

Nordic Review of International Studies

3/2024

Peer-reviewed articles

Kristin Haugevik, Katja Creutz, Matti Pesu and Øyvind Svendsen: Becoming allies: Finland, Norway, and the Nordic security community after Russia's invasion of Ukraine [↗](#)

Tapio Juntunen and Emma Rosengren: Naturalising nuclear deterrence: A comparative analysis of Finnish and Swedish discourses on nuclear weapon politics, 2016-22 [↗](#)

Waltteri Immonen: Nationalist justifications of realist policies: How Finnish parliamentary parties turned to favouring NATO membership [↗](#)

Discussion articles

Albert Weckman and Anton Brännlund: Shaping Security: The Rising Influence of Public Attitudes on Defence Policies

Andris Banka: Asmus strategic vision makes a comeback: Finnish-Swedish role in defending the Baltics

Brendan Humphreys: Adieu neutrality: The dwindling power of Nordic non-alignment

Mathieu Landriault and Julie Renaud: Russian information campaigns and NATO in the Arctic

Tyynne Karjalainen: Imagining peace and producing knowledge about the war in Ukraine

Kyungmee Kim, Cedric de Coning, Emma Hakala, Tobias Etzold and Minoo Koefoed: The Peace and Security Implications of Climate Change for the Nordic Region

Publisher

The Nordic Review of International Studies (NRIS) publishes peer-reviewed scholarly contributions within the field of International Relations (IR), focusing specifically on Nordic perspectives. The NRIS is committed to publishing articles that examine the international sphere empirically, theoretically, or institutionally from a Nordic angle. The aim of the NRIS is to foster scholarly debates on international politics within and concerning the wider Nordic region. The NRIS embraces interdisciplinary approaches and appreciates a wide range of theoretical and methodological choices.

The journal is published by the Finnish International Studies Association (FISA) and committed to the principles of Open Access publishing.



Visit our journal site for further information and to submit your manuscript: nris.journal.fi.

ISSN 2984-3278 (print)

ISSN 2954-2553 (online)

Editors

Johanna Vuorelma, University Researcher, Centre for European Studies, University of Helsinki

Sanna Salo, Postdoctoral Researcher, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Ville Sinkkonen, Postdoctoral Researcher, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Editorial board

Tuomas Forsberg, Director, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki

Anni Kangas, Senior Lecturer, Tampere University

Torbjørn Knutsen, Professor, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Rauna Kuokkanen, Research Professor, University of Lapland

Leena Malkki, Director, Centre for European Studies, University of Helsinki

Mikael Mattlin, Research Director, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Hanna Ojanen, Research Director, Tampere University

Hannes Peltonen, Senior Lecturer, Tampere University

Matti Pesu, Leading Researcher, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Kristi Raik, Director, Estonian Foreign Policy Institute at ICDS

Jemima Repo, Senior Lecturer, Newcastle University

Teija Tiilikainen, Director, European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats

Silke Trommer, Senior Lecturer, University of Manchester

Henri Vogt, Professor, University of Turku

Juha Vuori, Professor, Tampere University

Mikael Wigell, Research Director, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Contents

Peer-Reviewed Articles

- 07** **Kristin Haugevik, Katja Creutz, Matti Pesu and Øyvind Svendsen**
Becoming allies: Finland, Norway, and the Nordic security community after Russia's invasion of Ukraine ↗
- 24** **Tapio Juntunen and Emma Rosengren**
Naturalising nuclear deterrence: A comparative analysis of Finnish and Swedish discourses on nuclear weapon politics, 2016-22 ↗
- 46** **Walteri Immonen**
Nationalist justifications of realist policies: How Finnish parliamentary parties turned to favouring NATO membership ↗

Discussion articles

- 63** **Albert Weckman and Anton Brännlund**
Shaping Security: The Rising Influence of Public Attitudes on Defence Policies
- 72** **Andris Banka**
Asmus strategic vision makes a comeback: Finnish-Swedish role in defending the Baltics
- 81** **Brendan Humphreys**
Adieu neutrality: The dwindling power of Nordic non-alignment
- 88** **Mathieu Landriault and Julie Renaud**
Russian information campaigns and NATO in the Arctic
- 97** **Tyyne Karjalainen**
Imagining peace and producing knowledge about the war in Ukraine
- 109** **Kyungmee Kim, Cedric de Coning, Emma Hakala, Tobias Etzold and Minoo Koefoed**
The Peace and Security Implications of Climate Change for the Nordic Region

Book reviews

- 117** **Sofiya Voytiv**
Foreign Fighters in Ukraine: The Brown-Red Cocktail

Lectio praecursoria

- 120** **Helmi Räisänen**
Reimagining crisis management: Preparedness imagination in an era of chronic socio-ecological crises

Editorial

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine has upended the European security architecture and poses a fundamental challenge to the international order. In the process, changes have been unleashed in the foreign and security policies and domestic politics of the Nordic and Baltic countries. For Finland and Sweden this has meant an end to their long-held commitments to military non-alignment.

Meanwhile, all the Nordics are, each in their own way, impacted by changes in NATO's force posture, EU sanctions on Russia, the imperative to support Ukraine's war effort and help refugees displaced by Russia's attack. As the war has entered an attrition stage, questions abound regarding the willingness and ability of the West to continue its support for Ukraine.

In this issue, Russia's war of aggression is examined from Nordic perspectives, which includes various theoretical and empirical angles. These perspectives increase our understanding of the impact of Russia's aggressive action and offer analytical lenses to make sense of the new security dynamics in Northern Europe.

In their article, Kristin Haugevik, Katja Creutz, Matti Pesu and Øyvind Svendsen study Finland and Norway's evolving narratives about one another as neighbours, partners, and allies against the backdrop of political and scholarly discourses about the broader Nordic security community. They argue that the swift reframing of the Finnish–Norwegian relationship was possible after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 because it was formulated against the backdrop of the already established narrative about the well-functioning and trustful Nordic security community.

Tapio Juntunen and Emma Rosengren examine the nuclear dimension of NATO enlargement in the Baltic Sea region. Their article compares domestic deliberations about nuclear weapons, disarmament, and extended nuclear deterrence in Finland and Sweden from 2016 to 2022 in two successive contexts: debates about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) from 2017, and about NATO membership after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Their aim is to reveal how joining a nuclear alliance was made possible in two historical contexts marked by non-alignment and opposition towards nuclear weapons.

In his article, Waltteri Immonen studies how Finnish parliamentary parties turned to favouring NATO membership, which they had previously opposed. Immonen argues that the parties employed a realist strategy of security, bolstered by political nationalism to express unity with the population to justify their shift. This amounted to an attempt to depoliticise the issue altogether. The study shows that nationalism can explain why states join international organisations rather than representing only a disruptive force in close interstate cooperation.

There are also a number of insightful discussion articles in the issue. Albert Weckman and Anton Brännlund underline the increasing importance of public attitudes on security and defence. They argue that 'the future security discourse should extend beyond traditional state-centric paradigms, incorporating a broader understanding of how democratic societies perceive threats and their responsibilities towards collective defence'.

Andris Banka revisits the old plans of Ronald Asmus, a key NATO enlargement architect on the US side, to woo the Finns and Swedes to join NATO ranks, which would have arguably alleviated the Baltic problem of strategic depth. At the time, Nordic leaders balked at the idea and conveyed their unwillingness to carry Baltic security burdens on their shoulders. Banka shows that as Finland and Sweden have now joined the alliance, it is worth revisiting the arguments and discussions

surrounding the proposal of putting Nordic countries in charge of Baltic security.

In his discussion article, Brendan Humphreys analyses the term ‘neutrality’ and the problems of finding a single definition relevant to post-Cold War politics. Humphreys examines the unique role and high profile that the Nordics have enjoyed in diplomacy and peacekeeping and also inquires if NATO membership for Sweden and Finland is being secured to the detriment of international diplomacy and conflict resolution.

In their discussion article, Mathieu Landriault and Julie Renaud analyse Russian information campaigns and show how Russia mounts them through its press agencies to discredit NATO’s presence in the Arctic region. They write that there was an increase in Russian media coverage of the Arctic in relation to NATO in May 2022, ‘attributable to the announcement by Sweden and Finland of their decision to join NATO. Russian intention here was clear: portray NATO enlargement as jeopardising Arctic stability and creating a source of tension for the Arctic region’.

Tyynne Karjalainen contributes to the emerging academic and expert debate about peace in Ukraine and security order in Europe by discussing, firstly, the omission of Ukrainian perspectives from the debate, and secondly, by providing an elementary introduction to that perspective by reviewing recent Ukrainian literature and commentary. Her discussion article echoes the proposal of many Ukrainian and other authors: to leave behind the European security order that enabled Russia’s aggression in the first place, the perspective of the ‘peripheries’ should be placed at the centre of imagining peace and security in Europe in the future.

Kyungmee Kim, Cedric de Coning, Emma Hakala, Tobias Etzold and Minoo Koefoed examine the peace and security implications of climate change for Nordic region. They argue that the Nordic countries can gain considerably by acting together on climate security. As they are facing similar risks and share similar approaches to civil preparedness, these states could join forces in developing effective responses. Rather than all individually building up risk analysis models or monitoring systems, they could pool resources for collaborative approaches.

The issue also includes a book review by Sofiya Voytiv on **Kacper Rejkawek’s book** *Foreign Fighters in Ukraine: The Brown–Red Cocktail* (Routledge 2023). Finally, there is Helmi Räisänen’s excellent lectio praecursoria: Reimagining crisis management.

We hope that this NRIS issue on Russia’s war of aggression from Nordic perspectives creates active academic and societal debates on these themes. We are looking forward to receiving new NRIS submissions on various aspects of international politics and the Nordics.

Johanna Vuorelma, Ville Sinkkonen and Sanna Salo

Peer-Reviewed Article

Becoming allies: Finland, Norway, and the Nordic security community after Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Kristin Haugevik, Research Professor, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Katja Creutz, Acting Deputy Director, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Matti Pesu, Senior Research Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Øyvind Svendsen, Senior Research Fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Abstract

This article analyses Finland and Norway's evolving narratives about one another as neighbours, partners, and allies against the backdrop of political and scholarly discourses about the broader Nordic security community. Drawing on International Relations (IR) theories on regional security complexes and security community formation, we find that a swift reframing of the Finnish-Norwegian relationship was possible after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 because it was formulated against the backdrop of the already established narrative about the well-functioning and trustful Nordic security community. The intense interaction dynamics between Finland and Norway in recent years have brought the Nordic security community to an unprecedented level of integration, and an all-time high sense of 'we-ness' now characterises Finnish-Norwegian relations.

Keywords

Security community, political narrative, Nordic region, regional security complex

Introduction

Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine in February 2022 changed security and defence debates in the Nordic region overnight. Longstanding truths about Finnish, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian security and defence policies ceased and analyses of Nordic security dynamics had to be revisited. This was not least the case in the Fennoscandian Peninsula: when Finland applied for NATO membership shortly after the outbreak of the war, it profoundly changed the country's relational dynamics with bordering states Russia, Sweden, and Norway. For the very first time, two NATO allies – Finland and Norway – shared a land border in the Nordic region (Sweden later also joined NATO). In the fall of 2022, Finnish and Norwegian political leaders signalled that their bilateral relationship had entered a new phase. Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre's statement in 2022, that Norway had “no better friend” than Finland (Niinistö and Støre, 2022), serves to exemplify the exceedingly amicable account of Finnish-Norwegian relations during this period, in sharp contrast to the once dominant historical account of a touchier relationship at times marked by mutual suspicion and even distrust. What made this rapid and profound reframing of their relationship possible?

In this article, we trace and analyse the evolving political and scholarly narratives around the Finnish-Norwegian relationship against the backdrop of narratives about the broader Nordic security community. Within regional security complexes like the Nordics, the nature and intensity of bi- and minilateral dynamics form a fundamental, yet understudied, part (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). As Tilly (2003, p. 405–406) notes, all security communities are inevitably underpinned by a myriad of different social structures, including various dyads and triads. The Finnish-Norwegian case presents us with an opportunity to analyse how key dyadic relations evolve in relation to, and relative to, the security communities of which they form part (Adler and Barnett, 1998; Tilly, 1998). It also allows us to study the interplay between the ‘we-ness’ of security communities and the ‘we-ness’ of these communities’ intrinsic dyads and triads. We suggest that the effective reframing of the Finnish-Norwegian relationship after Russia's invasion of Ukraine was possible because it was formulated against the backdrop of an already established narrative about a well-functioning and trustful Nordic security community. In short, the narrative surrounding the Nordic security community offered a ‘secure base’ around which the new Finnish-Norwegian relationship and shared narrative could be reformulated (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998, p. 29; Lupovici, 2023; Haugevik and Svendsen, 2023).

Subsequently, we explore how Finland and Norway have portrayed and approached one another as neighbours, partners, and allies in the context of the Nordic security community, first historically and then in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. We begin by positioning our study within IR scholarship, discussing relations between neighbouring states from the perspective of theories about the internal dynamics of regional security complexes and security communities. Next, we focus on the historical narratives about the Finnish-Norwegian relationship before delving into the process of political alignment between Oslo and Helsinki and how scholarly and political accounts of a more mature Finnish-Norwegian friendship emerged. In conclusion, we discuss potential future avenues for strengthened Norwegian-Finnish cooperation in foreign and security policy.

Neighbours, borders, and regional security complexes

State relationships are constantly evolving, changing in kind, degree, and manifestation over time. Enemies can be ‘civilized’ and transformed into friends (Jackson, 2006; Kupchan, 2010) and friends can become estranged if one party turns away from commonly established orders (Svendsen, 2019). Relations between bordering states make for a special, but understudied, category in IR scholarship

(see Hofius, 2016). While geographical proximity does not in and of itself determine the nature of state relationships, it does seem to have an impact on the *intensity* of these configurations. Borders are fundamental to all states, with issues of sovereignty, trust, and everyday border management at the core, but are ultimately what states themselves ‘make of’ them (Wendt, 1999). While friendly states typically seek to soften borders to reduce transaction costs and ease the everyday movement of goods, capital, services, and people, rivaling or inimical states will seek to maintain control over the same borders, keeping ‘the other’ at a distance.

Crucially, however, all state interaction transcends formal state borders. There are numerous ways of conceptualising how this transcendence materialises in practice, but for the sake of our study, two related analytical conceptions appeared particularly useful. The first is the concept of a *regional security complex*, defined by Buzan and Wæver (2003) as a regionally based cluster where the members’ security is interdependent. The second is that of a *security community*, a type of regional security complex inside which collective, amicable identity formation stands at the core (Deutsch et al, 1957; Adler and Barnett, 1998). Security community theory describes the process through which strategic collaboration between states progresses into more profound unity as the involved parties increasingly come to identify with and trust one another. In Adler and Barnett’s (1998) prevailing account, all security communities – whether nascent, ascending or more mature – are characterised by some degree of multilateralism, unfortified borders, and a common definition of threat, and with military planning only directed at community outsiders. A shared ‘language of community’ is also crucial (Adler and Barnett, 1998, pp. 55-56). When security communities become *tightly coupled*, they are expected to also involve arrangements for cooperative and collective security, a high level of military integration, policy coordination against ‘internal threats’, free movement of populations, internationalisation of authority, and a sense of shared rule “at the national, transnational, and supranational levels” (Adler and Barnett, 1998, pp. 56-57).

In the present context, a noteworthy criticism of security community theory is that it has attached too much importance to common identities and *sameness* (Tilly, 1998; Browning and Joenniemi, 2014). While Nordic cooperation has been described as ‘the standard example of an uncontested security community’ (Wæver, 1998, p. 72) and a ‘model security community’ (Wiberg, 2000), some of the bilateral relationships within the Nordic clusters have historically also been characterised by difference and even elements of mistrust (see e.g., Juntunen and Pesu, 2018). While these tensions are often explained by the different formal security arrangements of the Nordic states that emerged after the Second World War, scholars point out that the Nordic states also tend to safeguard their niche identities and internal differences when operating in Nordic settings (Haugevik and Sending, 2020).

Observing that even the most tightly coupled security community will be marked by some form of internal differentiation, Browning and Joenniemi (2014) make the case for a more nuanced theorisation of the pair identity/difference in security communities:

While communities clearly do require some sense of commonality and sameness, critically they are also bound by their differences and the existence of complementarities between different identities on the inside whereby the others appears simultaneously as both other and like.

Similarly, Tilly (1998) suggests placing social interaction – rather than systems, societies, units or individuals – at the centre of analysis when seeking to understand how security communities work. Such an approach, he argues, will allow a better grasp of the complex and dynamic interplay between the various social structures underpinning that community. Within and across security communities, relational structures will be manifold, the identities involved will be public and relational, and actors

will deploy multiple identities – “at least one per tie, role, network, and group to which the actor is attached” (Tilly, 1998, pp. 400-401).

If we focus on the network of bi- and minilateral ties within the Nordic security community, then the Finnish-Norwegian relationship appears to be one of the dyads most strongly altered by the new framework conditions after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. While the Finnish-Norwegian relationship has also, in security community language, been *maturing* over the past decades, the two states’ different security arrangements have remained a barrier to more formalised and committed defence cooperation. Representations of partnership and bilateral cooperation have been few and far between. The fact that all the Nordic states are now bound together by the mutual defence commitment enshrined in the North Atlantic Treaty adds a new dimension to the study of the Nordic region as a security community. Specifically, it alters the narrative about a highly integrated community prohibited from finding binding arrangements for collective security and military integration.

In what follows, we explore the evolving account of the Finnish-Norwegian relationship in the context of the evolving Nordic security community. Focusing on the representations of Finnish and Norwegian scholars and politicians, we follow Somers (1994) in studying narratives as social sites productive of both identities and action paths:

...narratives are used to define who we are; this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to do. This ‘doing’ will in turn produce new narratives and hence, new actions; the relationship between narrative and ontology is processual and mutually constitutive (Somers, 1994, p. 618).

We suggest that a new narrative about Finnish-Norwegian friendship was possible after 2022 because it linked to existing rhetorical commonplaces about the Nordic security community while also securing a positive account of how the bilateral relationship itself has progressed (Krebs and Jackson, 2007).

The historical record: Peaceful but detached neighbours

Whereas Finland’s neighbourly relations with the Soviet Union/Russia and Sweden have been subject to extensive and systematic scrutiny (see e.g., Koivisto, 2008; Rentola, 2023; Wahlbäck, 2011; Ojanen, 2023), its relations with Norway have been less so, despite the two states sharing a 736 km-long land border in the north.¹ Correspondingly, studies of Norwegian security and defence policy have typically foregrounded the two Atlantic powers – the United States and the United Kingdom – or the Nordic states either as a collective or as a potential theatre for security tensions and military action. As an individual partner and ally, Finland has been in the background until recently.

Finland and Norway are both relatively young sovereign states – Norway separated from Sweden in 1905, while Finland acquired its independence from Russia in 1917. Diplomatic ties between the two states were established in 1918 and scholars note that the early bilateral relationship was described in friendly or ‘correct’ terms (Kaukiainen, 1997). However, the early relationship was not trouble-free. In the early 20th century, Finnish immigration to Northern Norway was peaking and scholars make note of a widespread fear expressed in Norwegian politics at the time that Finnish nationalists would use immigration to assume greater control over Finnmark. This concern was referred to as ‘the Finnish danger’ and generated both scepticism and ill-treatment towards the Finnish population in Northern Norway (Eriksen and Niemi, 1981; Fure, 1997, pp. 50-51). Finnish historians echo this

1 To our knowledge, there are few detailed studies of Norway’s bilateral security and defence cooperation with other Nordic states (see Saxi, 2010; Bredesen and Friis, 2017).

account (see e.g., Kallenautio, 1985, p. 117).

Finnish and Norwegian historians seem to agree that the Finnish-Norwegian relationship warmed towards the mid-1930s against the backdrop of a deteriorating international security environment. The rapprochement, it is argued, was driven both by Finland's new Nordic orientation (see e.g., Selen, 1974; Fure, 1997) and by Norway's interest in securing supply routes to the northernmost part of the country (Kaukiainen, 1997, p. 149). When the Soviet Union attacked Finland in 1939, prompting the Winter War, the Norwegian government expressed profound sympathy for Finland and the Finnish population and sent aid, both in the form of humanitarian assistance and facilitative equipment such as fuel.

At the same time, the Norwegian government was cautious about maintaining its official policy of neutrality, fearing being dragged into the war. While more than 700 Norwegian volunteers fought alongside Finland, the government put restrictions on further participation (Fure, 1997, pp. 329-331). In the ensuing years, the complex web of hostility and alliance between the warring great powers pushed Finland and Norway onto different sides of the Second World War. In 1941, concerned about Russian aggression, Finland aligned itself with the Third Reich (which had occupied Norway in April 1940) and participated in Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union. In August 1941, Norway severed diplomatic relations with Finland, following the United Kingdom, where its government-in-exile was based. Still, it is worth noting that over 1000 Norwegian volunteers fought on Finland's side during the Continuation War (Arneberg, 1993).

Diplomatic relations resumed after the war, but Finland and Norway ended up adopting different security orientations in the Cold War security environment. Finland's signing of the *Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance* (FCMA) with the Soviet Union in 1948 ensured the country's territorial integrity, but it also restricted its room for foreign and security policy manoeuvre. One concrete implication was that Finland was practically prohibited from joining international organisations and initiatives considered hostile towards the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, unpersuaded by Swedish attempts to establish a Scandinavian Defence Union, Norway joined NATO as a founding member in 1949. From then on, NATO membership, and particularly relationships with the United Kingdom and the United States, became the cornerstone of Norwegian security and defence policy. Finnish decisionmakers expressed that Norway's NATO membership made the Finnish-Norwegian relationship challenging. In fact, in the early 1980s, Finland's President Mauno Koivisto described the relationship with Norway as one of Finland's most sensitive and difficult (Ovaska, 2023, pp. 78-79).

The source of friction was first and foremost structural, relating to the two states' different security arrangements. Encapsulating this setup, the influential Finnish diplomat and grey eminence Max Jakobson described Finland and Norway as 'counter-poles':

The objective of Finnish security policy is to prevent a situation, where the mutual defence mechanism of the FCMA treaty would be triggered; the objective of Norwegian security policy is to ensure that NATO's collective defence mechanism would indeed work if push ever came to shove. In Finland, we are afraid that we must receive military support from a great power; in Norway, they are afraid that such assistance is not given (Jakobson, 1980, p. 321).

Underlying this assessment was a wider Finnish recognition "that the security doctrines of the Nordic countries were interdependent: political decisions in regard to security made by one Nordic country would necessarily affect the strategic position of the whole region" (Juntunen, 2021, p. 224). This logic was also present in official narratives about the Finnish-Norwegian bilateral relationship – increased allied presence in Norway could lead to further Soviet pressure on Finland, a scenario

Helsinki wanted to avoid. In a similar vein, in the early- and mid-1960s, Norway expressed concern about certain Finnish foreign policy initiatives seen to be effectively aimed at limiting the (potential) scope of NATO presence in Norway. A positive take on this delicate situation is found in the ‘Nordic balance’ model borne out of Norwegian scholarship (Brundtland, 1966). In this account, the Nordic states’ sensitivities towards one another’s security policy situations helped secure peace and stability in the region, helping reduce great-power tensions in Northern Europe.

Different readings of the security climate occasionally put Helsinki and Oslo on a collision course during the Cold War. In 1963, Finland’s President Urho Kekkonen made a proposal of a Nordic Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone, suggesting that the Nordic countries would not procure nuclear weapons or station them in their territory. The proposal – which Finland further developed during the 1970s and 1980s – went against Norway’s policy of not stationing nuclear weapons during peacetime but did maintain an option for stationing them during a crisis (Apunen, 1980; Juntunen, 2016). Two years later, in 1965, Kekkonen started another initiative which came to be known as “the border peace proposal”, suggesting that Finland and Norway should formally agree that neither of them would allow the use of their territories as an attack platform against the other. The aim of this effective non-aggression pact was to pacify the delicate security environment of Northern Fennoscandia. Finnish Lapland, including the Fenno-Norwegian border, was after all a potential transit area for both NATO and Soviet troops (Suomi, 1994, pp. 311–319).

Kekkonen’s lukewarmness towards Norway’s NATO membership was a long-standing attitude. Already as prime minister in 1952, he envisioned a neutral Nordic alliance involving Sweden, Denmark, and Norway – a direct challenge to Norway’s NATO membership (see e.g., Nevakivi, 1997). Kekkonen’s proposal on a Nordic nuclear weapons-free zone echoed Soviet preferences and improved Finland’s and Kekkonen’s image in Moscow. Both proposals aimed at disengaging NATO and the Soviet Union from each other, which, in the Finnish view, would have made the region more stable. Kekkonen’s position resonated among other leading Finnish policymakers: in 1981, Aimo Pajunen, one of Finland’s most prominent defence officials, publicly criticised Norway’s decision to allow the United States to preposition military materiel on its soil. Pajunen deemed Norway’s foreign and security policy incompetent and warned that it could exacerbate already tense great-power relations.

The Norwegian press picked up on Pajunen’s comments, which reportedly offended key officials in Oslo. Pajunen’s remarks were likely driven by the fear that the Soviet Union would tighten its stance towards Finland in response to Norway’s decision (Tala, 2024, pp. 183–197). In addition to serious friction between Finland and Norway, the structural tensions sometimes manifested as more minor political incidents. In 1977, a satirical drawing in the Norwegian pro-NATO, Centre Party affiliated newspaper *Nationen* portrayed Kekkonen as the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev’s hunting dog. Kekkonen – not known as a champion of free speech – was viscerally offended. Eventually, Norwegian Prime Minister Odvar Nordli was forced to make a secret trip to Helsinki to apologise (Tamnes, 1997, pp. 45–56).

In summary, despite emphasising peaceful neighbourly relations, the dominant political and scholarly accounts of the Finnish-Norwegian relationship during the Cold War revealed friction and political distance due to conflicting security policy orientations. These were not stories of friendship and trust, but rather walking on eggshells to keep relations operational and prevent a larger great-power conflict from materialising in the Nordic region. At the same time, scholarly accounts such as the ‘Nordic balance’, offered a more positive take on the situation, suggesting that the Nordic states’ different security positions helped stabilise the region as a whole.

Towards more integration: A partnership in the making

Their different security doctrines notwithstanding, Finland and Norway collaborated in Nordic institutional forums during the Cold War, including the Nordic Council (1952) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (1971). The *Helsinki Treaty* explicitly limited cooperation in these forums to “legal, cultural, social and economic fields” as well as transport, communications, and environmental protection (*Helsinki Treaty*, 1962, art. 1). Cooperation in security and defence matters was limited to peacekeeping, as all the Nordics were active contributors to UN-led peacekeeping operations in various parts of the globe (see e.g., Jakobsen, 2006).

For Finland, these Nordic collaboration structures became a ‘window to the West’ during the Cold War and they had notable political significance. Recent studies find, for example, that cooperation related to peacekeeping allowed Finnish military officials to discreetly discuss potential wartime cooperation with the Nordic countries (Pesu, 2020). More broadly, extensive cooperation in areas of low politics allowed Nordic-wide security community building despite different security affiliations and a lack of cooperation in hard security matters (Creutz, 2018). This collaboration enhanced the underpinnings of Nordic cooperation and strengthened the whole Nordic community (see e.g., Strang, 2016). ‘Nordicity’ or ‘Nordicness’ even became an identifiable ‘brand’ known for bridge-building and international solidarity, although there were considerable differences in the respective security doctrines of the Nordic countries (Browning, 2007; see also Brommeson, 2018).

Towards the end of the Cold War, mutual understanding between Helsinki and Oslo of their respective foreign policy standpoints increased. Norway even started to cautiously warm up to the Finnish idea of a Nordic Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone (Juntunen, 2021, pp. 231-233; see also Cameron, 2024). Meanwhile, Finnish policymakers acknowledged that Norwegian security policy also had a mature element – more precisely, that Oslo did not only aim at deterring but also *reassuring* the Soviet Union (Nyberg, 1983, p. 159). Helsinki welcomed the Norwegian policy of reassurance as the appropriate approach to Moscow’s policies, which were purportedly driven by defensive objectives.

After the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Finland and Norway gradually stepped up their collaboration under more allowing circumstances – initially within the Nordic context and multilateral settings such as the UN, the OSCE, and the Arctic Council. In 1994, Finland and Sweden both joined NATO’s *Partnership for Peace* initiative, allowing the two states to – inter alia – deploy troops to NATO-led peacekeeping operations in the Balkans and additionally Afghanistan, where Finnish and Norwegian troops operated closely (Mustasilta et al, 2022). In 1995, both Finland and Sweden joined the EU. While Norway did not, following a second nation-wide referendum on EU membership, both Finnish and Swedish membership processes formed a key part of the Norwegian government’s argument as to why Norway had to join. While the different institutional choices of the Nordic countries still complicated formalised security and defence cooperation, Nordic cooperation grew in this domain, as well as in the extended institutional contexts of NATO and the EU.

In the new security landscape that emerged in the 1990s, Finland fully endorsed Norway’s security policy positions – a notable diplomatic and rhetorical turn from previous lukewarmness. The government’s 1995 report on Finnish security policy stated that “Norway’s consistent defence policy and the security guarantees given to Norway by the United States within NATO are an essential element of military stability in northern Europe” (The Government of Finland, 1995, p. 31). Further, the 1997 report on security and defence again contained a lengthy section on the basics of Norwegian defence policy, reiterating the view that US commitment to Norwegian security was a core pillar of Northern European security (The Government of Finland, 1997, pp. 33-35, 43). However, these more

permissive structural factors – and the noteworthy shift in Finnish official discourse – did not result in a deep Finnish-Norwegian relationship in the 1990s or during the first decade of the 2000s.

From Helsinki's point of view, the relationship with Norway was now cordial and unproblematic, but strengthening bilateral ties was not a priority. This is reflected in the remarks of Finnish decision makers in Norway-related events, which consistently had a broader scope than the bilateral relationship. In his speech at the University of Oslo in 1994, for example, President Martti Ahtisaari observed how the positive view of Norway had further been enhanced in Finland and how Norway has been blessed with beautiful nature and rich natural resources. However, the focus of the speech was on Arctic cooperation and Russia's evolving role in the North (Ahtisaari, 1994). Similarly, at a state banquet in honour of a visit by the Norwegian king and queen in 2007, Ahtisaari's successor Tarja Halonen did not address the bilateral relationship as such but spoke instead about Norway's global role and its relations with the EU (Halonen, 2007).

During this period, we thus see the emergence of a broader Nordic security community evolving through alignment with NATO and the EU. Nordic practical cooperation increased in the security and defence domain as the 'hard' institutional restrictions from the Cold War were no longer as strongly present. This development is in (stark) contrast to what the Nordic countries have been known for, such as "do-gooders" focusing on humanitarian aid and international peace and security (Wivel, 2017; Browning, Lehti and Strang, forthcoming; de Bengy Puyvallée and Bjørkdahl, 2021). However, with less friction, the bilateral Finnish-Norwegian relationship continued to be subject to limited political attention and interest and was rather noted as part of the context of the broader Nordic security community.

Crises and catalysts: New narratives in the making

Towards the end of the 2000s, broader dynamics pulled Finland and Norway closer together. Nordic policymakers now began to actively elevate regional cooperation to the security and defence agenda, hence bringing more relevance, substance and concrete interaction to the Finnish-Norwegian bilateral relationship. In 2008, against the backdrop of the international financial crisis and the Russian-Georgian war, the Nordic foreign ministers tasked Norwegian diplomat and ex-Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg with evaluating the possibilities for enhanced Nordic foreign, security and defence collaboration. The process resulted in a report with thirteen specific proposals as to how this could be done (Stoltenberg, 2009). The same year, NORDEFECO was established. One concrete result was that the Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish air forces began cooperative exercises on almost a weekly basis (see e.g., Dahl, 2021). This facilitated increased everyday practical cooperation between military officials, contributing to a strengthened community of practice in this domain. From this point onwards, security and defence – which in the past had been a 'no-go' – became the new engine of Nordic cooperation and integration.

During this period, Nordic cooperation also rose on the Finnish security and defence agenda, bringing more depth and substance to Finnish-Norwegian collaboration. Statements from Finnish leaders during this period confirmed that Finland placed a stronger emphasis on its relationship with Norway. In 2012, then President Sauli Niinistö declared in Oslo that the two countries are "welded together by sheer geography", adding that Finland and Norway enjoyed a relationship that went far beyond the traditional diplomatic jargon of a "good and well-functioning" relationship. Niinistö (2012) identified multiple avenues for deeper collaboration not only in security and defence but also economically. It was broadly conceived that the peak in Finnish-Norwegian relations was yet to be seen, a view confirmed by civil servants as well (Creutz, 2018, pp. 338).

The deterioration of the security environment eventually precipitated deeper Nordic military cooperation. Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Finland and Sweden increased their military training and exercises with the other Nordic states, including as part of the Norwegian-hosted NATO exercise 'Trident Juncture' in 2015. Collaboration among the Nordics was now driven by concrete security threats, and it gained unforeseen traction (Saxi, 2019). The security and defence policies of the five Nordic states progressively became more aligned. They not only increasingly offered similar assessments of the security environment but also shared the same partner preferences and participated in the same collaborative structures (Haugevik et al, 2022; Saxi, 2022; Brommesson, Ekengren and Michalski, 2023). Collaboration progressed, even as Nordic cooperation faced strains in other areas, such as border management during the global COVID-19 pandemic (Creutz et al, 2021).

In Finland, the enhanced Nordic cooperation constituted a focal part of a new security strategy of "alignment", in which Helsinki maintained nominal non-allied status but sought to deepen existing and forging new military partnerships. The aim of the policy was to bolster deterrence and to generate conditions for wartime cooperation (Pesu and Iso-Markku, 2024; Iso-Markku and Pesu, 2024), a notable change to the policy of military non-alignment. As part of this policy, Norway started to play an increasingly prominent role in Finnish security thinking. Initially, some Finnish observers noted that Norway seemed to not be as equally interested in cooperating with Finland and leaders in Helsinki got the impression that Oslo was hesitant to intensify the military relationship with a non-allied nation (Nurmi, 2023). However, this allegedly lukewarm attitude changed in the ensuing years and Norway warmed up to the idea of cooperating with Finland (Efjestad, 2019).

Finnish security documents also began to emphatically underscore the importance of Norway to Finland. In 2019, the Finnish government programme declared that cooperation with Norway would be deepened – an objective that was widely shared across the political spectrum (The Government of Finland, 2019, p. 99). The Finnish government's 2021 defence report, the last preceding Russia's war of aggression, again dealt explicitly with three bilateral partners, one of which was Norway. It stated that "defence cooperation with Norway will be increased and deepened, both bilaterally and together with Sweden". In terms of Finnish-Swedish-Norwegian trilateral cooperation, the stated objective was to "create prerequisites to execute military operations in times of crisis and conflict, if separately decided". Norway was also mentioned in connection to the Joint Expeditionary Forces (JEF), the aim of which is, inter alia, "to work together in crisis situations" (The Government of Finland, 2021, pp. 44-45, 59).

Russia's attempt to seek security guarantees in December 2021 along with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prompted Finland to seek NATO membership and started an even more conspicuous alignment between Finland and Norway. The Russian military build-up in and around Ukraine and the ensuing aggression significantly intensified Nordic coordination around the deteriorated European security environment. In this process, Finnish policymakers considered their Norwegian counterparts as vital interlocutors. During his visit to Oslo in October 2022, Niinistö anticipated that the relationship's importance would "only grow" with Finland's membership in NATO. By a similar token, Støre observed that "Norway has no better friend, I have no better interlocutor, than Finland and President Niinistö" (Niinistö and Støre, 2022). Furthermore, Finnish policymakers were impressed by Norway's steadfast support for its own NATO application process. Norway was among the first ratifiers of Finland's accession and Oslo also offered concrete assistance to Helsinki on many levels.

In August 2023, President Niinistö offered his gratitude to Norway in general and Prime Minister Støre personally for the support:

I would like to mention the role of Jonas Gahr Støre [...] he was with us all the time and very active. He helped in any way he could. He spoke for our cause everywhere. From his position within NATO and from his strong position as a well-known diplomat, (...) Støre played an important role in this process (Niinistö, 2023).

The process leading to Finland's NATO accession further elevated Norway's importance in the eyes of Finnish decisionmakers. Finland's and Norway's respective security policy doctrines were now practically aligned, which enabled new avenues for both formal and informal collaboration. Norway's experience as a Nordic country in NATO served as a model and inspiration for evolving Finnish policy in the alliance, and the utility of 'the Norwegian model' for Finland was subject to considerable public debate during its NATO membership process (see e.g., Solli and Solvang, 2024). In November 2023, a public seminar in Helsinki explored how Norway has balanced its role as a NATO ally with a principled and value-based approach to international affairs (FIIA, 2023). Inside observers have described Norway as a "model and tutor" for Finland in NATO, even if Finnish policymakers have been clear that they would not copy-paste or emulate "the Norwegian model" – e.g., with self-imposed restrictions on, e.g., foreign bases.²

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finnish-Norwegian relations have been described by observers as "record-close" and "never been closer and better" (Nykänen, 2023). Indicative of Finland's new security doctrine as well as its deepened relationship with Norway, Finland's new president Alexander Stubb made his first foreign visit to Norway to observe the high-visibility Nordic Response military exercise together with Prime Minister Støre (President of the Republic, 2024). Moreover, the Finnish Government's report on foreign and security policy from June 2024 underscored how "cooperation between Finland and Norway will become closer now that both countries are NATO members and share a land border with Russia" (The Government of Finland, 2024, p. 24.). In June 2024, Helsinki and Oslo signed a new bilateral defence agreement, detailing 20 areas of cooperation and further solidifying their strengthened bilateral relationship (Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2024).

After Russia's invasion: New opportunities and potential challenges

The formalisation of a defence alliance further increased Finland and Norway's relevance to, and attentiveness of, one another, pushing the relationship higher on their respective agendas. In the 2020s, Finland and Norway have increasingly become relevant as reference points and models also for one another's security and defence policy. There are several areas where Finland and Norway may benefit from comparing notes and exchanging viewpoints in the coming years. One such area relates to the maintenance of relations with the United States, especially if Donald Trump re-enters the White House after the 2024 presidential election. Both Norway and Finland had good relations with the first Trump administration (Creutz, 2018; Haugevik and Sending, 2020) in terms of security and defence cooperation, to the degree that the then Finnish defence minister Jussi Niinistö stated that "Finland has never had closer relations with the United States" (Salmela, 2018).

A second area concerns the future dynamics between Russia and the West, where both Finland and Norway have considerable experience with peaceful, pragmatic management of everyday relations with Russia. Both countries have been considered models on how to handle Russian relations (Bogdanoff, 2018), even though these perceptions appear in flux. Questions about the management of the two states' land borders to Russia form a key part of this, as exemplified in recent domestic

² Roundtable discussion, Oslo, March 2023.

debates about how to respond to migrant flows via Russia suddenly appearing at the Finnish and Norwegian borders. As noted by President Niinistö during a visit to Oslo in 2022: “Russia will not disappear. It will continue to be our neighbour, even if there is no turn for the better. Finland can never afford to ignore it. NATO membership will not change that reality. In this, too, I think there is a lot Finland and Norway can learn from each other” (Niinistö & Støre, 2022).

The relations with Russia also constitute a political conundrum to which Norway and Finland have slightly different approaches even though both countries have experienced Russia’s assertive actions in the form of hybrid operations, deteriorating political climate, and disinformation campaigns, to name a few (Spansvoll, 2023). From a Finnish perspective, Norway’s approach to Russia appears ambivalent, situated between reassurance and deterrence. Norwegians again are surprised by the U-turn in Finnish Russian policy, where no official discussions are held except on very basic cooperation (border officials remain one example). The subtle difference seems to lie in the ability of Helsinki to imagine (and practice) non-relations with Russia. To illustrate, the newly elected President Stubb stressed during his campaign that he would not pick up the phone should his Russian equivalent call. Meanwhile, Norway’s long-term everyday cooperation with Russia on – inter alia – fisheries, Svalbard, environmental governance, search-and-rescue, and oil-spill preparedness are seen as a reason to uphold a minimum level of communication (Kelman et al, 2020). Thus, scholars have argued that Norway should “continue its prudent politics of balancing appeasement and deterrence” (Waehler, 2022). In other words, disaster diplomacy seems relevant for both countries’ policies towards Russia. For Finland, it nevertheless indicates the maximum level of cooperation with Russia, whereas for some Norwegian policymakers it may constitute minimum-level cooperation.

A third point relates to how – with the notable exception of the EU – Finland and Norway operate within the same institutional frameworks. Norway’s role as a prospective mentor for Finland in NATO has been mentioned. Similarly, Finland, along with Denmark and Sweden, has served as a key information and access point for Norway in relations with the EU (Haugevik, 2017). With the rules-based international order under pressure, there is also a potential for Finland and Norway to cooperate more closely – with each other and the other Nordic states – in the context of other multilateral forums and platforms. Norwegian lessons learned will, for example, be highly relevant in Finland’s upcoming bid for a seat at the UN Security Council (2029-30) as part of the prearranged Nordic rotation system.

Fourthly, Finland and Norway will have a shared interest in highlighting the security connection between the Arctic and Baltic Sea areas. With both states inside NATO, new possibilities have emerged for cooperation on capability development – including procurement and acquisitions – and in operational terms where deterrence on NATO’s Northern Flank is now supported by a potent and interoperable fighter plane structure. Furthermore, new investments in infrastructure and military mobility in Northern Fennoscandia would be vital enablers of more intense Finnish-Norwegian operational cooperation. Such investments could arguably form part of a Nordic “Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)” as called for by policy experts (Penttilä, 2023). Finally, while Finland is keen to learn from Norway’s NATO experience, the organisation of Finland’s national defence and total defence concept will serve as important models and reference points as Norwegian security and defence structures adapt to a new security context (see NOU, 2023, p. 14).

Conclusion

This article set out to explore how the narrative surrounding Finnish-Norwegian relations could be redefined into a 'special' bilateral relationship so swiftly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Finland's subsequent application for NATO membership. It is significant that the change in narrative occurred so rapidly, as the two states have been relatively distant historically and it was not a given that this bilateral axis would flourish within the broader Nordic (and NATO) security community after 2022. We have argued that the effective reframing of the Finnish-Norwegian relationship as an exceptional friendship after Russia's invasion of Ukraine was possible because it was formulated against the backdrop of the already established narrative about the well-functioning and trustful Nordic security community. The intense interaction dynamics between Finland and Norway in recent years have taken the Nordic security community to an unprecedented level of integration, and an all-time high sense of 'we-ness' now characterises Finnish-Norwegian relations.

To this end, we have identified the role of specific bilateral relationships within security communities. At the level of community, much has been said about unequal power relations and dynamics, but intra-community relations remain largely unexplored to our knowledge. For Finland, intensive bilateral interaction with Norway became a tool to further its broader integration into the transatlantic security community. This can be attributed to external factors such as geography, shared size, or mutual threat perceptions, but the relative political detachment from which integration began and accelerated shows how intensive bilateral interaction can further security community integration. Narratives alone do not necessarily produce effects beyond the narratives themselves, but they are representations which can pave the way for further change. Future studies of security communities could explore a range of intra-community interactions and their effect on the broader security communities to which they belong. This includes further exploration of Finnish-Norwegian relations, as our analysis has illustrated that this could be a critical case of successful bilateral security community integration in an exceptionally short time.

Acknowledgments

This article builds on research carried out by the authors under the project 'New allies, new rooms for manoeuvre: Finland and Norway in a changed security context,' financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Defence in 2023. Haugevik and Svendsen also acknowledge support from the strategic program 'Norway and great power politics,' financed by the MoD in 2022-2024. The authors would like to thank participants at roundtables in Oslo (March 2023) and Helsinki (November 2023) for their input and reflections.

References

- Adler, E. and Barnett, M. (1998) *Security Communities*. Cambridge.
- Ahtisaari, M. (1994) 'The Nordic Countries in the changing international community', Speech at the University of Oslo, 19 October 1994. Available at: <https://www.eilen.fi/fi/2015/?language=en> (Accessed: 12 April 2024).
- Apunen, O. (1980) 'Three 'Waves' of the Kekkonen Plan and Nordic Security in the 1980s', *Security Dialogue*, 11(1), pp. 16-32. DOI: 10.1177/096701068001100103
- Arneberg, S.T. (1993) *Tragedie i Karelen – Norske skijegere i den finske Fortsettelseskrigen 1941-44*. Oslo: Grøndahl.
- Bredesen, M.G. and Friis, K. (2017). Swedish–Norwegian Defence Cooperation: New opportunities? *NUPI Policy Brief*, No. 17/17.
- Brommesson, D. (2018) 'Introduction to special section: from Nordic exceptionalism to a third order priority – variations of "Nordicness" in foreign and security policy', *Global Affairs*, 4(4-5), pp. 355-362. DOI: 10.1080/23340460.2018.1533385.
- Brommesson, D., Ekengren, A.M. and Michalski, A. (2023), 'From variation to convergence in turbulent times – foreign and security policy choices among the Nordics 2014-2023', *European Security*, 33(1), pp. 21-43. DOI: 10.1080/09662839.2023.2221185.
- Browning, C, Lehti, M. and Strang, J. (eds), (forthcoming), *Revisiting Nordic Peace*. Routledge.
- Brundtland, A. O. (1966) 'The Nordic Balance: Past and Present', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 1(4), pp. 30-63. DOI: [10.1177/001083676600100](https://doi.org/10.1177/001083676600100)
- Buzan, B. and Waever, O. (2003). *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511491252](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491252)
- Cameron, J. (2024) 'Deterrence, reassurance and strategic stability: The enduring relevance of Johan Jørgen Holst', *Journal of Strategic Studies*. 47 (3), pp. 363–386. DOI: [10.1080/01402390.2024.2321135](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2024.2321135)
- Creutz, K. (2018) 'Finlands pragmatiska kurs i de globala omvälvningarnas svallvågor', *Internasjonal Politikk*, 76(4), pp. 331–342. DOI: [10.23865/intpol.v76.1387](https://doi.org/10.23865/intpol.v76.1387)
- Creutz, K., Berglund, S., Kalacan, T.B, Giacometti, A., Haugevik, K., Sørensen, N.N, Wøien Meijer, M. and Lares, A. (2021) Nordic Cooperation amid Pandemic Travel Restrictions. *FIIA Report 68*. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs.
- Dahl, A. S. (2021) 'Back to the Future: Nordefco's First Decade and Prospects for the Next', *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 4(1), pp. 172–182. DOI: 10.31374/sjms.85.
- De Bengy Puyvallée, A. and Bjørkdahl, K. (eds) (2021), *Do-gooders at the end of aid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/9781108772129](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108772129)
- Deutsch, K. W., Burrell, S.A., Kann, R.A. and Lee Jr., M. (1957) *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*. Princeton University Press.
- Dupuis, A. and Thorns, D. C. (1998) Home, Home Ownership and the Search for Ontological Security. *The Sociological Review*, 46(1), 24-47. DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.00088
- Efjestad, Svein (2019) 'The Nordic Region' in Olsen, John Andreas (ed) *Security in Northern Europe: Deterrence, Defence and Dialogue*. London: Routledge.

- Eriksen, K. E. and Niemi, E. (1981) *Den finske fare. Sikkerhetsproblemer og minoritetspolitikk i nord 1860-1940*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- FIIA (2023). Finland and Norway as NATO allies – What can Finland learn from Norway? Seminar, 6 November. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=CJ_mbQIYWAA.
- Government of Finland (1995) 'Turvallisuus muuttuvassa maailmassa Suomen turvallisuuspolitiikan suuntalinjat Valtioneuvoston selonteko eduskunnalle', Government's Report to the Parliament, 6 June. Available at: https://www.defmin.fi/files/246/2513_2143_selonteko95_1_.pdf.
- Government of Finland (1997) 'Euroopan turvallisuuskehitys ja Suomen puolustus', Government's Report to the Parliament, 17 March. Available at: https://www.defmin.fi/files/245/2512_2142_selonteko97_1_.pdf.
- Government of Finland (2019) 'Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government 10 December 2019. Inclusive and competent Finland - a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society'. Available at: <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161935>.
- Government of Finland (2021) 'Government's Defence Report'. Publications of the Finnish Government 2021:80, 9 September. Available at: https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163407/VN_2021_80.pdf.
- Government of Finland (2024) 'Government report on Finnish foreign and security policy'. Publications of the Finnish Government 2024: 35. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-929-8>.
- Halonen, T. (2007) 'Speech at a state banquet in honour of the state visit by Their Majesties the King and Queen of Norway at the Presidential Palace', 5 June 2007. Available at: <https://www.president.fi/halonen/public/default61bd.html?contentid=176886&contentlan=2>.
- Haugevik, K. (2017) Diplomacy through the back door: Norway and the bilateral route to EU decision-making. *Global Affairs*, 3(3), pp. 277-291. DOI: [10.1080/23340460.2017.1378586](https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2017.1378586)
- Haugevik, K. and Sending, O.J. (2020) 'The Nordic Balance Revisited: Differentiation and the Foreign Policy Repertoires of the Nordic States'. *Politics and Governance*, 8(4), pp. 441-450. DOI: [10.17645/pag.v8i4.3380](https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3380)
- Haugevik, K., Svendsen, Ø., Creutz, K., Olesen, M.R., Regnér A.L. and Schmidt, J.L (2022) Security debates and partnership choices in the Nordic states: From differentiation to alignment. *NUPI Report* No. 1/22.
- Haugevik, K. and Svendsen, Ø. (2023) On safer ground? The emergence and evolution of 'Global Britain', *International Affairs*, 99(6), pp. 2387-2404. DOI: [10.1093/ia/iiaad186](https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaad186)
- Helsinki Treaty (1962) Treaty of Co-operation between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Available at: <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1250815/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Hofius, M. (2016) 'Community at the border or the boundaries of community? The case of EU field diplomats', *Review of International Studies*, 42(5), pp. 939-967. DOI: [10.1017/S0260210516000085](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000085).
- Iso-Markku, T. and Pesu, M. (2024) 'Finland's Approach to Military Cooperation and Integration: From Alignment to Alliance' in Haaland Matlary, J. and Johnson, R. (eds) *NATO and the Russian War in Ukraine: Strategic Integration and Military Interoperability*. London: Hurts & Company.
- Jackson, P. (2006) *Civilizing the Enemy. German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West*. University of Michigan Press. DOI: [10.3998/mpub.155507](https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.155507)

Jakobsen, P. V. (2006) 'The Nordic peacekeeping model: Rise, fall, resurgence?', *International Peacekeeping*, 13(3), pp. 381-395. DOI: 10.1080/13533310600824082.

Jakobson, M. (1980) *Vallanvaihto – havaintoja ja muistiinpanoja vuosilta 1974–92*. Helsinki: Otava.

Jakobson, M. (2006) *Finland: a lone wolf*. Helsinki: Otava.

Juntunen, T. (2016) 'Kaavoihin kangistumista vai käytännöllistä viisautta? Suomen alueellinen ydinasevalvontapolitiikka kylmän sodan aikana', *Kosmopolis*, 46(1), pp. 27–44.

Juntunen, T. (2021) "“We Just Got to Keep Harping On About It”: Anti-Nuclearism and the Role of Sub-Regional Arms Control Initiatives in the Nordic Countries During the Second Cold War' in Gassert, P., Geiger, T. and Wentker, H. (eds.) *The INF Treaty of 1987: A Reappraisal*. Göttingen, pp. 215–236. DOI: 10.13109/9783666352171

Juntunen, T. and Pesu, M. (2018) 'Mistrust within Trust: Finnish–Swedish defence cooperation and the ghosts of the 1990 EC application incident' in Haukkala, H., van de Veting, C. and Vuorelma, J. (eds.) *Trust in International Relations. Rationalist, Constructivist, and Psychological Approaches*. Abingdon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315209838>.

Kallenautio, J. (1985) *Suomi katsoi eteensä. Itsenäisen Suomen ulkopoliittikka 1917–1955*. Helsinki: Tammi.

Kaukiainen, L. (1997) *Avoin ja suljettu raja. Suomen ja Norjan suhteet 1918–1940*. Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society.

Kelman, I., Sydnes, A. K., Duda, P. I., Nikitina E., and Webersik, E. (2020) 'Norway-Russia Disaster Diplomacy for Svalbard', *Safety Science*, vol. 130, pp. 1-7. DOI: [10.1016/j.ssci.2020.104896](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2020.104896)

Koivisto, M. (2008) *Grannar - frändskap och friktion*. Helsinki: Schildts & Söderströms.

Krebs, R. R. and Jackson, P. T. (2007) 'Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms: The Power of Political Rhetoric', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13(1), pp. 35-66. DOI: 10.1177/1354066107074284

Kupchan, C. (2010) *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace*. Princeton. DOI: [10.1515/9781400834419](https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400834419)

Lupovici, A. (2023) 'Ontological security, cyber technology, and states' responses', *European Journal of International Relations*, 29(1), pp. 153-178. DOI: [10.1177/13540661221130](https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661221130)

Ministry of Defence of Finland (2024) 'Finland and Norway sign a Memorandum of Understanding', 20 June 2024. Available at: https://valtioneuvosto.fi/-/suomi-ja-norja-allekirjoittivat-yhteisymmarruspyytakirjan?languageld=en_US.

Mustasilta, K., Karjalainen, T., Stewart, T. R. and Salo, M. (2022) Finland in Afghanistan 2001–2021: From stabilization to advancing foreign and security policy relations. *FIIA Report 72*. June 2022. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

Nevakivi, J. (1997) 'Kekkonen, the Soviet Union and Scandinavia — Aspects of policy in the years 1948–1965', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 22(2), pp. 65-81. DOI: 10.1080/03468759708579343.

Niinistö, S. (2012) 'Speech at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs', 11 October 2012. Available at: <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/speeches/speech-by-president-of-the-republic-of-finland-sauli-niinisto-at-the-norwegian-institute-of-international-affairs-11th-october-2012/>

Niinistö, S. (2023) 'Sommarprat', *Sveriges Radio*, 20 August. Available at: <https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/sauli-niinisto-sommarprat-2023>.

- Niinistö, S. and Støre, J. G. (2022) A conversation with President of Finland, Mr Sauli Niinistö, and Prime Minister of Norway, Mr Jonas Gahr Støre, seminar 10 October. Oslo: NUPI.
- NOU (2023). Forsvarskommisjonen av 2021. Forsvar for fred og frihet. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/8b8a7fc642f44ef5b27a1465301492ff/no/pdfs/nou202320230014000dddpdfs.pdf>.
- Nyberg, R. (1983) *Pohjolan turvallisuus ja Suomi: ydinaseiden vähenevä merkitys*. Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.
- Nykänen, M. (2023) 'Norjan pääministeri: suhteet Suomen kanssa ennennäkemättömän tiiviit - 'Jaamme uniikkeja asioita'', *Iltalehti*, 13 July 2023. Available at: <https://www.iltalehti.fi/ulkomaat/a/826728f0-45e3-452f-9128-8127d3114569>.
- Nurmi, L. (2023) *Suomen salattu tie Natoon*. Helsinki: Into Kustannus.
- Ojanen, H. (2023) 'Rethinking Finnish-Swedish relations, Nordic cooperation and NATO', *Nordic Review of International Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 25-32.
- Ovaska, J. (2023) *Käännö – Suomen irtiotto Kremlistä Eurooppaan*. Jyväskylä: Docendo.
- Penttilä, R. E. J. (2023) 'HBL Debatt: Våga skapa ett starkt nordiskt block', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 10 December 2023.
- Pesu, J. (2020) *Suomi, rauhanturvaaminen ja kylmä sota 1956–1990. Rauhanturvaaminen osana Suomen ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikkaa ja YK-politiikkaa*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Turku. Available at: <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-29-8254-7>.
- Pesu, M. and Iso-Markku, T. (2024) 'Insufficiency of informal alignment. Why did Finland choose formal NATO membership?', *International Affairs*, 100(2), pp. 569-588. DOI: 10.1093/ia/iiae006
- President of the Republic of Finland (2024) 'President Stubb at NATO exercise in Norway: An important day for Finland, Sweden and Norway'. <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/president-stubb-at-nato-exercise-in-norway-an-important-day-for-finland-sweden-and-norway/>.
- Rentola, K. (2023) *How Finland Survived Stalin?* New Haven: Yale University Press. DOI: 10.2307/jj.7855330
- Salmela, S. (2018) 'Puolustusministeri Niinistö pitää harjoitustoimintaa kolmenvälisen aiejulistuksen konkreettisimpana antina', *Finnish News Agency*, 9 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.ts.fi/uutiset/3942314>.
- Saxi, H. L. (2010) Norwegian and Danish defence policy: A comparative study of the post-Cold War era. *Policy Brief* 1/10, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies.
- Saxi, H. L. (2019) 'The rise, fall and resurgence of Nordic defence cooperation', *International Affairs*, 95(3), pp. 659–680. DOI: 10.1093/ia/iiz049
- Saxi, H. L. (2022) 'Alignment but not Alliance: Nordic Operational Military Cooperation', *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*, vol. 13, pp. 53–71. DOI: 10.23865/arctic.v13.3380.
- Solli, P. E. and Solvang, O. (2024) 'Deterrence and Re-assurance in the High North: Finland and Norway Compared', *NUPI Policy Brief*. 23 February 2024. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). Available at: <https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/deterrence-and-re-assurance-in-the-high-north-finland-and-norway-compared> (Accessed: 12 April 2024).
- Somers, M. R. (1994) 'The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach', *Theory and Society*, 23(5), pp.605–649. DOI: 10.1007/BF00992905

- Spansvoll, R. (2023) 'Studying Moscow's Coercive Campaign Against Norway: The Bear is Awake', *The RUSI Journal*, 168(3), pp. 74–85. DOI: [10.1080/03071847.2023.2220756](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2023.2220756)
- Stoltenberg, T. (2009) Nordic Cooperation on Foreign and Security. Proposals presented to the extraordinary meeting in Oslo, 9 February. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/nordicreport.pdf>
- Strang, J. (eds.) (2016) *Nordic cooperation: A European region in transition*. London: Routledge. DOI: [10.4324/9781315755366](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315755366)
- Suomi, J. (1994) *Urho Kekkonen 1962–1968 – presidentti*. Helsinki: Otava.
- Svendsen, Ø. (2019) 'Brexit and the future of EU defence: a practice approach to differentiated defence integration', *Journal of European Integration*, 41(8), pp. 993–1007. DOI: [10.1080/07036337.2019.1622540](https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2019.1622540)
- Tala, H. (2024) *Aimo Pajunen. Kylmän sodan kenraali*. Helsinki: Siltala.
- Tamnes, R. (1997) *Oljealder 1965–1995. Norsk Utenrikspolitikks Historie, vol. 6*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Waehler, T. A. (2022) 'Hot Conflict in Cold Surroundings? Svalbard's Strategic Impact After Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine', *High North News*, 26 October 2022.
- Wahlbäck, K. (2011) *Jättens andedräkt – Finlandsfrågan i svensk politik 1809–2009*. Stockholm: Atlantis.
- Wendt, A. (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge. DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511612183](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612183)
- Wivel, A. (2017) 'What happened to the Nordic Model for International Peace and Security', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 29(4), pp. 489–486. DOI: [10.1080/10402659.2017.1381521](https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2017.1381521)

Peer-Reviewed Article

Naturalising nuclear deterrence: A comparative analysis of Finnish and Swedish discourses on nuclear weapon politics, 2016–22

Tapio Juntunen, University Teacher, Tampere University

Emma Rosengren, Research Fellow, Swedish Institute of International Affairs

Abstract

Finland and Sweden's decisions to join NATO not only marks the end of a long period of neutrality and military non-alignment for the Nordic neighbours - they also require major shifts in their policies and self-perceptions related to nuclear weapons, disarmament, and nuclear deterrence. Drawing on a comparative research design and theory on depoliticisation, this article analyses how joining a nuclear alliance was made possible in two historical contexts marked by traditional opposition towards nuclear weapons. Comparing domestic deliberations about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and NATO membership between 2016–2022, our findings suggest that two key narratives are essential for understanding how the nuclear dimension of NATO membership was reconciled in both countries. First, 'the virtue of (disarmament) pragmatism' narrative centres around how the historically stratified Finnish pragmatic approach to nuclear disarmament served as a guiding principle in both countries. Second, 'the necessity of extended (nuclear) deterrence' narrative enabled the nuclear dimension of NATO membership to become reconciled with Finland and Sweden's historically neutral and non-aligned policies.

Keywords

Nuclear disarmament, extended nuclear deterrence, depoliticisation, Baltic Sea region, NATO enlargement

Introduction

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Finland and Sweden applied for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO. This constitutes one of the most fundamental security shifts in the region since the end of the Cold War. To various extents, neutrality was a central feature of Cold War security policy and national identity in both countries (Rainio-Niemi, 2014), and both made themselves known as staunch supporters of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, albeit with slight differences in their profiles (cf. Juntunen, 2023; Rosengren, 2020). Their decisions to join NATO – an alliance reliant on extended nuclear deterrence – not only marks the end of a long period of neutrality and military non-alignment for Finland and Sweden but will also require a major shift in their policies and self-perceptions related to nuclear weapons, disarmament, and extended nuclear deterrence.

Focusing on the nuclear dimension of NATO, this article compares domestic deliberations about nuclear weapons, disarmament and extended nuclear deterrence in Finland and Sweden from 2016 to 2022 in two successive contexts: debates about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) from 2017, and about NATO membership after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The aim is to reveal how joining a nuclear alliance was made possible in two historical contexts marked by non-alignment and opposition towards nuclear weapons. Drawing on insights from research that treats security policy as “a product of social and discursive construction” (Hagström, 2021, p. 142) and on literature about depoliticisation as an analytical tool for understanding radical policy change (Wood, 2015), our analysis unpacks national narratives that enabled Finland and Sweden's turns towards reliance on extended nuclear deterrence.

Rather than explaining why Finland and Sweden changed their nuclear weapon policies and applied for NATO membership, our analysis exposes how “interpretative dispositions [regarding nuclear weapons] were socially constructed such that certain practices were made possible” (Doty, 1993, p. 298). While Finland and Sweden have not, at any point in history, followed a completely identical path regarding nuclear weapons and disarmament, we argue that an analytical focus on depoliticisation and naturalisation in domestic debates sheds light both on contemporary discourses about nuclear disarmament, NATO enlargement and nuclear deterrence, and on the changing role of nuclear weapons in the Nordics.

Case selection

There are similarities that make a comparison of nuclear discourses in Finland and Sweden especially fruitful. First, joining a nuclear alliance stands at odds with their historical legacies as non-aligned advocates for nuclear disarmament, even though NATO (2022) envisions a world free from nuclear weapons. Second, both share a geopolitical position neighbouring Russia and applied for NATO membership after Russia had openly challenged the existing regional security order by attacking Ukraine, one of its non-nuclear and non-allied neighbouring states.

Nonetheless, there are also differences between the two, not least regarding their historical relationship with one another. First, Sweden has a historical past as a colonial ruler of what is now known as Finnish territory, whereas Finland has been both under Swedish and Russian imperial rule. That said, Finland also enjoyed periods of relatively autonomous status before its independence in 1917, inheriting the key characteristics of its administrative system from Sweden (on the complex role of colonialism in Finland's history, see Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä, 2021). While Sweden recently celebrated what is often described as 200 years of peace (Biltekin, Petersson and Müller,

2022), Finland's experience in the Second World War is part of collective national memory (Kivimäki, 2012).

Second, while Finland and Sweden have been engaged in close defence policy cooperation during the post-Cold War era (Juntunen and Pesu, 2018), their security political decisions have diverged to some extent. For example, Finland maintained its conscription-based army during this period, implying a continuity from the total defence doctrine of the Cold War, whereas Sweden reformed its defence policy more thoroughly, including the introduction of a voluntary conscription policy (Strand, 2019). These contextual differences are likely to have consequences for how joining a nuclear alliance has been perceived in both countries.

Furthermore, there have also been slight differences in Finland and Sweden's historical nuclear disarmament profiles. Swedish disarmament engagement evolved in parallel with an intense debate about whether Sweden should acquire its own tactical nuclear weapons in the 1950s and 60s, a debate which caused a national split (Rosengren, 2020). In this context, international disarmament engagement evolved as "an exit" from the nuclear weapon option (Jonter, 2016; Jonter and Rosengren, 2014). After Sweden joined the Eighteen Nations Disarmament Committee in 1962, disarmament remained a central feature of Cold War Swedish security policy (Jonter and Rosengren, 2024). Finland took its first initiative on international nuclear disarmament in the 1960s when President Urho Kekkonen proposed the establishment of a Nordic Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (Juntunen, 2024). Finland's Cold War disarmament policy relied upon support for gradual or incremental disarmament, where the leading great powers (and later, recognised nuclear weapon states) should always be involved as key interlocutors. During this period, Sweden had a more progressive and far-reaching profile than Finland (Juntunen, 2023).

In the post-Cold War period, disarmament slowly faded as a Swedish policy priority (Jonter and Rosengren, 2024). Having joined the European Union in 1995, both Finland and Sweden acted as "bridge-builders" between those in the union in favour of nuclear deterrence and those leaning towards more abolitionist approaches (Onderco and Portela, 2023). While Swedish social democratic governments initiated the New Agenda Coalition (NAC), the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, and the de-alerting group in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the conservative government (2006–2014) withdrew from both the NAC and the de-alerting group (Jonter and Rosengren, 2024). Finland had a slightly more cautious approach, reminiscent of the bridge-building role embraced during the Cold War (Pesu and Juntunen, 2023, pp. 6–7). Especially in recent years, Finland's traditional pragmatic approach to disarmament has collided with demands in international society to reinforce the norm against nuclear weapons (Juntunen, 2018; Pesu and Juntunen, 2023). In this article, we argue that the above-mentioned similarities and differences make contemporary nuclear weapon discourses in Finland and Sweden an intriguing case for comparison and historical contextualisation.

Theoretical and methodological framework

To investigate the nuclear dimension of NATO membership in Finland and Sweden, we draw on a discourse analytical approach and theory about depoliticisation. We perceive discourses as "regimes of truth" which regulate both who is allowed to speak and what is allowed to be spoken about (Milliken, 1999). We understand politicisation and depoliticisation as the "processes of discursive contestation, during which policy actors either 'emphasise' the presence of 'political agency' – that is, they assert that collective action to change policy decisions is both desirable and possible – or they 'deny' that such agency could or should be exercised" (Wood, 2015, p. 3). Depoliticisation can involve a certain policy being described as unavoidable, as beyond political deliberation, or that

one conceptualisation of a problem becomes so dominating that alternatives become perceived as “mad, evil or inconceivable” (Eduards et al, 2023, p. 40). Hence, depoliticisation processes “involve establishing necessities and immobility” (Åse and Wendt, 2019, p. 18) and entail “concealing/negating or removing contingency” (Jenkins, 2011, p. 160). Understood inversely, politicisation can thus be understood “as an active use of contingency, of rendering something contested or controversial” (Wiesner, 2019, p. 257).

In our analysis, we unpack national narratives that have enabled policy change towards reliance on extended nuclear deterrence. Serving as maps for how to structure and order experiences and perceived realities, narratives are “schemes of intelligibility, seeking to replace uncertainty with a sense that the world is basically knowable and explainable” (Edenborg, 2016, p. 42). As one key function of narratives is to make experiences and perceived realities comprehensible, they rely on excluding that which does not fit in, of that which “complicates, blurs or contradicts the story” (ibid). At the same time, narratives also normalise/naturalise things by making them appear as “self-evident, incontestable and non-controversial” (Sandman, 2019, p. 28). References to imagined collective identity, and to notions of belonging, contribute to such naturalisation processes.

Discourses, depoliticisation and narratives are fundamentally intertwined. As regimes of truth, discourses set boundaries for how the world can be conceptualised. Depoliticisation makes certain lines of action appear as necessary and natural whereas alternatives are sidelined and/or dismissed. Since narratives rely on simplification and exclusion, they are central for depoliticisation (ibid). In representing certain things as “necessary and determined”, narratives also foreclose alternative possibilities (Edenborg, 2016, p. 43). Narratives are productive as they enable problem formulations and solutions (Hagström, 2021, p. 143) and are contestable (Edenborg, 2016, p. 24). Hence, paying attention to how narratives about nuclear weapons, disarmament, and deterrence have become naturalised, for example, “by appearing as fundamentally necessary, natural, existential or sacral – as standing above political consideration” (Åse and Wendt, 2019, p. 18), and how they have been contested, is central in our analysis. Against this backdrop, the following theory driven research questions guide our analysis: How has reliance on extended nuclear deterrence become depoliticised and, in effect, naturalised in Finland and Sweden? Which national narratives have enabled this policy change?

Comparative analysis is especially suitable for disentangling discourses, depoliticisation and narratives, and in effect naturalisation. Through comparison, we aim to both “individualise and contrast” nuclear discourses in Finland and Sweden (cf. Aronsson, 2008, p. 9). Historical contextualisation facilitates individualisation and sheds light on continuities and changes over time. By contrasting the cases with each other, we will both develop deeper knowledge about each respective case and explore unexpected dimensions by working with both cases (Wendt, 2020, p. 245). A comparative design is especially suitable for analysing depoliticisation, as it reveals “how the seemingly banal, or self-evident, in one context appears strange or contested in another” (ibid, p. 243). Comparison thus facilitates the denaturalisation of that which might appear as irrelevant to a national insider. Furthermore, comparison helps locate absences – “phenomena that are systematically excluded” that can only be revealed through comparison with another case (Gómez and Kuronen, 2011, p. 694).

Despite its advantages, comparison also poses challenges, especially as it requires both deep contextual knowledge and the ability to overcome “national imaginary and its truths” (Åse and Wendt, 2019, p. 21). As insiders in one respective national context, we have the “linguistic skills, a deep understanding of the wider cultural framework, and extensive knowledge of the political and

social conditions and national history” (Wendt, 2020, p. 246) regarding both Finland and Sweden. As outsiders in relation to each other’s cases, we can shed light on that which the insider takes for granted and thereby reveal silences. By being able to conduct a detailed and contextually rich analysis of our respective cases, and by zooming out when we compare our findings, we can both keep “analytical closeness” and “analytical distance” in our interpretations of the sources (ibid, p. 250).

While trying to keep a stringent approach to sources, our selection criteria have been adapted to national circumstances, considering the slight differences in the structures of foreign policy decision-making and debate, geographical location, and historical experiences in Finland and Sweden. For analysing the Finnish case, our sources include parliamentary debates, reports and statements by parliament committees, government reports and programs, statements, interviews by key decision-makers (especially the president, prime minister, and foreign minister) and major Finnish media and news outlets such as *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Iltalehti* and *Iltasanomat*. For analysing Sweden, we have included government statements, parliamentary bills and debates, and media sources from the four largest national newspapers: *Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Expressen* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. These newspapers cover a broad spectrum of political affiliations.

We have used a combination of the search words “nuclear weapons”, “nuclear ban” and “NATO” to ensure broad coverage from the sources. Our initial reading of the full collection of sources, alongside previous research about the topics discussed, made it possible to identify key national narratives about nuclear weapons, disarmament and extended nuclear deterrence in both contexts. As a second step, we delimited the source collection to those sources where these narratives were clearly articulated and we used the above-mentioned research questions in a systematic analysis based on these sources.

Analysis

In this section, we compare nuclear discourses in Finland and Sweden from 2016 to 2022. The disposition is organised around key narratives that our comparison identified. In the first narrative, “the virtue of (disarmament) pragmatism”, the historically stratified Finnish pragmatic approach to nuclear disarmament served as a guiding principle in both countries. The second narrative, “the necessity of extended (nuclear) deterrence”, centres around how the nuclear dimension of NATO membership was reconciled with Finland and Sweden’s historically neutral and non-aligned policies, and their nuclear disarmament advocacy legacies. Our analysis also reveals how notions of identity and belonging were central in the establishment of both narratives.

Narrative 1. The virtue of (disarmament) pragmatism

The TPNW was adopted by the UN General Assembly on July 7, 2017. While the treaty entered into force in 2021, none of the nuclear weapon states have signed it. The initiative dates back to the 2010 review conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) from 1968 which rests upon three pillars: non-proliferation of nuclear weapons to states that did not possess them when the treaty entered into force, the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy for all state parties, and obligations of the nuclear weapon states to negotiate nuclear disarmament “in good faith” (for historical analysis of the making of the NPT, see Hunt, 2022). While compliance with the first two pillars has been rather successful, nuclear weapon states have not lived up to their disarmament commitments. Therefore, and inspired by the landmine and cluster munition conventions which ban these weapons based on international humanitarian law (Garcia, 2011), non-nuclear weapon states

and civil society organisations under the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) umbrella initiated a campaign for a complete ban of nuclear weapons (Considine, 2019; Hanson, 2018; Ritchie, 2019; Ritchie and Egeland, 2018).

An early step on the road to the TPNW was a statement about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons delivered by South Africa on behalf of 80 states in 2013, the basis for the Humanitarian Initiative. Neither Finland nor Sweden signed it but they did participate in the first two Humanitarian Initiative conferences in Norway in 2013 and in Mexico in 2014. When states reconvened in Austria in 2014, neither Finland nor Sweden signed the outcome document. The same year, and with a new Social Democrat government in place, Sweden joined the Humanitarian Initiative. When states met in New York to negotiate the TPNW in 2017, Sweden, as opposed to Finland, participated (Jonter and Rosengren, 2024) but ultimately, both countries refrained from signing the treaty.

The integrity of the NPT regime

A key feature of Finnish nuclear disarmament policy has been its historically enduring support for the integrity of the NPT as the cornerstone of multilateral nuclear disarmament diplomacy. Since the 1960s, Finland has emphasised the responsibility of the nuclear weapon states in advancing nuclear disarmament. This has led Finland to not support initiatives that the recognised nuclear weapon states do not perceive as legitimate (see Juntunen, 2018; 2023). This approach was especially salient in Finland's position on the TPNW, distinguishing its pragmatic and gradualist approach from those demanding more progressive steps. At times, Finland's official stance was more conservative than those of NATO members like the Netherlands and Norway.

In June 2016, a few months before the UN decided to initiate TPNW negotiations, the centre-right government led by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä already stressed the importance of the NPT and the virtue of disarmament pragmatism in its white paper on security and foreign policy (Finnish Government, 2016, p. 31). While arms control and confidence-building measures were described as important for regional stability, the role of nuclear weapons as instruments of power politics was assumed to be rising (ibid, p. 16). Finland's role was described to centre around technical expertise regarding the implementation of arms control agreements and NPT safeguards. While in the white paper the government supported international action against violations of international humanitarian law, in fall 2016 it considered the TPNW process a distraction from the disarmament pragmatism it endorsed. Hence, unlike Sweden, Finland did not support TPNW negotiations. The integrity of the NPT, and the support from the nuclear weapon states, were described as prerequisites to achieve "concrete results" (Juntunen, 2018, p. 52).

The decision made by the Sipilä government caused a minor debate in Finland, breaking down the traditional consensus on foreign policy (on Finland's consensual foreign policy decision-making, see Forsberg, 2023a, p. 92; Raunio, 2021). The left-leaning opposition in parliament united in their criticism. Li Andersson, leader of the Left Alliance, criticised the passivity of Sipilä's government and argued that the TPNW would not jeopardise the NPT as both aimed to achieve nuclear disarmament. She also challenged the government's break from other non-aligned states, such as Austria, Ireland, and Sweden, which voted in favour of negotiations (Andersson, 2016). Around the same time, Finnish experts, scholars, and former diplomats also engaged in critical debate on the government policy in op-eds and columns (see e.g., Erästö, 2016; Ojanen, 2016; cf. Patokallio, 2017).

Considering such criticism, Foreign Minister Timo Soini from the Finns Party praised the virtues of continuity and pragmatism in historical Finnish foreign policy. Soini reiterated that Finland would only support initiatives supported by the nuclear weapon states that would advance disarmament

in practice, thereby enhancing security and stability (Soini, 2016). The TPNW was not considered to promote these goals. The pragmatist virtues in Finland's stance – highlighting the responsibility and practical significance of the P5 – were reiterated in a memorandum by the Unit for Arms Control in the Finnish MFA in 2017 (see Simonen, 2018, pp. 8–9). Moreover, the memorandum stated that the forthcoming TPNW negotiations would likely increase polarisation in nuclear disarmament diplomacy and, thus, distract the upcoming NPT review cycle.

In October 2017, shortly after ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize, the main opposition parties in Finland again criticised the government's conservatism on disarmament. The chair of the main opposition party, social democrat Antti Rinne, together with former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto from the Green League and Paavo Arhinmäki of the Left Alliance, all of whom were also members of the Foreign Affairs Committee in parliament, demanded that Finland sign the TPNW (Auvinen, 2017). Haavisto argued that it would be compatible with Finland's traditional foreign policy line and that Finland was too gentle in its stance towards the nuclear weapon states. Arhinmäki pointed out that Finland departed from the traditional group of neutral and non-aligned European countries and Rinne added that it would have been natural for Finland to at least participate in negotiations which involved most UN member-states. Hence, the opposition tried to politicise the issue. Somewhat surprisingly, Prime Minister Sipilä responded that Finland would consider its stance and have "an open debate" on the TPNW (Päivinen and Sullström, 2017). Foreign Minister Soini and chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee Matti Vanhanen from the Center Party were more reserved. Vanhanen echoed the pragmatist approach, inherited from the 1960s, by highlighting that Finland had traditionally only supported diplomatic processes that involve the countries that were most affected by it.

In November 2017, the Unit for Arms Control in the Finnish MFA shared a more detailed explanation of Finland's TPNW position (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017). In addition to highlighting the integrity of the NPT, the crucial role of the nuclear weapon states in advancing disarmament, and Finland's long-lasting incremental approach, the memorandum also included more substantial criticism, especially of the vague safeguard and verification formulations in the TPNW (see also Highsmith and Stewart, 2018). The Foreign Affairs Committee, however, was not convinced. In June 2018, it criticised the conservative tenets of the government's disarmament pragmatism (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2018). Unlike the government and the MFA, it argued that the TPNW and the NPT could develop in tandem, as stated in the preamble of the TPNW. Moreover, the Foreign Affairs Committee argued that the TPNW was a natural reaction to the dysfunctionalities of the NPT regime. In the end, however, the committee only went as far as to demand that the government should follow the implementation process closely, ideally in close cooperation with Sweden.

The idealism/pragmatism nexus

As opposed to Finland, the Swedish government did participate in negotiations of the TPNW. When Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström declared her intention to sign the treaty shortly after its conclusion, however, this sparked an intense debate in Sweden. While both the left and green parties in parliament (Lindholm, 2017; Sjöstedt et al, 2017), along with debaters primarily published in the independent social democrat journal *Aftonbladet* (see for example Lindberg, 2017; Andersson, 2018; Peterson and Theorin, 2018), endorsed the foreign minister's ambition, she also faced heavy criticism, especially in the media. The conservative opposition in parliament, but also fractions of the Social Democrat Party, opposed Sweden signing the treaty. Like in Finland, they argued that Sweden should only engage in disarmament initiatives supported by the nuclear weapon states (see for example Lundgren et al, 2017) and that a Swedish signature would put the NPT regime at risk (Kristersson et al, 2019). Moreover, the TPNW was argued to lack sufficient verification mechanisms

(Lundin, 2019). Those opposing the TPNW preferred an incremental approach to disarmament based on the NPT, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Fissile Material Cut Off Treaty (FMCT). This is what Sweden advocated in the 1960s (Rosengren, 2022) and corresponds with the Finnish ‘pragmatic approach’. Hence, advocacy against the TPNW in Finland and Sweden was quite similar.

An interesting feature of the Swedish TPNW debate was how the TPNW was described as a “utopia”, as a “naïve initiative with certain risks” (Dagens Nyheter, 2017a). The NPT was relationally described as the opposite, as “rational” and “useful” (Expressen, 2017a). In addition to being described as idealist, the TPNW was represented as a threat to “Western democracies with nuclear weapons” since authoritarian states “will not care about moral perceptions about disarmament” (Enström, 2017). In debates, Foreign Minister Wallström was associated with the idealist approach whereas Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist was associated with a more “reality-based”, pragmatic, and defence cooperation friendly approach explicitly described as in line with Finland’s position (Expressen, 2017b, see also Dagens Nyheter, 2017a; 2018a).

Divisions between ‘the West’ and the rest, between idealist and pragmatic approaches, were interlinked with a central argument against the TPNW in Sweden – namely that a Swedish signature would put Sweden’s defence cooperation with the US, and its future possibility to join NATO, at risk. In media and parliamentary debates, a letter from US defence minister James Mattis to Hultqvist was used to argue that the relationship between the two states would be negatively affected should Sweden sign the TPNW. Conservative politicians warned that by supporting the TPNW, “we put both our future possibility to become a NATO member and existing cooperation we have with NATO countries, including the US, at risk” (Enström, 2017). While Wallström was argued to “threaten Sweden’s cooperation with NATO” by wanting to sign the TPNW, Hultqvist was described as a voice of reason (Dagens Nyheter, 2017b; Expressen, 2018a). This division led to the labelling of defence cooperation as reasonable and rational, and disarmament advocacy as the opposite. Distinguishing between pragmatic and idealistic disarmament advocacy, and making the Finnish pragmatic approach into an ideal, made it possible to describe the TPNW as incompatible with military cooperation with the US and NATO. Representations of such cooperation as essential to Swedish security interests contributed to naturalise continued support of the NPT at the expense of the TPNW.

After intense debate about whether Sweden should join the TPNW, the government appointed Lars-Erik Lundin, a former diplomat, to investigate its potential consequences. In his final report, he concluded that the verification mechanisms in the TPNW were insufficient and that Swedish security interests would suffer should Sweden sign the treaty (Lundin, 2019). Shortly thereafter, and only a few weeks before her resignation as Sweden’s foreign minister, Wallström announced that Sweden would not ratify the TPNW but would remain an observer in meetings of state parties. After this, and in line with the Finnish pragmatic approach, Swedish disarmament policy centred around initiatives aimed to strengthen the NPT, such as the Stockholm Initiative (Jonter and Rosengren, 2024). Representatives of the left (Gunnarsson et al, 2021) and green parties (Regeringskansliet, 2022) and some social democratic parliamentarians (Naraghi et al, 2021) continued to call on the government to ratify the TPNW. Conservatives, however, were pleased with the decision (see for example Wallmark et al, 2021).

Although the political left in Finland, which supported the TPNW in 2016–17, gained power in the parliamentary elections in 2019, the new government led by the Social Democrats did not make a U-turn regarding the TPNW. While the government recognised the role of the treaty in advancing nuclear disarmament, and intended to follow how it would be implemented, it did not aim to sign the treaty (Finnish Government, 2019). Despite strong pleas by Finnish ICAN (Juva and Montonen,

2019) and MPs from the Social Democratic Party, including former Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja (see Heinäluoma and Tuomioja, 2020), urging the Social Democrat-led government to follow the anti-nuclear sentiment among the public and sign the TPNW as a “brave pioneer”; no policy change occurred. Instead, the prevailing narrative of virtuous pragmatism within the existing NPT framework suppressed the nascent politicisation of the issue.

By the end of the decade, this had led to the naturalisation of disarmament gradualism, thereby reducing discursive space for idealistic reimagining of the existing nuclear order. In 2022, Sanna Marin’s Social Democrat-led government joined the first meeting of state parties for the TPNW as an observer. The following national conservative government, led by the National Coalition Party, reversed this decision in 2023. According to the new government, the TPNW was at odds with Finland’s responsibilities as a newcomer in NATO and the pragmatic approach prevailed. The dominance of the virtue of pragmatism narrative over time, in both Finland and Sweden, meant that the political-moral dimensions of nuclear disarmament, namely that the TPNW could reinforce the norm or stigma against nuclear weapons, was not prioritised. By advocating for a pragmatic and rational path forward as the only viable option, alternatives were marginalised and dismissed as idealistic, irrational, and impossible. Hence, the pragmatic approach contributed to depoliticising the issue.

Narrative 2. The necessity of extended (nuclear) deterrence

Russia’s full-fledged attempt to invade Ukraine in February 2022 was a genuine game changer for Finnish and Swedish security policy. Before this, the Social Democrats in Sweden maintained that the non-aligned policy served Swedish security interests well (see for example Linde, 2022). Nevertheless, the post-Cold War period was marked by increased transatlantic military cooperation and integration in both Finland and Sweden (Jonter and Rosengren, 2024). In Sweden, advocacy for NATO membership intensified after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Hagström, 2021). However, prior to the full-scale invasion in 2022, the nuclear dimension of NATO was often used as an argument for continued non-alignment. For example, in 2018, Foreign Minister Wallström (2019) said: “It is a fact that [conservatives] want to join NATO, and NATO is based upon nuclear deterrence. You want to sit under a nuclear weapon umbrella. We, on the other hand, continue to support military non-alignment”. The green and the left parties agreed (Utrikesutskottet, 2022). Support for nuclear disarmament, and resistance towards extended nuclear deterrence, were central in the advocacy for sustained non-alignment in Sweden.

In Finland, perceptions of NATO as a nuclear alliance and the perceived value of extended nuclear deterrence were central features of decision-making on the matter. Finland’s official strategic documents on foreign and security policy started to broaden the understanding of deterrence from a purely national standpoint from the early 2010s onwards, after Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Around this time, Finland gradually deepened its cooperation and interoperability with NATO and other key partners such as the Nordic countries, the US, and the UK. This line of policy enjoyed wide parliamentary and public support (Pesu, 2022) and perceptions of Russia as a threat was a key feature thereof. A 2016 white paper described Russian aggression and open hostility towards the existing security order as the most significant security challenge for regional stability and emphasised the stabilising role of NATO and the US military presence in the Baltic Sea region (Prime Minister’s Office, 2016, pp. 13–15). Hence, threat perceptions related to Russia did not change overnight in 2022 when public support for NATO membership in Finland soared (cf. Vicente, Alkiş and Maksymenko, 2023, pp. 232–233). Putin’s ultimatum in December 2021, demanding legal guarantees by the US to prevent further NATO enlargement, challenged a key tenet

in the Finnish foreign policy doctrine, that is, the aspiration of maximising one's freedom of action (Pesu and Iso-Markku, 2024, p. 583). This paved the way for the naturalisation of extended nuclear deterrence in Finnish foreign policy narratives in 2022.

“Western” belonging

In the post-Cold War period, and alongside strengthened European and transatlantic military integration and cooperation, both Finnish and Swedish identity was increasingly associated with notions of “Western” belonging (Jonter and Rosengren, 2024). Immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Ulf Kristersson, leader of the conservative opposition party in Sweden, proclaimed: “No one doubts for a second where we belong” (Svenska Dagbladet, 2022). Media communicated similar messages, arguing, for example, that “Sweden simply belongs in the Western community of democracies, the ones that are members of NATO” (Dagens Nyheter, 2022a). In such narratives, joining NATO would confirm Sweden's assumed “natural” belonging to the “free world” (Expressen, 2022). Notions of natural belonging contributed to the naturalisation of NATO membership and was contrasted with Putin's Russia: “The choice is simple when choosing between an authoritarian and aggressive Russia, which defends the right of the strong to conquer smaller countries, and the democratic world, which defends the European security order and international law” (Jerneck, 2022). Through such representations, the adversary of “the West”, that is Russia, was demonised and attributed with threatening and aggressive characteristics (Eduards et al, 2023, p. 48).

Narratives about “Western” belonging also made it possible to renegotiate the meaning of international solidarity. During the Cold War, Swedish neutrality policy was associated with the work for decolonisation, development and third world solidarity (Agius, 2006). However, NATO advocates reimaged solidarity as constituting European and transatlantic defence cooperation “where friendship is deepened, and alliances get closer together – and gain new members” (Dagens Nyheter, 2022c). Solidarity was described as a “key principle” for the NATO alliance, and Sweden should be “proud” to contribute to the defence of its “natural” allies (Dagens Nyheter, 2022d). NATO allies were described as friendly and helpful “neighbours” (Dagens Nyheter, 2022b), alignment was equated with friendship, and NATO membership was described as “coming home” (Arvidsson, 2022). In such representations where familial imageries were used to describe Sweden's relationship with NATO, membership was described as a familial duty, as doing the right thing for members of one's family. The opposite – remaining non-aligned – was associated with negligence, disloyalty, or even cowardice. Such narratives contributed to naturalising Sweden's relationship with NATO and thereby depoliticising the nuclear dimension of NATO membership.

Notions of “Western” belonging, or of taking one final step to join the “Western value community”, were not that prominent in Finland (see also Särkkä, 2023, p. 68). In fact, perceptions of NATO as a homogenous value community were even challenged at times in Finnish parliamentary debates in 2022. The consensus on NATO membership was rather based on narratives about harsh military-political realities and the need to fill the perceived “deterrence deficit” accentuated by Russia's reckless coercive language on nuclear weapons (see also Forsberg, 2023b, p. 47). Thus, and perhaps a bit paradoxically, rejecting the policy of networked military alignment – which gradually replaced Finland's policy of non-alignment in the early 2010s (Pesu, 2022) – for formal alliance commitments was understood to increase Finland's freedom of action in a radically shifted security environment.

This was supported by the widely shared perception that it was impossible to continue the long tradition of pragmatic relations with Russia. Remaining outside NATO was considered to limit Finland's freedom of action (Linnainmäki, 2023, pp. 60–61). Since Finland had highlighted the

stabilising factors of NATO and the US military presence in the Baltic Sea region since 2016, there was a sense of continuity regarding perceptions of deterrence. This paved the way for a change from the rather idiosyncratic conceptions of national deterrence that were now explicitly supplemented with more interdependent conceptions of (extended nuclear) deterrence.

The deterrence deficit

In early April 2022, both Prime Minister Sanna Marin and President Sauli Niinistö argued that Finland would be less secure without the preventive effect of NATO's (extended) nuclear deterrence capability (Särkkä, 2022; Ristamäki and Nurmi, 2022). The leading Finnish news outlet, *Helsingin Sanomat* (2022), which had been advocating for NATO membership since the mid-2000s, claimed that Europe's deterrence was not credible without US commitment. The same message was repeated by the Foreign Affairs Committee (2022) in May 2022. Patching up the 'deterrence deficit' with NATO security guarantees, ultimately based on US extended nuclear deterrence, was generally deemed as more a necessity than a virtue.

As Pesu and Iso-Markku (2023, pp. 582–585) point out, perceptions of a “deterrence deficit” in Finland was not solely about (the lack of) extended nuclear deterrence. It was primarily built upon Russia's increased willingness to accept significant risks in using conventional military force. The emphasis on national (conventional) deterrence has deep and rather idiosyncratic historical roots in Finland (Rainio-Niemi, 2014). Key features here have been the citizens' will to defend the country, the importance of societal resilience as a kind of ‘soft deterrent’, and the policy of mandatory conscription for the male population, something that has been kept in place throughout the post-Cold War years. Swedish security policy has also relied on national military capability and notions of conventional deterrence. While strongly associated with perceptions of a peaceful national Self, the idea behind the Swedish Cold War armed neutrality policy was that mandatory male conscription, comparably large investments in the national armed forces, and a strong national arms industry would convince adversaries that the military costs of attacking Sweden would simply be too high to be worthwhile (Rosengren, 2020). While mandatory conscription was replaced with a voluntary conscription policy in 2010, it was reintroduced in 2017 (Strand, 2019).

In the Swedish NATO debate, however, critique was repeatedly directed at the assumed “bad” state of Swedish protection capabilities. For example, a former Supreme Commander, the highest ranked officer in the Swedish Armed Forces, argued: “The strong defense that was supposed to back up non-alignment and neutrality was dismantled without debate about its security political implications. The responsibility for this must be a heavy burden” (Wiktorin, 2022). Furthermore, the neutrality policy was represented as a myth, as a nostalgic and hypocritical social democrat delusion about neutrality during the Cold War. The argument was that neutrality was mere chimera, that Sweden was never de facto neutral due to secret relations with the US (Dagens Nyheter, 2018b). The perceived double standards of Swedish historical neutrality made it appear as shameful (Dagens Nyheter, 2017a, see also Dahl, 2017). The neutrality myth narrative led conservatives to conclude that joining NATO would not constitute a break from Swedish historical policy. On the contrary, it would be a sign of continuity, and would constitute a break from a shameful and hypocritical policy of the past.

While Sweden's historical neutrality policy was represented as a shameful myth, Finland's civilian and military planning was described as an ideal for Sweden to follow. While security policy priorities have been rather similar in Finland and Sweden in the post-Cold War era, one key difference is that Finland maintained its doctrine of total defence (amalgamated with the doctrine of comprehensive security in the early 2000s) and mandatory conscription for men in the post-Cold War period (Hyvönen and

Juntunen, 2020, pp. 163–164). Finland also kept the option to apply for NATO membership open. This was picked up by conservative parliamentarians in Sweden who argued that “the Finnish stand is both understandable and rational” (Jonsson, 2017). As opposed to Swedes, who were represented as damaged by Sweden’s long historical peace (Andersson, 2018, see also Eduards et al, 2023), Finland’s historical war experience with the Soviet Union during the Second World War was said to make them better prepared for the contemporary security situation (Dagens Nyheter, 2022e; 2022f). In various ways, Finland was described as a rational and pragmatic ideal for Sweden to follow (Dagens Nyheter, 2022h).

The comparison between Finland and Sweden also entailed bodily elements. “Finland is Sweden for grown-ups” was a repeated phrase in *Dagens Nyheter* (2022g; 2022f). Finland’s “military and civilian preparedness, ability to take care of itself, and not, as a child, depend on others” was contrasted with Sweden, in need of “a hand to hold onto” (Dagens Nyheter, 2022g). The historic colonial relationship between the two Nordic neighbours was also used to reimagine Finland as a ruler of Sweden in the present: “During hundreds of years, Finland was ruled from Stockholm. This spring Sweden is ruled from Helsinki” (Barth-Kron, 2022). Such representations put Sweden in a passive position with the body of a child compared to its grown-up Finnish counterpart. When Finland announced its decision to apply for NATO membership, it was perceived as impossible for Sweden to choose a different path. Representations of Finland as a grown-up role model for Sweden to follow thus contributed to rule out alternatives to joining NATO and thereby depoliticising NATO alignment.

The deterrence/disarmament nexus

In Sweden, narratives about neutrality as a myth also made it possible to argue that extended nuclear deterrence was, in fact, a historical continuity. For example, in 2017, an editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* (2017b) stated: “Neutrality was always a myth, the US had our backs after the Second World War and held its nuclear umbrella over us”. The argument was that Sweden had relied on extended nuclear deterrence all along. Furthermore, hypocrisy was argued to mark Swedish historical disarmament ambitions: “It is a typical illustration of how Sweden debates nuclear weapons: loudly demanding a nuclear ban and beautiful speech about disarmament – from our safe position under the US nuclear weapons umbrella” (Expressen, 2021). Since extended nuclear deterrence was perceived as a long-term continuity, disarmament ambitions were discredited. Narratives about disarmament as a hypocritical myth contributed to naturalising the nuclear dimension of NATO membership in Sweden, and thus contributed to depoliticisation.

While disarmament was described as a hypocritical myth in Sweden, the government maintained that nuclear disarmament remained a policy priority, regardless of NATO membership. When Sweden’s conservative foreign minister Tobias Billström (2024) presented Swedish foreign policy priorities after the approval of Sweden’s NATO application in March 2024, he said: “Sweden stands behind NATO’s strategic deterrence, and will remain a strong voice for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation”. Similarly, the Finnish Foreign Affairs Committee (2022) insisted that Finland would keep its strong profile in nuclear disarmament diplomacy “without compromising NATO’s nuclear deterrence”.

Such arguments recurred in Finnish parliamentary debates during spring 2022. Interestingly, in Finland, it was not Sweden but Norway that was used as the main analogy to deliberate policy options under the new circumstances. MPs especially on the political left and centre in Finland referred to the “Norwegian model” – the political commitment of not allowing nuclear weapons on its soil in peacetime – as an ideal for Finland (Finnish Parliament 2022a; 2022b). This approach

was described as compatible with Finland's *Nuclear Energy Act* (1987) which prohibits the import, manufacture, possession, and detonation of nuclear explosives in Finland. Hence, both Finland and Sweden combined a policy line consisting of deterrence optimism and disarmament pragmatism, where (extended) nuclear deterrence optimism was amalgamated with the already internalised narrative of disarmament pragmatism amid the NATO debate. That said, both Finland and Sweden applied for NATO membership without any preconditions, that is, with full rights and obligations.

Discussion

Our comparison of debates about nuclear weapons, disarmament and extended nuclear deterrence has revealed that the narrative of disarmament pragmatism prevailed in both Finland and Sweden. While this approach was associated with rationality and reason, we maintain that “appeals to a non-ideological, ‘practical’ nuclear politics are ideological statements par excellence” (Egeland, 2021, p. 209). At the outset, the pragmatic stance adopted by Sipilä's government in Finland was based on the conception that the TPNW was incompatible with the NPT regime. Importantly, this stance was not based on legal reasoning, at least not in the beginning (cf. Egeland et al., 2018), but instead on the perceived need to maintain the NPT regime as the cornerstone of the existing global nuclear order.

In Finland, the pragmatist narrative was also justified through the emphasis of Finland's historical disarmament gradualism and its bridge-building role, going back to the 1960s (see Juntunen, 2023). Over time, Sweden endorsed Finland's pragmatic approach. This led to a policy line which naturalised the existing nuclear order through emphasis on its compatibility with certain historically stratified small state virtues. These were based on the idea of reducing the sense of political contingency by emphasising the pragmatist virtue of approaching policy areas, such as disarmament, as a gradual or incremental process that should aim for practical (measurable) outcomes (on negating or removing contingency from politics, see e.g. Jenkins, 2011, p. 160; Wiesner, 2019, pp. 256–257). This was assumed to happen without norm entrepreneurship and/or paradigm change. As an interesting amalgamation of principled small state realism with a touch of great-power centric liberal ideals, especially the emphasis on the responsibility of the leading nuclear powers in advancing disarmament, this ethos anchored Finland and Sweden's positions in the hegemonic camp of the global nuclear order, that is the nuclear weapon states and their allies (cf. e.g. Ritchie, 2019; 2022; Egeland, 2021, p. 209).

The reasoning behind downplaying the political agency of more progressive or even radical initiatives, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, implies a certain level of depoliticisation. As Wood (2015, p. 3) points out, the removal of political agency is a typical discursive move that drives the process of depoliticisation. In Finland, the decision to not support the TPNW was justified by downplaying Finland's agency in disarmament matters, or, for that matter, the agency of all non-nuclear weapon states. On the other hand, this was done indirectly by emphasising the agency and responsibility of the recognised nuclear weapon states and, more importantly, recognising the limited spaces small states had to manoeuvre at the margins of the system. In Sweden, representations of continued military cooperation with the US as fundamentally necessary for Swedish security, and of the TPNW as a threat to such future relations, contributed to depoliticising the choice not to support it.

Together with the threat to regional security posed by an increasingly revisionist nuclear power relying on open nuclear coercion (see Arndt, Horowitz and Onderco, 2023), and the subsequent perception of a ‘deterrence deficit’ in Finland and Sweden, the pragmatic approach to disarmament led to the legitimisation of the hierarchically structured global nuclear order (cf. Ritchie, 2019). It was portrayed as an insurmountable, almost ahistorical or irreversible element in international politics,

but in a way that also left some agency for small states to fine-tune or manage the existing order from the margins of the system. This can be understood as a way of nurturing the system by avoiding a paradigm shift, something that might have increased unpredictability at a systemic level and diffused political agency within the system even further. It was based on the conscious narrowing down of one's own agency, at least when understood in terms of systemic transformation and norm entrepreneurship. This move was relational in a sense, as it accentuated the political agency of the leading nuclear powers.

The prevailing disarmament pragmatism narrative also had consequences for how nuclear issues were debated in both Finland and Sweden in relation to NATO membership. The sense of national 'deterrence deficit' shared by the political elite in Finland and central in Swedish parliamentary and media debates supported the discursive landscape in which the already naturalised disarmament pragmatism seemed to be almost a natural fit. In Sweden, representations of the historical neutrality policy – and in effect nuclear disarmament advocacy – as a myth associated with hypocrisy and shame made it possible to represent NATO alignment, and in effect reliance on extended nuclear deterrence, as both a historical continuity and the only reasonable and brave way forward. Hence, narratives about the neutrality myth contributed to naturalising both the choice not to join the TPNW and to join NATO.

The nuclear dimension of NATO membership was thereby depoliticised during the processes that led the Finnish and Swedish governments to apply for NATO membership together in May 2022. That said, it is noteworthy that the nuclear dimension has become re-politicised in both countries since the realisation of their NATO memberships. For instance, during the second round of Finland's presidential elections in early 2024, national policy on nuclear weapons, more specifically the question of whether to allow the transit of nuclear weapons through Finland's territory, emerged as a central issue distinguishing the leading candidates Alexander Stubb (elected president) and Pekka Haavisto (Nalbantoglu, Herlin and Pekonen, 2024). Subsequently, in spring 2024, both the Swedish and Finnish prime ministers took stances on their countries' guidelines on nuclear weapons policy (Alentola, 2024; Shanwell, 2024). Although the scope of this article ends in spring 2022, the nascent re-politicisation of nuclear weapons policy after NATO membership offers a fruitful topic for further research – a topic which could also be examined from the perspective of internal decision-making dynamics when new members integrate into military alliances.

Furthermore, and especially in Sweden, identity was central in debates about both the TPNW and NATO. Nuclear deterrence was incorporated into notions of "Western" belonging, where the "Western" practice of extended nuclear deterrence was perceived as a logical continuum of developments over time. Familial imageries about Sweden's intimate relationship with NATO and its allies contributed to naturalising Sweden's belonging in the alliance. Hence, in debates about both the TPNW and NATO, extended nuclear deterrence practices were integrated into understandings of what belonging to "the West" entailed. Moreover, what we perceive as "Nordic relationality" was also central in both Finland and Sweden. Instead of looking towards Sweden as the significant other in nuclear weapons and disarmament diplomacy, as Finland used to do in the Cold War era, it was Norway that was presented as a key point of reference in Finland. The Norwegian example served as an analogy or discursive-relational instrument used to reconcile the increased emphasis on extended nuclear deterrence with continuity in disarmament pragmatism. Sweden, on the other hand, made a model of Finland's pragmatic approach and its military and civilian preparedness.

In conclusion, our comparative analysis has revealed how depoliticising narratives, alongside drastic changes in the regional security environment, made joining a nuclear alliance possible in

two national contexts marked by historical opposition towards nuclear weapons. Further analysis of continuities and changes over a longer period, including the role of identity and power in nuclear policies and about experiences beyond the Nordic region, would shed additional light on some of the topics discussed in this article.

References

- Agius, C. (2006) *The social construction of Swedish neutrality: challenges to Swedish identity and sovereignty*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. DOI: [10.7228/manchester/9780719071522.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719071522.001.0001)
- Alentola, A. M. (2024) 'Ruotsin ja Suomen pääministerit eri linjoilla ydinaseista: "Ei ole aktiivinen keskustelu Suomessa"', *Iltalehti*, 14 May [online]. <https://www.iltalehti.fi/ulkomaat/a/7ee1a4c8-6d22-4813-8801-5262e8834103>
- Andersson, A. (2018) "'Ned med vapnen!' borde bjudas in till Folk och försvar', *Aftonbladet*, 21 September.
- Andersson, L. (2016) Interpellation on Finland's nuclear disarmament policy, November 11. KK 598/2016 vp. Available at: https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Kysymys/Documents/KK_598+2016.pdf
- Arndt, A. C., Horovitz, L. and Onderco, M. (2023) 'Russia's Failed Nuclear Coercion Against Ukraine' *The Washington Quarterly*, 46(3), pp. 167–184. DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2023.2259665
- Aronsson, P. (2008) 'Comparing National Museums: Methodological Reflections' in Aronsson, P. and Nyblom, A. (eds.) *Comparing: National Museums, Territories, Nation-Building and Change*. Linköping University, pp. 5–20.
- Arvidsson, C. (2022) 'Ännu ett steg på vägen hem', *Expressen*, 30 June, p. 2.
- Åse, C. and Wendt, M. (2019) 'Comparison as feminist method. Denaturalising gender and nation' in Åse, C. and Wendt, M. (eds.) *Gendering military sacrifice: a feminist comparative analysis*. London: Routledge, pp. 17–40.
- Auvinen, P. (2017) 'SDP, vihreät ja vasemmistoliitto: Suomen liityttävä YK:n ydinasekieltosopimukseen', *Yleisradio*, 13 October [online]. Available at: <https://yle.fi/a/3-9883079>
- Barth-Kron, V. (2022) 'Nu styrs Sverige från Helsingfors', *Expressen*, 14 April, p. 9.
- Billström, T. (2024) 'Utrikesdeklaration med anledning av Sverige medlemskap i Nato', *Sveriges riksdag*, 20 March.
- Biltekin, N., Petersson, M. and Müller, L. (2022) *200 years of peace: new perspectives on modern Swedish foreign policy*. New York: Berghahn.
- Considine, L. (2019) 'Contests of legitimacy and value: the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the logic of prohibition', *International Affairs*, 95(5), pp. 1075–1092. DOI: 10.1093/ia/iiz103
- Dagens Nyheter (2017a) 'Ny tid, samma USA-hat', *Dagens Nyheter*, 8 September.
- Dagens Nyheter (2017b) 'Ge Wallström skrivförbud', *Dagens Nyheter*, 1 September.
- Dagens Nyheter (2018a) 'Oförsvarliga motsägelser', *Dagens Nyheter*, 15 January.
- Dagens Nyheter (2018b) 'Socialdemokraterna borde rusta ned hyckleriet', *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 May.
- Dagens Nyheter (2022a) 'Väst måste backa upp orden i Kiev med handling', *Dagens Nyheter*, 13 April, p. 2.
- Dagens Nyheter (2022b) 'Putinpropagandan är knappast en slump', *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 April, p. 2.
- Dagens Nyheter (2022c) 'Boris Johnsons besök visar vidden av Putins misstag', *Dagens Nyheter*, 12

May, p. 2.

Dagens Nyheter (2022d) 'Nato kan hjälpa Sverige betala av skulden till Baltikum', *Dagens Nyheter*, 20 May, p. 2.

Dagens Nyheter (2022e) 'Tack för ert mod och er kyla, Finland', *Dagens Nyheter*, 13 May, p. 2.

Dagens Nyheter (2022f) 'Kanske är det Finland som är Sverige för vuxna', *Dagens Nyheter*, 30 March, p. 2.

Dagens Nyheter (2022g) 'Finland är ett Sverige för vuxna – också i Natofrågan', *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 April, p. 2.

Dagens Nyheter (2022h) 'Sverige får aldrig stå försvarslöst igen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 March, p. 2.

Dahl, A.S. (2017) 'Den svenska populariteten dalar i Nato', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 September.

Doty, R. (1993) 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines', *International Studies Quarterly*, 37(3), pp. 297–320. DOI: 10.2307/2600810

Edenborg, E. (2016) *Nothing more to see. Contestations of belonging and visibility in Russian media*. Diss. Lund: Lund University.

Eduards, M., Jansson, M., Wendt, M. and Åse, C. (2023) 'Gender, sexuality and (in)security. A feminist analysis of Swedish security debates following the war in Ukraine', *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*, 43(2–3), pp. 37–60. DOI: [10.55870/tgv.v43i2-3.8446](https://doi.org/10.55870/tgv.v43i2-3.8446)

Egeland, K. (2021) 'The Ideology of Nuclear Order', *New Political Science*, 43(2), pp. 208–230. DOI: 10.1080/07393148.2021.1886772

Egeland, K., Hugo, T.G., Løvold, M. and Nystuen, G. (2018) 'The nuclear weapons ban treaty and the non-proliferation regime', *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 34(2), pp.74–94. DOI: 10.1080/13623699.2018.1483878

Enström, K. (2017) 'Nuclear Ban Treaty (NBT)', *Sveriges riksdag*, Interpellation till statsråd 2016/17:608.

Erästö, T. (2016) 'Suomen tulisi kannattaa ydinasekieltoa', *Helsingin sanomat*, 12 November [online]. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/paakirjoitukset/art-2000002929867.html>

Expressen (2017a) 'Lyssna inte på ICAN:s goda råd', *Expressen*, 7 October.

Expressen (2017b) 'Farlig naivitet om kärnvapen', *Expressen*, 20 August.

Expressen (2018a) 'Attacken på Nato är omdömeslös', *Expressen*, 7 January.

Expressen (2021) 'Sluta hyckla om kärnvapen', *Expressen*, 19 November.

Expressen (2022) 'Nej till Nato håller inte', *Expressen*, 19 May.

Finnish Government (2016) *Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy*, 17 June. Available at: <https://vnk.fi/julkaisu?pubid=12503>

Finnish Government (2019) *Programme of Prime Minister Antti Rinne's Government*, 6 June. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-287-760-4>

Finnish Parliament (2022a) Minutes of the plenary session, 20 April 2022. PTK 41/2022 vp. Available at: https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/PoytakirjaAsiakohhta/Sivut/PTK_41+2022+4.aspx

Finnish Parliament (2022b) Minutes of the plenary session, 16 May. PTK 56/2022 vp. Available at:

https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/PoytakirjaAsiakohta/Sivut/PTK_56+2022+3.aspx

Foreign Affairs Committee (2018) Committee statement, 6 June. UaVL 7/2018 vp. Available at: https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Lausunto/Sivut/UaVL_7+2018.aspx

Foreign Affairs Committee (2022) Committee report, 17 May. UaVM 5/2022 vp. Available at: https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Mietinto/Sivut/UaVM_5+2022.aspx

Forsberg, T. (2023a) 'Finland and Sweden's Road to NATO', *Current History*, 122(842), pp. 89–94. DOI: [10.1525/curh.2023.122.842.89](https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2023.122.842.89)

Forsberg, T. (2023b) 'Four rounds of the Finnish NATO debate', *Nordic Review of International Studies*, 1(1), pp. 40–49.

Garcia, D. (2011) *Disarmament diplomacy and human security: regimes, norms and moral progress in international relations*. London: Routledge. DOI: [10.4324/9780203830703](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203830703)

Gómez, M. and Kuronen, M. (2011) 'Comparing local strategies and practices: recollections from two qualitative cross-national research projects', *Qualitative Research*, 11(6), pp. 683–697. DOI: [10.1177/1468794111413366](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111413366)

Gunnarsson, H., Johansson Fornarve, L., Segerlind, E., Thunander, J., Holm, J., Posio, Y. and Svenneling, H. (2021) 'En feministisk utrikes- och säkerhetspolitik', *Sveriges riksdag*, Motion till riksdagen 2021/22:449.

Hagström, L. (2021) 'Disciplinary power: Text and body in the Swedish NATO debate', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 56(2), pp. 141–162. DOI: [10.1177/0010836720966376](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836720966376)

Hanson, M. (2018) 'Normalizing zero nuclear weapons: The humanitarian road to the prohibition treaty', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 39(3), pp. 464–486. DOI: [10.1080/13523260.2017.1421344](https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2017.1421344)

Heinäluoma, E. and Tuomioja, E. (2019) 'Suomen on liityttävä ydinaseet kieltävään sopimukseen', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 26 September [online]. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000006648074.html>

Helsingin Sanomat (2022) 'Suomen paikka on Natossa', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18 March [online]. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/paakirjoitukset/art-2000008688715.html>

Highsmith, N. and Stewart, M. (2018) 'The Nuclear Ban Treaty: A Legal Analysis', *Survival*, 60(1), pp. 129–152. DOI: [10.1080/00396338.2018.1427371](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1427371)

Hunt, J.R. (2022) *The nuclear club: how America and the world policed the atom from Hiroshima to Vietnam*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hyvönen, A.E. and Juntunen, T. (2020) 'From "spiritual defence" to robust resilience in the Finnish comprehensive security model' in Larsson, S. and Rhinard, M. (eds.) *Nordic Societal Security: Convergence and Divergence*. London: Routledge, pp. 154–178. DOI: [10.4324/9781003045533-11](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003045533-11)

Jenkins, L. (2011) 'The Difference Genealogy Makes: Strategies for Politicisation or How to Extend Capacities for Autonomy', *Political Studies*, 59(1), pp. 156–174. DOI: [10.1111/j.1467-9248.2010.00844.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2010.00844.x)

Jerneck, L. (2022) 'Vilsna S-röster vill ha EU-försvar', *Expressen*, 23 March.

Jonsson, P. (2017) 'Sveriges säkerhetspolitiska handlingsutrymme', *Sveriges riksdag*, Interpellation till statsråd 2017/18:227.

Jonter, T. (2016) *The key to nuclear restraint: the Swedish plans to acquire nuclear weapons during the*

Cold War. London: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1057/978-1-137-58113-6

Jonter, T. and Rosengren, E. (2024) 'Advocating nuclear disarmament as NATO members – lessons from the past and possible routes ahead for Finland and Sweden', *H-Diplo RJISSF*. Available at: <https://issforum.org/to/jprlll-2>

Jonter, T. and Rosengren, E. (2014) 'From nuclear weapons acquisition to nuclear disarmament – the Swedish case', *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 30(1), pp. 46–63. DOI: 10.1080/13623699.2014.930241

Juntunen, T. (2018) 'Harmaantuvaa pienvaltioliberalismia: Suomi, ydinaseiden kieltosopimus ja ulkopoliittikan koulukuntavaikutteet', *Kosmopolis*, 48(4), pp. 39–63.

Juntunen, T. (2023) 'Finland: From Curious Observer to Active Accommodator of the NPT Process' in Lottaz, P. and Iwama, Y. (eds.) *Neutral Europe and the Creation of the Nonproliferation Regime 1958–68*. New York: Routledge, pp. 130–149.

Juntunen, T. (2024) *Varjonyrkkeilyä Pohjolassa: Ydinaseongelman alueellinen hallinta Suomen ulkopoliitikassa kylmän sodan aikakaudella*. Diss. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Juntunen, T. and Pesu, M. (2018) 'Mistrust within trust: Finnish–Swedish defence cooperation and the ghosts of the 1990 EC application incident' in Haukkala, H., van de Wetering, C. and Vuorelma, J. (eds.) *Trust in International Relations: Rationalist, Constructivist and Psychological Approaches*. New York: Routledge, pp. 129–157.

Juva, K. and Montonen, C. (2019) 'Ydinaseiden uhka on lisääntynyt merkittävästi viime vuosina', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 12 December [online]. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000006336537.html>

Kivimäki, V. (2012) 'Between Defeat and Victory: Finnish memory culture of the Second World War', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 37(4), pp. 482–504. DOI: 10.1080/03468755.2012.680178

Kristersson, U., Billström, T., Wallmark, H., Forssell, J., Enström, K., Finstorp, L., Quicklund, S., Svantesson, E., Roswall, J., Waltersson Grönvall, C., Hjalmered, L. and Green, M. (2019) 'En utrikespolitik utifrån svenska intressen', *Sveriges riksdag*, Motion till riksdagen 2019/20:2830.

Linde, A. (2022) 'Regeringens deklARATION vid 2022 års utrikespolitiska debatt i riksdagen onsdagen den 16 februari 2022', *Sveriges riksdag*, 16 February.

Lindberg, A. (2017) 'Högerns sällsamma kärlek till kärnvapen', *Aftonbladet*, 12 October.

Lindholm, J. (2017) 'Förbud mot atomvapen', *Sveriges riksdag*, Motion till riksdagen 2017/18:1716.

Linnainmäki, J. (2023) 'Suomen ulkopoliittiset koulukunnat kevään 2022 Nato-jäsenyyskeskustelussa', *Kosmopolis*, 53(1), pp. 45–63.

Lundgren, K., Bäckström, D., Hedin, J., Johnsson, P.I., Danielsson, S., Johansson, O. and Åkesson, A. (2017) 'Utrikes- och säkerhetspolitik', *Sveriges riksdag*, Motion till riksdagen 2017/18:3775.

Lundin, L.E. (2019) 'Utredning av konsekvenserna av ett svenskt tillträde till konventionen om förbud mot kärnvapen', *Regeringskansliet*.

Merivirta, R., Koivunen, L. and Särkkä, T. (2021) *Finnish Colonial Encounters. From Anti-Imperialism to Cultural Colonialism and Complicity*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-80610-1

Milliken, J. (1999) 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5(2), pp. 225–254. DOI: 10.1177/1354066199005002003

- Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2017) 'Ydinaseet kieltävä sopimus ja Suomen toimintalinja'. Unit for Arms Control, 13 November. Available at: <https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Liiteasiakirja/Documents/EDK-2017-AK-155994.pdf>
- Nalbantoglu, M., Herlin, C. and Pekonen, J.-P. (2024) 'Näissä kahdessa aiheessa Stubb ja Haavisto olivat täysin eri mieltä – Videot näyttävät väittelyt', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 6 February [online]. <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000010209248.html>
- Naraghi, L., Gustafsson, E., Haraldsson, J., Kayhan, S., Kronståhl, T., Ohlsson, C., Ödebrink, C., Larsson, H., Manhammar, M., Hammarberg, T. and Lundgren, E. (2021) 'Signera och ratificera FN:s kärnvapenförbud', *Sveriges riksdag*, Motion till riksdagen 2021/22:3846.
- NATO (2022) 'Strategic Concept' [online]. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>
- Nuclear Energy Act 11.12.1987/990, *finlex.fi* [online]. Available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1987/en19870990.pdf>
- Ojanen, H. (2016) 'Suomi ei kannata eikä vastusta ydinaseiden täyskieltoa', *Suomen kuvalehti*, 24 November [online]. Available at: <https://suomenkuvalehti.fi/jutut/kotimaa/mielipide-kotimaa/suomi-kannata-eika-vastusta-ydinaseiden-tayskieltoa>
- Onderco, M. and Portella, C. (2023) 'NATO's Nordic Enlargement and Nuclear Disarmament: The End of Bride Building', *War on the Rocks*, 20 February [online]. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2023/02/natos-nordic-enlargement-and-nuclear-disarmament-the-end-of-bridge-building/>
- Päivinen, E. and Sullström, H. (2017) 'Sipilä: Toivon, että selvittää ilman työtaistelua – "Metsäteollisuuden sopimus äärettömän tärkeä"', *Yleisradio*, 7 October [online]. Available at: <https://yle.fi/a/3-9871096>
- Patokallio, P. (2017) 'Suomi ei halua horjuttaa ydinsulkusopimusta', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 22 March [online]. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/paakirjoitukset/art-2000005136160.html>
- Pesu, M. (2022) 'As Finland Watches: From Alignment to Alliance', *War on the Rocks*, 11 February [online]. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/as-finland-watches-from-alignment-to-alliance/>
- Pesu, M. and Iso-Markku, T. (2024) 'Insufficiency of informal alignment: why did Finland choose formal NATO membership?', *International Affairs*, 100(2), pp. 569–588. DOI: 10.1093/ia/iiae006
- Pesu, M. and Juntunen, T. (2023) *Finland in a nuclear alliance. Recalibrating the dual-track mindset on deterrence and arms control*. FIIA Briefing Paper, no. 375. Available at: https://www.fii.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/bp375_finland-in-a-nuclear-alliance-1.pdf
- Peterson, T.G. and Theorin, M.B. (2018) 'Hotet har aldrig varit större', *Aftonbladet*, 15 May.
- Prime Minister's Office (2016) *Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy*. Available at: <https://vnk.fi/julkaisu?pubid=12501>
- Rainio-Niemi, J. (2014) *Ideological Cold War: The Politics of Neutrality in Austria and Finland*. New York: Routledge.
- Raunio, T. (2021) 'Finnish Foreign Policy: Pragmatic Adjustment to a Changing World Order' in Joly, J. K. and Haesebrouck, T. (eds.) *Foreign Policy Change in Europe Since 1991*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 99–125. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-68218-7_5
- Regeringskansliet (2022) *Ett försämrat säkerhetspolitiskt läge – konsekvenser för Sverige*. Ds 2022:7.

- Ristamäki, J. and Nurmi, L. (2022) 'Niinistö IL-haastattelussa: Nato-jäsenyys ei muuttaisi arkipäivää, toisi turvallisuutta', *Iltalehti*, 1 April [online]. Available at: <https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/cb40efcb-1728-4638-80d4-b386898d3112>
- Ritchie, N. (2019) 'A hegemonic nuclear order: Understanding the Ban Treaty and the power politics of nuclear weapons', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 40(4), pp. 409–434. DOI: 10.1080/13523260.2019.1571852
- Ritchie, N. (2022) 'A contestation of nuclear ontologies: resisting nuclearism and reimagining the politics of nuclear disarmament', *International Relations*, pp. 1–24. DOI: 10.1177/0047117822112295
- Ritchie, N. and Egeland, K. (2018) 'The diplomacy of resistance: Power, hegemony and nuclear disarmament', *Global Change, Peace and Security*, 30(2), pp. 121–141. DOI: 10.1080/14781158.2018.1467393
- Rosengren, E. (2020) *Gendering Nuclear Disarmament. Identity and Disarmament in Sweden during the Cold War*. Diss. Stockholm: Stockholm university.
- Rosengren, E. (2022) 'Gendering Sweden's nuclear renunciation: a historical analysis', *International Affairs*, 98(4), pp. 1231–1248. DOI: 10.1093/ia/iia113
- Sandman, T. (2019) *The dis/appearances of violence: when a 'peace-loving' state uses force*. Diss. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Shanwell, L. (2024) 'Så kan kärnvapen förvaras i Sverige i krigstid', *Sveriges Radio*, 13 May [online]. <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/sa-kan-karnvapen-forvaras-i-sverige-i-krigstid>
- Simonen, K. (2018) 'Ydinaseiden kieltosopimus ja Suomi', *Kosmopolis*, 48(4), pp. 7–22.
- Sjöstedt, J., Holm, J., Rågsjö, K., Sydow Mölleby, M., Karlsson, M., Snecker, L. and Henriksson, S. (2017) 'En militär alliansfrihet', *Sveriges riksdag*, Motion till riksdagen 2017/18:554.
- Soini, T. (2016) Response to Li Andersson's interpellation on Finland's nuclear disarmament policy, 12 December. KKV 598/2016 vp. Available at: https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Kysymys/Documents/KKV_598+2016.pdf
- Strand, S. (2019) *(Re)inventing the armed forces: a governmentality analysis of Swedish military marketing and outreach in the era of voluntarism*. Diss. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University.
- Svenska Dagbladet (2022) 'Nato-medlemskap en fråga på liv och död', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 27 February.
- Särkkä, H. (2022) 'Marin Nato-jäsenyydestä Ylellä: Toisi varmasti turvaa', *Iltasanomat*, 9 April [online]. Available at: <https://www.is.fi/kotimaa/art-2000008741141.html>
- Särkkä, I. (2023) 'Nordic, European, or Atlanticist? Finland's state identity during the post-Cold War period', *Nordic Review of International Studies*, 1(2), pp. 64–71.
- Utrikesutskottet (2022) 'Förbättrade rättsliga förutsättningar för att kunna ta emot militärt stöd från andra stater', *Sveriges riksdag*, Utrikesutskottets betänkande 2021/22: UU19.
- Vicente, A., Alkiş, M. A. and Maksymenko, I. (2023) 'The Impact of Russia's War against Ukraine on Finland and Sweden's Decision to Join NATO: Effects on the Global Nuclear Order' in Vicernte, A., Sinovets, P. and Theron, J. (eds.) *Russia's War on Ukraine: The Implications for the Global Nuclear Order*. Cham: Springer, pp. 229–246. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-32221-1_16
- Wallmark, H., Jonson, P., Andersson, J.R., Berglund, J., Anstrell, A., Rothenberg, H., Cederfelt, M.,

Schröder, M. and Roswall, J. (2021) 'Svensk säkerhetspolitik för en orolig tid', *Sveriges riksdag*, Motion till riksdagen 2020/21:3445.

Wallström, M. (2019) 'Det kommande arbetet med konventionen om förbud mot kärnvapen', *Sveriges riksdag*, Interpellationsdebatt 2018/19:28.

Wendt, M. (2020) 'Comparing "deep" insider knowledge: developing analytical strategies for cross-national qualitative studies', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 23(3), pp. 241–254. DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2019.1669927

Wiesner, C. (2019) 'Rethinking politicisation as a multi-stage and multilevel concept', *Critical Exchange: Rethinking Politicisation*, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 18(2), pp. 248–281.

Wiktorin, O. (2022) 'Gå med i Nato tillsammans med Finland', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 5 March, p. 6.

Wood, M. (2015) 'Puzzling and powering in policy paradigm shifts: politicization, depoliticization and social learning', *Critical Policy Studies*, 9(1), pp. 2–21. DOI: 10.1080/19460171.2014.926825

Peer-Reviewed Article

Nationalist justifications of realist policies: How Finnish parliamentary parties turned to favouring NATO membership

Walteri Immonen, Doctoral Researcher, University of Turku

Abstract

Russia's all-out-attack against Ukraine in late February 2022 caused a fast turnaround in Finland's public support for NATO membership that led the political parties, which had hitherto opposed joining NATO, to reconsider their stances. I argue that those parties, via their elites, employed a realist strategy of security, bolstered by political nationalism to express unity with the population to justify their shift, in an attempt to depoliticise the issue altogether. The premise of the study thus becomes the use of nationalism in explaining states joining international organisations rather than seeing it only as a disruptive force in interstate cooperation. The study also contributes to the previous scholarship on Finnish foreign policy and its different schools of thought by examining how nationalism plays a part in the realms of security and national interest. Ultimately, the membership signals a Finnish foreign policy swing from idealism to classical realism in which Finland had hitherto been an anomaly. This study uses data collected from Finnish parliamentary parties' council conferences held between April and May 2022, where they formulated their stances.

Keywords

NATO, nationalism, political parties, idealism, realism

Introduction

The phrase ‘sudden change in our security environment’ became ubiquitous in Finland after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Now, political parties had to re-evaluate Finland’s position in the international system. President Sauli Niinistö’s comments on how NATO membership would be, “the most adequate safety measure as there is nothing beyond it” (Yle, 2022a) summed up the sentiment for applying for NATO membership. While the decision to join NATO may seem obvious in light of the changed public opinion, an exploration of the communication strategies of the political elite regarding the decision is a useful area of inquiry. Previous studies (e.g., Nortio et al., 2022) show that framing Russia as a “threatening national other” has been used to both oppose and support Finland’s NATO status. Stemming from Finland’s history and its geographical location as a western borderland, the Cold War era of *Realpolitik*, i.e., neutral pragmatism (Raudaskoski, 2019), has continued to play its part in Finland’s foreign and security policy (FFSP). The decision to apply for NATO membership constituted a true *Mini-Sattelzeit* in FFSP when traditional adages of neutrality, non-alignment and non-membership in military alliances became lacklustre in the face of a volatile Russia.

Only a month before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, then prime minister Sanna Marin had said that Finland applying for NATO membership would be “very unlikely” even if Russia attacked Ukraine (Reuters, 2022). Prior to February 2022, only a quarter of Finns supported NATO membership, but in March 2022, this share rose to 60% of the population (Yle, 2022b). This Gallup democracy instigated the political elite to act as well (Kanniainen, 2022; Weckman, 2023). Acknowledging the public opinion, political parties in Finland were pressed to re-evaluate their positions on the topic. Such a major shift in policy position needs to be sold to the public with a strategy that does not portray the parties as inconsistent. Valuable scholarly analysis of the parliamentary discussions has already been carried out (Linnainmäki, 2023), but in the parliament MPs seek more to explain their views to each other. This article examines how the parties formed their stances to supporters and other citizens before conveying them in the parliamentary arena. In fact, all the Finnish parliamentary parties’ executive organs held supplementary meetings to formulate their NATO stances, which are used as this article’s data.

Finland’s decision appears to be a textbook example of Morgenthauian classical realism where small states join alliances against a larger adversary in an anarchic international system (Morgenthau, 1973). However, realism and its principle of unitarity is not enough to answer the question whether a state exists for its own sake or for the sake of its people. It still needs to show *how* the unitarity is reached. This is done by adding the component of nationalism into the analytical framework, in building the state and nation as unitary and “congruent” (Gellner, 2006, p. 1). The current academic landscape seems to hold nationalism accountable for international conflicts and exacerbating the fracturing of global governance (Shukla, 2018). In addition, nationalism is sometimes used interchangeably with populism (see Vulović and Palonen, 2023). This blending of concepts has led to the coining of the term ‘neonationalism’ when talking about the movements that led to phenomena, such as Brexit and Trump (Blyth, 2016; Fukuyama, 2016). In these instances, nationalism has been used to explain states’ *withdrawal* from international organisations (Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019). In comparison, much less research utilises the idea of nationalism to explain states *joining* international organisations.

Previous studies have shown Finland’s relationship with NATO to be complex and open to many interpretations (e.g., Särkkä, 2019; Forsberg, 2018). Equally, the studies about FFSP in general have

elucidated multi-tiered considerations about the construction of the concept varying on all the levels of IR theory (e.g., Pesu, 2019; Haukkala and Vaahtoranta, 2016; Aaltola, 2003). This study takes into account the discussion of FFSP regarding main variants of IR theory while evaluating policy decisions done through these lenses as well. This article answers Tuomas Forsberg's (2023, pp. 93–95) call for foreign policy research to open up new points of view without the need to be directly connected to questions about the “general orientation” of Finnish foreign policy, but to advance “theoretical pluralism” in asking questions of “how” and “why”.

This study acts as a contribution to the scholarship on Finnish foreign policy and its different schools of thought by identifying a constructivist shift from idealism to realism via nationalism. I propose that Finnish parliamentary parties employed political nationalism as a realist strategy, to explain their change in policy position in favour of NATO membership to respect the idea of consensus in foreign policy decisions. I argue that Finnish decision-makers operated in the interplay between three elements: realism, nationalism and constructivism. The decision to join NATO is a realist one; the elite conveyed the argument to join to the public through nationalism; and a past of constructivist identity seeking allowed Finland to find itself in the position to actually do so.

Finland's foreign and security policy: theories and schools

Finnish foreign and security policy has been characterised as walking the tightrope between being as West-oriented as possible without needlessly provoking neighbouring Russia's security concerns. In this searching of space to manoeuvre, Finland has inched towards idealism in its foreign and security policy while never abandoning its realist roots. Seen this way, Finland's decision to join NATO does not seem like a disruption but a buttress of an existing notion (cf. Ferreira-Pereira, 2006). The idealist effort to move closer to the West was done through constructivism, which expanded the space for manoeuvre that allowed the realist tenet of security maximisation to eventually flourish. However, when it comes to the actual NATO membership application process, constructivism's explanatory powers are limited as Finland had already cemented its position as a Western country and had no need for further identity building. What Finland had to do was to show its citizens how the shift towards military alliance and classical realism was done in the national interest.

This shift can be analysed through the discussion of schools of thought regarding FFSP (Haukkala and Vaahtoranta, 2016; Pesu, 2017; Juntunen, 2018; Linnainmäki, 2023). Hiski Haukkala and Tapani Vaahtoranta talk about the schools of thought as being “analytical lenses” (2016, p. 61). For Matti Pesu, they are “conceptual frameworks” with which to outline ways of thinking about foreign policy in a very general level (2017, p. 285). In other words, the schools cannot be called ‘theories’ in the broad sense – even if they have their basis in IR theories – but they offer conceptualisations of different strategies to pursue. The schools can also overlap, in that in many decisions we can see different explanations (Juntunen, 2018, p. 40).

Haukkala and Vaahtoranta (2016) outline Finnish security policy by identifying three schools of thought in whose interplay Finland operates. In *small state realism* Finland focuses on its geopolitical situation next to Russia, *Euro-Atlanticism* has a liberalist focus where nurturing Western relations is advocated, and *globalism* has the aspiration to be rid of power politics altogether towards a cosmopolitan world of mutual norms, rules and institutions. Drawing from this notion, I position FFSP into a dimension between realism and idealism to which the different schools align. The point here is not to compare the FFSP schools of thought with theories of international relations, but to see how the FFSP schools are actually built from IR theories. I will look at realism and its role as a ‘grand’ theory in international relations more deeply below. Idealism is not such a theory in itself but it does

function as a useful organising principle opposite to realism (Griffiths, 1992).

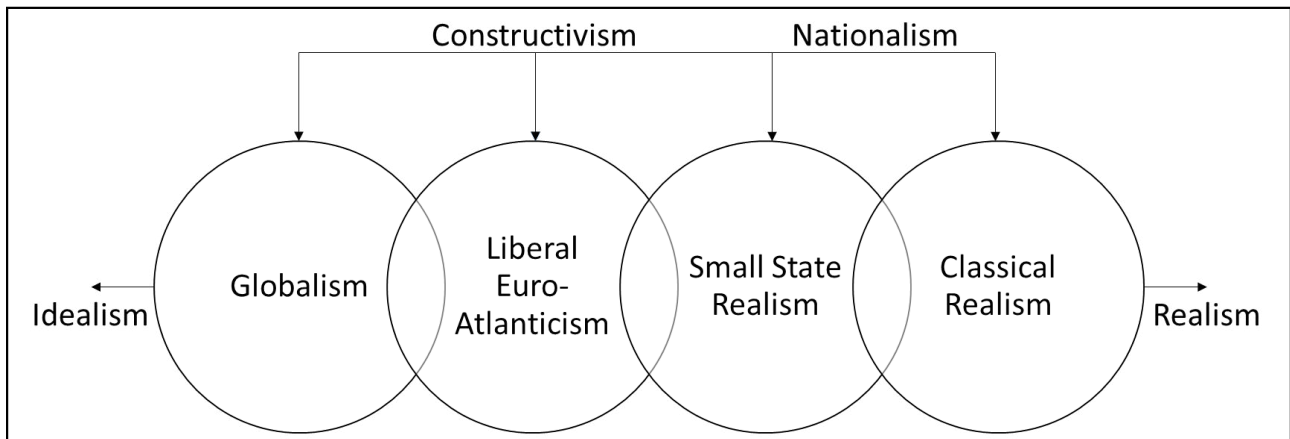


Figure 1. Finnish foreign and security policy dimension regarding NATO membership

In Figure 1, I have laid out the FFSP dimension regarding NATO membership. It outlines the different theories of IR as spheres and places them appropriately on a continuum of idealism–realism. Above the spheres, I have laid out the path of Finland in its position seeking on the international stage, and labelled the manoeuvring strategies employed. It shows how the idealist shift towards globalism is done constructively, namely trying to transcend the realm of power politics altogether (Wendt, 1992; more below). With the NATO membership, however, Finland could not ignore its primacy and sought to make a shift towards realism – which it never truly abandoned. However, as the decision was to be done from the premises of ensuring national interest (i.e., survival), this could not be done in traditional constructivist terms and required another component to explain the shift: nationalism.

The realism-idealism continuum

The school of thought with the most realist disposition is appropriately classical realism. It acknowledges the realist tenet of anarchy in the global system where states' ultimate objective is to maximise security. However, where in (classical) realism states tend to counter security imbalances through forming alliances, for Finnish small state realism this is not the case. Until May 2022, Finland had an official policy of not seeking membership in a military alliance, even if it was on a road to ever deepening alignment with NATO seen through peacekeeping operations abroad and joint military exercises, which all worked towards removing barriers of deeper partnership. Without the deterrent of military alliance, Finnish small state realism demanded the building up of national defence capacities and capabilities – the epitomes of Finnish sovereignty. This was done even while maintaining amicable bilateral relations with Russia still after the first Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014. In 2018, Helsinki was the location for a meeting between presidents Trump and Putin, crystallising Finland's continuing endeavour as a mediator and bridge-builder between West and East (Aaltola, 2003).

Indeed, ever since the Cold War came to an abrupt end, Finland sought to further its identity-construction towards the West (Aunesluoma and Raino-Niemi, 2016, p. 51), heralding the advent of Euro-Atlanticism. It is more idealist than small state realism due to its emphasis on Western liberal institutions and values, focussing on economic – and not security – gains. This is why I choose to further delineate this school as *liberal* Euro-Atlanticism in order to emphasise the school's orientation away from realist power politics and more into identity and economic issues (e.g., Browning, 2008). It is noteworthy that Haukkala and Vaahtoranta do admit the terms liberalism and Euro-Atlanticism

can be used interchangeably (2016, p. 58). Another cause to position Euro-Atlanticism as more idealist than small state liberalism is that it also has (or at least had) the idealist notion of containing Russia through trade and advocating democracy and human rights.

Like stated, in liberal Euro-Atlanticism the focus is extensively towards the West. It sees membership of the European Union bringing significant economic and political advantages to Finland, for instance. The late president Martti Ahtisaari, who presided over Finland's accession to the EU, mused that simultaneous membership applications to both the EU and NATO would have been too much to handle for the Finnish people (Ahtisaari et al., 2016). This can be seen as another extension of the school's liberalist focus over realism where matters of the economic surpassed those of security (see Ingebritsen, 1998). However, it must be stated that in the mid-1990's, Finnish NATO membership would not have been that easy to accomplish as it was in 2022–23 and would have perhaps needlessly jeopardised the EU accession. Secondly, the security environment of the mid-1990's was much less hostile than after February 2022. In addition to stronger European dimensions and integration, Euro-Atlanticism advocates for deeper cross-Atlantic couplings. One illustration of this is the United States becoming Finland's largest trading partner in 2022 (Hamilton and Quinlan, 2023).

It is important to highlight the liberal emphasis of the school because 'realist' Euro-Atlanticism would be nothing more than classical realism (of which more below). Having said that, Euro-Atlanticism does have a limited realist bent which can be seen in President Koivisto's statement that Finland's membership in the EU serves first and foremost the security dimension of Finland as the rationale was that no country would be willing to attack the Union (Raudaskoski, 2019). This only lends more explanatory power to the original point of aligning of the schools in realism vs. idealism terms.

To show Finland's interest in spreading Western values, human rights and democratic institutions all around the world, a school of globalism was construed. It is the most ideal (i.e., non-realist) due to its disregard to power politics completely. The central tenet for globalism, in turn, is a rules-based world order and governance in order to solve universal problems such as environmental issues, promotion of gender equality and eradicating global poverty. This Finland has advocated for and been active in the EU and various UN institutions. The globalist school can thus be characterised as explicitly normative. After the February 2022 transgressions against this purported rules-based order, also the globalists had to admit that power politics could not be ignored in its entirety.

Security and unity

Analysing the parliamentary discussion around Finland's NATO membership proceedings, Joel Linnainmäki (2023) identified that advocates of both small state realism and Euro-Atlanticism ultimately acknowledged the 'real' in their schools of thought, emphasising security. Another significant finding of Linnainmäki (ibid.) was that previous advocates of small state realism employed nationalist rhetoric in their argumentation. Exactly this national(ist) dimension has been overlooked in the discussion regarding FFSP schools. I develop this notion further, hypothesising that all the parliamentary parties utilised nationalist discursive strategies to express unity in the demanding times when justifying their pivots to realism.

Realism

As Finland already had such rootedness in realist thinking regarding its FSP, the full pivot towards classical realism demonstrated by the NATO membership was not very cumbersome. Another particular dimension of the national interest in FFSP has been *consensus seeking* in the parliamentary institutions (Särkkä, 2019). Seen in a positive light, decisions regarding FFSP are done after careful

deliberation with the objective to attain as large a unanimity as possible. This makes FFSP predictable and consistent as it ensures consistency no matter what government configuration Finland might have. The negative consequence is that it might lead to a limited freedom of expression. David Arter (1987, p. 100) speaks of “compulsory consensus” in the Cold War context of being as amicable as possible towards the Soviets, limiting critique. In the current context, we might term the NATO membership discussion as ‘compulsory consensus 2.0’ as the decision had to be as unanimous as possible in order to be future-proof. Put differently, parties were inhibited from politicising the issue, indicating they had to be creative in their framing of their formulation of stances. I draw a framework of just how creative next.

In realism, states are the key units of analysis, as they are the principal actors in the international system (Morgenthau, 1975, p. 3). States are considered as rational agents whose *raison d'état* is to maximise their prospects for survival. Due to the international system being anarchic by nature, meaning that there is no central authority, a realist perspective is useful for predicting nation-state behaviour security-wise. States are seen as self-help agents responsible for their own survival; they define their own interests and pursue power and international influence (Waltz, 1979). The key concept is power, especially material power, to deter, defend, and retaliate against possible aggressors to resolve conflicts.

The power capacities between states grow unequally, as some states have more material goods to increase their military power than others. To balance this inequality out, states will always anticipate worst-case scenarios and are expected to seek “the redistribution of power in one’s own favour through preventive wars or coalitions” (Kapitonenko, 2022, pp. 36–7). States’ pooling of power and resources through coalition formation is a well-examined phenomenon in realist literature regarding NATO (see, e.g., Hyde-Price, 2016). Now, the scenario certainly applies in the Finnish case as well: Finland maximises its military power and capacity through an alliance to avoid the worst-case scenario of war that could threaten the existence of Finland.

The core assumption of rationality in reality stems from Morgenthau’s (1975) general idea that human nature is primarily self-interested and seeking power, and to advance ambitions is to act rationally. This notion is applied to states, and to say that states are rational is to look at their actions in working towards this goal of amassing power and maximising security. To reach this goal, states behave in a consistent, calculated and predictable manner. This idea of rational maximisation of self-interest we can also call “egoistic” (Niebuhr, 1932, p. 198). However, not all egoistic behaviour is necessarily rational, only the kind that is done for one’s own good and not for one’s own ‘bad’. In this article, the rationality assumption is not needed to be taken at face value. It only suffices to say that states do act egoistically, and how these actions can be portrayed as rational is the focus of the analysis. Whether parties and their representatives actually *are* rational is not of the scope of this article, only the assumption that they wish to *be perceived* as such.

The assumption of rationality entails also the realist assumption of unitarity, meaning that the state is considered as one, single, integrated unit that functions as the basic unit of analysis in IR (Allison, 1971). With every particular issue, a unitary state forms a singular policy to attend to that issue. These issues have a hierarchy and national security tops the list as it is considered ‘high politics’ whereas economic and social issues are regarded as ‘low politics’. Thus, for realists, domestic contestation may occur in the realm of ‘low politics’, but when it comes to matters of security, military, or strategy a singular policy direction prevails. This we can see applying to Finland in its consensus seeking.

The realist approach does not assume that a country will choose a particular policy and maintain that policy over time. Instead, the realist approach only contends that the international system comprises

principal actors (states) that act rationally towards their goals at any point in time. Depending on the circumstances, the policy prescription for a country could be drastically different, even on matters of national defence. This approach does not argue that a state must act *ex nihilo*, nor does it deny that there are alternatives to reach their goal, only that a certain unitarity as well as unity is required for states to interact at the international level. How this unity is ultimately reached is the focus here.

I examine whether realist undertones are present in the parties' arguments and persuasive attempts to convince citizens of Finnish NATO membership being the correct move for the country. States are not taken as "billiard balls" (Joseph, 2014), but are constrained by domestic and societal issues that need resolving before action at the international level can be taken. This neoclassical realist understanding allows to account for the relationship between domestic politics and decision-making in the international arena (Ripsman et al., 2016). There is recognition with this approach that a singular figure cannot make a unilateral decision on topics of this magnitude in a democratic society. Instead, there is a deliberative process where politicians discuss pros and cons, and then these stakeholders must discuss with citizens regarding the strategies. Politicians must provide consistent and clear reasons for decisions in order to minimise dissent.

Nationalism

James D. Fearon (1998) argues that states' desire to survive and valuing security is but an assumption and not a consequence of anarchy or the international structure. In Wendtian terms we might call it a value-construction in the nation(-states) themselves based on ideas (Wendt, 1992). Even if states are the basic-unit with singular preference(s), they are not immutable; they can change and be changed. Consequently, the notion of states as unitary becomes simplifying while unrealistic. Be that as it may, state actors could still act according to the maxim that unity yields optimal results on a systemic level of IR, thus having an incentive to be at least perceived as such. This Finland has cherished with its consensus seeking. Parliamentary groups with different identities do play a key role in the outcomes of crises (Owen, 1997), but in the context of NATO membership, the public had already settled on the outcome. Now it was up to the decision-makers only to give the people what they wanted without politicising the issue. I argue that the reason behind this non-politicisation is nationalism.

With nationalism, we can bridge Morgenthau's epistemological leap of states' self-interest deriving from self-interested human nature. In fact, for realists, the national interest and state interest are becoming interchangeable in their lexicon (Kapitonenko, 2022, p. 25). A government must be aware of the character of the nation it governs in order to act efficiently and in an otherwise amoral realist international system. The "moral principle of national survival" is the sole motive to affect states' behaviour (Morgenthau, 1973, p. 166). Nationalism has that same exact tenet that realism has: that of ensuring the survival of the nation(-state). Michael C. Williams (2005, p. 78) has also identified this self-reflective dimension of realism, but regards it as problematic to characterise states as "acting units" with distinct, rational national interests. This is because states and especially nations are emotive as well as rational, and "political institutions are strongest when they cultivate an affective dimension of political association that fosters sub-rational and sentimental attachments within the community" (ibid). In other words, "nationalism and national identity are often the main if not the sole force" binding the society together as a nation-state (Prizel, 1998).

The centrality of the relationship between the state and nationalism exists in nationalism studies' branch of political nationalism. In it, nationalism is seen primarily as a form of politics, the central task of which is to obtain and use state power (Breuilly, 1993). Such actions are justified with nationalist arguments which is virtually a political doctrine built upon three basic assertions where (a) there exists

a nation with an explicit and peculiar character; (b) the interests and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values; and (c) the nation must be as independent as possible. This usually requires at least the attainment of political sovereignty (ibid., p. 2). Conversely, it is the structure of the state that makes “it possible to conceive the nation as *unitary*” (Calhoun, 1997, p. 68; emphasis added).

Sovereignty can be seen as the ultimate form of agency, which is another feature that nationalism and realism have in common. Walker Connor indicates that “a nation must be self-defined” (1994, p. 103). Even though he discusses an ethnic base that forms this definition, political nationalism focuses on the actual *act* of this self-defining and on the agency and sovereignty it entails. In a similar vein, Ernest Gellner (2006, p. 73) argues that the state is used to try to impose a cultural homogeneity to reify the nation, but the cultural homogeneity is of zero importance to political nationalism – only that there is a large enough understanding of the “imagined *political* community” (Anderson, 2006, p. 6; emphasis added).

In addition to IR, power is a central concept of nationalism as well – certainly in its political sense. Nationalist movements must obtain power, which is in turn obtained through the state apparatus (Schnee, 2001, p. 10). Anthony D. Smith’s formulation of nationalism being “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining the autonomy, unity, and identity of a nation” means that it is an ideology of “the nation, not the state” (1991, p. 74). The formation of a nation-state might not even be the end-goal for all nationalist movements, which has led Walter Schnee to state that the nation “ought to be the final arbiter of its own affairs” (2001, p. 6). That being said, nationalism certainly is disposed to pursue and attain state power so that the nation would be sovereign and as capable as possible to maintain it.

The attainment of power, agency, and sovereignty is just the first step of political nationalism because after self-determination is established, the aim then becomes one of self-preservation. Self-preservation can be accomplished through the upholding of symbolic manifestations of the nation (Billig, 1995) or more materialist means like joining a military alliance. Nationalism turns the realist assumption of being unitary into a rationale of unity in itself. If the realist interest is to survive, the national interest must be the national will to survive. Elie Kedourie has characterised nationalism as “an industrial lubricant” (1993, p. 144) when he talks of how nationalism aided in the success of the Industrial Revolution. Political nationalism characterises nationalism as a *security lubricant*, adding to the realist account. As Konstantinos Kostagiannis (2018) has suggested, better self-awareness through the idea of nationalism can lead to better understanding of realist policies.

Materials and method

I gathered data from council conferences of Finnish parliamentary parties to analyse their policy formation. In the parliamentary vote on May 17, 2022, 94% of Finnish members of parliament voted for applying for NATO membership. Such a display of uniformity required prior discussion and deliberation by the parties. Indeed, eight out of the ten Finnish parliamentary parties held a party council conference between April 9th and May 14th, which accounts for 99% of all MPs. It was in these conferences where the parties’ respective stances on NATO were established. The focus of my analysis is on the parties that previously were either against NATO or did not have an official stand on the issue.

I use qualitative content analysis to analyse the data. This allows for a systematic examination of the informational content present in the material in order to identify and compare the latent meaning structures from the textual content. I implement the method through the process of

inductive category formation where the main talking points of the data are first summarised and then categorised. Inductivity means here that the categories are largely derived from the data but in a theory-driven fashion insofar that they apply to the framework of security through unity. The categories are then applied to the data through close reading. As I am interested in finding if and how political nationalism is used as a realist strategy in the data, I do not employ quantitative measures such as analyses of frequency or valence. The goal is to understand a phenomenon and the processes it incorporates, not to make generalisations based on statistical inference. Saying that, it is assumed that due to the general character of some of the conferences, issues other than NATO will be brought up, which are not in the scope of this study.

Qualitative content analysis lends itself well to examining data from an open-ended data collection technique aimed at depth and detail. This is the case here as the data consists of materials gathered from the respective conferences the Finnish parliamentary parties held between April 4th and May 15th, 2022. The data mostly consist of speeches the main actors of the parties (chairs and ministers in government where applicable) gave. However, in some instances the speeches are supplemented by press conferences, press releases, and in the Centre Party’s case, a white paper on foreign policy. The dataset gathered has 21,905 words. Table 1 provides information on the general patterns of the data. The parties in government are presented first in order of the number of MPs they have in parliament. Then, the opposition parties are presented in a similar fashion. As stated before, all the parties either did not have an official NATO stance or were against it prior to February 2022, meaning that a change in their stances indeed occurred. It is in these conferences where the parties (re)formulated and expressed their respective stances on a possible NATO membership. Thus, the data contains a high level of comparability.

Table 1. Overview of the Data

Party	Type and date of conference	Decision	Data	# of words (%)
Social Democratic Party	Extra council conference, 14.5.2022	Support for NATO and for state leadership in membership talks (53-5-2)	Three speeches; press conference	6426 (29)
Centre Party	Council conference, 9.4.2022	Unanimous support for state and party leadership in applying for NATO membership	Three speeches; council’s “white paper” on FP	2818 (13)
Green League	Delegation conference, 23.4.2022	Unanimous support to parliamentary and ministerial group to act how they see fit, and reacts positively to possible NATO membership	Three speeches, press conference	4845 (22)
Left Alliance	Joint conference of the council and parliamentary group, 7.5.2022	Possible NATO membership application not a decisive issue for staying in government (52-10-1)	Press conference	2035 (10)
Finns Party	Council conference, 30.4.2022	Supports NATO membership (61-3)	Speech, press conference	5176 (24)
Christian Democrats	Extra council conference, 29.4.2022	Supports applying for NATO membership (43-6-1)	Press release	605 (3)

The data for the Social Democrats consists of three opening speeches, given by the chair of the party council and Minister of Local Government Sirpa Paatero, chair and Prime Minister Sanna Marin, and

chair of the parliamentary group Antti Lindtman. In addition, a press conference that was held was transcribed and added to the dataset. The data for the Centre Party consists of three opening speeches given by chair of the party council Liina Tiusanen, chair and Minister of Finance Annika Saarikko, and Minister of Defence Antti Kaikkonen. A white paper on foreign and security policies published by the party council also is analysed. The data for the Green League consists of three opening speeches given by acting leader of the party Iiris Suomela, chair of the parliamentary group Atte Harjanne, and Minister for Foreign Affairs Pekka Haavisto. A press conference held was transcribed and added to the dataset. Regarding the Left Alliance, their conference was held behind closed doors in its entirety, so only a press conference given afterwards was transcribed and included for analysis. The data for the Finns Party consists of an opening speech given by chair Riikka Purra, as well as a press conference that followed. Finally, the Christian Democrats circulated a press release that summarises the conference's decision, published in the party organ KD-Lehti. All the sources of the data are available online.

Analysis and discussion

When making policy decisions, parties need to consider two things: on what *grounds* they hold the decision important enough to be made and how to *justify* the actual decision. The analysis juxtaposes these with categories of security and unity to examine if nationalism is used as a realist strategy. This is illustrated in a fourfold table (Table 2) where the rows are ones of grounds and justifications, with the categories functioning as the columns. As parties need to have both grounds and justifications, they are placed in both of the rows, while the column depends on their argumentation. Considering the notion of rationality inherent to realism being the one that supersedes everything, it is seen as an either/or question. In other words, if a party is realist in its grounding of the issue, it is first and foremost that. If the grounds are then justified in a nationalist fashion they are positioned in the nationalist column in the row of justification.

Table 2. Parties' positions in stance formation regarding NATO membership

	Realist (security)	Nationalist (unity)
Grounds	Social Democrats Centre Party Green League Finns Party Christian Democrats	Left Alliance
Justification	Green League	Social Democrats Centre Party Left Alliance Finns Party Christian Democrats

A majority of the parties have their grounds in realism and justifications in nationalism. They frame the decision as a question of security while emphasising unity in making it. As a party, the Left Alliance cannot be seen to ground their decision through security and cannot be considered realist when it comes to NATO membership. Similarly, the Green League does not justify their decision through unity and cannot be considered nationalist. Five of the six parties provide the argument for their decision that NATO membership would maximise the security of Finland. In other words, for these parties the fundamental purpose of the state is to ensure the security of its citizens, which some parties explicitly affirm. Thus, the state needs to act now, and the parties must and will help it do so. They all draw attention to the change in the security environment of Finland and argue that what is happening

in Ukraine must not ever be allowed to happen in Finland. To put it in realist terms, these parties rationalise that the action of joining NATO is the right action to take security-wise. Interestingly, only the Finns Party and the Green League (although for different reasons) talk of how it is the time to cash in the so-called 'NATO-option'.

In addition, all of the parties emphasise the security that NATO would bring through its principle of collective defence articulated in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. They explicitly state that the security guarantees that NATO membership brings with it are the main element that ensure the survival of Finland, and must thus be taken advantage of. The parties also emphasise how the decision to apply for NATO membership is to be seen in defensive terms and not made in opposition to an enemy. The Centre Party states the purpose of joining NATO is to raise the repercussions for attacking Finland to such a height that it would never be attempted. Interestingly, only the Finns party actually use the word 'deterrent' when discussing this, referring to the material capabilities of NATO.

However, the Centre is the only party that mentions the security guarantees to perhaps be a hindrance to security as well. All the other parties who refer to Article 5 just focus on how other NATO members would come to the aid of Finland if needed. In comparison, the Centre party is the only party that mentions that Finland might also be forced to aid other countries. This is not to say that the Centre party is against attaining the security guarantees, but instead that they are considering the potential negative outcomes as well. In addition, the Centre party is the only party to talk about 'rational' weighing of options in matters of national security, which makes them appear very realist. Likewise, the Finns Party also mentions that they treat Russia in a 'realist' fashion. Not only do the parties attempt to evoke reason when discussing the security aspects of joining NATO but some of them also appeal in an emotive fashion. Instead of referring to the security of the state or the nation, there are instances where both the Social Democrats and the Centre Party explicitly employ the term 'Fatherland', and how the Fatherland's interest must come first. This can be considered as an expression of nationalism as well, which segues us into the discussion of unity.

When it comes to expressing unity, the five realist parties express more gradation than with the matter of security. The Social Democrats emphasise the need to have a Finnish view that is as uniform as possible. Chair and Prime Minister Sanna Marin refers many times to the consensus that has been attained over the spring between the deciding institutions and bodies, which is in line with the tradition of consensus in Finland. Thus, the Social Democrats can be seen to hold unity in very high regard. The party is keen to show that the opinion is shared, common, and mutual among the political establishment and thus deserving of utmost respect. In other words, they act as if the nation has an implicit need of unity to which the Social Democrats are willing to cater.

The Centre Party, in turn, does not speak of consensus, verbatim, but is consistent in highlighting how important it is to show national unity in the proceedings. They emphasise how instrumental it is in these volatile times, how important it is to cultivate it, and that the views of the party and nation are one and the same. They assert that the era of Finlandisation has now truly come to an end; Finland is free as a sovereign state and nation to decide for herself. For the Centre Party it also seems important to match itself as closely as possible with the Finnish population. For instance, they talk of how it is a principle for the Centre to put the needs of Finland first before the party. Like the Social Democrats, the Centre Party reveres parliamentary majority in the decision making as an extension of ensuring security and helps building it – an extension of consensus seeking.

Being a *de facto* nationalist party, the Finns Party seems to be an anomaly when it comes to presenting unity in nationalist terms. They are decorous and much less vocal than their colleagues in

the Social Democrats or the Centre, for instance. The Finns Party is content to state that their opinion represents that of the nation. They can be seen to almost underplay the situation which is explained in them being a populist party in opposition. The Finns Party is wary to commend the government about their actions and remain very matter-of-fact in their expressions of consensus. They state that the NATO question must not be reduced to day-to-day politicking, and thus they are doing the respectable thing of being on board, on the right side of history in almost a nonchalant fashion. Overall, the Finns Party respect the consensus inherent in FFSP but in a slightly antagonistic manner.

Conversely, even the Green League emphasise the importance of consensus for the process. However, this cannot be considered an expression of nationalism as they are more concerned with the practicalities of getting to the actual membership process. In other words, they do not express *national* unity, either consciously or unconsciously, but do expect it from others in order to show “a functioning democratic political system,” which the NATO 1995 Study on Enlargement requires aspiring members to do. Another reason why the Green League cannot be regarded as nationalist is that they do not appear to be engaging the electorate. Nowhere does the Green League speak of ‘Finns’ or ‘nation’. They only refer to the state of Finland. The party gives the impression that they do not care about the polls and instead that they have made the decision in isolation based on the party’s self-interest. This might be taken as a conscious decision not to be seen as pandering to the people, but the underlying cause is that nationalist arguments are not thought to go down well with the Green League in general, i.e., in those who the party elite is trying to exhort to support NATO.

Both the Left Alliance and the Green League need to show that the will of the people is the will of the party, but the difference resides in *whom* this display is aimed at. The Greens can be seen to be most concerned about how they, as a party with strong roots in the peace movement, could justify their support for a military alliance. Conversely, the Left seems to be most concerned about having to justify their about-turn to the public, being a party so strongly opposed to NATO in the past. The rationale, for them, is not based on security but unity.

The Left Alliance is the only party not explicitly tying their change of stance to security. They do acknowledge Russia’s actions as a catalyst why the discourse about joining NATO has increased nationwide, but are not, as a party, committed to accepting this kind of thinking in their political agenda. Even if the Left Alliance themselves are not sold on the idea of NATO maximising security, they accept that the vast majority of Finnish citizens and parties do support it. Thus, for them, the main selling point in their changed NATO stance is unity and even unitarity itself. The party goes on the record when stating that the Left Alliance might disagree with becoming a member of NATO, but they will not oppose it by leaving the government if it came to that. At least two reasons for this finding can be identified. The first is that the party has shifted its stance in favour of NATO, but because of its historical baggage there remains factions inside the party that continue to oppose NATO. Therefore, for the sake of keeping up appearances of unity, this particular group must be appeased. Since the conference and vote was held behind closed doors, we cannot know for certain. That being said, it is not farfetched to assume that there is some overlap with the six MPs who voted against NATO membership application in the parliament and the ten votes against in the conference.

The other somewhat more likely scenario is that due to the major shift in the security thinking in Finland, as the majority of the people as well as the other parliamentary parties were supporting applying for NATO membership, the Left Alliance had to submit to the changing times. The data support this scenario. The decision has already been made for them, and now it is just a question of how to retain and portray a shred of agency in their decision-making process. It is easier to oppose NATO when just a quarter of the population supports it, but when the *zeitgeist* changes, so must

the party's stance. The party does not effectively speak of submission rather than being able to go with the flow, so to speak. In sum, the Left Alliance's strategy can be seen as a delicate balancing act between being for and against NATO, with their use of nationalism playing a role in establishing the party's legitimacy towards the population. The people had made their stance, and now what was left for the Left Alliance was to follow suit. The party would do what is right and honourable for the sake of the nation and its people. In the end, the party might not be unitary in itself, but it is not willing to break the unity of the nation in this matter, adding to the consensus seeking in FFSP.

The Green League is most interested in expressing how their party identity remains intact even with supporting NATO. Where the Left Alliance is able to admit that they are capable of change in concordance with the times, the Green League is adamant in demonstrating that for them nothing has to change. This can be seen due to the roots of the party being in the peace movement and how joining a military alliance might possibly be seen as a disruption in seeking those objectives. Actually, the data shows that when it comes to the opening speeches, the party elite is trying to persuade the delegation to vote for becoming a member of NATO. For instance, the Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto urges the delegation to solemnly consider whether the time to implement the NATO option is now, and if not, then when would it be. The Green League in their rhetoric also appears to be talking amongst themselves, and not to the population. With their decision being unanimous, the only task left is for the party to justify the decision to themselves. As this justification is done solely in terms of security and not of national identity, the Green League is conveying a realist perspective, but are not nationalist in their policy position formation.

Conclusion

This article examined how Finnish parliamentary parties used a combination of realism and nationalism to ground, as well as justify, their change in stance regarding NATO membership. As the issue can be considered a manifestation of Gallup democracy where the majority of people were already found to be for NATO, the parties essentially had to explain the will of the people to the people themselves, at least insofar as to show that they understood what it is. The decision to join NATO is a realist one (maximising security), the elite conveyed the argument to join to the public through nationalism (to depoliticise the issue), and a past of constructivist identity seeking allowed Finland to find itself in the position to actually do so (having a Western identity). Finland had hitherto been more focused on how it appears outward and internationally, but now the emphasis was on looking inward and making decisions from a national interest, while conversely paying attention to appearances in showing that Finland is indeed unitary and its actions are deliberate and measured.

A clear majority of parties were found to frame their reasoning in terms of security as well as unity, offering arguments that employ both realist and nationalist strategies. Even the parties who did not use an explicit combination of security and unity in their argumentation were found to have at least one of the constituent elements present in their line of reasoning. Respecting the tradition of consensus in matters of FFSP, the majority of the parties emphasised the reverence towards unity, the case in point being the Left Alliance which did use security as grounds for their decision but justified it with national will. Being so resolutely against NATO membership in the past, they were less than thrilled to undergo this change of not opposing it anymore, but wanted to do this by showing willingness to respect how things stood. In other words, they had already made the decision but were now concerned with how to justify it to the outside world and did so by doubling down on the issue of consensus.

The Green League, however, was found to be more interested in playing down the contradiction

of joining a military alliance and having its roots in the peace movement. However, engagements with these arguments mostly occurred towards other party members and not the general populace. Pertaining to this, their argumentation was found to not contain any nationalist argumentation and for them the issue was solely about security. Paradoxically, the nationalistic Finns Party was found to actually de-emphasise their nationalistic argumentation in their stance formation. Being a populist party in the opposition, they were deemed to be cautious not to praise the government for any of their actions. They rather focused on pointing out that joining NATO is the right thing to do – for the nation and state – and that they will do their part. All in all, the nationalist party was not found to be any more nationalist than the other parties employing similar nationalist strategies. Conversely, it was actually the two main government parties of the Social Democrats and the Centre Party that can be characterised as the most nationalist in their stance formation. Both of them were found to underline the need for Finnish unity, in line with the tradition prevalent in Finnish foreign and security policy issues.

This study has shown how nationalism can be a contributing factor when it comes to states joining international organisations. The combination of realism and nationalism has proven itself to be a viable framework with which to examine the international system and more research is encouraged in both applying the framework to other cases and examining nationalism not just as a disruptor but also as a unifier in the realm of international relations.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland (grant numbers 345950 and 345951).

References

- Aaltola, M. (2003) *Suomen ulkopoliitiikan kielipelejä: Analyysi ulkopoliitiikan tutkimuksesta 1970–2003*. Tampere: Tampereen yliopistopaino.
- Ahtisaari, M., Iloniemi, J., and Ruokanen, T. (2016) *Miten tästä eteenpäin*. Jyväskylä: Docendo.
- Allison, G. (1971) *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.
- Anderson, B. (2006) *Imagined Communities*. 2nd edition. London: Verso.
- Arter, D. (1987) *Politics and Policy-Making in Finland*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf.
- Aunesluoma, J. and Raino-Niemi, J. (2016) 'Neutrality as Identity? Finland's Quest for Security in the Cold War', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 18(4), pp. 51–78. DOI:[10.1162/JCWS_a_00680](https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00680)
- Billig, M. (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage. DOI: 10.4135/9781446221648
- Blyth, M. (2016) 'Global Trumpism: Why Trump's victory was 30 years in the making and why it Won't stop Here', *Foreign Affairs*, [online]. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-11-15/global-trumpism> (Accessed: 31 March 2023).
- Breuilly, J. (1993) *Nationalism and the State*. 2nd edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Browning, C. S. (2008) *Constructivism, Narrative and Foreign Policy Analysis: A Case Study of Finland*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Calhoun, C. (1997) *Nationalism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Connor, W. (1994) *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fearon, J. D. (1998) 'Domestic politics, foreign policy, and the theories of international relations', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1, pp. 289–313. DOI: [10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.289](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.289)
- Ferreira-Pereira, L. C. (2006) 'Inside the Fence but Outside the Walls: Austria, Finland and Sweden in the Post-Cold War Security Architecture', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 41(1), pp. 99–122. DOI: [10.1177/0010836706060938](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836706060938)
- Forsberg, T. (2018) 'Finland and NATO: Strategic Choices and Identity Conceptions' in Cottey, A. (ed.) *The European Neutrals and NATO: Non-alignment, Partnership, Membership?*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 97–127. DOI: [10.1057/978-1-137-59524-9_5](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59524-9_5)
- Forsberg, T. (2023) 'Suomen ulkopoliitiikan tutkimus uudessa murroksessa', *Politiikka*, 65(1), pp. 89–100. DOI: [10.37452/politiikka.122402](https://doi.org/10.37452/politiikka.122402)
- Fukuyama, F. (2016) 'US against the world? Trump's America and the new global order', *Financial Times*, 11 November 2016.
- Gellner, E. (2006) *Nations and Nationalism*. 2nd edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Griffiths, M. (1992) *Realism, idealism and international politics: A reinterpretation*. London: Routledge.
- Hamilton, D. S., and Quinlan, J. P. (2023) 'The Transatlantic Economy 2023: Annual Survey of Jobs, Trade and Investment between the United States and Europe'. Washington, DC: Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University SAIS/Transatlantic Leadership Network.
- Haukkala, H. and Vaahtoranta, T. (2016) 'Suomen turvallisuuspolitiikan linjat ja koulukunnat' in

- Blombergs, F. (ed.) *Suomen turvallisuuspoliittisen ratkaisun lähtökohtia*. Helsinki: National Defence University, pp. 55–76.
- Hyde-Price, A. (2016) ‘NATO and the European security system: a neo-realist analysis’ in Webber, M. and Hyde-Price, A. (eds.) *Theorising NATO*. London: Routledge, pp. 41–60. DOI: [10.4324/9781315658001](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315658001)
- Ingebritsen, C. (1998) *The Nordic States and European Unity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Joseph, J. (2014) ‘Realism and Neorealism in International Relations Theory’ in Gibbons, M. T. (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*. DOI: [10.1002/9781118474396.wbep0864](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118474396.wbep0864)
- Juntunen, T. (2018) ‘Harmaantuvaa pienvaltioliberalismia: Suomi, ydinaseiden kieltosopimus ja ulkopoliittikan koulukuntavaikutteet’, *Kosmopolis*, 48(4), pp. 39–62.
- Kanniainen, V. (2022) ‘Gallup Democracy in Exercising the NATO Membership Option: The Cases of Finland and Sweden’, *CESifo Economic Studies*, 68(3), pp. 281–296. DOI: [10.1093/cesifo/ifac008](https://doi.org/10.1093/cesifo/ifac008)
- Kansikas, S. (2019) ‘Dismantling the Soviet Security System. Soviet–Finnish Negotiations on Ending Their Friendship Agreement, 1989–91’, *The International History Review*, 41(1), pp. 83–104. DOI: [10.1080/07075332.2017.1398177](https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2017.1398177)
- Kapitonenko, M. (2022) *International Relations Theory*. London: Routledge. DOI: [10.4324/9781003132769](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003132769)
- Kedourie, E. (1993) *Nationalism*. 4th edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kostagiannis, K. (2018) *Realist Thought and the Nation-State Power Politics in the Age of Nationalism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: [10.1007/978-3-319-59629-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59629-7)
- Linnainmäki, J. (2023) ‘Suomen ulkopoliittiset koulukunnat kevään 2022 Nato-jäsenyyskeskustelussa’, *Kosmopolis*, 53(1), pp. 45–63.
- Morgenthau, H. J. (1973) *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace*. 5th edition. New York: Knopf.
- Niebuhr, R. (1932) *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics*. New York: Charles Scriber’s Sons.
- Nortio, E., Jasinskaja-Lahti, I., Hämäläinen, M., and Pakkasvirta, J. (2022) ‘Fear of the Russian bear? Negotiating Finnish national identity online’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 28(3), pp. 861– 876. DOI: [10.1111/nana.12832](https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12832)
- Owen, J. M. (1997) *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Pesu, M. (2017) ‘Kun pienvaltiorealismin hegemonia murtui: suomalaiset ulkopoliittiset koulukunnat kylmän sodan jälkeisen ajan alussa’, *Politiikka*, 59(4), pp. 280–297.
- Pesu, M. (2019) *Introducing Ideational Foreign Policy Analysis: Explorations of the Underlying Ideas of Finnish Foreign Policy*. Tampere: Tampereen yliopistopaino.
- Prizel, I. (1998) *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511582929](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511582929)
- Raudaskoski, M. (2019) ‘From ‘between’ to Europe: Remapping Finland in the post-Cold War Europe’ in Laine, J. P., Liikanen, I., and Scott, J. W. (eds.) *Post-Cold War Borders: Reframing Political Space in Eastern Europe*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 188–207. DOI: [10.4324/9780429491177-11](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429491177-11)

- Reuters (2022) 'Finland's PM says NATO membership is "very unlikely" in her current term', 20 January [online]. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finlands-pm-says-nato-membership-is-very-unlikely-her-watch-2022-01-19/> (Accessed: 25 October 2023)
- Ripsman, N. M., Taliaferro J. W., and Lobell, S. E. (2016) *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199899234.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199899234.001.0001)
- Schnee, W. (2001) 'Nationalism: A review of the literature', *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*, 29(1), pp. 1-18.
- Shukla, S. (2018) 'International Relations on the Rise of Nationalism: Institutions and Global Governance', *McGill Journal Of Political Studies*, [online]. Available at: <https://mjps.ssmu.ca/2018/02/09/international-relations-on-the-rise-of-nationalism-institutions-and-global-governance/> (Accessed: 25 October 2023)
- Smith, A. D. (1991) *National Identity*. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press.
- Särkkä, I. (2019) *Nato-retoriikka Suomen turvallisuuspoliittisessa keskustelussa*. Helsingin yliopisto, Valtiotieteellisen tiedekunnan julkaisuja 121.
- Von Borzyskowski, I., and Vabulas, F. (2019) 'Hello, goodbye: When do states withdraw from international organizations?', *The Review of International Organizations*, 14, pp. 335–366. DOI: [10.1007/s11558-019-09352-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-019-09352-2)
- Vulović, M., and Palonen, E. (2023) 'Nationalism, populism or peopleism? Clarifying the distinction through a two-dimensional lens', *Nations and Nationalism*, 29(2), pp. 546–561. DOI: [10.1111/nana.12920](https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12920)
- Waltz, K. (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Weckman, A. (2023) 'Public opinion and NATO: How different security environments influence the support for NATO in Finland', *Nordic Review of International Studies*, 1, pp. 4–24.
- Wendt, A. (1992) 'Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, 46(2), pp. 391–425. DOI: [10.1017/S0020818300027764](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764)
- Williams, M. C. (2005) *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: [10.1017/CBO9780511491771](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491771)
- Yle (2022a) Ykkösaamu. Aired on 26 March 2022.
- Yle (2022b) 'Nato-jäsenyys parantaisi turvallisuutta, mutta asevelvollisuus tulisi säilyttää, arvioi suomalaisten enemmistö', [online]. Available at: <https://yle.fi/a/3-12381891> (Accessed: 12 February 2024)

Discussion Article

Shaping Security: The Rising Influence of Public Attitudes on Defence Policies

Albert Weckman, Doctoral Researcher, Åbo Akademi University

Anton Brännlund, Postdoctoral Position, Uppsala University

Abstract

The main purpose of this discussion article is to provide insight into and highlight the growing importance of citizen attitudes on security policy related issues, a largely neglected area in both public opinion and international relations research. In this article, we reflect on the role of public opinion in decision making regarding security issues and the important role it plays in policy formation in democratic states. We believe that the discussion around security attitudes is imperative not only for one's own national defence, but also for increasing our knowledge of how solidarity can be sustained within Western democracies. This discussion article takes up some of these issues and reflects on where they might be leading, not only for Finland and Sweden, but also for Nordic cooperation and NATO in the near future.

Keywords

Defence, public opinion, security attitudes, solidarity

Introduction

As new members of NATO, Finland and Sweden must reevaluate and adapt to a range of new security policies. Previously, both nations upheld a policy of military non-alignment, characterised by an absence of direct commitments to defend other states. Therefore, integrating into NATO's ethos of collective defence mandates substantial policy shifts for these Nordic countries. The development of these new security policies is expected to significantly involve public consultation, reflecting the democratic fabric of both societies.

Conventional International Relations theories have a limited capacity to effectively analyse the increasing importance of public attitudes in the formulation of foreign policy. This is problematic, as political science scholars often argue that public policies tend to reflect public opinion, especially in Western democracies where there is a compelling incentive for political elites to align with public sentiments (e.g., Stimson et al., 1995). The influence of public opinion on foreign policy decision-making has been a persistent and ongoing topic of debate in academic research. Recent literature indicates that political elites actively seek to understand public opinion, often trying to align their actions with these popular sentiments (Walgrave and Soontjens, 2023). Furthermore, government decisions and policies are profoundly influenced and shaped by public opinion (Monroe, 1998). As a result, public sentiment is a key factor in the decision-making process, making it unsustainable for foreign policy to deviate markedly from public opinion over extended periods.

In this context, it is particularly noteworthy that research on security policy attitudes suggests it is not the elites who shape public opinion. Instead, individuals formulate their viewpoints based on their environmental, personal, and social contexts (Kerzer and Zeitzoff, 2017). This dynamic, recognised in public opinion research as the 'bottom-up' approach, signifies that public sentiment shapes foreign policy attitudes independently of actions taken by the political elite. Conversely, the need to examine the determinants of security policy attitudes through causal research is becoming increasingly evident. We argue that previous studies have overlooked a vital component: the factors shaping citizens' attitudes, which significantly impact foreign policy decisions, even during wartime (De Mesquita et al., 1999). In the context of European security, scholars have highlighted the pivotal role of public opinion in shaping a cohesive European foreign and security policy (Gravelle et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the most significant policy transformation accompanying NATO membership for Finland and Sweden pertains directly to Article 5, the collective defence clause. This foundational principle mandates that all member states must assist one another in the event of an attack. Consequently, Finland and Sweden must determine their contributions should an ally be targeted by a hostile actor. Similarly, other member states must establish the extent of their commitments if a conflict arises in the Nordic or Baltic regions. The ongoing security situation in Europe, exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has elevated security concerns not only in Finland and Sweden but also across numerous nations, placing them at the forefront of political discourse. Russia's aggressive stance has particularly ignited security discussions in Finland, given its extensive border with Russia. The sequence and timing of events leading to Finland's application for NATO membership revealed that the decision by both Finland and Sweden to join the alliance was not solely a reaction to the heightened threat from Russia. A pivotal shift in public opinion, marking the first instance where a majority of Finnish citizens expressed favourable views towards joining the defence alliance, was observed in this process (Weckman, 2023) (Forsberg, 2024). These observations highlight the critical need to comprehend the factors influencing these sentiments. A fundamental question arises, for

example, regarding why a significant number of citizens were opposed to joining NATO despite the prolonged and evident threat from Russia.

Finland's accession to NATO culminated after years of navigating and carefully balancing its ties between the Western and Eastern spheres. Similarly, Sweden transitioned from a longstanding tradition of pronounced neutrality spanning centuries. In both instances, the influence of public opinion on these processes was profound. This was particularly evident in Finland, where the political elite appeared to adjust their stance in response to a significant surge in NATO support reflected in public opinion polls. While it remains speculative whether the elite would have pursued membership without robust public backing, it is reasonable to argue that such a path would have presented considerably greater challenges. Ultimately, it is accurate to conclude that public opinion exerted a critical influence on the membership application process. The push for applying for NATO membership was notably set in motion by President Niinistö, spurred by poll results showing majority support among the populace (Forsberg, 2023). Consequently, we firmly hold that public opinion influences security policy decisions and warrants more comprehensive study using the more robust methods.

Security attitudes

The investigation into public opinion regarding security issues has traditionally received limited focus from comparative political scientists, especially outside the United States. Despite nearly eight decades of academic research, our understanding of the causal mechanisms behind attitudes towards security policy remains significantly underdeveloped. Moreover, an abundance of survey data on national security matters exists in both Finland and Sweden, highlighting the gap in scholarly examination. This is particularly notable when compared to the extensive quantitative research performed in the broader area of political behaviour, which encompasses thousands of studies. The oversight of citizen values, attitudes, and behaviours within security policy research starkly contrasts with the wider field of political science, especially given the readily accessible data.

The existing body of literature on security has predominantly focused on qualitative analyses centring on international relations (IR) policy, often overlooking the crucial role of public opinion. Scholars in international relations and security policy analysis have traditionally positioned states at the forefront, given their direct impact on critical issues such as war and peace. A key question within international relations scholarship revolves around why states engage in war to begin with. Within this scholarly domain, well-established theoretical frameworks such as neo-realism, liberalism, and social constructivism have been predominant. However, these theories mainly concentrate on the actions of states or significant non-state actors such as NGOs, neglecting the perspectives of the electorate. To fully grasp the dynamics of how democracies function in times of war, it is imperative to consider the views and thoughts of the electorate, rather than solely focusing on the power dynamics of countries. This is not to say that these theories lack relevance in understanding global state interactions, but aspects such as war, peace, and strategic decisions are ultimately government policy. Hence, a challenge arises when the principle of electoral accountability comes into play, requiring elected officials to remain responsive to the electorate. Such accountability, therefore, affects the decision-making of democratic leaders in times of war.

A review of history underscores the importance of past events: The military involvements in Afghanistan and Iraq imposed considerable financial strains on the United States, accelerating the decision to withdraw troops. The imperative of economic sustainability necessitated shifts in strategic priorities, as evidenced by the diminished U.S. engagement in NATO during the Trump administration.

Such shifts reflect a declining commitment among certain segments of the population to maintain the rule-based international order. Currently, U.S. leadership exhibits fluctuating stances characterised by isolationist tendencies and a pro-Russia orientation within certain Republican circles, indicating a possible decline in American backing for European defence. The once steadfast U.S. support for Ukraine has waned following alterations in congressional leadership, and recent developments have revealed fissures in European solidarity as well.

The political opposition in Poland, in pursuit of domestic favour, is signalling a potential reduction in assistance to Ukraine. Similarly, Slovakia's gravitation towards a pro-Russian viewpoint and Hungary's ambiguous stance further exacerbates these concerns. Most pressing, however, is the significant decline in public backing within the EU for Ukrainian aid since the conflict's inception. Therefore, the cohesion that binds Western nations is susceptible to disruption, with public opinion playing a pivotal role in shaping support and solidarity within the democratic community. Amidst declining solidarity, smaller Western states are compelled to devise strategies to rally their populations against the challenges posed by authoritarian regimes, notably Russia. Smaller democracies must find ways to strengthen their cooperation and prepare for a world order where support from former allies, such as the U.S., is in decline. The historical lesson here is to understand how public sentiments around security questions are shaped.

Extensive research in political behaviour has highlighted the profound impact of socio-economic and demographic factors on political attitudes and behaviour in general (Dalton et al., 2007). These insights underscore the necessity of integrating individual-level attributes into security studies, as these attributes significantly influence citizen attitudes and behaviours in varied contexts. Kerzer and Zeitzoff (2017) contended that foreign policy attitudes are not solely dictated by political elites; rather, they are formulated based on an individual's personal experiences, environmental factors, and social context, echoing broader findings in the field of political behaviour. Consequently, we argue that to address the clear gap in understanding how security policy attitudes and behaviours are formed, scholars need to focus on micro-level characteristics. Despite some existing research, there is a need for further comprehensive and comparative studies, given the evolving nature of the security landscape and the inadequacies in current methodologies, data, and analytical frameworks. Our research has pinpointed two areas within the sphere of security policy attitudes and perceptions where knowledge is particularly lagging: the inclination to resist foreign military aggression, referred to as defence will, and the readiness to support allied nations in the event of an attack, a concept comparable to citizen military solidarity.

Defence will and collective defence solidarity

The significance of resistance in military conflicts is paramount, yet research into the motivations driving individual participation in defence efforts remains insufficiently explored. Our understanding of the factors that inspire individuals to undertake sacrifices in times of conflict is not fully developed. Notably, the existing literature, which is sparse, predominantly examines individuals' willingness to engage in combat or support military actions, essentially assessing their preparedness to sacrifice their lives for their nation (Anderson et al. 2020; Inglehart et al, 2015). These studies, however, tend to overlook the broader concept of resistance against foreign aggression, focusing instead on a narrow interpretation of combat readiness or support for militaristic measures. Such approaches are deeply rooted in traditional international relations theories, like neorealism, which emphasise the importance of physical state assets, including military hardware and personnel. Yet, resistance is a complex and layered phenomenon that extends beyond mere participation in combat, suggesting a

need for a more nuanced understanding of what drives individuals to resist.

The conceptualisation of ‘support for the use of force’ introduces potential complexities in its operationalisation, highlighting that the predisposition towards military engagement can be influenced by a myriad of contextual elements. Contemporary research frequently examines economic conditions and characteristics as pivotal factors influencing security-political behaviour. This trend aligns with the broad recognition of economic factors as significant determinants of shifts in values, as evidenced by extensive literature on the subject. The inclination towards participation in warfare is similarly subject to the influence of various contextual considerations. Among these, economic attributes have been identified as critical in shaping attitudes towards security and defence. Such insights are hardly surprising, given the well-documented impact of economic variables on value transformation across multiple domains. Our forthcoming research, particularly within the Finnish context, indicates a notable association between substantial personal assets and an increased readiness to counter foreign aggression or defend the nation (Weckman and Brännlund, 2024).

Moreover, a significant predictor of security attitudes is the evident gender-based discrepancies. Research consistently shows that gender plays a crucial role in shaping views on matters such as defence budget allocations, with men generally favouring higher defence spending than women. This variance in perspective spans various aspects of security, including support for military coalitions like NATO, and is evident across diverse geographical contexts such as Europe, North America, and Israel. Additionally, the literature on engagement in military activities mirrors this divergence, where women display a lesser propensity towards combat roles and a heightened awareness of the human consequences of warfare compared to men.

However, the participation of women in conflict situations is further nuanced by intricate cultural factors. For instance, the Yugoslav Wars saw women being intentionally targeted for systematic violence, whereas during the Vietnam War, women played essential support roles within the North Vietnamese military framework. The conflict in El Salvador further exemplifies the adaptability of gender roles within war settings, with both genders participating actively (see Skjelsbæk, 2001). This illustrates the complex interplay between gender and security attitudes, underscoring the necessity to consider these dynamics in analysing security policy and engagement in conflict. More precisely, questions regarding the willingness to fight in wars might miss the defence willingness of women in certain contexts, given that many critical activities can take place far from the battlefield.

Another aspect insufficiently addressed in the existing literature is the notion of solidarity among citizens in democratic nations and their readiness to support allies facing adversity. While it may appear self-evident that individuals unite over shared interests, discerning the origins of these interests presents complex challenges. Neo-realists emphasise national interests such as survival within an anarchic international system, positing that political decision-makers often evaluate the advantages and drawbacks of actions based on outcome-oriented logic. However, it is unlikely that the average person’s sense of solidarity is derived from such calculated considerations, particularly given the difficulty of predicting the consequences of war without expert insight. In contrast, social constructivism emphasises the role of identities, beliefs, and norms in shaping human behaviour (Guzzini, 2022), with Jepperson et al. (1996) arguing that these factors are fundamental in establishing interests from the outset. This perspective regards ideas as variables subject to causal analysis, implying that individuals’ actions are motivated by intrinsic reasons stemming from these ideas. Understanding solidarity, therefore, requires examining the underlying identities, beliefs, and norms that drive individuals to support their allies, highlighting the importance of these factors in shaping

security attitudes and behaviours.

The hypothesis that wartime solidarity within democracies is rooted in value-based reasoning assumes that individuals' actions are informed by moral principles rather than tactical considerations. This theory posits that individuals are more likely to offer support when such actions align with their ethical beliefs, emphasising the importance of moral integrity over the assessment of potential consequences. This concept is supported by evidence indicating that political and cultural values play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards foreign policy (e.g., Holsti, 2004). Understanding this dynamic is key to comprehending the propensity of citizens in democratic settings to aid those with whom they share common values in times of conflict. Furthermore, social constructivist theories highlight the process of European integration as a catalyst for transforming allegiance from the national to the European level, thereby nurturing a shared sense of identity among EU citizens. Research within the realm of European Union studies has illuminated the ideational underpinnings of European solidarity, encompassing both its obstacles and achievements. The existence of a collective European identity plays a pivotal role in shaping the response of communities to wartime challenges, with a tendency towards safeguarding shared norms and values against external threats. However, further studies are needed to understand how wartime solidarity is actually formed.

Conclusions

The endurance of Ukraine's independence, democratic values, and cultural heritage has heavily relied on the unwavering resolve and sacrifices of its people on the front lines. Much like in numerous historical conflicts, the resilience of Ukrainian resistance is contingent upon widespread voluntary support from its populace. Therefore, Ukraine's defence efforts are intrinsically linked to the collective will of its citizens. Beyond this strong will to defend, it is evident that international economic and military assistance plays an indispensable role in enabling Ukraine to withstand opposition from a significantly more formidable military force. Although certain factors shaping security policy attitudes may be universally applicable, the critical role of context—encompassing the historical, cultural, and geographical specificities unique to each country—cannot be emphasised enough. These distinct national characteristics significantly influence individual attitudes, thereby affecting positions on security-related matters. This phenomenon is particularly pivotal in shaping the determination to defend one's nation and the willingness to support other countries in distress. We call for more causal studies in these areas to understand how smaller countries can cooperate and survive in a more hostile environment.

Moreover, in the evolving security landscape of Europe, the induction of Finland and Sweden into NATO marks a pivotal transition from their long-standing positions of military non-alignment to embracing the alliance's ethos of collective defence. This transformation necessitates a re-evaluation of security policies, significantly influenced by public sentiment in these democracies. Research and historical precedence underscore the influence of public opinion in shaping foreign and security policies, suggesting a 'bottom-up' approach where policies reflect the populace's will rather than being merely elite-driven mandates. This dynamic is particularly relevant given the backdrop of Russia's aggressive posture in Ukraine, which has heightened security concerns across Europe and catalysed a shift in public opinion within Finland and Sweden towards NATO membership. The collective defence commitment, encapsulated in NATO's Article 5, introduces new considerations for Finland and Sweden. Both nations now grapple with the imperative of contributing to mutual defence while calibrating their commitments to align with public expectations and the broader European security framework. The public's role in this recalibration cannot be overstated. In the long run, security commitments will be shaped not only by political leaders but also by the solidarity of

the electorate.

The choices and interests of everyday citizens are frequently discussed but rarely examined empirically in this type of research, as there often exists an assumption that the perspectives of ordinary citizens are not as consequential as those of powerful state actors. This oversight is peculiar, given that the essence of what citizens think forms the cornerstone of democratic decision-making, including decisions pertaining to national security. Politicians typically hesitate to significantly diverge from the preferences of their electorate; opposing a clear public consensus can be seen as a risky endeavour. Consequently, in functioning democracies, deviations between foreign or public policy and the popular will can only be temporary, not sustained over long periods.

An examination of the literature on security attitudes beyond the American context reveals studies that have analysed survey data on security issues within both Central and Eastern European contexts. Yet, when shifting focus to the Nordic countries, a notable gap in research becomes apparent. The majority of studies within this Nordic framework adopt a broad policy approach, characterised by a qualitative methodological focus. While some studies have ventured into examining security attitudes, their analysis often remains superficial, lacking depth in uncovering the foundational elements and motivators that shape these attitudes. This trend is compounded by a research emphasis that prioritises entities other than the general public in the domain of foreign and security policy, thereby widening the existing research gap. An important inquiry arises concerning the pivotal role of context in the study of public opinion.

Hence, the future security discourse should extend beyond traditional state-centric paradigms, incorporating a broader understanding of how democratic societies perceive threats and their responsibilities towards collective defence. The growing interest in security attitudes within democratic contexts, notably outside the American purview, highlights a critical gap in our understanding of the public's influence on security policies in smaller democracies. This gap is particularly evident in the Nordic context, where limited research exists on public attitudes towards defence and collective security. The case of Finland and Sweden's NATO membership illustrates the decisive role of public sentiment, shaped by a complex interplay of individual experiences, socio-economic factors, and collective identities. These factors collectively influence national and European security policies, highlighting the indispensable role of democratic engagement in addressing contemporary security challenges. The imperative for further research is clear: to deepen our understanding of how public attitudes towards defence and solidarity in times of conflict are formed and how these attitudes influence national and international security policies. As Finland and Sweden navigate their new roles within NATO, insights from public opinion research will be invaluable in crafting policies that not only strengthen collective defence but also resonate with the democratic values and aspirations of their citizens.

References

- Anderson, C., Getmansky, A., & Hirsch-Hoefler, S. (2020). 'Burden sharing: Income, inequality and willingness to fight', *British Journal of Political Science*, 50(1), 362–379. DOI: [10.1017/S0007123417000679](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123417000679)
- Dalton, R. J., & Klingemann, H.-D. (2007) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270125.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270125.001.0001)
- De Mesquita, B., Morrow, J., Siverson, R., & Smith, A. (1999). 'An institutional explanation of the democratic peace', *American Political Science Review*, 93(4), pp. 791–807. DOI: [10.2307/2586113](https://doi.org/10.2307/2586113)
- Forsberg, T. (2023) 'Four rounds of the Finnish NATO debate', *Nordic Review of International Studies* 1, pp. 40-49.
- Forsberg, T. (2024). Bottom-up foreign policy? Finland, NATO and public opinion. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 47, 283–307. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12273>
- Gravelle, T. B., Reifler, J., & Scotto, T. J. (2017) 'The structure of foreign policy attitudes in transatlantic perspective: Comparing the United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany', *European Journal of Political Research*, 56(4), pp. 757-776. DOI: [10.1111/1475-6765.12197](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12197)
- Guzzini, S. (2022) "'Vision of Itself" in Foreign Policy Analysis: From the Role of Ideas to Identity and Recognition', *Teoria Polityki*, 6, pp. 33. DOI: [10.4467/25440845TP.22.001.16001](https://doi.org/10.4467/25440845TP.22.001.16001)
- Holsti, O. R. (2004) *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy, Revised Edition*, University of Michigan Press. DOI: [10.3998/mpub.6750](https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.6750)
- Inglehart, R. F., Puranen, B., & Welzel, C. (2015). 'Declining willingness to fight for one's country: The individual-level basis of the long peace', *Journal of Peace Research*, 52(4), pp. 418–434. DOI: [10.1177/0022343314565756](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343314565756)
- Jepperson, R.L., Wendt, A. & Katzenstein, P.J. (1996) 'Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security', in Katzenstein, P.J. (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 33-75.
- Kerzer, J. D. & Zeitzoff, T. (2017) 'A Bottom-Up theory of Public Opinion about Foreign Policy', *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(3), pp. 543-558. DOI: [10.1111/ajps.12314](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12314)
- Kertzer, J. D. (2021) 'Public Opinion about Foreign Policy', in Huddy, L., Sears, D., Levy, J., & Jerit, J. (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Third Edition), Oxford University Press.
- Monroe, A. D. (1998) 'Public opinion and public policy, 1980–1993', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62(1), pp. 6-28.
- Skjelsbæk, I. (2001) 'Is Femininity Inherently Peaceful? The Construction of Femininity in War', in Skjelsbæk, I. and Smith, D. (eds.), *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, London: SAGE Publications. DOI: [10.4135/9781446220290](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446220290)
- Stimson, J. A., Mackuen, M. B., & Erikson, R. S. (1995) 'Dynamic representation', *American Political Science Review*, 89(3), pp. 543-565. DOI: [10.2307/2082973](https://doi.org/10.2307/2082973)
- Walgrave, S., & Soontjens, K. (2023) 'How politicians learn about public opinion', *Research & Politics*, 10(3). DOI: [10.1177/20531680231200692](https://doi.org/10.1177/20531680231200692)

Weckman, A. (2023) 'Public opinion and NATO: How different security environments influence the support for NATO in Finland', *Nordic Review of International Studies* 1, pp. 5–25.

Weckman, A., Brännlund, A. (2024) Defending the Fortress: How Asset Ownership Shapes the Desire to Resist Foreign Aggression. (Accepted forthcoming) *Journal of Peace Research*

Discussion Article

Asmus strategic vision makes a comeback: Finnish-Swedish role in defending the Baltics

Andris Banka, Senior Researcher, Interdisciplinary Centre for Baltic Sea Region Research

Abstract

As the three Baltic countries embarked upon their NATO membership path, Western critics objected that these nations were militarily indefensible. To neutralise such concerns, a key NATO enlargement architect on the US side, Ronald Asmus, had proposed looking in the Nordic countries' direction. His plan, sketched out in 1997, was to woo the Finns and Swedes to join NATO ranks, which would effectively alleviate the Baltic problem of strategic depth. At the time, Nordic leaders balked at the idea and conveyed their unwillingness to carry Baltic security burdens on their shoulders. With the recent double Nordic NATO alliance membership, it is well worth revisiting the arguments and discussions surrounding the proposal of putting Nordic countries in charge of Baltic security. Drawing primarily upon declassified US State Department materials, this article sheds light on the envisioned Nordic-Baltic security linkage and how Finnish and Swedish diplomats perceived it at the time. Subsequently, the discussion article assesses Helsinki and Stockholm's transition from non-aligned to full NATO-member status and how this geopolitical fact may benefit the outlook of the three Baltic states..

Keywords

Baltics, NATO, Finland, Sweden, Ronald Asmus

Introduction

In the summer of 1997, key NATO enlargement architects in the Clinton administration, Ronald Asmus and Strobe Talbott, schemed how to get the three Baltic countries into NATO. Achieving this objective, however, faced steep odds. Among other things, Baltic membership prospects were plagued by the issue of ‘defensibility’. Critics, both within the United States and Europe, posited that NATO simply did not have the means to defend such exposed small nations on Europe’s edge. Baltic location on the map as well as their insignificant indigenous military forces had discouraged many policy planners and strategists. In personal correspondence between Asmus and Talbott, the former put the finger on the problem: “One reason we don’t have enough support either at home or in the alliance is because of the defensibility issue [...] In the Baltic case, their small size, lack of strategic depth, and geographic proximity to Russian power all add up to make this a rather daunting task” (Asmus, 1997b, p. 2).

To neutralise such concerns, Asmus proposed looking in the Nordic countries’ direction. The United States, he insisted, should attempt to woo Finns and Swedes to join NATO ranks, a move that would effectively alleviate the Baltic problem of strategic depth. Having toured the Nordic countries in the summer of 1997, Asmus laid out the plan in greater detail: “Use the next five years to get the Balts ready; let the Swedes and Finns get closer to NATO; in the meantime build cooperation with Russia in Northern Europe and put it all together in the years 2002-2004 by bringing both the non-NATO Nordics and the Baltics into the alliance” (Asmus, 1997a, p. 2). Eric Edelman, who at the time served as US ambassador to Finland, later recalled that in case the US was going to add the Baltics to NATO, they simultaneously needed to get Finland and Sweden into the transatlantic alliance (Edelman, 2017). The Clinton administration had reasoned that the Nordic membership would be the key to solving the Baltic defensibility conundrum. “You’ve got to have the Finns and the Swedes in because they create a strategic hinterland from which you can more easily reinforce the Baltic states”, Edelman explained the US geopolitical reasoning (Edelman, 2017).

More than two decades have passed since Asmus first laid out his Nordic-Baltic strategic connection and vision in US policy documents. With Helsinki and Stockholm now officially under the NATO umbrella, it is well worth revisiting the arguments and discussions surrounding the proposal of putting Nordic countries in charge of Baltic security. Drawing primarily upon declassified US State Department materials, this discussion article sheds light on the topic of Nordic-Baltic security linkage and how Finnish and Swedish diplomats perceived it at the time. Subsequently, the discussion article assesses how the rapidly changing security environment prompted Helsinki and Stockholm to transition from non-aligned to full NATO-member status and how this geopolitical fact may benefit the outlook of the three Baltic states.

The Baltic whisperers

At a time when major European actors approached Baltic NATO aspirations with great wariness, the Nordic countries exhibited more flexibility and support. While non-aligned themselves, Finland and Sweden had lent their hand in modernising Baltic armed forces. Since the early 90s, Stockholm and Helsinki had assumed the role of a mentor and material supporter for the newly created Baltic armies. As noted by Dahl (2011, p. 8), Finland had sought to take Estonia under its wing, while Sweden worked closely with Estonia and Latvia to sharpen their military readiness. It is worth recalling that at the time, the Balts had to build their national security structures entirely from scratch (Kasekamp and McNamara, 2018, p. 43). In the words of one Latvian senior diplomat, all that the country had

inherited from the withdrawing Soviet forces was the rubble. The state had no weapons and no defence plans (Teikmanis, 2020). In this context, various Nordic initiatives proved invaluable in terms of setting up the basis for Western-oriented armed forces (McNamara, Nordenman and Saloniuss-Pasternak, 2015; Kuldkepp, Piirimäe and Aunesluoma, 2022).

As non-NATO members themselves, Helsinki and Stockholm were rather reserved in their public pronouncements regarding who should or should not be included in future NATO expansion rounds. The Finnish government did, however, stand up for the rights of the Baltics to choose their own alliances and security partners (Honkanen 2002, p. 6). During the mid-90s, Finnish diplomats had expressed their worries that without proper anchoring into Western institutions, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would once again be relegated to Moscow's sphere of influence (Shearer 1995b). Likewise, the Swedish ambassador to the US, Carl Henrik Sihver Liljegren, had assured to US officials that Sweden was playing an important role in bolstering the Baltic integration into the West and expressed the view that "no grey zones of insecurity should be allowed to reemerge in Europe" (Liljegren, 1996, p. 5). While measured in their public rhetoric, Finnish and Swedish policymakers in talks with their US counterparts did reiterate support for NATO's open-door policies, including for the Baltics (Albright, 1998b).

In the context of NATO's eastward expansion, Washington would come to see the Nordic partners as valued Baltic-whisperers. American officials regularly turned to them for advice on how to better craft their Baltic strategy. Washington assumed that, due to the close geographic proximity, these countries had a better grasp of Baltic developments (Asmus, 2002, p. 231). Countries like Finland, which were grounded in the West but also had long-standing relations with Russia, were seen as critical actors for promoting the Baltic-related agenda. During a conversation with Estonian Foreign Minister Siim Kallas in 1996, US officials had made it clear that Washington was constantly prodding the Nordic governments to enlist their support for the Baltic cause (Talbot, 1996b). Tighter Nordic-Baltic links, the Clinton administration surmised, would help to puncture the prevailing notion among some NATO governments that the Baltics ought to be forever excluded from the transatlantic alliance. Another US cable posited that the interaction between these countries could be a "force for peace, and prosperity" (Talbot, 1997, p. 3).

The Clinton administration viewed Finland as an ideal mentor for the Balts that could speed up their integration into the West (US National Security Council, 1997). The same message had been relayed to Stockholm. Anna Wieslander, who spent numerous years at the Swedish Defence Ministry, later recalled that Ronald Asmus would visit the ministry every half a year and ask: "What can you do to help prepare the Baltic states for joining the alliance?" (Wieslander, 2019). At the time, other prominent US national security figures had likewise conveyed the understanding that Northern European support was essential for the Baltic Western trajectory. Zbigniew Brzezinski, a distinguished American strategic thinker, had told the Lithuanians that the Baltic road to Western-based institutions could only go through the Nordics (Janeliūnas, 2021, p. 228). In sum, during the 90s' discussions about the future European security order, and the Baltic place in it, many viewed the Nordic role in solving this puzzle as highly salient.

...But not security guarantors

While Finland and Sweden played an instrumental role in advancing the Baltic agenda, they were nonetheless forthright about their unwillingness to carry Baltic security burdens on their shoulders. Such an undertaking, they expressed, was a task for a great power. As one US diplomatic cable in 1995 recorded, it remained a Finnish axiom not to link its national security directly to the future of the

Baltic states (Shearer, 1995a). In interaction with US policymakers, this point was constantly repeated by the Finns and Swedes. Just before departing from his post in 1996, the Finnish ambassador to the US informed his American colleagues that the ideas floating around about Finland and Sweden becoming the security guarantors of the Baltic states were undesirable (Talbot, 1996a). During a conversation with US President Bill Clinton, Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari had “hammered down” the same message in no uncertain terms: “We are helping Estonia establish better border controls and proper visa restrictions. We have extended similar cooperation to Latvia, but this is where our possibilities for cooperation end. There is no way that we or the Nordic countries could give security guarantees to the Baltic states; that would be beyond our capabilities” (Albright, 1997, p.6). On another occasion, Ahtisaari reiterated the same to US Secretary of State Warren Christopher – only the US military was in a position to take on the responsibility for defending the Baltics (Ainola, 2015). The Swedes were on the same wavelength. Discussing the Baltic question, a high-ranking Swedish representative had informed Washington that it was better to leave to Stockholm the “non-security measures” (Asmus, 2002, p. 160).

Briefly, it is worth mentioning that at the time, another Nordic country, Denmark, an actual alliance member, was ‘all in’ for Baltic NATO membership. Copenhagen had already displayed its Baltic activism during the early 90s when it staunchly supported the Baltic calls for independence (Olesen, 2022). Subsequently, the Danish government led the way in spearheading the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT) in 1994, an institution that enabled Baltic participation in various NATO Partnership for Peace activities. In due course, Denmark emerged as the most vocal supporter in Europe for an early Baltic inclusion in NATO (Mouritzen, 2007, p. 156). The Danish parliament had given widespread support for Baltic aspirations to join both the EU and NATO (Archer, 1999, p. 50). All of this was carried out with the political backing of Washington. As the Danish Defence Minister assured US officials in 1998, his government was pressing the case for Baltic NATO accession (Albright, 1998a). In discussing those NATO countries who would potentially back Baltic membership in 1997, Asmus in internal correspondence had scribbled down that the Balts enjoyed the support of the “plucky Danes” (Asmus, 1997b, p.2). Yet, the staunch Danish support could not, on its own, solve the Baltic ‘defensibility’ equation – a broader Finnish-Swedish buy-in as security guarantors were deemed necessary.

In March 1996, retired British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd had “stirred the pot” further, insinuating in a public speech that Sweden and Finland would be good candidates for assuming a security guardian role for the three Baltic republics (Sharp, 1997). Helsinki and Stockholm were growing visibly infuriated. When US diplomats engaged the Norwegian State Secretary Siri Bjerke on this matter, he noted that Finland and Sweden were becoming “hyper-sensitive to any proposals which suggest regionalization of security structures that might appear to shift the responsibility for security in the Baltics to them” (US Department of State, 1997, p.3). Gradually, Americans acknowledged that Finns and Swedes were rather immovable on this issue. In internal discussions, Strobe Talbot noted that while Helsinki and Stockholm were at the forefront of supporting the Baltic republics’ Western orientation, they visibly had no desire to link their future security with these countries (Edelman, 1997).

Years later, former Finnish Chief of Defence Pauli Juhani Kaskeala publicly asserted that one of the reasons that Finland had refused to join NATO in the mid-1990s was because the country, in case of a conflict with Russia, would have been forced to take responsibility for defending Estonia. “The old members of NATO wanted to ask us [Finland and Sweden] to take responsibility for defending the Baltic states. This expectation had an impact on Finland’s decision not to join NATO”, he asserted

(ERR, 2015). In the end, the Baltic countries joined NATO in 2004 without Finnish and Swedish direct involvement as defence guarantors. The post-9/11 era, during which Washington's relations with Moscow had visibly warmed, had defused the question of Baltic defensibility and they managed to join the transatlantic organisation.

Vision fulfilled: Nordic-Baltic security alignment

Russia's full-scale attack against Ukraine in February 2022, however, forced both Finland and Sweden to rethink their guiding security paradigms and apply for full NATO member status. It is worth noting that already before hoisting the NATO flag, these countries collaborated intensively with other Baltic Sea region countries. After the Russian illegal takeover of Crimea in 2014, a certain alignment in geopolitical thinking and threat perceptions transpired whereby countries like Sweden began to take defence issues more seriously (Ålander and Salo, 2023, p. 56). In many ways, Helsinki and Stockholm, even as non-aligned NATO members, were already steaming in the same direction as the three Baltic states. For instance, they routinely took part in NATO-led regional military exercises, practising interoperability with Baltic Sea states (Banka and Bussmann, 2023, p. 11). As Claudia Major and Alicia von Voss postulated in 2016, the Baltic Sea region had already become "one interdependent military operational area from which no country can withdraw" (Major and von Voss, 2016, p. 3). Russia's unprovoked attack against Ukraine in 2022 only further cemented this notion.

While Finland and Sweden, even as non-aligned countries, were already seen as essential pieces of the broader Baltic Sea region security landscape, their formal NATO membership was nonetheless greeted as a seminal transformational event. Emphasising the difference that their allied status makes, Elgin and Lanoszka (2023, p. 35) underscore that "NATO planners can now assume Swedish and Finnish participation, rather than treating it as a variable". Indeed, across the Baltic capitals, their decision to seek full NATO member status was hailed as a geopolitical "game changer" (Jačasukas, 2022).

Martin Herem, Estonian defence forces commander, for instance, contends that Finnish and Swedish NATO accession provided Estonia with a "completely new angle" to solve its security questions (Bath, 2023). Indeed, various research institutions have drawn attention to the fact that in military terms these Nordic nations are well-placed to make noteworthy contributions to Baltic deterrence and, if need be, defence efforts. Whereas Finnish territory enables the alliance with much-needed strategic depth for defending the Baltics, Sweden brings to the table a first-class navy that can operate in Baltic waters (Pesu, 2023; 2024). According to a report by the Estonian-based International Centre for Defence and Security, Finnish and Swedish accession plugs a "large hole in NATO territory, reducing the isolation and vulnerability of the Baltic states" (Lawrence and Jermalavičius, 2024, p. 4). In sum, their membership undoubtedly redraws the security map in favourable ways for the three Baltic states.

To be clear, the Baltic defence does not rest solely on its new Nordic allies. For the foreseeable future, Washington remains the alliance's ultimate underwriter. What is more, in 2016 NATO agreed to implement the so-called enhanced forward presence model on its eastern flank. As a result, multinational battalion-sized forces are stationed across the Baltic states, led by the United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany. That said, purely due to geography, the Nordic newcomers are bound to play an important role in NATO's defence plans for this region. Inevitably, some responsibility will be transferred to Helsinki and Stockholm. In the run-up to the 2023 Vilnius NATO summit, alliance military planners drew up highly specific classified defence plans detailing what each member would be responsible for in a crisis (Joshi, 2023). Reportedly, Finland and Sweden are already being woven

into these allied plans as defenders of the High North and the Baltics (Holmström, 2024). More than 25 years after US diplomat Ronald Asmus had linked Baltic and Nordic security in a policy memo, his outlined vision is being implemented in practice.

References

- Ainola, O. (2015) 'Miksi Suomi sanoi ei Natolle? Tässä syy', *Ilta-lehti*, 22 March [online]. Available at: <https://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/a/2015032219394833> (Accessed: 8 July 2023)
- Ålander, M. and Salo, S. (2023) 'NATO's Nordic enlargement: Reconfiguring Sweden's foreign policy identity after 200 years of neutrality and non-alignment', *Nordic Review of International Studies* 2, pp. 55-63.
- Albright, M. (1997) 'Memorandum of Conversation Between the President And President Martti Ahtisaari Of Finland', US Department of State, Case No F-2017-13804, Doc No C06702841, 4 April.
- Albright, M. (1998a) 'Deputy Secretary Discusses Nato Enlargement And Kosovo With Danish Defmin', Case No. F-2017-13804, Doc No. C06771955, 9 July.
- Albright, M. (1998b) 'Deputy Secretary's Meeting with Finnish Defense Minister Anneli Taina', US Department of State, Case No. F-2017-13804, Doc No. C06721161, 31 March.
- Archer, C. (1999) 'Nordic Swans and Baltic Cygnets', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 34(1), pp. 47-71. DOI: [10.1177/00108369921961771](https://doi.org/10.1177/00108369921961771)
- Asmus, R.D. (1997a) 'Trip Report', US Department of State, Case No. FL-2017-13804, Doc No. B-00002120045, 18 August.
- Asmus, R.D. (1997b) 'The Hanseatic Strategy', US Department of State, Case No. M-2017-11994, Doc No. C06570058, 20 July.
- Asmus, R.D. (2002) *Opening NATO's Door*. New York: Columbia University Press. DOI: 10.7312/asmu12776
- Banka, A. and Bussmann, M. (2023) 'Uncomfortable neighbors: NATO, Russia and the shifting logic of military exercises in the Baltics', *Defence Studies* 23(1), pp. 1-24. DOI: [10.1080/14702436.2022.2089657](https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2022.2089657)
- Bath, A. (2023) 'Work remains for NATO in Baltic despite adaptations to Russian threat, US admiral says', *Stars and Stripes*, 5 June [online]. Available at: <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2023-06-05/russia-nato-finland-baltops-10331886.html> (Accessed: 2 February 2024)
- Dahl, A. (2011) 'Sweden, Finland and NATO: Security partners and security producers', In Nurick, R. and Nordenman, M. (ed.) 'Nordic-Baltic Security in the 21st Century: The Regional Agenda and the Global Role', *Atlantic Council*. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/nordicbaltic-security-in-the-21st-century/>
- Edelman, E. (1997) 'Official Informal: For Office of the Deputy Secretary (Eric Edelman)', US Department of State, Case No. F-2017-13804, Doc No C06703169, 6 March.
- Edelman, E. (2017) 'Eric Edelman Oral History', *The Miller Center*, 2 June. Available at: <https://millercenter.org/experts/eric-edelman>
- ERR (2015) 'Finnish daily: Finland refused to join NATO for fear of having to defend Estonia', 24 March [online]. Available at: <https://news.err.ee/115468/finnish-daily-finland-refused-to-join-nato-for-fear-of-having-to-defend-estonia> (Accessed: 3 March 2024)
- Holmström, M. (2023) 'Nya arméchefen: Nato flyttar försvaret av Sverige österut', *Dagens Nyheter*, 19 December [online]. Available at: <https://www.dn.se/sverige/nya-armedchefen-nato-flyttar-forsvaret-av-sverige-osterut/> (Accessed: 12 March 2024)

Honkanen, K. (2002) *The Influence of Small States on NATO Decision-Making*. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency.

Jačasuskas, I. 2022. 'Finland, Sweden in NATO Would Be Game Changer for Baltic Security – Lithuanian PM', *LRT*, 14 April [online]. Available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1673389/finland-sweden-in-nato-would-be-game-changer-for-baltic-security-lithuanian-pm> (Accessed: 12 March 2024)

Janeliūnas, T. (2021) 'Changes and adjustment in the foreign policy of Lithuania during Dalia Grybauskaitė's presidency', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 52(2), pp. 221-244. DOI: [10.1080/01629778.2021.1876120](https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2021.1876120)

Joshi, S. (2023) 'NATO is drafting new plans to defend Europe', *The Economist*, 2 July [online]. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/international/2023/07/02/nato-is-drafting-new-plans-to-defend-europe> (Accessed: 11 March 2024)

Kasekamp, A. and McNamara, E.M. (2018) *From the Cold War's End to the Ukraine Crisis: NATO's Enduring Value for Estonia's Security Policy*, in Zyla, B. and Kammel, A. *West or East? - Eastern and Southern Europe's Belonging after the Ukrainian Crisis*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

Kjellström Elgin, K. and Lanoszka, A. (2023) 'Sweden, Finland, And The Meaning Of Alliance Membership', *Texas National Security Review* 6(2), pp. 35-56. DOI: [10.26153/tsw/46144](https://doi.org/10.26153/tsw/46144)

Kuldkepp, M. Piirimäe, K. and Aunesluoma, J. (2022) 'Baltic crisis: Nordic and Baltic countries during the end stage of the Cold War', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 47(3), pp. 271-279. DOI: [10.1080/03468755.2022.2025896](https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2022.2025896)

Lawrence T. and Jermalavičius, T. (2024) 'The Newest Allies Finland and Sweden in NATO', *International Centre for Defence and Security*, 12 March [online]. Available at: <https://icds.ee/en/the-newest-allies-finland-and-sweden-in-nato/> (Accessed: 13 March 2024)

Liljegren, C.H.S. (1996) 'Letter to Secretary Talbott', US Department of State, Case No. FL-2017-13804, Doc No. A-00000657558, 2 December.

Major, C. and von Voss, A. (2016) 'Nordic-Baltic Security, Germany and NATO', *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, 10 March [online]. Available at: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/nordic-baltic-security-germany-and-nato/> (Accessed: 8 February 2024)

McNamara, E. M., Nordenman, M. and Salonijs-Pasternak, C. (2015) 'Nordic-Baltic Security and US Foreign Policy. A Durable Transatlantic Link?', *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, Working Paper 87 [online]. Available at: <https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/wp87.pdf> (Accessed: 12 March 2024)

Mouritzen, H. (2007) 'Denmark's Super Atlanticism', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 5(2), pp. 155-167. DOI: [10.1080/14794019908656861](https://doi.org/10.1080/14794019908656861)

Olesen, M.R. (2022) 'The beginnings of Danish foreign policy activism: Supporting Baltic independence 1990-1991', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 47(4), pp. 370-390. DOI: [10.1080/03468755.2022.2034664](https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2022.2034664)

Pesu, M. (2023) 'Nato In The North: The Emerging Division Of Labour In Northern European Security', *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, Briefing Paper 370.

Pesu, M. (2024) 'Finland in NATO: an emerging Nordic- Atlantic orientation?', *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 22(1), pp. 35-42. Available at: <https://journals.lka.lt/journal/lasr/article/2191/info>

Sharp, J. (1997) 'British Views on NATO Enlargement', *NATO*, 7 October [online]. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/docu/1997/199707/19970701a.htm>

www.nato.int/acad/conf/enlarg97/sharp.htm (Accessed: 12 February 2024)

Shearer, D. (1995a) 'Visit Schedule And Background For Briefing Papers', US Department of State Virtual, Case No. F-2012-27671, Doc No. C0528309, 18 July.

Shearer, D. (1995b) 'Depsec Talbott Discusses Baltics/Estonia With Finns And Estonian Foreign Minister', US Department of State, Case No. F-2017-13804, Doc No. C06700554, 2 August.

Talbott, S. (1996a) 'Finnish Ambassador's Farewell Call On The Deputy Secretary', US Department of State, Case No. F-2017-13804, Doc No. C06697800, 6 February.

Talbott, S. (1996b) 'The Deputy Secretary's Meeting with Estonian Foreign Minister Kallas', US Department of State, Case No. F-2017-13804, Doc No. C06697970, 25 March.

Talbott, S. (1997) 'Note From Strobe Talbott To Derek Shearer w/Attached Facsimile Transmission', US Department of State, Case No. FL-2017-13804, Doc No. A-00000657567, 12 December.

US Department of State (1997) 'Deputy Secretary Talbott 5/21 Meeting With Norwegian Mfa State Secretary Bjerke', Case No F-2017-13804, Doc No C06703287, 21 May.

US National Security Council (1997) 'Declassified Documents Related to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)', Clinton Digital Library, Identifier: 2015-0772-M.

Wieslander, A. (2019) 'NATO at Seventy – Post Cold War Enlargement', *German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)*, 18 March.

Discussion Article

Adieu neutrality: The dwindling power of Nordic non-alignment

Brendan Humphreys, Senior Researcher, Aleksanteri Institute

Abstract

With the decisions of Finland and Sweden to join NATO, a long chapter of Nordic neutrality is suddenly closed. This article examines the often misunderstood term ‘neutrality’ and the problems of finding a single definition relevant to post-Cold War politics. It then looks at the unique role and high profile that the Nordics have enjoyed in diplomacy and peacekeeping. Finally, it asks if NATO membership for Sweden and Finland is detrimental to international diplomacy and conflict resolution.

Keywords

Nordic, neutrality, NATO, diplomacy

Introduction

One immediate consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the accession first of Finland, and then in March 2024 of Sweden, into NATO. This was a significant subtraction from the small number of western European states committed to a policy – or philosophy – of neutrality. Those still standing are Austria, the Republic of Ireland, Malta, and Switzerland, but unlike Finland, none of them share a border with Russia. That said, Russian brinkmanship and threats have extended far beyond its borders. For example, Dmitry Kiselyov, the Kremlin-aligned broadcaster, spoke of Russia using nuclear weapons off Ireland’s Atlantic coast to send a tsunami over the British Isles (The Irish Times, 2022). Threats against Sweden significantly helped shift opinion in the country. To quote Gunilla Herolf of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs: “As for Swedes, the realisation that their country may be a future target for Russia came already in 2013. The decisive event was when on Easter Friday, 2013, Russian bomber planes made a mock attack on Stockholm and southern Sweden, turning away just outside the territorial border” (TPQ, 2022). It is a classic self-fulfilling prophecy: the Kremlin’s attempts to stop the eastward enlargement of NATO have ensured that it has come to pass.

Could it have been different, that is, was European security vis-a-vis Russia mismanaged following the Cold War? There is certainly a robust debate about the end of the Cold War and European security among historians and IR scholars. The maximalist position, as extolled by John Mearsheimer, is that NATO expansion caused the Ukraine War. In a recent interview, he stated: “The responsibility for this war, in my opinion, lies squarely in the West and really in Washington” (Judging Freedom, 2024). A more midway position is held by scholars like Richard Sakwa, who wrote in 2017 that “Russia was subjected to various forms of ‘soft containment’ which has hardened over time. The crisis in Ukraine in 2014 was a symptom and not the cause of the breakdown in European security” (Sakwa, 2017). Prior to him, there were others, most notably George Kennan, the theorist of the Cold War policy of containment, who insisted that NATO enlargement was a bad idea and would be resisted by Russia. Interestingly, the arguments for and against enlargement did not fall neatly into left vs right on the political spectrum. To quote British conservative Peter Hitchens: “Not many causes unite Chomsky and Kissinger. The folly of NATO expansion is one” (X, 2022). Unfortunately, we will never know what type of Russia might have emerged in the 1990s had things been different, but we have ample evidence of the type of Russia we are dealing with, hence the huge shift away from neutrality in the security thinking of Sweden and Finland. The term *neutrality* itself is also worth examining.

Defining neutrality

An editorial of DLP (Diplomacy, Law, Policy) defines neutrality as: “Under customary international law, all states have the right to refrain from engaging in an armed conflict by adopting neutral status. The law of neutrality confers rights (notably that of inviolability) and imposes duties (of impartiality and abstention) on neutral states as well as belligerents in regard to neutral states (to respect their impartiality and insist upon their inviolability)” (DLP, 2023). The law is grounded in The Hague Conventions V and XIII (1907). The authors go on to note that this was an era in which states issued declarations of war before engaging in conflict, and there was a somewhat clearer demarcation between war and peace than currently exists. States no longer declare war and therefore “the law of neutrality has been subject to some criticism for being outdated” (Ibid, 2023).

Writing in 2011, Christine Agius and Karen Devine noted the difficulty of finding a single definition for neutrality post-Cold War; they spoke of “the current era of post-neutral, former neutrals, military non-aligned and non-allied states...”. This was in response to a 1999 article by Laurent Goteschel

which argued that neutrality still had value but decreasing relevance. The 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in eastern Ukraine have changed the landscape from *post*-Cold War to something closer to *neo*-Cold War. It hardly needs to be said that this polarisation has increased since February 2022.

The definitions of neutrality in the remaining non-aligned European countries are not identical; for example, Switzerland's 'armed neutrality' shields it from some external criticism. Such criticism argues that western European neutrals are benefiting from NATO without contributing to it, yet alone making sufficient provision for their own defence. For example, Franz-Stefan Gady writes "Naturally, this security free-riding is breeding resentment among non-neutrals, most of which spend a significantly higher share of GDP on defence or have plans to do so. Austria, Ireland, and Malta expect others to fight on their behalf, while they are unwilling to do the same for their neighbors" (Foreign Policy, 2023).

Neutrality is sometimes confused rather vaguely with a form of high idealism that pervades all aspects of society. For example, Swedish author Gunnar Ardelius wrote that "We still cling to the creed that we are a peaceful society for example, but no other country in Europe shows increases in gun violence comparable to that in Sweden" (Guardian, 2024). Why is there a conflation here of a consistent foreign policy stance and a recent increase in domestic crime rates? The Republic of Ireland has maintained neutrality for a century yet has a tradition of domestic political violence, but the latter does not invalidate the former. Indeed, it might be the recent memory of bloodshed that preserves a commitment to neutrality.

It must be noted that Sweden and Finland were not identical in terms of neutrality. Sweden had been called a 'moral superpower' whereas Finland's low-key approach during the Cold War gave the term 'Finlandization' to the political lexicon. (Oceans of ink have been spilled on this phrase, and it need not be revisited here.) However, the policies of both countries reflected some of the better values of Nordic society: democracy, egalitarianism, and a belief in international law and the value of diplomacy. The contributions of the Nordics to international peacekeeping and diplomacy are striking – even if Denmark is not as prominent. Two out of nine UN Secretary Generals (Norwegian Trygve Lie and Swedish Dag Hammarskjöld) were from the region, as were several other high-ranking UN staff, such as Gunnar Jarring and Max Jacobson, and the most prestigious global peace prize in the world – the Nobel – is awarded by Norway. Helsinki hosted the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which promoted *détente* in the 1970s.

In particular, peacekeeping efforts in the Middle East have been prominent, if not always appreciated or successful. From the Jarring Mission to the Oslo Accords, Nordic diplomacy has tried to mitigate or even end the seemingly intractable Arab/Israel conflict. Finland's military credibility has secured a role in these processes; the first Finnish UN peacekeepers were deployed to Egypt following the 1956 Suez Crisis, and later General Ensio Siilasvuo would also coordinate disengagement and peacekeeping following the 1973 Yom Kippur War. His memoirs offer insights into the difficulties and frustrations of peacekeeping missions, as well as a generous and affectionate portrait of the Middle East and its peoples (Siilasvuo, 1992).

In addition to the most prominent post-World War 2 Swedish diplomats, the above-mentioned Hammarskjöld (1905-1961), and Olof Palme (1927-1986), it is worth recalling two prominent wartime diplomats, both of whom were instrumental in saving tens of thousands of lives from Nazi camps. These were Raoul Wallenberg (1912-disappeared 1945), and Count Folke Bernadotte (1895-1948). All four men died unnatural deaths, although only Bernadotte's is clearly a politically-motivated murder – he was shot by the Israeli paramilitary Stern Gang. Wallenberg died under Soviet imprisonment,

although the year has not been established beyond doubt. Hammerskjöld died in the line of duty trying to resolve the Katanga breakaway crises in the Congo, although it remains to be proven if the fatal plane crash was caused deliberately. Unresolved too is the reason for, and agent of, Palme's assassination in Stockholm. It is worth emphasising the loss of life because, to its critics, neutrality often implies a lack of commitment.

Neutral and/or NATO-sceptical?

In a present day European, and more specifically Nordic, context, neutrality is often shorthand for non-NATO. This either/or definition has been amplified recently with the accession of Finland and Sweden. Certainly, NATO has always had Western critics. Among them was Mauno Koivisto who served as Finnish President from 1982 to 1994. He stated in an interview that the argumentation was always negative, based on what Finland will miss out on by not joining the alliance (YLE, 2003).

Other critics of NATO have been far more direct in their argumentation. Simon Jenkins is one; "NATO was founded in 1949 in response to Stalin's blockade of Berlin. It was intended to 'keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down'. Since then, it has welcomed the American nuclear shield, at vast cost to America. Otherwise, its only military achievements have been the breakup of Yugoslavia and the loss of a squalid 17-year war in Afghanistan. Neither has anything to do with the North Atlantic" (Jenkins, 2018). This critical judgement pre-dates NATO's final denouement in Afghanistan. This was a massive failure by any measure; the televised images of people literally clinging to, and falling from, departing Western aeroplanes, evoked the fall of Saigon in 1975. The cold facts were that after 20 years, NATO-led forces withdrew from Afghanistan but left in place the Taliban regime they had gone there to remove from power. The Soviets, in *their* occupation of Afghanistan, had cut their losses and departed after eight years.

There are troubling reports of potential war crimes committed by NATO forces (and other combatants) in Afghanistan. There have been investigations and prosecutions by the US, Australia, and other countries of their armed forces. Were the investigations and prosecutions sufficient in scale? Voices from the Global South think not. To quote one highly-charged Chinese opinion piece:

NATO, the world's most powerful military alliance, has earned itself a reputation for brutality. In the name of freedom and democracy they came, and in the name of protecting the people they inflicted harm. Those who are most vocal about defending human rights have committed some of the most horrible crimes against humanity. Action is long overdue. The innocent people are crying out for justice. It is time to put the perpetrators in the dock and hold them accountable. (Global Times, 2022).

This is worth quoting not for its objectivity, but rather because this is the harsh light by which NATO actions are judged by many around the globe. They see double standards that seem to favor the Atlantic countries, especially the United States. Sweden and Finland will now be lumped together with an alliance that is viewed with some hostility by the Global South. During the negotiations to end the Kosovo War in 1999, Finland was an ideal partner because of its (then) good relations with Russia, whose presence was needed to reassure the Yugoslav/Serbian government. It did not seem to matter that the chief negotiator – the late President Martti Ahtisaari – was himself strongly pro-NATO; Finland's neutrality was trusted. Such moments in international diplomacy will now surely be less frequent, if they are even possible, at least at state level. This is lamentable, but new security realities have presented themselves.

“Neutrality facilitates offering good offices”

Speaking in October 2023, Gilles Carbonnier, the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, made a robust defence of neutrality. Noting that “Conflicts often result in extreme polarization. Everyone is expected to take sides”, he continued “Yet, the ICRC always strives to preserve a space for neutral and impartial humanitarian action.”

Remaining neutral does not mean that the ICRC does not care about the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict, or that we do not take action. To the contrary! Neutrality is what allows us to fulfill our mandate. Remaining neutral is a condition to reach people affected by armed conflict and provide them with assistance. (ICRC, 2023)

With Swiss neutrality in mind, Marco Sassòli writes: “Neutrality facilitates offering good offices, including the role of ‘international Geneva’”. He continues “Neutrality is profoundly anchored in the self-perception of the Swiss people. They are convinced that it preserved them from the horrors of three major wars in Europe during the last 150 years. Finally, neutrality also decisively contributes to the particularity of Switzerland, in particular in the eyes of public opinion in the Global South” (The Defense Horizon Journal, 2023).

Sweden, to a very high degree, and Finland, to a lesser extent, have been able to offer ‘good offices’ for international diplomacy, arbitration, and peace-keeping. One high-profile case was the 1999 Račak controversy in Kosovo. Two forensic teams were allowed to examine the corpses at the site of the massacre. One was a joint Belarussian/Yugoslav team and the second a Finnish team working on behalf of the EU led by Dr. Helena Ranta. Only the findings of the latter were considered credible by the international community.

A distinguished chapter of Nordic diplomacy has now come to an end. Formal re-alignment will diminish the possibility of such good offices in the future, although individual bodies like the Helsinki-based Crisis Management Initiative will continue their work in conflict resolution, but operating below state level.

Meanwhile, some countries currently under questionable regimes have offered their services as ‘honest brokers’ in international conflict. These include Belarus and China in the Russian war on Ukraine and some of the Gulf States and Turkey (itself a NATO member) in the Gaza war. Liudmyla Kuriosikova assesses China’s intentions thus: “China’s position emphasises its ‘neutrality’ on the grounds that it is not a ‘related party on the crisis of Ukraine’, but at the same time, it strengthens its relations with Russia.” These relations entail “deepening China-Russia ‘no-limits partnership’ and have led to significant economic and military collaboration” (GMF, 30 July 2024).

Authoritarian Turkish President Erdogan has offered his services “to mediate in the conflict in Israel and Gaza, including by negotiating a potential prisoner exchange” (Wall Street Journal, 2023). So too have repressive Gulf Arab regimes, eager to boost their status and have their human rights abuses overlooked. Their efforts have been largely self-serving, a means to boost their legitimacy and international prestige; they may well have valid interests, but they also have serious human rights issues. The process is not unlike ‘sportswashing’, for which the Gulf States are notorious. These diplomatic offices would be better served by neutral states working without a self-serving agenda. However, as discussed above, neutrals are increasingly rare in Europe, and now non-existent in the Nordics.

References

- Agius, C. and Devine, K. (2011) ‘Neutrality: A really dead concept?’ A reprise’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 265–284.
- Ålander, M. and Salo, S. (2023) ‘NATO’s Nordic enlargement, Reconfiguring Sweden’s foreign policy identity after 200 years of neutrality and non-alignment’, *Nordic Review of International Studies*, 2/2023, 55–63.
- Carbonnier, G. (2023) *The critical importance of neutrality, a humanitarian perspective into a multi-polar world* [Online]. Available at; <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/critical-importance-neutrality-humanitarian-perspective-multipolar-world> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Diplomacy, Law, Policy (2023) <https://www.dlpforum.org/2023/05/05/the-law-of-neutrality/> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Gady, F. (2023) ‘Why Neutrality is Obsolete in the 21st Century’, *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/04/finland-sweden-nato-neutral-austria-ireland-switzerland-russia-war/> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Gallagher, C. (2022) ‘Russian state TV shows clips simulating Ireland being wiped out by nuclear weapons’, *The Irish Times*. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/russian-state-tv-shows-clips-simulating-ireland-being-wiped-out-by-nuclear-weapons-1.4867631> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Goetschel, L. (1999) ‘Neutrality, a Really Dead Concept?’ *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 115–139.
- Herol, G. (2022) ‘The Nordic Countries, Divided and United’, *The Transatlantic Policy Quarterly (TPQ)*. <http://transatlanticpolicy.com/blog/82/the-nordic-countries-divided-and-united> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Hilpold, P., Gillibert, M., Rainio-Niemi, J. and Sassòli, M. (2023) ‘Neutrality in Law in a comparative perspective; Austria, Switzerland, Finland’, *The Defense Horizon Journal*. <https://tdhj.org/blog/post/neutrality-law-comparison-austria-switzerland-finland/> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Hitchens, P. (2022), X
- ICRC (2023) <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/critical-importance-neutrality-humanitarian-perspective-multipolar-world> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Jenkins, S. (2018) ‘Donald Trump is right. NATO is a costly white elephant’, *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/12/donald-trump-nato-costly-white-elephant-russia> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Judging Freedom (2024) *Pro. John Mearsheimer: Who/What Caused the War in Ukraine?* [Online]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2-Wu6JQzp4&t=170s&ab_channel=JudgeNapolitano-JudgingFreedom (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Kurnosikova, L. (2024) ‘Engaging Beijing for Peace: Strategies for Ukraine’, *GMF*. <https://www.gmfus.org/news/engaging-beijing-peace-strategies-ukraine> (Accessed 9 August 2024)
- Malsin, J. (2023) ‘Erdogan Says Turkey Is Willing to Help Negotiate Potential Prisoner Exchange’, *Wall Street Journal*.
- Ping, X. (2022) ‘NATO war crimes should be held to account’, *Global Times*. <https://www.globaltimes>.

[cn/page/202208/1272102.shtml](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/31/putinism-russia-1989-world-order-rejected) (Accessed 9 August 2024)

Sakwa, R. (2017) 'Russia's 1989 plea for a new world order was rejected, and so Putinism was born', *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/31/putinism-russia-1989-world-order-rejected> (Accessed 9 August 2024)

Siilasvuo, E. (1992) *In the Service of Peace in the Middle East 1967-1979*, London: C. Hurst, New York: St. Martin's Press.

YLE (2003) *Koivisto: Ei Natolle ja EU-kansanäänestykselle* [Online]. Available at: <https://yle.fi/a/3-5150654>

Discussion Article

Russian information campaigns and NATO in the Arctic

Mathieu Landriault, Adjunct Professor, the École Nationale d'Administration Publique

Julie Renaud, Researcher, Observatory on Politics and Security in the Arctic

Abstract

This discussion article presents evidence of how Russia mounts information campaigns through its press agencies to discredit NATO's presence in the Arctic region. The analysis highlights how and when different framings of NATO's actions in the Arctic region are disseminated by Russian press agencies. The discussion article suggests strategies to counter these campaigns as well as recommendations for policy-makers and researchers to better monitor Russian disinformation on the Arctic region.

Keywords

disinformation, NATO, information campaigns, Russia

Introduction

The unprecedented rate at which global warming unfolds has increased access to the Arctic region. Global warming has caused Arctic waterways to be ice-free for a longer period, especially in the Russian Arctic. The pace at which this dynamic will continue to develop, as well as the exact nature of its impact on different parts of the Arctic is difficult to properly evaluate. Such uncertainty is fertile ground for online disinformation. Disinformation is about deliberately and willingly spreading false information. Sovereign states (and many other non-state actors) are partaking in disinformation, integrating this type of information in informational campaigns. These informational campaigns are concerted and coherent efforts by a political actor to frame issues and influence others to shape their perceptions of current events and developments. For example, wild predictions, fabricated information and conspiracy theories are promoted and disseminated by rivals who wish to shape the informational environment to their advantage.

These efforts create informational competition, where narratives of different actors, including states, are promoted and spread out to impose their preferred perception of reality. Such informational campaigns and competition are deployed to describe the Arctic geopolitical landscape. This is not surprising considering that Arctic states are attempting to ensure that they retain a predominant status in their region. Control over shipping lanes (especially the Northern Sea Route in Northern Russia) and extraction of renewable and non-renewable resources are strategic objectives for the Arctic states.

In this context, studying Russian disinformation is pivotal as the Russian state has led several coordinated disinformation campaigns to undermine the legitimacy of democratic elections and credibility of authority figures in the West (Fallis, 2015; Lemke and Habegger, 2022). Of course, Russian disinformation is not at play on every single topic. Some Arctic issues, for example, were not subjected to disinformation campaigns (LaFortune and Landriault, 2024; Nae, 2022). It is then imperative to empirically analyse which Arctic issues are more subject to fall victim to Russian disinformation campaigns. Among these, the presence of NATO in the Arctic region is certainly one of these probable issues.

Because there is a high degree of uncertainty about the future of the region, strategic interests are at play for Arctic and non-Arctic states alike. For Arctic states, the main objective is to retain their dominance in a region where they have territory. For non-Arctic states, they want to have a role to play in a region opening up more and more to human activities, including resource extraction and possible shipping lanes. In this sense, framing the Arctic as an area of cooperation or competition will be part of this informational competition and could be used to justify the future governance institutions of the region. The same can be said about defining which threats are looming over the region. There was a consensus a few years ago that the Arctic region was characterised by cooperation and represented a zone of peace (Young, 2011, p. 180). Recent developments are casting doubts over this assessment.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine brought forth a more confrontational approach from Russia to exploit weaknesses or soft spots of Western countries. This can be observed in relation to Norway and especially Svalbard after 2022. Even though Norway has sovereignty over Svalbard, the archipelago is governed by a treaty which allows foreign nationals to live, trade and exploit resources in Svalbard. Already, Russian symbolic displays in Svalbard have multiplied to the point where Russian nationalism is visible: from displaying the flag to public rallies. These actions occurred against the backdrop of Russian press agencies relaying the Kremlin's accusations that Norway violated the 1920

Svalbard treaty, partook in a military build-up on the archipelago and denied Russia's access to the territory.

Finland's and Sweden's accessions to NATO will change Arctic relations, with seven of eight members of the Arctic Council being NATO allies. Finland and Sweden have already been the target of Russian disinformation campaigns in the lead up and after their respective NATO accessions. The objective is clear: to sow social dissent and to fracture NATO's solidarity. In this case, Russian informational campaigns are also combined with other actions launching hybrid threats at Western countries. The recent Russian initiative to send illegal migrants to the Finnish-Russian border was a recent example of this dynamic: the initiative was accompanied by important Russian media coverage to frame the crisis and provide shocking images.

More broadly speaking, the increased number of military exercises conducted by both Russia and Western allies in (or near) the Arctic region will exacerbate this informational competition. These drills typically represent flashpoints where the protagonist conducting the exercise will frame it as benign and defensive while the rival actor will cast it as offensive, disruptive and threatening, as documented through media coverage of the 2018 NATO exercise Trident Juncture, which was conducted in Norway (Landriault and MacDonald, 2019). With Russia attempting to reach out to non-Arctic states (BRICS countries, for example) to counterbalance Arctic Western states' cooperation, disinformation campaigns on Arctic issues and about the role of NATO in the Arctic are likely to multiply and intensify. Hence, it is pivotal to analyse Russian disinformation strategies to be able to respond in kind, providing counter-narratives and debunking Russian disinformation in real time.

Six themes of Russian Arctic communications

Russian information campaigns to discredit NATO's presence in the Arctic started well before Finland and Sweden submitted applications to join NATO. NATO Allies' cooperation with Norway and stops at Northern Norwegian ports (especially Tromsø) unleashed Russian disinformation prior to 2022. The goal was to highlight dissent in Allied countries and amplify discontent due to US presence in Norway. American and British military ships sailing close to the Russian Arctic in 2020 started a similar fury in Russian media coverage: the objective of Russian press agencies was to frame NATO countries as belligerent and solely responsible for heightened tension. The desire by both Russia and NATO members to deploy military exercises in the region to test operational capabilities and train soldiers in a cold climate provoked adversarial reactions from the opposite parties. These recent examples are all evidence of Russian disinformation increasing on Arctic issues and attracted the interest of academics. Researchers Lackenbauer, Bouffard and Lajeunesse (2022) have identified six themes in Russian communication tactics that are connected to NATO or NATO Allies in the Arctic:

Theme 1: The US and NATO are a destabilising force in the Arctic; the growing presence of NATO in the Arctic is presented as changing the fragile, peaceful equilibrium that prevailed prior.

Theme 2: Arctic states are pawns of the US; a hierarchical and simplistic vision of the Alliance is presented, with the US fully dictating orders to Allies and imposing their will to subordinate their interests to American interests.

Theme 3: The idea of a Russian threat is ridiculous; this theme is the flip side of Theme 1. While American and NATO presence is cast as threatening, Russian military exercises are presented as routine and banal.

Theme 4: NATO and the US are poor houseguests; Russia's disinformation will focus and highlight negative consequences or protest spurred by local communities when NATO or US forces disembark

at a Northern port or facility.

Theme 5: US colonialism and interference in internal Arctic states' affairs; the US is framed as meddling in the internal affairs of Arctic states by playing favourites or worsening internal tension. An example is the media coverage of Trump's idea to purchase Greenland.

Theme 6: Participation of Arctic states in US/EU sanctions damages their own Arctic economic interests; an extension of Theme 2, Arctic states should focus on their own interests, while pursuing economic cooperation with Russia that is presented as beneficial.

The presence of the US in most of these narratives is anything but surprising: the country is the most frequently mentioned nation in articles referring to the Arctic by Russian press agencies. There is a tendency in these agencies to allocate a disproportionate amount of attention to the US as great power competition accelerated in the past five years, with great power interests diverging in several key areas. Along with this array of themes comes the importance of properly distinguishing between those that are central and repeated at will, and those that have more of a dormant or punctual nature, ready to be reactivated on an *ad hoc* basis. The former requires a counter-narrative that is deployed on a long-term horizon while the latter calls for a quick response team to counter disinformation. For example, Theme 1 is most likely to require a permanent and long-term communication strategy while Theme 4, NATO/US as poor houseguests, deserves quick responses to redress Russian disinformation on the spot. The latter point will often be raised when US vessels, aircrafts or soldiers are transiting or exercising on the territory of a fellow ally: public outreach campaigns and transparency will dissipate most doubts about the intentions behind this presence.

Despite the publication of articles almost every month from 2020 to 2023 (the only exceptions were January and March 2022), certain events have caused a surge in Russian media coverage on the subject. We analysed articles published in TASS and Sputnik from January 2020 to February 2023 to assess the popularity of the six Arctic core themes. In order to gather these articles, we looked for articles in the two outlets that used the keywords "NATO" and "Arctic". Then, we manually coded the occurrences of these 6 themes in these articles, counting in how many articles a theme was articulated. In total, 224 articles were published with these keywords and close to 80% of articles had one of the six themes listed by Lackenbauer, Bouffard and Lajeunesse, with a majority of these articles containing more than one theme.

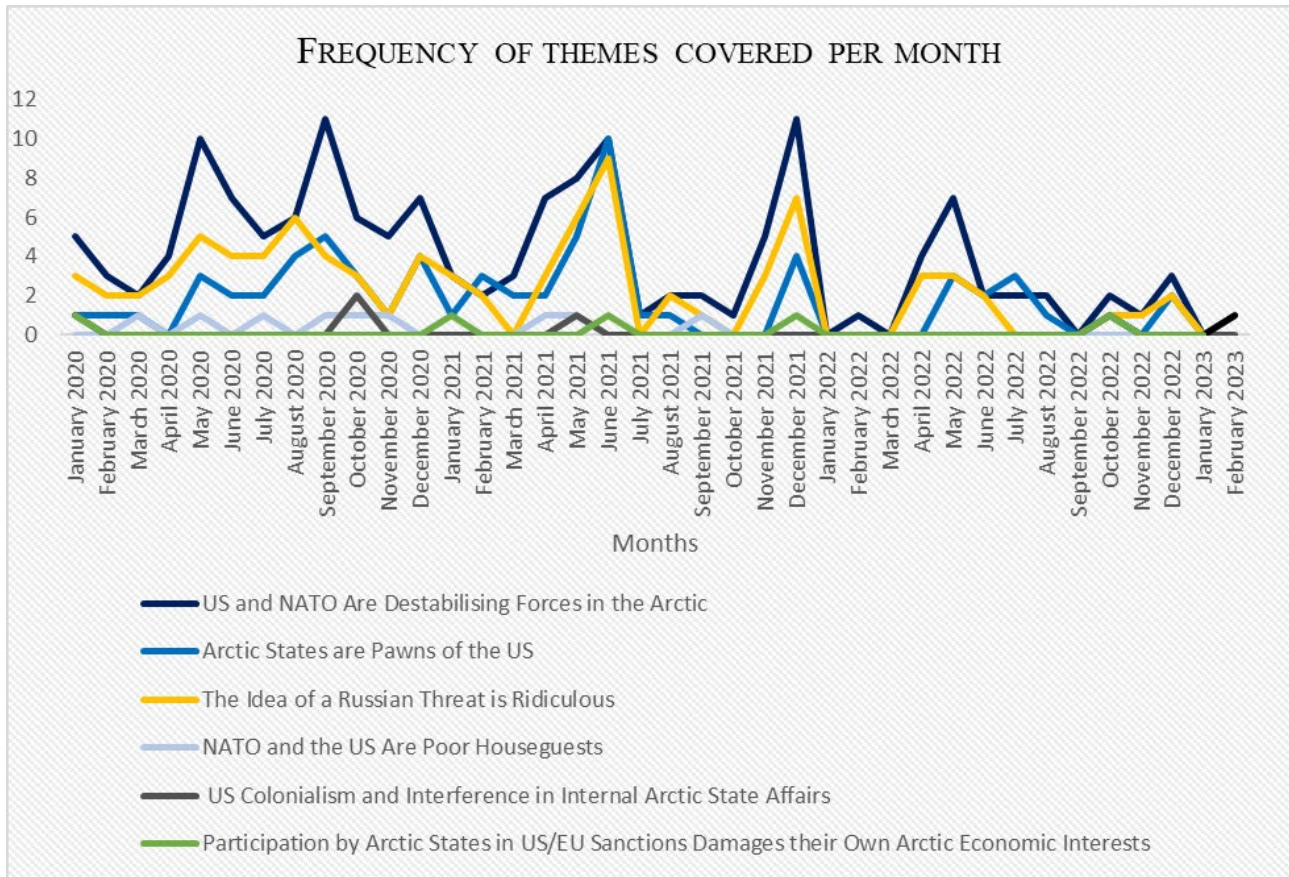


Figure 1. Frequency of themes covered per month.

Four peaks or periods of intense coverage appear on this timeline: May 2020, September 2020, June 2021 and December 2021.

The first rise in the number of articles in May 2020 can be attributed to media coverage by Russian press agencies of a military exercise by the US and UK in the Barents Sea. This time period is dominated by the themes *Destabilizing forces in the Arctic* and *Idea of a Russian Threat is Ridiculous*. According to Russian media, NATO was expanding into the Arctic, and the Alliance’s increased activities in the region were undermining the regional cooperation to which Russia subscribed. In a similar vein, the same themes prevailed in September 2020, when military exercises were conducted near the Russian Arctic, when a NATO group was led by the destroyer USS Ross. A similar pattern emerged in December 2021, when Russian press agencies came back several times on a joint air patrol conducted by the US and Norway in Northern Norway. In all three cases, Russian disinformation was in direct relation to a US or NATO military exercise or patrol in the Arctic. In June 2021, media attention was propelled by the Biden-Putin Summit in Geneva. All these events were dominated by the mobilisation of the themes *Destabilizing forces in the Arctic* and *Idea of a Russian Threat is Ridiculous* in the Russian communications strategy. In these instances, we observed that Russia is quick and active at framing NATO initiatives to fit their strategic interests: undermining the legitimacy of the Alliance by representing the actions of NATO members as nefarious and destructive.

From January 2020 to February 2023, the theme *Destabilizing forces in the Arctic* was found in 205 articles, making it the most discussed theme, followed by the *Idea of a Russian Threat is Ridiculous* (91) and *Arctic States are Pawns of the US* (72) (Figure 2). These three narratives represent the core of Russian disinformation towards NATO, while the other three themes are secondary or offshoots of

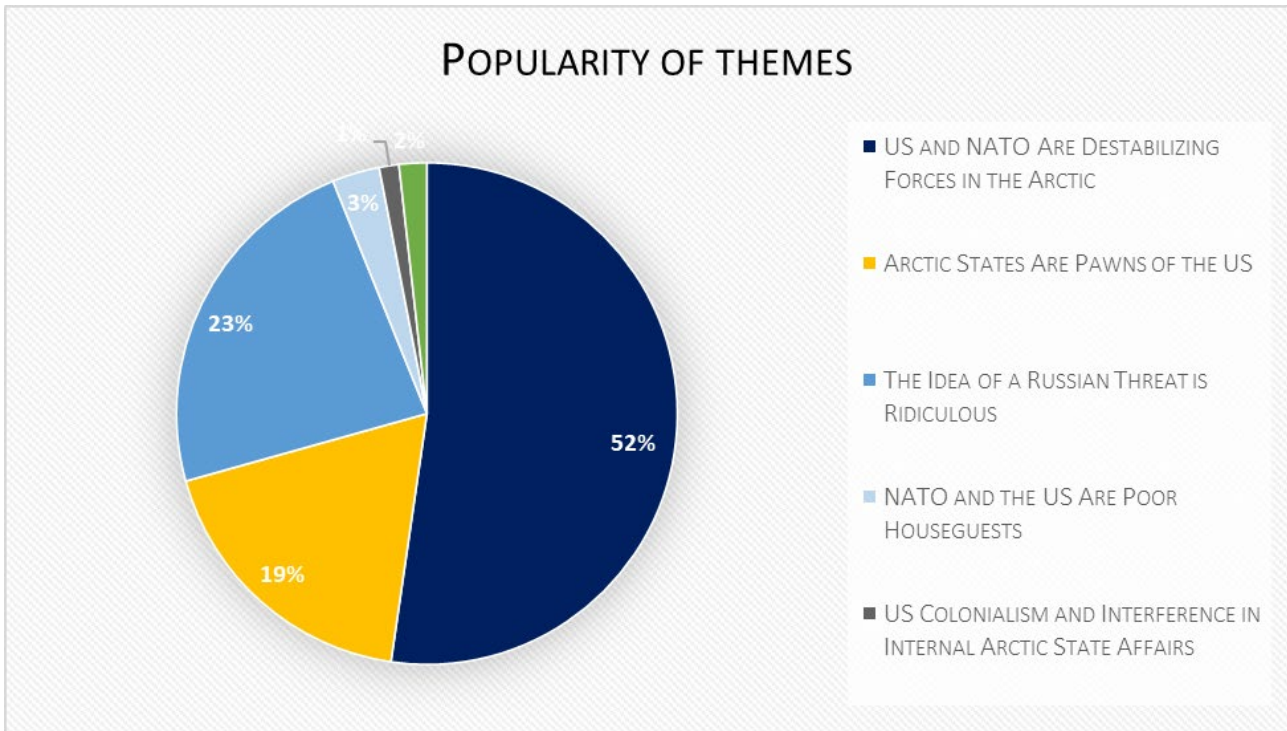


Figure 2. Popularity of themes from January 2020 to February 2023.

the three core narratives. All these narratives are typically woven together in Russian press agencies, one theme co-occurring often with the other: some themes are assembled to emphasise malicious US or NATO interests and downplay Russian intent. As can be seen in Table 1 (below), downplaying the Russian threat in the Arctic means almost systematically fear mongering about NATO or the US. The posited dependency of Arctic states on the US is also framed as contributing to destabilise the region, suggesting in Russian informational tactics an overblown assessment of the Russian threat. Arctic states are presented as US puppets, unable of agency and led to initiate to purely suit US interests rather than their own.

Table 1. Occurrences of different frames in Russian press agencies.

Themes appearing together in an article	Number of articles
US and NATO are destabilising forces and the idea of a Russian threat is ridiculous	79
US and NATO are destabilising forces and Arctic states are pawns of the US	56
Arctic states are pawns of the US and the idea of a Russian threat is ridiculous	38
US and NATO are destabilising forces and NATO/US are poor houseguests	7
Arctic states are pawns of the US and NATO/US are poor houseguests	7

The themes *Arctic states’ sanctions damage their own interests*, *US and NATO are poor houseguests* and *US colonialism* are present in less than 15 press articles over this time period. However, it is interesting to note that whenever economic sanctions are mentioned in an article, they are accompanied by the themes *Arctic States are pawns of the US* and/or *the idea of a Russian threat is ridiculous*. The theme *pawns of the US* is also treated alongside the theme of *US and NATO as poor houseguests*. In these associations, Russian press agencies accuse the US and NATO of forcing new military installations onto the territory of their Allies and degrading the environment.

Messaging about the Arctic after 24 February 2022

The Russian invasion of Ukraine created consequences for Arctic governance, with Western states suspending cooperation with Russia in different forums, including the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. Around the beginning of the war, there was a slight drop in Russian media coverage of the Arctic in relation to NATO. However, there was an increase in May 2022, attributable to the announcement by Sweden and Finland of their decision to join NATO. Russian intention here was clear: portray NATO enlargement as jeopardising Arctic stability and creating a source of tension for the Arctic region.

The accessions of these two countries ran counter to Russian Arctic interests by isolating Russia on the circumpolar scene. This increase was thus particularly linked to the theme *Destabilizing force in the Arctic*. During this period, the theme was frequently treated in conjunction with *The idea of a Russian threat is ridiculous* and *Arctic States are pawns of the US*. Moreover, these articles tended to frame the Arctic as the scene of a new Cold War, pitting the US and its Western allies against Russia and China. This was accomplished by presenting Russia and China as respecting international law and treaties (in a very selective way) while the US was not: ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea by China and Russia (but not the US) was, for example, presented as evidence. Russian media outlets also presented Russia-China Arctic cooperation as running counter to US intentions in the region: China and Russia were described as possessing shared interests and representing a unified front against US Arctic interests.

The narrative of NATO's Arctic expansion and discussions surrounding Ukrainian membership in the Alliance also began to be linked together in Russian press agencies. This tendency can also be seen in the association of *Destabilising forces* with the theme of *Economic sanctions*, as articles accused NATO of undermining regional economic cooperation. The Russian press spoke of destabilisation brought on by NATO and its Allies in the Arctic, similar to that caused by Washington's "provocative measures against China" in the Indo-Pacific region. Again, Russia and China were presented as being on the side of history, as mere victims of the detrimental and aggressive actions of the US. This narrative must of course not address evidence that goes against this construction. For example, the extension of Russian prerogatives over the Northern Sea Route or illegal Chinese actions in the South China Sea are not covered as these actions run counter to the narrative of Russia and China as model students of international law.

Takeaways, communication strategies and research priorities

Specific Russian narratives are punctual and require heightened vigilance during certain times. For instance, the accusation that the US and NATO are poor houseguests routinely emerges whenever NATO newly deploys to the Arctic region or makes a port visit – in northern Norway, for example. Transparency is key to limit rumours or the spread of conspiracy theories of US troops misbehaving or trashing the environment that are then amplified by the Russian media. In order to efficiently counter Russian disinformation online, a rapid response team, put in place by individual NATO members, must be able to quickly detect messages during these salient moments. Promptly providing clear information about specific developments will also reduce the impact of Russian disinformation.

Core narratives have to be addressed together and this requires sustained attention. More precisely, explaining how the US and NATO are not destabilising forces in the Arctic must go in tandem with describing how Russian Arctic military developments could represent a threat in the Arctic region. This last frame in particular will require a more agile and dynamic strategy, one that highlights and

focuses on social media and on Russian acts of hostility. For example, dangerous and disruptive Russian manoeuvres in the exclusive economic zones of Arctic states must be denounced more forcefully in NATO and Allies' communication practices. The social and economic impacts of these disruptive initiatives on NATO countries must be highlighted more clearly and efficiently. In the case of these core narratives, addressing only one narrative will mean only partially debunking the Russian informational competition approach. Western Arctic states need to be on the offensive rather than being satisfied with a defensive approach.

Disinformation in general erodes trust, destabilises societies and sows confusion. The Arctic region will evolve substantially in the next few decades: rival interests are bound to arise as the region opens up to new human activities. At the same time, the region is still remote and difficult to access for the majority of Arctic and non-Arctic societies. The quality of information we receive will be pivotal to coherent and rational decision-making in relation to this region. This challenge requires researchers to work together as only true multi-national, multilingual research initiatives can effectively measure the scope and extent of Russian disinformation about the Arctic region. This type of research consortium, pooling expertise from Finland, Canada, the United States, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Denmark, does not exist as it stands.

The evidence provided in this discussion article is the tip of the proverbial iceberg, focusing on one topic and from rather traditional sources (Russian press agencies). Russian disinformation on social media presents us with a much more daunting challenge, constantly shifting and using anonymous accounts as well as bot farms. Although Russian disinformation on social media has been limited on Arctic issues, it is imperative to start focusing on it now, in order to establish baseline social media attention on certain Arctic issues and develop appropriate tools to monitor in almost real-time how the Arctic region is portrayed on social media. Such an approach would again allow researchers to be ahead of disinformation activities and be able to report faster when anomalies or certain narratives emerge. This objective is both feasible and desirable, proving once more that the Arctic research community can generate knowledge that is relevant and contributes to communities' wellbeing.

References

- Fallis, D. (2015) 'What Is Disinformation?' *Library Trends*, 63(3), pp. 401–26. DOI: [10.1353/lib.2015.0014](https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2015.0014).
- Lackenbauer, P. W., Bouffard, T., and Lajeunesse, A. (2022) 'Russian Information Operations: The Kremlin's Competitive Narratives and Arctic Influence Objectives', *Journal of Peace and War Studies*, 4, pp. 161–186.
- LaFortune, G. and Landriault, M. (2024) 'The coverage from Russian press agencies of the Greenland purchase story', *The Polar Journal*, 14(1), pp. 333-349.
- Landriault, M. and MacDonald, A. (2019) 'Debating Arctic security through a media lens – the case of NATO's Trident Juncture operation', *Arctic Yearbook*, 8, pp. 58-74. Available at: <https://issuu.com/arcticportal/docs/ay2019>. (Accessed: 1 May 2024).
- Lemke, T. and Habegger, M. (2022) 'Foreign interference and Social Media Networks: A Relational Approach to Studying Contemporary Russian Disinformation', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 7(2), ogac004. DOI: [10.1093/jogss/ogac004](https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogac004)
- Nae, A. (2022) 'Russian strategic narratives on the Arctic region: embedded in strategic documents and narrated by RT and Sputnik', *The Polar Journal*, 12(2), pp. 363-383. DOI: [10.1080/2154896X.2022.2137093](https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2022.2137093)
- Young, O. (2011) 'A peaceful Arctic', *Nature*, 478, pp. 180-181. DOI: [10.1038/478180a](https://doi.org/10.1038/478180a) (Accessed: 1 May 2024).

Discussion Article

Imagining peace and producing knowledge about the war in Ukraine

Tyynne Karjalainen, Research fellow, FIIA & doctoral researcher, University of Turku

Abstract

After two and half years of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine, experts around Europe are increasingly tempted to picture peace in Ukraine and security in post-war Europe. Peace researchers have a few useful principles to guide the way. The legacy of Johan Galtung proposes that not just any peace is better than conflict. The kind of peace that is suitable should be defined by those affected by the conflict. To support the emerging debate, this discussion article asks, what do we know about what peace means for Ukrainians? The answer is not that much. Debates about peace and security in Europe have long sidelined perspectives from the 'periphery' and Ukrainian voices continue to be dismissed despite the on-going war. Moscow's perspective, in contrast, has historically been influential in shaping European debates, manifested in the silent acceptance of Russian imperialism in its self-described sphere of interest. This discussion article proposes that in order to leave behind the European security order that enabled Russia's aggression in the first place, the perspective of the 'peripheries' should be placed at the forefront of imagining future peace and security in Europe.

Keywords

Ukraine, peace, European security order

Introduction

After two and half years of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine, experts around Europe are increasingly tempted to picture peace in Ukraine and security in post-war Europe. The legacy of the father of Nordic peace studies Johan Galtung warns that we are entering a dangerous period: "[f]ew words are so often used and abused - perhaps, it seems, because 'peace' serves as a means of obtaining verbal consensus - it is hard to be all-out against peace" (Galtung, 1969, p. 167).

Just weeks before the "Summit on Peace" organised in support of Ukraine in Switzerland, the aggressor Russia signalled that it would be in favour of a ceasefire in Ukraine. A debate followed among Ukraine's supporters on whether Russian President Vladimir Putin actually seeks peace or has hidden motivations. Since February 2022, no single day has passed without a new European news piece analysing Putin's objectives, red lines and minimum requirements for the outcome of the war. At the same time, there has been surprisingly little interest towards the Ukrainian goals, minimum requirements, red lines or vision for peace.

There are not many shared principles among peace researchers, but the concept of 'local ownership' is widely accepted. It suggests that any process towards peace should be based on the analysis and understanding of peace in the local context, and the process – including means, timetable, priorities – should be planned by the people experiencing and involved in the armed conflict (see e.g., Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015; Höglund and Fjelde, 2011; Ljungkvist and Jarstad, 2021). Imagining peace in Ukraine with a focus on analysing Russia's point of view provides an unsustainable starting point for the debate.

According to Ukrainian authors, the Ukrainian perspective continues, however, to be missing from debates about peace in Ukraine. This continues a trend in which the perspective from the 'peripheries' has been sidelined in European debates about peace and security in Europe (Kurylo, 2023; Oksamytna, 2023; Khromeychuk, 2022; Sonevytsky, 2022; Hendl, 2022; Kazharski, 2022). Studies of Eastern Europe in particular have been influenced by Russia's imperial perspective (e.g., Lehti, 2023). This asymmetry has had concrete consequences since production of knowledge is not disconnected from policymaking. Aligned with the bias of knowledge production, the European security architecture predating the war was based on arrangements between the centres instead of reflecting the point of view of the neighbourhood in between.

This discussion article aims to contribute to the emerging academic and expert debate about peace in Ukraine and security order in Europe by discussing, firstly, the lack of Ukrainian perspective in the debate, and secondly, by providing an elementary introduction to that perspective by reviewing recent Ukrainian literature and commentary. The discussion article echoes the proposal of many Ukrainian and other authors that to leave behind the European security order that enabled Russia's aggression in the first place, the perspective of the 'peripheries' should be placed at the centre of imagining peace and security in Europe from now on.

Knowledge about Russia's war against Ukraine

According to Ukrainian and other scholars, the academic production of knowledge about Russia's war on Ukraine has been characterised by epistemic imperialism, 'Westplaining', and the exclusion of Ukrainian perspectives (Kurylo, 2023; Oksamytna, 2023; Khromeychuk, 2022; Sonevytsky, 2022; Hendl, 2022; Kazharski, 2022). Panel discussions and debates about the war continue to be organised without a Ukrainian expert or even a 'Ukraine expert' (Khromeychuk, 2022; Hendl, 2022). Ukrainians

have had “to fight not only Russian troops but also the toxic spell of its imperial knowledge” (Riabchuk, 2023, p. 4). At the same time, Ukraine has lost seven percent of its scientists because of the war (de Rassenfosse, Murovana and Uhlbach, 2023).

Kurylo (2023) identifies several hierarchies that shape the production of knowledge about the war: one between Europe’s East and West, one between the elite and the everyday, and one between the objective and subjective. According to Hendl (2022), people from the “East” have long been framed as irrational, paranoid or biased when speaking about Russia in comparison to the noble, rational and impartial Western experts. Oksamytna (2023) notes that Ukrainians’ access to global academic dialogues was already limited before the war due the hierarchies of international academia. During the war, academia was selective in terms of what type of argumentation it welcomed into the debate, and too often Ukrainians were perceived as “warmongers” if supporting military resistance to the aggression (Oksamytna, 2023, p. 679).

Several Ukrainian researchers, experts and other professionals have brought up the traumatising experiences and pressure from their well-meaning Western colleagues to cooperate with Russian experts, artists or citizens on (grass-root level) projects related to the war (see e.g., Dostlieva and Dostliev, 2022). Glybchenko (2023) highlights that such “(neo-)colonial/imperial interactions” happen without real consent and compromise the security of the “colonized” (p. 3). One example of the problem emerged among feminist circles when international feminists published an anti-war manifesto (Smyth et al, 2022) that fully sidelined the Ukrainian perspective in not attributing accountability of the war to the perpetrator and pushing aside Ukraine’s right to self-defense (Hendl, 2022). Kurylo (2023) believes that the reason for international feminists’ lack of support is that they fail to recognise agency that does not follow fixed conceptions in critical IR (p. 687). Hendl, in contrast, wonders whether the Western feminists do not see Ukrainians as deserving of the same standards of living, freedom and self-determination as Western feminists (2022, p. 67).

The asymmetry in the production of knowledge is not only theoretical but has material consequences. Many believe the current war to be one such consequence. Gorodnichenko and others suggest that had there been better understanding about the region before the war (not overly Russia centric), it could have been avoided. “[K]nowledge is power. This includes the power to prevent wars by knowing who is capable of what, what to expect, and what is at stake.” (Gorodnichenko et al, 2022, n.p.). Now, the biased understanding about the region and the war is materialising in the calls for peace negotiations. Riabchuk (2023) argues that negotiations are mostly called for by people that do not know Ukraine, Russia or the region.

Why is there a lack of knowledge of Ukraine in academia? Khromeychuk (2022) points out that the lack of Ukraine expertise is particularly striking considering that Ukraine is the largest country in Europe. Mälksoo (2022) suggests that the lack of interest towards studying Ukraine’s history has been linked to the legacy of Russian imperialism that has led many westerners to not differentiate between Ukrainian and Russian subjectivity. Sonevytsky (2022) argues that academic debate around Ukraine has been characterised by “epistemic imperialism”, namely the “hubris of believing that what one knows or studies from a privileged perspective, as within the Anglophone academy, can be exported wholesale to contexts about which one knows little or nothing” (Sonevytsky, 2022, p. 22).

As a result, the war-time debate about Ukraine and the war has been shaped by ‘Westplaining’ by scholars and experts from Western centres, while the Ukrainian view of Russian imperialism in the region has been marginalised (Sonevytsky, 2022). Kazharski (2022) defines ‘Westplaining’ as “speaking without sufficient expertise but from a position of authority, often making false projections and assumptions that are based on the Western experience but are not necessarily relevant to the

region in question” (n.p.; see also Smoleński and Dutkiewicz, 2022). ‘Westplaining’ has manifested as Russo-centrism, in applying the same structural theories in any context (Kazharski, 2022), considering Nato’s expansion the main reason for the war, or seeing Russia’s security concerns as relevant but not the rest of Eastern Europe’s (Smoleński and Dutkiewicz, 2022).

Defining peace by Ukrainian authors

It is not possible to undertake a systematic review of Ukrainian thinking around peace in this discussion article, and my position as a non-Ukrainian author sets limitations on the comprehensiveness of the review, not least the language barrier. In this section, I aim, however, to highlight at least some key arguments and observations made by Ukrainian researchers, authors, activists and political actors about the current war and path to peace, including President Zelenskyy’s peace plan. As mentioned in the previous section, these observations should be interpreted in a context where the war-time circumstances, previous limitations in access to international academia, and the war-time phenomena such as ‘Westplaining’ complicate the work of Ukrainian authors and experts. To make the perspective inclusive, I do not limit the review to peer-reviewed articles, and, while many of the referenced authors are scholars, I also reference other relevant agents for peace in Ukraine.

Yurchenko (2023, n.p.): “The peace demanded is violence”, and hence Ukrainians need to define their own peace¹

The above quote highlights that not just anything served as ‘peace’ means peace for Ukrainians. Riabchuk (2023) argues that the current calls for peace in Ukraine are not motivated by empathy for the victims of the war but rather by the negative effects that the war has on the global economy, prices and supply chains. Yurchenko (2023) highlights that the peace proposed for Ukraine could mean the continuation of the genocide of Ukrainians in occupied territories and rid Ukrainians of their collective identity. Ukrainian authors are afraid that the foreign proposals for peace in Ukraine are affected by Russian narratives and propaganda, framing events and developments based on imperial knowledge (Riabchuk, 2023).²

In general, Ukrainian analyses of the war advise against simplifying the conflict into a territorial question (e.g., Riabchuk, 2023). International supporters of Ukraine should not expect to know what Ukrainians consider an acceptable solution to the conflict but to expect unexpected answers (Oliynyk, 2023). It should not only be the elites that are consulted when trying to understand what peace and war mean for Ukrainians. Kurylo (2023) points out that the perspective of Ukrainians located far from the “presumed centres of power” (p. 688) is particularly easily sidelined. She proposes bringing the everyday experiences and mundane wartime practices of Ukrainians to the centre of knowledge production about the war. Without analysing mundane experiences such as children’s wartime drawings, looted homes or other “everyday material horrors”, part of the catastrophe remains uncovered (Kurylo, 2023).

1 The cited author is a Ukrainian political economist: at the beginning of her analysis, she notes: “Being a political economist, activist, feminist, ecosocialist and a Ukrainian who was in the country when the war started informs my following comments” (n.p.).

2 One particular point of view to Ukrainian ownership of their peace is that of “peace-tech” suitable to support the peace process. According to Glybchenko (2023), peace-tech developed in other contexts does not necessarily meet the needs for peace in Ukraine: it has often focused on facilitating dialogue, while in the Ukrainian context, for instance, virtual reality solutions for connecting with allies, the modeling of destroyed cultural artefacts or virtually conveying the everyday experience of the war to foreign audiences come into question.

Riabchuk (2023, p. 4): “all the war crimes and crimes against humanity should be properly investigated and criminals brought to court, and all the due reparations should be paid by the aggressor state”³

For the time being, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s peace formula can be consulted as one particularly legitimate Ukrainian proposal for peace in Ukraine. Zelenskyy continues to enjoy popularity among the Ukrainian population⁴ and his peace proposal is positively or neutrally acknowledged in Ukrainian sources⁵. Zelenskyy’s formula defines peace broadly. It not only concerns the restoration of the nation state’s territorial integrity, but also addresses several other topics that deal with the foundations of a peaceful, secure and prosperous life for citizens in Ukraine and abroad: nuclear safety, food security, energy security, the release of prisoners and the protection of the environment, among others (Official Website of the President of Ukraine, 2022; BRAND Ukraine and the MFA of Ukraine, 2023).

A key characteristic of President Zelenskyy’s peace formula is the call for “just” peace, in comparison to “any” peace, insisting that war crimes need to be investigated and punished, and Russia needs to compensate for the damage caused by the war (Official website of the President of Ukraine, 2022; BRAND Ukraine and the MFA of Ukraine, 2023). In comparison, China’s peace formula proposes that any peace in Ukraine should be supported by the international community (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2023).

The same principle of “just” peace is repeated in researchers’ and activists’ accounts (e.g., Pigul et al, 2022; Yurchenko, 2023). Many argue that had Russia been punished for its violations in 2014, the current war could have been avoided (Zabuzhko, 2022). Yurchenko (2023) and Bilous (2022) particularly criticise the Western “anti-war” Left for failing to hold Russia accountable for its violence and crimes in Ukraine: “With this kind of ‘left’, how is one to fight for social justice?” (Yurchenko 2023, n.p.).

Pigul et al. (2022, n.p.): “[T]he essential difference between violence as a means of oppression and as a legitimate means of self-defense”⁶

The appeal by Pigul and others (2022) is part of a manifesto by Ukrainian feminists that responds to and criticises a previous international “Feminist Resistance Against War manifesto” (Smyth et al., 2022) for denying Ukrainians their right to self-defence. The perspective is central in Ukrainian analyses on the war: Ukraine does not have the “luxury” of opting for pacifism – it is an option that one cannot afford under an imperialist invasion (Yurchenko, 2023). Ukraine’s military resistance is in line with international law and agreements, while Russia’s objectives breach the same legal framework (Riabchuk, 2023).

It seems important for many Ukrainian authors to highlight that Ukrainians are not motivated to fight

3 The cited author is a Ukrainian political analyst and scholar who has extensively covered nation-building, postcommunist transition, nationalism and Eastern European politics in his books and articles.

4 The current postponing of presidential elections is widely accepted and considered necessary by Ukrainians (Haran, 2023, p. 37). At the same time, there are previous experiences of Zelenskyy reshaping powers in favor of his presidential administration in non-war circumstances (Minakov, 2022), which advises against over-simplifying his legitimacy.

5 See e.g., “Call from the expert community for broad and high-level participation in the inaugural Peace Summit” (Maksak, 2024); Krupenya and Tututchenko (2023); Maksak (18.6.2024), Vyshnevsky, Y. (18.6.2024); Sydorenko (5.6.2024); Freedom (16.1.2024). Texty.org.ua (15.11.2022).

6 The cited author is a Ukrainian activist and a member of the NGO “Social Movement”. The cited “manifesto” in which she is the first signatory has already been signed by 893 people and 73 organizations, including a great number of Ukrainian researchers (Oksana Dutchak, Oksana Potapova and Daria Saburova on the top of the list), journalists, artists, activists and other experts as well as non-Ukrainian contributors.

because the US is asking for it. Such interpretations deny Ukrainian agency and mock the sacrifices that Ukrainians make to “live in a free country” (Kukharskyy et al, 2022). The right international contextualisation for Ukraine’s self-defence is that of “history of genocide, cultural oppression, and constant denial of the right to self-determination” (ibid, n.p.; see also Perepelytsia, 2023).

On the other hand, the ability of Ukrainians to defend themselves depends on international military support. Many Ukrainians hold their international supporters accountable for making the defence effort difficult (e.g., Soldodkyy, 2024; Zabuzhko, 2022). “[E]very coffee break you are taking during your discussions about how to interfere without provoking Putin to go further, costs someone’s life” (Zabuzhko, 2022, n.p.). Ukraine’s right to pursue NATO membership is interpreted in the context of the right to self-defence: a sovereign nation can make alliances to defend itself and this right cannot be denied from it by agreements between foreign state leaders (Kukharskyy et al, 2022).

Solodkyy (2024, np.): “*negotiations may not solve but increase challenges — or simply postpone them*”⁷

Many Ukrainian authors highlight that Ukraine has tried to resolve the conflict through negotiation. The negotiation process for peace in Donbas included a number of negotiation rounds and agreements (Kazdobina, 2024; Solodkyy, 2024). Zelenskyy in particular was mandated by his voters in 2019 to make peace in Donbas, which resulted in revised negotiation efforts in the Normandy format (Minakov, 2022).⁸ After the full-scale invasion started, talks continued at the Belarusian border, and there was support from Ukraine’s Presidential Office to arrange a bilateral meeting between the two Presidents (Perepelytsia, 2023, pp. 14-15). These attempts lead Kazdobina (2024) and Solodkyy (2024), among others, to conclude that negotiations with Russia do not bring peace. Russia would likely use a truce to mobilise and reorganise its troops.⁹

Ukraine-based and Ukrainian-speaking journalist Koshiw wrote in her analysis in 2022: “If Ukraine accepts Russia’s interpretation of the Minsk Agreements, it could face indefinite Russian influence in its affairs”. Koshiw’s (2022) quote predates the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but it summarises what many Ukrainians highlight as the problem of peace talks with Russia: such an agreement would likely facilitate Russia’s influence and control over Kyiv, for instance, through special status for Donbas (Koshiw, 2022; see also Allan, 2022). Control over Ukraine is the foundational objective of Russia if asked from Ukrainian experts: as Riabchuk (2023) puts it, Russia’s goal is to “make the remaining free citizens of the democratic nation into voiceless subjects of a despot” (p. 2). This observation should inform the international calls for peace talks.

This does not, of course, mean that negotiations could never be opted for by Ukrainians. Oliynyk’s (2023) analysis of Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (2024) data reveals that the public opinion on negotiations varies between social groups, between regions, and is linked to information sources that the respondents follow. In 2024, fewer Ukrainians than the previous year fully reject the option of recognising Donbas as part of Russia to end the war (KIIS, 2024). On the other hand, Kukharskyy and others (2022) highlight that, for instance, the question of Crimea should not be discussed without the

7 The cited author is the First Deputy Director of the New Europe Center, a Ukrainian NGO that produces research to support Ukraine’s European integration. The cited article continues a series of New Europe Center publications that aim to communicate the risks of negotiations to Western audiences (see New Europe Center, 2022; Solodkyy, 2022).

8 Not everyone in Ukraine was happy with his willingness to negotiate with Putin and to make concessions (see Moshes and Nizhnikau, 2022).

9 Eremin and Petrovich-Belkin, two IR experts that report having fled Russia after the war began, agree with the Ukrainian analysis: any agreement in the current situation would likely be fragile and the relapse of violent conflict in Ukraine likely. In order to achieve long-lasting peace in Ukraine, there should be a regime change in Russia, accompanied with changes in foreign policy agenda (Arkadiy and Petrovich-Belkin, 2023; see also Saari, 2023).

point of view and testimony of Crimean Tatars who have already experienced violent deportations, occupations and one non-free referendum.

Kurylo (2023, p. 694-695): “[N]o longer accept the unjust and unequal status quo that robbed Ukrainians of our political agency as normal”¹⁰

The above quote is from Kurylo’s autoethnographic account, but it summarises what many Ukrainian and other researchers argue well: the status quo before the war dismissed Ukrainian agency, and the concerns of Ukrainians were sidelined in the international arena (Kurylo, 2023). Yurchenko (2023) believes that discussions on peace between Ukraine and Russia need to simultaneously address the problem of the international legal and security architecture that left previous atrocities unpunished and hence facilitated the invasion.

On the other hand, Kukharsky and others (2022) demand that previous crimes that went unpunished in the International Criminal Court cannot serve as an excuse for not holding Russia accountable. In contrast, they believe that prosecuting Putin supports future peace by serving as an international precedent for state leaders with similar aspirations. Perepelytsia (2023), in turn, warns that after the war, the European security order will be shaped by the winner. If Russia is not defeated, Europe needs to be prepared to face and deter an even more aggressive and empowered Russia.

Conclusion: A Nordic word about Ukrainian thinking around peace

In this discussion article, I have taken a glimpse at Ukrainian thinking around the war and peace in Ukraine. I conclude the analysis with a few observations from a Nordic point of view. Firstly, it is obvious that Galtung’s conceptual division between “positive” and “negative” peace backs the calls for “just” peace instead of “any” peace in Ukraine. Philippine scholar Primitivo Ragandang summarises Galtung’s heritage well in stating that “*achieving true peace requires more than just the absence of war; it necessitates addressing the root causes of violence and injustice at their source*” (p. 5). I believe Galtung’s concepts can especially help the peace building, peace mediation and peace studies communities in the Nordics and elsewhere to understand why Ukrainian authors view some peace proposals as violence and why peace talks with the aggressor state are feared.

As an example of Galtung’s division between negative and positive peace, Ukrainian authors insist that Ukrainians do not only have the right to live free from continuing physical threats but also free from varying forms of structural violence and the oppression of their rights and freedoms from Moscow. As violence is not only physical violence but also includes indirect forms, peace requires social justice (Galtung, 1969, pp. 169-172). Moreover, Ukrainian authors underline that achieving a just peace in Ukraine necessitates that Ukraine uses its right to self-defence: dozens of negotiation rounds with Russia between 2014 and 2022 did not end Russia’s imperial war in Ukraine. As I read it, Galtung’s thinking backs this strategy: he insisted that when facing a “social wrong”, doing nothing may count as supporting social injustice (p. 184).

The Ukrainian perspective has been sidelined not only in the production of knowledge about the history and politics in Eastern Europe, but also in the international politics from which the European security order was developed on the basis of Moscow-West cooperation. While the war brought

¹⁰ The cited author is a Ukrainian scholar whose publications cover knowledge production in IR, security and Eastern European politics among many other topics. The quoted sentence starts with “I could” and is not in an imperative form as presented here.

Ukraine to the centre of international attention, knowledge being produced about the war has continued to sideline Ukrainian voices. This leads to a risk that the future security order in Europe will also not reflect the lessons of the war from the Ukrainian point of view. The analyses reviewed for this article suggest that if the aim is to end Russia's imperialist status building era in Europe, the development of a new security order should start from placing the perspective from Kyiv (and other peripheric capitals) at the centre of the process.

Researchers from Northern-Eastern Europe have made similar observations. Lehti (2023) proposes that a decolonial perspective on Ukraine could be particularly relevant in thinking about the European order for security and peace after the war (see also Mälksoo, 2023). Lehti highlights that a “peace that reproduces old imperial and colonial power structures will not be sustainable” (Lehti 2023, p. 58, translated by the author), but new European architecture for security and peace should start from listening to Eastern European actors. Learning from Galtung, the challenge in rebuilding the European security order will be to recognise and address not only physical but also structural violence; ethical systems directed to prevent intended violence easily fail to recognise forms of structural violence (Galtung, 1969, p. 172).

There are already some positive developments in terms of centralising Ukrainian perspectives. The war has increased the international recognition of Ukraine as a nation state separate from Russia. The biggest achievements for Ukraine thus far have been the prospect of EU membership and convincing partners to support Kyiv's defence efforts militarily and to respect its strategy of non-negotiation with Moscow. The Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland in June 2024 provided one more opportunity for Ukraine to communicate its own vision for peace to its supporters. While the conference was criticised for limited participation (China absent, the US President absent, among others), the outcome of almost 80 countries signing a declaration in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity is a significant improvement to recognising Ukraine's vision for peace compared to the starting point of negotiations in the Normandy format a decade ago.

References

- Allan, D. (2020) 'The Minsk Conundrum: Western Policy and Russia's War in Eastern Ukraine', *Chatham House Research Paper*. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/05/minsk-conundrum-western-policy-and-russias-war-eastern-ukraine-0/minsk-2-agreement> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Arkadiy, E. and Petrovich-Belkin, O. (2023) 'Is Sustainable Peace in Ukraine Possible? Contributions of Quality Peace Theory', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 19(1), pp. 123-128. DOI: [10.1177/15423166231221776](https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166231221776)
- Bilous, T. (2022) 'A letter to the Western Left from Kyiv. The 'anti-imperialism of idiots' meant people turned a blind eye to Russia's actions', *Open Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/a-letter-to-the-western-left-from-kyiv/> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- BRAND Ukraine and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (2023) *What is Zelenskyy's 10-Point Peace Plan?* [Online]. Available at: <https://war.ukraine.ua/faq/zelenskys-10-point-peace-plan/> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Dostlieva, L. and Dostliev, A. (2022) 'Not all criticism is Russophobic: on decolonial approach to Russian culture'. *Blok Magazine*. Available at: <https://blokmagazine.com/not-all-criticism-is-russophobic-on-decolonial-approach-to-russian-culture/> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Freedom (2024) 'Формула миру для України: результати зустрічі в Давосі аналізували експерти'. <https://uatv.ua/uk/formula-myru-zelenskogo-rezultaty-zustrichi-v-davosi-analizuvaly-eksperty/>
- Galtung, J. (1969) 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), pp. 167-191. DOI: [10.1177/002234336900600301](https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301)
- Glybchenko, Y. (2023) 'Virtual Reality Technologies as PeaceTech: Supporting Ukraine in Practice and Research', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 19(1), pp. 117-122. DOI: [10.1177/15423166231211303](https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166231211303)
- Haran, O. (2023) 'Democracy at war: What Ukrainians think', *Ukraine Analytica*, 3(32), pp. 32-38.
- Hendl, T. (2022) 'Towards accounting for Russian imperialism and building meaningful transnational feminist solidarity with Ukraine', *Gender Studies*, 26, pp. 62-93.
- Howlett, C. F. (2022) 'Peace movements and the war in Ukraine: The opportunity'. *Peace and Change*, 47, pp. 256-259. DOI: [10.1111/pech.12545](https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12545)
- Höglund K. and H. F. (eds.) (2011) *Building Peace, Creating Conflict? Conflictual Dimensions of Local and International Peacebuilding*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press. DOI: [10.2307/jj.919487](https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.919487)
- Gorodnichenko, Y., Sologoub, I. and Deryugina, T. (2022) 'Why Russian studies in the West failed to provide a clue about Russia and Ukraine', *Vox Ukraine*. Available at: <https://voxukraine.org/en/why-russian-studies-in-the-west-failed-to-provide-a-clue-about-russia-and-ukraine> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Kazharski, A. (2022) 'Explaining the "Westsplainers": Can a Western scholar be an authority on Central and Eastern Europe?', *Forum for Ukrainian Studies*. Available at: <https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2022/07/19/explaining-the-westsplainers-can-a-western-scholar-be-an-authority-on-central-and-eastern-europe/> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Kazdobina, Y. (2024) 'Ukraine's integration with the west is about a new security architecture in Europe', *Ukrainian Prism Comment*. Available at: <https://prismua.org/en/english-ukraines->

- [integration-with-the-west-is-about-a-new-security-architecture-in-europe/](#) (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Khromeychuk, O. (2022) 'Where is Ukraine?', *RSA Journal*, 2. Available at: <https://www.thersa.org/rsa-journal/2022/issue-2/feature/where-is-ukraine> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- KIIS, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (2024) 'OPINIONS AND VIEWS OF KYIV RESIDENTS: RESULTS OF A TELEPHONE SURVEY CONDUCTED ON APRIL 23-MAY 1, 2024.' [online] Available at: <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1409&page=1> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Koshiw, I. (2022) 'Everyone is talking about Minsk but what does it mean for Ukraine?', *Open Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russia-ukraine-what-are-the-minsk-agreements/> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Kukharsky, B., Fedyk, A., Gorodnichenko, Y. and Sologoub, I. (2022) 'Open Letter to Noam Chomsky (and Other Like-Minded Intellectuals) on the Russia-Ukraine War', *e-flux notes*. Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/470005/open-letter-to-noam-chomsky-and-other-like-minded-intellectuals-on-the-russia-ukraine-war> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Kurylo, B. (2023) 'The Ukrainian subject, hierarchies of knowledge production and the everyday: An autoethnographic narrative', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 26, pp. 685–697. DOI: [10.1057/s41268-023-00310-5](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-023-00310-5)
- Krupenya, I. M. and Tututchenko, O. O. (2023) 'ДРОГА ДО МИРУ: СТРАТЕГІЇ, УГОДИ, ФОРМАТИ, СЦЕНАРІЇ ТА ФОРМУЛА МИРУ ЗЕЛЕНСЬКОГО ІЗ 10 ПУНКТИВ', *ВІСНИК НТУУ, КПІ: 1(57)*. DOI: [10.20535/2308-5053.2023.1\(57\).280807](https://doi.org/10.20535/2308-5053.2023.1(57).280807)
- Lehti, M. (2022) 'Rauhantutkimus ja Venäjän sota Ukrainassa' *Kosmopolis*, 52(1).
- Lehti, M. (2023) Dekoloniaalinen tutkimus ja rauha Euroopassa. *Idäntutkimus*, 1.
- Leonardsson, H., and Rudd G. (2015) 'The 'Local Turn' in Peacebuilding: A Literature Review of Effective and Emancipatory Local Peacebuilding', *Third World Quarterly* 36(5), pp. 825–839. DOI: [10.1080/01436597.2015.1029905](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1029905).
- Ljungkvist, K. and Jarstad, A. (2021) 'Revisiting the local turn in peacebuilding – through the emerging urban approach', *Third World Quarterly*, 42(10), pp. 2209–2226, DOI: [10.1080/01436597.2021.1929148](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1929148).
- Maksak, H. (2024) 'Three reasons why Ukraine's Global Peace Summit was a success', *Euromaidan Press*. <https://euromaidanpress.com/2024/06/18/three-reasons-why-ukraines-global-peace-summit-was-a-success/>
- Maksak, H. (2024) 'Call from the expert community for broad and high-level participation in the inaugural Peace Summit', *Ukrainian Prism Comment*. <https://prismua.org/en/english-call-from-the-expert-community-for-broad-and-high-level-participation-in-the-inaugural-peace-summit/>
- Minakov, M. (2022) 'The Three Ages of Zelensky's Presidency'. *Kennan Institute blog "Focus Ukraine"*. Wilson Center. Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/three-ages-zelenskys-presidency> (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2023) *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis* [Online]. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202302/t20230224_11030713.html (Accessed 10 June 2024)
- Moshes, A. and Nizhnikau, R. (2022) 'Zelenskyy's change of approach towards Russia. From soft touch to firm hand', *FIIA Briefing Paper*, 340. Available at: https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/bp340_zelenskyys-change-of-approach-towards-russia_from-soft-touch-to-firm-hand.pdf (Accessed 10 June 2024)

10 June 2024)

Mälksoo, M. (2023) 'The Postcolonial Moment in Russia's War Against Ukraine', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 25(3-4), pp. 471-481. DOI: [10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947](https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947)

New Europe Center (2022). *Don't Buy Putin's Lie! Why Russia's negotiation promises should not be trusted* [Online]. Available at: <http://neweurope.org.ua/en/visual-materials/don-t-buy-putin-s-lie-chomu-ne-var-to-viryty-obitsyankam-rosiyi-pro-peregovory/> (Accessed 10 June 2024)

Oliynyk, A. (2024) 'Важке питання про перемогу', *Ukrainska Pravda*. Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2024/05/25/7457285/> (Accessed 10 June 2024) English version: 'Anton Oliynyk's Column for UP based on KIIS Data: "A Difficult Question About Victory"', *KIIS Press Releases*. Available at: <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1410&page=1> (Accessed 10 June 2024)

Oksamytna, K. (2023) 'Global dialogues during the Russian invasion of Ukraine', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 26, pp. 675-684. DOI: 10.1057/s41268-023-00315-0

Perepelytsia, H. (2023) 'The concept of peace and victory in the domestic and foreign policy of Ukraine', *Przeegląd Geopolityczny*, 44, pp. 9-24.

Pigul, V. et al. (2022) *The Right to Resist* [Online]. *Commons*. Available at: <https://commons.com.ua/en/right-resist-feminist-manifesto/> (Accessed 10 June 2024)

Official website of the President of Ukraine (2022) *Ukraine has always been a leader in peacemaking efforts; if Russia wants to end this war, let it prove it with actions - speech by the President of Ukraine at the G20 Summit* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-zavzhdi-bula-liderom-mirotvorchih-zusil-yaksho-rosi-79141> (Accessed 10 June 2024)

Ragandang, P. III C. (2024) 'In Honor of Johan Galtung, the Father of Peace Studies', *Peace Review*. DOI: 10.1080/10402659.2024.2360472

de Rassenfosse, G., Murovana, T. and Uhlbach, W-H. (2023) 'The effects of war on Ukrainian research', *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(856). DOI: [10.1057/s41599-023-02346-x](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02346-x)

Riabchuk, M. (2023) 'War in Ukraine: peace-talking versus peace-making', *CIDOB Notes Internacionals*, 288. https://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionals_cidob/288/war_in_ukraine_peace_talking_versus_peace_making

Saari, S. (2023) 'Deterring Russia in Ukraine: The only way to achieve sustainable peace' *FIIA Comment*, 13. <https://www.fiaa.fi/en/publication/deterring-russia-in-ukraine>.

Smyth et al. (2022) *Feminist Resistance Against War. A MANIFESTO* [Online]. Accessed at: <https://spectrejournal.com/feminist-resistance-against-war/> (Accessed 10 June 2024)

Smoleński, J. and Dutkiewicz, J. (2022) 'The American Pundits Who Can't Resist "Westspaining" Ukraine', *The New Republic*. <https://newrepublic.com/article/165603/carlson-russia-ukraine-imperialism-nato>

Solodkyy, S. (2024) 'Nudging to a covert surrender. Assumed outcomes of negotiations with Russia if held today', *New Europe Center Analytical commentary*. http://neweurope.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Pushing_SS_eng.pdf

Solodkyy, S. (2022) 'Putin's peace talks ruse: why the West should listen to Ukraine', *New Europe Center Research*. <http://neweurope.org.ua/en/analytics/peregovorna-pastka-putina-chomu-zahid-maye-doslumatysya-do-ukrayiny/>

Sonevytsky, M. (2022) 'What is Ukraine? Notes on epistemic imperialism', *TOPOS*, 2. DOI: 10.24412/1815-0047-2022-2-21-30

Sydorenko, S. (2024) 'Swiss Peace Summit could end up harming Ukraine as nothing is going to plan', *European Pravda*. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/articles/2024/06/5/7187503/>

Texty.org.ua (2022) "Українська формула миру". Зеленський представив G20 10 пропозицій України (ПЕРЕЛІК)". <https://texty.org.ua/fragments/108233/ukrayinska-formula-myru-zelenskyj-predstavyy-g20-10-propozycij-ukrayiny-perelik/>

Vyshnevsky, Y. (2024) 'Другий та останній саміт миру. Чи варто чекати кінця війни за "місяці, а не роки"' *dsnews.ua* <https://www.dsnews.ua/ukr/politics/uspet-do-noyabrya-zachem-zelenskiy-anonsiroval-zavershenie-voyny-na-vtorom-sammite-mira-17062024-503200>

Yurchenko, Y. (2023) 'Democratic socialism or barbarism: A reply to Hans-Herbert Kögler', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 26(4), pp. 591-599. DOI: [10.1177/13684310231172721](https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310231172721)

Zabuzhko, O. (2022) *International Women's Day – Address by Oksana Zabuzhko*. *European Parliament's Verbatim report of proceedings* [Online]. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-03-08-ITM-005_EN.html (Accessed 10 June 2024)

Discussion Article

The Peace and Security Implications of Climate Change for the Nordic Region

Kyungmee Kim, Associate Researcher, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

Cedric de Coning, Research Professor, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Emma Hakala, Leading Researcher, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Researcher, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University

Tobias Etzold, Senior Research Fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Mino Koefoed, Senior Research Fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Abstract

Climate-related stressors like extreme weather events, in combination with factors such as increased global rivalry for natural resources and a changing global order, will exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, and drive compounding and cascading effects. Such developments may undermine the resilience of communities and institutions also in the Nordic region and can have a negative impact on social cohesion and human security. In the Arctic region, in particular, temperature rises faster than the global, which further increases vulnerability and risks. This discussion article suggests that the Nordic countries are relatively well equipped to tackle comprehensive security risks and have adaptive capacity towards climate change. We argue, however, that far more could still be done on foresight and preparedness for climate-related security risks. In particular, the Nordic countries must strengthen their cooperation on climate security to effectively address the escalating challenges.

Keywords

Climate security, Nordic region, climate change, Nordic cooperation

Introduction

Climate change, especially the gradual rise in global temperatures, is already disrupting weather patterns, changing ecosystems, reducing biodiversity and exacerbating environmental degradation across the planet. These changes are happening faster in the Arctic region than in the rest of the world and are already resulting in the melting of arctic ice, permafrost and glaciers. Over time this will lead to, amongst other things, rising sea levels that would make some coastal zones – where most people in the Nordic region currently live – uninhabitable in this century. Climate change is also expected to increase the scope and frequency of extreme weather events – such as droughts, floods, and heat waves – which will have an impact on the primary industries in the Nordic region, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

These climate related stressors, in combination with factors such as increased global rivalry for natural resources and a changing global order, will exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, and drive compounding and cascading effects. These may undermine the resilience of communities and institutions in the Nordic region, and could have a negative impact on social cohesion and human security. Some effects of climate change – such as seasonal changes in the polar ice cap – have also increased hard security risks in the Arctic region. The Arctic, in particular, experiences the effects of climate change such as a rise in temperatures between three and four times faster than the global average. The Arctic region is becoming more accessible to shipping and extractive industries, and this may increasingly lead to an ‘Arctic scramble’ that will exacerbate geo-political tension in the Nordic region. However, cooperation to manage shared natural resources like fish stocks, or to cope with transboundary natural disasters, can also contribute to sustaining peace in the Nordic region.

This discussion article will explore the profound implications that climate change will have for present and future human and hard security, but also the opportunities to influence how to build and sustain peace, including in the Nordic region. It argues that the Nordic countries have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to cooperate even more closely in order to reduce climate security risks and increase resilience, both in the region and beyond it.

Nordic countries’ responses to climate change and Nordic cooperation

The Nordic countries have been considered resilient to climate-related risks due to their relatively low direct exposure to severe climate hazards like storms and floods. As democracies with high income levels, they also are well placed to adapt to and prevent potential risks. Yet they are also small countries that strongly rely on international trade and functioning multilateral systems. With increasing geopolitical tensions – and also further threatened by climate change – the Nordics are exposed to new vulnerabilities.

The consequences of climate change are not limited to direct risks. Cascading risks occur when the ecological change is combined with socio-economic and geopolitical factors, such as supply chain disruptions or forced migration. In addition, transition risks are associated with the mitigation of and adaptation to the climate crisis. These can manifest, for example, through lack of access to critical materials for the energy transition, increased polarisation resulting from poorly planned climate policies, a lack of acceptance for the need to adapt, as well as misinformation. Cascading and transition risks will also be felt by the Nordic countries.

One example of a cascading risk is more frequent and more intense heat waves in continental

Europe, with indirect implications in the Nordic countries in the form of supply chain disruptions, economic impacts and possibly even political volatility. Already during the European heatwave in 2022, transportation routes were hampered due to low water levels in rivers and extreme heat, hindering energy supply and raising production costs. In the long run, increasingly severe heat and wildfires may strain relations among countries within the European Union (EU). The incidence of direct impacts is unequally divided, with Southern European countries generally disproportionately affected. The EU may need to consider compensation mechanisms to address the damages, but the solidarity of less vulnerable member states may be limited when it comes with a price tag. Heated political debate within the EU about such measures could feed – and be deliberately used to feed – nationalist, populist or EU-sceptic rhetoric.

Cascading and transition impacts are complex and therefore difficult to anticipate and prepare for. They emerge through chains of events involving multiple factors and usually end up affecting various sectors of society, so they also require cross-sectoral responses. The Nordic countries have an advantage as they already apply whole-of-society thinking in civil preparedness through their comprehensive security or total defence models. On paper, such an approach to security appears ideal for integrating preparedness for climate-related risks. So far, however, the Nordic systems have only considered climate-related risks at the surface level, largely neglecting the more complex cascading and transition impacts.

Therefore, more needs to be done to integrate climate-related risks to Nordic civil preparedness. Risk assessments should incorporate climate change in a comprehensive way, also taking into account compound effects with political and economic factors and the structural changes brought about by the green transition. The chains of effects through which cascading and transition risks emerge need to be more explicitly traced in order to anticipate their impacts on critical functions of society. In the longer term, systematic monitoring of global climate-related risks could help to prepare for risks while they are in the process of emerging.

The Nordic countries can gain considerably by acting together on climate security. As they are facing similar risks and share similar approaches to civil preparedness, they could join forces in developing effective responses. Rather than all individually building up risk analysis models or monitoring systems, they could pool resources for collaborative approaches. Here, the Nordic countries could also contribute to broader international cooperation by developing globally applicable solutions.

Climate change and social (in)cohesion in the Nordics

The impact of climate change in the Nordic region can adversely affect social cohesion by aggravating environmental challenges and pressures on indigenous people. The Nordic region struggles with serious environmental challenges, such as biodiversity loss, altered natural habitats and ecosystems, melting glaciers, sea ice and permafrost, excessive waste stemming from overconsumption, and more. These ecological risks are exacerbated by the fast-changing climate. The Arctic partly overlaps with Sápmi, the indigenous Sámi territory spread across Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. Indigenous peoples such as the Sámi tend to be more vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change because they are to a larger extent than others dependent on nature, functional ecosystems and biodiversity for their subsistence and cultural survival as peoples.

At the same time, Nordic governments have adopted ambitious plans and policies aiming to mitigate climate change by reducing their emission and accelerating ‘Green Transition’. Unfortunately, the way some of the green transition projects relate with local and affected communities, and in

particular indigenous Sámi communities, has in many cases been problematic. This runs the risk of undermining their potential usefulness as ‘green’ projects and may lead to negative unintended social, environmental, and cultural consequences, including reduced social cohesion.

Green transition and extractive initiatives, such as wind power plant construction on land as well as mineral extraction, are major sources for social and political tension in affected Sami areas as they have a negative impact on traditional Sami reindeer herding practices. In Norway, Sami communities in Øyfjellet and Fosen, where wind power parks have been constructed, have experienced that reindeer avoid grazing in areas where they can see or hear the wind turbines. In addition, the wind power plants disrupt the migration of reindeer, which is crucial for their survival in the winter months.

Reindeer herding is key for southern Sámi cultural survival, both in terms of language, knowledge transfer and cultural belonging. Green transition projects like wind power on land could be seen as representing an historical continuation of a process where the foundations for the future of reindeer herding are gradually reduced. Sami communities thereby become exposed to a double burden of climate change – one concerning direct exposure to negative impacts of climate change, and the other linked to the measures implemented to combat climate change.

In Norway, massive long-lasting protests and demonstrations occurred in front of the Norwegian parliament in Oslo. Sámi activists chained themselves to the entrances of different governmental departments to protest against what they saw as violations of indigenous rights inflicted by the wind power park in Fosen. The Sámi communities eventually won the case in the Norwegian High Court in the case of Fosen. The Sámi in Sweden share a similar experience. One thousand turbines have been constructed at the Markbygden wind farm in Piteå despite the concerns by the Sámi reindeer herders. In Finland, the Arctic railroad project into Sàpmi sparked resistance and was eventually cancelled by the government.

Political and social polarisation might be the result of decisions made without sufficiently considering the grievances of the local population. This underscores the need to seriously consider and apply a holistic, rights-based approach when assessing the impacts of climate actions including green transition policies. An environment and social impact assessment with a narrow focus is inadequate to ensure social cohesion and safeguard the rights of indigenous people. The ‘ecological footprint’ cannot be reduced to emissions alone.

Impact of climate change on hard security in the Arctic

Climate change may compound the hard security risk in the relatively peaceful Arctic, which has a high significance for the Nordic region. Labelled as ‘Arctic exceptionalism’, since the end of the Cold War the Arctic region has been a space for constructive, pragmatic and mainly scientific cooperation and an area of low tension despite disagreements and tensions elsewhere in the world. In recent years, however, the Arctic has been emerging as a potential arena of global rivalry over military power, influence and resources between the United States, Russia and China. This has partly to do with climate change, which offers both opportunities and challenges to the Arctic.

Melting sea ice, at least during the summer, opens the Arctic for external actors through new sea routes. At least a part of the Arctic’s resources have become or are becoming more easily accessible. This development has created a fear of conflicts about resources and even territory. A warmer Arctic is likely to attract more commercial and civilian activities such as shipping, mining and tourism, leading to a risk of more accidents and misunderstandings. In addition, the region is facing significant environmental changes, which have considerable influence on the population and various operations

in the region. However, differences between the three parts of the Arctic (American, Russian and European) need to be taken into account.

While climate change with all its implications and consequences has long been a concern for the Arctic, the situation has drastically changed since February 2022. The region is now directly affected by the intersection of two ongoing global crises: climate change and Russia's war against Ukraine. The latter marked the end of 'Arctic exceptionalism', where the shared challenges and opportunities created by climate change fostered cooperation among the countries of the region, including Russia. Now, a major problem is the lack of fully functioning platforms for cooperation. This means that tackling the implications of climate change by involving all countries has become nearly impossible.

On the other hand, military approaches have made a strong comeback in the region after having been neglected since the end of the Cold War. A growing reliance on the hard security dimension is exemplified by an increase in shows of force and military exercises. Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO indicates that they feel more insecure following the Russian war against Ukraine and in response saw the need to strengthen their security cooperation and thus to invest more in deterrence. But it simultaneously divides the region even further, making dialogue and cooperation cumbersome also in the long term. These developments pose risks of miscommunication and misunderstandings that could lead to conflicts.

Hence, the Arctic is gaining strategic importance for multinational forces, especially within NATO. Global warming and increasing geopolitical competition make military operations more likely, but at the same time, military operations are becoming more difficult, complex and costly due to the changing environmental conditions. These include extreme and unpredictable weather conditions, difficult ice conditions, small breakaways from icebergs and glaciers threatening to damage ships, along with permafrost thaw. The last of these can undermine military infrastructure, ports and runways, which, however, is a lesser problem in the Nordic Arctic than in Greenland.

The new climatic conditions could also reduce the constraints for force projection in the Arctic. The increasing accessibility of the Arctic and new economic opportunities and related changes bring to the fore "new security realities, including the potential for increased drone, submarine, and intelligence-gathering activities, and concerning signs of a strategic capabilities arms race starting in the region" (Goodman et al., 2021).

These developments increase the need for enhanced situational awareness, operational capability, coordination, and policy changes on the part of the Nordic countries and their NATO allies. So far, various capability and coordination gaps – for example, insufficient resources and modern equipment, as well as the absence of joint command structures – restrict the ability to address current and future challenges adequately. Therefore, a robust policy framework and better coordination of policies and activities to maintain a strong and effective military presence in the region is required. This is also necessary for civilian tasks such as search and rescue and disaster response, in which armed forces will however be increasingly involved.

Nordic contributions for building climate resilient peace

As discussed earlier, climate change poses risks to human security and hard security, as well as social cohesion in the Nordic region. To effectively address the escalating challenges posed by cascading and transition risks, the Nordic countries must strengthen their cooperation. This collaboration should consider not only safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples, but also ensuring the resilience of social cohesion in the face of cascading risks. Outside the Nordic region, the Nordic

governments have played a crucial role in drawing attention to and addressing the peace and security risks exacerbated by climate change. Their efforts extend to the broader agenda of building sustainable peace globally.

The Nordic countries have a longstanding experience in integrative approaches for making sense of complexity. This approach favours adopting a holistic view when analysing conflicts and security, considering the social, political, economic, and ecological contexts. Rooted in Nordic perspectives, this integrative approach is inherently aligned with values such as sustainable development, equality, and human rights. These fundamental values compel us to prioritise the integrity of individuals and societies in our contemplation of peace – a consideration that is inseparable from the inclusion of nature in the discourse.

Some of the Nordic countries have played a pioneering role in recognising the linkages between climate change, peace, and security. This consistent advocacy for integrating climate change and environmental degradation into global security agendas has been carried out in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The climate, peace, and security agenda is not a Nordic invention but is embedded in profound conceptual and policy debates and reflections on the human security dimension of climate change. In the international security policy debate, the Nordic countries have spearheaded this agenda together with other likeminded countries.

The Nordic contribution to bringing climate, peace, and security onto the global policy agenda stems from their long-term commitment and support for environmental sustainability and peace in their international engagement. Sustainable development emerged as a global concept after the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, where Gro Harlem Brundtland, who later became the Prime Minister of Norway in 1981, presented the landmark report “Our Common Future”. The Nordic countries have since then consistently advocated for a balance between economic growth, social equity, and ecological sustainability.

The Nordic countries also have a long history of peace mediation, having played an important role in conflict resolution around the world. Not all attempts by Nordic countries to resolve conflicts have been successful, but their contributions have been significant in the sense that their approaches focusing on impartiality, consensus building, and dialogue have earned them a solid reputation as effective mediators. The Nordic countries remain committed to fostering peace and stability around the world by supporting peacebuilding efforts.

Leveraging their competences in sustainability and peace, the Nordic countries have been at the forefront in raising climate change to the agenda as a concern for global peace and security. During its UNSC membership in 2017-2018, Sweden initiated a discussion on climate-related security risks to the council debate (S/2018/749). This was the third time the UNSC had discussed climate change, but it was a timely moment as the conflicts in the Lake Chad basin region, West Africa and Sahel region, Mali, and Darfur had all been exacerbated by the adverse impacts of climate change. Sweden laid the groundwork for like-minded countries to continue addressing this issue on the Council’s agenda.

Climate security was one of the four Norwegian priorities in the UNSC during its membership in 2021-2022. Together with Kenya, Norway spearheaded efforts to broaden the scope of the climate security debate to include the interlinkages between climate change and the peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding work of the UN. Despite some members of the Council objecting to having climate, peace and security on the agenda of the UNSC, many UNSC resolutions adopted

over this period and up to this day include language on climate-related peace and security risks. The Nordic reputation for being impartial and global promoters for peace may have helped the countries promote the climate, peace, and security agenda without undue politicisation, a challenging feat given the inherently political nature of issues on the UNSC agenda.

Conclusion and ways forward

Climate change stands as one of the most formidable challenges of our time. The impact of climate change on society and individuals is not predetermined by our exposure to climate change. Climate change may influence our options, but we can choose how to respond to these climate-related stressors. The choices we make under stress from climatic and environmental causes are influenced by our adaptive capacity and resilience. We can influence these negative effects of climate change by firstly reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, slowing biodiversity loss and taking other steps to prevent environmental degradation; and secondly by investing in those capacities that will enable us to adapt, including especially our social cohesion and societal resilience. As this discussion article highlights, the Nordic countries have an opportunity as well as a responsibility to address climate risks and build resilience, and strengthening Nordic cooperation is one way to achieve climate security. How the Nordic countries respond to climate-related risks to our society can provide opportunities for building resilience and peace.

References

Kornhuber, K., Vinke, K., Bloom, E.T., Campbell, L., Rachold, V., Olsvig, S., and Schirwon, D. (2023), 'The Disruption of Arctic Exceptionalism. Managing Environmental Change in Light of Russian Aggression', DGAP Report, No. 2, *German Council on Foreign Relations*.

Goodman, S., Guy, K., Maddox, M., Hansen, V. V., Sending, O. J., Winther, I. N. (2021), 'Climate Change and Security in the Arctic'. A product of the Center for Climate and Security (CCS), an institute of the Council on Strategic Risks (CSR), and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

Book Review

Foreign Fighters in Ukraine: The Brown-Red Cocktail

Sofiya Voytiv, Postdoctoral researcher, Department of Strategic Communications, Lund University and Institute for Futures Studies, Acting lecturer, Stockholm University

Book Title

Rękawek, K. (2022). *Foreign Fighters in Ukraine: The Brown-Red Cocktail* (1st ed.). Routledge.

The issue of foreign fighters participating in wars abroad and then returning to their homelands has been a highly topical and politicised one due to many links found to terrorism upon their return (OHCHR, 2024). While much research has been dedicated to foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, less has covered similar issues in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Kacper Rękawek starts his monograph with a question: is the Russian-Ukrainian war a potential space for attracting and radicalising right-wing fighters from the West that might pose a danger of extremist violence back in their homelands upon their return? The short answer is no. The more interesting discussion is – why not? While the author does not dwell directly on the reasons for this latter question, his detailed and captivating story of foreign fighters participating in the Russian-Ukrainian war gives us some clues.

Rękawek puts forward an argument that ideologically, foreign fighters constitute a “brown-red cocktail” where right- and left-wing ideologies mix and even coexist. Dissecting the propositions of Russian (propagandist) media as well as Western mainstream media, the author finds that the definitions of far-right and far-left ideologies constructed in the 20th century are not easily applied to the realities of both sides in the war. He finds out that individuals who profess far-right ideologies that are racist, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-globalist were fighting alongside those who claim to be far-left without any discomfort. What united them was their anti-American positions. The author carefully deconstructs the motivations, ideologies and experiences of foreign fighters arriving from the Western countries to participate in the Russian-Ukrainian war, mostly focusing on the 2014-2016 period but dedicating the last chapter to potential mobilisations of the foreign fighters during the first year of the re-escalation of the war into a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Since the numbers of the fighters are so low, the author opts for individual stories of fighters coming from different Western countries and situates them within the institutional and state level circumstances of both Ukraine and the countries of origin.

When it comes to practical organising, Rękawek discusses networks within the right-wing circles in countries of origins as well as Ukraine and Russia, and notes that those individuals who had established contacts were more likely to also mobilise during 2022. Surprisingly, he finds little evidence that Ukrainian or Russian diasporas served as recruitment channels for the fighters in Ukraine, unlike what has been seen in other wars. While the purpose of the book is perhaps descriptive, a more

theoretical, abstract level of motivations to join this war could be of large value. For example, one could delineate some of the following narratives that are implicitly present throughout the book but never actually discussed:

As related to (collective) memory: One of the more fascinating findings shows that some fighters, notably those on the Russian side, would relate the reasons for joining to other wars/conflicts. The author discusses an example of foreign fighters from Spain who saw the initial periods of the Russian-Ukrainian war as similar to the Spanish Civil War. They would join the pro-Russian “separatists” and see themselves as fighting what they saw as the “Franco”-esque army of Ukraine. Fighters from Serbia, who also predominantly joined the pro-Russian side, would refer to the debt they owe to Russia for joining them in their “anti-NATO fight” during the Balkan wars. Another narrative pertaining to memory is a hint the author gives on intergenerational transmittance of trauma (a phenomenon discussed by Baser and Toivanen, 2024; Féron, 2024). Here was an example of an American fighter who joined the Ukrainian side of the war without ideological reasons but admitted that his Latvian grandma shared memories of being persecuted by “Russian/Soviet” rule. This, he claimed, together with the news of Russian invasion pushed him to join the war effort on the Ukrainian side.

Masculinity and saviour narratives: It seems most Western foreign fighters (predominantly men) on both sides experienced disillusionment and disappointment as nothing was organised as they envisioned it: they were often treated as “tourists” and not heroes, and they were not always even permitted to participate in the actual battles. Central and Eastern European as well as Russian foreign fighters tended to have an easier time integrating into existing structures and suffered less of a language barrier. This seems to point to another ideological dimension of how the Western foreign fighters thought of Ukraine and its people – no matter the military experience, they saw themselves as masculine saviours who were not appreciated by the locals.

In the final chapter of the book, the author analyses the first half a year of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and critically approaches the issue of potential re-mobilisation of the foreign fighters. He concludes that during this period motivations of the foreign fighters in joining the war were less ideological. They acted more in a capacity of “concerned citizens”. While only time will show whether new patterns of participation have emerged, the author continues to claim that the expected, in the West, mass mobilisation of the far-right individuals to join the Russian-Ukrainian war has largely failed. It would be of great value to continue this research and draw conclusions on the theoretical level which would also aid in our analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war overall and its specific narratives circulating globally.

References

Baser, B. and Toivanen, M. (2024) 'Inherited traumas in diaspora: postmemory, past-presencing and mobilisation of second-generation Kurds in Europe', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 47(2), pp. 297–320. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2023.2261288.

Féron, É. (2024) 'Memories of violence in the Rwandan diaspora: intergenerational transmission and conflict transportation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 47(2), pp. 274–296. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2023.2261285.

OHCHR. (2024) *Return and Repatriation of Foreign Fighters and their families* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-terrorism/return-and-repatriation-foreign-fighters-and-their-families> (Accessed: 5 July 2024).

Lectio praecursoria

Reimagining crisis management: Preparedness imagination in an era of chronic socio-ecological crises

Helmi Räisänen, Postdoctoral Fellow, FIIA; Visiting Researcher, University of Helsinki, Faculty of Social Sciences

About

Lectio praecursoria, 12th of April 2024, University of Helsinki

Keywords

preparedness, crisis management, preparedness imagination, socio-ecological crises

On a crisp spring morning, we had gathered in a large conference room at the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport. Officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, municipalities, the rescue services, and different research institutions were present. We were handed a paper that explained the situation: there is a suspected case of pneumonic plague at the airport.

A lively discussion ensued. Multiple conversations were taking place at the same time, and I tried my best to keep up with at least some of them.

“How do you inform the airport staff?” I heard someone asking. Soon, airplane disinfection was discussed in detail. Then, an expert reminded us that the case is still not confirmed by laboratory tests. “We have to act before we know!” someone else protested immediately. Then, I heard some people discuss the responsible organisation for the isolation of passengers. But which passengers should be considered to be exposed to the plague? Someone mentioned a threat assessment tool that could be of help.

Despite the very *real* tension that had built up in the room, it was not a real crisis situation. What I just described, was the very first simulation exercise that I attended. The exercise took place in 2018, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, as you all know, there is no shortage of real crises in current times. Recently, we have had the pandemic: a health threat that quickly affected the whole society. Then, two years ago, Russia started a full-scale war in Ukraine. It was followed by an energy crisis in Europe and soaring inflation. Global supply chains have been disrupted since the pandemic, and the war has worsened the global food crisis. Geopolitical tensions are high.

At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the different human-induced ecological crises, such as biodiversity loss and climate change. Last year, records were broken for ocean heat, sea level rise, Antarctic Sea ice loss and glacier retreat. There is more human-made mass in the world than biomass. Nanoplastics are found everywhere, even in our blood veins. Species are disappearing at a record rate. And, of course, ecosystem destruction and biodiversity loss are also making pandemics more likely.

It seems that there are multiple systemic crises that often interact and even amplify each other. In this light, it is not surprising that Collins English Dictionary declared *permacrisis* as the word of the year in 2022. *Permacrisis* is “an extended period of instability and insecurity.”

This is what the Anthropocene looks like. In other words, we have entered an era of chronic socio-ecological crises. We live in an epoch in which human activity is the dominant cause of changes in Earth’s land, oceans and atmosphere. Socio-ecological crises are resulting from human activity - or social systems - that exceed planetary boundaries. Planetary boundaries are the environmental limits within which humanity could safely exist. Such boundaries are, for example, the atmospheric CO₂ concentration, ocean acidification, freshwater use, and land system change. Socio-ecological crises reveal that there are fundamental flaws in societal structures – in the way we move, eat, and dwell.

There arises the particular challenge of our times – and the topic of my thesis: How to cope with the already-induced crises while also finding a sustainable path regarding the long-term future? Or how to navigate all these short- and long-term crises at the same time? In my thesis, I studied Finnish public authorities’ approach to these issues. I explored what their crisis preparedness *is* and what it *ought to be* in such an era of chronic socio-ecological crises.

From the point of view of the authorities, we are in a situation in which historical templates and

strategies for managing socio-ecological challenges are becoming increasingly insufficient. The practices of crisis management have traditionally concentrated on crises that have a clear, sudden beginning and a clear ending, after which a return to ‘normalcy’ is made. Now, chronic socio-ecological crises can continue to deplete societies’ capacities over time, and they further constrain responses to the next crisis. Furthermore, the ‘normal’ that is supposed to be established after a crisis has often contributed to the crisis in the first place.

Furthermore, what is assumed as ‘normal’ is changing. The warming climate changes the incidence rate of storms. And when some ecological tipping points are reached, there will be previously unforeseen dynamics. Tipping points are points-of-no-return, like changes in ocean currents. In such a context, learning from past crises is not enough. There is a need to reorganise the way authorities prepare for the future.

The empirical material for this qualitative study was collected among Finnish public authorities and experts. Therefore, the thesis forms a case study of the Finnish comprehensive security model. The model is the official guideline for preparedness activities in different sectors. In Finland, all public authorities – or security actors, as the policy documents would say – are legally required to prepare to perform their tasks in all conditions, including crises. In the Finnish policy documents, the aim of preparedness is said to be 1) to prevent disruptions, 2) to prepare for a response and 3) to plan the recovery process. In essence, preparedness aims to build capacities to manage future crises – or, at best, to prevent crises altogether.

When authorities prepare, they make risk assessments and preparedness plans. They might maintain stocks of essential supplies, like medicines or grain. In addition, authorities organise simulation exercises in which they test their procedures – like the Helsinki-Vantaa airport exercise.

Despite the gloomy character of my research topic, I was actually drawn towards it because of my personal interest in imagination and play. I became interested in how bureaucratic institutions that are based on routine operations seem to invite officers to imagine what could go wrong and what they would do about it.

In essence, preparedness is a future-oriented task. Although scenario-based simulation exercises are the clearest example of it, the rest of preparedness efforts are also based on some ways of imagining or making sense of possible futures. I decided to approach preparedness activities by investigating something called preparedness imagination. The concept was proposed by Heino et al. who studied Finnish security policy documents. Preparedness imagination refers to authorities’ ability to explore ideas about threats and crises, especially those that are not apparent in an operational environment. The focus is not on individuals’ minds but on social practices.

With the concept of preparedness imagination, my aim was to contribute to the multidisciplinary field of crisis research. More specifically, my research contributes to literature on sense-making and detection of emerging crises. Sense-making is one of the critical crisis management tasks, like communication to the public or coordination of response efforts. Sense-making refers to the collecting and processing of information that helps authorities to detect an emerging crisis and to understand the significance of what is going on. By studying preparedness imagination, I shed light on the conditions that shape how authorities make sense of future crises.

First, my goal was to know if the current preparedness imagination is up-to-date – considering the current epoch. I wanted to know what factors prevent authorities from recognising socio-ecological crises. Second, my goal was to suggest ways to broaden the scope of preparedness imagination to better address chronic socio-ecological crises.

The empirical material of the study made it possible to analyse Finnish authorities' preparedness imagination in multiple domains and at different administrative levels: First, I analysed the national security and preparedness policy documents. Second, I studied a national expert institute and ministry regarding their preparedness for one specific socio-ecological crisis, a pandemic. Third, I analysed a large corpus of expert interviews on Finnish preparedness. The experts represented various sectors, including environmental experts, but also more conventional security actors. Lastly, I took part in designing a new kind of simulation exercise for municipal policymakers and experts. The exercise, the so-called Policy Operations Room, is an on-going design experiment – and I will return to it later.

In practice, I studied authorities' preparedness imagination in these different contexts by observing the epistemic work that they do regarding three aspects: 1) how they construct their operational environment, 2) who they consider to be the appropriate security actors, and 3) what they consider as adequate preparedness.

As a result, my thesis revealed a set of tensions that compromise the current preparedness imagination of Finnish authorities. These tensions impact how authorities make sense of socio-ecological crises: There is an unavoidable tension between imagined crises and 'real' crises, as crises never turn out as expected. This speaks to a well-known dilemma between the need to *anticipate* and, on the other hand, to maintain *flexibility*. There is a tension between short-term and long-term time horizons in preparedness activities. Also, a tension between so-called hard and soft security actors is found, as well as tensions between the operational and strategic levels of preparedness, and between climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. In the realm of simulation exercises, a further tension exists between exercises that seek to routinise response and exercises that allow participants to explore uncertainty.

Because of the tensions, many of the long-term, cross-sectoral, and cascading aspects of socio-ecological threats are not being considered properly. What results from this is something I call an *illusion of control*. Uncertainty is tamed, and there is a false sense of security. Authorities' focus is often on preparing for direct and local socio-ecological crises, like storms and floods. Indirect, structural and long-term impacts of environmental change are neglected. By pointing out this illusion of control, I wanted to highlight the limitations of traditional crisis detection and sense-making. They tend to focus on well-known risks and fail to account for the interconnections between different threats. Since global environmental changes are accelerating and the predictability of the future is decreasing, preparing for the future could be done with a more imaginative and inclusive approach to crisis management. The point is not to better predict the future but to rather learn how to better improvise in the face of increasing uncertainty and complexity.

In the thesis, therefore, I posit several policy recommendations for broadening the scope of authorities' preparedness imagination. For example, efforts could be taken to further develop generic planning – non-threat-specific planning that allows for flexibility in new situations. Yet, historical analogies and assumptions that form the basis of such planning, need to be carefully evaluated. It is also necessary to develop the current collaboration practices. Scenarios that guide preparedness efforts should be devised and explored in a multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral manner. It is critical to better analyse the systemic aspects of crises. In order to do this, using truly comprehensive policy advice and broad-based expertise would be necessary. Regarding the Finnish comprehensive security model: Knowledge of environmental change is still not properly integrated into the model, or into security work in general.

Also, crisis management's time frame needs to be extended. Specifically, chronic crises deserve

special attention in today's world. During COVID-19, it became clear that some planned responses only work for a particular phase of a crisis. Preparedness should include analysis of how urgent decisions affect the long-term capacity of critical systems to deal with future crises. Also, I present a specific type of simulation exercise for policymakers and experts. The so-called Policy Operations Room is an exercise that works as a time-machine that forces the participants to experience the long-term consequences of their urgent decisions. These kinds of exercises could help authorities in exploring uncertainty and in practising improvisation.

Let's finish by briefly returning to the exercise I described in the beginning. The airport exercise ended up being quite a typical one: It was an exercise in which authorities built routine responses. They tested their established protocols designed for such occasions. I cannot help but wonder how the COVID-19 pandemic would have been received at the airport if this exercise had been different. What would have happened if there had been an ecologist or an anthropologist as part of the team who designed it? What if the participants had been asked to imagine a situation where ten airplanes of exposed people – instead of one person – entered the airport? What if someone had asked if the existing protocol is truly flexible enough?



Nordic Review of International Studies

The Nordic Review of International Studies (NRIS) publishes peer-reviewed scholarly contributions within the field of International Relations (IR), focusing specifically on Nordic perspectives. The NRIS is committed to publishing articles that examine the international sphere empirically, theoretically, or institutionally from a Nordic angle. The aim of the NRIS is to foster scholarly debates on international politics within and concerning the wider Nordic region. The NRIS embraces interdisciplinary approaches and appreciates a wide range of theoretical and methodological choices.

The journal is published by the Finnish International Studies Association (FISA) and committed to the principles of Open Access publishing.



FISA Finnish International Studies Association