

*Jarostaw Suchoples**

In the Shadow of the Eastern Neighbour. Finland in the Security Policy of Russia and the Soviet Union from Peter the Great to Contemporary Times

Abstract

Throughout its history, Finland's relations with Russia have generally been determined by Russian attempts to secure control over the eastern part of the Baltic Sea region. In medieval times, it was mainly about the control of trade routes, especially between Novgorod, and Western Europe and Byzantium. After the founding of the new city of St. Petersburg by Peter the Great in 1703, the rulers of Russia were faced with the problem of ensuring security to that city. From a Russian point of view, it became vitally important to gain control over lands on the eastern side of the Baltic Sea. When Finland became a Russian province in 1809, it seemed that the Baltic security dilemmas of Russia had finally been resolved. However, the collapse of Tsarist Russia in 1917 changed that particular situation. Finland became independent, and Russia's border moved east to the outskirts of St. Petersburg (renamed Petrograd during World War I). For the leaders of the Soviet Union, which had replaced the Romanov Empire, World War II provided an opportunity to try to regain lost Finnish territories. Although the Red Army did not manage to conquer Finland, during two wars (occurring between 1939–1940 and 1941–1944), the post war settlement saw the Soviet-Finnish border shift back westwards. Finland also had to reckon with the requirements of the USSR's security policy and make it a priority of its own foreign policy.

***Jarostaw Suchoples** – University of Jyväskylä, e-mail: jsuchoples@hotmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7146-1387.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Finland modified its policy of neutrality and adopted a doctrine of non-alignment that has remained in place to this day. However, the increase of tensions in international relations in recent years, due to Russia's aggressive foreign policy threatening its neighbours, has forced Finnish statesmen to rethink their country's security policy. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Finland, together with Sweden, decided to apply for NATO membership. The ratification procedure is ongoing.

The aim of this paper is to analyse, in a longer historical perspective, what Finland's place was as regards the Russian and Soviet security policy, from Peter the Great to our times. The methodological approach reflects the chronology of events which have occurred in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea region in the last 300 years. They are described to provide readers with necessary facts, and create the background for conclusions on the reasons for the Russian/Soviet policy towards Finland and, in a broader sense, the northern coasts of the Gulf of Finland.

Keywords: Finland, Russia, Soviet Union, Eastern Baltic, Sankt Petersburg

Historical Preconditions: Russia, Sweden, and Finland. From the Great Northern War to 1809

On March 29th, 1809, during a session of the Diet of Finland, Tsar Alexander I of Russia, after receiving the oath of allegiance from the representatives of Finnish states and recognising him as the ruler of Finland, pledged that he would rule the country that had just come under his rule in accordance with its laws, and its inhabitants would be able to preserve their religion and customs (Jussila et al., 1999, pp. 14–16; Lavery, 2006, p. 52). It thus became an autonomous part of the Romanov Empire, a Grand Duchy which was formally united with Russia by a personal union. Thus, it began a new phase in Finland's history which, for six centuries, had been a part of the Kingdom of Sweden. It began as a result of the Russia/Sweden war, in 1808–1809, which ended in victory for Russia (Lindgren, 1959, pp. 9–14; Jussila et al., 1999, pp. 14–16).

The Finnish War, as the conflict of 1808-1809 went down in history, ended with Russia achieving a goal that its rulers had dreamed of at least since the time of Ivan IV Vasilyevich, better known as Ivan the Terrible. This was to provide Russia with secure access to the Baltic Sea and control the trade routes running through the eastern part of the Baltic region (Wittram, 1973, pp. 30–38; Ochmański, 1980, pp. 110–114, 134; Sundberg, 1998, pp. 74–86, 126–135, 220–227; Kagarlicki, 2012, pp. 134–145).

However, it was Peter the Great who took the Russo-Swedish conflict to a completely different level when, in 1703, during the Great Northern War (1700–1721), he decided to build the Peter and Paul Fortress on land formally still belonging to Sweden – the nucleus of St Petersburg, and the future capital of the Russian Empire, which came about ten years later (Troyat, 2005, pp. 102–103, 115–120; Carrère d’Encausse, 2014, p. 60; Anisimow, 2017, p. 179). Peter the Great’s decision was a demonstration of his aspirations. The centre of his empire was to be located on the Baltic Sea. It was, therefore, clear that Tsar Peter was no longer interested in controlling the trade routes through the Baltic Sea and its coastal areas, but rather in shifting the centre of gravity of the empire westwards to the Gulf of Finland. By founding St. Petersburg at the mouth of the Neva, he had achieved his goal (Troyat, 2005, p. 185; Anisimow, 2017, p. 184; *Istoricheskij fakul’tet Moskovskogo Gosudarstvennoho Universiteta imeni M.V. Lomonosova, N.D.*).

Thus, if St. Petersburg was to continue and develop as the capital of the entire empire, the Russian rulers had to answer the question of what to do to ensure its security. This could only happen after assuming control of both the northern and southern shores of the Gulf of Finland. According to this concept, Finland and Estonia were to be assigned the role of buffer zones which would protect St. Petersburg from the west. After all, the geopolitical fact created by Peter the Great had to have its consequences. Sweden not only lost the war and its status as a regional Baltic power, but also began to lose its Finnish borderlands to Russia, which had “always” been a part of its territory.

For the next eighty-eight years, despite Russia’s growing power and Sweden’s gradual loss of importance, the kingdom of the Swedes did not give up on regaining its lost position and territories. Russian-Swedish relations in this period can, therefore, hardly be characterised as being friendly and peaceful. It is, in fact, to the contrary; in the 17th century alone, two more wars broke out. The first of them, occurring between 1741–1743, was lost by Sweden, and, in its course, Finland found itself under Russian occupation (LeDonne, 2003, p. 50; Bazyłow, 2005, p. 160; Oakley, 2005, pp. 129–132; Anisimow 2017, p. 205). In 1743, the Swedish government had to ask for peace, as a result of which the Finnish lands with such cities as Lappeenranta (in Swedish, Vilmanstrand) and Hamina (Frederikshamn) were absorbed into Russia’s borders (Kruhse, 2006; Bagger, 1993, pp. 55–56).

In 1788, Sweden struck back. This time, however, the primary cause of the war was the internal situation of the Swedish kingdom (King Gustav III Vasa, trying to strengthen his position and prestige in the country,

also needed success in foreign policy) (LeDonne, 2003, pp. 111–112; Troyat, 2006, pp. 263–264). The Swedish commanders planned to launch a combined fleet-and-land army attack through Finnish territory on St. Petersburg. However, such an operation succeeded only partly, because the Swedish troops operating in Finland were too weak (Jägerskiöld, 1957, pp. 317–319). In August 1790, a new peace treaty was signed at Värälä (in Swedish, Wereloe), near Kouvola. It confirmed the current course of the Swedish-Russian border and abolished the right of Russia to interfere in Sweden's internal affairs, primarily related to succession to the throne in Stockholm (Jägerskiöld, 1957, pp. 334–336; Russkaja Ideia, 2007). In any case, by 1790, the Swedes had finally come to terms with the loss of their former eastern Finnish borderlands.

Autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland – The North-western Buffer Zone of the Russian Empire (1809–1917)

Meanwhile, in 1807, at Tilsit, after the dismantling of Prussia, Napoleon met with Emperor Alexander I of Russia to outline the framework of the order in which the two powers would coexist in the future (Lefebvre, 1969; Seton-Watson, 1989, p. 114; Bazylow, 2005, p. 194; Hårstedt, 2011, pp. 63–64). Although these agreements lasted only five years, anyone who underestimated their long-term significance would be mistaken. The two rulers then divided their spheres of influence in Germany, Central Europe, and the Baltic region in an attempt to settle the most pressing foreign and security policy issues of their countries. When one looks today at the engravings depicting Napoleon and Alexander tenderly embracing each other or exchanging handshakes, one is irresistibly reminded of the photographs recording similar scenes from 23rd August, 1939, when Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Third Reich, was received in the Kremlin by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. Then, just as 132 years earlier, the superpowers entered into alliances and delimited their spheres of influence, and the smaller countries had to bear the consequences. It was no coincidence that, both in 1807 and in 1939, one of the countries that Russia/the Soviet Union desired the control of and indeed had as one of its objectives, was Finland. At Tilsit, Napoleon, seeing no point in directly subjugating a recalcitrant Sweden which had caused him some trouble by allying with the English, not only agreed to have the country within Russia's sphere of influence, but even insisted that Emperor Alexander order his troops into the territory of Sweden, thus forcing it to join the continental blockade of Great Britain (Carlsson, Höjer, 1954, pp. 109–111; Ochmański, 1980, p. 190; Saunders,

1992, p. 49; Luntinen, 1997, p. 30; Bazyłow, 2005, p. 194). The Russian ruler did not need much encouragement to organise an armed expedition against Sweden. After all, here was an opportunity to achieve a strategic goal of the Russian Empire, which was to turn the Gulf of Finland into internal Russian waters. Taking into account that Estonia and Swedish Livonia (northern Latvia including Riga) had already been conquered by Russia as a result of the Great Northern War, it can be concluded that the aforementioned scenario outlined by Peter the Great was simply being consistently implemented by his successors, and Alexander I, as fate would have it, was destined to complete this mission. Russian armies entered Finland on February 21st, 1808 (Frilund, N.D.). The campaign appeared to be victorious. The most important result of the conquest of Finland was that Russian garrisons could now be deployed in Finnish cities without any hindrance and that the march of foreign armies on St. Petersburg through Finnish lands had now become something difficult to imagine (Luntinen, 1997, pp. 46–47, 49–54; Klinge, 1993, pp. 100, 125).

As a result of the war of 1808–1809, the Åland Islands also came under Russian rule (Gardberg, 1995, p. 7; Kleemola-Juntunen, 2019, pp. 4–5). Never before had Russia ruled in northern Europe over lands located so far west. Moreover, the possession of the strategically located archipelago allowed the Russians to reverse the geostrategic realities in the entire region. Now, it was not Swedish castles that were located on the far outskirts of St. Petersburg, but Russian troops deployed on the far outskirts of Stockholm. Although the Swedish capital was still beyond the sea, the nearest Russian outposts were only one hundred and sixty kilometres from that city. Finding Finland in Russian hands also put a definitive end to any Swedish dreams of greatness.

The fortress at Bomarsund on the Åland Islands is a symbol of the furthest extent of imperial Russian rule in northern Europe, like a border stone thrown into the middle of the Baltic Sea. Construction of the fortress began in 1832, but it was never completed (Kleemola-Juntunen, 2019, p. 5; Åland Museum, N.D.; Visit Åland, N.D.). During the Crimean War in August 1854, the British fleet landed 12,000 troops in the archipelago. The Russian troops surrendered after three days of fighting (Duckers, 2011; Grehan, Mage, 2014). The Allied fleet was then able to sail on and ravage the Finnish coast with their ships' guns, also attempting further landing operations. Although it did not succeed in attacking St. Petersburg directly, nor in threatening Russian garrisons deployed on the territory of the Grand Duchy, the events that took place on the Baltic (Finnish) front of the Crimean War must have influenced the thinking of those responsible

for the military security of the Russian state (Luntinen, 1997, pp. 91–96; Duckers, 2011). On the one hand, it turned out that only by controlling the exit from the Baltic Sea would Russia be able to gain free access to the North Sea and the Atlantic. Without this, ships with Russian grain bound for the ports of Western Europe could always be stopped in the Danish straits. However, the powers that fought against Russia in the first half of the 1850s did not want to allow any such kind of expansion. Therefore, together with the Treaty of Paris ending the Crimean War, the Åland Convention was imposed on Russia. According to its provisions, Russia had to agree to demilitarise the archipelago (Gardberg, 1995, pp. 7–8, 87–89; Kleemola-Juntunen, 2017, pp. 5–7). Therefore, it can be concluded that on the day of signing both documents, that is, on 30th March 1856, the range of Russia's internationally acceptable military presence in the Baltic Sea basin was defined. This boundary was the coast of Finland, and respect for Russian rule over the Grand Duchy was an expression of the recognition of the geopolitical realities created by Peter the Great. After all, more than a hundred and fifty years after its foundation, St. Petersburg could not be moved to another place, which was understood in London, Paris, and Vienna.

For the next thirty-four years, the status quo prevailed in the Baltic Sea region. A glance at a map of the region is enough to see the order that prevailed there. From the mouth of the Tornio River in the very north of the Gulf of Bothnia, to the mouth of the Niemen River, the entire Baltic coast belonged to Russia. Further on, up to the border with Denmark established as a result of the victory of the Prussian-Austrian coalition over the Danes in 1864, the Baltic coast stretched under Prussian and, from 1871, German rule (Cranckshaw, 1981, pp. 163–175; Hafner, 2009, pp. 163–175). Sweden retained sovereignty over the western side of the Gulf of Bothnia and beyond to the Kattegat, and Denmark over the Jutland Peninsula and the islands set in straits through which the North Sea can be crossed. In this configuration, Finland was an extremely important part of the Russian empire, making it the Baltic state par excellence, controlling, precisely thanks to the possession of Finnish lands, the entire eastern part of the Baltic Sea.

Soon after the ascension to the throne of Germany's new emperor, Wilhelm II, German-Russian relations began to deteriorate. Wilhelm II broke with the policy of self-restraint pursued by Bismarck, who understood that although Germany was the most powerful state in Europe, it would be weaker than a coalition that could be formed to stop its over-expansion (Hafner, 2009, pp. 65–66, 80, 83, 90–110). The new emperor was thinking about how to make Germany into a superpower

of the first magnitude, and this had to lead to confrontation with France, eager for revenge for the defeat of 1870, along with with Great Britain, and with Russia, a country at that point in time still basically friendly to the Second Reich. When, in 1890, Bismarck resigned, and Germany did not agree to an extension of the Reinsurance Treaty concluded in 1887, as proposed by Russia, it became clear that the paths of the two Baltic powers began to diverge (Rich, Fischer, 1955, pp. 116–132; Cranckshaw, 1981, pp. 402–406; Lampe, 1996, pp. 133–134; Hafner, 2009, pp. 78, 83; Klinge, 2010, pp. 167–169, 174). From a Russian point of view, this meant that Germany could become an opponent with whom a clash could occur in the areas around the Baltic Sea.

Finland felt the changes in international politics at the turn of the nineteenth century, during the so-called first Russification period (1898–1905) (Polvinen, 1995; Jussila et al., 1999, pp. 66–83). Suspicion of pro-German sympathies among Finns by Russian politicians and military officials coincided with the rise of conservative and nationalist movements in Russia, for whom anyone who was not a right-wing-thinking, preferably Orthodox Russian, was a potential threat to the state. Although the Finnish elite showed admiration for the then flourishing German culture, art, science, industry, and general organisational efficiency, this did not mean selling out to Germany (Klinge, 1993, p. 206; Klinge, 2000, p. 102). Adherents of blunt Russian nationalism seemed to have forgotten that the Finns repeatedly managed to prove their loyalty to the Emperor/Great Duke. This was, after all, during the years of the Crimean War, when they not only did not think of the upcoming opportunity to return to the rule of the kings of Sweden, but bravely participated in the defence of the coasts of their country against the British and French ships firing on them and attempts to land on Finnish soil. Later, in the late 1870s, Finnish soldiers made history by participating in a war against Turkey that brought independence to Bulgaria (1877–1878) (Laitila, 2003). And yet, this did not convince those Russian nationalists, politicians, and military men, who imagined that the Finns might benevolently receive German troops if they invaded the Grand Duchy, to march on St. Petersburg from there.

Although the fears of the Russians about the possibility of the Germans attacking the Russian capital from the side of Finland were not unjustified because the rapidly expanding German navy could easily carry out such an operation, the policy of tightening the screw (among others, attempts to limit or even eliminate Finnish autonomy and to establish direct Russian rule in the Grand Duchy) by the Russian authorities should be regarded as a serious mistake, which, in the-short-and-long run, had to affect the state of Russian-Finnish relations, and, as a result, turn against Russia's

strategic interests in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea region (Luntinen, 1997, pp. 163–180; Jussila et al., 1999, pp. 72–78; Kelly, 2011, pp. 166–222). The fate of Governor General Nikolai Ivanovich Bobrikov, the direct implementer of the Russian course calculated on the Russification of Finland and its unification with the rest of the empire, rises to symbolic status here. He was shot in June 1904 by an official of the Finnish senate (government), Eugen Schaumann (Canzanella, 2010, p. 545). This was evidence of the fact that the Finns regarded what they had experienced from the Russian authorities after decades of successful co-existence with Russia under the Romanov dynasty as something not only unjust but also incomprehensible. Only a few years earlier, events such as the mass participation of Finns in a civil disobedience campaign in response to Russian violations of the Grand Duchy's constitution or the assassination of the tsarist governor-general would have been unthinkable (Huxley, 1990, pp. 143–252; Canzanella, 2010, pp. 545–548).

The assassination of Bobrikov, along with the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, and the outbreak of the 1905 revolution (which had a tumultuous course in Finland) halted the Russification drive of the tsarist authorities in the Grand Duchy for several years (Jussila et al., 1999, pp. 79–83). However, the Russians, faced with increasing tensions in international politics and deteriorating relations with Germany, soon resumed it in 1908 (Jussila et al., 1999, p. 121; Meinander, 2011, pp. 120–121). This time, it consisted not only in taking action to extinguish the autonomy of the Grand Duchy, but also in increasing the number of Russian garrisons and the powers of Russian commanders (especially after the outbreak of World War I). It led to the emergence of anti-Russian sentiment in many circles of Finnish society, with a simultaneous strengthening of pro-German tendencies (Jussila et al., 1999, pp. 90–91; Klinge, 2000, p. 108; Meinander, 2011, p. 121). This phenomenon was particularly noticeable among patriotically-minded youth, among whom the idea of political activism, i.e., an active struggle against Russia to preserve and expand Finnish autonomy, or even to achieve full independence, gained popularity already after the outbreak of the war. The very fact that about 2,000 young Finns went over to the side of the enemy, most often via neutral Sweden to Germany, posed no real danger to Russia, but it was a telling sign of the mood prevailing among the vast majority of Finns and was an image defeat for a still-powerful Russian empire (Halter, 1938; Jussila et al., 1999, p. 91; Keßelring, 2005; Meinander, 2011, p. 121).

Russia/the Soviet Union and Independent Finland (1917–1944)

Meanwhile, the number of Russian troops deployed on Grand Duchy territory was systematically growing. Importantly, after the outbreak of war in 1915, they returned to the Åland Islands (Luntinen, 1997, p. 272). But Finland, for the time being, was spared the horrors of war. Apart from the annoying presence of Russian troops, the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy could only feel and observe gradually-increasing problems with their food supply, fuel, and other necessary goods. This state of affairs prevailed until the February Revolution in Russia, or even longer, until the outbreak of the Finnish civil war in January 1918 (Luntinen, 1997, pp. 357–368). In any case, nothing happened during the first three years of World War I that would undermine Russian control over Finland. The Germans did not attack the country, and the Finns, despite their dissatisfaction with the Russification-war regime established in the Grand Duchy by Russia's civil and military authorities, did not openly rebel against it (Kirby, 1979, p. 39; Meinander, 2011, p. 121).

Only the last weeks of 1917 brought a change in the political and military situation in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea region. After a tense period in relations between the Finnish Senate and the Russian Provisional Government over the issue of whom, after the fall of the Tsar and the end of the Finnish-Russian personal union, should have sovereignty over the Grand Duchy, along with the dissolution of the Social-Democratic dominated Finnish Parliament by Alexander F. Kierenski's government (which proved that the Russians did not intend to give up Finland), and the takeover of power in Petrograd by the Bolsheviks, in December, Finland declared independence (Jussila et al., 1999, pp. 92–106; Upton, 1980, pp. 35–55, 102–202; Haapala, 2014, pp. 42–49). Its authorities quickly realised that without recognition of this fact by any Russian government, even if it were also the government of Soviet Russia not recognised by anyone, there was no chance for any international stabilisation of the new state. Therefore, on the last day of 1917, the chairman of the Finnish Senate, Pehr E. Svinhufvud, at the head of a delegation, visited the Russian Bolshevik leader Vladimir I. Lenin in Petrograd, asking for recognition of Finnish independence, to which he agreed (together with the Council of People's Commissars) and which was confirmed a few days later by the Executive Committee of the Congress of Councils (Upton, 1980, pp. 196–198).

Lenin took this decision hoping that the recognition of Finland's independence would be seen in the world as proof of the Bolsheviks'

respect for the principle of self-determination of nations, and that the country would soon return to the bosom of an already-Soviet Russia as a result of a revolution similar to the one that had swept away the Provisional Government in Petrograd a few weeks earlier and brought the Bolsheviks to power (Upton, 1980, pp. 42–43, 186–187, 412–413). However, these calculations turned out to be wrong. The civil war unleashed by the forces of the radical Finnish left ended in their defeat, and Finland retained its independence proclaimed at the end of 1917 (Upton, 1980, pp. 473–515; Tikka, 2014, pp. 102–108). As a result, Russia (it did not matter much whether tsarist, “white’ or “red’) lost control over the Finnish lands, which restored the situation from the time of Peter the Great, that is, its border moved eastward, all the way to the outskirts of Petrograd, whose name, after Lenin’s death was changed again, this time to Leningrad.

At this point, it is necessary to return for a moment to the first years of Russian rule over Finland. It was then that an important, although somewhat underestimated, event took place. In 1812, emperor Alexander I added so-called Old Finland (Finnish: Vanha Suomi, Russian: Staraya Finliandia, Swedish: Gamla Finland) to the Grand Duchy of Finland. Thus, Hamina, Savonlinna, Lappeenranta and Viipuri [Vyborg], but also Käkisalmi and Sortavala, located on the shores of Lake Ladoga, that is, the lands that Russia conquered from Sweden in 1743 and some of those which the Swedes had to give over as early as 1721 to Russia, were again included in the Finnish lands (Harle, 2000, p. 162; Korpela, 2008). This situation can be compared to the giving of Crimea in 1954, on the 300th anniversary of the Pereyaslav Agreement, to Soviet Ukraine, a place at least theoretically autonomous, like Finland in the 19th century, decided upon by the authorities in Moscow and headed by Nikita S. Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, because both the tsarist state and the USSR were supposed to last forever (Solchanyk, 2001, pp. 165–167; Zadorozhnii, 2017, pp. 56–59). In both cases, however, this did not happen, and, what is more, it came to pass years later that Russia laid claim to both Finland and Ukraine and decided to settle both disputes by force.

However, for the time being, the leaders of Soviet Russia and later the USSR could not think about an armed conquest of Finland and had to accept the reconfiguration of borders near Petrograd; an unfavourable move from a Russian point of view. This became clear already on March 3rd, 1918, when peace was made in Brest-Litovsk between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers. This treaty gave Germany and its allies victory on the eastern front in the Great War and was intended to make possible the realisation of the idea of Mitteleuropa as described by Friedrich

Naumann in 1915 (Naumann, 1915, pp. 478–479). However, the peace dictated at Brest also sanctioned, from a military point of view, a shifting of the Russian border on the north side of the Gulf of Finland almost to the gates of Petrograd. After all, in Article 6 of this treaty, Soviet Russia undertook to evacuate the Åland Islands and demilitarise them, and to remove Russian troops and the Russian Red Guards from Finland (Wikisource, N.D.). Later that same month, the Bolsheviks moved the seat of their power to Moscow, which again became the first capital of Russia. They did it mainly because of the fear of a possible seizing of Petrograd by the German army, but from where – if not from Finland – would come its troops? In March (in Åland) and in the first days of April 1918 (in Hanko and Loviisa), there landed the Danzig-formed German Baltic Division, (Menger, 1974, pp. 134–135; Putensen, 2021, pp. 31–32). Germany significantly helped the legal Finnish government to end the civil war quickly and victoriously. They did this in order to transform Finland into a German protectorate and base for possible military actions in Russia (von Ludendorff, 1919, pp. 207–208).

Returning to Petrograd/Leningrad, however, it is true that the border now ran through its distant suburbs, and the rise of an independent Finland and Estonia left only small patches of coastline north and south-west of it in Russian hands. But the city itself continued to exist after all, and its importance increased to the extent that Leningrad was now the only Soviet Russian port located on the Baltic Sea. Thus, the geopolitical realities created by Peter the Great proved to be permanent once again. Even the German victory and the dictates of the Brest Treaty did not change them. This made one assume that the problem of the city's security, as understood by the Russian and now Soviet leaders and generals, and the inextricably-linked issue of control over the areas situated on both sides of the Gulf of Finland would sooner or later become the order of the day once again.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, in the interwar period, the most important problem in the security policy of Finland was relations with the eastern neighbour, perceived as the main and only real threat to its independence which had been proclaimed in 1917. In spite of the conclusion of a peace treaty in the Estonian city of Dorpat (Tartu) in October 1920, and another peace treaty on June 1st, 1922 (this time it was called the “Agreement on measures to secure the inviolability of the Soviet-Finnish border”), the Finnish supreme authorities tried to work out as realistic and effective a concept of foreign policy as possible, which would allow them to count on international assistance in the event of the need to defend against armed aggression of the Soviets (United Nation,

1921; Smith, 1958, pp. 195–207; Heninen.net, 1991). Therefore Finland engaged in attempts to create a political-military alliance around Poland. These plans, however, were not realised, among other things, because the Parliament of Finland did not ratify the agreement concluded in Warsaw on March 17th, 1922 (Estonia and Latvia were also parties to it), according to which the Baltic Union, i.e., a regional grouping of the Baltic border states was to be created (Skrzypek, 1972, p. 166). This represented, on the one hand, the lack of faith of most members of the Finnish political elite in the effectiveness of an alliance with the other signatories of the Warsaw agreement, and on the other, their conviction that it would be better if Finland turned to Germany or the Scandinavian countries in search of security. At that time in Helsinki, they were already thinking about how to provide Finland with either the support of a state that could effectively oppose the expected Soviet expansion westwards, or to do something basically impossible, i.e., break with Finland's previous geopolitical reality or, in other words, get out of the broadly defined Central Europe, created after World War I and fulfil Finland's aspiration to become a part of a neutral Scandinavia (Browning, 2008, p. 147; Upton, 2016, pp. 170–171). Aware of the different realities of the 20th and 21st centuries and the distance separating the two countries, this aspiration of Finland could be compared, for example, with the aspirations of Slovenia, the former Yugoslav republic which, after gaining independence in 1991, tried to prove that the Balkans, with its instability and unpredictability, starts only behind its southern borders (Izakowski, Kalinowska, Szymańska, 2013).

In the interwar period, mutual suspicion and far-reaching distrust prevailed in Soviet-Finnish relations. The border, closely guarded on both sides, was in fact a line separating completely different, hostile, and incompatible worlds. Although on 21st January 1932 both countries concluded a non-aggression pact, for the Soviets it was a tactical action calculated only to gain time and avoid a two-front fight, if the next target of the Japanese expansion in Asia, demonstrated in 1931 in China, turned out to be the far eastern areas of the USSR (Large, 1973; Haslam, 198, pp. 83–106).

In turn, the Finnish leaders, still looking for a way to increase the security of their country, also needed time. They were under no illusions about the gigantic and ever-growing disproportions between the military potentials of the Soviet Union and Finland. They also foresaw that it was only a question of time until the Red Army moved west, at least to regain the areas lost after the fall of tsarist Russia, to wit, unfettered access to the Baltic Sea. Therefore, in the mid-1930s, they returned to the idea of

tying their homeland to the neutral Scandinavian kingdoms (Suchoples, 2003, pp. 3–22). These kingdoms, however, were not eager to enter into closer relations with the country, which seemed to be one of the most obvious targets of the expected Soviet expansion. Therefore, when, on 30th November 1939, the Soviet Union attacked, the Finnish army had to repulse the aggression of the numerically superior and better-armed enemy alone (Trotter, 1991; Tuunainen, 2016).

The invasion of Finland in November 1939 was a brutal, unprovoked attack. However, it is worthwhile to reflect on the circumstances, the goals of the Soviet attack, and the question of what the aggressor actually managed to achieve. The similarity of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact to the 1807 agreement between the emperors of France and Russia has already been mentioned. At the beginning of 19th century Napoleon “gave” Sweden to Russia, just as a few days before Germany’s attack on Poland, Hitler “gave” Finland, among other countries, to Stalin. In both cases, war broke out in northern Europe for basically the same reason – the desire of an eastern power to control the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland in order to move its border away from St. Petersburg/Leningrad. All this took place in circumstances indicating that sooner rather than later there would be a conflict between the rulers and dictators aligned in Tilsit and Moscow, wishing to bring about the unification of Europe under their leadership and according to their ideas. In both cases this ended in war, during which Finland became a battlefield.

Already in April 1938, Stalin proposed to Finland the conclusion of a Soviet-Finnish military alliance in the face of the expected expansion of the Third Reich (Suchoples, 2019, pp. 454–455). If the Finnish government had agreed to the Soviet initiative (this and several modifications to the initiative, put forward in the following months), the USSR would have non-violently restored the situation from the years 1914–1917, when Russian garrisons were stationed in Finland, protecting Petrograd from the possibility of a German attack led through the territory of the Grand Duchy. However, wishing to preserve the neutrality of their country and avoid provoking Germany, the Finns consistently refused to allow the Soviet Union to become the protector of their independence (Suchoples, 2019, pp. 454–461).

Finland did not yield to Soviet territorial demands and, therefore, the Winter War 1939–1940 had to break out. However, the unpreparedness of the Red Army caused that the new Finnish War was, to use the idiom, no walk in the park. The hard resistance of the Finns and the terrible losses suffered by the attackers, compounded by unusually harsh weather, meant that the war ended on 12th March 1940 with the signing of a Peace

Treaty in Moscow (Heninen.net, 1997b; Trotter, 1991, p. 263). What did the Soviet Union gain from it? There was a shifting of the border in Eastern Karelia about 150 kilometres to the west, more or less to the line of the border of the Russian Empire established in 1721 in the Treaty of Nystad (in Finnish, *Uusikaupunki*), in addition to the western part of the Fisherman Peninsula on the Barents Sea, portions of the districts of Salla in Lapland and Kuusamo in Northern Ostrobothnia, and the leasing of land in Hanko for a Soviet naval base (Heninen.net, 1997b; Trotter, 1991, p. 263). Tens of thousands of dead and wounded Soviet soldiers was the price the USSR paid for occupying only a portion of Old Finland, which Sweden had lost in the Great Northern War in the 18th century, 5,000 square kilometres in two sparsely populated counties, thanks to which, for strategic reasons, the Soviet border shifted in their area about 80 kilometres westward, and 321 square kilometres of the Finnish part of the Fisherman Peninsula in the far north, and the Baltic Fleet ship base at the southernmost point of Finland guarding, together with the Soviet military bases in Estonia, the entrance to the Gulf of Finland. And that was it. Of course, 26,000 dead and missing soldiers, the loss of Viipuri, the second largest city, an important cultural centre of the country, and a total of 11% of its territory and the need to resettle more than 400,000 refugees from areas taken by the USSR was a painful experience for the Finns, but they managed to defend their independence (Danielsbacka et al., 2020, p. 131).

The result of the Soviet-Finnish war was reflected in German-Soviet talks held in Berlin in mid-November 1940. They were devoted to the division of the spheres of influence in the world between the Third Reich, the USSR, Japan, and Italy (Weeks, 2002, p. 142; Miyake, 2010, pp. 348–349). The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, and German Chancellor Adolf Hitler spent a surprisingly long time discussing Finland's future. Perhaps the most interesting statement by Molotov regarding Finland was made on the first day of the Berlin talks. He then said that from a Soviet point of view, the Finnish issue had still not been resolved (Memorandum of the Conversation Between the Führer and the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Molotov in the Presence of the Reich Foreign Minister and the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Dekanosov, as Well as of Counselor of Embassy Hilger and Herr Pavlov, Who Acted as Interpreters, in Berlin on November 13th, 1940). This revealed that, for the USSR's leadership, settling the problem of Finland meant its annexation together with the Åland Islands and the areas separating the Soviet Union from Sweden and Norway. This way, the dilemmas of the USSR's security policy in the

Baltic Sea region would be resolved, and bridgeheads would be created for this power to expand in Scandinavia.

However, no new German-Soviet agreement was concluded at that time. It was very much to the contrary; the outbreak of war between the existing allies began to approach (Weeks, 2002, pp. 142–145). Therefore, it should be acknowledged that, in the long run, the most important consequence of the Winter War was that at the turn of May and June 1941, when the Third Reich was preparing an attack on the USSR, Finland's authorities decided that it would fight again with its eastern neighbour, but this time with Nazi Germany as its ally (Vehviläinen, 2002, pp. 85–89). Then, for the first and only time since the Swedish-Russian war of 1788–1790, the scenario in which Finnish territory was used to invade Russia/the Soviet Union by a third country became reality.

In 1944, after the Continuation War, when the Finnish army fought with the Red Army at the side of the German Wehrmacht, Finland still had to give up the territory of Petsamo, which meant that it lost the rich deposits of the nickel ore located there along with access to the Arctic Sea (Polvinen, 1986, pp. 26–29, 35; Hjlem, Maud, 2021, pp. 33–35). Moreover, instead of the Hanko base which had been evacuated in December 1941, the USSR demanded a 50-year lease of the Porkkala Peninsula, where the Red Army had established a strong artillery base. Firing from there, the Soviet heavy artillery could not only easily cover a considerable part of the Gulf of Finland with their fire-power, but also shell Helsinki (Polvinen, 1986, pp. 26–29, 35; Tynkynnen, Jouko, 2007, pp. 10–11). Thus, if one compares the eastern border of Finland set in the armistice agreement concluded with the Soviet Union on September 19th 1944 with the eastern border of Finnish lands set in the Nystadian peace of 1721, the only significant difference was that relatively small areas of parts of the Salla and Kuusamo counties were again ceded to the Soviet Union. In Karelia, on the other hand, the Finnish border, established in 1940 and finally confirmed in 1944, ran further to the east than it had in the first years after the Russian occupation of the country in 1809, that is, before the territories of Old Finland, conquered not only by Peter the Great during the Great Northern War but also by Empress Elizabeth during the war of 1741–1743, were generously returned to the Grand Duchy by Emperor Alexander I in 1812.

Certainly, a number of favourable circumstances helped Finland to retain its independence after World War II. One of them was the fact that the Red Army had captured the southern coast of the Baltic almost as far as Lübeck (Meinander, 2011, p. 156; Vehviläinen 2002, pp. 135–151; Erfurth, 1979, pp. 176–198). This made the USSR the hegemon of the

entire Baltic region and solved Soviet security dilemmas both in the area of Leningrad and the Gulf of Finland, along with solving the problem of competing on this body of water with the other superpower, the now defeated and partially-controlled Germany.

In Times of Soviet Hegemony (1944–1991)

The signing of the armistice agreement of 1944 and, later, in 1947, of the peace treaty, ended a stage in Soviet-Finnish relations that had begun after Finland's declaration of independence, marked by mutual suspicion, dislike, and finally hostility during the war. However, it was only the conclusion of the Agreement of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) on 6th April 1948 that laid the foundations for relations between the two states during the Cold War (Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 1999, pp. 245–247). According to this document, the USSR was given, in practice and at the moment when its leaders considered it appropriate, the right to call upon the Finnish side to hold talks on political and military questions that could become a prelude to the deployment of Soviet military troops on Finnish territory. Therefore, the Finnish leaders did what they could from then on to ensure that such consultations never took place, and the Soviet dictators had no doubts as to the good will of the Finns towards the USSR and their fulfilment of the obligations they had assumed in 1948. On the other hand, both states confirmed what they had already agreed to in article 3 of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, in that they would not join alliances and coalitions directed against one of the parties to the agreement (Jussila, Hentilä, Nevakivi, 1999, pp. 245–247). In other words, the Soviet Union promised that, as long as Finland did not bind itself to any alliance considered in Moscow as that which threatened the interests of the USSR and remained neutral on the international arena, it would not seek to change the democratic order of the Finnish state.

It seems that Finland's relations with the Soviet Union after World War II can be compared to the ties linking the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland with the Russian Empire in the more distant past. Both in the 19th century and after 1944, once in St. Petersburg and later in Moscow, it was recognised that the requirements of the security policy of Russia/the USSR could be met by Finns ruling their country independently and, in the end, it was unnecessary to introduce direct Russian rule there (apart from the twofold and unsuccessful attempts to Russify it in 1899–1905 and after 1908) or to establish a communist regime, or to transform Finland into yet another Soviet republic. In short, both Russia and the Soviet Union could be sure that from the side of Finland and the Gulf of

Finland, nothing threatened them and that the Finns themselves would do their best, knowing how much they could lose, if it was otherwise. On the other hand, the autonomy of the Grand Duchy – as well as the FCMA Agreement of 1948 – set the framework for Finland's self-reliance and independence on the international arena and in military affairs.

At this point, however, it is necessary to mention one more factor that clearly favoured Finland in the first years after the end of the Second World War, namely, the specific balance of power created in northern Europe at that time, which also contributed significantly to the maintenance of the independence by Finland. When it became clear that maintaining the unity of the anti-Hitler coalition after the defeat of Germany would not be possible and it turned out that the words of Winston S. Churchill about the Iron Curtain dividing Europe were true, the Scandinavian countries had to choose the direction of their security policy (Aalders, 1990, pp. 125–153; Muller, 1999). All three kingdoms feared Soviet expansion, and their leaders wondered how to protect them from its effects. Eventually, in 1949, Denmark and Norway, as well as Iceland, decided to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Sweden, the largest and strongest among them, chose the option of neutrality (Aalders, 1990, pp. 125–153; Petersen, 1991, p. 63; Bergqvist, 2016). In addition, Swedish neutrality also strengthened Finland's position and its neutrality, which could thus serve as a buffer separating Sweden from the USSR.

In 1956, the Soviet Union returned the Porkkala base to Finland (Petersen, 1991, p. 63). Its strategic importance diminished with the rapidly advancing development of missile weapons and aviation. Of course, the abandonment of the Porkkala base was used for propaganda purposes by the USSR to demonstrate that (unlike the United States) it was giving up one of its military bridgeheads located outside the Soviet Union (United Nations, 1956; Allison, 1995, pp. 38–39). In any case, if it had been recognised in Moscow that the Porkkala base was still necessary to maintain Soviet military control of the Gulf of Finland and its northern, Finnish coasts, the Soviet leaders would certainly not have made the decision to cede it to Finland earlier. Anyway, this gesture did not alter the geopolitical situation in the Baltic region.

On the other hand, the Soviet leadership did not intend to completely give up its influence on the internal situation in Finland. Although the consent of the USSR to the accession of the former allies of Nazi Germany, including Finland, to the United Nations in December 1955, as well as the already-mentioned return of the Porkkala base, might have indicated that the Soviets were beginning to accept a little more freedom for the countries in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, nothing could be

further from the truth (Conforti, 2005, p. 34; Higgins et al., 2017, p. 12). The Soviets reminded the Finns of the limits of their freedom within the framework of Soviet-Finnish bilateral relations under the terms of the FCMA Agreement. When, in 1958, it became possible that the Finnish government would include unacceptable social democratic politicians in Moscow, the Soviet Union initially suspended talks on several economic issues important from the Finnish point of view, and when this did not “discipline” the Finns, the Soviet ambassador in Helsinki, Viktor Z. Lebedev, left for home on leave in October, as it was announced, and was subsequently transferred to another post, leaving the Finnish capital without a suitably senior Soviet representative (Billington, 1964, pp. 134–135; Lundstrom, 2012, p. 333; Rainio-Niemi, 2021, pp. 86–88). The Finnish authorities understood the significance of this gesture. In January 1959, President Urho K. Kekkonen went on an allegedly private visit to Leningrad, during which he met “incidentally” with Khrushchev and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko to resolve the crisis in mutual relations. Meanwhile, the Finnish government resigned. A new, minority cabinet was appointed in its place, with a composition that did not raise any objections from the Kremlin authorities. Then, in early February, the new Soviet ambassador, Alexei V. Zakharov, arrived in the Finnish capital, which finally ended several months of tension between Finland and the Soviet Union (Billington, 1964, pp. 134–135, 136; Fields, 2020, p. 318, fn. 18). A good summary of the events were words Khrushchev said at the time of Kekkonen’s visit to Leningrad. Then, the Soviet leader said that although Finland had the right to decide who sat in its government, the USSR had the right to express its opinion on the matter (Lundstrom, 2012, p. 333). In this way, he clearly delimited the limits of Finland’s freedom in domestic politics, and its authorities, by accepting this position of the USSR, demonstrating that the Soviet point of view would not be ignored in Helsinki. These realities prevailed in Soviet-Finnish relations until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

After the Collapse of the Soviet Sphere of Influence (1991–2022)

In 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland and Russia concluded a Treaty on the Foundations of Mutual Relations. This replaced the Soviet-Finnish agreement of 1948 and meant that Finland regained freedom in its foreign policy (Heninen.net, 1997c; Lukacs, 1992, pp. 50–63). However, the Finns remembered that their country was still a neighbour of Russia and that its border with its eastern neighbour was

still 1,340 kilometres long. In doing so, they had to redefine its security policy. The majority of Finnish society – at the turn of the 20th and 21st century – opposed the possibility of Finland's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, convinced that neutrality (or non-alignment) had served the country well (Aunesluoma, Rainio-Niemi, 2016, pp. 59–60; The Barents Observer, 2017; YLE, 2019). Despite this, Finland still remembers the lessons of history. Therefore, being aware of the weaknesses of their country, Finnish politicians have long been looking for appropriate points of support for its security policy. This was behind Finland's entry into NATO's Partnership for Peace program as early as 1994, although this was not intended to lead to full membership of the alliance (von Moltke, 1994, p. 6). Certainly, membership of the European Union (obtained in 1995) has further stabilised its situation in the international arena (Kirby, 2006, pp. 280–284).

It was also impossible to forget that after East Germany and Poland threw off the yoke of communism and the Baltic states regained their independence, the borders of the areas controlled by Russia shifted eastwards again on the southern shores of the Gulf of Finland as they had after the First World War. They now end at the Narva River, which marks the Russian-Estonian border. It differs only slightly from the border established between Estonia and Soviet Russia in 1920 (United Nations, 1922; Levinsson, 2006, pp. 98–110). Considering that relations between Russia and Finland are now based on the 1992 treaty, and are thus characterised by the equality of the parties to the treaty and that of the countries around the Baltic Sea, and that only Russia has remained a non-member of both the European Union and NATO (if Finland and Sweden are accepted as its members) since 2004, one must wonder how Russia's power ambitions, which have recently been increasingly manifested in the Baltic region can be realised. At least a partial answer to this question was what happened at the Russian-Finnish border in 2015, and then, in the following years, in Finnish airspace. It was then that dozens of citizens of Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Nepal, Somalia, Syria, and other countries seeking asylum in Finland appeared at Finnish border crossings (Nilsen, 2015; Alho, 2021, pp. 89–91). It was obvious that it was the Russian authorities who were directing these people towards Finland, causing the government in Helsinki and the whole of Finnish society to worry about the possible number of refugees on the territory of their country, which could drive it into chaos and paralysis.

In the face of these worrying developments, Finland has taken a number of measures to strengthen its security. The country signed a number of bilateral letters of intent and military cooperation agreements with NATO

partners between 2016 and 2018 (Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, USA, and the UK) and with Sweden (the Ministry of Defence of Germany et al., 2004; YLE, 2016; Polskie Radio24.pl, 2017; the Swedish Armed Forces, 2020; Kaikkonen, Bakke-Jensen, Hultqvist, 2020; the U.S. Department of State, 2021). Since 2017, Helsinki has also been home to the NATO-EU European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. During these years, its leaders, President Sauli V. Niinistö and Prime Minister Juha P. Sipilää, have repeatedly expressed concern over Russia's actions and indicated that it is Russia that is destabilising the situation in the Baltic region (Finnish Government, 2016; President of the Republic of Finland, 2017).

The situation changed after February 24th, 2022, that is, after Russia invaded Ukraine. The Russian aggression against a neighbouring country has radically changed the attitude of both the Finnish political elite and the public towards the issue of membership in the North Atlantic Pact. The Finns, after a relatively short internal debate, strongly supported the accession of their country to NATO (Bishop, Ellyatt, 2022; France 24, 2022; Wienberg, 2022). This decision was certainly facilitated by a similar development in Sweden. Representatives of both countries applied for admission to the alliance as early as May, at its headquarters in Brussels (NATO, 2022). Meanwhile, during a North Atlantic Pact summit held in Madrid on 29th and 30th June 2022, Finland and Sweden were formally invited to join the alliance. This initiated the accession process, that is, the ratification procedure for NATO enlargement by two northern states by the parliaments of all states belonging to the alliance (Finnish Government, 2022; Sweden invited to join NATO at Madrid Summit, 2022).

Conclusions

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO will be a real revolution, and not only in terms of the security policy of these two countries. This is particularly evident in the example of Finland. Its long border with Russia will now become the external border of the alliance. Although the Finnish authorities do not plan to locate the pact's military bases on their country's territory, it has already been covered by NATO security guarantees. This means that if, in the future, Russian leaders wanted to move the current border with Finland by force, they would have to take into account the reaction of 32 member states of the alliance, including the nuclear powers, i.e., France, the United States, and Great Britain. Moreover, it is hard not to notice that the accession of Finland

to NATO together with neighbouring Sweden will transform the Baltic Sea, after becoming almost entirely an internal sea of the European Union in 2004, to almost completely an internal sea of the North Atlantic Pact. The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO is therefore changing the security architecture in the Baltic Sea region. In the case of Finland, it also eliminates the determinants of its foreign policy resulting from the realities of the international order formed after World War II.

It can be said that, in a sense, the situation resembles that which was sanctioned by the peace concluded in 1323 between Sweden and Novgorod. Then, under that agreement, the border was established between two civilisation circles (the Western and the Byzantine). It was also the eastern border of the Finnish lands. On the other hand, Finland's accession to NATO in the 21st century will make its border with Russia, especially in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, a line dividing the worlds of different values – open liberal democracy and the so-called (and possibly bankrupt) Russian *mir*.

In past centuries, Finland experienced the effects of a struggle between the superpowers for control of the Baltic Sea and its shores repeatedly, starting from times medieval. Its strategic location on the Gulf of Finland meant that – especially since the times of Peter the Great and the founding of St. Petersburg – Russian rulers were constantly interested in extending military control over its territory and preventing any other state from being able to launch an attack on Russia from Finnish lands or impede that power's access to the Baltic Sea. It was no different in the 20th century, when Finland became an independent state, one which fought for survival in 1939–1940 and at the end of World War II, and later successfully tried to properly arrange its relations with the Soviet Union, a neighbour whom, thanks to its Machiavellian approach to the outside world, could never be fully trusted. Although in the last decade of the second millennium and the first decades of the 21st century, relations between Moscow and Helsinki have been free from dramatic events, tensions have arisen in recent years in connection with Russia's attempts to destabilise the situation by means of actions characteristic of hybrid wars in the areas adjacent to this country with the aim to restore, strengthen, or even expand Russian spheres of influence and to implement its superpower, not to say imperial ambitions. In recent months, it has also turned out that Russian leaders, in order to achieve their goals, have been and are able to invade a neighbouring country. Finland's response to the resulting threats is to join NATO, which makes any attack or attempts to re-subjugate Russia problematic. Nevertheless, the Finns hope for the continued peaceful coexistence and cooperation not only of their own country, but also of other Baltic states

with Russia. However, they also take into account the possibility of less optimistic and even dangerous scenarios, so as not to be surprised by the future, which is unpredictable today.

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