



Sweden and Finland from Neutrality to NATO: The Strategic Transformation of European Security

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Abstract

The political geography of Scandinavia has undergone remarkable transformations over the past century, pushing the states like Finland and Sweden into the spotlight of International relations discourse. This study examines the shifting dynamics of European security structures as a result of Finland and Sweden's NATO membership. In May 2022, both countries revealed their plan of joining NATO. This was a radical turnaround in both states' security and foreign policies, but a rational outcome of their European Union membership and strong association with NATO in the post-cold war period. Finland became a NATO member on April 4, 2023 and Sweden joined on March 7, 2024, broadening the alliance to 32 member states. The paper further analyzes that for both nations, the primary factor behind joining the NATO alliance was the necessity for enhanced strategic stability in response to Russian military aggression against Ukraine. Finnish and Swedish inclusion in NATO redefined the European security architecture and signified a turning point for these traditionally neutral and militarily nonaligned states who strived to balance cultural, political and economic relations with Russia and the West for decades. Moreover, it is arduous to comprehend the immediate change in their traditional military nonalignment position without taking into consideration the significant public outrage in both countries as a reaction to Russia's unjustified aggression against Ukraine.

Keywords

NATO Enlargement, Sweden, Finland, European Security, Russia-Ukraine War.

Introduction

The relations of Russia with North European states became significant due to the growing influence of this region and Arctic zone in International politics. Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008, seizure of Crimea in 2014 and assault on Ukraine in 2022 substantially influenced the neighbouring countries and intensified the security protocols within the region of Northern Europe. States of North European have also strengthened their outreach with each other. The unwavering assistance for Ukraine grew into an unavoidable geopolitical obligation and application of NATO membership submitted on May 18, 2022 by Sweden and Finland was the expression of rising apprehension within the two Nordic states neighbouring Russia (Archick et al., 2024)

The action of submitting membership bids simultaneously indicated careful orchestration and harmonious political coordination between Helsinki and Stockholm, in addition to each state's defence coordination. By the end of 2022, 28 NATO members out of 30 had validated the protocols (Raik et al., 2024). However, the domestic ratification of Hungary and Turkey was delayed for both countries, citing concerns regarding the Sweden's and, to a limited extent Finland's, advocacy for Kurdish groups. National procedures of Hungary and Turkey concluded their domestic procedures for Finland in March 2023, permitting Finland as the 31st member to legally associate with the alliance. In

early 2024, Turkey, and then Hungary, validated Sweden's accession protocol and on 7 March, 2024 Sweden became the 32nd NATO member. (NATO, 2022)

Neutrality has been a deeply ingrained concept in the political landscapes of Stockholm and Helsinki, forming their foreign policies across the years. As states with a prior stance of neutrality, Sweden since 1812, and Finland since the end of World War II, have pursued principled neutrality in global conflicts, refraining from military alliances and abstaining from participating in wars unless subjected to direct threat. Both states officially turned away from the notion of neutrality while integrating into the EU in 1995 with a joint application, which could be perceived as one of the most significant foreign policy change after cold war. Furthermore, the affiliation of both states with EU meant that both nations would partake in Common Security and Foreign Policy (CSFP) as well as in the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). (Holland, 2024)

Literature Review

Geographical neighbours of Russia have long been acutely aware of severe security concerns associated with the border they share with this country. The occurrences following February 24, 2022, together with the Russian government's nuclear threats, have extended the scope of this risk beyond the Asian and European limits. It has been undeniably evident that issue regarding the Russian proximity has expanded internationally. Among 14 states sharing the land borders with Russia, six have signed up for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and are already under the nuclear protection of alliance. (Bersheda, 2023)

By acquiring the membership of a defense alliance, states gain additional welfare benefits with regard to the collective defense, functioning as an international public good. NATO membership has been significant in modifying the status of Finland from to a lower-risk state to high-risk state. The risk reduction benefits for Sweden are similar to Finland. Sweden formally put an end to its military service draft in 2000, but has not been able to renew it. Regardless of its strong navy and air force, the safety of Sweden has been compromised in the aftermath of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. (Kanniainen, 2022)

The public opinion in Finland went through a significant change following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Numerous younger MPs – from political parties which redefined their official narratives on NATO – had begun to express the openness towards NATO membership prior to the invasion. Even the Social Democratic Party (SDP) of Finland, a party associated with NATO opposition, at least from theoretical perspective, this notion was firmly rooted. Generational ideological differences became apparent among the Finnish political leaders due to Russian invasion. (Fittante, 2023)

Looking it differently, Finnish and Swedish decision to join NATO may escalate the potential of regional tensions, rather than preventing military confrontations between Russia and NATO in future. Although both states officially declared neutrality, they could still foster normal relations with Russia while simultaneously aligning with the NATO framework. After NATO membership, Moscow is expected to modify its relations with Stockholm and Helsinki accordingly. Over the long term, this could probably heighten uncertainty, deepen mistrust and a greater risk of conflict between the Nordic bloc and Russia. (Filipovic, 2024)

Swedish and Finnish accession would cause a dramatic security overhaul in Europe. Both states would be the providers of security, with exceptionally capable forces. They would offer a significant contribution in improving the ability of NATO to enhance its defense strategy and capability development by sharing the responsibilities among allies and boosting overall strength. Their inclusion would also reinforce the deterrence of alliance by disrupting the military planning of Russia in the transforming strategic framework of Baltic Sea basin. NATO engagement with Russia in that region, the High North and the Arctic will be increasingly crucial to its overall strategic approach. (Alberque et al., 2022)

The international order centered on rules has offered stability to small and liberal countries such as Finland and Sweden. This order has provided them the opportunity to align with the institutions like the EU and UN, creating a safe context for them to pursue foreign policies based on their own values. However, when such order collapses and a more aggressive power-focused system takes over, small countries feel insecure, as reflected in the Swedish and Finnish severe concerns of vulnerability after Russian invasion of Ukraine. (Michalski et al., 2024)

Another significant factor for NATO to enhance ties with Finland and Sweden was the necessity to cooperate more effectively on the matters related to Baltic Sea. Both countries had contributions regarding the military capabilities, intelligence and situational awareness and territory access to conduct military exercises, offers that the alliance found considerably appealing. Due to the domestic political factors, the possibility of Finnish and Swedish NATO membership seemed distant. In 2014, the political attitudes regarding the alignment with NATO began to shift, whereas the Finnish position remained unchanged. (Wieslander, 2019)

Nordic states have shifted from rather a significant variation in the decisions regarding foreign and security policies towards a more unified approach, i.e. following the similar patterns with regard to involvement in organizations. Aggression of Russia, authoritarianism of China and polarization of US has encouraged the Nordic nations for closely cooperate within the EU, NATO and to a certain degree within Nordic institutions as well. Nordic states have updated their policies of remaining outside alliances to becoming the member of the organizations through membership and greater synergy with EU and NATO. (Brommesson et al., 2023)

From Partnership to Full Membership: Sweden and Finland's NATO Journey

Modern Europe is grappling with major geopolitical shifts. Russian aggression against Ukraine impacted Arctic and Northern Europe, areas where Russia remains a key player. The security landscape of the region has been considerably transformed after Finland and Sweden acquired NATO membership. These two states had previously prioritized to NATO cooperation over full membership, now became part of the alliance. Finland and Russia shares a common land border and internationally this decision of Finland was met with reserved understanding. In contrast, Sweden, is in a low-risk region, so it was and unexpected action for the actors outside Northern Europe. Both countries have already been important partners of NATO and embrace the fundamental political values that have been the serving principles of NATO for over 70 years. They are well-integrated EU members, a critical factor in a period when strengthening of ties between NATO and EU is essential to improve cooperation. (Spindler, 2024)

Finland and NATO: From Cooperation to full Integration

Subsequent to the Cold War, Finland confronted the challenge of transforming its security and foreign policy devoid of Eastern and Western blocs. As these blocs disappeared, the national discourse within Finland about the adherence to neutrality gradually undermined. Instead, the country opted for a fusion of commitment to the EU and military non-alignment, in the form of CSDP. To strengthen its security and hold on to its leading position in the changing international dynamics, Finland actively strived to cultivate relations with NATO. Finland joined NATO's program Partnership for Peace (PfP) program 1994, indicating its eagerness for alliance collaboration and commit to Western security cooperation. Eventually, Finland became a significant partner of NATO, joining the NATO response force (NRF), frequently exercising with the alliance and achieving the status of Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP). (Franzen, 2023)

Finland's pursuit of NATO partnership has been inextricably interlinked with Sweden's, as both states have fostered their association with the alliance in the broader context of Western security cooperation. One considerable feature of Finland's NATO partnership is driven by crisis management. As a key partner, Finland's cooperation with NATO is largely about crisis management operations. Even though its position in this domain has diminished to a certain extent since the Cold War, Finland uphold the commitment to contribute to peacekeeping operations led by NATO upon receiving a UN-mandate. Participation of Finland in different NATO-led operations highlights its determination towards International security and peace. Notably, Finland played a key role in crisis management operations in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo led by NATO. However, chose not to participate in Unified Protector operation of NATO in Libya in 2011, in spite of having the mandate of UN. (Forsberg, 2018)

Finland has proactively committed to NATO over the NATO Strategic Communications Centre in Riga since 2015, reinforcing its standing as a reliable partner. Moreover, Finland set up the Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats in 2027 in Helsinki by collaborating with NATO and EU partners, signifying its commitment to confront present-day security challenges. In aligning with the post-Cold War period, Finland thus redirected from UN-mandated peacekeeping to joining the operations of military crisis management steered by NATO and EU. Even though, dedication of Finland towards military non-alignment, peace mediation and crisis management has framed its

position across the evolving landscape of international security. To some up, Finland's collaboration with NATO has dramatically improved since the end of the Cold War. As it takes on a military non-alignment stance, Finland simultaneously engaged in security policy of EU and eagerly strived for NATO partnership through peacekeeping and crisis management operations. (Thorhallsson et al., 2023)

Sweden and NATO: From Non-alignment to Enhanced Partnership

After the Cold War era, Sweden has experienced drastic shifts in its security policy, driving towards unprecedented level of engagement with NATO. This change in strategy resulted in two major changes: Sweden's partnership with NATO in 1994 along with its EU membership in 1995. Over time, cooperation among Sweden and NATO has significantly grown, gaining it the informal labels of "partner number one" and "NATO's allied partner" at the Headquarters of NATO. Sweden has engaged vigorously in the major operations of NATO in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya and Kosovo, playing a more active role as compared to some NATO members. Indeed, contributions of Sweden were primarily centered on NATO-led operations instead of peacekeeping missions led by UN. One important development in Sweden's collaboration with NATO is its participation in the NATO-managed Strategic Airlift Capability, where resources are aligned to amplify the airlift capability for affiliated states. (Stangvik, 2023)

Furthermore, Sweden earned the status of EOP within NATO during the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, showcasing its refined opportunities for cooperation and a distinctive association with NATO. In 1994, the willingness to join NATO's PfP authorized Sweden to strike a middle ground between non-alignment and siding with the former Warsaw Pact and Baltic States in alliance with NATO. This strategy enabled Sweden with the tools to engage in international order enforcement operations under the mandate of UN, perceiving NATO as an executive entity of the UN Security Council. The commitment of Sweden towards NATO is demonstrated by its active engagement in different exercises and NRF. The country bears the rank of EOP and has conducted wide-ranging military operations, such as Aurora 17, emphasizing territorial defense including Finland and various NATO nations, such as United States. (Pettersson, 2018)

Nevertheless, the desire of Sweden to strengthen defense and political cooperation with NATO has persisted as a key concern since the end of Cold War, as it aim to incorporate itself into the Western security infrastructure. In short, journey of Sweden from being neutral to a NATO PfP partner showcases its commitment to contribute towards global security and peace. Its participation in different operations of NATO and strategic collaborations have solidified its status as an EOP, experiencing the greater prospects for partnership and exclusive affiliation with the alliance. Sweden's association with NATO highlights its willingness to play a major role in the affairs of international security. (Lundmark, 2022)

Public Opinion and Policy Shift in Sweden and Finland

Democratic states are responsive towards the opinion of public when it is transparently articulated through media and opinion poll results. It is difficult for politicians to ignore an unequivocal transition in public viewpoint on a crucial political issue. Opinion of public always played a significant role in the determination of Finland and Sweden to pursue NATO membership, particularly with regard to their long-term policies of non-alignment and military impartiality. In 2022, before the Russia-Ukraine war, Finland and Sweden were politically and socially polarized regarding the formal NATO membership issue. Although both countries had the general agreement with respect to the significance of trans-Atlantic security partnership. (Forsberg, 2024)

Considering one aspect, critics of the NATO membership, affiliating with the old non-alignment tradition, understood that their priorities lie in utilizing the soft powers and serving as a facilitator between the West and Russia. Though in favour to cooperate with NATO, they further held the view that an official membership would involve more costs and less benefits. From another perspective, the proponents of NATO membership highlight Russia as a critical threat, despite the absence of solid evidence about the clear Russian aggressive behavior devalued the pro-NATO argument. This contributed to a low proportion (and relatively uncertain) of support for the membership of NATO in both states, with nearly one out of three Finns and Swedes advocating for NATO before 2022. (Yden et al., 2019)

Traditionally Sweden has maintained a stance of military non-alignment. Nevertheless, the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022 triggered a major change in public sentiment towards the

membership of NATO. Before 2022, the dominant part of Swedish citizens was generally not in favor to join NATO, with approval for membership remaining close to 30-40%. (Chatterjee, 2023) Ukrainian war, however, considered as a significant event that reconfigured the public and political landscape. By mid-2022, support of public towards NATO membership spiked to nearly 50-60%, with opposition notably declined (Savolainen, 2024).

This shift was motivated by rising security concerns regarding Russian aggression and the acknowledgement that NATO membership can provide a collective defense structure that could offer greater protection. Regardless of Sweden having efficiently equipped military, the attack on Ukraine signified the vulnerability of European states to Russian military actions. As an outcome, many Swedes started to see NATO as a necessary safeguard for their national security (Henley, 2022).

The political landscape of Sweden had been traditionally divided regarding the issue of NATO membership. Generally, the center-right parties were in favour, and the parties of left-wing, particularly the Social Democrats, had more reservations. Nonetheless, when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, it caused a dramatically changed the political consensus of Sweden. Social Democrats, who always opposed the NATO membership, revised their stance and confirmed their support for the membership of NATO in May 2022. The decision of Social Democrats to embrace membership of alliance was vital to strategy, particularly as it united the government with the considerable majority of Swedish voters leading to the national elections (Vanhanen, 2023).

Application of Sweden for NATO membership was largely influenced by the desire to enhance its security affiliation with Finland, which had likewise re-evaluated its policy of non-alignment as a result of growing threat of Russia. Sweden and Finland have long-time shared defense policies, and their collaborative strategy towards NATO membership further solidified their security approach. One major hurdle to Sweden's NATO membership was the opposition of Turkey. Concerns were raised by Turkey about Sweden's alleged shelter for Kurdish insurgents and other individuals classified as terrorists. This diplomatic challenge became the reason to delay the process of NATO accession, yet, Sweden participated in negotiations with Turkey, modifying its asylum policies and acknowledging to address security concerns of Turkey. (Kaynak, 2023)

As far as the Finland is concerned, historically it has a unique context with Russia, specifically subsequent to Winter War of 1939-1940, which crafted a cautious strategy on military alliances. Before 2022, public opinion in Finland was fragmented about the NATO membership, with support swinging between 20-30%. Nevertheless, the attack on Ukraine triggered a profound change in public opinion. By the spring of 2022, support for the membership of NATO jumped to 60-70%, with only limited population in the country remaining opposed. (Elgin et al., 2023)

Russia and Finland shares a long border, and the threat of Russian hostility has remained as a constant threat for a significant period of time. Historically the Finnish citizens, especially the older generations, were not in favor to join NATO, with a fear that such action might be provoking to Russia. Nonetheless, the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022 triggered the public to consider NATO membership as a crucial defensive mechanism against the expansionism of Russia. Finland had adopted the policy of military non-alignment for a span of decades but had strong association with NATO in the form of Partnership for Peace program. In 2022, President Sauli Niinisto along with Prime Minister Sanna Marin and major political parties from both the right and left, unified in their approach to support for NATO membership. (Biskup et al., 2022)

The membership of NATO was regarded as a high level of security assurance for Finland, mainly due to its geographic proximity to Russia. The national leadership acknowledged that NATO membership would improve national defense capabilities of Finland and improve its status in European and International security setups. When Sweden tends to seek the NATO membership, the suit was followed by the Finland, reflecting their strategy inspired by their historical precedent. Both nations unified in their intent to join NATO and it assured that neither would fall behind in the wake of increasing Russian aggression, ensuring the regional stability and strengthening their security. For a long time, Russia has viewed the non-alignment approach of Finland as a source of stability in the region, and Finland's decision to join NATO signalled a substantial decline in the reach of Russian influence in Northern Europe. (Nisch, 2023)

Russian response towards Finland's possible NATO accession was a pressing problem. Despite refraining from any military action to prevent the NATO membership of Sweden and Finland, stern cautions has been directed to both countries by Russia. In the realm of security and foreign

policy, public opinion is often regarded as a dual force that stabilizes and also inhibits. Public sentiment can serve as a force for change, even in the issues of national security, as seen with the Finland's NATO accession. In Sweden and Finland, the opinion of public underwent a dramatic shift, with previous critics of NATO membership began to see NATO membership as a crucial defense against Russian aggression. A wide consensus emerged in both countries, with all political sides emphasizing that NATO membership was essential for their future security. (Seyaz, 2024)

Catalysts for change: Russian aggression and European Security Concerns

The military strategy of Russia took a more aggressive turn in the early 21st century, as demonstrated by its active involvement in a range of European conflicts, such as the dispute over the Tuzla island to the ongoing war with Ukraine. This increased aggressiveness led to considerable concerns among the countries in the vicinity owing to Russian nuclear strength and its far-reaching impact in global affairs. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was a primary catalyst that transformed the security landscape of Europe. The abrupt and ruthless intensification of Russian territorial expansionism in Ukraine triggered apprehensions regarding the security of neighbouring European states, particularly those geopolitically and historically linked with Russia. Sweden and Finland monitored the events unfolded carefully, realizing they could no longer remain neutral in the midst of such transformations. (Meleshchenko, 2024)

Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 served as a moment of reckoning, revealing the willingness of Russia to use military force in order to accomplish political ambitions, despite the international backlash. For Finland, sharing an extensive border with Russia, and Sweden, a close defense ally of Finland, the awareness grew that their approach of non-alignment could no longer protect them amid a more antagonistic Russia. Finland, enforces a general conscription policy and maintains a well-equipped and highly trained army, while Sweden is known for its advance defense industry. Both nations can strengthen the security structure of NATO while being safeguarded by the alliance's safety net. (Roth, 2022)

With the Baltic States accession to NATO in 2004, the position of alliance as a primary security provider in northern Europe was significantly strengthened. In 1949, the alliance was founded by Denmark and Norway and Denmark, subsequently joined by Germany in 1955, Poland in 1999, and Baltic states in 2004. Thus, Sweden and Finland were the only states in the region that were non-aligned states with NATO. Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway had previously put together the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF) in November 2009 to bolster the national defense infrastructure of the participating states. (Wieslander, 2024)

Until 2023 and 2024, the only states not in NATO among them were Sweden and Finland. Being excluded from the clause of collective security, they were in a less secure position. The main objective to establish NORDEF was the integration of the armed forces of Nordic countries. However, the emphasis has shifted towards strengthening the operational military capabilities in response to the security challenges within a decade of its establishment. Originally started as a Swedish-Norwegian initiative, the NORDEF quickly shifted to be led by Finnish-Swedish and Danish-Swedish collaboration. (Saxi, 2019)

The process of NATO membership was quicker for Finland and slower in the case of Sweden because of the Turkish veto which criticized the tolerance of Stockholm towards the terrorist group activities in its territories. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that Sweden and Finland have been historically inclined to work in collaboration, as clearly illustrated by their accession process of EU. Following the Finnish NATO membership, Sweden finally received the go-ahead from Ankara after the Turkish general elections in 2023. Sweden's inclusion in NATO was finally ratified by the Parliament of Turkey in January 2024. (Silverman, 2024)

Swedish and Finnish accession to NATO will undoubtedly shape both global and regional level security strategies. NATO now operates as a 32-state alliance, leaving Russia as the only non-member state in the Baltic Sea region. As far as conventional power is concerned, NATO has a clear advantage over Russia on a broader scale. Finland and Sweden can provide major benefit to NATO in the form of their contribution in the Baltic and Arctic region by utilizing their underwater capabilities. The support of Swedish forces in submarine and seabed monitoring missions could impede covert maritime activities of Russia. It is vital to straight away ensure the cross-functionality of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance expertise. The Nordic-Baltic states, who are current NATO members

now, should take a unified stance particularly while dealing with security matters. (Lawrence et al., 2024)

Special military capabilities of Finland and Sweden enable them to perform operations in the Arctic. Russian military outlook had already been curtailed in the Baltic Sea due to the Polish, Danish and German military presence in the region. However, the NATO membership of two Scandinavian states converted the Baltic Sea turned nearly into a NATO-controlled lake exempting the coasts of Russia. This development has made the Eastern Europe and Baltic region less vulnerable. The swift accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance will most likely reduce the chance of Russia's possible military response to NATO. Moreover, their membership will completely unite the Scandinavia and Baltic region equipping them to confront Russia both in the Arctic and in their region. (Michnik, 2024)

Regional Stability Redefined: Sweden and Finland in NATO after One Year

The Finnish-Swedish decision of joining NATO stands as one of the most prominent geopolitical outcome of Russian full-scale attack on Ukraine. Although the strategic paradigms built on non-alignment and neutrality reigned for decades in Sweden and Finland, and now both have pursued closer defense partnership with NATO. Finland and Sweden are the stable Nordic democracies and significant missing components required to complete the northern security architecture of NATO. The Sweden and Finland's accession would strengthen the security of NATO, as well as of the Baltic region. In the light of this fact, their accession has been widely supported by the Baltic states. For a long time, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia intended to see their Nordic neighbours as members of the Alliance. (Lawrence et al., 2024)

The contributions of Sweden as a NATO member in its first year have been substantial; positioning as a major contributor to the alliance. Around 550 Swedish troops sent to Latvia in January 2025 in the context of multinational NATO battalion, aiming to deter the aggression of Russia against NATO territory. The battalion is one of the components of eight forward deployed missions on the eastern flank of NATO, striving to deter Russian hostilities, with four missions established following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. This is generally regarded as the greatest contribution of Sweden to the alliance and to overall regional security. Furthermore, the presence of new forward land forces in Finland was disclosed in September 2024, with Sweden willing to assume the role of a primary state to head NATO forces in Finland. (Moyer, 2025)

The presence of forward land force diverges from the established setups in Baltics or anywhere else on the eastern flank of NATO, with considerable troop strength of Finland and its rigorous reservist culture. It is considered an important commitment as the newest NATO member. In the maritime sphere, the Baltic Sea underwent an unprecedented extent of hybrid and disruptive activities to affect the underwater infrastructure. Sweden, tapping into its vast experience in carrying out operations in the Baltic Sea, has been leading the way to address the hybrid threats targeting the region. In addition, Sweden joins the UK-led Joint expeditionary force, which sets in motion a new initiative called "Nordic Warden" at the outset of January 2025 to safeguard underwater infrastructure and to hinder actions of Russian "shadow fleet". (Moyer, 2025)

In 2025, Sweden aims to allocate approximately 2.4% of its GDP on defense and planning to raise it to 2.6% in 2028. This timeline or percentage could be higher in response to the re-evaluated threat assessment of Europe due to the altering policies of existing US administration and its European security strategy. (Cafiero, 2024) On the flip side, Finland as a new member has been remarkably proactive and is adapting itself into NATO formats, frameworks and customs. Finland has enhanced its understanding of nuclear deterrence in a surprisingly short timeframe. The current Finnish Government suggested that they are eager to accommodate a specialized NATO facility. Currently, there are 28 accredited centres within the alliance focusing on different security dimensions, ranging from energy issues to strategic communications. (Moyer, 2025)

The historic decision of Sweden and Finland to join NATO and their whole-hearted participation as newest allies reflects the enduring purpose of the alliance. Firstly, geostrategic ally, Finland has accumulated valuable experience of more than century as Russian neighbour by sharing a land border of 1,340 km (832 miles). Finland has also gathered valuable intelligence regarding the activities on Eastern frontier. Serving as important trade hubs, the Åland Islands, a self-governing demilitarized Finnish region, along with Gotland, a Swedish island with the base of military, are significant to Baltic Sea commerce. Finland and Sweden are the members of Arctic Council and have

practical expertise about the functioning of their societies in sub-Arctic climates characterized by harsh and long winters with heavy snow in the north. (Forsberg et al., 2022)

Secondly, besides their important geostrategic locations, Sweden and Finland both states are technologically highly developed with top-tier solutions in cybersecurity and 5G-technologies. Domestic medium and small sized corporations in both countries with innovative solutions in the sector of security, aerospace and defense would have upgraded exclusive access to national processes of procurement at NATO's Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD). By having access to the right decision-making tables, companies would experience more cost-efficient and faster product launches, advantageous to the whole Alliance. Due to the changed security reality, the states across the transatlantic sea are modernizing their capabilities. Therefore, the demand for the Finnish and Swedish innovative technologies is renewed. (Forsberg et al., 2022)

And thirdly, both countries have the ability to navigate and sustain activities in Arctic sea and land conditions, along with controlling the airspace in the northern Baltic Sea region. With two decades of close association with NATO, frequently participating in joint military exercises- armies of Finland and Sweden are NATO aligned and seamlessly integrated. NATO's northern expansion would extend its eastern limits towards two major cities of Russia; St. Petersburg, which has a major maritime hub, and secondly the Murmansk's strategic military outpost, where the Northern fleet of Russia resides with its nuclear submarines. With the new border in place, a solid defense perimeter would wrap around Western Europe, positioning the early-warning detection and anti-air capabilities nearer to the boundary of Alliance. (Wieslander et al., 2023)

Conclusion

The Russian-led invasion of Ukraine represents a historical inflection point, urging the EU to deeply engage in the most consequential conflict in Europe since World War II. The conflict prompted the EU to back Ukraine and address the situation as a rising influential geopolitical entity. The policy of EU towards Ukraine has been predominately influenced by its competition with Russia, a factor whose importance has gradually increased since 2004, marked by crisis-induced escalations. Starting with the aggression of Russia against Ukraine in 2014 and intensifying into large-scale warfare in 2022, clearly illustrated that EU had become embroiled in a broad cutthroat competition with Russia. Increasingly aggressive Russian attempts to re-store its dominance in the post-Soviet region sparked a robust backlash from the EU, Ukraine and other Western actors.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, coupled with determined resistance by Ukraine, have prompted the transatlantic community to focus on the significance of collective defense and strengthening the fighting spirit of military forces. It was Russian objective to weaken the credibility and unity of NATO, and to create divisions in Europe, by pushing Finland and Sweden towards NATO membership, ultimately Russia has ended up strengthening the capabilities of NATO alliance and enhancing its presence in the Baltic-Nordic region. Sweden and Finland provide outsized military resources in land, sea and air, along with technical proficiency in emerging innovations and technological domains. Both countries carry historical significance of leadership in the fields of civic resilience, hybrid threats and total defense.

Sweden and Finland's NATO membership create positive outcomes and many opportunities and for the Alliance. The political drive invested by both countries in order to demonstrate institutional obligation with NATO, has been crucial to establish a strong institutional structure. Despite the Finnish and Swedish proximity to Russia, and Finland having a long historical relationship with the country, the worsening European security situation has changed the perception of Sweden and Finland about themselves, or their view about Russia. In NATO, both countries are considered as a segment of the 'Western camp' and as a part of the circle of trust and loyalty within the community of West, in which Russia isn't part of the equation, because its aggressive attitude toward the neighbours and its initiatives aimed at disrupting democracy and Western unity.

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