will give in to Putin's intimidation and pressure would still face a threat of being attacked by Russia but will be much less prepared for it. Finland and Sweden made right historic choice in this regard - now it's time to take complex practical steps to counter Russian threat on all fronts - increasing assistance to Ukraine, countering Russia's disinformation and hybrid threats, increasing the effectiveness of sanctions, cutting off patterns for exporting military technology and components from Western countries to Russia, and in many other ways.

# Finland and NATO's enlargement

Tuomas Forsberg

TUOMAS FORSBERG



Finland's approach to NATO's enlargement has been based on three principles. First of all, it has supported NATO's open door policy, meaning that NATO has the right to invite new members according to its own criteria. Secondly, Finland has taken a rather cautious approach to the actual enlargements: it has often seen NATO enlargement as a potential risk to regional stability without however, opposing enlargement policy directly. Thirdly, Finland has seen NATO enlargement as a stabilizing element after each enlargement round. When the enlargement of NATO has become a fact, Finland has welcomed it. The problem is therefore not the enlargement per se, but Russia's possible reactions to the enlargement plans.

Finland's policy towards NATO enlargement has been consistent to the extent that Finland also approached its own accession to NATO in the same way. Finland emphasized the importance of the open door policy, and regarded also its own membership as a risky project. Yet, when Russia insisted that NATO should no longer accept new members, Finland wanted to join NATO rather than remain outside it. The possible negative reactions of Russia to NATO enlargement was considered for a long time as a reason why Finland should not join NATO. However, when Russia had violated fundamental international norms by attacking Ukraine, the membership was seen as a factor that increased stability through deterrence.

Finland is now forming its policy towards NATO enlargement for the first time as a member state. The enlargement policy is not yet fully formed, but the old principles mostly apply. Finland still supports NATO's open door policy, at least in principle, and is ready to welcome Ukraine as a member as well. However, Finland has reservations about the possible negative consequences of NATO enlargement: applicant countries must meet the criteria before becoming members and it can be a problem if NATO was enlarging too fast. If NATO expands in the future, Finland will probably support it and consider it a factor that increases stability.

## Enlargement of international organisations

In principle, the enlargement of international organisations can be considered a positive development. By expanding the number of members, international institutional cooperation can cover new countries and geographical areas. This would result in more comprehensive international networks and increased cooperation

in world politics. Most international organisations have a natural tendency to recruit new members and expand.

However, the enlargement of international organisations is not without problems. First of all, international organisations are not separated from the rest of the world, but they also affect third countries. Simply drawing the line between inclusion and exclusion can raise concerns about identity and status in countries outside the organisation. The more important the organisation is, the more such concerns can matter. In particular, international organisations such as military alliances, whose purpose is to unite members against outside threats, change international constellations regionally, if not globally, and therefore easily cause suspicion, insecurity and conflict.

The enlargement of international organisations also affects the organisations themselves and their members. Excessive or rapid expansion of an organisation can dilute its original purpose, create friction in its operations, and change the status of old members and the benefits of membership. Therefore, it is important that the invited members meet certain criteria that the organisation has set for them.

## Post-cold war enlargements

Finland's attitude towards NATO enlargement after the end of the Cold War was both open and reserved at the same time. Finland did not feel that it could take a very strong stand on matters in which it was not directly involved. Finland rejected the creation of new spheres of interest in Europe and respected the right of all countries to choose their own security solutions. The United

States' commitment to Europe, the renewal of NATO, its importance as a forum for interstate cooperation for European stability, and the open door policy were all considered good things. On the other hand, NATO's enlargement against the will of Russia will and especially to its borders were seen as potential problems. In Finland's view, national solutions should not create new security problems and inequality.

The first round of NATO enlargement, which was decided on in the summer of 1997 and which took place with the membership of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in the spring of 1999, did not arouse much discussion in Finland. The expansion of NATO to these countries was not seen as affecting Finland very much. They did not create new problems or alter Finland's own security policy. Finland considered it a good thing that NATO took into account the security concerns presented by Russia and strengthened its relations with Russia by establishing a separate cooperation council. Finland looked at NATO's enlargement mainly from the perspective of security and stability in Northern Europe. From this perspective, the membership of the Baltic countries was seen as a much bigger issue.

Finland's attitude towards the Baltic countries' efforts to become members in NATO was ambiguous. On the other hand, Finland supported NATO's open door policy and did not want to directly oppose the Baltic countries' aspirations. Finland reminded of the importance of granting an equal status to the Baltic countries compared to other aspirants. At the same time, there was concern about the formation of a potential "security vacuum" if the Baltic countries were left on their own.

From Finland's perspective, the security guarantees given by NATO to the Baltic countries were a better solution in any case than shifting the burden on the shoulders of Finland and Sweden. On the other hand, Finland was feared that the NATO member-

ship of the Baltic countries would lead to confrontation between NATO and Russia. Russia's countermeasures could also weaken Finland's position. Finland hoped that the enlargement of the alliance would be implemented in such a way that it strengthened the security of the entire continent.

There was also concern that the membership process could last for years and in itself a destabilizing factor if the Baltic countries were given vain hopes for their membership. For example, Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen criticized foreign advisors who in his view were misleading the Balts by saying that NATO enlargement was an easy process. Finland's priority was to help the Baltic countries join the EU.

After NATO's enlargement to the Baltic countries took place, Finland saw it as having contributed to the security and regional stability of the entire Northern Europe. In general, the enlargement of NATO to Central and Eastern Europe was regarded positively, because it tied together countries that could potentially harbor hostilities towards each other. At the same time, Finland was concerned that the enlargement remained a subject of controversy in the relations between Russia and NATO.

Finland had a relatively passive approach towards NATO's further enlargements in the Balkans and its policy towards enlargement to Georgia and Ukraine as well. Maintaining the open door policy was considered important in itself. At the same time, Finland saw risks that the cohesion of the alliance was loosening if it expanded too quickly.

## Finland and Sweden's membership

In its policy of military non-alignment, Finland had maintained an "option" to join NATO at a future stage if circumstances changed. To keep this option realistic Finland tightened its relations with NATO and supported the continuation of NATO's open door policy. Russia's demand to end NATO's open door policy in December 2021 was a blow to Finland as the credibility of the "option" as a strategic instrument was lost.

The policy of keeping the "option" to join NATO but remaining militarily non-aligned was no longer feasible. After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Finland made a quick decision and applied for membership in NATO in May 2022. The initiative to apply for membership in NATO clearly came from Finland and was not a result of the alliance's strategic thinking, although it welcomed Finland as a long-term partner whose military capability, operational compatibility and commitment to common values were all proven.

From Finland's point of view, Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership at the same time as Finland was crucial because in this way the entire Nordic region was united in NATO. When Sweden's membership was delayed due to slow ratification by Turkey and Hungary, Finland emphasized that its membership in NATO is not complete until Sweden has also become a member. From Finland's point of view, it was clear that criteria are set for those aspiring to become members, but if these criteria are met, acceptance as a member should no longer be delayed unnecessarily.

From Finland's point of view, its and Sweden's membership strengthened NATO as a whole and they had not joined the organisation as free passengers. For Finland itself, the security provided by NATO was considered more important than the concern caused

by Russia's countermeasures. At the same time, Finland tried to emphasize its own role in the process, i.e. the narrative that Finland - and Sweden - made the decision to join NATO themselves and not that NATO expanded to these countries.

## Future enlargements

Finland has supported the continuation of NATO's open door policy even after it has become a member in the alliance. Concretely, the question has so far come up regarding Ukraine's NATO membership. Finland has not been rushing NATO's official decision on the matter. President Sauli Niinistö stated in connection with the Vilnius summit in the summer of 2023 that the primary goal should be to promote and assist Ukraine in reaching the criteria that NATO has set. According to President Alexander Stubb, on the other hand, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyi does understand that Ukraine cannot become a member of NATO while the war is ongoing on its soil.

As such, Finland has strongly indicated that it supports Ukraine's membership in NATO. In the security cooperation agreement between Finland and Ukraine, for example, it is stated that "Ukraine's rightful place is in NATO". It also states that "Ukraine's future membership in NATO will strongly contribute to the peace and security of Europe". In the agreement, Finland promises to deepen cooperation between NATO and Ukraine and to carry out practical cooperation to support Ukraine's reform efforts "on its path towards future NATO membership".

Finland still supports NATO's open door policy, but not unconditionally. The criteria set for applicant states and passing them

before full membership are still important. Political consideration is also important, but no further conclusions have been made regarding it in Finland. There has been very little discussion, for example, about Finnish perspectives on how global NATO's membership could become. In general, the discussion has been quite unstructured and will probably come to the fore more only when the next membership decisions or possible further strategic guidelines on the geographical boundaries of NATO's membership begin to be made.

*This is Ajatuspaja Toivo and Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies think tanks' joint publication. It has an important and current topic; Finland's NATO-strategy.*

*What can Finland expect from NATO and what does Finland have to offer the alliance? What will change, what is being strengthened and what is essential for Finland to recognise?*

*Ten experts contribute in the publication. The perspectives vary from Sweden to Russia, from the Arctic region to EU politics and from the development of Finland's conscript service to the expansion of NATO.*

