Report

The Newest Allies

Finland and Sweden in NATO

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| with a contribution by Jan Hyllander |

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Cover page photo: View from the boardwalk to the "Three-Country Cairn". Photograph by TylerTheTraveler - own work, distributed under a CC BY-SA 3.0 license, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32448953. The cairn marks the point where the borders of Finland, Sweden and Norway meet.

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Contents

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Any errors of fact or judgement are ours alone.

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Executive Summary

Finland and Sweden's decisions to apply to join NATO have been among the most notable geopolitical consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This report examines, largely from the perspective of the security and defence of the Baltic states, the impact of their accession. This is very positive; nonetheless, some associated risks and challenges should also be acknowledged.

While strong strategic cultures based on neutrality and non-alignment dominated for decades in Finland and Sweden, both have sought greater defence cooperation with NATO and with key partners since the end of the Cold War, especially in the past decade or so. Finland has long been alert to the threat posed by Russia and has developed armed forces to address independently any military violence. But the brutality of Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine led to a rapid and substantial shift in public opinion in favour of NATO membership, which was quickly embraced by the leadership. Renewed public appreciation of the threat from Russia ensured that the membership debate proceeded quickly in Sweden too, but the speed of Sweden's shift was also influenced by a wish to take the NATO issue off the table ahead of the elections in September 2022, and by the inevitability of a quick positive decision in neighbouring Finland. The two countries submitted their applications to join NATO on the same day in May 2022. Finland became NATO's 31st Ally on 4 April 2023 while Sweden joined on 7 March 2024.

Finland and Sweden's membership will bring great benefits to the security of the Nordic-Baltic region at all levels. Politically, their accession will strengthen NATO, including by creating a large bloc of states in northern Europe whose memberships of security organisations are (mostly) aligned and who demonstrate broadly similar security thinking. At the operational level, their accession will plug a large hole in NATO territory, reducing the isolation and vulnerability of the Baltic states and allowing military commanders many more options for preparing for and dealing with a possible conflict with Russia. At the tactical level, they add modern, capable armed forces to NATO's inventory.

Nonetheless, their accession is not without its challenges. The most difficult practical challenge for both countries is likely to be developing deployable ground forces to meet the requirements of NATO membership. Finland's present territorial defence arrangements place a high premium on in-place rather than deployable forces. Sweden's recent defence reforms have also focused more on territorial defence than on international deployability, and its army has suffered from recruitment problems.

Overcoming the mental and cultural challenges of accession, however, will probably be more difficult. For Finland, these relate to adjusting an independent, highly self-reliant defence model, held in great regard by both the leadership and population, to meet the needs of collective defence and to the requirement to bolster Allied cohesion by speaking more openly about threats to the Allies' common security interests, in particular, Russia. For Sweden, the notion of neutrality has not only been fostered as a defining element of its self-identity as a distinctive international actor, but also as a necessary vehicle for the development of a unique democracy and welfare state. Its mental transition to Allied status may be difficult and lengthy.

While Finland and Sweden accession to NATO bring immense benefits for the security of the Baltic states and beyond, there are also risks that should be acknowledged. One is that the addition of two strong Allies may encourage other Allies or their publics to believe that deterrence and defence in the Nordic-Baltic region is complete, and needs no further attention. A second is that the low-key approach Finland and Sweden expect to take to their membership, at least in the years immediately following accession, may mean that the benefits of their joining will be only partly realised. It would be a missed opportunity, for example, if Sweden declined to take a leadership role in the Nordic-Baltic region.

There is also a risk that Finland and Sweden's commitment to a strong Nordic regional identity, while useful for promoting practical security and defence cooperation, may be disadvantageous to Baltic security if its pull were to result in the diminished engagement of Finland and Sweden in the Baltic region. The tension between the two countries' northern and Baltic identities has already been evident in a discussion concerning their place in NATO's operational-level command structure. Finally, there is a risk that imprecise talk about 'strategic depth' that has sometimes been part of the discussion about the benefits that Finland and Sweden bring to NATO may suggest that other parts of Allied territory are somehow less important. This would be unhelpful to coherent deterrence by denial on the north-east flank.

We recommend that:

- Finland and Sweden should engage to the greatest extent possible in implementing NATO's core task of collective deterrence and defence in the Nordic-Baltic region. NATO is a political alliance as much as it is a military one. Demonstrating commitment and cohesion by operating alongside other Allies is an important aspect of building deterrence and strengthening defence. Even if membership means making unwelcome or unexpected adjustments to national defence postures and policies, a stronger NATO benefits all Allies, including its newest members.

- They should thus consider contributions to enhanced Forward Presence, Baltic Air Policing, the rotation of air defence systems and capabilities on the eastern flank announced at NATO's Vilnius Summit, and NATO's Standing Maritime Groups and Standing Mine Countermeasures Groups. Sweden has already indicated an intention to contribute in some areas. As a front line state itself, Finland will naturally have less scope for such contributions.

- Sweden should consider cultivating a regional leadership role, especially in the maritime domain. It will need to find a balance between leadership in the Baltic Sea with its ambitions to expand its naval footprint in the North Sea and North Atlantic.

- Both Finland and Sweden should also be open to NATO requests to host Alliance facilities or develop national facilities to better meet Alliance needs on their own territories. This might include, for example, air and sea bases or other logistics facilities, facilities for prepositioning equipment and, in the case of Finland, a NATO Force Integration Unit or similar liaison function.

- Finland and Sweden should be active from day one in security initiatives and policy discussions at NATO HQ that span the entire range of NATO business. Their participation and voices are important in finding solutions to the security challenges facing the Nordic-Baltic region and beyond that also protect Nordic-Baltic interests.

- Equally, they should be ready to step away from the reticence and 'bothsidesism' of non-alignment, in particular to reinforce the Alliance's deterrence messaging.

- They should consider further measures to accelerate the substantial cultural and mindset changes that will be necessary domestically if the Alliance, including its two newest members, is to benefit to the greatest possible effect from their accession. Public information and strategic communication measures are likely to be of greatest value.

- They should continue, with some urgency, to strengthen their military capability, allocating defence funding as needed. Sweden, especially, has work to do to remedy the capability deficits it allowed to develop during the post-Cold War period. Capability developed today can be presented as the 'new normal,' while capability development once Russia's war in Ukraine is over will be claimed by Russia to be escalatory, a sentiment that may also resonate with sectors of Finnish and Swedish society. Naturally, as Allies, they will need to adjust to developing capability within the framework of the NATO Defence Planning Process.

- Finland and Sweden should take advantage of their accession to further develop NORDEFCO within a NATO framework. In this they should be ambitious and recognise that they can be an example to other Allies. They should also make efforts to include the three Baltic states in such cooperation.

- However, they should remain aware that, as Allies, they have responsibilities to NATO that sit above responsibilities to Nordic cooperation. There is no other regional grouping inside NATO that resembles the Nordic states' vision for a Nordic identity. If the north-eastern flank is to remain a security priority for the entire Alliance, Finland and Sweden should be ready to engage with the security interests of all Allies, including those outside the wider Nordic-Baltic region.

List of Abbreviations

A2/AD	Anti-access and area denial
C2	Command and control
eFP	Enhanced Forward Presence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IAMDS	Integrated Air and Missile Defence System
JEF	Joint Expeditionary Force
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NB8	Nordic-Baltic Eight
NDPP	NATO Defence Planning Process
NORDEFCO	Nordic Defence Cooperation
PARP	Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process
PfP	Partnership for Peace

Introduction

The security policy consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 have been profound, including a new seriousness about defence in Europe, a rejuvenation of the transatlantic relationship, and the growth of the EU as a security and defence actor. Alongside Germany's security policy turnaround which, in *Zeitenwende*, gave the world a new word, Finland and Sweden's decisions to break with longstanding policies of neutrality and military non-alignment and to apply to join NATO have been the most notable outcomes at the state level.

A 2016 report commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to examine the impact of Finland joining NATO (although not, reflecting the sensitivities of that time, to come down for or against such a move) characterised its significance thus:

> The shift would be geopolitical and strategic in nature, as momentous, for example, as Sweden's decision to become neutral some two centuries ago, or Poland joining NATO at the end of the nineties. These were decisions conceived for the long haul, which transformed the positioning of these states as political and strategic actors. In other words, the decision to join NATO would not be a mere incremental extension of Finland's increasingly close partnership with NATO.[1]

This report examines the decision to join NATO that Finland and Sweden eventually took in May 2022. It does so largely from the perspective of the security of the Baltic states, where Finland and Sweden's applications to NATO were unanimously and enthusiastically welcomed. It has been written following extensive discussions with officials and analysts in the Nordic-Baltic region who, to allow as much frankness as possible, were interviewed on an anonymous basis. While views are not attributed to individuals or organisations in what follows, they are extensively reflected.

Chapter 1 sets the scene by describing the major factors influencing the present Nordic-Baltic security environment, and the circumstances of Finland and Sweden's long periods of neutrality and non-alignment. Chapter 2 outlines the developments in Finland and Sweden that led to their applications to join the Alliance, while Chapter 3 sets out their expectations for membership. Chapter 4 describes the benefits their membership of NATO will bring, in particular to Baltic security, while Chapter 5 describes some of the challenges they will face in meeting the obligations of NATO membership, and some of the related risks to Baltic security. The report concludes with recommendations.

1. Background

1.1. The Nordic-Baltic Security Environment

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the subsequent integration of the three Baltic states into western security structures brought a period of stability, peace, and prosperity to the Nordic-Baltic region. This has been jeopardised in recent years, in large part due to the actions and posture of Vladimir Putin's Russia. Russia is the only conceivable existential threat to the states of the region and to European states more widely. The dangers it posed to peace and security on the continent were evident for some years before its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. President Putin set out his dissatisfaction with Russia's place in the security order at the Munich Security Conference in 2007.[2] A year later, in August 2008, Russia invaded Georgia and in 2014 illegally annexed Crimea and waged a semi-covert war in eastern Ukraine, hardening existing and creating new frozen conflicts to cultivate instability and extend its sphere of influence. In late 2021, it issued demands in

[1] Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The effects of Finland's possible NATO membership: An assessment* (Helsinki: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2016), 57.

[2] President of Russia, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," 10 February 2007.

the form of draft treaties with NATO and the US for the revision, in its favour, of Europe's security architecture, including the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe, the withdrawal of NATO forces and weapons from the 14 states that became members of the Alliance after 1997 (which in the wider Nordic-Baltic region would include Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and a commitment not to enlarge the Alliance further.[3]

Even so, the fact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the brutality of the conduct of its armed forces in the war that followed were a shock to many of Europe's political leaders and publics. Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz famously spoke of a *Zeitenwende* – a watershed era – and set out to reverse decades of German security and defence policy.[4] Russia's willingness to resort to military action to advance its claims and its readiness to take military risks on the back of serious miscalculations clearly increased the threat it posed to other European states, including in the Nordic-Baltic region where geographically isolated and relatively weak Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had often been envisioned as territories in which Russia might test NATO's resolve.[5] While large-scale conventional military threats have not materialised, Russia has made frequent use of 'hybrid' means in the region, including hostile military actions below the threshold of conflict, to create uncertainty and undermine responses.[6] These sub-threshold military actions have targeted not only NATO states but also non-aligned Finland and Sweden.[7]

NATO has not been blind to the threat from Russia and has, since 2014, adopted a series of measures to strengthen its deterrence and defence posture.[8] In the Nordic-Baltic region, the most visible measure was the deployment, from 2017, of multinational battalion-sized battlegroups to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland: the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP).

The Allies have come to regard the Alliance more in terms of its original purpose of collective defence, rather than as a vehicle for conducting expeditionary operations

The Allies have come to regard the Alliance more in terms of its original purpose of collective defence, rather than as a vehicle for conducting the expeditionary operations that had dominated the post-Cold War period. As they noted in their 2022 Strategic Concept, the first such document for over a decade:

> Our new Strategic Concept reaffirms that NATO's key purpose is to ensure our collective defence, based on a 360-degree approach […] We underscore the need to significantly strengthen our deterrence and defence as the backbone of our Article 5 commitment to defend each other.[9]

Alongside the growing threat from Russia and NATO's adaptation to meet it, other strategic shifts were also taking place in or affecting the security of the Nordic-Baltic region. Since at least the first Obama administration, the US has taken a greater interest and more active role in the Indo-Pacific region.[10] The prospect that European states would, consequently, be less able to rely on the US for security

[3] Stefan Meister, "The Future of European Security – What Does Russia Want?" *German Council on Foreign Relations,* 17 January 2022.

[4] Federal Government (Germany), "Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin," 27 February 2022.

[5] Most famously, perhaps: David A Shlapak and Michael Johnson, "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank. Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics," *RAND Corporation,* RR-1253-A, 2016, 1.

[6] Heinrich Brauß and András Rácz, "Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region," *DGAP,* January 2021, 6-7.

[7] For example: Andrew Higgins, "On a Tiny Finnish Island, a Helipad, 9 Piers – and the Russian Military?" *The New York Times,* 31 October 2018; "Finland reports GPS disturbances in aircraft flying over Russia's Kaliningrad," *The Guardian,* 9 March 2022; Peter Walker, "Sweden searches for suspected Russian submarine off Stockholm," *The Guardian,* 19 October 2014; "Russia accused of disrupting new energy link between Sweden and Lithuania," *Euractiv,* 4 May 2015.

[8] Heinrich Brauss, Kalev Stoicescu, and Tony Lawrence, "Capability and Resolve. Deterrence, Security and Stability in the Baltic Region," *International Centre for Defence and Security,* February 2020, 6-7.

[9] NATO, "2022 Strategic Concept," 29 June 2022, 1.

[10] Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy,* 11 October 2011.

and defence and would need to do more for themselves was reinforced from the other end of the US political spectrum by the hostility of the Trump presidency towards the Alliance, a pattern that may yet re-emerge after the US elections in 2024.[11]

Developments in the US have been among the EU's motivations to enhance its role, although its ambition has been limited to crisis management rather than collective defence

Developments in the US have been among the EU's motivations to enhance its role as a security and defence actor, although its ambition has been limited to crisis management – albeit at the higher end of the spectrum – rather than collective defence.[12] The launch of the EU Global Strategy, in 2016, set in train several EU defence initiatives that have, against the background of an unresolved debate about the need for and scope of Europe's autonomy in security and defence, mostly focused on collaborative capability development. The UK's exit from the EU following a referendum in 2016 meant, for EU defence, both the loss of a difficult member state and the loss of a good deal of military capability that might otherwise have been available to the Union. It also led to a shift in the UK itself, which has in recent years taken a greater interest in the security of the states of the Nordic-Baltic region and made efforts to build a leadership role there. In particular, it has emphasised the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), in which both Finland and Sweden (and the three Baltic states) participate, and which provides another possible vehicle for building capability and responding to regional crises.[13] The strategic coherence of the region, and the EU's identity within it have, meanwhile, been strengthened by Denmark's decision to remove its opt-out from the Common Security and Defence Policy – another surprising, if less consequential, impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[14]

The Nordic states themselves have a tradition of deep cooperation in many sectors. In defence, this cooperation has been exercised multilaterally through Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) and has included, as part of a wide agenda, a focus on the Arctic region. Climate change and ice loss have led to competition regarding resources and potential polar trade routes in the Arctic, as well as leaving Russian territory more exposed. Russia has retained a strong military presence in the region, despite its war in Ukraine, and the potential for friction or conflict here has become a growing concern for NATO and individual Allies.[15] After Finland and Sweden's accession, seven of the eight permanent members of the Arctic Council, the region's most important, if currently dormant, cooperative forum will be NATO Allies.

1.2. Finland and Sweden's Non-Alignment

Strong strategic cultures based on neutrality and non-alignment have dominated for decades in both Finland and Sweden. Sweden has not been engaged in armed conflict since the Napoleonic wars, during which it lost Finland to Russia and gained Norway from Denmark. It subsequently avoided military participation in major conflicts, including the Crimean War and the two World Wars, and preserved a neutral status during the Cold War. It did, however, begin to expand its armed forces and domestic defence industrial capacity in response to the deteriorating security environment of the 1930s and has maintained a robust armed neutrality ever since. Despite its formally neutral status, both Sweden and NATO's leadership understood that Sweden would require assistance if attacked by the Soviet Union and that it would be in NATO's interests to provide it, and that Sweden's neutrality would not be sustainable in the event of a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict. While

[11] Julian E Barnes and Helene Cooper, "Trump Discussed Pulling U.S. From NATO, Aides Say Amid New Concerns Over Russia," *The New York Times,* 14 January 2019.

[12] European Union, Council of the European Union, "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence - For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security," 7371/22, 21 March 2022, 13.

[13] Tomas Jermalavičius and Alice Billon-Galland, *British Power in Baltic Weather. The UK's Role in Nordic-Baltic Security and UK-Estonia Defence Cooperation* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2023), 17-20.

[14] Louis Pernotte and Tony Lawrence, "Denmark's CSDP U-Turn," *ICDS,* October 2022.

[15] Joanna York, "War in Ukraine Threatens Geopolitical Balance in the Arctic," *France 24,* 29 April 2022.

NATO could not provide Sweden with any form of security guarantee, secret preparations for wartime cooperation were made with the Alliance, including practical measures such as creating communications links, expanding airbases, and developing intelligence-sharing arrangements.[16]

Despite its formally neutral status, both Sweden and NATO's leadership understood that Sweden would require assistance if attacked by the Soviet Union and that it would be in NATO's interests to provide it

After the Cold War, Sweden considered the threat of military conflict in its surroundings to be small. Its neutral status formally ended when it joined the EU in 1995, but it held to a strategy of freedom from alliances, while at the same time emphasising the principle of 'solidarity.'[17] This principle was given substance in 2009 with the issue of a formal parliamentary declaration, later endorsed by the government, stating that Sweden should be ready to provide military support if another EU member state was attacked.[18] Solidarity also included closer practical cooperation with NATO, and key partners such as Finland, the US and the UK.[19] Among other initiatives, Sweden was a NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partner, has a host nation support agreement with the Alliance and participates in the NATO Interoperability Platform and Strategic Airlift Capability Initiative.[20] It pursues extensive bilateral military cooperation agreements with both Finland and the US, and trilateral cooperation with the same partners through a 2018 Trilateral Statement of Intent on defence.[21] The UK-led Northern Group and JEF were also important in bringing both Sweden and Finland closer to NATO. Sweden has coordinated its defence planning with these partners and has carried out joint planning with Finland.

These practical efforts, which began in earnest following Russia's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas, are often seen as part of the Hultqvist Doctrine, named after then defence minister, Peter Hultqvist. Although described by Hultqvist himself as an evolution of non-alignment, analysts have argued that the doctrine was in fact a notable move towards alignment and towards collective defence in wartime.[22]

Finland declared independence from the Russian empire in December 1917 and enjoyed two decades of liberal democratic government before Russia invaded in late 1939. Finland preserved its independence in the subsequent Winter War and in 1941 fought alongside Germany to regain lost territories. The 1948 Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between Finland and the Soviet Union set the tone for Cold War relations between the two countries. Finland retained its independence, but the Soviet Union gained political influence over its domestic and international affairs, often through a process of Finnish self-censorship rather than direct pressure from Moscow. Finland's deliberately distant relationship with NATO, for example, allowed it to fend off pressure to join the Warsaw Pact.

These circumstances, often (and sometimes pejoratively) referred to as 'Finlandisation,'

[16] Tapani Vaahtoranta and Tuomas Forsberg, "Post-Neutral or Pre-Allied? Finnish and Swedish Polices on the EU and NATO as Security Organisations," *Finnish Institute of International Affairs, UPI Working Papers* 29 (2000): 8-9.

[17] The EU's Lisbon Treaty (2009) includes both a solidarity clause and a mutual assistance clause, which were important in Finland and Sweden's stepping away from non-alignment "The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster." Article 222, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; "If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter." Article 42.7, Treaty on European Union.

[18] The key part of the 2009 declaration reads: "Sweden will not remain passive should a disaster or an attack afflict another member country or Nordic country. We expect that these countries will act in the same manner should Sweden be afflicted. Sweden should therefore be able to both give and to receive military support."

[19] Jacek Tarociński, "Sweden and Finland: towards Defence Cooperation Agreements with the US," OSW, 11 January 2023; Ministry of Defence (UK), "Sweden and Finland join UK-led response force," Gov.UK, 30 June 2017.

[20] NATO, "Relations with Sweden," 12 April 2023.

[21] Swedish Armed Forces, "Defence Cooperation with Finland," 27 April 2023.

[22] Anna Wieslander, "'The Hultqvist doctrine' – Swedish security and defence policy after the Russian annexation of Crimea," *Defence Studies,* 22:1, 36.

eased after the Cold War. Finland joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 and the EU, alongside Sweden and Austria, in 1995. While there were occasional calls to join NATO in the ensuing decades, the majority position of Finland's political leadership, supported by public opinion, was to stick firmly to a policy of non-alignment and credible national defence.

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Russia's strong opposition to Finland joining NATO, coupled with the presidency of the anti-NATO politician Tarja Halonen (2000-12) led to a period of renewed Finlandisation and made any application to join the Alliance more unlikely.[23]

Even so, Finland recognises that NATO's increased presence in the Baltic region, for example, following the accession of the three Baltic states, has been beneficial for Finland too.[24] Moreover, Finland (unlike Sweden) retained a 'NATO option' in its official security policy discourse, capturing the idea that Finland saw no need for NATO membership but wanted to retain the option of joining if the security situation changed.[25] Recent years have seen Finland closely cooperate in defence with Sweden, the US, and others. Increasingly, non-alignment has entailed being as close as possible to NATO without joining, being a good partner to the US, participating in crisis management, and pursuing technical interoperability with NATO. Closer cooperation with NATO in collective defence came after 2014. As both NATO, and Finland and Sweden were preparing to defend against possible Russian aggression, it made sense to coordinate, de-conflict, and identify mutually supporting goals for separate operations. In response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, NATO activated an initiative known as 'modalities for strengthened interaction,' which provides for coordination in defence planning and classified information sharing, for both Finland and Sweden on 25 February 2022.[26]

Despite these moves, however, Finland's defence posture since at least the 1960s has been characterised by a high degree of self-reliance based on universal male conscription, mass mobilisation of a substantial reserve, proper resourcing of defence, the cultivation of a societal will to defend, and the involvement of the whole of society through total defence.[27] Finns strongly believe that the defence of their country lies in their own hands, and is not something to be outsourced to others.[28]

Finns strongly believe that the defence of their country lies in their own hands and is not something to be outsourced to others

2. The Membership Debates

Throughout the Cold War, Finland had been alert to the Russian military threat and had prepared itself to meet it. Even so, the brutality of Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine and the realisation that, like Ukraine, Finland would have to defend itself alone led to deliberation in defence circles about how it might cope if faced with a similar aggression. While there was no question that Finland would do anything but fight back, there would certainly be heavy casualties. The war of attrition that followed Russia's failure to take Kyiv raised questions in Finland about whether it held the necessary stocks of weaponry, especially of long-range munitions, to resist for a lengthy

[23] David Arter, "From Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation to the end of Finlandisation? Finland's road to a NATO application," *European Security,* 32:2 (September 2022), 181.

[24] For example: "The increased operations and presence of NATO and United States in the Baltic countries and Poland have enhanced stability in the Baltic Sea region," *Government's Defence Report* (Helsinki: Finnish Government, 2021), 15.

[25] Minna Ålander, "Finland wants to use the 'NATO option'," *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik,* 27 April 2022.

[26] Alexandra Brzozowski, "Finland, Sweden to receive enhanced access to NATO intel over Ukraine," *Euractiv,* 26 February 2022.

[27] *Government's Defence Report* (Helsinki: Finnish Government, 2021), 26.

[28] Heljä Ossa and Tommi Koivula, "What Would Finland Bring to the Table for NATO?" *War on the Rocks,* 9 May 2022.

period. Furthermore, Russia's atrocities in Bucha and elsewhere raised doubts about the acceptability of Finland's longstanding territorial defence concept, which allows for territory to be ceded to attacking forces in order to exhaust them and to draw them into locations where Finland holds the advantage to counterattack, including with long-range weapons.[29]

The main impetus for NATO accession came not from the security and defence establishment but from the population

The main impetus for NATO accession, however, came not from the security and defence establishment but from the population. In the 2000s and 2010s, between 60% and 70% of the Finnish population had consistently responded that they would not wish Finland to seek NATO membership, with a plurality of Finns believing that NATO membership would decrease security.[30] Public opinion changed abruptly and starkly following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Polling by national broadcaster Yle, for example, found support for Finland's accession to NATO rising from 53% in February 2022 to 62% in March and 76% in May.[31] Finns also lodged petitions in favour of joining NATO with their parliament.

In February 2022, the government abandoned a longstanding policy of not sending weapons to war zones to supply Ukraine, and in mid-April, it released a report on the changed security environment. The report made no recommendations regarding NATO accession, but its descriptions of alternative arrangements for strengthening Finland's security, including the EU, and various bilateral and multilateral formats, clearly suggest that none would be a substitute for NATO membership.[32] The parliament's debate on the report took place on 13 May, a day after President Sauli Niinistö and Prime Minister Sanna Marin jointly declared that "Finland should apply for NATO membership at the earliest possible opportunity." It was, in effect, a debate about Finland's NATO application, which parliament overwhelmingly backed.[33]

For Finland, non-alignment had been a pragmatic response to its historical circumstances and geographical position. Russia's war cast serious doubt on the continuing value of this policy. Putin's intimations that Finland had only limited sovereignty and that its bilateral relations with Russia were not in any way special only emphasised the point. Russia's immediate resort to nuclear threats to dissuade Finland (and Sweden) from trying to join NATO, meanwhile, provided further evidence of its understanding of the relationship between the two countries.[34] The Finnish leadership and population apparently had little hesitation (and few regrets later) about shifting direction.

For Sweden, however, the question was somewhat more complicated. The Swedish decision to apply for NATO membership can be attributed to three key reasons: first, Russia's war in Ukraine; second, the shift in Finland; and third, a wish to deal with the issue ahead of the Swedish elections in September 2022 and avoid NATO membership becoming an election question.

The Swedish decision to apply can be attributed to Russia's war in Ukraine, the shift in Finland, and a wish to deal with the issue ahead of the elections

Public understanding of NATO in Sweden was quite low, at least in part because political sensitivities made it impossible to talk openly to the public about the Alliance. For many Swedes, NATO was essentially equivalent to the US and membership would inevitably lead to

[29] Pekka Visuri, "Evolution of the Finnish Military Doctrine 1945-1985," *Finnish Defence Studies 1*, (Hensinki: War College, 1990), 60-3.

[30] Charly Salonius-Pasternak, "The defence of Finland and Sweden: Continuity and variance in strategy and public opinion," *Finnish Institute for International Affairs,* Briefing Paper 240, June 2018.

[31] "Yle poll: Support for Nato membership soars to 76%," *Yle,* 9 May 2022.

[32] *Government report on changes in the security environment* (Helsinki: Finnish Government, 2022), 14-29.

[33] Arter, "From Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation to the end of Finlandisation?" 183-4.

[34] Jon Henley and Julian Borger, "Russia warns of nuclear weapons in Baltic if Sweden and Finland join Nato," *The Guardian,* 14 April 2022.

Sweden hosting US forces. For others, NATO's nuclear dimension was a major concern, again with some assuming that membership would force US nuclear weapons onto Sweden. NATO's reputation and the reliability of the US were also tainted in many Swedes' minds by the Trump presidency.

Russia's war in Ukraine demonstrated that being outside the Alliance meant no direct assistance in the event of an attack.[35] Public support for Swedish membership of NATO during the 2000s and 2010s had been higher than in Finland, growing (albeit not consistently) from around 15% in 2005 and peaking at almost 50% in 2015.[36] By April 2022, two months after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, support for membership had grown to around 57% according to one typical poll.[37] Even if the change in public opinion in Sweden was less dramatic than it was in Finland, the NATO bottle had been uncorked. In terms of supporting Ukraine, Sweden, like Finland, was very quick to reverse longstanding policies and supply it with lethal weapons.[38] At 97%, compared to an average of 74%, Sweden has shown the highest level of approval among the member states for the EU's support to Ukraine.[39]

Before the war, the social democrats had been spooked by a December 2020 parliamentary majority backing for a 'NATO option.'[40] Like its Finnish equivalent, the NATO option would not oblige Sweden to apply for membership, but its very existence was a challenge to long-held Swedish, and especially social democrat, beliefs about neutrality and Swedish identity. In the Europe-wide security policy turmoil that followed Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there was a clear prospect that NATO membership could become an issue in Sweden's September 2022 general election.

The NATO option would not oblige Sweden to apply for membership, but its very existence was a challenge to long-held Swedish beliefs about neutrality and identity

Its removal from the table was made possible by a change in the leadership of the Social Democratic Party: Magdalena Andersson, who took the leadership in 2021, is regarded as representing the pragmatist wing of the party that does not feel itself bound by the tradition of neutrality promoted by her predecessors. Under her leadership, the social democrats announced their backing for NATO accession in May 2022.

Still, for Sweden, the most persuasive factor favouring a NATO application was the clear direction in which Finland was heading. Sweden had previously argued that its military non-alignment was a force for stability in northern Europe.[41] In particular, it recognised that its own security and that of Finland were closely tied and that any unilateral move Sweden might make towards NATO membership would leave Finland vulnerable. Once Finland was ready to apply to join NATO, Sweden's arguments about the stability brought by its own non-alignment no longer held water. The strategic logic would be reversed, and Sweden, rather than Finland, would be left exposed. As the report commissioned by the Swedish government on the security situation after Russia's full-scale invasion observed:

> If Finland chose to apply for NATO membership but Sweden did not, Sweden's security situation would be adversely impacted. Sweden would be the only non-NATO country in the Nordic and Baltic regions and would therefore be of military strategic interest to Russia if a conflict arose. Our military and security vulnerabilities and exposure would increase.[42]

[35] Despite the expectations of Sweden's unilateral 2009 solidarity declaration, which not only committed Sweden to act in the defence of its partners but also anticipated that these partners would act if Sweden were attacked.

[36] Salonius-Pasternak, "The defence of Finland and Sweden."

[37] "Growing majority of Swedes back joining NATO, opinion poll shows," *Reuters,* 20 April 2022.

[38] Ella Strandberg, "A Welcome Surprise from the IKEA Guys," *ICDS,* 8 March 2022.

[39] European Union, European Parliament, "EU citizens' support for Ukraine is solid, Eurobarometer survey finds," 14 December 2022.

[40] "Majority in Swedish parliament backs 'NATO option' after Sweden Democrats shift," *Reuters,* 9 December 2020.

[41] For example: "Our non-participation in military alliances serves us well and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe." Government Offices of Sweden, "The Government's Statement of Foreign Policy 2020," 12 February 2020.

[42] Government Offices of Sweden and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Deterioration of the security environment – implications for Sweden," Ds 2022:8, 13 May 2022, 33-4.

The report, like its Finnish equivalent did not specifically recommend that Sweden should apply to join NATO, though its conclusions include statements and an argumentative logic clearly supportive of membership.[43] All parties in the parliament contributed to the report, building shared understanding and consensus to the point that, at the political level at least, joining NATO was no longer a divisive issue. Nonetheless, consensus was not total, and the report includes clear dissenting statements from the opposition Left Party (24 of 349 seats) and Green Party (18 seats) which, while broadly sharing the majority view of the threat posed by Russia, did not accept that NATO was the answer.[44] Both parties were critical of NATO's nuclear dimension, while the Left Party also stressed the dominance of the US in the Alliance.

The government decided to apply for membership of NATO on 16 May. On 18 May, Finland and Sweden submitted their applications at the same time.[45] The subsequent NATO integration process has been led by Allied Command Transformation with support from Allied Command Operations ('SHAPE'). Both Finland and Sweden have consulted widely with current Allies, often in great detail, to prepare for membership. Sweden has valued the support of Norway as a 'big brother' during the accession process.

Both invitees were required to develop a NATO integration plan but, in recognition of their already advanced technical integration with the Alliance, neither was asked to participate in a Membership Action Plan (MAP).[46] This will undoubtedly raise eyebrows in states that have been kept outside NATO's doors for many years. NATO has few criteria for accepting new members. The main requirements are set out in its 1995 Study on Enlargement, but even this points out that there is no "fixed or rigid list."[47] Nonetheless, established NATO practice since the late 1990s has seen applicants participate in a MAP process to help them prepare for membership. The eleven Allies who joined NATO between 2004 and 2020 went through the MAP, sometimes for extended periods– for example, North Macedonia, which joined NATO in March 2020, had participated in the MAP for 21 years. Bosnia and Herzegovina has participated since 2010. Finland and Sweden's fast-tracking will certainly be questioned by other NATO applicants (currently, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine) and was likely a consideration in NATO's decision at the Vilnius Summit "to recognise that Ukraine's path to full Euro-Atlantic integration has moved beyond the need for the Membership Action Plan."[48]

The parliaments of all existing Allies must ratify the accession protocols before an invitee can join NATO. This was achieved speedily in the case of Finland, but Sweden's progress was held up in the Hungarian and Turkish parliaments. Despite the frequent insistence of the two countries that they would only join at the same time, Finland became NATO's 31st member state on 4 April 2023, Sweden remained in the wings for almost another year.[49] Despite the accession process dragging on, the Swedish population's support for membership continued to grow, reaching 65% in mid-2023, with notable growth in support amongst women accounting for part of the rise.[50] On the other hand, a constituency of

[43] For example: "Within the framework of current cooperation, there is no guarantee that Sweden would be helped if it were the target of a serious threat or attack […] Swedish NATO membership would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a deterrent effect in northern Europe." Government Offices of Sweden and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Deterioration of the security environment," 39-40.

[44] "The Left Party says no to Sweden joining NATO"; "Many formulations in the analysis imply a clear position that NATO membership would best serve Sweden's security, but we do not share those conclusions." Government Offices of Sweden and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Deterioration of the security environment," 45, 51.

[45] NATO, "Finland and Sweden submit applications to join NATO," 18 May 2022.

[46] NATO, "Membership Action Plan (MAP)," 19 April 2023.

[47] NATO, "Study on NATO Enlargement," 3 September 1995 (updated 5 November 2008), para. 70.

[48] NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué. Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Vilnius 11 July 2023," press release (2023) 001, 11 July 2023, para. 11.

[49] Sweden and Türkiye announced a deal in the margins of NATO's Vilnius Summit intended to pave the way for Türkiye's ratification of the accession protocols in 2023; Sweden's accession was approved by the Turkish parliament's foreign affairs committee in December 2023 and the full parliament voted to ratify its accession on 24 January 2024; Hungary's parliament ratified Sweden's accession on 26 February 2026. Lili Bayer, "Turkey agrees to back Sweden's NATO membership bid," *Politico,* 10 July 2023; "Turkish lawmakers take next step towards letting Sweden into Nato," *The Guardian,* 27 December 2023.

[50] Hans Rosén, "DN/Ipsos: Stödet för svenskt Natomedlemskap ökar [DN/Ipsos: Support for Swedish NATO membership is increasing]," *Dagens Nyheter,* 1 June 2023.

Swedes believes that the debate was rushed and that inadequate information provided to the population.[51] The idea that Sweden would be expected to contribute at fairly large scale to deterrence and defence operations in other parts of NATO territory, for example,

Even after Finland's accession, public debate in both countries has often focused on the obligations of membership and the domestic impact rather than the collective benefits

was perhaps not widely understood.[52] Even after Finland's accession, public debate in both countries has often focused on the obligations of membership and the domestic impact ("we need to send troops") rather than the collective benefits ("we are NATO").

[51] "In Sweden, misgivings over rushed debate to join NATO," *France 24,* 13 May 2022.

[52] Mikael Holmström, "Källor: Nato vill ha svensk armétrupp på 5 000 soldater [Sources: NATO wants Swedish army troops of 5,000 soldiers]," *Dagens Nyheter,* 19 May 2023.

The Long and Winding Road

A personal perspective by Jan Hyllander[53]

Swedish security policy has followed a long and winding road to the door of NATO's collective security. Sweden's accession to the Alliance marks the formal end of a complicated legacy of neutrality with a disputed conceptual continuity. Swedish neutrality and military non-alignment date back to the end of the Napoleonic wars and the loss of Finland to Russia in 1809 and reflect a security policy adapting to changing geopolitical conditions with Russia at its core. The Swedish journey has seen several twists and turns challenging the notion of neutrality but has kept Sweden out of wars for more than 200 years.

Practical neutrality exists only in times of war and its essence is non-participation in a war between other states. But there are two main categories of neutrality as a peacetime policy. The first is a permanent, legally binding neutrality, either through a treaty or national legislation. The second is a unilateral statement of will with no legally binding legislation or treaty. A state with legally binding neutrality is expected to adopt some restrictions on its peacetime policy, while the second category of state will have a larger degree of flexibility. But in any event, a security policy doctrine will only be relevant if it is credible in the eye of its beholder.

Finland and Sweden share much common history, but the 1930s and 1940s laid the foundations for different security policies. At the start of the Second World War, both Finland and Sweden declared neutrality, but the Soviet Union invaded Finland in November 1939, starting the Winter War (1939–40) and eventually forcing Finland to sign the Moscow Treaty in March 1940. Sweden managed to stay out of the war but paid a heavy price in terms of concessions to Germany, including an agreement to supply, for example, iron ore, and a transit agreement to allow transportation of troops and goods through its territory.

A key development after the Second World War was the 1948 Treaty of Friendship Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Soviet Union and Finland, which limited Finland's freedom to make policy. After a period of discussions on a potential Scandinavian Defence Union, Sweden, recognising the risk of provoking the Soviet Union to take further actions against Finland, adopted a policy of neutrality. Sweden's Cold War doctrine was eventually summarised as non-alignment in peacetime, aiming at neutrality in war. It was a policy with no legally binding legislation or treaty.

Swedish non-alignment during the Cold War was combined with (today) well-known but then secret arrangements with Western countries to prepare for military cooperation in the event of war. During the decades following the Second World War, Sweden gradually developed a large military defence within a comprehensive total defence structure to deter attacks, but if it was drawn into an armed conflict with the Warsaw Pact, the basic aim would be to hold out until help could arrive.

To cut short the long and complex story of Sweden and the Cold War, there were several political disputes, primarily between social democrats and conservatives, related to the policy of neutrality. Social democratic governments worked to keep a lid on these debates for the sake of the credibility of Sweden's neutrality in the eyes of the Soviet Union. A more active foreign policy with a prominent moral dimension was developed when Olof Palme became party leader and prime minister in 1969. Influenced by the peace movements, this activism included participation in anti-US demonstrations about the war in Vietnam. A moral stance on wars in other parts of the world was considered to be in accordance with a self-proclaimed policy of neutrality between East and West but had consequences: the US even froze diplomatic relations with Sweden for a period at the peak of US-Swedish tensions.

In the 1980s, broad international tensions and Soviet submarine intrusions into Swedish waters led to intensified criticism from liberals

[53] The text is based on the author's many years of experience in Swedish security and defence policy and does not necessarily reflect the views of previous or current employers.

and conservatives about the social democrats' version of neutrality, including what they considered to be a reluctance to be firmer on the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, liberal and conservative politicians started the Monday Movement Demonstrations at Norrmalmstorg in the centre of Stockholm in support of the Baltic states. These continued every Monday at noon until the Baltic states regained their independence.

The immediate post-Cold War euphoria and its visions of eternal peace had dramatic effects. Fears of war between East and West diminished and several initiatives for dialogue and cooperation were established, with NATO as a key player. In this new era, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the following Yugoslav Wars contributed to changes in the policies of multinational institutions and individual countries, including Sweden. The focus gradually shifted from preparing for a major war between East and West to cooperation in peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations.

In 1991, Carl Bildt became Sweden's prime minister, leading a conservative/centre/liberal coalition government. Increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation in foreign, security, and defence policy became key elements of government policy in the following years. Substantial contributions to international operations were an obvious element of solidarity with the international community but were also, to some extent, an indicator of Sweden's place in the European security order as a contributing state worthy of future EU membership and increased cooperation with NATO. The regained independence of the Baltic states was the starting point of long-lasting Swedish support to their sovereignty, initially centred on preparations for a Baltic contribution to peacekeeping operations which were intended to limit the risk of provoking Russia.

Domestically, however, the Bildt government was reluctant to move fast on changing Sweden's doctrine of 'non-alignment.' In recognition of the prospect of future EU membership, the wording changed to 'military non-alignment' without a major political reaction except from the far left which promoted neutrality and opposed EU membership. But Sweden's legacy of neutrality meant that joining the EU in 1995 was not an obvious step for a large part of the population – an advisory referendum showed only 52.3% in favour. Security policy was not, however, among the main arguments in the debate, which was largely dominated by economic aspects.

Sweden's cooperation with NATO took several specific steps in the 1990s. The Allies established the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1991 as a forum for dialogue and cooperation with NATO's former Warsaw Pact adversaries. Increasing multilateral political consultation and cooperation paved the way for the creation in 1994 of the Partnership for Peace as a forum for cooperation and a waiting room for countries openly aspiring to NATO membership. Finland and Sweden took part in some NACC meetings before joining the PfP and the associated Planning and Review Process, which was a major step in promoting further practical cooperation and interoperability with NATO. The Swedish Armed Forces have thus developed interoperability with NATO since the early 1990s, adopting NATO standards and participating in several NATO-led operations, including in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

Another change in Swedish doctrine came in 2002. With the social democrats back in government since 1994, Prime Minister Göran Persson established a new formula with the support of the centre and conservative political parties in parliament: "Sweden is militarily non-aligned. This doctrine, with the possibility of neutrality in conflicts in our vicinity, has served us well." Neutrality was thus reduced to a possibility and referred to in the past tense. Several factors were behind this change. One important aspect was the continuation of the notion that Russia would not be a threat in the near future, allowing Sweden to take 'strategic time out' from substantial national defence efforts. Meanwhile, in more practical terms, Sweden had become a more active EU member and a solid NATO partner with a focus on cooperation in international peace support and counterterrorism.

Ongoing reductions in Sweden's defence forces and a decrease in the training of conscripts led Swedish security policy

consideration to crucial points in 2007 and 2008. The Defence Commission (a forum for consultations between the government and representatives of the political parties in parliament) produced two reports intended to generate solid parliamentary support for a new defence resolution for the next five-year period. A key element from the first report, on security policy, was the proposal for a Swedish unilateral declaration of solidarity: Sweden would not remain passive if another EU Member State or a Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack and would expect these countries to take similar action if Sweden was affected. The second report, on defence policy, added that Sweden should be able to give and receive military assistance. These proposals amounted to a dramatic change of policy and created substantial debate. Officially, the solidarity declaration was presented as an addition to the EU treaties to also cover the Nordic countries outside the Union. De facto, however, it was another step away from the legacy of neutrality.

Soon after the Defence Commission´s second report in 2008, Russia attacked Georgia. The government delayed the defence reform bill, providing time to include an updated analysis of Russia. The bill, largely based on the Defence Commission's reports and this updated analysis, was completed in 2009 by the liberal/centre/conservative coalition government, in power since 2006 and led by Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt. It included an increased focus on professional military forces with short-notice deployment capability and proposed leaving conscription dormant. A broad majority in parliament, including the social democrats, adopted the suggested solidarity declaration, but the remainder of the defence bill was carried by only a narrow margin because of the opposition's objections to the conscription proposal.

After 2009, Sweden's official policy of military non-alignment, combined with a security policy of solidarity, was regularly debated and often questioned. Russia´s attack on Georgia was not enough to trigger a fundamental change, but concern gradually grew over Russia and the poor state of the Swedish armed forces – since the end of the Cold War, Sweden had dramatically reduced its armed forces and dissolved its total defence system. Russia´s annexation of Crimea and intrusion into Donbas in 2014, however, was a game changer. In 2015, the parliament agreed a defence resolution based on Defence Commission reports that would reinvent the total defence system adapted to current conditions and challenges. It also included the reintroduction of conscription (gender-neutral for the first time) and long-term plans to develop both military defence and civil defence.

While cooperation with NATO further increased, including in civil resilience working groups, the official policy of military non-alignment was maintained. To the surprise of many, a new government elected in 2014 and led by the Social Democratic Party, also added – without political consultations – previously abandoned wording to the effect that military non-alignment served Sweden well. The context for this change was the so-called 'Hultqvist doctrine,' championed by the minister for defence, Peter Hultqvist, that rejected NATO membership but advocated the development of bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation with Finland and several NATO countries, including the US.

In the same year, partly in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea, Sweden and Finland became NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partners. This involved enhanced security dialogue concerning the Baltic Sea region and an intensified exchange of information between Sweden, Finland, and NATO. In 2016, Sweden signed a host nation support agreement with NATO, regulating aspects of foreign forces under NATO command on Swedish territory and making it easier for Sweden to receive support from NATO in response to a crisis or war.

A new total defence bill, based on Defence Commission reports, was approved by parliament in December 2020. The reinforcement of total defence continues today, while military defence is also being developed through substantial reinforcement of the wartime organisation, increased numbers of personnel and quantities of defence materiel, and new capabilities. During 2021, Sweden's security policy debate intensified. A majority in parliament suggested that a NATO option, similar to Finland´s, should be included in the security policy doctrine. The social democratic government disagreed,

however, and as late as February 2022, a few days before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, continued to promote military non-alignment as an essential contribution to stability and security in northern Europe.

Russia's invasion was followed by a few turbulent months of international consultation and domestic political negotiation that resulted in a new government report signed by representatives from all political parties in parliament (the Left Party and the Green Party supported large parts of the report but not the material related to NATO). The report, *Deterioration of the security environment – implications for Sweden, Ds 2022:8*, concluded that it was not realistic to develop bilateral defence alliances involving mutual defence guarantees outside existing European and Euro-Atlantic structures and that there was a lack of political will among EU Member States for collective defence within the Union. There is no doubt that clear signals from Finland that it would move towards a NATO application were also decisive for Sweden: one of the report's conclusions was that Swedish membership of NATO would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a deterrent effect in northern Europe.

A historical change in Sweden's security policy doctrine had thus become fact. On 16 May 2022, the Social Democratic government, with broad support in parliament, applied for NATO membership. In the formal letter to the NATO Secretary General, Sweden accepted NATO´s approach to security and defence, including the essential role of nuclear weapons. At the Madrid Summit on 5 July 2022, all NATO Allies signed the Accession Protocol. Until this was ratified in capitals, Sweden had the status of 'invitee.' On 8 March 2023, the new liberal/conservative coalition government presented a bill proposing Sweden's accession to NATO, which was approved in a historic vote in parliament on 22 March with 269 in favour, 37 against, and 43 absent. While waiting for ratification in Hungary and Türkiye, Sweden continued to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The significance of Sweden´s decision to apply for NATO membership should not be underestimated. It marks a paradigm shift in Swedish identity and security policy. The prospect of a NATO application always hinged on the Social Democratic Party: despite gradually growing political support for NATO over the years, a broad and lasting majority could only be established through a fundamental change within this party. This dramatic change happened in the space of just a few months in 2022, but the psychological and societal adaption that will be required in Sweden has only just begun, with many still sceptical about or even against NATO membership.

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO will be beneficial to both countries as well as to the Alliance. Northern Europe, including the Baltic Sea region, is a key strategic area where Russian and Western interests collide. Russia's increasingly aggressive activities in the region indicate the risk of conflict. Military attacks on a NATO member country might be unlikely, but there are valid concerns regarding the condition of NATO's response capabilities, both in the Arctic and the Baltic Sea region. Finland and Sweden's NATO membership will fundamentally change the geo-political and geo-strategic conditions here. As integral parts of NATO's collective defence, defence planning, and operational planning, Finland and Sweden will contribute to NATO's deterrence and geographical depth, ending question marks about their status and role in the event of war. Both countries will adopt NATO's strategic concepts, defence plans, and 360-degree approach and bring substantial and capable military forces that will be fully integrated into Alliance deterrence and the defence of NATO territory.

After the NATO summit in Madrid in 2022, Finland and Sweden immediately started to adjust their participation and cooperation inside NATO's structures and working groups. In integrating into the Alliance, Swedish representatives will need to maintain a humble and open mind and avoid categorical caveats.

Adjustments are required in numerous areas. Society-wide information sharing and education are essential to build both public and professional understanding and support. Education and training programmes for both military and civilian personnel need to be adapted and increased. Organisational change and reinforcement of staff will also be needed

in government offices, the armed forces, and civilian agencies, including the additional human resources and capacity required to participate in NATO structures. The ongoing reform of Sweden's total defence must adapt to NATO strategic concepts, defence plans, operational planning and the 360-degree approach. It is no longer a national defence reform that includes cooperation with NATO but a reform for NATO deterrence, resilience, and the collective defence of all Allied territories. Future conflicts in northern Europe will most likely take place in every domain: cyber, space, air, sea, and land. Russia has long been a constant threat to countries in the region with its various hybrid activities and operations and the Baltic states and other member states are obviously concerned about Allied response time and capabilities in conflicts. Finland and Sweden's membership changes the calculus dramatically in favour of Allied deterrence and defence in northern Europe. Even so, the challenges of Finland and Sweden's integration into NATO should not be underestimated.

A security policy doctrine will only be relevant if it is credible. Sweden's policies of neutrality, non-alignment and military non-alignment probably lacked credibility in Soviet and Russian eyes over the years, but Russia preferred them to Sweden's NATO membership. In security policy and more broadly, Sweden has long been an integrated part of the West, sharing fundamental values. On the other hand, Sweden has lacked the collective security provided by NATO. As Ukraine's fate has clearly indicated, military non-alignment does not provide deterrence and security, only vulnerability. And once Finland had paved the way to NATO membership, Sweden lost its former argument for military non-alignment – that it was necessary to preserve stability in northern Europe and not risk Finland's security. During the spring of 2022, this became obvious to a majority of Sweden's public and a broad majority of its political parties, including the Social Democratic Party. Military non-alignment does not serve Sweden well. There is no going back to the legacy of neutrality.

Sweden will continue to build on existing relations and cooperation with individual countries, in the Nordic-Baltic context, with NATO, and within the EU. For example, in October 2023, Sweden signed a strategic partnership with the UK deepening cooperation on defence and security. Sweden is also part of the Joint Expeditionary Force with ten northern European countries, while in December 2023, in a further development of their cooperation, Sweden and the US signed a substantial bilateral defence cooperation agreement.

The Swedish Defence Commission is expected to provide a final report in spring 2024 as a key contribution to the autumn 2024 Government Bill and Defence Resolution. An obvious question in this timeframe concerns the potential consequences of another Trump presidency. Should Trump limit US commitment to Europe and NATO, or even try to withdraw from the Alliance, NATO and Euro-Atlantic security would face a deep crisis, and discussions on different definitions of European strategic autonomy would be re-ignited. Security is always a complex business. But for Sweden, its NATO membership is the obvious end of the long and winding road of neutrality, non-alignment, and military non-alignment.

3. What Finland and Sweden Want from NATO

While many of Europe's armed forces were downsized and refocused on expeditionary operations during the post-Cold War period, Finland maintained a strong defence posture. Its defence planning during this period and beyond assumed that its armed forces must be sized and shaped to deal with a military attack by Russia and that they alone would be responsible for Finland's defence.[54] For Finland, NATO accession is about enhancing deterrence more than about strengthening defence. As a non-aligned state, Finland had believed itself too small to refer to deterrence in a national context, relying instead on a more nebulous concept that concerned building a sufficient 'threshold.' While this defence posture ought to be sufficient to dissuade any potential adversary from an attack, Russia's decision to invade Ukraine on multiple axes with insufficient forces has shown that it may take risks based on flawed judgements in pursuit of its objectives. Russia is not an irrational actor but may miscalculate. In such circumstances, the added knowledge that other NATO Allies would support Finland in the event of an attack, and that NATO's response may include a nuclear component, are understood to greatly strengthen Finland's deterrence.

For Finland, NATO accession is about enhancing deterrence more than about strengthening defence

Finland also recognises the 'force multiplier' effect of allied forces and capabilities, which provide greater collective capacity in areas such as intelligence, airborne surveillance, and space and submarine operations that most individual nations cannot provide alone.[55] But overall, it remains confident in its own defence and expects not to need substantial Allied support. It will continue to prepare for and conduct its own defence, in accordance with Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, but will do so within a wider NATO context.[56] This may mean, for example, that NATO operations elsewhere could benefit from the tying up by Finnish forces of large numbers of Russian troops in locations such as Karelia and the Kola peninsula.

Similarly, the Finns see no requirement to host some form of NATO eFP or to extend the deployment of the US troops sent to Finland as a reassurance measure.[57] Both would be inconsistent with the concept of self-reliance. Lower levels of presence, for example, prepositioned stocks and equipment, a NATO Force Integration Unit, NATO exercises on Finnish soil, and the construction of host nation support capacity could be considered as integration proceeds, but Finland stresses that its analysis will be based on military need.

Sweden has historically been much more open to the idea of collective defence, albeit outside any alliance context. Its secret Cold War arrangements and its emphasis on solidarity in the post-Cold War period point to a recognition that Sweden does not have the capacity for fully independent defence and will need to rely on others. Sweden's accession to NATO is thus about both defence and deterrence (although Sweden also recognises the need to continue to strengthen its own

Its secret Cold War arrangements and its emphasis on solidarity in the post-Cold War period point to a recognition that Sweden does not have the capacity for fully independent defence and will need to rely on others

[54] Charly Salonius-Pasternak, "Defence Innovation: New Models and Procurement Implications. The Finnish Case," *The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, ARES Policy Paper,* 65 (March 21): 3-4.

[55] Finnish Defence Forces, "The Finnish Defence Forces and NATO."

[56] "In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack." NATO, "The North Atlantic Treaty. Washington D.C. - 4 April 1949," 10 April 2019; Finnish Defence Forces, "The Finnish Defence Forces and NATO."

[57] The US Marine presence in Finland was increased following its application for accession in May 2022. NATO, "Reaching the Finnish line together – US Marines train with Finland's Nyland Brigade," 14 May 2023.

defence capabilities to fulfil its obligations under Article 3 of the Washington Treaty). As Sweden will not be a front-line state, there is little prospect of it hosting a meaningful NATO land domain combat presence, such as eFP. While some Swedes have argued that in a crisis it would be important to have as many Allies on Swedish territory as possible – to ensure NATO's engagement and enhance deterrence – it remains unclear whether Sweden is prepared to host any form of permanent NATO presence.

The issue of nuclear deterrence is, however, certainly contentious in Sweden. In 2019, the government announced, amid substantial domestic controversy, that it would not accede to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and in its application to join NATO, Sweden clearly accepted the "essential role of nuclear weapons" in NATO's approach to security and defence.[58] But government messaging about the prospect of Sweden hosting nuclear weapons on its soil, as a consequence of joining NATO, has been less clear.[59] While this is an important issue of principle, in practical terms, the question is unlikely to arise. NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements, by which a limited number of US B-61 bombs are stored on the territory of and could be delivered by aircraft belonging to a handful of Allies, are mostly seen as a relic of the Cold War.[60] No Ally that acceded to NATO after the end of the Cold War has been asked to host US nuclear weapons and, unless a major strategic realignment provokes a review of NATO's nuclear deterrence policy, this is likely to remain the case. Nonetheless, the domestic importance of this question may yet compel Sweden to include a caveat forbidding nuclear weapons on its territory as a means of preserving consensus.

[58] Government Offices of Sweden, "The Government's continued work for nuclear disarmament," 12 July 2019; Anne Linde to Jens Stoltenberg, 5 July 2022.

[59] "New Swedish PM Says Open to Nukes Under NATO," *The Defense Post,* 2 November 2022; "Sweden to spurn nuclear weapons as NATO member, foreign minister says," *Reuters*, 11 November 2022.

[60] Frank Kuhn, "Making Nuclear Sharing Credible Again: What the F-35A Means for NATO," *War on the Rocks,* 14 September 2023. In October 2023, the US announced its intention to introduce a new design for the B-61. This is intended to replace, rather than supplement, existing designs and there is no suggestion that the US intends to extend nuclear sharing beyond the existing arrangements: Aaron Mehta, "US to introduce new nuclear gravity bomb design: B61-13," *Breaking Defense,* 27 October 2023.

4. What Finland and Sweden Bring to NATO

This chapter examines what Finland and Sweden's accession bring to NATO at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. It considers the implications for the high north and Arctic but focuses mostly on the impact on the security and defence of the Baltic region, and in particular of the three Baltic states.

Finland and Sweden's accession have been universally welcomed in the Baltic states. It has long been Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania's ambition to see their Nordic neighbours become Allies. Leaders in all three states were quick to applaud Finland and Sweden's applications, and the three parliaments rapidly ratified the accession protocols.[61] Estonia's postal service later issued a postage stamp to commemorate Finland's accession.[62]

Perhaps the most important benefit of Finland and Sweden's accession, especially regarding defence and deterrence in the Baltic region, is the political signal it sends to Russia and other potential adversaries

4.1. The Strategic Level: A Political Signal

Perhaps the most important benefit of Finland and Sweden's accession, especially regarding defence and deterrence in the Baltic region, is the political signal it sends to Russia and other potential adversaries. Accession will create a large bloc of states in northern Europe whose memberships of security organisations are aligned (except for Norway's non-membership of the EU). These states demonstrate broadly similar security thinking: they all take seriously the threat that Russia poses to regional security, and all recognise the importance of a military

[61] Government of Estonia, "Joint Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Baltic States on the decisions of Finland and Sweden to join NATO," 18 May 2022; NATO Parliamentary Assembly, "Ratification of Finland and Sweden's Accession to NATO."

[62] "Omniva issues new stamp to commemorate Finland joining NATO," *ERR,* 2 June 2023.

component as a key part of the response to that threat. With Finland and Sweden's accession, their military response will be collective and organised under NATO. These two aspects – a strong military response, conducted with Allies – have been the foundation of security thinking in the Baltic states since they regained their independence in the early 1990s. It should thus not be surprising that the Baltic states had long advocated and then warmly welcomed Finland and Sweden's applications to join the Alliance.

Russia's reaction has also been unsurprising. While Russia appears to have grudgingly accepted there is little it can do to prevent Finland and Sweden from joining NATO, it has, nonetheless, variously labelled the move destabilising, warned of serious political and military consequences, and threatened that it would need to restore the military balance in the region, including by creating military groupings in Russia's north-west and deploying nuclear weapons.[63] Indeed, Russian threat perceptions concerning the possible location in Finland and Sweden of NATO units, weapons, and equipment and the greater vulnerability of St. Petersburg and the Kola peninsula have already led it to announce "retaliatory measures" even as its armed forces continue to be heavily occupied in Ukraine. These include plans for 2023-26 to create an army corps in the Republic of Karelia and to dissolve the Western Military District and re-establish instead the Moscow and Leningrad military districts.[64] At the time of writing, Russia does not appear to have acted on these plans.[65]

Finland and Sweden's accession will likely accelerate a growing conception of a division of labour between the EU and NATO

More broadly, Finland and Sweden's accession will strengthen NATO as a whole politically. It underlines both that this is an organisation that states wish to join in the expectation that it will bring demonstrable benefits to their own security and that the Alliance is the only show in town when it comes to providing hard security. This in turn will likely accelerate a growing conception of a division of labour between the EU and NATO, which sees NATO as responsible for collective defence and some crisis management, and the EU having a greater role in capability development, countering hybrid threats, and also some crisis management. Prior to its decision to apply for NATO membership, which was inconceivable before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Finland had for some time championed defence inside the less provocative framework of the EU. NATO accession will probably make it less enthusiastic for this option. For Sweden, though, which has always been rather sceptical of EU defence, little will change in this regard.

Finland and Sweden's accession will shift NATO's focus to the north and to the east and strengthen the transatlantic link

Further, Finland and Sweden's accession will shift NATO's focus to the north and to the east and strengthen the transatlantic link. There will, of course, be no formal policy changes in the Alliance to reflect this shift, but the addition of two Nordic Allies will add weight to the view that dealing with Russia on the eastern flank should be NATO's overwhelming priority. Finland and Sweden's close bilateral defence relationships with the US will also strengthen NATO's transatlantic dimension. These shifts will be welcome to the three Baltic states but may exacerbate the already present divisions in the Alliance between the northern and eastern Allies and southern and western Allies regarding threat perceptions, NATO's role in addressing threats, and the balance between the transatlantic and European dimensions of Europe's security and defence arrangements. It will be important for the northern and eastern Allies to continue to take seriously the threats to NATO's south – principally terrorism – and to be seen to do so.

[63] Andrew Roth, "Putin issues fresh warning to Finland and Sweden on installing Nato infrastructure," *The Guardian,* 29 June 2022; Sergei Kuznetsov, "Russia says it will boost military near Sweden, Finland," *Politico,* 21 December 2022.

[64] Nicholas Lokker and Heli Hautala, "Russia Won't Sit Idly by after Finland and Sweden Join NATO," *War on the Rocks,* 30 March 2023.

[65] Richard Milne, "Finnish border 'pretty empty' of Russian troops, says Helsinki," *The Financial Times,* 14 August 2023.

4.2. The Operational Level: A Coherent Theatre

Finland and Sweden's accession will plug a large hole in NATO territory. Geographically, NATO Europe will comprise a series of connected spaces that stretch from the north Atlantic in the west to the Baltic Sea in the east and from the Arctic in the north to the Black Sea in the south.

The Baltic states, previously something of an isolated and vulnerable peninsula in NATO's north-east, will be more connected to other Allies

The Baltic states, previously something of an isolated and vulnerable peninsula in NATO's north-east, will be more connected to other Allies. From a defence perspective, the fact that Finnish and Swedish territories can be included in NATO planning for a conflict with Russia will allow military commanders many more options for preparing for and dealing with such aggression. For example, possible supply and reinforcement routes to the Baltic region via the Scandinavian peninsula will open (even if these are somewhat more complex than current routes), alleviating pressure on congested routes through the north of continental Europe and providing alternatives if these become unavailable. Sites in Sweden and, perhaps to a lesser extent in Finland, will (subject to the two countries' agreement) become available for use by NATO sea and air assets, for deploying long-range weapon systems able to support anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) zones, and for the prepositioning of wartime stocks and equipment. One consequence is that Kaliningrad will become more of a vulnerability for Russia and less of a threat to European states. Russia will also no longer be able to rely on numerical superiority in the Baltic region to conduct the long-feared fait accompli-style attack, not least because NATO's horizontal escalation response options would extend throughout the entire Nordic-Baltic region and include many that would put Russia on the defensive and seriously complicate its strategic calculus.[66] The 1 340-kilometre land border with Russia that NATO has acquired with Finland's accession thus offers opportunities as well as risks.

The Baltic Sea will be almost entirely surrounded by NATO states, whose collective maritime capability and infrastructure will offer greater opportunity to protect sea lines of communication and deny Russia's own naval actions, perhaps even bottling up Russia's Baltic Fleet in its home ports of Baltiysk and Kronstadt and limiting Russia's ability to prevent Allied operations through the deployment of A2/AD assets. Sweden's accession will bring the island of Gotland into NATO's area of responsibility. Located in the middle of the Baltic Sea, Gotland offers opportunities to control sea and air movements in much of the southern Baltic (and to deny the same opportunities to an adversary), as well as being a geographical stepping stone between the Baltic states and mainland Sweden. In recognition of its strategic importance, Sweden reversed the island's demilitarisation and deployed a new army regiment there in 2018 and air defences in 2021.[67]

4.3. The Tactical Level: Modern, Effective Armed Forces

While raw defence spending is an imperfect predictor of a state's military capability, it has political importance as a comparative measure, not least because both NATO and the EU collect defence spending data from their members and set guidelines for it.[68] By comparison with these guidelines, Finland and Sweden's defence spending has been relatively

[66] Minna Ålander and William Alberque, "NATO's Nordic Enlargement: Contingency Planning and Learning Lessons," *War on the Rocks,* 8 December 2022.

[67] Anna Wieslander and Eric Adamson, "A glimpse of Sweden in NATO: Gotland could be a game-changer for Baltic defense," *Atlantic Council,* 26 April 2023.

[68] To simplify, NATO expects its members to spend 2% of GDP on defence, and 20% of that total on equipment. The EU's benchmarks, also 2% and 20%, are calculated on a collective rather than national basis. NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales," press release (2014) 120, 5 September 2014, paragraph 14; European Union, European Defence Agency, "Defence Data 2022," 4-11.

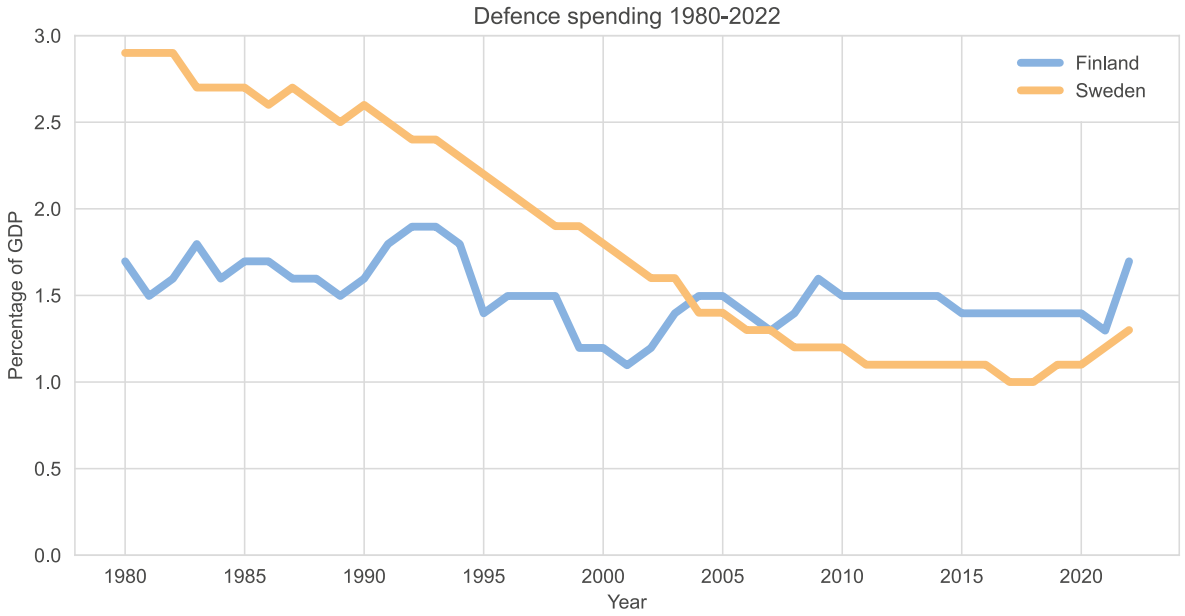

Figure 1. Defence Spending as percentage of GDP.
Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.[73]

low for the past two decades.[69] After the end of the Cold War, Sweden's defence spending fell from 2.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1991 (already some way below the roughly 4% of GDP Sweden spent in the mid-1960s) to a low of 1.0% in 2017. In 2023, the parties in the Swedish parliament reached a political agreement to increase defence spending to the 2% of GDP NATO guideline as soon as practically possible.[70] The government expects to reach this level in 2024, somewhat sooner than had been envisaged.[71]

Finland's spending has been more stable, albeit with a trough around the turn of the millennium, and notable spikes after the end of the Cold War and since 2021, the latter largely due to the strategic acquisition programmes for the F35 fighter aircraft and Pohjanmaa multi-role corvette. To respond to recent changes in the security environment, the government announced a further year-on-year increase of around 20% to the 2023 defence budget which, according to NATO estimates, will reach 2.45% of GDP.[72] The defence establishment aspires to maintain a level of 2% of GDP once the two strategic projects conclude. While there is a strong consensus for this, the Finnish economy is not in good shape, and analysts expect the budget will likely begin to fall again from 2026 when these big-ticket procurements are complete.

From the perspective of the defence of the Baltic states, Finland and Sweden's main capability contributions will be on the sea and in the air

From the perspective of the defence of the Baltic states, Finland and Sweden's main capability contributions will be on the sea and in the air. In the maritime domain, Finland's accession adds to NATO's inventory of coastal combatants armed with anti-air and anti-ship missiles, coastal missile defence, minelaying and mine countermeasures vessels, and an amphibious capability (the Nyland Brigade) focused on the defence of the Finnish archipelago. Finland's strategic programme to acquire four Pohjanmaa multi-role corvettes (expected delivery, 2026-29) will enhance the

[69] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database." However, SIPRI, NATO, and nations may collect data according to different definitions, meaning that their figures are not directly comparable. Finland's own figure for 2022, for example, is 1.96%: Ministry of Defence (Finland), "Breakdown of Defence Expenditure."

[70] Government Offices of Sweden, "The Swedish Defence Commission has submitted a midterm report to the Minister for Defence Pål Jonson," 26 April 2023.

[71] Government Offices of Sweden, "Military budget initiatives for 2024," 22 September 2023; "Sweden's defence budget could reach 2% of GDP in 2028, military says," *Reuters,* 11 April 2022.

[72] Ministry of Defence (Finland), "Defence budget for 2023 continues to strengthen defence capability," press release, 1 September 2022; NATO, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2023)," 7 July 2023, 8.

[73] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database."

navy's ability to carry out a range of naval tasks. Sweden also brings modern corvettes, mine countermeasures, amphibious capability, and coastal combatants. An especially important addition will be Sweden's longstanding submarine expertise, including two new Blekinge-class (A26) vessels, currently under construction. Most of Finland and Sweden's naval vessels are tailored to operations in the confined and shallow waters of the Baltic Sea, whose unusual physical environment presents challenges to vessels equipped for blue water operations.[74]

Analysts expect that of the three services, the Swedish navy may see the largest changes and that its horizons will expand dramatically upon accession. As regards Baltic Sea operations, the navy will likely see a significant doctrinal shift, from sea denial to sea control – a shift that will require it to pursue a broadly defensive strategy at the operational level but to integrate tactical-level offensive actions. The high north will also require greater attention, as may Atlantic operations, requiring consideration of how to interoperate with Allies such as Denmark, Germany, the UK, and the US. Further, the navy will need to enhance its presence on Sweden's western coast, where the commercially important port of Gothenburg will take on additional significance in transatlantic reinforcement options. Taking on these new challenges may entail substantial investment, for example, in larger vessels for roles beyond, and even in, the Baltic Sea.[75] The Swedish Chief of Defence has also recommended that Sweden should recognise its regional responsibility as a NATO Ally and consider establishing a maritime component command for the Baltic Sea.[76]

Finland is apparently less ready to consider doctrinal shifts, preferring to stick with naval operating patterns that have served its own defence well for some decades. However, geographical considerations would suggest that NATO planning will likely require the Finnish navy to play a major part in any attempt to bottle up the Russian Baltic Fleet in Baltiysk and Kronstadt.

Both countries will also make a significant contribution in the air domain, where integration is relatively straightforward: the Swedish and Finnish air forces are already very interoperable with NATO air forces. Both countries also bring certain air domain specialities. For example, Finland's air forces have been trained to fight in an A2/AD environment, while Sweden has long experience in operating air power from dispersed locations. Both countries will also bring a regional competence to NATO with their ability to conduct large-scale operations, including in the air domain, in cold-weather environments.

Finland will soon join many other European states in operating the Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II multi-role fighter. In a deal reported to be worth USD 12.5 billion, it will replace its fleet of McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornets with 64 aircraft, the first of which will be operational in 2026 and allocated to the Lapland Air Force in Rovaniemi.[77] The acquisition package also builds on Finland's existing long-range strike capability with the inclusion of additional Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile-Extended Range missiles.

Sweden's air power is based largely on domestic production and centred on its fleet of 96 Saab JAS 39C/D Gripen. In the past, Sweden has mostly focused on local air defence operations, including through the 2021 acquisition of the US-manufactured long-range ground-based Patriot air defence system. Accession to NATO may also require the air force to take on an air defence and counter-air role far from Swedish territory, perhaps in support of Allies' F-35 ground attack missions. The advice provided

[74] Heinrich Lange, Bill Combes, Tomas Jermalavičius, and Tony Lawrence, *To the Seas Again. Maritime Defence and Deterrence in the Baltic Region* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2019), 6-8.

[75] Factors such as speed, manoeuvrability, and low visual and radar cross section often mean that smaller warships are better suited for operations in confined and shallow waters such as the Baltic Sea. On the other hand, larger vessels may be required to equip a single platform for many roles. Sweden's Visby class corvettes, for example, are a little over 70m long, while Finland's Pohjanmaa corvettes will be more than one-and-a-half times longer – approaching the dimensions of a frigate.

[76] Defence Forces (Sweden), "Överbefälhavarens råd avseende svenskt Natomedlemskap [The Commander-in-Chief's advice regarding Swedish NATO membership]," 31 October 2022, 10.

[77] Defense Security Cooperation Agency (US), "Finland – F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft with Air-to-Air Missiles and Air-to-Ground Precision Guided Munitions," 9 October 2020; Thomas Nilsen, "Finland's first F-35s will be based up north," *The Barents Observer,* 28 May 2023.

to the government by the Swedish Chief of Defence raises the possibility of the need for a new aircraft and uninhabited vehicles for this enhanced role.[78] The Swedish Air Force has also proposed acquiring cruise missiles to expand its operational scope. Deficiencies such as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defence, dispersal bases, and logistic capacity have been identified and are in the process of being addressed.

A contribution to Baltic Air Policing would also be a relatively easy contribution that both countries could make to NATO and could be initiated soon after accession

As regards NATO accession, integration into the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence System (IAMDS) is a priority for both countries. While not a huge technical challenge, an additional Combined Air Operations Centre might be required to facilitate Finnish and Swedish IAMDS operations. A role in Baltic Air Policing would also be a relatively easy contribution that both countries could make to NATO and could be initiated soon after accession.

Personnel shortages, however, are a major problem for the Swedish air force. Long-running frustrations concerning poor pay and compensation, compounded by raised retirement age, led to around half of Sweden's fighter pilots quitting or taking extended leave by late 2022, hollowing out air force readiness.[79]

The Finnish army can provide substantial means for the defence of Finland but has little spare capacity for operations elsewhere

The air force has allocated substantial sums of money (around EUR 52 million) to redress the problem, but money alone may not be enough to repair the damaged trust between pilots and leadership.

Regarding the land domain, Finland, with a population of 5.5 million, concluded that the only cost-effective means to provide independent defence was to rely on universal male conscription and a conscript-based reserve.[80] While its active army is only around 4 500 strong, Finland conscripts around 18 000 personnel per year in two training cycles and can mobilise a total force of around 285 000.[81] In practice, this approach means that the Finnish army can provide substantial means for the defence of Finland but has little spare capacity for operations elsewhere.

Swedish analysts expect that the Swedish army's most likely role will be to support the new front-line state of Finland, requiring a shift in focus to the east and perhaps the north. The need to assist in Finland's defence and the lessons from Russia's war in Ukraine point to a shortage of ground-based long-range fires and division- and brigade-level air defence (the Swedish Army has proposed acquiring rocket artillery and air defence systems to address these shortfalls).[82]

The Swedish army's most likely role will be to support the new front-line state of Finland requiring a shift in focus to the east and perhaps the north

The active army today is only around 7 000 strong and suffering from serious manpower shortages that can only be solved by increasing defence spending. Aside from one armoured brigade, the army had been transformed to be able to generate brigade-size task forces according to specific requirements.[83] The situation will be much improved once a new force structure agreed in 2020 is

[78] Defence Forces (Sweden), "Överbefälhavarens råd avseende förmågeutveckling [The Commander-in-Chief's advice regarding capability development]," 31 October 2022, para. 3.3.4.

[79] "Swedish Air Force pilot dispute: A complication on the eve of joining Nato," *Air Force Technology,* 14 October 2022.

[80] Heljä Ossa and Tommi Koivula, "What Would Finland Bring to the Table for NATO?" *War on the Rocks,* 9 May 2022.

[81] International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2022* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 102.

[82] Defence Forces (Sweden), "Överbefälhavarens råd avseende förmågeutveckling [The Commander-in-Chief's advice regarding capability development]," para. 3.3.1.

[83] International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2022,* 151.

in place. This structure, whose development has been accelerated in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, will see four brigades in total and a divisional structure with divisional-level enablers.[84] According to some reports, Sweden is planning to create two CV90-equipped brigades for expeditionary operations.[85] The armed forces have also proposed a (small) enhancement to the C-130 replacement programme to provide additional deployability.[86] As in other domains, both Finland and Sweden have cold-weather experience in land warfare.

4.4. Other Benefits

Finland and Sweden's accession also offers several indirect benefits relevant to the defence of the Baltic states.

4.4.1. Enhanced Cooperation Opportunities

The NATO membership of all the Nordic countries will present an opportunity to enhance and sharpen the focus of regional defence cooperation. While the Nordic states have worked together in the framework of NORDEFCO, their cooperation has arguably been limited by a lack of a common sense of purpose and by the technical difficulties of sharing information outside the Alliance. Finland and Sweden's closest defence partners have thus been each other. In the air domain, the four air forces will be able to move towards more integrated structures such as a Nordic strike force of F-35s (in service with Denmark and Norway and ordered by Finland) and Swedish Gripens. The chiefs of the Nordic air forces have taken steps in this direction through a letter of intent to deepen cooperation between their air forces and lay the foundation for a unified Nordic air defence.[87] The agreement foresees cooperation in: command and control (C2), operational planning and execution; deployment of the air forces; airspace surveillance; and education, training, and exercises.

Similarly, the already close Finnish and Swedish naval cooperation on the Baltic Sea can be built upon to strengthen maritime security and defence in a NATO context.[88] Operational cooperation between land forces is generally harder to achieve than cooperation between the more platform-centric air and naval forces, but analysts have suggested that NATO accession may encourage closer cooperation or even integration in, for example, the land-based defence of northern Europe.[89]

Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO also offers greater opportunities for their cooperation with other Allies. For example, frameworks such as the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force can be strengthened, and Nordic cooperation extended to the Baltic states, perhaps building upon the existing Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) format.

4.4.2. Resilience

Russia's war in Ukraine has pointed to the importance of resilience to complement military defence. While NATO treats this as a national responsibility, it supports Allies in developing resilience and has agreed new objectives to guide national planning in this area.[90] Decades of non-alignment and an inability to rely on others, meanwhile, have ensured that both Finland and Sweden have well-developed concepts for and experience in comprehensive defence that can be used to support other Allies. Finland especially is a

Finland and Sweden have well-developed concepts for and experience in comprehensive defence that can be used to support other Allies

[84] Aaron Mehta, "Swedish Army chief on Ukraine, artillery gaps and the need for industry to 'cooperate'," *Breaking Defense,* 5 May 2023.

[85] Nicholas Fiorenza, "IAV 2023: Sweden plans two brigades for expeditionary operations," *Janes,* 27 January 2023.

[86] Defence Forces (Sweden), "Överbefälhavarens råd avseende förmågeutveckling [The Commander-in-Chief's advice regarding capability development]," para. 3.3.4.

[87] Forsvaret [Danish Defence], "Nordiske air chiefs: Vi skal have ét samlet luftforsvar [Nordic air chiefs: We must have one unified air defence]," 24 March 2023.

[88] Michael Jonsson and Robin Häggblom, "Cooperation Can Make the NATO Lake a Reality," *War on the Rocks,* 29 August 2022.

[89] 'Corporal Frisk,' "6. Division to the defence of the common North," blog post, 27 May 2022.

[90] NATO, "Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3," 2 August 2023; NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué," para. 61.

world leader in its approach to and practice of comprehensive security.[91]

In Sweden, the total defence system was allowed to decline in the post-Cold War period. A 2022 report to the government by the Norwegian Agency for Community Protection and Preparedness recommended that an additional SEK 27 billion (around EUR 2.3 billion – equivalent to around one-third of the 2023 defence budget) would be required each year from 2026-30 to remedy vulnerabilities in infrastructure, rebuild emergency stocks, and include in emergency planning aspects that are not currently addressed, such as the protection of cultural heritage and critical infrastructure on the seabed.[92] However, Sweden's pioneering appointment of a minister for civil defence will add credibility to the seriousness with which it takes this issue.

4.4.3. Defence Industry

Finland and Sweden expect to bring technical know-how and innovation to the Alliance: they rank ninth and third, respectively, in the World Intellectual Property Organization's Global Innovation Index.[93]

In Finland, a domestic defence industry has been seen as an important element of credible national defence, and the government has promoted domestic competence in key technologies (including C2 and net-centric capabilities, intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance capabilities, engagement, and protection) and in domestic equipment repair and maintenance.[94] Most defence companies are small- and medium-sized. Among the major companies, Patria, owned by the Finnish state and Norway's Kongsberg, provides through-life services, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability, and armoured vehicles, while Rauma Marine Constructions is building Finland's new Pohjanmaa multi-role corvettes.

Neutral and non-aligned Sweden aimed to be largely self-sufficient in defence technology development and equipment production. As a result, it has a large defence industry for its size, including major companies such as Saab, BAE Hägglunds, and BAE Bofors that have produced equipment specifically tailored to the requirements of Swedish defence (for example, small submarines and fighter jets).[95] This specialisation, coupled with competition in the defence industry and an apparent lack of enthusiasm on the part of the government to promote Swedish defence industry, has limited export opportunities. Saab's Gripen combat aircraft, for example, has fared poorly in recent international procurement competitions. Sweden is the world's 13th largest arms exporter, but its exports amount to less than 1% of the global total.[96]

4.4.4. Intelligence

Finland and Sweden's accession will also enhance NATO's ability to collect and process intelligence, including in areas where its capability is somewhat limited. These would include Russia's important naval bases in Kronstadt and Murmansk. In terms of analysis, Finland especially brings an understanding of the threat environment and an understanding of how Russia operates in north-eastern Europe, while Sweden operates two airborne signals intelligence platforms for missions covering Kaliningrad.[97]

Finland especially brings an understanding of the threat environment and an understanding of how Russia operates in north-eastern Europe

[91] Jyri Raitasalo, "Finnish Defense 'Left of Bang,'" *Prism,* 10:2 (March 2023): 80-1.

[92] "Stora brister i Sveriges beredskap – krävs mångmiljardsatsning för att åtgärda [Major shortcomings in Sweden's preparedness - a multi-billion dollar investment is required to remedy]," *SVT Nyheter,* 31 October 2022.

[93] Soumitra Dutta, Bruno Lanvin, Lorena Rivera León and Sacha Wunsch-Vincent (eds.), *Global Innovation Index 2022. What is the future of innovation driven growth?* (Geneva: World Intellectual Property Organization, 2022), 19.

[94] Association of Finnish Defence and Aerospace Industries, "AFDA Facts and Figures 2023," 16.

[95] Peter Nordlund, "Sweden and Swedish Defence – Introduction to the Special Issue," *Defence and Peace Economics,* 33:4 (2022): 392-3.

[96] Pieter D Wezeman, Justine Gadon and Siemon T Wezeman, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2022," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute,* fact sheet, March 2023, 2.

[97] Douglas Barrie, Nick Childs, Yohann Michel, Ester Sabatino, and Ben Schreer, "Northern Europe, The Arctic and The Baltic: The ISR Gap," *International Institute for Strategic Studies,* December 2022, 10.

5. Challenges and Risks

Before Finland and Sweden applied for NATO membership, a common narrative held that their integration into the Alliance would be straightforward. Their close partnership with NATO, their technical interoperability, and their clear position within the western camp made them as close to being Allies as possible without actually being Allies – 'informal Allies' in the characterisation of one commentator.[98] These considerations were in large part behind NATO's decision to fast-track the accession process and admit Finland and Sweden without a MAP.

Nonetheless, their accession is not without its challenges. Some are practical, but the mental and cultural aspects of accession are likely to be more difficult. Furthermore, while Finland and Sweden's accession is undoubtedly beneficial to Baltic security, it also brings certain risks.

5.1 Practical Challenges

Although Finland and Sweden possess modern and capable armed forces, continued force modernisation and strengthening will be necessary both to meet the need for stronger defence that results from the deteriorated Nordic-Baltic security environment and to meet the requirements of NATO membership. Sweden, whose armed forces had been allowed to decline more than Finland's in the post-Cold War period and whose role will change more when it becomes an Ally, faces larger challenges.

Sweden, whose armed forces had been allowed to decline more than Finland's in the post-Cold War period, faces larger challenges

The Swedish navy, for example, will need to substantially upgrade its logistics capacity to deal with the increased deployments at greater distances that membership is expected to require.[99] The air force, meanwhile, had already recognised the need to replace the aging Gripen fleet, but membership will also require it to consider shifting from platforms designed for defensive missions to models with greater offensive capability – a decision that may have substantial impacts on operating doctrine and logistics requirements.[100]

Both countries will face challenges in the land domain related to the requirements of NATO membership. As Allies, Finland and Sweden will participate in the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), through which the military capabilities required by the Alliance to carry out its core tasks are identified and distributed among the member states by the allocation of capability targets. The targets are classified, but their broad outlines and even some details are available in the public domain. Comparison with what is known of other Allies' targets suggests that the most challenging requirement for Finland and Sweden will be to provide a deployable army brigade (most likely only in the local region).[101] As well as identifying how a brigade-sized force can be put together, this will require the army to consider, for example, how it might deploy across the Baltic Sea, perhaps entailing a combination of air, sea, and land movements.

The most challenging requirement for Finland and Sweden will be to provide a deployable army brigade

Deployability is a challenge for all Allies. While accepting the need to do more, Finland believes its present capabilities place it close to the middle of the NATO pack. In weighing the costs and benefits of deployable and in-place forces for independent national defence, Finland came down firmly on the side of in-place forces. Its territorial defence arrangements

[98] Anna Wieslander, "What makes an ally? Sweden and Finland as NATO's closest partners," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies,* 17 (2019), 195.

[99] Lee Willett, "Turing [sic] Point for the Swedish Navy," *Armada International,* 13 December 2022.

[100] Gastón Dubois, "Sweden commissions Saab to carry out preparatory study for post-Gripen future," *Aviacionline,* 1 June 2022.

[101] Swedish interlocutors indicated that Sweden's interim capability target (as invitees, both Finland and Sweden participated in the NATO defence planning process on an 'interim' basis) was one-and-a-half mechanised brigades.

are tightly organised, with each unit having a particular designated role. Rapid reaction for national defence is not organised at the brigade level but in lower-level formations. Deploying a brigade's worth of troops away from Finland would thus, Finns suggest, reduce their own deterrence and defence, and perhaps create a vulnerability somewhere along Finland's long land border with Russia. The upshot is that Finland will likely need to develop a capability that is surplus to its national defence plans to meet the requirements of the NDPP, entailing additional expense. It is examining a series of options for creating additional deployability, for example using volunteer reserves, or creating a new professional component. While this is primarily a practical problem, it also illustrates the mental challenges Finland faces in moving from a self-reliant national defence model in which the leadership and population are very confident, to a model of Alliance-based collective defence. While Finns acknowledge that their primary motivation for applying to join NATO was to enhance deterrence, they appear hesitant to use the cover of enhanced deterrence to make adjustments to their national defence system that would benefit the Alliance more widely.

Finland will likely need to develop a capability that is surplus to its national defence plans to meet the requirements of the NDPP, entailing additional expense

Sweden too will find it challenging to produce a deployable brigade. It has some experience in deploying larger-size combat formations, for example, in Afghanistan where it participated with a little over 500 light and mechanised infantry personnel.[102] But Sweden's recent defence reforms have focused more on the needs of territorial defence than on international deployability.[103] Meanwhile, the army has suffered from recruitment problems in the post-Cold War period – one of the reasons behind the decision to reinstate conscription on a reduced basis in 2017, after it had been suspended in 2010.[104] Swedish analysts assess that Sweden has all the necessary pieces to meet NATO's likely deployability requirements but has yet to put them together – they have an 'Ikea' model brigade. But analysts also agree that Swedish defence spending is not yet high enough to create the necessary level of expeditionary capability to integrate into NATO.

Like Finland, Sweden is considering alternative options, such as the use of conscripts, to provide the required levels of deployability. Meanwhile, NATO's new force model will likely place additional requirements for readiness on Finland and Sweden's already stretched land forces. The details of its working and implementation are somewhat opaque, but the new force model, agreed at the Madrid Summit in 2022, is intended to increase the number of troops in NATO's response forces from 40 000 to a total 300 000 at three tiers of readiness.[105]

NATO's new force model will likely place additional requirements for readiness on Finland and Sweden's already stretched land forces

A second practical concern for both countries is the need to quickly find sufficient qualified personnel to take up positions in the NATO civilian and military structures and in various NATO agencies. Finland expects to place more than 100 officers in the military structures in the initial phase of membership. Sweden expects that it will need around 200 personnel to fill positions in NATO's structures, each with the requisite experience and training. Although both countries have had national delegations at NATO headquarters for some years and have even had staff officers integrated into the military command structure, they have few personnel who have followed NATO-focused careers that, through a succession of appointments in NATO structures or in related national policy areas, allow a full and practical understanding of how the Alliance works.

[102] Jan Ångström, "Contribution Warfare: Sweden's Lessons from the War in Afghanistan," *Parameters,* Vol 50, No. 4 (Winter 2020), 66.

[103] Government Offices of Sweden, "Main elements of the Government bill Totalförsvaret 2021–2025. Total defence 2021–2025," [Ministry of Defence translation of the main elements of the Government bill "Totalförsvaret 2021–2025"], 34.

[104] Philip Oltermann, "Sweden to reintroduce conscription amid rising Baltic tensions," *The Guardian,* 2 March 2017.

[105] NATO, "New NATO Force Model," [infographic].

A third, largely practical concern is the need to adapt to NATO processes as members rather than as partners. Both countries have found the NDPP, in which they have participated on an interim basis as NATO invitees, to be very different from its partnership equivalent, the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (PARP). Unlike the consensual and voluntary PARP, the NDPP is a top-down, intrusive process in which capability targets are assigned to Allies through a consensus-minus-one procedure and implementation is closely reviewed by NATO's defence planners.[106] Swedish analysts noted that the greater transparency in defence planning offered to it as an invitee was something of a culture shock. Sweden has been used to planning at all levels and in all planning disciplines on a national basis. While it has some experience of NATO collective operations planning through its role from 2006 as the leader of the NATO International Security Assistance Force Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mazar-i-Sharif, a major mental shift – as well as perhaps structural changes in planning organisations – will be required to integrate into NATO collective defence planning.

A largely practical concern is the need to adapt to NATO processes as members rather than as partners

Furthermore, despite their Enhanced Opportunities Partnership status, neither Finland nor Sweden participated in all the key NATO processes of policy-making and decision-making. More broadly, in both Finland and Sweden, NATO has been something of a niche concern for parts of the armed forces and ministries of defence. With accession comes the requirement to ensure that many other departments and agencies with defence responsibilities also understand what NATO is, and the requirements that arise from membership. Both Finland and Sweden expect that the processes of learning, and aligning their systems with NATO's, will be long ones.

[106] John R. Deni, *Security Threats, American Pressure, and the Role of Key Personnel: How NATO's Defence Planning Process is Alleviating the Burden-Sharing Dilemma* (Carlisle PA: US Army War College Press, 2020), 5-9.

5.2. Mental and Cultural Challenges

Dealing with practical challenges will also require a degree of mental and cultural shift. However, at a more fundamental level for both Finland and Sweden, membership of NATO requires very different mindsets from those that have served neutrality and non-alignment over the decades. In defence, civilian and military leaders will need to transition to thinking in an Alliance, rather than a national, context. Sweden has thus introduced a series of exercises to help its leadership better understand NATO and better operate as Allies. But membership will also challenge deeper-held conceptions of Finnish and Swedish identity and statehood. Dealing with the mental and cultural shift that accession brings will likely be harder, and take longer, than dealing with the practical issues. But the process of Finland and Sweden becoming Allies – rather than simply joining the Alliance – will be essential if NATO is to derive maximum benefit from their accession.

Membership of NATO requires very different mindsets from those that have served neutrality and non-alignment over the decades

For Finland, the mental and cultural issues relate to the implications of adjusting an independent, highly self-reliant defence model, held in great regard by both the leadership and population, to meet the needs of collective defence; and to the requirement to bolster Allied cohesion by speaking more openly about threats to the Allies' common security interests, in particular, Russia. For Sweden, they relate to fundamental questions of national identity rooted in neutrality.

Finland has for decades emphasised self-reliance in defence. During the later years of the post-Cold War period, as the threat from Russia became more apparent, the possibility of a NATO-Russia conflict in the Baltic region was more openly discussed. Finnish officials argued that Finland's role in such a conflict would be to look after itself so that NATO would not need to be concerned about its territorial integrity (although, of course, NATO had no obligation to come to Finland's assistance if it were attacked). This thinking has, to a fair

degree, persisted as Finland has thought about its role as an Ally. In April 2023, for example, Commodore Jukka Anteroinen, the chief of staff of the Finnish Navy stated that "our biggest contribution to NATO is to take care of our own land and our own environment."[107]

In the NATO accession debate, Finland's leadership was keen to stress that little would change with regard to defence and to emphasise Article 3 (rather than Article 5) of the Washington Treaty. Even at the ceremony marking the completion of Finland's military integration into NATO in June 2023, Commander of the Finnish Defence Forces Timo Kivinen stressed that the foundations of Finland's defence (conscription, strong defence forces) would remain unchanged.[108] The website of the Finnish Defence Forces, meanwhile, affirms the continuity of the Finnish defence system and emphasises that Finland will remain responsible for its own defence:

> Nato membership increases deterrence and prevents military crisis. However, Finland will remain committed to maintaining its own defence capabilities. The biggest impacts of Nato membership are the force multiplier effect of allied forces and capabilities that a small country cannot acquire independently. These include broader intelligence capabilities, airborne surveillance, space capabilities and submarine capabilities.[109]

Clearly, Finland does not expect to receive much by way of assistance from NATO for its defence, nor does it especially want to develop additional capacity to contribute to the defence of Allies. Speaking to the Finnish press in April 2022, for example, Janne Kuusela, head of the defence policy department of the Finnish Ministry of Defence, explained that Finland must primarily take care of its own defence and, as capacity allows, participate in the defence of other countries.[110]

This narrative underlines the Finnish defence leadership's view that NATO membership is primarily about deterrence rather than defence. It also reflects a view promoted by the Finnish Defence Forces – that nothing much would change upon joining NATO – that was intended to calm the population and leadership. However, analysts suggest, Finland has now found itself captive to this narrative, and a mental shift is needed to reflect the realities of NATO membership. This shift – from deep-rooted beliefs about the efficacy of Finland's defence arrangements – will be difficult. It will, however, likely be made easier by Finland's very pragmatic considerations of defence. Finland's defence posture – like its neutrality – was ultimately a practical response to a security threat rather than a question of national identity. Public opinion polls have not wavered in their support for membership as its implications have become clearer. According to officials, the population does understand the implications of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and recognises the possibility that Finns may be required to fight abroad.

Finland's new leadership (parliamentary elections were held in April 2023 and a presidential election in January 2024) will also have to decide how, as a NATO member, Finland will talk about Russia. Neighbouring this large, aggressive power through its long period of neutrality and non-alignment, Finland was cautious in its rhetoric, a habit that continued even as it developed closer relations with the US and NATO. For example, Estonian Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur's statements in Helsinki about Finnish-Estonian cooperation in missile-based coastal defence were seen by many Finns to be too forward-leaning, and perhaps

Finland's new leadership will also have to decide how, as a NATO member, Finland will talk about Russia

[107] Aaron Mehta, "Finnish naval officer talks NATO expectations."

[108] Elina Kervinen, "Prikaatikenraali: On tärkeää, ettei Suomi hankkiutunut eroon sotilaallisista kyvykkyyksistään [Brigadier General: It is important that Finland did not get rid of its military capabilities]," *Helsingin Sanomat,* 12 June 2023.

[109] Finnish Defence Forces, "The Finnish Defence Forces and NATO."

[110] Annika Martikainen, "Nato-jäsenyys tarkoittaisi Suomelle todennäköisesti joukkojen lähettämistä Baltiaan sekä ilmavalvontaan osallistumista [NATO membership would probably mean Finland sending troops to the Baltics and participating in air surveillance]," *Yle,* 23 April 2022.

even provocative.[111] Even after joining NATO, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö continued to emphasise the need for an element of trust in future relations with Russia, a position that most in the Baltic states, for example, would find hard to understand.[112]

Effective deterrence requires the clear conveying of deterrence messages, not only to a potential adversary but also to other Allies and the public. An adversary should be left in no doubt of the Allies' capability and intent to respond to provocations. As Finland has joined the Alliance primarily to enhance deterrence, it is unavoidable that its relations with Russia will become more focused around deterrence. The strategic ambiguity that Finland relied on is no longer relevant – indeed, it is not helpful – in an Alliance deterrence context. Finland will thus need to move in the direction of NATO's more demonstrative approach to deterrence. This too will entail something of a cultural shift.

While for Finland, neutrality and non-alignment were practical responses to a perilous security situation, for Sweden, they have long been fundamental aspects of national identity

While for Finland, neutrality and non-alignment were practical responses to a perilous security situation, for Sweden, they have long been fundamental aspects of national identity. Neutrality was especially closely associated with the Social Democratic Party which dominated Swedish politics for much of the twentieth century and beyond. As well as being a practical security proposition, this policy has also been a defining part of Sweden's self-identity as an international actor. Sweden has seen itself, through the lens of its neutrality, as a peaceful state (sometimes in contrast to a view of NATO, the US, and other European states as aggressive actors) and as an advocate for non-military solutions to problems. It has believed deeply in the value of its unique role as a small neutral state ready to act as an honest and moral player in and advocate for the global south – a 'humanitarian superpower' – and has valued greatly its independence in foreign affairs.[113]

Domestically, neutrality and peace are regarded as key factors underpinning Sweden's construction of a welfare state and a democracy whose characteristics include gender equality, stability, rationality, transparency, integrity, fairness, and high levels of participation. Swedes believe that their democracy and welfare state are unique, and better than others in Europe. In this sense, neutrality has been more than just a security policy but an ideological cornerstone of Sweden's identity.[114] As one interlocutor put it, Sweden has been different because it has chosen to be so. As a consequence, Swedes may struggle with the fundamental change in national security identity that NATO membership will bring.[115]

Sweden's cultural and mental differences from its future Allies are clearly more abstract than Finland's, but Swedish analysts indicate that they are profound and that Sweden's mental transition may be lengthy. The direct impact on NATO is less clear. Some observers have noted, for example, that Sweden's security policy considerations are self-centred, with little consideration given to how its choices may affect others.[116] Given Sweden's history of neutrality, this is, perhaps, unsurprising, but it may present obstacles to working in an alliance.

More broadly, the risk is perhaps that Sweden's enthusiasm for the Alliance will be less than it might be. Neutral Sweden has seen itself as an independent front-line state, sparing parts of its armed forces to carry out an essential and unique role in the world. But NATO membership will transform its identity to that

[111] "Minister: Estonia, Finland to integrate coastal missile defense systems," *ERR,* 12 August 2022.

[112] Steven Erlanger, "Finland's President, No Stranger to Russia, Warns Europe About Complacency," *The New York Times,* 17 September 2023.

[113] Greg Simons and Andrey Manoilo, "Sweden's self-perceived global role: Promises and contradictions," *Research in Globalization 1* (2019).

[114] Andrzej Marcin Suszycki, "European Identity in Sweden", in *European Identity: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Insights,* ed. Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski and Viktoria Kaina (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), 188-9.

[115] Priyanka Shankar, "Why some young Swedes are uneasy about joining NATO," *Deutsche Welle,* 18 May 2022.

[116] Robert Dalsjö, "Trapped in the Twilight Zone? Sweden Between Neutrality And NATO," *FIIA Working Paper* 94, April 2017, 29.

of (to simplify) a supporting or rear area state in a large military alliance. This is, of course, a vital role, performed diligently by many Allies, but it would be understandable if individuals in the armed forces, and society as a whole, regarded it as somewhat less prestigious.

More positively, some analysts see opportunity in Sweden no longer being a front-line state. The release from the immediate pressure placed on the armed forces for independent national defence will allow Sweden to commit more fully to NATO's 360-degree approach, which might mean acting in the high north and on the entire eastern flank from the Baltic to the Black Sea, for example, in air policing operations or eFP.[117]

5.3. Risks for Baltic Deterrence and Defence

While Finland's accession and Sweden's presumed accession to NATO bring immense benefits for the security of the Baltic states, raising NATO's deterrence posture and making conflict in the region less likely, some risks should also be acknowledged.

There is a risk that the addition of two strong Allies will encourage other Allies or their publics to believe that deterrence and defence in the Nordic-Baltic region is complete

5.3.1. Complacency

There is a risk that the addition of two strong Allies will encourage other Allies or their publics to believe that deterrence and defence in the Nordic-Baltic region is complete, that their engagement is no longer required, and that NATO can focus on other concerns – for example, the threats to NATO's southern borders that have been less prominent on the agenda for some years or, in the case of the US, the challenges posed by China in the Indo-Pacific region.

One example of complacency, perhaps even triumphalism that has emerged in the context of Finland and Sweden's accession is the use of the term 'NATO lake' to describe the new situation in the Baltic Sea, echoing the term 'red lake' from the Cold War period when Denmark and West Germany were the only Allies to have (relatively short) Baltic Sea coastlines. While the Baltic Fleet is the weakest of Russia's fleets, it still has more than 60 vessels, many of which are tailored for operations in the confined and shallow waters of the Baltic Sea.[118] Russia thus continues to have the capability to pose a significant naval challenge to NATO in the Baltic, both in conventional warfare and in grey-zone operations. Russia is reportedly taking steps to modernise the Baltic Fleet in response to what it sees as an increased security need in its western direction, including the upgrade of amphibious capability and the addition of more Kalibr-missile-capable corvettes.[119] Furthermore, the Baltic Sea has historically been of great economic significance to Russia: it will not simply abandon its naval presence.[120]

It is important that the Allies do not underestimate the strategic importance of the Baltic Sea to Russia

While the term 'NATO lake' is perhaps not intended to be taken too seriously, it is important that the Allies do not neglect the strategic importance of the Baltic Sea to Russia and become complacent about defence requirements.[121] More broadly, however important the contribution that Finland and Sweden make to the Nordic-Baltic region, the region does not have the

[117] NATO, "Deterrence and defence," 12 September 2022.

[118] 1 submarine, 6 principal surface combatants, 34 patrol and coastal combatants, 11 mine warfare, 13 amphibious: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2022* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 202-3

[119] "Russia's Baltic Fleet to receive four new warships this year, says Navy chief," *TASS,* 12 May 2023; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2022* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 171.

[120] Trade volumes have reduced substantially because of sanctions imposed following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the Nord Stream pipelines are clearly no longer an economic concern. But in 2017, for example, more than half of Russia's container traffic – around 2 and a quarter million twenty-foot equivalent units – flowed through its Baltic ports, representing a sevenfold increase on volumes in 2000: Heinrich Lange, Bill Combes, Tomas Jermalavičius, and Tony Lawrence, *To the Seas Again. Maritime Defence and Deterrence in the Baltic Region* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2019), 5.

[121] Julian Pawlak, "No, Don't Call the Baltic a 'NATO Lake'," *RUSI Commentary,* 5 September 2022.

capacity to become self-sufficient in deterrence and defence, and the disengagement of other Allies would send unfortunate messages about (a lack of) Alliance cohesion. The continued engagement of other Allies will be essential to future Baltic security.

5.3.2. Lack of Ambition

There is an expectation that Finland and Sweden's accession will act as a stimulant to the development of a substantially stronger and more integrated defence posture in the Nordic-Baltic region.[122] Certainly, Finland and Sweden have a great deal to bring, and their NATO membership will reduce some of the complications of cooperation across the region. But realising a more synergetic defence posture will require the full engagement of the new (and the existing) Allies and a degree of regional leadership. Analysts and officials expect, however, that both Finland and Sweden will take a low-key approach to their membership, at least in the years immediately following accession. Partly, it will simply take time to learn the mechanics of how NATO works. Partly, neither new Ally will wish to push themselves forward or risk stepping on the toes of other Allies. At the time of writing, this is evident in the fact that no details of a Finnish peacetime contribution to the Alliance, for example to Baltic air policing or eFP, have been announced.

Realising a more synergetic defence posture will require the full engagement of Allies and a degree of regional leadership

In his military advice to the government, the Swedish Chief of Defence recommended that Sweden should be forward-leaning in its contribution, including to NATO's standing maritime groups, to eFP, and to Baltic Air Policing.[123] As a second-line state with a traditionally more extrovert foreign policy, Sweden might be expected to take on a more prominent role than Finland. Indeed, in early 2024, Sweden announced that once its accession to NATO was complete, it would send a battalion-sized combat unit to join the Canadian-led eFP contingent in Latvia.[124] However, despite Sweden's natural tendency to wish to be the best in class, analysts expect that it is unlikely to rush to seize leadership roles in either the northern or Baltic theatres, even though Swedes recognise that if they do not accept such roles, it is not obvious who else would. The risk is clear – the security benefits of Finland and Sweden's accession can only be partially realised if neither state, Sweden especially, embraces its new status and commits to pursuing defence in an Alliance context.

5.3.3. Nordic Identity

As the Alliance has enlarged, it has become more difficult to find consensus across the entire spectrum of the Allies' interests and activities. While NATO remains the key organisation embodying shared transatlantic security interests, and while NATO unity has been hugely strengthened by the Allies' common response to Russia's war in Ukraine, it is perhaps inevitable that differing threat perceptions and interests will lead to a degree of regionalisation inside the Alliance. As a concept, regionalisation could certainly be beneficial to the Nordic-Baltic region.[125] However, there is a risk that Nordic regional identity, greatly amplified in the Alliance by Finland and Sweden's accession, may leave the Baltic states somewhat excluded.

There is a risk that Nordic regional identity, greatly amplified in the Alliance by Finland and Sweden's accession, may leave the Baltic states somewhat excluded

Nordic regional identity is widely recognised as being unusually strong. In Sweden, the concept of 'Norden,' the community of values, language, culture, and personal relations between the Nordic states is held in very high

[122] For example: Anna Wieslander, Eric Adamson, and Jesper Lehto, "Securing Northern Europe Within NATO: Sweden and Finland as New Allies," *Atlantic Council, Issue Brief,* 6 January 2023, 16-18.

[123] Defence Forces (Sweden), "Överbefälhavarens råd avseende svenskt Natomedlemskap [The Commander-in-Chief's advice regarding Swedish NATO membership]," 31 October 2022, 9.

[124] Neil Ritchie, "Sweden to deploy forces to Latvia following NATO accession," *Defence Today,* 10 January 2024.

[125] Justyna Gotkowska, "Regional Cooperation for a Stronger NATO," ICDS Brief, April 2021.

regard.[126] In the realm of security, Sweden's natural tendency is to fall back on Nordic solidarity and to focus on Nordic solutions. The Swedish Commander in Chief's advice to the government regarding NATO membership, for example, makes clear the importance of developing a Nordic dimension within the Alliance (there does not appear to be a similar regional dimension elsewhere in the Alliance) and calls for common and coordinated defence concepts.[127] The Swedish Defence Commission, meanwhile, in its interim report on security policy, calls for Nordic defence cooperation to include "joint operations planning and preparations for joint or coordinated action in times of peace, crisis and war […] a deepened strategic dialogue, cooperation on total defence planning, Host Nation Support, military mobility, security of supply, defence materiel cooperation and logistics."[128]

Defence cooperation is hugely beneficial to the cooperation partners and thus to the wider frameworks of which they are members. The three Baltic states have in the past, however, found it difficult to persuade their northern neighbours to take them seriously as defence cooperation partners. For example, most of the recommendations on defence cooperation in a 2010 'wise men' report, commissioned by Latvia and Denmark and referenced even today by the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as one of the main documents on NB8 cooperation, concerned minor amendments to the operation of the Baltic Defence College.[129] This is an important institution, but the report authors' vision for NB8 defence cooperation clearly falls far short of the vision for Nordic defence cooperation set out by the Swedish Defence Commission.

The greater risk, however, is that the Nordic Allies will pursue a common security agenda within NATO that reduces the benefits that Finland and Sweden's accession might otherwise bring to Baltic security. Finland and Sweden are both Baltic and Arctic states and clearly emphasise their roles in both Baltic and high north security. The Finnish government report on changes in the security environment notes that the key objective of Nordic defence cooperation is "to increase security and stability in Northern Europe, in the Baltic Sea region and in the Arctic region."[130] The Swedish Defence Commission recommends that Sweden's role as an Ally should "include a regional assumption of responsibility, primarily based on the Baltic Sea area and the Cap of the North."[131] However, the focus of collective Nordic defence interests, and to an extent capabilities, is skewed towards the high north, more than it is the Baltic region. This reflects geography (all five NORDEFCO partners have Arctic territories, while only three are located in the wider Baltic region), the very clear high north focus of Norway's armed forces, and the limited interest of Denmark in NORDEFCO (as Denmark's main territories are located in the wider Baltic region, it might otherwise be expected to bring a Baltic anchor to NORDEFCO).[132] Finland and Sweden have, during their deliberations regarding NATO accession, frequently stressed their ability to operate, along with other Nordic partners, in cold regions. While the high north is a growing security concern, it would clearly be disadvantageous to Baltic security if the pull of Nordic solidarity resulted in the diminished engagement of Finland and Sweden in the Baltic region.

The focus of collective Nordic defence interests, and to an extent capabilities, is skewed towards the high north, more than it is the Baltic region

[126] Suszycki, "European Identity in Sweden," 190.

[127] Defence Forces (Sweden), "Överbefälhavarens råd avseende svenskt Natomedlemskap [The Commander-in-Chief's advice regarding Swedish NATO membership]," 31 October 2022, 1.

[128] "The Swedish Defence Commission's report on security policy, 2023. Excerpts", 19 June 2023, 25.

[129] Valdis Birkavs and Søren Gade, "NB8 wise men report," 2010, 11-2; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Estonia), "Nordic-Baltic Cooperation (NB8)".

[130] *Government report on changes in the security environment* (Helsinki: Finnish Government, 2022), 21.

[131] "The Swedish Defence Commission's report on security policy, 2023. Excerpts," 23.

[132] August Cole, "Autonomy and asymmetry: The future of Norway's defense 2022-2042," *Atlantic Council,* 1 June 2023; Amelie Theussen, "Denmark's Security Starts in the Baltic States," *Prism*, 10:2 (March 2023), 170.

5.3.4. Command and Control

The tension between Finland and Sweden's Nordic and Baltic identities has already revealed itself in a discussion concerning how they will fit into NATO's command and control arrangements. The particular question is whether responsibility for Sweden and Finland at the operational level will fall to Joint Force Command Brunssum, in the Netherlands, or to Joint Force Command Norfolk, in Virginia, USA. The high premium that Sweden and Finland (and Norway) place on Nordic solidarity has driven an argument that Finland and Sweden should be placed under the same command as Norway, whose own strategic inclination towards the North Atlantic and Arctic regions, as well as the responsibilities allocated to the Joint Force Commands under NATO's new regional defence plans, locate it more firmly within Norfolk's orbit.[133]

Finland and Sweden's Baltic perspective would, however, more naturally lead them to be placed with the three Baltic states under Brunssum's command. Because of the importance they attach to the indivisibility of the operational area in the Baltic region, this would be the clear preference of the Baltic states themselves.[134] According to press reports, this is also the solution that NATO has adopted for Finland.[135] However, as the justification was partly Norfolk's present lack of operational capacity (the command was activated only in 2019) and as NATO's command structure is in any case evolving, this may yet be temporary.

Officials in Finland and Sweden have preferred not to express a position on this issue beyond stressing the importance of the Nordic dimension and rejecting suggestions that their territories could somehow be divided between the two commands. However, analysts note that Sweden does not seem ready to be boxed into the Baltic. Finland, meanwhile, has emphasised that any decision should be based on practical military considerations and has pointed out the benefits to Finnish security of being placed under direct US-based (i.e., Norfolk) command. This, and the eagerness of the then Defence Minister Antti Kaikkonen to point out that the NATO decision was not final, perhaps indicate that Finland was somewhat disappointed by it.

Finland and Sweden's accession brings great security benefits to the Baltic region. However, there is a risk that that these benefits will not fully materialise if the Nordic states focus on constructing a Nordic dimension within NATO, particularly if this dimension is underpinned by divisions within the NATO command structure. From the perspective of the Baltic states, the threat from Russia to their region has increased, and is existential and long-term, requiring NATO to build a deterrence by denial posture on the eastern flank.[136] Finnish and Swedish engagement in Baltic security is vital to this, and this can be best facilitated by including the entire wider Baltic region within the same plans and command arrangements.

One way or another, however, the Nordic-Baltic region will be divided in two by the command structure, whether that division occurs on the Norwegian-Swedish border, the Swedish-Finnish border, in the Baltic Sea, or elsewhere. NATO will need to put in place and to exercise arrangements to mitigate the friction and disconnects that will inevitably arise at the seams.

[133] For example: "The Defence Commission considers that all Nordic countries should ultimately be part of the same NATO staff at operational level (Joint Forces Command), something that would facilitate coordination of NATO's force structure, command structure, operations, and exercises." "The Swedish Defence Commission's report on security policy, 2023. Excerpts," 25. Norway's place in the command structure has not been made public, though it has expressed a firm wish to be part of the Norfolk command. Speaking at NATO's Vilnius Summit, the Chairman of the Military Committee Admiral Rob Bauer outlined NATO's three new regional plans: one for the high north and Atlantic led by Joint Force Command Norfolk; a central plan commanded from Joint Force Command Brunssum that covers the Baltic to the Alps; and a regional plan south-east commanded from Joint Force Command Naples covering the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Hilde Gunn-Bye, "'With All the Nordic Countries in NATO, the Region Will Have a Formidable Air Force'," *High North News,* 8 December 2022; NATO, "Media briefing with Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer and SHAPE Deputy Chief of Staff Operations, Major General Matthew Van Wagenen," 3 July 2023.

[134] Gintaras Bagdonas, "Military Command and Control," ICDS Brief, July 2023.

[135] "Finland joins Nato's Brunssum HQ in the Netherlands," *YLE,* 24 May 2023.

[136] Government of Estonia, "National Security Concept of Estonia," 2023, 6, 13.

5.3.5. Conflicting Concepts of Defence

A further hesitation regarding NATO's new geography concerns a possible disconnect between Baltic thinking about defence and deterrence and conventional military strategy. It has been argued that the accession of Finland and Sweden will bring greater 'strategic depth' to the defence of the Baltic region.[137] The term is often used somewhat loosely but is frequently associated with the military strategy of trading space for time, in which an adversary is allowed to advance into territories that are not considered essential to the overall war effort and counterattacked at a time and place that offer the defender advantages such as troop concentration or favourable geography. Both concepts have featured in the discussion about Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO. For example, in a May 2023 interview, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, Philippe Lavigne, reminisced about examining maps with the Commander of the Finnish Defence Forces, Timo Kivinen, and recognising the strategic depth offered by the Baltic states, Finland, Sweden, and Norway.[138] More explicitly, a 2023 report from the Riga office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung notes, "Finland's and Sweden's large territories, their airspace and territorial waters will provide NATO with the strategic depth necessary to plan (and execute) the (re-) conquest of potentially occupied territories in the Baltics."[139]

Forward defence is clearly not compatible with trading space for time

NATO's deterrence and defence posture has evolved in parallel with Finland and Sweden's deliberations regarding their NATO membership. As part of this process, the three Baltic states have argued strongly that the arrangements that were put in place for their deterrence and defence after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 need to be upgraded. In the light of Russia's atrocities in areas under its occupation in Ukraine, they have rejected the idea that deterrence in the Baltic region should be based on a tripwire and reinforcement model and instead argued for a posture of deterrence by denial, or 'forward defence,' in which sufficient armed forces would be deployed to front line states to dissuade an adversary from entering allied territory in the first place.[140] Such an approach is clearly not compatible with trading space for time.

While Baltic leaders have expressed satisfaction with NATO's progress, largely delivered in the form of new regional defence plans endorsed at the Vilnius Summit, it remains the case that their demands for upgrading the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture have been only partly implemented.[141] The fact that Finland and Sweden's accession will not bring large numbers of additional ground troops to the Baltic region is likely behind the wish of some in the Baltic states not to overstate the impact of Finland and Sweden's accession on their

[137] Essentially, the distance between front lines and the heartland. For instance, much of Russia's post-Cold War foreign policy in Europe is often ascribed to a perception that its strategic depth (or buffer zone) has been lost and must be regained. See, for example: Eugene Rumer and Andrew S Weiss, "Ukraine: Putin's Unfinished Business," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* 12 November 2021.

[138] Elina Kervinen, "Nato-komentajan mukaan Suomelle tulee vielä 'jonkin verran sopeutumista' Natoon, yksi asia on liikkuvuus [According to the NATO commander, Finland will still need "some adaptation" for NATO, one thing is mobility]," *Helsingin Sanomat,* 15 May 2023. See also, among others: A Wess Mitchell, "NATO: Keep Urging Turkey to Admit Sweden, Finland as Allies," *United States Institute for Peace,* 24 February 2023; Robin Forsberg, Aku-M Kähkönen, and Jason C Moyer, "Finland's Contributions to NATO: Strengthening the Alliance's Nordic and Arctic Fronts," *Wilson Center,* 8 November 2022; Judy Dempsey, "Judy Asks: Is Finnish and Swedish NATO Membership Useful for European Security?" *Carnegie Europe,* 28 April 2022. Similar arguments are made about Sweden's contributions to Finland's defence.

[139] Lukas Hassebrauck, "No Longer Off the Radar – NATO's Enlargement to the North and its Implications for the Baltic States," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung,* March 2023, 11. The author acknowledges that "The Baltic allies […] would naturally prefer to see a Russian conquest to be ruled out categorically from the outset."

[140] Richard Milne, "Estonia's PM says country would be 'wiped from map' under existing Nato plans," *The Financial Times,* 22 June 2022.

[141] "Kallas: NATO's new plan moves from deterrence to defense," *ERR,* 18 May 2023; Jūratė Skėrytė, "Lithuanian MPs 'optimistic' after seeing NATO's Baltic defence plans," *LRT,* 17 May 2023; NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué." para. 34; Toms Rostoks, "NATO's Posture on the North-East Flank," ICDS Brief, July 2023; Jacek Tarociński and Justyna Gotkowska, "Expectations versus reality: NATO brigades in the Baltic states?" *OSW,* 6 December 2022; Lukas Milevski, "Baltic Defense after Madrid," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 28 July 2022.

deterrence and defence.[142] While it is not clear that Allies share a common understanding of 'forward defence' that can be communicated to their publics and adversaries, it should be evident that imprecise language about strategic depth, that may suggest that parts of Allied territory are somehow less important because they are distant from the heartland, is unhelpful to coherent deterrence by denial.[143]

Conclusions and Recommendations

The events of spring 2022 quickly exposed the flawed assumptions behind Russia's decision to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin's expectations for a short and triumphant 'special military operation' were shattered by the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people and armed forces. And rather than dissolving into confusion, argument, and recriminations, the states of the west came together to condemn Russia and to offer moral, financial, and practical support to Kyiv. Russia's war thus resulted in the strengthening of the very institutions it sought to weaken. Among the most striking developments were the rapid decisions taken by Finland and Sweden to abandon decades-long security policies of neutrality and non-alignment and to apply to join NATO.

As well as strengthening their own security, Finland and Sweden's membership of NATO will bring many benefits to the security of northern Europe, including to the Baltic states. These include the greater strategic coherence of the Nordic-Baltic region, the widening of options for its defence, and the addition of modern, capable armed forces to contribute to that defence. Finland and Sweden's applications were thus enthusiastically welcomed in the Baltic states.

Nonetheless, their accession will not be free of challenges. At the technical level, because of their cooperation with NATO over many years, Finland and Sweden's integration into NATO will be relatively straightforward. Both countries will face some practical problems, especially in the land domain, as they adjust to meeting the requirements of membership, but with determination and the judicious use of the additional funding they have committed to defence, these should be overcome with relative ease.

At the technical level, because of their cooperation with NATO over many years, Finland and Sweden's integration into NATO will be relatively straightforward

The larger challenges for both states, perhaps, are related to the need to adjust mindsets and strategic cultures in the transition from the independence of non-alignment to the collectiveness of Alliance membership. Finland will need to work out how to reconcile its highly self-reliant defence model, held in great regard by both its leadership and population, with NATO's collective defence arrangements. In practice, this will most likely mean accepting some adjustments, even if Finns are reluctant to countenance this at present. Finland will also need to speak more openly about threats to the Allies' common security interests, in particular Russia. For Sweden, neutrality and non-alignment have not just been practical security solutions but defining aspects of its self-identity as an international actor and, to Swedish eyes, necessary prerequisites for its unique and fruitful democracy. Allied status thus presents a deep challenge to Sweden's self-perception which, while less tangible than the integration challenges facing Finland, will likely make Sweden's integration bumpier than some have predicted.

There are no simple solutions, but subtle changes in strategic communications, public education, and information campaigns may help

Dealing with these cultural aspects will be a challenging and lengthy process, probably more so in Sweden. There are no simple solutions, but subtle changes in strategic

[142] "Defense ministry chief: Risks arise while waiting on Finland NATO accession," *ERR,* 14 May 2022.

[143] NATO, in any case, does not use the term to describe a concept, referring instead to 'forward defences' (i.e., capabilities). NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué," para. 34.

communications may help, for example, emphasising 'becoming Allies' rather than 'joining NATO,' or finding ways to give meaning to the NATO hashtag 'WeAreNATO.' Public education and information campaigns may also be useful, especially as the shock that was the impetus for Finland and Sweden's applications – Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – recedes. In Sweden, and to a lesser extent in Finland, careful public information campaigns may also be required to challenge latent anti-US and anti-nuclear sentiments.

In addition to welcoming the benefits of Finland and Sweden's accession, it is important to recognise that there are also risks, including to Baltic security. These are far outweighed by the benefits and can be managed; nonetheless, acknowledgement of risks is the first step towards their mitigation. They include: that complacency may develop if Finland and Sweden's accession is thought to somehow solve security challenges in the Nordic-Baltic region; that the expected benefits of Finland and Sweden's accession will not be fully realised if they do not vigorously commit to their new roles in a collective defence context; that the pull of Nordic identity may detract from Baltic security; that frictions and disconnects at command and control boundaries will be detrimental to regional security; and that loose notions about 'strategic depth' might weaken efforts by the Baltic states to build a deterrence by denial posture on the north-east flank.

Even if membership means making unwelcome or unexpected adjustments to national defence postures and policies, a stronger NATO benefits all Allies, including its newest members

We recommend that:

- Finland and Sweden should engage to the greatest extent possible in implementing NATO's core task of collective deterrence and defence in the Nordic-Baltic region. NATO is a political alliance as much as it is a military one. Demonstrating commitment and cohesion by operating alongside other Allies is an important aspect of building deterrence and strengthening defence. Even if membership means making unwelcome or unexpected adjustments to national defence postures and policies, a stronger NATO benefits all Allies, including its newest members.

- They should thus consider contributions to enhanced Forward Presence, Baltic Air Policing, the rotation of air defence systems and capabilities on the eastern flank announced at NATO's Vilnius Summit, and NATO's Standing Maritime Groups and Standing Mine Countermeasures Groups. Sweden has already indicated an intention to contribute in some areas. As a front-line state itself, Finland will naturally have less scope for such contributions.

- Sweden should consider cultivating a regional leadership role, especially in the maritime domain. It will need to find a balance between leadership in the Baltic Sea with its ambitions to expand its naval footprint in the North Sea and North Atlantic.

- Both Finland and Sweden should also be open to NATO requests to host Alliance facilities or develop national facilities to better meet Alliance needs on their own territories. This might include, for example, air and sea bases or other logistics facilities, facilities for prepositioning equipment and, in the case of Finland, a NATO Force Integration Unit or similar liaison function.

- Finland and Sweden should be active from day one in security initiatives and policy discussions at NATO HQ that span the entire range of NATO business. Their participation and voices are important in finding solutions to the security challenges facing the Nordic-Baltic region and beyond that also protect Nordic-Baltic interests.

- Equally, they should be ready to step away from the reticence and 'bothsidesism' of non-alignment, in particular to reinforce the Alliance's deterrence messaging.

- They should consider further measures to accelerate the substantial cultural and mindset changes that will be necessary

domestically if the Alliance, including its two newest members, is to benefit to the greatest possible effect from their accession. Public information and strategic communication measures are likely to be of greatest value.

- They should continue, with some urgency, to strengthen their military capability, allocating defence funding as needed. Sweden especially has work to do to remedy the capability deficits it allowed to develop during the post-Cold War period. Capability developed today can be presented as the 'new normal,' while capability development once Russia's war in Ukraine is over will be claimed by Russia to be escalatory, a sentiment that may also resonate with sectors of Finnish and Swedish society. Naturally, as Allies, they will need to adjust to developing capability within the framework of the NATO Defence Planning Process.

- Finland and Sweden should take advantage of their accession to further develop NORDEFCO within a NATO framework. In this, they should be ambitious and recognise that they can be an example to other Allies. They should also make efforts to include the three Baltic states in such cooperation.

Finland and Sweden should remain aware that, as Allies, they have responsibilities to NATO that sit above responsibilities to Nordic cooperation

- However, they should remain aware that, as Allies, they have responsibilities to NATO that sit above responsibilities to Nordic cooperation. There is no other regional grouping inside NATO that resembles the Nordic states' vision for a Nordic identity. If the north-eastern flank is to remain a security priority for the entire Alliance, Finland and Sweden should be ready to engage with the security interests of all Allies, including those outside the wider Nordic-Baltic region.

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