

MAY 2024



WRITTEN BY
CATARINA SILVA

EDITED BY
ROSÁRIO FRADA

SUPERVISED BY
SYUZANNA KIRAKOSYAN

Introduction

On May 18, 2022, both Finland and Sweden applied to formally join NATO, abandoning their non-alignment policies that constituted their ethos for so long. In this article, we will delve deeper into Finland's decision to join NATO and its consequences on the Finnish security model. As the Finnish government initiated the process towards integrating NATO, which then strongly influenced Sweden to follow, this article will delve deeper into Finland's decision to join the transatlantic alliance (Nilsson and Strömberg, 2022).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has already been identified by scholars as a turning point in contemporary politics, the impact of which is felt throughout the defence and security environment of all European nations (Elgin and Lanoszka 2023). Finland is no exception, with its security concerns against external threats leading the country to rethink its reasons for previously not adhering to NATO membership (Forsberg, 2023).

The effects of the war on Finland's 'holistic' approach to security are still awaiting debate and analysis by academics. Finland's 'holistic' approach to security is an inclusive strategy that integrates military, civil, and societal aspects to ensure comprehensive national security. This model, often referred to as 'comprehensive security' has been pointed out by Finland and its representatives for its uniqueness. According to this perspective, Finland's political choices consider "all security-related elements that, if threatened, could cause serious harm or danger to the public or society (The Finnish Terminology Centre 2017, p. 16).

The purpose of this article is to briefly analyse the ongoing transformation of Finland's comprehensive security framework. With its recent alignment with NATO, Finland's approach to enhancing comprehensive security must now extend beyond purely national goals, also incorporating the obligations and opportunities stemming from NATO membership. Additionally, Finland must now adapt to NATO's evolving objectives in bolstering civil resilience. Consequently, the Finnish government is developing strategic policies that will profoundly impact the nation's comprehensive security landscape.

Finnish Security Model Pre-Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine

The Finnish model of collective preparedness centres around a so-called 'holistic approach' (The Finnish Terminology Centre 2017, p. 15), with comprehensive security as its cornerstone. This entails an ideal situation where all threats aimed at vital societal functions are managed in a unified manner. Moreover, the term 'comprehensive' signifies that this model includes all pertinent stakeholders, ranging from individual citizens to governmental authorities (Nilsson and Strömberg 2022).

To properly understand this security model, it is essential to rewind to the beginning of 2022 and reflect on the essence of Finland's comprehensive security. The primary reference point for understanding this model is the 2017 Security Strategy for Society. Within this Finnish government document, comprehensive security is delineated as the 'Finnish model of joint preparedness' (Government of Finland 2017). This model operates on the principle that all public authorities also function as security entities, and therefore collaboration is key to comprehensive security: not only are businesses, non-governmental organizations, and citizens expected to contribute but they are also entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding vital functions — those crucial for the well-functioning of society, that must be upheld under all circumstances (Government of Finland 2017, pp. 14–24).

Therefore, within the framework of comprehensive security, an important notion is preparedness, defined as “activities ensuring that all tasks can continue with minimum interruptions and that the required exceptional measures can be performed during disruptions occurring in normal conditions and during emergencies” (Government of Finland 2017, p.9). The responsibilities of authorities regarding preparedness also include ensuring that each organ retains control over its designated area of expertise during crises. No designated crisis administration assumes control; rather, authorities must remain consistently adaptable to any alterations in their operational context.

The swift evolution of Finland's foreign and security strategy during the spring of 2022 is highlighted in a government report concerning shifts in the security landscape, released in April of that year (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022). This document significantly influenced Finland's decision to align with NATO, (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022, p. 20). Once the aggressive actions of Russia and their immediate consequences became apparent, Finland's reaction to the altered security landscape was articulated in its government report: “The threshold for externally exerting influence on Finnish society will be heightened by means of preparedness in different administrative branches in line with the model for comprehensive security and by means of citizens' resilience to crisis” (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022, p. 11).

From Non-Aligned To The NATO Alliance

Various interpretations of Finland's decision to join NATO have surfaced in academia, reflecting diverse perspectives on the emergence of alliances. According to Walt's balance of threat theory, for example, the Finnish and Swedish bids for NATO membership stemmed from a shift in their perception of Russia as a threat, particularly following its invasion of Ukraine (Walt, 1985). Before February 2022, Russia was already deemed a significant threat from the perspective of the Nordic countries due to its aggregate power, proximity, and offensive capabilities (Walt 2022). However, Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine further underscored its aggressive intentions, serving as the decisive factor for Finland and Sweden (Walt 2022).

An alternate perspective on Finland's and Sweden's bids for NATO membership is presented by Lanoszka and Elgin in their work (Elgin and Lanoszka 2023). They argue that Finland and Sweden had already cultivated such a close partnership with NATO before February 2022 that their subsequent decision to seek formal membership cannot be solely attributed to rationalist motives of seeking efficiency (Elgin and Lanoszka 2023). Instead, the authors emphasize the significance of ontological considerations—essentially, matters of identity—in shaping Finland's and Sweden's stance towards NATO. According to them, prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, both Finland and Sweden still maintained their identities as 'non-aligned' states, engaging extensively with NATO but remaining hesitant to join formally. However, the shock of the Russian attack on Ukraine prompted a shift in public opinion and altered elite attitudes by highlighting the political and symbolic consequences that a formal membership in a military alliance could bring.

However, Finland had already cultivated a wide range of bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral relationships with neighbouring Sweden and pivotal NATO allies, particularly the US, Norway, and the United Kingdom, with the latter leading the Joint Expeditionary Force (Iso-Markku and Pesu 2022, pp. 38–40). Consequently, Finland began to perceive itself as an inherent component of the NATO-centric European defence framework. Nevertheless, although Finland's military alliances created a grey area between being aligned and non-aligned, there were boundaries that neither Finland nor its partners were willing to breach. These limitations revolved around matters such as information exchange and command and control (Møller, 2019). More importantly, Finland continued to abstain from officially seeking NATO membership, citing apprehensions regarding the potential consequences of such an action on Finnish-Russian relations and the stability of the Baltic Sea region (Iso-Markku and Pesu 2022).

It is generally agreed amongst academics that Finland's decision to align with NATO was ultimately influenced by two main factors: a significant change in public opinion regarding NATO membership, and a substantial alteration in the threat perceptions among Finnish policymakers (Kari 2024). Since the mid-1990s, various private polling agencies and the Parliamentary Advisory Board for Defence Information (ABDI) have regularly gauged public sentiment on security and defence policy. Until February 2022, the data consistently indicated that a majority of the population opposed Finland's entry into the transatlantic alliance (Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi 2016).

Given this context, the extent and speed of the shift in Finnish public sentiment following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 were notable. Just before the invasion, in December 2021, a survey conducted by ABDI revealed that only 24 percent of Finns supported NATO membership, while 51 percent were against it (Finnish Ministry of Defence 2024).

Nonetheless, a survey released by the Finnish public broadcaster 'Yle' on February 28, 2022, immediately following the Russian invasion, revealed a significant shift. It marked the first instance where over 50 percent of Finns expressed support for the nation's NATO membership (Koivisto 2022). As of early May, backing for NATO membership had surpassed 75 percent and remained consistently around that threshold. (Amadae et al. 2023).

Security concerns therefore took precedence over any remaining emotional attachment to non-alignment. Drawing lessons from the Ukrainian situation, Finnish leaders reasoned that not being under a nuclear umbrella could expose Finland to nuclear coercion and restrict the level of military support from its allies (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2022). Above all, NATO membership was viewed as the most effective means to substantially bolster Finland's capacity to deter military aggression. As outlined by the Finnish government in its assessment of the ramifications of Russia's invasion, the most substantial benefit of potential NATO membership for Finland would be its inclusion in NATO's collective defence framework and the assurance of security guarantees outlined in Article 5 (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2022, p. 26.).

Post-2022 Reforms To The Finnish Model Of Security

Several initiatives are currently underway to reform the Finnish model of comprehensive security, with Russia's war and Ukraine's struggle for survival playing a significant role in driving this process. The roadmap for Finland's integration into NATO and the future trajectory of the Finnish comprehensive security model are outlined in the Government Programme. The Government's vision encompasses 'being influential and proactive in NATO, the European Union, the UN, and international relations otherwise' (The Finnish Government, 2023). However, the specific priorities of Finland's NATO membership remain undetermined and will be elucidated in the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy and the Defence Policy Report at the outset of the new government term.

The Emergency Powers Act spearheaded by the Ministry of Justice is at the forefront of ongoing legislative endeavours. This initiative stems from a directive outlined in the prior Government's Programme, according to which, "in addition to traditional military threats, Finland is preparing – in accordance with the model of comprehensive security and through legislative reform – to meet more multifaceted threats, which combine military and non-military means" (European Commission, 2023). From the standpoint of Finnish security policy, the primary concern regarding NATO membership is the potential overshadowing of their national comprehensive security model by NATO's 'inconsistent, relatively simplistic, and evidently politically influenced civil resilience model' (Kari 2024).

Conclusions

Finland and Sweden's choice to seek NATO membership in May 2022 are some of the most unexpected and impactful outcomes of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In fact, the entry of these two nations into NATO significantly influences the dynamics of the transatlantic alliance and the broader European security landscape. To delve into the underlying reasons behind this shift, this article focused on examining Finland's NATO accession process (Alberque and Schreer 2022).

Since joining NATO in the spring of 2023, Finland's relationship with the Alliance has undergone significant transformation. Politically, certain nations, particularly the United States, now regard Finland not just as a friendly partner but as a full-fledged ally. With Russia's aggressive warfare fundamentally altering the security landscape, it's unavoidable for Finland to reform its comprehensive security model.

Consequently, Finland is navigating a new foreign and security policy landscape, which will require a period of adaptation. Finland is still in the process of finding its footing within NATO and remains undecided on matters such as civil resilience (Pesu 2023). This hesitancy however can be attributed to how extremely fast Finland's NATO accession was finalised, resulting in ongoing adjustments within the civil service apparatus. It will be of interest to see what the future holds for Finland's model of security post-NATO membership, and its consequences on the dynamics of the broader European security landscape.

Bibliography

Alberque, W. and Schreer, B. (2022). Finland, Sweden and NATO Membership. *Survival*, 64(3), 67–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2078046>.

Amadae, S. M., Wass, H., Hentunen, M., Tukiainen, J., Weckman, A., and Laine, M. S. (Jul 4, 2023). Top gear security: Finns' expectations for NATO membership. NATO poll research project. https://www.helsinki.fi/assets/drupal/2023-07/NATOpoll%20policy%20brief%201_2023%20English_6.7.2023.pdf.

Aunesluoma, J. and Rainio-Niemi, J. (October 1, 2016). Neutrality as Identity? Finland's Quest for Security in the Cold War. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2016; 18 (4): 51–78. https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00680.

Elgin, K. K., and Lanoszka, A. (June 13, 2023). Sweden, Finland, and the meaning of Alliance membership. *Texas National Security Review*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/46144>.

European Commission. (January 20, 2023). The Rule of Law Report 2023: Input of Finland. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/104_1_52822_input_mem_finland_en.pdf.

Forsberg, T. (2023). Nato-matkan lokikirja: [Review of] Risto E.J. Penttilä & Jyrki Karvinen, Pitkä tie Natoon [A Long Road to NATO]. Helsinki: Otava 2022. *Maanpuolustus*, (140). <https://www.maanpuolustus-lehti.fi/nato-matkan-lokikirja/>.

Government of Finland. (2017). Government Resolution: Security strategy for society. Turvallisuus Komitea. https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YTS_2017_english.pdf.

Iso-Markku, T. and Pesu, M. (December 15, 2022). Finland as a NATO Ally: First Insights into Finnish Alliance Policy. *Finnish Foreign Policy Paper*. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4481296>.

Kari, M. (2024). Effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the Finnish model of comprehensive security. *Defensor Legis: Suomen asianajajaliiton äänenkannattaja*, 104(4,5), 735-745. https://www.edilex.fi/defensor_legis/1001160014.pdf.

Koivisto, M. (February 28, 2022). 'Yle poll: majority of Finns support NATO membership', *Yle News*. <https://yle.fi/a/3-12336530>.

Ministry of Defence of Finland. (March 15, 2024). Finnish opinions on security policy and national defence 2021. *CESSDA Data Catalogue*. <https://datacatalogue.cessda.eu/detail?q=8eb2bba6701e0c1bb53c3e2ee19ce7a06d6241c820b229ad21ca46f9ee86cb48>.

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. (April 13, 2022). Government report on changes in the security environment. Helsinki. Valto. <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/164002>.

Møller, J. E. (2019). Trilateral defence cooperation in the North: an assessment of interoperability between Norway, Sweden and Finland. *Defence Studies*, 19(3), 235–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2019.1634473>.

Nilsson, T. and Strömberg, M. (July 2, 2022). That's why Sweden turned around on NATO. *Svenska Dagbladet*. <https://www.svd.se/a/Qy1gXx/sa-gick-det-till-nar-magdalena-andersson-kovande-om-nato>.

Pesu, M. (2023). Finland's emergent NATO policy. BSR Policy Briefing 2/2023 – Centrum Balticum. https://www.centrumbalticum.org/en/publications/databank/databank/bsr_policy_briefing_2_2023.6958.news.

The Finnish Government. (June 20, 2023). Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government. Government and Ministries. Helsinki. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/governments/government-programme#/>.

The Finnish Terminology Centre TSK, and The Security Committee. (2017). *Vocabulary of Comprehensive Security*. Turvallisuukskomitea. Helsinki. <https://turvallisuukskomitea.fi/en/comprehensive-security/vocabulary-of-comprehensive-security/>.

Walt, S. (1985). Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power. *International Security*; 9 (4): 3–43. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.9.4.3>.

Walt, S. (May 18, 2022). 'What are Sweden and Finland thinking?', *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/18/nato-sweden-finland-russia-balance-threat/>.