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It Is About Protection. Defence in Finland's Steps to NATO

Abstract

After Russia invaded Ukraine, Finland quickly applied for NATO membership. This step is not necessarily that drastic should Finland's security policy development in the long term be examined with one's focus set on a gradually-developed defence policy. It represents an important continuity in security policy, but also played a central role in advancing Finland's steps to becoming NATO members. On the basis of different studies and accounts, the following points seem to be critical in constructing a preliminary narrative about Finland's road to the Alliance.

After the Second World War, Finland's western relations became dependent on its bilateral relations with the Soviet Union. Finland was aware that it could not expect any support from the West as regards its security. Despite a security policy based on recognising facts, and the FCMA Treaty with the Soviet Union, the eastern neighbour was seen as the main, and, later on, the only military threat on the basis of history and Finland's vulnerable geopolitical position. The threat, however, was concealed by so-called "doubletalk" in security policy discourse until the 2010s. In this context, state defence was developed to be an independent and modern territorial defence, ultimately there to defend against a large-scale invasion. Finland's defence enjoyed high legitimacy and confidence in society, especially from the 1970s. Security policy was raised above normal politics to be a kind of super-politics with a strong political consensus.

When the Cold War ended and Finland joined the European Union, defence policy and the defence establishment got a leading role in working an approaching NATO. Finland's opportunities to conduct stabilisation policy in its close neighbourhood were seen as being limited, especially after Russia adopted a self-asserting foreign and security policy towards the

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West after 2007. At the same time, the subsequently increased cooperation, networking, and integration stimulated perceptions about western defence dependence. This increased emphasis on defence actually turned people's attention to the extra security that NATO membership might provide. Applying for NATO, however, required the shock of a Russian invasion of Ukraine before the Finnish public was ready to see the risks of NATO membership as being less than that of its benefits.

Keywords: Finland, Security Policy, Defence, NATO, Russia

Introduction

After Russia invaded Ukraine on the 24th February 2022, Finland quickly decided to apply for NATO membership. The country's application was handed over to the Secretary General of NATO on the 18th May, together with Sweden's application. Among most members of the Alliance, it received a very positive response. In various statements, it was often emphasised that Finland and Sweden would bring forth a prominent addition to NATO's collective defence in spite of the fact that half of the eastern land-border of the alliance would be Finland's border with Russia.

The most essential change in often-repeated preconditions for Finland's NATO decision seemed to be public opinion that turned favourable as regards NATO membership in a rather short period of time. According to polls from the Advisory Board for Defence Information (ABDI), the number of those favouring membership rose from 24 to 68% between autumn 2021 and spring 2022 (MTS, 2022).

In public discussion, the decision was regularly seen as a unique step in the history of Finland's foreign, security, and defence policy. At the same time, critical opinions and those voices which warned about the risks of NATO membership faded.

But the depth of the current change can also be at least preliminarily questioned if Finland's security policy is examined in the long run after WWII or, specifically, after the Cold War, and if those factors which represent parallel patterns with NATO membership are studied. The move from a kind of neutrality or non-aligned policy to an allied policy is not necessarily particularly drastic should one pay attention to the different elements of security policy.

In every foreign policy, security represents an essential purpose, together with autonomy, welfare, status, and prestige (Holsti, 1995, pp. 84–87). At the same time, it also represents a collection of problems that

a state aims to solve through its security policy, trying to prevent any threats to national security and reduce the vulnerability of that state in order to meet such threats effectively.

Defence policy is not necessarily and solely about the forming and use of military force, but also includes other measures to protect against different threats arising from the operating environment of the state and to lower that state's vulnerability (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 190). In spite of a wide understanding of security, its military sector still tends to dominate, especially if violent threats are intensive in the operating environment. They are often considered as requiring the greatest of attention and preparedness, even if non-violent threats may be more prominent in peace time.¹

Security policy can be divided into different segments of action; stabilisation policy, conflict management, and protection. Stabilisation policy aims at achieving a secure and stable operating environment that generates as few threats as possible and which provides the opportunity to control them at the source. In the policy of a small state, this action is largely the domain of foreign policy, and its instruments are diplomacy along with economic rewards and/or sanctions. Conflict management includes a wide use of instruments, usually in cooperation with other states in various international conflicts.² The third segment, protection, is mainly carried out via defence policy.

In this article, the role of defence policy in Finland's security policy over time is specifically clarified, along with how it has potentially affected Finland's road to NATO and to the adoption of the country's current security policy.

Finland's Security Policy After the Second World War: Time Periods and Turning Points

Fact-recognising Security Policy

At the end of the Second World War, Finland had to re-evaluate its security policy. In the Continuation War of 1941–1944, Finland, fighting alongside Germany, had at best strived for a strategic result whereby the

¹ The defence capability of a state is a wider concept than its military-based defence capabilities, even if the latter is often and ultimately decisive, should the country find itself under the threat of an invasion. In the frame of comprehensive security, all of the action aiming to provide protection in the face of threats and rebuking them actively or passively is part of using one's defence capability.

² This approach is based on an analysis of Möttölä (1995). Instead of protection, he used a concept of deterrence-defence to depict a segment of action that, above all, was about military defence capability and the defence solution of the state.

threat from the east would be fended off. When this did not materialise, Finland changed tack completely and began to treat and handle the new situation as a bilateral conflict between Finland and the Soviet Union (Apunen, Wolff, 2009, pp. 448–450). After the Second World War, Finland had to create a relationship that tried to take into account its great-power interests and reinforced international status as best as possible with the war's winner. In this process, the entirety of Finland's security policy held something of an ethos of cautiousness, wherein relations with the Soviet Union became a factor to centralise policy and a norm of underlining its orthodoxy. A so-called "sensitive ear" towards Soviet policy was largely understood as a precondition that Finland could develop its relations with the West. Finland was certainly a democracy and a western country by its identity and wanted to stay as such.

When the short, honeymoon-like period of mutual understanding between the allied great-powers began to escalate into confrontation after the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, Finland was left decidedly more alone with the Soviet Union. No support for Finland's security was expected from the West. Foreign policies, especially new relations with the big, eastern neighbour, were emphasised. Defence policy was very much in the background, not least because Finland's defence faced heavy restrictions in the beginning. But, for conducting new policy, it was very important, however, that Finland's Defence Forces were not beaten at war and that the country remained unoccupied. The future of Finland's defence had one important starting point; the very legitimacy of its own defence in the eyes of the people, that the country's Defence Forces would prevail in spite of various post-war restrictions, and that no foreign forces would be allowed in the country. The constitution remained in place without any upheaval. Finland received special treatment from the winning states, partly because it was left out of the main focus in the final settlements of the war (Visuri, 2015, pp. 253–254).

The time period right after the war can be described as a period of "fact-recognising security policy", following the words of its central architect, J.K. Paasikivi.³ The foreign policy could be labelled as "the Paasikivi Doctrine". Essentially, it was based on a concept that Soviet interests as regards Finland were military-strategic and defensive. The Soviet Union had to be reassured that Finland would not put its territory on offer as a base for offensives to the east (Visuri, 2015, pp. 250–254). A turn that clarified and stabilised policy came soon after the Paris Treaty

³ Prime Minister (and, from 1946, President of Republic) J.K. Paasikivi talked about recognising the facts in his speech on Independence Day on 6th December, 1944. That speech is often regarded as an important doctrinal speech.

of 1947, when Finland and the Soviet Union made a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (the FCMA Treaty) in April 1948. That treaty can also be interpreted as the creation of a political connection between Finland and the Soviet Union that Stalin had gradually pursued from 1938 (Apunen, Wolff, 2009, p. 453).

In a strategic great-power context, when the Cold War began to loom, it was favourable for the Soviet Union to ensure that Finland would be ready to act militarily if a threat from the west actualised. Finland managed, however, to secure its independent defence in that the FCMA Treaty did not bring an alliance with the Soviet Union unlike in Eastern Europe in areas where the Soviet forces had advanced during World War II. Finland was able to influence the obligations of the treaty, and Finland's role in defending the Soviet Union was restricted to the defence of its own territory. Soviet assistance would have depended on consultations had a threat appeared. President Paasikivi tried to keep Soviet influence in Finland as reduced as possible, but, at the same time, he underlined the fulfilling of agreements and aimed to prevent the Soviet Union itself from acting against those agreements (Visuri, 2001, p. 25; Manninen, 1993).

Some effect on Soviet attitudes towards Finland after the war may have been due to the fact that Stalin had noticed the stiff Finnish resistance against the attacking Soviet forces in 1944 (Meinander, 2012, pp. 382–392). Additionally, the Soviet Union did not have the confidence that Finland's extreme left would make a revolutionary change and actually support Soviet policy, which often occurred in post-World War Eastern Europe (Holmila, Mikkonen, 2015, pp. 191–200). In repelling such a change, President Paasikivi played an important role against the efforts of the communists. A way for that to happen was also paved by the result of parliamentary elections in March 1945.

The most significant security threats in Europe have been political and also largely military in nature. Finland's most central security problem was defined in this context. The FCMA Treaty did not remove the notion that Finland's most immediate threat was the Soviet Union and its military might, and any political threat towards the organisational stability of the state was, essentially, secondary (Buzan, 1991, pp. 118–122). The threat posed by the Soviet Union was not a topic to be widely and publicly debated, but, gradually, defence arrangements began to refer to its existence. The FCMA Treaty gave rise to the possibility to crystallise a military threat from the West as a basis of Finland's defence. Independent of people's beliefs or disbeliefs on this topic, it was in the text of Treaty. The imagery of a western threat was undoubtedly also specified by a mutual breach of relations between the winners of WWII,

the founding of NATO in 1949, and the increasing interests of the United States towards northern parts of Europe.

One alternative in an operational order of the Defence Forces in 1952 entailed a scenario that the Soviet Union might be an invader and demand passage rights through Finland's Lapland on the basis of the FCMA Treaty (Tynkkynen, Jouko, 2005).⁴ Defence planning against the eastern threat was, at the beginning, considered a highly sensitive subject, but the peacetime contingency of the Defence Forces and the location of personnel and materiel as elements of action capability created the necessary conditions to be ready for military pressure and unwanted "help" from the Soviet Union. In a secret analysis of the Defence Command presented in 1960, it was said that the eastern threat had already been taken into account during the 1950s. In addition, defending Finland's eastern border had been planned already at the end of the same decade (Tynkkynen, 2006, pp. 452–461; Tynkkynen, Jouko, 2005). In August 1962, a Defence Forces evaluation stated that the Soviet Union might invade northern Norway, and NATO's air forces might hit targets in the Soviet Union already at the first stages of east/west operations. In that case, the Soviet Union would push its air defence to the territory of Finland (Visuri, 2010, pp. 126–128).

Politicians hardly had any wider knowledge about top secret evaluations and plans. They were not able to raise the eastern threat as a policy target on their basis. The President of Republic and the Chief of Defence, however, had a very open discussion (Visuri, 2010, pp. 133–134).

Because of war-based experiences and Soviet policy, the majority of politicians did not really have any major doubts about the need to be ready for any threats from the east. The discrepancy between public policy and militarily-necessary-evaluated preparedness brought a phenomenon that prevailed through the Cold War and, in some occasions, even after until Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It can be characterised as *doubletalk*. During the Cold War, Finland had a so-called "Soviet dilemma" that applied to discourses: eastern relations were to be *represented* properly (Nokkala, 2009, pp. 13–17; Iloniemi, 2015).

Risto E.J. Penttilä has described a similar phenomenon. Finland had two defence policies at the same time during the Cold War. The first was officially declared and concerned good relations between Finland and the Soviet Union, whereas the second could be inferred only from contextual matters, and it was aimed at defending against a Soviet attack (Penttilä, 1988; Penttilä, Karvinen, 2022, p. 27).

⁴ Primary threat scenarios were in the west. A NATO attack, though, was not considered very probable in official threat models in 1952, because NATO was not considered to have sufficient forces available for such an attack in northernmost Europe.

The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 and the FCMA Treaty laid an important part of the framework for Finland's post-war defence policy, whose substance emphasised developing an independent defence. However, it took Finland's security position and interests into account in a way that would not cause any harm to Finland. For its part, this policy created freedom of action for Finland's relations with the West, even if they began to concretise more only after 1955 in the so-called "Spirit of Geneva", when Finland entered the United Nations, and the Soviet Union handed back the Porkkala region that Finland had had to rent to the Soviet Union as a naval base at the end of the war.

Finland's security depended strongly on foreign policy, but, from 1952, the state's defence improved its position. Among other measures, new legislation and organisation of the Defence Forces were introduced. Finland's freedom of action in foreign policy was still rather limited, the country's international position weak, and not many opportunities to influence the security environment dominated by great-power relationships existed. Conditions in which to conduct defence policy improved when the Defence Council was re-established in 1957. It united ministers to follow the situation, to plan, and to prepare. Despite that, the conditions in which to improve defence readiness were still poor, because governments were short-lived and tensions as regards the Cold War were high (Visuri, 2010, p. 43).

In the international situation, a turning point was about to occur, and the steps towards it were nuclear competition, a weakening of relations between the western powers and the Soviet Union together with controversies about the status of Berlin, and the establishment of the Warsaw Pact. Crises in Finnish-Soviet relations included the period of the so-called "night frost" in autumn 1958 along with the Note Crisis between October and November 1961. Relations between the great powers reached a low point during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962.

During the time period of fact-recognising security policy, the foundation for stabilised protection against threats primarily by means of defence policy and military readiness was created. An important precondition for this was that Finland came out of the Second World War with relatively little political or societal damage, as compared with most other states in Europe; the Defence Forces having not been completely beaten, Finland not having had to surrender, and the Soviet Union not bringing its forces to the country or demanded anything which would lead to deep controversies in the democratic Finnish society. One factor in that situation was probably that the Soviet Union wanted Finland in its own camp in a dividing Europe, but could not do that from an uncompromised political power-position.

Security Based on Active Neutrality Policy and Independent Defence

In the great-power political environment, the condition of Mutual Assured Destruction was reached, and it was apt to also stabilise Finland's strategic position and its long-term defence and improve Finland's action capability in conflict management. In 1956, Finland began to participate in United Nations' peacekeeping in Suez and, in 1964, in Cyprus (Holma, 2012, pp. 25–38). More room opened for "active, peace-willing neutrality policy" that was coined in the "Paasikivi-Kekkonen Doctrine" (Visuri, 2006, pp. 174–175; Apunen, 2012, p. 19).

The time period from the beginning of the 1960s until the end of the Cold War in 1990 can be called the period of "security based on active neutrality policy and independent defence". The turning point really occurred in the years 1960–1964. Finland could now clear a better way for its policy towards western countries that had security-policy importance as well. It was still dependent on maintaining good eastern relations, but Finland's policy was gradually better understood in the West. At the same time, conditions for Finland's role as a bridge-builder between the East and West emerged (Valtasaari, 2015, p. 69). The strategic position of Finland eased remarkably until the middle part of the 1960s (Valtasaari, 2015, p. 69).

At the beginning of the 1960s, there emerged both the need and the conditions to develop defence and defence policy in a way that is still recognisable to this day in the form of Finland's defence and the role of defence policy in the country's current security policy. Steps towards total defence, or the absolute crisis readiness of different sectors of society, were taken at the same time, and, in that sense, military force was of the utmost importance (Visuri, 2006, pp. 166–167). The FCMA Treaty and the specific neutrality policy that included staying out of conflicting great-power interests brought together an element that had a stabilising effect on the operating environment. It was also part of the so-called "Nordic balance", whose concept was adopted in the 1960s (Penttilä, Karvinen, 2022, p. 36).

The Note Crisis of 1961 turned out to be something which clarified Finland's defence policy and reinforced its defence capability (Visuri, 2010, pp. 83–84).⁵ It was largely improved by new materiel purchases. In

⁵ However, Visuri does not consider an "awakening" brought by the crisis as a complete turn in defence policy, because decision makers already knew the central problems of national defence before the Note. It was because of crisis awareness which made it easier to get programmes more easily accepted after the crisis. Visuri has also paid attention to communication problems among security political leadership. These were problems which did not disappear.

the 1980s, Lt.Gen. Ermei Kanninen described the decade of the 1960s as the most prominent post-war decade of buying defence materiel (Kanninen, 1988, pp. 10–16).

This is how the neutrality policy of President Kekkonen's time was crystallised as a framework for defence policy. So-called “omni-directional defence” supported the neutrality policy, and President Kekkonen used the Defence Forces to support it educationally from a conscript-and-military-personnel perspective as regards their knowledge and understanding of correct policy (Salminen, 1995, p. 368).⁶ It was easier than it had previously been to argue for the need of defence without pointing to a potential enemy, when it was something of a social taboo to present the Soviet Union as such. On the other hand, open, negative talk about western actors, specifically the United States and NATO, did not match the neutral security policy, either.

The concept of “security policy” was officially launched in the 1960s. Its pillars were foreign policy and, subordinate to that, national defence.⁷ In addition, this definition matched with the development of total defence with all of its sectors.

The work of parliamentary defence committees⁸ started in 1970, and this made it easier for the Parliament to develop long-term defence capabilities. Committees could make recommendations and reinforce any existing plans of the defence establishment, which were then approved by the parliament (Kanninen, 1988).

All the western countries were somewhat shaken by the societal radicalism witnessed at the end of the 1960s. After the situation had calmed down in Finland and until the recession in the middle of the 1970s, security policy was clarified. At the same, a security and defence political consensus was reinforced. This was one of the central patterns in Finland's cold-war security policy. It was lifted above the rest of politics and “party-politicking” to be a kind of so-called “super politics”. The preconditions for this move were partly born when no single party tried to question threat perceptions in the form that widely-endorsed norms allowed for them to be presented.

⁶ Defence was seen as a good tool “to educate the people to support the leadership of the state” in foreign policy. “Neutrality education” and a citizen's will to defend were central concepts.

⁷ It was notable that instead of “defence policy”, the concept of “national defence” was emphasised. It could be understood to refer to “a-political” common and consensus-seeking practical activities.

⁸ The first committee gave its memorandum 1971, the second 1976 and the third in 1981.

In public opinion, the will to defend rose considerably. According to polls from the Advisory Board for Defence Information (ABDI), the percentage of those who said that defence against an attack would be necessary, even if the result was uncertain, rose to 73% in the middle of the 1980s, whereas it had been 42% at the beginning of the 1970s. Finland's policy was evaluated as being well-conducted by 84–96% of Finns in the 1970s. The FCMA Treaty was considered as positive for Finland's international status by 80% of respondents, and this level remained throughout the mid 1980s (Kekäle, 1998, pp. 26, 34, 62).

The threat from the Soviet Union was still held as the primary threat in Finland's security policy. Military security in the face of the Soviet threat was the central problem in the event of a surprise attack. Such a threat perception had appeared already in the 1950s, but the Soviet-led occupation of the then-Czechoslovakia in 1968 made the threat even more urgent (Palokangas, Jouko, 2006).⁹ The work of the Third Parliamentary Defence Committee in 1981 condensed a doctrine of crisis management¹⁰ policy in Finland's defence policy (Komiteanmietintö, 1981). It emphasised a so-called "grey phase"; a crisis between peace and war that was more probable than sudden, all-out war. Finland was evaluated as having the ability to influence crisis development and also to gradually raise its defence readiness.

In Finland's policy, a rather strong reliance on the mutual nuclear deterrence between the Great Powers prevailed, even if the continuing arms race sparked worries. Finland's defence could not be measured for any kind of nuclear war, but conventional defence was developed to better meet those surprise-and-large-scale offensive scenarios which were deemed most plausible. Until the 1960s, Finland's defence was still very much based on thinking about where Finland's specific geographical conditions, such as the vast land-area, were not sufficiently utilised. Gradually, a new military doctrine was adopted and a change from so-called "front-defence" to territorial defence took place. It also supported other elements of security policy. The Defence Forces were reorganised, and a new division of military regions was adopted in 1966 (Visuri, 1989).

The Soviet Union did not consider Finland a neutral state, but preferred the FCMA Treaty that determined Finland's position and the

⁹ According to Maj. Gen. Juhani Ruutu, the former concept of "capture attack" was later changed to be "surprise attack", because politicians were afraid that the word "capture" referred too much to the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ The term here was not about the management of some distant international crisis, but denoted the management of a crisis wherein Finland would be involved on its own soil.

opportunity to define the character of its policy. In the West, however, there was much more readiness to regard Finland as being neutral (Visuri, 2006, p. 226). From the beginning of the 1970s, the Soviet Union tried to sharpen its stance on Finland's neutrality policy, on obligations that the Treaty placed upon Finland, and to tighten military relations with Finland. This development peaked in 1978 when Marshall Ustinov made a well-known proposal about joint military exercises concerning both Finland and the Soviet Union. Finland decisively rejected the proposal under the lead of President Kekkonen. These events increased the level of mutual understanding between the president and the military leadership (Visuri, 2010, pp. 217–222, 236–241).

The security-and-defence-based political consensus was further reinforced as the mid 1980s approached. One obvious reason was the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan along with various conflicts over so-called “euro missiles”, but nothing happened which would have triggered any major change of course in Finland's security policy. The beginning of change in Europe, largely connected with the change of Soviet policy in Gorbachev's era, a tighter course of U.S. nuclear and disarmament policy, along with the impending political awakening of Eastern European states made Finland at first rather cautious about the possible security benefits. When the change in the security environment gathered more momentum, Finland concentrated on primary and existential issues in national security. Security concepts began to simultaneously widen as a signal of an approaching turning point. Finland, in addition to concentrating on its primary and existential issues, also had its system of the aforementioned total defence that provided a solid basis for developing a comprehensive level of security which would subsequently take different security issues into account later in the 2000s.

At the core of security policy was the notion that any kind of a so-called “loosening” of defence capability was not warranted. It was very much to the contrary; the change witnessed in Europe in the second half and the end of the 1980s along with the widening of security concepts were often taken to mean that the world would be changing to be a more uncertain place, and it was used as an argument to maintain defence readiness.¹¹ While the rest of Europe began to talk about a “peace dividend” and professionalising militaries, Finland's course began to be one of contrast. One factor was undoubtedly that an independent defence was relied upon

¹¹ This kind of evaluation was especially put forward by the military leadership. As an example, Chief of Defence, Adm. Jan Klenberg (1992) stated that the forming Europe of the future seemed to be “more challenging and dangerous than before”. His general evaluation was that “threats against a state like Finland will be greater than earlier”.

in the middle of major changes in the operating environment. Allying militarily was more often present in small-circle discussions from the beginning of the 1990s, but it was rarely believed that it would come into existence any time soon. “Credible national defence” was the basic course that was evaluated to best serve Finland. Independent defence was seen to set high requirements for Finland’s defence capability (Ministry of Defence, Finland, 1997, pp. 46–47). Finland also cleared more room in its foreign, security, and defence policy by unilaterally renouncing restrictions that the Paris Peace Treaty from 1947 had applied to Finland’s defensive capability (Pesu, 2017, pp. 25–26).

The end of the Cold War meant a challenge to Finland’s security-policy arguments, a fact that was often overlooked. A potential adversary that had legitimised that which can be understood as a kind of omni-directional defence suddenly disappeared from the west. As it was not possible to be silent about the threat from Russia all the time, the non-allied doctrine needed new arguments. There was no need nor possibility to talk about any “Nordic balance” any more.

In a way, the end of the Cold War and inherent international upheaval, despite its destabilising factors (Blomberg, 2011, p. 657) opened a door for Finland to become part of European integration and the European Community. In security policy, the actual turning point was the first part of the 1990s. In defence policy, the turn came somewhat later, in 1997, when it was possible to infer that Finland was developing a “spearhead” for its defence forces, even if it was maintaining the ability to mobilise, if necessary, large forces compared with the size of its population (Nokkala, 2013, pp. 97–98, 103). The message of this so-called “spearhead thinking” was intended especially for the West. It conveyed that Finland understood the requirements of modern technology in both fighting wars and military crisis management, a so-called “revolution in military affairs”, and that Finland was not a consumer of security from a western perspective, but rather a benefactor of wider, regional security.

A Committed and Networked Policy of Wide Security and Military Non-alignment

Finland entered the European Union on 1st January, 1995. Its membership improved opportunities for stabilisation policy as part of security policy in Finland’s close neighbourhood. One such opportunity was the Northern Dimension of the European Union.¹² Finland began to conduct much

¹² Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen initiated the programme in his speech in Rovaniemi in 1997.

more multilateralism in its policy, though bilateralism, especially as regards Russian relations, was important. Claiming, recognising, and trying to reinforce economic and security interdependence over the eastern border and, in a wider sense, in East-West relations was the order of day immediately after the Cold War, even if this course did not largely succeed from today's perspective. A rather common belief was that Russia could be positively assured from Finland's viewpoint if it were drawn into an ever-closer cooperation with the West. Some basis for this belief was given by a change in attitudes towards Finland's neutrality policy in the last years of the Soviet Union that seemed to continue in Yeltsin's Russia.

The emphasis on interdependence did not, however, concern defence policy. After the FCMA was abandoned, Finland did not want to depend on Russia in developing and using its own defence capability. All eyes were turned to the West in every other sense apart from threat perception. Changing the basic course of security policy by joining the European Union was important, but in its course of action, a major change happened in defence and conflict management. Finland's defence policy internationalised, and Finland began to participate essentially more to international civilian-and-military crisis management and also to missions other than traditional peacekeeping. The first steps in this sense had already been taken before Finland's EU membership (Holma, 2012, pp. 41–92). European integration raised the number of Finland's opportunities to participate in the development of common European security and defence policy and, at the same time, to deepen cooperation in a NATO context, considering a more active and more demanding management of regional crises such as that in the former Yugoslavia. However, there were also problems about military allying which came to the fore because of the Maastricht Treaty and its distant objective of common defence (Blomberg, 2011, pp. 477–484). In that context, the Western European Union (WEU) firstly seemed to reinforce its status, but NATO's change was, however, decisive. It represented a vital transatlantic connection. NATO's status also began to be reinforced, because it was accepted to set common standards for developing the armed forces of European states, and also when eastern European states began to strive for membership in the Alliance¹³. Finland rather quickly adopted a new perception about NATO, even if the country did not aspire to be a member.

As regards the agenda of NATO, its basic task, collective defence, did not seem as prominent as before, unlike for Finland, where the defence of its territory was above every single other purpose of the military. A strong

¹³ Even if their membership interests at the beginning also raised a lot of doubts specifically in the United States about the weakening of NATO.

orientation of NATO into international crisis management and peace-support missions was undoubtedly one reason why Finland did not long for membership. Despite that, discussion of allying began more common in 1992. It was in that year that Finland was allowed to participate as an observer of the meeting of foreign ministers of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). The possibility that Finland would ally in the future was not excluded (Nokkala, 2001, p. 149) especially inside the defence establishment. Finland began to develop the compatibility of its Defence Forces with NATO, though only through small steps at the beginning.

In 1992, Finland also began to look for opportunities to widen its participation in military crisis management within the context of the European Union and NATO as and when its EU membership became reality. Opportunities for the NATO course appeared when Finland joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) in 1994, followed by the Planning and Review Process (PARP). Even if the interoperability of the Defence Forces was primarily developed for peace-support operations, it was rather clear that it opened a window for Finland to receive help for defence purposes if necessary. The renewal of peacekeeping legislation in 1995 laid the foundation for Finland's participation in the NATO-led IFOR/SFOR operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996. The government in Finland, however, emphasised strongly that PfP did not imply any changes to Finland's defence solution (Penttilä, Karvinen, 2022, p. 71).

Hardly any doubts about increasing crisis management participation were raised in the Parliament. Also most small parties supported the reinforcement of European cooperation. Only the USA's and NATO's critics on the extreme political Left were ready to resist a more international orientation in the defence and military crisis management policy. It was enough for a majority of the Parliament that Finland would not participate in any peace-enforcement efforts and still take advantage of the increased participation which would improve Finland's own defence capability along with the development of the Defence Forces.

The Deputy Secretary of State of the United States, Strobe Talbott, had privately explored Finnish perceptions about its readiness for NATO membership in August 1995. He let it be known that the USA would be ready to engage in a long-term collaborative effort to advance the matter. Talbott mentioned that he wished that NATO would first enlarge to countries such as Finland before the countries of the Warsaw Pact (Tarkka, 2017, p. 28) In June 1997, Talbott had even "offered" membership to Finland, when he met Prime Minister Lipponen (Penttilä, Karvinen,

2022, pp. 92–93). This proposal was rejected, which was of course in line with the 1995 and 1997 Reports of the Government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, 1995; Ministry of Defence, Finland, 1997). In a way, it reflected Finland's specific cautiousness towards in-depth cooperation with NATO, especially when the country's main efforts were being focused on the obligations and opportunities of EU membership. In addition, public opinion did not support any changes to the status quo. In 1997, 67% of Finns were of the opinion that Finland should remain militarily unallied. If Finland, however, decided to ally itself with NATO, the most favoured choice was the membership without hosting any forces or bases of other NATO states in peacetime (Kekäle, 1998, p. 91).

Cautiousness, however, played no part as regards the practical applications of the defence establishment. Although Finland began to edge towards NATO using small steps of technical and everyday cooperation and training and materiel, the scale difference between a tight partnership and full membership began to slowly diminish by this action. The hidden importance of common PfP or "in-the-spirit-of-PfP" exercises cannot be underestimated, even if their imagined exercise situations drew crisis management rather than defence to mind.

In Finnish policy, it has often been an outspoken claim that Finland has no "security deficit" – it was along those lines that the issue was publicly argued (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, 1995). Here we have some echoes from the time of Finland's neutrality policy; specific risks were seen to be included in NATO membership due to the fact that Russia considered NATO its opponent, and was expected to cause nasty consequences for Finland if tensions were to arise. No obscurity about Russia's doubts towards NATO existed. At the turn of the century, in evaluations about situations wherein Finland applied for NATO membership, one essential potential scenario was a subsequent, increased Russian threat. Also, a footnoted example coming out of Sweden might have had an effect (Törnudd, 2001, pp. 72–78) These factors, however, were not in play in the second part of the 1990s. Security-based, political decision-making was not informed by the idea that membership in a military alliance should be strived for when tensions were low.

The Report of the Government to the Parliament from 2001 boiled Finland's doctrine down to three main factors: credible defence capability, staying "militarily non-allied in the current situation", and participation in international cooperation in order "to strengthen security and stability". Defence capability was to be dimensioned just so, in order to secure territorial integrity and independence along with the living conditions of Finnish citizens. In the development of defence capabilities, the readiness

to receive help in a crisis situation was also taken into account. Finland's attitude to NATO's enlargement was that it should be done so that it reinforces the stability and security of the whole continent and prevent new lines of division and spheres of interest. Finland would develop its defence policy and national defence on the basis of its geopolitical position and historical experience (Ministry of Defence, Finland, 2001).

In the next Report, in 2004, the analysis of the operating environment and the presentation of Finland's doctrine was clearly more detailed than it had been three years earlier. The central evaluation of NATO was that the importance of its defence tasks had been reduced, and that Russia was not seen as a threat in the strategic planning of the Alliance. The Report also stated that NATO estimated that it had several years' time to react should the situation in Russia change. In the report, Russia was described as continuing to be "the most important military power in Finland's neighbouring areas". Finland's stance on NATO membership was briefly defined thus; "Applying for the membership of the Alliance will remain a possibility in Finland's security and defence policy in the future" (Prime Minister's Office, 2004).

Even if – according to polls – a clear majority of Finns supported staying militarily unallied, it also revealed that as a result of its cooperation, Finland was gradually committing itself to NATO membership. In the years 1998–2004, the share of that thinking oscillated between 45% and 66%. In the autumn of 2004, it stood at 64%. Cooperation with NATO was considered positive by 70% of respondents (MTS, 2004, pp. 18–20).

But no party dared to begin supporting actually applying for NATO membership. Leaving it to wait until times had changed also reflected a reliance on Finland's own independent defensive capability as a necessity whose basis went as far back as the Cold War. 58% of Finns, in the autumn of 2004, considered Finland's ability to defend as being good in a conventional war. That percentage had clearly risen since the end of the 1970s. The will to defend was also good; 80% were of the opinion that Finns should defend against an attack even if the end result seemed uncertain. Only 18% declared that they would try to leave the country if war broke out (MTS, 2004, pp. 28–30, 34–35).

Reliance on Finland's defensive capabilities had probably received a boost from the security political consensus in the 1980s, and materiel purchases in the 1990s. Because of those things, the Army was often said to be in a better shape than ever after the Second World War. The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought some new threat-perceptions whose substance, though, was not military or political, but more societal and environmental. One can point to the eventual refugee crises and

pollution hot-spots near the Finnish border as examples. These issues, however, did not challenge the country's major defence policy.

Striving for NATO membership was also hampered by Finland's identity. For various, interrelated reasons, those states which applied for membership in the 1990s were not considered as such a reference group for Finland to suggest that it should apply at the same time. Finland's position and history were so different in comparison to those candidate states. The state leadership had also some fears that entering NATO might bring about internal divisions, and the country's attention, in any case, was being focused on the European Union (Penttilä, Karvinen, 2022).

The Soviet Union's dissolution along with European integration caused political turbulence. In spite of that, Finland's comprehensive security was considered as being of good quality. The stabilising of the new doctrine was helped by the fact that Russia did not react negatively to Finland's membership in the EU, and great-power relations eased during Yeltsin's time to a much more palatable level from what they had been in the Gorbachev era.¹⁴ The FCMA Treaty was abolished, and a totally different agreement between Finland and Russia was adopted at the beginning of 1992 (Blomberg, 2011, pp. 407–439).¹⁵ This event was an important turning point in Finland's eastern relations and, on a larger scale, in security policy. Relations with Russia were, in a security sense, defined as in many other agreements with European countries; there was a ban on the use of and threats of force, a ban on giving territory to a third party to use it against a party of the agreement, and a ban on assisting an invader militarily if the party of the agreement in any case were to face such an invasion. The obligation to negotiate was restricted to multilateral frameworks in crises which endangered international security.

New steps in security-based political action were presented around the turn of the century. So-called "hard" security was brought in on the agenda of Nordic cooperation. Finland also began to aim at attaining closer bilateral-defence cooperation with Sweden, with signs thereof coming already in the middle of the 1990s. Also, bilateral cooperation with the United States began to develop; the decision in 1992 to purchase

¹⁴ The war in Kosovo in 1999, however, cooled relations between the USA (and NATO at the same time) and Russia. Putin's entrance to the presidency in Russia promised a new start to great-power relations at the beginning.

¹⁵ Blomberg has thoroughly described this two-phase agreement process. At the beginning, an agreement about good-neighbour relations and cooperation was drawn up with the Soviet Union, but it was soon useless. A new agreement was signed on 20th January 1992. The FCMA Treaty, which had been seen as a potential complicator for Finland's road to EU, was considered expired.

F18 Hornet jet fighters from the United States was a visible political step in this sense (Pesu, 2017, pp. 28–32). Later, in the 2010s, Sweden and the United States became the two most important states for Finland's networked security and defence cooperation, which, from a certain viewpoint, could also be seen as a substitute for any rapid NATO membership.

In the first decade of the 2000s, the pending crisis in European economy and Finland's rising debt began to have an effect on defence development. The parliament made considerable cuts to defence spending at the same time when the Defence Forces had already come to the conclusion that the whole organisation needed some rationalisation. Financial perceptions caused the feeling that defence capabilities in the coming years would be seriously jeopardised without it (Nokkala, 2014, pp. 254–260, 283–286).

In light of this development, the non-allied-security-policy solution seemed to be challenged at the beginning. Different discussions of cooperation with both different states and NATO gained more pace in Finland especially, because Russia had, in 2004, adopted a foreign policy course that was more independent and underlined Russia's position as a great-power (Mankoff, 2009). Russia began to challenge the United States and the western powers more openly in the area of the former Soviet Union, which it considered to be its sphere of interests. This reached its peak when Russia occupied Crimea in 2014. Additionally, NATO started to re-emphasise its basic task of collective defence, where Russia had remained a central military threat despite different public statements within the Alliance after the Cold War.

In Finland, several NATO reports have appeared since the 1990s, and in the year 2007 alone there were two, one by Charly Salenius-Pasternak from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs and another by Antti Sierla from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Salenius-Pasternak, 2007; Sierla, 2007). Usually, in separate reports, the most important benefit from potential membership was increased deterrence. Discussions about the sufficiency of defence capabilities became more regular because of weakened East/West relations. Finland had not denied the continuity of East/West conflict at a strategic level. In public discussion, the often-heard "Finland's geopolitical position" and "Finland's history" were connoting expressions about the fact that in such a conflict, Finland is always geographically in a frontline position, and historical experience would reinforce this position.

The basic solution to stay outside a military alliance was maintained "at least for the time being" and was often labelled as the "NATO option

(Penttilä, Karvinen, 2022, pp. 73–74, 163–169).¹⁶ It was seen to imply that it was not the time to apply for membership, but, if necessary, it could be done. Finland currently meets application preconditions, should the situation in Finland's operating environment require it.¹⁷ At the same time, it was rather obvious that Finland wanted to send a delicate message to Moscow, in that if Russia applies any harmful pressure, Finland may send in its NATO application and probably be granted membership which, of course, would be detrimental to its eastern neighbour. In reality, then, the NATO option was also a tool of dissuasion. But what really had a special importance was that public opinion remained critical as regards NATO membership, and NATO was understood to expect strong public support behind Finland's application. According to the polls, the main reason for public reluctance was that being a NATO member could mean that Finland would be drawn into conflicts that did not concern it (Hägglund, 2014; Iloniemi, 2015, pp. 174–176).¹⁸

Russia's overall reaction to the memberships of Eastern European states turned out to be relatively mild and it was not considered by NATO to be a major increase in threat. In Finland, the word was that Russia considered Finland already "lost" (Penttilä, Karvinen, 2022, p. 85; Iltalehti, 2014).¹⁹ So, today, it might not be such a big difference from Russia's viewpoint any more as regards whether Finland is actually a NATO member or merely has the NATO option. Russia, though, has warned Finland several times

¹⁶ Points out that the term "NATO option" was first used by the headline editor Erkki Pennanen of the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* on 8th March, 1995. Actually the NATO option came into use in 2004, when, after the security and defence political report of the government, it became "a central element of security policy".

¹⁷ One of these requirements was the compatibility of the Defence Forces.

¹⁸ In a study of ABDI (MTS) in December 2007, 48% maintained that Finns would enter into war outside the country and used it as an argument for not joining NATO. 46% found staying out of Great Power controversies to be a good argument for not joining. 43% were of the opinion that the United States had too much power and influence in NATO. – Also, many expectations rose that NATO membership would jeopardise both the general military conscription service and the will to defend. This doubt was authoritatively presented by Gen. Gustav Hägglund.

¹⁹ Claims that in the Soviet Union, Finland was already counted into the western block because of its EU membership. According to them, the Foreign Ministry of Finland had already made a report in 1996, according to which Russia would treat Finland as an adversary in a conflict. Finland's non-allied status would be an inducement for Russia to use Finland's territory. Researcher Pauli Järvenpää, a former diplomat and director of the Ministry of Defence, evaluated on the basis of Russia's exercise *Zapad* in 2013, that "Russia considers Finland as an enemy, even if Finland as a country outside NATO has no security guarantees of Article 5".

about applying, but obviously it has hardly had any effect on Finnish considerations (Juntunen, 2012).²⁰

After the Russian occupation of Crimea, in a poll from December 2014, 46% of Finns were of the opinion that the military situation in Finland's neighbouring area would become more of a threat over the following 10 years. Reliance on Finland's independent defence had somewhat lowered. Two years earlier, 51% had considered that Finland's defence opportunities would be either quite bad or very bad in a conventional war, but by 2014, that percentage rose to 63%. 56% wanted more money for defence. In spite of these figures, the will to defend remained high, foreign policy and defence policy were considered well-conducted, and 58% were still of the opinion that Finland should not ally itself with NATO (MTS, 2014).

Russia's policy did not move Finland's decision makers much closer to apply for NATO membership in 2014. However, Finland, together with Sweden, were granted an enhanced partnership of NATO in the Wales Summit in December, after which the international exercising of the Defence Forces was ramped up. Another forward step for Finland was its under-signing of a host-nation agreement²¹ with NATO in 2014. That agreement improved the country's readiness to receive external military help.

However, in the second half of the 2010s, it was still unclear whether the NATO approach that largely happened on the level of the execution of defence policy would lower the threshold to apply for membership, or actually raise it. Would Finland be so satisfied with the level of support reached by cooperation and the level of Finland's defence capability that no possible risks involved with membership would be taken? (Nokkala, 2013, p. 104). Even if Russia had taken Crimea, it was continuously repeated that Russia posed no threat to Finland.²²

In the foreign and security political Report of the Government 2016, the goal of Finland's policy was defined as reinforcing Finland's international position, independence, and territorial integrity, improving the security and welfare of Finns, and maintaining the functionality of Finnish society. Of all states and other international actors, Russia was

²⁰ One of more recent examples was the speech of Nikolai Makarov, the Chief of Russian General Staff, in Finland on 5th June, 2012. Soon after, President Putin expressed his negative stance and so supported his top soldier.

²¹ Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Provision of Host Nation Support for the Execution of NATO operations.

²² For example, the Operational Chief of Staff of the Army Brig. Gen. Petri Hulkko announced, on 29th January, 2016, that "We are not threatened by any military threat" (Radio Suomi Rovaniemi, 2016).

referred to the most in the report. Its leadership was said to aim for a more major Great-Power status. It had largely overruled cooperative security and challenged the European security order. Finland's objective was, however, to "maintain stable and well-functioning relations" with Russia. NATO was described as being responsible for stabilising the security situation in Finland's close neighbourhood. The commitment of the United States to NATO and its military investment in Europe were essential for Finland's security. Cooperation between Finland and the United States was going to be intensified in order to reinforce Finland's defence capability. In NATO-policy, "...while carefully monitoring the developments in its security environment, Finland maintains the option to seek NATO membership" (Finnish Government, 2020b).

In the following year of 2017, the Government's Defence Report highlighted the weakening of the security situation in Finland's nearby areas post the occupation of Crimea and because of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Military tension has risen in the Baltic Sea region, and insecurity has grown far and wide (Prime Minister's Office, 2017). At the same time, Finland's Defence Forces carried out military cooperation with NATO on 14 subject areas. These were argued for by the development of national strategic-planning capability, and the compatibility and improvement of national defence and know-how of its personnel, and action-capability of its forces (Mission of Finland to NATO, 2017). On the web-pages of Finland's Mission to NATO, the credibility of NATO security guarantees in the Baltic Sea region was also described as a Finnish interest (Prime Minister's Office, 2016).

Continuity and Change in Finland's Security Policy Until 2022

Phases of change in Finland's security policy have mostly been connected with deep changes in the international environment, specifically the Great-Power political environment and the anticipating of such change happening. On the other hand, and also separately from international change, turns in the state's economy have had an effect. The domestic political coalition has had a lesser influence, because for the development of security and defence, usually those who were moderate and supported security and defence development had been in power. The influence of the president and, especially from the 1970s, military leadership, can be evaluated as being prominent.²³

²³ The influence of military leadership grew especially during the period of Gen. Lauri Sutela from 1974.

The majority of important turning points judged by the depth of their consequences have been connected with changes of policies of the prominent great powers of the era. One of them was the Soviet Union/Russia, particularly when it started operating under a revisionist policy. Defence-political turning points have also followed changes in the basic course of Finland's foreign and security policy.

Turning points, however, have not been particularly fundamental since 1948. Specifically out of necessity and the independence of defence, a sufficient and even reinforcing consensus has been extant. Even if national defence has been wanted to be as self-powered as possible, external help would have been welcome from the West in crisis situations, if it had only been available, but no expectations about getting such help were upheld in Finnish policy. Help from the East has been met with major doubts and potential resistance (Harle, Moisiö, 2000). Even if the basic doctrine of defence policy can be seen as being quite stable and even gradually more solid at least until the 2010s, some political twists existed about the level of defence spending at least until the 1970s.

The most important turning points wherein security policy clearly changed were; 1) Finland's 1960s break out of the isolation that resulted from WWII, and 2) the turn affiliated with the end of the Cold War and Finland's being granted access to the EU. In the first turning point, a major development of Finland's defence policy was emphasised in the shadow of activating Finland's neutrality policy. In the second turning point, the former neutrality policy was skipped for (politically) committed, but not militarily-allied policy.

After 2000, Finland's security policy also became more political. Even if the basic consensus prevailed, discussion was liberated. It obviously increased the influence of public opinion in politics, but did not bring about any major controversies. Defence committees of the 1970s and 1980s were discontinued, replaced by security and defence political reports in 1995. Security strategies for society began to direct the development of comprehensive security in the 2000s. This change gave rise to stability and new continuity to security policy.

The central threat-image was something Finland had to regulate with specific "doubletalk", at least at the beginning. This situation was eased by a so-called "no directions" policy. When talking about threats, the policies of different states were not talked about at the same time. Threats were often argued by "Great-Power relations", Finland's "geopolitical position" or otherwise by factors related to the international system (Nokkala, 2001, pp. 244–260). After the Cold War, however, Finland

could no longer use this kind of argumentation especially about military threats. This problem pushed threat-images to the sidelines and were alleviated in discourse (Nokkala, 2013). There was no alternative for the central threat-image of Russia, because Finland in any case tied itself more strongly to the West. Additionally, it was not possible to keep silent about Russia's changed policy and actions especially after 2007. But Finland did not want to openly underline Russia as the practically sole military and existential threat because depicting the threat as being too great would have undermined societal support for Finland's defence. Concealing the threat in official talk was a determined strategy. It would be premature to say how much this stance involved messages to the West saying that Finland's entering of NATO would not be a burden for the Alliance.

In the turning point of the end of the Cold War, Finland's defence started, rather logically, to be connected with western European and Euro-Atlantic structures largely by the lead of institutional military-to-military cooperation, and the main lines of policy were, of course, politically accepted by the Government and the Parliament. These developments also led to an understanding that Finland's western defence dependence had grown. Oft-heard expressions about Finland's doctrine were that it was "committed" and "networked", especially in the defence establishment. As such, it was clear in Finland's politics at the end of the 2010s that keeping up as independent a defence as possible may turn out to be a challenge and would not sufficiently reduce vulnerability. Reliance on Finland's defence was somewhat weakened. The Defence Forces, though, still managed to be reformed in spite of their curtailed financing in the first part of the 2010s by organisational and partly doctrinal changes, but securing protection – the basic element of Finland's security policy – by external support began to tempt decision makers ever more.

Additionally, Finland's active role in influencing its operating environment, that is, through its stabilisation policy, had narrowed, and opportunities in bilateral policy with Russia curtailed. As regards its Russia policy, Finland leaned more heavily on the European Union. All of this lowered the threshold of sending a membership application to NATO, even if the final push did not occur before the international, war-based shock of 2022.

Finland's NATO-Decision

In the spring of 2015, the Government still characterised Finland as "a militarily non-allied state which is engaged in a practical partnership with NATO and it maintains the option to seek NATO membership"

(Ministry of Finance, Finland, 2015). In 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a NATO report, in which Finland is “close to the limit of what a non-member can achieve with NATO”. If Finland joined NATO, it would probably strengthen Finland’s “immediate security” and deterrence against any potential attack against the country. Membership was expected “to constitute a significant defeat for Moscow”, yet open conflict would not be necessarily the result (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, 2016).

In the Programme of Sanna Marin’s government in December 2019, Finland was described as the safest country in the world and stated that it “[wanted] to stay that way”. Finland was also described as being “a militarily non-allied state and maintains its own credible defence capability”. Finland also continues “its wide-ranging cooperation with NATO based on its partnership” (Finnish Government, 2019). The foreign and security political report in 2020 did not entail any new delineation. This time, Finland was defined as a militarily unaligned state which “maintains a credible national defence capability” (Finnish Government, 2020b).

Change in Finland’s policy began to occur in 2021, when Russia commenced major military exercises on the borders of Ukraine. At the beginning of December, Putin gave his so-called “sphere of interest” speech in which he wanted guarantees that NATO would not enlarge any further. The President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, let it be known that Finland was keeping its NATO options open. Later on, Niinistö said that a push to begin the membership application process was when Russia tried to “deny our freedom of choice”. Finally, the decision came about only after Russia had invaded Ukraine (Ilta-Sanomat, 2022). Already before the invasion, on 19th of February, 2022, President Niinistö stated in a Security Conference in Munich that Finland does not have a special relationship with Russia. He characterised the relationship as a neighbour-based relationship “on the common border of more than 1,000 kilometres”.

Finland’s state leadership condemned the Russian invasion with strong words on the very day of 24th of February. “Now masks have been stripped, only the face of war is visible” (Helsingin Sanomat, 2022c). An intense discussion about NATO started right away in the Finnish media. A very common stance was that Russia could not be relied on any more, and that Finland must not be afraid of joining NATO. Also, the situation before the Winter War 1939 was often recounted; the invasion of Ukraine had pointed out that Russia could invade a militarily unallied Finland.

The course of public opinion had been slightly turning towards Finland filing for NATO membership already before the Russian invasion in 2022. However, 56–64% had, for the entire time, been against joining, whereas

17–26% had been in favour. In January 2022, the share of those of a pro-joining stance rose to 28% and those against joining went down to 42% (Helsingin Sanomat, 2022e).

The will to defend rose considerably after the invasion. In January 2022, 56% of Finns were of the opinion that Finns should defend militarily against an attack to the country, and in March this was the opinion of 75% of the people. Respectively, in January, 67% believed that conscripts would be willing to defend the country by taking up arms, and in March this share had risen to 82% (Helsingin Sanomat, 2022f).

President Niinistö stated in an interview with the broadcasting company YLE on 26th March that NATO membership would be “the most sufficient security” and its greatest benefit would be its preventive effect. This matched with earlier arguments in NATO reports. According to Niinistö, NATO membership would, however, permanently increase tension on the Finnish/Russian border (Helsingin Sanomat, 2022g). The President had, from the beginning, desired a public-wide discussion. He also reminded the country that NATO membership entails risks, that being the reason why the consequences of the decision should be carefully examined (Helsingin Sanomat, 2022h).

At the very beginning of March, President Niinistö travelled to meet President of the United States Joe Biden. According to information from Risto E.J. Penttilä and Jyrki Karvinen, the United States took a very cautious stance on Finland's and Sweden's aims, and its reasons were obviously partly connected with U.S. domestic policy and partly to the idea that Putin should not be provoked into any stronger, further action (Penttilä, Karvinen, 2022, pp. 262–266). The situation changed because, among other reasons, Russia's offensive did not manage to achieve what it had set out to achieve; Ukraine put up incredibly strong resistance to the Russian offensive. So, there was more room for consideration on Finland and Sweden, and the decision-making process in Finland could be advanced without great hurry. The process also included an introduction of a new NATO report. Finland also had time to collect the support and stances of other NATO members. At the same time, Sweden's NATO report was awaited.

The Finnish Government published a report on 13th April which talked of “a fundamental change” in Finland's and Europe's security environment. The security situation was “more serious and more difficult to predict than at any time since the Cold War”. The change was also judged to be long-lasting. The military situation in Finland's close neighbourhood was described peaceful and that no military threat was targeted at Finland. Finland was preparing for a situation in which military force would be

used solely against Finland. The consequences of the country's potential NATO membership were dealt with from different perspectives. The most important of which would be Finland's access to NATO's common defence and to the sphere of security guarantees. The deterring effect of Finland's defence would be "considerably stronger than it is at present". Separately, it was stated that, as a member, Finland would still maintain and develop its own strong defence capability and continue bi-and-multilateral defence cooperation. The country's NATO membership would not imply neither an abolishing of general conscription nor a noteworthy change in the level of Finland's participation in NATO's crisis management operations. Furthermore, the Report came to the conclusion that "failing to react to the changes in the security environment could lead to change in Finland's international position and a narrowing of Finland's room to manoeuvre" (Finnish Government, 2020a).

The Parliament received a governmental report about Finland's applying for NATO membership on 15th May in which it partly repeated the statements of the abovementioned Report from April. A strong national defence capability and NATO membership would together be a credible security solution. Finland's defence capability and resilience would reinforce NATO's common defence across the entire area of the Alliance (Finnish Government, 2022). The Parliament endorsed a report concluded by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament about the Report in April and the Report about Finland's joining NATO on 17th May. The next day, the application was given to the Secretary General of NATO, and, on 19th May, President Niinistö and Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson were in Washington, where President Biden expressed his full support for the application and also stated that Finland and Sweden would reinforce NATO. The two countries were invited to join NATO and got its observer statuses on 29th of June while waiting for ratification. It was quickly advanced in the parliaments of the member countries except for Hungary and Turkey.

As until the end of November 2022, Russia had not focused on Finland with any visible adversarial action that could be connected to Finland's changing position after NATO's decision. Such action has often been expected and, after the Cold War, used as arguments saying that Finland should not join NATO. During the spring of 2022, other negative measures were also much speculated by various experts. Certain continuity was, however, seen in Russian statements. Russia has declared for a long time that NATO enlargement would cause changes in Russian defence planning.

Public opinion seemed to very much welcome NATO's decision. In evaluating the effect of different actors to Finland's security, NATO's

effect was considered positive by 68% in an ABDI poll in December 2022, while it had been just 31% one year earlier. 89% of the Finns questioned said that Finland's membership in NATO increases security. Only 34% had said the same one year earlier. 85% said that Finland's defence policy has been conducted either very well or quite well during the previous years. The will to defend reached a new high; 83% of the Finns were of the opinion that it would be necessary to defend by taking up arms in all situations, even if the result seemed uncertain. 58% wanted more defence spending, and 89% relied quite a lot or very much on the ability of the Defence Forces to defend the country against different military threats (MTS, 2022).

Conclusions – The Role of Defence Policy in Finland's Security

Finland's final move to NATO membership is a result of a long period of development with several phases and factors as well as explanations. However, the most central issue has been Finland's Russia-based problem, namely, the threat posed by Russia, that by its substance has been military and emphasised Finland's defence policy and capability. Stabilisation policy has been restricted. It has been, above all, foreign policy efforts to influence the Soviet Union/Russia so much so that the threat would not increase. Efforts to underline "normal" good neighbourly relations were most prominent especially from the 1960s to the 1980s.

An essential continuity factor in Finland's security policy has been a geopolitical factor in the form of the close neighbourhood of the great power that was the Soviet Union. But it is not just geography at play; the neighbour was and is so different from that of Finland which identifies itself as being democratic and western and which has a unique, historical experience of relations with its formerly-Soviet neighbour. That lived experience reinforced the habit of seeing it as a specific kind of threat, the notion of which did not fade away deeply enough after the Second World War and the introduction of Finland's new foreign policy. Therefore, reducing Finland's vulnerability by protective action was important from the very beginning. On the other hand, only in the 1960s did some preconditions to improve the credibility and sufficiency of defence-related capability to better fit into foreign policy emerge.

Security-political discourse about the Soviet Union/Russia did not (in its most visible patterns) clear out the threat perception that prevailed, and was less common and only really accessible in some institutional

discourses. Talking about the Soviet Union/Russia was normatively guided. Doubletalk tells of a specific pattern that only now seems to be changing.²⁴

Why, then, did Finland not seek an allied relationship with the West earlier? More systematic answers to that question are awaited. Some preliminary potential explanations can be put forward, though. Adjusting the threat image is one. The second is the increased reliance on the Defence Forces, in spite of a few set-backs in the situation where expectations of getting help from the West were low, and the feeling about being alone with the big and different Soviet Union in security terms was strong. After the Cold War, when NATO became an ever more important partner for Finland, especially during the 2010s, the readiness to take risks as regards security policy obviously rose. The NATO membership problem was allowed to be politicised, especially when the former ‘above politics character’ of security policy somewhat weakened and the discussion was liberated.

Also, the image of NATO in Finland was relevant. How would NATO really bring some extra value and integrity to Finland’s defensive capabilities? When NATO seemed to orientate itself more away from collective defence, this development lowered Finland’s interest in considering membership in the Alliance. This, from Finland’s perspective, meant that NATO was not as readily seen as a producer of such security that was most important to Finland, and the Alliance was also judged to be a creator of some risks at the same time. For Finland, NATO membership has not been an issue about belonging to the right camp, or seeking for some necessary status or prestige, or because NATO is a community of common values; it has been, first of all, just a pragmatic question about reinforcing deterrence and a level of defence that Finland may not be able to produce alone, should it turn out to be necessary because of actual Russian policy of using its military force, not just because of its capabilities and military posturing.²⁵

²⁴ It is important to understand that doubletalk was not a question of what was officially declared secret, but a social phenomenon in ordinary discourse about security policy. Moreover, it was like a play whose actors were decision-makers and the audience the Finnish public audience. The message, however, stood, and was largely meant to be heard by an international audience as well.

²⁵ In this article I have not dug into a strategic analysis of Finland’s neighbourhood, but it is important to note that Finland’s proximity to Russia’s strategic areas of the Kola Peninsula and St. Petersburg or its attention to the Baltic Sea area have been rather permanent strategic factors over decades. The government’s Defence Report 2021 states, if somewhat generally, that “Russia maintains significant conventional warfighting capabilities in Finland’s neighbouring areas and has, during the past few

For those political forces in Finland which had long advocated for NATO membership after the Cold War, it was easy to give the Defence Forces a role in promoting the NATO approach by apolitical, practical cooperation. The Defence Forces' own stance on Russia and institutional practices have also influenced security and defence policy in the political process. A rather stable and unified institutional discourse on Russia was formed within the defence establishment. Russia has been a very special element in that. Finally, this trait has played an important role in developing defence policy and getting additional deterrence by allying (Nokkala, 2008).

This is how Finland's defence against the Soviet/Russian threat was formed to be such a permanent element in security policy that it had such a powerful effect towards Finland's allying, not from weakness, but from strength in weakness. The role of defence policy and defence in Finland's security policy has also been kept going by the strong legitimacy of the Defence Forces and the whole defence system in society, one sustained by cultural patterns. A strong will to defend has prevailed for decades, if compared internationally. Relations between the Defence Forces and Finnish society have been close largely because of general conscription. The politico-military culture has been unified. Finland's somewhat peripheral position in Europe, and its front-line position as the neighbour of the great power Russia, has been apt in strengthening societal influence on forming security policy.

The weight of continuity factors in Finland's security policy stems from reasons which may not fade away for a long time with its allying. NATO will probably be seen as an organisation that brings "in certain cases" extra security for Finland, especially military security due to Finland's geographic position as a neighbour of Russia. Finland will fill its obligations to the Alliance, but the defence and comprehensive security of Finland stand strong at the core. Finland will also probably be a strong contributor to NATO, specifically in its neighbourhood of the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions. Finland's security discourse will be probably evermore open, but at the same time more multiform in the future.

years, increased its military capacity in particular in its western region. It has continued the modernisation of its armed forces." – "During the last few years, Russia has positioned some of its most technologically advanced weapons systems and increasingly more capable forces close to Finland." – About Finland's strategic environment before the Russian occupation of Crimea, see Nokkala, 2014, pp. 232–253. About newer developments in the north, cf. Rautala, 2022.

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