

## A Convincing Finnish Move: Implications for State Identity of Persuading Sweden to Jointly Bid for NATO Membership

### Abstract

This article examines the consequences for Sweden's state identity by the decision of Finland and Sweden to apply for membership in NATO. Taking its starting point in Sweden's shattering loss of its easternmost provinces in the 1809 Treaty of Fredrikshamn, it explores Sweden's initial formulations of a policy of neutrality and its evolution until the end of the Cold War. The article then directs attention to how Social Democratic leaders managed to institutionalise a Swedish "active foreign policy", exerting a lasting, formative influence on Sweden's state identity. It also addresses the rapprochement of Finland and Sweden after the end of the Cold War and the consequences of the bilateral dynamics that characterised their EU-membership applications. The article critically discusses how Sweden reformulated its concept of neutrality into a nebulous concept of non-alignment and adopted a security policy rooted in a cooperative security approach. Based on key findings drawn from this historical account, this article addresses the processes that lead to Finland and Sweden unexpectedly deciding on jointly applying for NATO membership. It concludes with a forward-looking assessment of how a Swedish NATO membership will ultimately stabilise Sweden's adaptable state identity and its implications for the Nordic countries' regional military strategy.

**Keywords:** Sweden, Finland, State-Identity, Neutrality, Non-Alignment, NATO Membership

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## Introduction

In the last thirty years, critical scholars have studied how norms and identity influence the outcome of political leaders' foreign-policy decision-making by deconstructing and reconstructing narratives of state identity (Hyde-Price, 2004). However, there is no consensus on the definition of state identity and its impact on foreign policy. Tiilikainen (2006, pp. 74–78), examined how Finland's small state identity and security concerns relating to its 1,340 km common border with Russia formed the basis for its accession to the EU, replacing its Cold War policy of neutrality with "a policy of firm commitment to European integration". The present study illustrates how Finnish policy-makers used established representations of Finland to not only articulate its interests and gain popular support for remaking its foreign policy, but also to convince Swedish policymakers to follow suite. Such linking of a particular policy change with widely-accepted "state representations", including internal and external dimensions and "beliefs about the appropriate behaviour", represent state identity politics (Alexandrov, 2003, p. 39). Claims that identities and interests exist in parallel in foreign policy – as "interests are produced by identities" and that policy-makers select a state identity based on certain interests – gained support in Tiilikainen (2006). This article also draws on the role of state identity politics to discuss the present transformation in Sweden's foreign policy.

Finland and Sweden share a common heritage, but pursued distinctly different foreign and security policies and there was only very limited defence cooperation during the Cold War (Tiilikainen, 2006, p. 76; Lundqvist, Widen, 2016, p. 358). They differed because of Finland's common border with the Soviet Union and their 1948 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA), which explicitly prohibited Finland from pursuing certain policies.<sup>1</sup> To make matters worse, Finland had to pay costly war reparations to Russia (St. Petersburg Times, 1952). Sweden, for its part, maintained the largest defence expenditures among the Nordic states throughout the Cold War and developed close security links with the U.S. (Wieslander, 2022, pp. 42–43). After the Cold War, these formerly neutral states pursued parallel foreign policy change processes that have, incrementally, become joint.

This article addresses the research question: What are the consequences for Sweden's state identity of its joint bid with Finland for NATO

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<sup>1</sup> Following the 1961 Berlin Crisis, Richard Lowenthal coined the pejorative term "Finlandisation" to describe Russia's political influence over Finland in the Cold War (Laqueur, 1977).

membership? It proceeds as follows; the first section discusses the origins of Sweden's policy of progressive neutrality and its developments up until the end of the Cold War. The article then continues by mapping and discussing how Swedish policy-makers remodelled its foreign and security policy to fit into the concept of a non-aligned EU Member State. Its third section explores the common heritage of Finland and Sweden from the loss of the 1808–1809 war and how these sister nations eventually became brothers in arms. The fourth section addresses how Finnish policy-makers convinced its Swedish counterparts that they should jointly apply for NATO membership. The concluding two sections discuss the consequences for Sweden's state identity by becoming a NATO member and provide a forward-looking estimate on its regional military strategic consequences.

## **Sweden – A Progressive Neutral and a Diplomatic Actor on the World Stage**

For almost 200 years, Sweden pursued a progressive policy of non-alignment and neutrality. It has oscillated between pursuing its security internally – i.e., declaring itself neutral and observing balance-of-power mechanisms – or externally, by seeking collective security through active contributions to the international community. This choice of policy originated in the turbulent aftermath of its 1808–1809 war with Russia, in which Sweden lost not only eight eastern provinces – which made up one-third of its territory and one fourth of its population – but also its status as a regional great power (Alapuro, 2019, p. 19). Before settling the peace agreement, the “men of 1809” deposed and expelled King Gustav IV Adolf to Switzerland – a state with a long history of pursuing a policy of true neutrality (Tersmeden, 1998, p. 37; Schindler, 1998, p. 155).<sup>2</sup>

The 1809 coup d'état induced Swedish policy makers to adopt a new political system, the Instrument of Government, which is commemorated by a national day on June 6<sup>th</sup>. Charles John<sup>3</sup>, the de facto head of state and pending successor to the crown, introduced the policy of neutrality and expected it to become “an enduring feature of the Swedish state” Rightly, it “fuelled an important [domestic] battle of ideas” which has continuously influenced its policies and strategies (Agius, 2006, pp.

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<sup>2</sup> Switzerland, as well as Austria, are “true neutrals” bound by their constitution and international agreements respectively to declare themselves neutral in the event of war (Bjereld, Johansson, Molin, 2022, pp. 23–24).

<sup>3</sup> Born as Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, he was a former French Field Marshall serving under Napoleon Bonaparte.

60–62). Here, we must bear in mind that Sweden has neither codified its policy of neutrality, nor made it bound by international treaty (Wahlbäck, 1986, p. 11). Sweden has consistently based its policy of non-alignment and neutrality on the assumption that the territories of Nordic states would remain beyond the great powers' conflicting interests, and linked it to a "strategic calculus" that centres on remaining insulated from conflict and war (Huldt, 1995, p. 139; Agius, 2006, pp. 61–63). On this basis, ideas about "Scandinavianism" in Swedish policy have waxed and waned over the years, depending on its leaders' political orientation.

Neutrality remained an enduring and successful feature of Sweden's foreign and security policy, based on balance-of-power considerations until the end of World War I (Hopper, 1945, pp. 436–437). Sweden's foreign and security policy had been that of "passive" neutrality until 1914, but developed into an increasingly "pragmatic" policy of neutrality as the war progressed (Westberg, 2016, p. 32). Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) leader Hjalmar Branting, who had served in coalition governments since 1917 and as prime minister for three minority governments in 1920–1925, explored a different path in the 1920s. Swedish neutrality thus transformed into an active policy promoting democracy, disarmament, and "international co-operation (...) to achieve international peace and security" by building a system of "collective security" through the League of Nations (1920, p. 3; Stern, 1991, pp. 82–83). Although its active policy of neutrality made Sweden "the harbinger of a new international order" (Ruth, 1984, p. 70), it withdrew from its collective security obligations in 1936 because the League of Nations had become a major disappointment (Agius, 2006, pp. 71–72). Pressed by escalating regional military tensions, Sweden returned to a policy of neutrality.

The Second World War proved to be challenging, not only to the rules of neutrality laid down in the Hague Conventions, but also to the credibility of the strict neutrality that Sweden had declared in September 1939 (Wahlbäck, 1998, p. 105). Sweden violated the rules by facilitating the regular rail transport of German soldiers to and from occupied Norway in 1940–1943, and by allowing Germany to re-deploy an army division from occupied Norway to Finland via Swedish territory in 1941. Sweden adhered to a policy of strict neutrality only as long as there were no immediate threats to its sovereignty or as long as its key national interests were not under threat. According to Agius (2006, pp. 78, 85), Sweden's policy of neutrality "lacked integrity" due to: i) its support of Finland by facilitating volunteer forces; ii) its submissiveness to German military requests until 1943; and iii) its support of allied forces in the last years of the war. Until now, Sweden's policy of neutrality had proved flexible,

pragmatic, and self-serving, i.e., keeping Sweden out of conflict while maintaining its sovereignty and trade. From now on, its official doctrine would read thusly; “non-aligned in peacetime, aiming to be neutral in war”.

The SAP was continuously in government from 1932 to 1976. In 1945 to 1962, the foreign and security policy of Sweden was characterised by caution and restraint under Foreign Minister Östen Undén (SAP), who placed emphasis on international law and the balance of power (Bjereld et al., 2022, p. 17). In this period, Sweden built a reputation of commitment to the United Nations (UN). Driven by ideals and by pursuing diplomacy and mediation in Middle East conflicts, Swedish diplomats Dag Hammarskjöld – Secretary-General of the UN from 1953 to 1961 – and Gunnar Jarring – Permanent Representative to the UN between 1956–1958 – laid the groundwork for what would later become Sweden’s “active foreign policy” (Krasno, 1999; Uppsala University, 2022; Fröhlich, 2018, pp. 61–63, 67–68). Hammarskjöld, having served as cabinet secretary at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1949–1951, strengthened the independence and impartiality of the UN. His skilful management of the Suez Crisis in 1956, in which the UN established its first peacekeeping force, was one of many reasons for posthumously awarding him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961. Sweden not only took on mediating roles in international disputes and conflicts from the 1950s, it also made itself a spokescountry for the rights of small independent states (Goetschel, 1999, p. 120; Möller, Bjereld, 2010, p. 376). Even so, the sole focus of the Swedish Armed Forces in the Cold War was territorial defence, and its participation in international military missions was marginal (Hellquist, Tidblad-Lundholm, 2021, p. 40). Sweden was, to some extent, on its own on. There was no Nordic defence or security identity in a region “defined in terms of a delicate Nordic balance” made up of three NATO allies and two neutrals (Hyde-Price, 2018, p. 436).

From 1962, Swedish policymakers began to pursue an “active foreign policy”, characterised by taking independent positions in opinion formation (Bjereld et al., 2022, pp. 17, 224–225). In 1968, during the Vietnam War, the SAP had invited the North Vietnamese leader Nguyen Tho Chanh to Sweden. Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme and Chanh marched side by side through Stockholm, after which Palme sharply criticised the U.S.’ invasion of Vietnam in an infamous, high-profile speech, prompting the U.S. to issue sharp protests. Their clash culminated with the U.S. freezing its diplomatic relations with Sweden in 1973–1974. However, Prime Minister Olof Palme criticised not only the U.S. and the West but also the Soviet Union throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, while

stressing the need for solidarity with states of the so-called Third World. In 1968, he established this enduring formulation of Sweden's neutrality policy: "We decide autonomously on Sweden's policy of neutrality. Its essence is non-alignment in peace aiming at neutrality in war. This is why we neither join military alliances, nor enter any great power bloc. Therefore, we must build confidence in our ability to maintain our chosen policy through firmness and consistency, and confidence in our volition not to give in to pressure from foreign powers" (Palme, 1968).

This policy of neutrality did not imply aspirations to isolation, even though SAP leaders realised their limited opportunities to influence developments in the world. Palme (1968) thus declared, "the policy of neutrality does not condemn us to silence" and identified a niche in which this small state could fulfil its self-imposed "obligation to work for peace and reconciliation between peoples, for democracy and social justice" (Palme, 1968). This role – resonating with the social-democratic political concept of a domestic "people's home" – not only gained voter support and helped the SAP maintain power until 1976; it became a core part of Sweden's state identity. Here, we must bear in mind that the ten-year détente-era of cooperation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union – starting in the late 1960s and reaching its height by the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 – reduced military tensions significantly and facilitated this height of Swedish activism (Longley, 2022).

In this period of détente, Prime Minister Olof Palme (SAP) turned the objective of the Swedish Armed Forces into "a political manifestation" cutting defence spending by one third and reducing its capabilities to demonstrate to the world its willingness to disarm (Fältström, 2016, p. 95). To this end, the Swedish Armed Forces adopted a new doctrine that conceptualised the notion of "marginal deterrence", in turn serving to justify Sweden's maintenance of only a limited defence capability. As noted by Gerner (1986, p. 319), disarmament reduced Sweden from the status of "a medium power" in the early 1960s to "a weak power" in the 1980s. Recognising that Great Power rivalry had consigned the period of détente to the history books and facing political criticism after serious Soviet submarine intrusions in Swedish territorial waters, Prime Minister Olof Palme (1984, pp. 280–282) declared that the "first line of defence" in Sweden's policy of neutrality was its foreign policy. He deplored the apparent need for an increase in defence spending to maintain the credible military capabilities needed for maintaining Sweden's territorial integrity, stressing the need for Sweden to remain non-aligned to continue on the beaten path of non-alignment and active "internationalism".

The above account elucidates how Sweden distinguished itself from dominant understandings of how a neutral state should behave in the anarchic international system by holding alternative and activist views of security, based on socialist norms and values. SAP leaders pursued state identity politics by implementing its socialist beliefs about appropriate state behaviour. Their consistent advancement of these normative ideas through an active policy of neutrality in 1960–1989, served to shape Swedish state identity. As noted by Möller and Bjereld (2010, p. 376), SAP leaders did not just make neutrality a guiding principle in Sweden – it institutionalised it. The end of the Cold War did not nullify the consequences of this deliberate act. Rather, it influenced decades of Swedish foreign and security policy by limiting its willingness to sign binding defence treaties.

### **Sweden – A Non-Aligned EU Member State That Assumes Responsibility**

With the end of the Cold War, Sweden pursued the peace dividend while it remodelled its foreign and security policy. In this process, the transformation of the European Communities into the supranational European Union (EU) played a key role (Lundqvist, 2017, pp. 69–70). Sweden became an EU member in January 1995 – joined by Austria and Finland – after successfully completing the negotiation process following its formal request to accede, submitted by Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson (SAP) in July 1991 (EPRS, 2015, p. 3). At this time, Sweden was sceptical of the political and economic model of the European Community (EPRS, 2015, p. 45). However, a financial crisis in 1991–1993 and its dependency on economic cooperation and free trade in Europe proved decisive for the Swedish decision. Sweden was a founding member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960 and remained so until it joined the EU (EFTA, 2014; EPRS, 2015, p. 3). This arrangement had allowed Sweden to maintain its policy of neutrality, its independence in its political decision-making, its national sovereignty, and its social democratic welfare system. However, the “evolution of the Community to the European Union and the introduction of the Euro” (EPRS, 2015, p. 45) during its accession period proved to have profound political consequences. Through the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the EU adopted a three-pillar structure including a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as well as Police and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters.<sup>4</sup> The CFSP deepened further

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<sup>4</sup> The European Communities became its first pillar, the CSFP the second, and Justice and Home Affairs the third.

by the EU's 1999 launch of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), and the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) (Lundqvist, 2017, pp. 69–70).

As Swedish policy-makers preferred to lead rather than follow, they braced themselves for an inevitable change in state identity. Accordingly, they adjusted Sweden's national security discourse to that of the EU by placing emphasis on the international dimension of security, and stepped up the transformation of its defence forces (Lundqvist, 2017, p. 70). Their new representation of Sweden became that of a non-aligned EU member that could be trusted in taking responsibility for European security. Sweden implemented a wide concept of security and developed an “innovative” comprehensive approach that combined “economic, political, and military instruments of power in crisis management”. The heritage of the Olof Palme era is apparent in the emphasis placed on international security perspectives and on pursuing a comprehensive approach based on foreign policy by SAP policy-makers, echoing his words of “taking responsibility for Sweden by promoting peace and international solidarity” (Palme, 1984, p. 283). The fact that the ESS replicated the threats specified in the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy, but employed another set of policy tools to address them, was a perfect fit for Swedish policy-makers who could link popular “beliefs about (...) ‘appropriate behaviour’ with the radical policy-change associated with being an EU Member State” (Lundqvist, 2017, p. 70).

In 2002, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Anna Lindh (SAP) reformulated Swedish security policy, phrasing the word “neutrality” in the past tense as follows: “Sweden is militarily non-aligned. This security policy, including the possibility of [declaring] neutrality in the event of [regional] conflict, has served us well” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2002, p. 6). The Parliamentary Defence Committee relegated it to the status of a footnote in 2004 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2004, p. 38). Now, it focussed on explaining how Sweden was formulating its new foreign and security policy based on the CFSP and its 2003 landmark strategy – the ESS. It involved a “new focus on increasing the EU's crisis management capacity” that Sweden would address jointly with its Nordic-Baltic neighbours. The Committee expected the ESS to promote a common European security culture. This effectively transformed Swedish identity, making Sweden intent on addressing regional and global threats within the EU framework.

The signing of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 – launched as a constitutional project in 2001 to amend the Treaty on European Union – made things even clearer. It introduced a clause on mutual solidarity and assistance between

Member States being subject to a terrorist attack or disaster, and set aims for enhanced cooperation on defence – including defence integration and permanent structured defence cooperation (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007).<sup>5</sup> In addition, Article 188 R established the “solidarity clause” by laying down that “[s]hould a Member State be the object of a *terrorist* [emphasis added] attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster, the other Member States shall assist it at the request of its political authorities” (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). However, Sweden interpreted the Treaty of Lisbon as implying that EU Member States would assume a joint responsibility for Europe’s civil and military security (Government of Sweden, 2009, p. 9). Based on a proposal from the Swedish Defence Commission, the Swedish Parliament issued a unilateral declaration on solidarity in June 2009 stating, “Sweden will not remain passive if another [EU] Member State or Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is affected”. Based on this interpretation of the Treaty of Lisbon, the Swedish Parliament decided that “Sweden must therefore be able to both give and receive *military* [emphasis added] support” (Government of Sweden, 2009, p. 9). We can thus infer that Sweden, at this time, had high expectations for the EU’s growing crisis management capabilities – and its policy-makers were more than willing to offer active contributions.

Sweden joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme in 1994, and, three years later, it did the same with NATO’s Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (Finlan et al., 2021, p. 365). While its army, navy, and air force focussed on international peace-support operations – whose intensity peaked at the turn of the millennium – Sweden began to dismantle its national defence capabilities (Hellquist, Tidblad-Lundholm, 2021, pp. 12, 42). In 2004, the Parliamentary Defence Committee defined participation in international military operations as a means to strengthen Sweden’s defence capability (Government Offices of Sweden, 2004, p. 13). The Swedish Army made battalion-sized contributions to a NATO-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, and in Kosovo from 1999 (Finlan et al., 2021, p. 365). In 2002–2015, it made sizeable contributions to the NATO-led *International Security Assistance Force* in Afghanistan. The Royal Swedish Navy helped keep Lebanese waters open through contributions to the *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon* in 2006 and 2007 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2007, pp. 4–10). Thereto, it made five separate naval contributions to the EU-led *Operation Atalanta*

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<sup>5</sup> Article 11 of the Treaty of Lisbon established the aim to base the CSDP on “the progressive framing of a common defence policy that might lead to a common defence”.

off the coast of Somalia in 2009–2017 (SwAF, 2019). The Swedish Air Force enforced a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011 as part of the NATO-led *Operation Unified Protector* (Doeser, 2014). Tellingly, Sweden's sole focus on international security perspectives and UN-mandated expeditionary operations led naval strategist Till (2013, p. 43) to use the Royal Swedish Navy to illustrate the novel phenomenon of “post-modern” navies.

This account is instructive on Swedish policy-makers' willingness to take an active part in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), laid down in the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty. Facing rapidly changing geo-economic realities [its GDP fell by more than 5 percent in 1990 to 1993 (Perbo, 1999, p. 325)], and the risk of being sidelined on key European markets, Sweden was remarkably agile in adapting its foreign policy to one of non-alignment. Although its policy-makers could not foresee the consequences of the EU's forthcoming CFSP when submitting Sweden's membership application, they soon became advocates for boosting the capabilities of the EU to respond to crises on its borders. The reorientation of Swedish foreign and security policy in the 1990s resulted from a “process of Normative Europeanization” making Europe the new territorial and normative point of reference for its defence and security (Brommesson, 2010, p. 238). Its policy-makers formulated a type of logic based on “common values” among EU Member States being best defended by “common security”. By net contributions, Sweden's former state-identity as a neutral entity smoothly morphed it into one of a non-aligned EU Member State assuming responsibility.

## **Sweden and Finland – Sister Nations That Became Brothers in Arms**

“Svea, let your mountains double their treasure! Let the harvest flourish in the night of your forests! Guide the river's billows around like tamed subjects, and regain Finland back within Swedish borders!”  
Tegnér (2022).

Sweden and Finland share a common history. Since the thirteenth century, the Baltic Sea has proven itself *not* to be a separating barrier between Sweden's eastern and western provinces along the coasts of the Gulf of Bothnia and the Gulf of Finland (Alapuro, 2019, p. 19). Rather, this common body of water served to unite its eastern provinces with Stockholm, the hub of the unified state, by allowing the transfer of “[i]deas, people and goods” (Engman, 2009, p. 52). In this era, the concept of “Finland” was a geographical rather than a political term and the elites of

these provinces spoke Swedish. The provinces in the southwest of what would become the Republic of Finland in 1919 were “more oriented to Stockholm than to each other” and represented part of the core of the Swedish kingdom (Alapuro, 2019, p. 19). In the era of the Napoleonic wars, the 1809 Treaty of Fredrikshamn meant that Sweden lost an integrated part of its territory to its main rival in the Baltic Sea Region (Engman, 2009, p. 23). Stenroth (2005, pp. 13, 17) has conceptualised the loss of Finland as a traumatic event fuelling Swedish nationalism, perhaps most vividly described in the award-winning poem “*Svea*” by Esaias Tegnér (2022).

Contrary to the eloquently-phrased desires by Tegnér, Crown Prince Charles Johan made Sweden an ally of Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1812 (Hwasser, 1938, pp. 3–20). Instead of retaking Finland, he redirected the Swedish efforts towards supporting a coalition war on France. The coalition defeated the army led by Napoleon Bonaparte at the Battle of Leipzig in 1813, which obliged him to abdicate in 1814 (Dwyer, 2017). In 1813, Sweden also launched a military attack on Denmark, forcing the King of Denmark and Norway Frederick VI – an ally of Napoleon Bonaparte – to concede Norway to Sweden in the 1814 Treaty of Kiel (Hwasser, 1938, pp. 37–40; Britannica, 2022). Norway and Sweden established the United Kingdom of Sweden and Norway, which partly compensated Sweden for its territorial losses in 1809 and provided secure borders in the west. Russia, for its part, made Finland “a separate entity in governmental, financial, and religious affairs” – the Grand Duchy of Finland – in an effort to transfer the loyalties of its elite to the Tsar, “the new sovereign”, and forestall any potential attempts by Sweden to retake its lost provinces (Alapuro, 2019, p. 22). Russian authorities initially supported incipient Finnish nationalism as a means to break existing bonds to Sweden, but from 1899, they subjected Finland to two periods of “Russification” that severely curtailed its autonomy (Lundin, 1981, pp. 419–447). This caused resentment among the Finnish population, fuelling their desires for gaining independence. Interestingly, the attempts by Swedish kings and Russian Tsars to keep their newly gained territories proved to be brief chapters in history. The Swedish-Norwegian union turned out to last until 1905 while the Grand Duchy of Finland managed to gain independence from Russia in December 1917, partly facilitated by the Russian February and October Revolutions. While the secessions of Finland and Norway were peaceful, Finland experienced a violent civil war in January–May 1918 (Alapuro, 2019, pp. 3, 156–161).

Social Democracy played key roles in Swedish and Finnish politics in the 20th century. In Finland, this left-wing political movement embarked

on a turbulent and violent path at first. Founded in the former provincial capital Turku in 1899, in a congress attended by then Swedish SAP leader Hjalmar Branting (Hilson et al., 2019, p. 9), the Finnish Social Democratic Party (SDP) secured a majority in the 1916 Finnish parliamentary election following the introduction of universal suffrage.<sup>6</sup> Also in 1899, the Swedish Confederation of Workers in Finland was established (Kaihovirta et al., 2019, p. 190). When losing its majority in the 1917 parliamentary election, the SDP initiated a coup d'etat and declared Finland a socialist republic that escalated into the Civil War of 1918, claiming the lives of 1.2 percent of Finland's 3 million population and leaving harrowing memories of citizens turning against each other (Seitsonen et al., 2019, p. 3). After the war, it reformed and distanced itself from revolutionary socialism (Kaihovirta et al., 2020, pp. 189–197). Until the end of World War II, the SDP pursued political cooperation but had limited influence on Finnish politics. It then identified the issue of national unity in the labour movement as a success factor. The Swedish-speaking minority in Finland became an ethnic minority of key importance, which the SDP sought to unify with the Finnish-speaking majority. Here, Prime Minister of Sweden Tage Erlander (SAP) made key contributions, stressing the need for cohesion within Finnish and Nordic Social Democracy. N.B. Erlander descended from the so-called Swedish-Finns who migrated from the Savolax province in Finland to the province of Värmland in Sweden in the 16th century (SVT, 1984).

As noted by Hilson et al. (2019, pp. 3–6), the Nordic region is distinctive as a result of the common histories among the Nordic states that have produced shared features such as a “dominance of Lutheran faith”; an “absence of feudalism”; and “traditions of local self-government within a strong and centralised state”. These features have, in turn, produced “a strong political culture of participation and representation” that has forged acceptance regarding strong “popular movements” and “high rates of women’s labour market participation”, in turn promoting gender equality (Hilson et al., 2019). In this context, Sweden is “understood as synonymous with the history of Social Democracy” – or rather, Nordic Social Democracy, which has a distinct red colour despite the many shades that are particular to the labour movements and the distinctive features of each Nordic state. Here, widely differing experiences among the Nordics of World War II have had an enduring influence on “attitudes and politics among the labour movements” (Hilson et al., 2019, pp. 17–18). Germany occupied Denmark and Norway; Finland sided with Germany in the

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<sup>6</sup> Founded as the *Finnish Labour Party* in 1899, it adopted the name *Social Democratic Party* in 1903.

war on the Soviet Union; while Sweden combined a policy of neutrality with an appeasement of Germany. Their differing experiences were not conducive to Nordic trust and solidarity. Denmark and Norway became founding members of NATO in 1949; Finland became bound by the FCMA treaty with the Soviet Union; and Sweden maintained its policy of non-alignment.

The social and political bonds between Finland and Sweden deepened in the decades that followed the end of World War II. Given the stable electoral successes for labour parties, mainly but not only in the Nordic region, some scholars have referred to this period as a “happy moment” for Social Democracy (Hilson et al., 2019, pp. 18–20). Blessed by having the competitive advantage of an intact infrastructure and population after successfully managing to stay out of the warfighting, Sweden enjoyed an unprecedented era of stability and prosperity. In this period, women’s participation in the labour market increased markedly. The SAP had the privilege of administrating a booming industrial expansion. In the 1960s, Sweden received an influx of hundreds of thousands of Finnish-born workers who temporarily or permanently staffed Sweden’s expanding export industries. These workers and their families, the leaders of the SAP and Swedish citizens, all benefitted from the seemingly evermore-expanding Swedish welfare state. In 1950, the number of “Swedish Finns” amounted to 45,000.

In 1980, this figure had increased more than fivefold to 250,000 – rendering “Swedish Finns” the biggest minority in Sweden (Archives of the Swedish Finns, 2017). The term “Swedish Finns” refers to people who descend from Finnish-speaking Finland, and who enjoy official minority status in Sweden. The term “Swedish-Finnish Swedes” represents a sub-category referring to people who descend from Swedish-speaking Finland (Bruun, 2018). The “Swedish-Finnish Swedes” who lack official status as a minority in Sweden, make up 25 percent of the “Swedish Finns” and 20 percent of all people of Finnish origin who speak Swedish as a native language (Potinkara, 2022, p. 4). This has led some Finnish scholars to refer to Sweden as “the fifth region”, adding it to the four Swedish-speaking provinces in Finland.<sup>7</sup>

An ever-recurring concern in Finland is whether they can trust the political leaders of Sweden. This concern partly stems from their serious dispute concerning the territorial rights to the Åland Islands during and after the 1918 Finnish Civil Was (Hayes, 2018). The islanders submitted a petition to King Gustav V requesting Sweden annex the Åland Islands,

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<sup>7</sup> Namely, “Nyland”, “Åboland”, “Åland”, and “Österbotten”.

which he granted and to where he deployed a military detachment. The League of Nations eventually ruled in 1921 that the Åland Islands belonged to Finland, but granted the islanders a certain degree of autonomy. Finnish doubts regarding Sweden's reliability also stem from their differing views on whether or not Sweden provided the military support it had promised Finland prior to the Russo-Finnish Winter War of 1939–1940. In the 1930s, Sweden informally reassured Finland that it would provide military aid if it was attacked, which convinced Finnish policy makers that they could swiftly establish a “defensive alliance” with Sweden if required (Heydarian Pashakhanlou, Berenskötter, 2021, pp. 88–89). Here, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland Erkki Tuomiojas noted in retrospect that “Sweden has never failed its obligations or promises towards Finland, in contrast to “the Finns’ own expectations and hopes” (Tuomiojas, 2015). One must take the differing geostrategic situation of Finland and Sweden into account when evaluating their negotiations during the 1930s, he argues, as Finland feared the Soviet Union more than Germany, while Sweden feared both. A military alliance between Sweden and Finland was therefore unrealistic, Tuomiojas concludes, noting that Sweden abandoned neutrality and “declared itself a non-belligerent country in the Winter War and contributed arms deliveries and volunteers to Finland’s defence in a way that should have been valued higher than a large part of the bitter Finns were ready to do” (Tuomiojas, 2015).

The sense of a Swedish proneness to engage in surreptitious affairs to the detriment of Finland gained strength in their pursuit of a coordinated policy in their negotiations with the European Communities (EC) on membership in 1989–1990. Finnish policy-makers repeatedly sought reassurance from Sweden that it would not apply for membership in the EC separately from Finland (Bruun, 2017). In the event of that being the case, they anxiously pleaded for advance information. Finland’s worst-case scenario was that Sweden would apply for membership separately and leave Finland stranded. At that time, the need to compete on equal terms on Europe’s major markets was just as crucial for Finland as for Sweden. However, while Sweden was free to make an informed choice, the FCMA treaty tied Finland to the Soviet Union and left its foreign affairs to Moscow’s discretion. In June 1990, Swedish policy-makers assured their Finnish colleagues that Sweden would not apply for membership in the EC, but bring negotiations on a trade agreement to an end. Pressed by an escalating economic crisis, Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson (SAP) announced on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1990 that Sweden would apply for full membership in the EC (Government of Sweden, 1990). His statement

came as a shock to Finnish President Mauno Koivisto and created a deadlock on Finland's negotiations not only with the EC but also with EFTA on a trade agreement (Bruun, 2017).

After Boris Yeltsin dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, Finland declared the FCMA treaty void in January 1992. With a two-year delay, Finland also applied for membership in the EC. Alas, the failure of Swedish Prime Minister Carlsson to inform his Finnish counterpart on this critical policy-change left a permanent mark on their bilateral relations. Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland Erkki Tuomiojas (2015) testified to Carlsson and Koivisto, spontaneously returning to the incident with deep regret. Yet, he placed emphasis on an agreement made at the millennium that "Sweden and Finland will never cause each other any surprises in security policy, but inform and consult each other before every more significant security policy decision" (Tuomiojas, 2015). Since Finland and Sweden jointly joined the EU in 1995, these sovereign sister nations that share a common history have honoured this agreement.

Bohlin et al. (2021, p. 6) suggest that "the loss of Finland has practically no significance for [Sweden's] self-image whatsoever". However, it is worth reminding ourselves that Finland and Sweden have ever more strongly emphasised their affinity and commonalities due to the fact that Russian actions – Russia being a common adversary through centuries – have increased regional security pressure. In 2007, the Swedish Government appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs to lead the work of a National Committee in 2008 and 2009, tasked to deepen "the affinity between Sweden and Finland in *inter alia* cultural life, business and research" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2007, pp. 12–13). Activities performed in Sweden and Finland included parliamentary seminars, historical exhibitions on the 1808–1809 war, bilateral sports events, and cultural events. They minted coins in the currencies of euro and Swedish krona to commemorate the events of 1809 (Riksbanken, 2011). The coin embossing on Sweden's 2009 "1-krona" depicts the sea as a connecting link and quotes the poet Anton Rosell, commemorating Sweden's relations with Finland as "[t]he wonderful tale of a land on the other side of the sea".

Russia's short but intense war against Georgia in August 2008 ushered in a new phase in its foreign policy (Larsson et al., 2008, pp. 10, 90). The fact that Georgia had been an active partner to NATO since 1994 raised questions regarding how NATO managed threats to their territorial integrity. By its willingness to use arms to change previously recognised state borders in Northern Europe, Russia was deteriorating the integrity of the regional security environment. These considerations influenced the decision by Swedish policy makers to issue unilateral security guarantees

to its Nordic neighbours and EU-members alike in 2009. It also spurred the Nordic states to launch the multilateral Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), “(...) as a means to an end of promoting comprehensive defence cooperation” (Lundqvist, 2017, p. 53; Brommesson et al., 2022, p. 3). The pooling and sharing of military capabilities that Sweden pursued within NORDEFCO proved to be key to its integration into the EU (Lundqvist, Widen, 2016, p. 351). After the Georgia war, Sweden once again had to consider military threats to its territory and its sovereignty, which posed challenges to its now limited territorial defence capabilities and its new identity as a provider of international security.

The 2008 Georgian War resulted in a more than decade-long simmering debate on whether Sweden should apply for NATO membership. At the time, a coalition government led by the Conservative party held power. The Foreign Affairs Committee (Swedish Parliament, 2009, pp. 1, 11–14) stressed the need to address threats to peace and security jointly with other states. It dismissed Parliamentary Motions on: i) ceasing discussions on joining NATO that “risked weakening the credibility of Swedish security policy” ii) accentuating Sweden’s persisting desire for non-alignment; iii) instantly terminating Sweden’s commitments to NATO’s PfP programme; and iv) declaring that Sweden would only conduct peace-support operations on behalf of the UN. The fact that parliamentarians from the SAP, the Left, and the Green parties put these proposals forward for debate – while proposals from the Conservative Party called for a review of whether Sweden should apply for NATO membership – illustrate the split between left and right-wing parties. The report stressed the need for Sweden to deepen its participation in NATO operations to “best avert” threats to peace and security, while emphasising that the “EU held a special position in Swedish foreign and security policy”. It welcomed the strengthening of the ESDP, but cautioned that “closing the door to the EU for Turkey would be a mistake of historic proportions” (Swedish Parliament, 2009). Alas, the EU decided to do just that.

The Russian attempts to reshape the geopolitical and strategic context in Northern Europe served to evoke declarations of solidarity between the Nordic countries. So did the growing uncertainties regarding “the reliability of the U.S.’ security commitment to Europe” (Hyde-Price, 2018, p. 438) and their ever-shrinking military capabilities inflicted by repeated cuts to their defence budgets. In the words of former Swedish Supreme Commander Håkan Syrén (2009, pp. 62–63), Sweden had “reached the end of the road (...) in its pursuit of maintaining a versatile and modern armed force on a strict national basis”. These factors motivated the launch of the NORDEFCO cooperation. At this time, Sweden viewed Norway

as its “preferred partner with whom it shared border [and] the vision of establishing [an EU] battle group” (Lundqvist, Widen, 2016, pp. 358–360). However, Finland was also a close partner in the Baltic Sea Region with whom Sweden had conducted regular naval exercises since the end of the Cold War, maintained a combined Amphibious Task Unit since 2001, and operated an interface for exchanging target data in the Northern Baltic Sea since 2006. A shared desire to conduct cost-effective-crisis-response operations within the framework of the EU’s CSDP motivated the deepening of their bilateral peacetime capacity and capability.

In response to Russia’s invasion and annexation of Crimea, Finland and Sweden became NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partners along with Australia, Georgia, Jordan, and Ukraine at NATO’s 2014 Wales Summit (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022a). In 2016, they signed Host Nation Support (HNS) agreements with NATO, to facilitate the receipt of NATO military support in the event of a crisis or war and to be host nations for NATO-led military exercises. From 2015, they acted unitedly within multilateral fora such as the EU, NATO, NORDEFCO, the Northern Group<sup>8</sup>, and the UN (Lundqvist, 2020, p. 24). In the words of the then-Ministers for Defence in Sweden and Finland, Hultqvist and Haglund (2015) respectively, “[b]oth [countries] have long traditions of military non-alignment and both have a responsibility for the security around the Baltic Sea and our immediate area. Both Finland and Sweden base their security policies on the principle of building security cooperatively with other [states]” (Hultqvist, Haglund, 2015). The two ministers thus recognised certain commonalities in the state identities of Sweden and Finland.

Even if these small states were on the same page, they were in different books. Finland, for its part, enacted a law on the exchange of operational military support with Sweden in the case of war in July 2017, while Sweden failed to adopt a corresponding law until September 2020 – citing its legal complexity (Lundqvist, 2020, p. 24; Swedish Parliament, 2020). In 2018, Finland and Sweden extended their defence cooperation beyond situations of peace and crisis, setting no *a priori* limits on their military cooperation. Here, Sweden opted to maintain its revamped identity as “non-aligned” by refraining from issuing mutual defence guarantees while pursuing bilateral joint planning and preparations for wartime

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<sup>8</sup> The U.K launched the Northern Group initiative in 2010 to deepen its bi-and-multilateral defence relationship with Nordic and Baltic states, including Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland. The initiative addressed its “security concerns closer to home”, while reflecting its economic priorities and growing concerns about climate change and resource competition in the Arctic (Depledge, 2012).

cooperation with Finland at “all levels of the Participants’ defence, the policy and military levels including the strategic, operational, and tactical level” (Lundqvist, 2020). Occasionally, Finland and Sweden failed to coordinate their decision-making. This is illustrated by Finland joining the German-led *Framework Nations Concept* in 2017 with Sweden joining in 2018; and Finland joining the *European Intervention Initiative* in 2018 while Sweden joined in 2019 (Lundqvist, 2020, p. 25).

The aforementioned notwithstanding, Finland and Sweden did act in tandem in their U.S. and U.K. relations – jointly joining the U.K.-led Joint Expeditionary Force at a signing ceremony in Stockholm in 2017 and upgrading their respective bilateral cooperation to a trilateral cooperation in 2018. As shown by the Swedish naval exercise *SWENEX-21*, they maintained their long-term objective of conducting combined military operations and integrating their units under national commands (SwAF, 2021). In 2021, they launched the strategic *Hanaholmen Initiative* – including an annual bilateral, high-level forum with decision-makers in crisis management and a course inclusive of decision-making training – to complement their existing military cooperation (SEDU, 2021). The Nordic dimension gained traction when Sweden joined NATO’s *Air Situation Data Exchange* system in 2010 (Engvall et al., 2018, pp. 35, 42–43; Nordic Defence Cooperation, 2021, pp. 11, 19). Since then, Sweden has been exchanging filtered air-surveillance data needed for joint responses to incidents on the Scandinavian Peninsula and for Nordic Cross Border Training, e.g., the country has been hosting the annual air force *Arctic Challenge Exercise* series since 2013. Since 2017, Sweden has exchanged such information with Finland bilaterally. Under Finnish Chairmanship in 2021, the Policy Steering Committee of the Nordic Defence Cooperation tasked its Military Cooperation Committee “to take prompt actions” to implement the *Nordic Enhanced Cooperation on Air Surveillance*.

## **A Convincing Move by Finland**

In the autumn of 2021, military analysts warned about the risks for an outbreak of what could be “the most serious war in Europe since 1945” (The Economist, 2021). They noted that: i) low temperatures would likely make vast land areas in southeast Ukraine freeze solid in January 2022; ii) Russia was in a deployment cycle for its conscripts; and iii) recent flare-ups in the Russian-annexed provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk could serve as a pretext for a Russian invasion. Analysts also warned that “the 100,000 Russian troops amassed near the border [were] more than mere theatre” (The Economist, 2021) and that Russia was calling up its

reserves and establishing field hospitals. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned of a large-scale Russian invasion at the meeting between 57 foreign ministers of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Stockholm on 2<sup>nd</sup> December (Holmström, 2022). Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Ann Linde, for her part, questioned his warnings. “Talking about war makes the situation for Ukraine more difficult” (Bjon, 2022), she argued, stressing that the Swedish Military Intelligence and Security Service assessed the risk of an invasion as unlikely. So did the heads of states in Europe who engaged themselves in diplomacy, convinced that they could avert a Russian attack on Ukraine (Bjon, 2022). In retrospect, we know that Chinese officials had “direct knowledge about Russia’s (...) intentions before the aggression started” and, at a summit on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022, “asked senior Russian officials not to invade Ukraine before the end of the Winter Olympics in Beijing” (European Parliament, 2022). Here, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping issued a joint statement declaring “no limits” to the friendship between China and Russia, while China “officially joined Russia’s demand for a halt to NATO’s expansion”.

On December 17<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs published a request for “a legally binding guarantee that NATO would give up any military activity in Eastern Europe and Ukraine”, set out in a draft agreement with NATO member states and a draft treaty with the U.S. (Tétraultr-Farber, Balmorth, 2021). Finland and Sweden did not take this lightly. The request would imply that their territories would become part of a Russian-controlled “sphere of interest”. In the words of President of Finland Sauli Niinistö, Russia thus “unilaterally redefined Finland’s sovereignty” by demanding an end to NATO’s policy of an open door (Bjon, 2022). Then Swedish Minister for Defence Peter Hultqvist declared the request “completely unacceptable”, as it would “create a Russian sphere of interest where the Russian side will be able to exert influence over countries in our immediate area” (Lindberg, 2021). At the turn of the year, a lively debate began on whether or not Finland should apply for NATO membership (Bjon, 2022). Several political parties – including some having previously been opposed to NATO membership – now considered this option seriously and the public opinion began to shift towards a more advantageous view on NATO in January 2022. On 24<sup>th</sup> January, Finland asked NATO to confirm that the policy of an open door still applied and swiftly received an affirmative answer from NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. At the end of March, the majority of the parliamentary group of the Finns Party also declared themselves supportive of Finland applying for NATO membership.

Sweden's path to apply for membership in NATO was somewhat winding to say the least. In 2016, when the legal counsel referral of Sweden's Host Nation Support agreement with NATO stirred-up political debate, Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström and Minister for Defence Peter Hultqvist stressed, "it would not unsettle the principle of military non-alignment" (Wallström et al., 2016). Critics affirmed this was a "much-needed step", but which failed to address "the fact that Sweden needs to design a roadmap towards NATO membership" (Enström, Wallmark, 2016). In 2020, official declarations from Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (SAP) and Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde (SAP) emphasised the continuity of this policy – "Sweden's security policy prevails. Military non-alignment serves Sweden well and contributes to stability and security in Northern Europe". In February 2021, Minister for Defence Peter Hultqvist (2021) made it known that Sweden was maintaining and further developing its multinational "cooperation" and "coordination" with Denmark, Finland, the U.K., and the U.S. "on the basis of military non-alignment" (Hultqvist, 2021). Scholars have referred to this policy as "the Hultqvist doctrine" described by the man himself as a "natural evolution of non-alignment" and the "self-evident foundation for international defence cooperation" (Wieslander, 2022, p. 36).

The key argument for Sweden maintaining non-alignment has been that it "contributes to predictability and stability in the Baltic Sea region" (Wieslander, 2022, pp. 49–50). This points to the crux of the riddle concerning the "Hultqvist doctrine". SAP leaders manoeuvred "within the acceptable range [of the internal dynamics of the party] which include[d] close cooperation with NATO and the U.S., as such not uncontroversial in the leftist [fraction of the] party" (Wieslander, 2022). On January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022, Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde thus told NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg that Sweden has "extended experience of military non-alignment, which has served us well for a long time, also in very difficult situations. And we are confident that it will continue to serve us well" (TT, 2022a). She affirmed this position in the February 17<sup>th</sup> 2022 Statement of Foreign Policy, declaring "[t]he Government does not intend to apply for NATO membership. Our security policy remains firmly in place. Our non-participation in military alliances serves us well and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe" (Embassy of Sweden, 2022). Soon, many would call into question the alleged firmness of this policy.

At that time, President of Finland Sauli Niinistö moved away from a perceived need for a "super gallup", as public opinion had turned from one of opposition to a wish for Finland to apply for NATO membership

(Bjon, 2022). On March 30<sup>th</sup> 2022, when opinion polls showed that over 60% of Finland's population supported Finnish NATO membership, he declared, "NATO needs to know about the people's support. We already have that, I believe" (Bjon, 2022). The Finnish debate on NATO accession ended in Finland, as hardly any parliamentarians commented on the absent referendum. From February 24<sup>th</sup>, when Russia launch its invasion of Ukraine, Prime Minister Sanna Marin (SDP) and President Niinistö often appeared together – pursuing Finland's foreign policy in close coordination. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, President Niinistö got a head start by meeting in-person with U.S. President Joe Biden in Washington to discuss European security and deepening of their defence cooperation (Hupa, 2022). Prime Minister of Sweden Magdalena Andersson, who was absent in the meeting, was called up by President Biden at the end of their meeting to be informed on the outcome. The following day, President Niinistö met with Prime Minister Andersson in Helsinki for further deliberations.

When Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, on March 30<sup>th</sup>, received the question "[i]sn't it obvious that [Sweden] should remain non-aligned?", she opened up about change in Sweden's foreign policy based on "an updated security policy analysis" (TT, 2022b). "[N]othing should be ruled out in this situation", she said, adding "we must decide on what is best for Sweden's security – now and for the future" (TT, 2022b). April 2022 included frequent bilateral in-person meetings between the prime ministers, the ministers for defence, and other key policy makers who visited their sister parties to align timetables (Bjon, 2022). On April 13<sup>th</sup>, the prime ministers gave a joint press conference in Stockholm signalling accelerated agendas and a deepening bilateral partnership, shortly before the Finnish government presented its new security policy analysis to its parliament (TT, 2022c). On May 13<sup>th</sup>, the Swedish Government presented its "updated security policy analysis" in the Swedish Parliament, concluding that "membership in NATO would increase Swedish security" (Hupa, 2022). The key sentence in the report is that Sweden – despite being a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP), and having activated a deepened information exchange through the Modalities for Strengthened Interaction mechanism – "does not participate in [NATO's] decision-making and is not covered by the collective defence obligations" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022c, pp. 3, 5, 27–28). The harsh reality of its "altered security environment following Russia's aggression" follows from the fact that the Swedish Government noted that Ukraine – despite being a NATO EOP – had to bear the effects of "Russia's large-scale aggression" without NATO intervening (Government Offices of

Sweden, 2022c). Russia's war on Ukraine had ultimately invalidated the assumption of the “Hultqvist doctrine” that various solidarity mechanisms could serve as substitute of NATO security guarantees. Sweden thus had to become a NATO member.

The middle part of May 2022 proved intense. On May 12<sup>th</sup>, President Niinistö and Prime Minister Sanna Marin went on the record to say that Finland would apply for NATO membership (Haglund, 2022). On May 15<sup>th</sup>, the Finnish Government approved the Report on Finland’s Accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Government of Finland, 2022a). On May 16<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Andersson announced that Sweden would follow suit, stating, “[t]he best thing for Sweden’s security is that we join NATO and that we do it together with Finland” (Torvalds, 2022). On May 17<sup>th</sup>, President Niinistö made public Finland’s interest in joining NATO (Government of Finland, 2022b). May 17<sup>th</sup> also marked the start of a two-day state visit from Finland to Sweden, where President Niinistö and Mrs Jenni Haukio visited Sweden at the invitation of King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden (Swedish Royal Court, 2022). They received full honours, including a cortège through the streets of Stockholm to the Royal Palace. In a statement, King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden emphasised that “the proximity between Finland and Sweden is not only geographic. We also share history, culture, and values. We are colleagues and partners. Friends and family.” (Swedish Royal Court, 2022). During that visit, a delegation including representatives from the Finnish Government and industry accompanied the President of Finland. On May 18<sup>th</sup>, Sweden and Finland submitted their membership applications, after which, U.S. President Biden welcomed the three leaders to the White House – declaring his desire to call them “friends, partners – and NATO allies”.

All NATO member states signed the accession protocols on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, granting Finland and Sweden invitee status to NATO (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022b). On September 27<sup>th</sup>, Slovakian legislatures became the twenty-eighth NATO member state to ratify the amended NATO treaty that will welcome Finland and Sweden as full members, should Hungary and Turkey also ratify it (Atlantic Council, 2022).

## **Consequences for Sweden’s State Identity**

Altoraiifi (2012, p. 23) suggests that “[s]tate identity plays a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy decision-making at (...) times of great change or flux”. However, the case of Sweden shows that foreign policy decision-making can also play a decisive role in reshaping the identity of a state.

On October 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> 2022, the Ministers for Defence of Finland and Sweden actively participated in the NATO Defence Ministers’ Meeting, which, in the words of the NATO Secretary General, addressed “key challenges for our security” (NATO, 2022a). Minister for Defence Peter Hultqvist, for the first time ever, officially represented Sweden at the table on a NATO ministerial meeting to discuss common security, illustrating the sea change implemented in Swedish foreign and security policy in little more than six months. As accounted for above, the Swedish government neither initiated nor controlled the process. It was the strength and the ruthlessness of “Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine” (The White House, 2022) – whose stated aims have fluctuated during the course of the war (CFR, 2022) – which overturned stances previously held by Finland and Sweden on foreign and security policy. Fear that this war would not be confined within the borders of Ukraine but involve the Baltic Sea Region was accentuated by Russia’s demand for a regional sphere of interest. Fear created a sense of urgency overturning existing assumptions on the value of cooperative security in the face of an imperialist aggressor in the region.

Throughout history, Finland and Sweden have been a security policy “community of destiny” (Wilén, 2021). In this dyad, Finland has been “the threatened” country because of its 1,340 km shared border with Russia, while Sweden has benefited from being the “protected” one. Accordingly, Finnish policy-makers have been keener to consider a defensive military alliance with Sweden than its Swedish counterparts. When Russia attacked Ukraine, Finland realised that it had to act – preferably in concert with Sweden – in what could be a limited window of time for revising its security policy. If either Finland, Sweden, or both were to be subject to direct Russian threats before submitting their membership applications, it could complicate the accession process. Sweden’s more dubious attitude to NATO membership also depended on its government’s heritage of the “Palme era” and the strength of its normative “feminist foreign policy”, focussed on promoting gender equality, peace, and sustainable development as outlined in UNSCR 1325 and 2250 (Socialdemokraterna, 2022). Faced with a Russian aggressor, which has made threatening demands, Finland and Sweden had the incentives they needed to show unity and resolve. Their bid to join NATO proved a firm and unexpected response to Russia’s blatant violation of the international rule-based order.

Sweden’s application for NATO membership had immediate and pervasive consequences for its foreign and security policy. In April 2021, Swedish Ministers Linde and Hultqvist (2021) marketed it as “successful,

not least because of its stability and predictability”, “resolute” and “adapted to today’s reality” – “based on a broad concept of security linking security with human rights, democracy, and the principle of the rule of law”. In October 2022, it was history. So were their ideas on “non-alignment providing Sweden freedom of action in any given situation in the way that best benefits de-escalation and peaceful development, thus securing Sweden’s independence in foreign policy” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022b, pp. 57–59). Now, NATO membership “would not only safeguard Sweden’s security, but also contribute to peace and security in the entire Euro-Atlantic region”. Sweden would also “contribute to NATO’s deterrence and defence measures” and cooperate with other NATO member states on “the operational planning in the defence of Sweden and its closest international neighbourhood”. This would “raise the threshold for military conflicts and thereby provide a conflict-deterrent effect in northern Europe” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022b, pp. 57–59). The government had replaced formulations such as “independence in foreign policy” with value words like “common security” and “influence” on NATO’s “political and legal *acquis*” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022b, pp. 57–59). Plainly put, Sweden no longer defined itself as a partner promoting cooperative security by contributing to NATO-led exercises and operations. Its state identity was transforming into that of a NATO ally.

Values are important to Sweden. Swedish policy-makers have emphasised values and ideals in the country’s global role since the mid-1960s, and presented “top-down” as representations of its national interests (Simons, Manolio, 2019, pp. 1–2). Ideologically inspired by “socialist models of third world development” they initially branded this small state a “moral superpower”, a niche role that gained popularity and earned it a key role on the global stage until the Cold War ended (Dahl, 2006, pp. 895–896, 908). Although Sweden had some success in defining itself as a role model for the world, the self-imposed moral superiority of Swedish policy-makers also stirred-up serious friction, e.g., with Israeli leaders (McDonough, 2017). In an unusual exhortation to society aimed at making Swedish citizens accept mass migration in 2013, then Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt (conservative party) had some success in rebranding Sweden as a self-perceived “humanitarian super power” (Simons, Manolio, 2019, p. 2). The coalition government under Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (SAP) extended this notion into a “feminist foreign policy” agenda in his parliamentary keynote speech in October 2014.

As Dahl (2006, p. 908) rightly concludes, Sweden was “neither very moral nor much of a superpower”. Rather, SAP leaders pursued an

“activist” foreign policy and were “blind to the human rights atrocities performed in the east”, and why “the entire idea of a “third way” between democracy and communist dictatorship” served to “undermine western democracy” (Dahl, 2006, p. 908). One might ask why the notion of Sweden as some sort of superpower has been so prominent in the last 60 years. Tilly (1981, p. 16) offers a valid answer, arguing that Sweden “is a shrunken remainder of the expansive power which, at one time or another, dominated Norway, Finland, Estonia, Livonia, and other important parts of the North”. The will of Swedish policymakers to “punch beyond Sweden’s weight”, i.e., have a larger say in international politics than its current “size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength” (Waltz, 1993, p. 50) would suggest that it is deeply embedded in its state identity. They thus opt to excel in Waltz’s additional criteria “political stability and competence” to gain a relational advantage to influence or change the behaviour of other states.

Values are important also to NATO. The common values shared by its member states are “the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law” – which aligns with long-held Swedish values – forming the basis of its guiding principle of collective defence (NATO, 2019). Sweden adhere also to the latter since May 2022, but the agreement between Turkey, Finland and Sweden furthermore stipulates support to the “fight against terrorism” with “unwavering solidarity and cooperation” (NATO, 2022b). This involves a significant Swedish foreign policy change, as Turkey defines the Kurdish Yekîneyê Parastina Gel (YPG) militia – closely linked to the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD), a political party in the autonomous Syrian region Rojava – as a terrorist organisation. As late as November 2021, SAP Party Secretary Tobias Baudin signed an agreement with the politically independent parliamentarian Amineh Kakabaveh on deepening Sweden’s cooperation with the PYD (Socialdemokraterna, 2021). Seven months later, Sweden and Turkey agreed *not* to “provide support to YPG/PYD”, establishing that “the [Partia Karkaren Kurdistan] PKK was a proscribed terrorist organisation” and committed itself to preventing its activities (NATO, 2022b). Sweden also confirmed that a “new, tougher, Terrorist Offences Act [would enter] into force on 1<sup>st</sup> July” while preparing a “further tightening of [its] counter-terrorism legislation”. Furthermore, Sweden committed itself to address Türkiye’s pending deportation or extradition requests of terror suspects expeditiously and thoroughly” (NATO, 2022b). To this end, the parties to the memorandum established a Permanent Joint Mechanism. Implementing the agreement is decisive to whether or not Turkey will ratify Sweden’s membership application, and is why the negotiation rounds receive significant media attention.

Sweden's new policy on nuclear weapons represents another significant change in its foreign policy. Swedish policy-makers, mainly from the political left, long pursued a hard-line policy on the total elimination of nuclear weapons – demanding effectuation of the action plan adopted in 2000 by the UN Nuclear Proliferation Treaty Review Conference (Government of Sweden, 2002, p. 7). They repeatedly called for strict control of the arms trade as a means to improve global security. Swedish government representatives also voted in favour of the UN adopting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017, which entered into force in January 2021. Following parliamentary debates and a report by an expert, Sweden refrained from signing and ratifying it – pointing to “several shortcomings” and arguing that the treaty failed to “offer a credible and effective path towards either nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation or the promotion of the peaceful use of nuclear technology” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022d; Swedish Parliament, 2019). Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde (SAP) completed this change process by signing Sweden's application for membership of NATO, declaring that “Sweden accepts NATO's approach to security and defence, including the essential role of nuclear weapons” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022e). Swedish Supreme Commander Micael Bydén, for his part, did not request any restrictions in the Swedish Armed Forces' integration into NATO – neither regarding nuclear weapons nor the permanent stationing of NATO forces on Swedish territory (TT, 2022d). Sweden's altered policy on nuclear weapons and openness to a temporary or permanent deployment of forces, relates to its policy-makers' accommodation of the key role of deterrence and defence in NATO. Sweden must thus make substantial contributions to NATO's common capabilities. In fact, NATO defines deterrence and defence of alliance territory as its most prioritised “core task” in its latest *Strategic Concept*, followed by the tasks of pursuing cooperative security and crisis prevention and management (NATO, 2022c).

To sum up, the deterioration of the regional security environment induced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its threatening statements on a new regional security order made Sweden reconsider the usefulness of its policy of non-alignment. However, such change might have been impossible if Finland had not taken the lead, initiating a process that rapidly led Sweden to make decision as regards applying for NATO membership. This, in turn, invalidated the previous core argument by the Swedish government not to upset stability in the region, since such a move would risk the security of Finland. The convincing Finnish move on applying for NATO membership stunned the SAP-led Swedish

government. It had seemed so unlikely that the “threatened” part of the Finish-Swedish dyad would dare make it. The fact that the Finnish Government was led by the SPD, while NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was a former Norwegian Social Democratic Prime Minister (Ap), was likely conducive to alter the firm and long-held stance by the Swedish SAP to base its security policy on a web of security cooperation. Facing the risk of looming regional war, SAP leaders replaced its normative, liberal, foreign policy with a narrower, realist-oriented policy with a focus on military security. We can now distinguish the features of Sweden’s new state identity – a Nordic NATO member state, strategically positioned on the Scandinavian Peninsula in the Baltic Sea Region, punching above its weight and assuming responsibility in a very powerful alliance. Its heritage as a former: i) regional power; ii) moral superpower; iii) diplomatic superpower; and iv) humanitarian superpower; has already morphed into the search for an influential military role in Scandinavia. Key words in these identity narratives are *super*, i.e., Sweden showing excellence, and *power*, i.e., Sweden being influential. Maintaining this self-image is beneficial to its policy makers in their pursuit to prepare Sweden to assume a new leadership role.

## **Closing Remarks – Some Military Strategic Consequences**

Sweden holds the largest territory among the Nordic states and it spans the length of the Scandinavian Peninsula. U.S. military leaders have repeatedly stressed the military strategic value of Sweden controlling the Island of Gotland, situated in the middle of the Baltic Sea (Traub, 2022; Holmström, 2017). Its geography dominates much of the Baltic Sea Region and it is key in enabling NATO to defend Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland – a scenario that has exercised in the NATO *BALTOPS* series since the 1990s. This notwithstanding, the military dynamics are even stronger in the High North. Russia’s pursuit of a strategy of military dominance in both regions have made the two regions geostrategically interconnected, rendering them a NATO theatre of operations on its Northern Flank. Finland, Sweden, and the U.S. have jointly addressed this fact since 2018, when they signed a trilateral agreement to deepen their defence-based relationships (Lundqvist, 2020, pp. 23–26). Norway, Finland, and Sweden followed suit in their 2020 *Trilateral Statement of Intent on Enhanced Operational Cooperation*. When updating their statement on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022, they *inter alia* committed themselves to “[c] conduct[ing] common operations planning in areas of mutual interest,

especially in the northern parts of Finland, Norway, and Sweden” and “scenario-based discussions and exercises based on requirements from current national operations planning and common security concerns” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022f). They also agreed to prepare for the “conduct [of] combined or coordinated military operations”.

Their timely statement indicates the focus of the efforts they will undertake, organising a cost-effective joint Nordic defence of the “Cap of the North” and preparing for receiving and integrating them with U.S. military forces that deploy to this theatre. These will be the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force, which will deploy through Norway, the U.S. Second Fleet and parts of the U.S. Air Force. The “Cap of the North” is a vast and sparsely populated area, offering only limited lines of communication. It risks being subjected to heavy Russian attacks in order to provide it a sizeable buffer zone around its Northern Fleet – tasked with hosting Russia’s nuclear second-strike capacity – coined the “Bastion” concept. Since this theatre of operations includes the North Atlantic and the Barents Sea, and that access to resources represent key national interests, operations will include all domains, all military services along with civilian agencies assigned responsibilities within the concept of total defence. To this end, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO will fundamentally alter the military strategy along NATO’s Northern Flank – paving the way for a deepened integration between the Nordic states and strengthening their Nordic and NATO identities.

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