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Finland in a Geopolitical Perspective - From Finlandization to Integration with NATO

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Abstract

Objectives: The aim of this article is to analyse the determinants of changes in the foreign and security policy of the Republic of Finland and to answer the question of how this country's accession to NATO influenced the balance of power and the security environment in Northern Europe. The results of these analyses will allow us to understand how small states can shape the security environment at both the micro, meso, and macro scale.

Methods: Due to Finland's geographical location and its experience in relations with Russia (later the USSR and again with Russia), the article uses a historical and polemological approach. The methodology was supplemented with systemic, quantitative and comparative research.

Results: Finland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization finally ended its long-standing policy of military non-alignment. Not only the European, but the global security map has changed. There are no longer democratic countries on the map of Europe that border directly on Russia and do not belong to Western military structures. From the Alliance's point of view, Finland's accession is an added value, and this country's greatest advantage is its knowledge and experience in dealing with Russia.

Conclusions: In today's security environment, there is no longer room for either neutrality or military non-engagement. Future research on this issue should approach it in a holistic way, treating the security environment as the sum of military and digital security. Although these two aspects are intertwined, it should not be forgotten that activities in each of them can take place independently.

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Introduction

Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022 changed the security environment of Europe and became a catalyst for changes in the foreign and security policies of many countries. An example of such a country is Finland, which, after decades of functioning in the shadow of its eastern neighbor and remaining a neutral country, and after the collapse of the USSR and joining the European Union in 1995, militarily non-involved (Szacawa, 2023, pp. 21-26), decided to for full integration with the military structures of the West, officially becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on April 4, 2023. However, the full-scale armed conflict caused by Russia was not the only determinant of Finland's departure from the policy of military nonalignment, but only accelerated this process.

Understanding the functioning of societies, states, and international organisations, their narratives and the ways in which they structure their policies requires taking into account their history and geographical location, as well as other contextual factors. Therefore, the analysis of Finland's contemporary foreign and security policy requires complex, adaptive, multi-threaded research taking into account the characteristics of the country's society. At the same time, the political realities of a given country are determined not only by political and social factors, but also by the historical context. Therefore, they are subject to constant temporal transformations, and understanding current social and political phenomena and processes requires an in-depth analysis of their genesis and evolution (Pawłuszko, 2013, pp. 7-8). It should also be noted that the basis for understanding any phenomenon is research on its history (Hoffer, 2008, pp. 106-127). In the case of research on the evolution of Finland's foreign and security policy, particular consideration should be given to the country's participation in World War II and its geopolitical situation from its end until 2023, when it became a full member of NATO.

The aim of this article is to analyse the determinants of changes in the foreign and security policy of the Republic of Finland and to answer the question of how this country's accession to NATO influenced the balance of power and the security environment in Northern Europe. The results of these analyses will allow us to understand how small states can shape the security environment at both the micro, meso, and macro scale.

This research issue has also been addressed by Matti Pesu Tuomas and Iso-Markku (Pesu, Iso-Markku, 2024), Yeliz Kulali Martin (Martin, 2024), Vesa Koskimaa and Tapio Raunio (Koskimaa, Raunio, 2024), Ciwan M. Can (Can, 2024), Gabriella Gricius, and Renato Fakhoury (Gricius, Fakhoury, 2024), Michael Jonas (Jonas, 2023), David Arter (Arter, 2023), Michael Tomz, Jessica LP Weeks and Kirk Bansak (Tomz, Weeks, Bansak, 2023).

Due to the geographical location of Finland and its experience in relations with Russia (later the USSR and again with Russia), in addition to the historical approach, the article uses a polemological approach. The methodology was also supplemented with systemic, quantitative and comparative research.

1. Origin and evolution of the political and social system of Finland

Finland's modern political and social system is a derivative of the country's history and was shaped by both centuries of Swedish rule and over 100 years of Russian influence, when Finland was part of the Russian Empire as the Grand Duchy of Finland. Until the mid-12th century, the areas of today's Finland were not part of any state body, and wars over them were waged by Sweden and Veliky Novgorod (Russia). As a result of the peace treaty of Pähkinäsaari (Swedish: Nöteborgsfreden) signed in 1323, the western and southern parts of Finland were incorporated into Sweden, and the eastern part (Karelia) became part of the Byzantine world. The border established then also became the dividing line between Latin and Byzantine culture. Finland's membership in Western Europe was determined (Cieślak, 1983, p. 34). During the period of Swedish domination, the Swedish legal and social system was introduced in the area of today's Finland. In the 16th century, as throughout Sweden, the Reformation was introduced in Finland, and in 1548 the New Testament was translated into Finnish (Zetterberg, 2017). This was the beginning of the formation of Finnish identity and the Finnish literary language. It is worth noting that at that time Finland was treated as an integral part of Sweden, and not as conquered territories (Klinge, 1997, pp. 16-20).

After Sweden lost its superpower status as a result of defeats in the wars with Denmark and Russia in 1808, Russia gained control over Finland, transforming its territorial gains in 1809 into the Grand Duchy of Finland under the authority of the Russian Tsar (Barton, 1986, p. 311). At this time, Helsinki became the capital of Finland, and the university, founded in Turku in 1640, was moved to Helsinki in 1828. During the period of dependence on Russia, the Finnish national movement was born and in 1863 Tsar Alexander II issued a decree on the language, which began the process of Finnish becoming the official administrative language (Zetterberg 2017). Finland was part of the Russian Empire for more than a hundred years. However, this did not result in the settlement and domination of Finns by the inhabitants of other parts of the Empire in Finland, which could have resulted in Russification. At the end of the 19th century, there were no more than 6,000 people on its territory, not counting soldiers. Russians. At the same time, over 100,000 Finns lived in the St. Petersburg area. However, the Finns were not integrated into Russian society. They generally did not know Russian. There were few situations in which Russian would be useful. Russian was also not taught in schools, and on the language issue, the Russians did not fight the Finns' demands to promote the rights of the Finnish language in the country, on the contrary. It was due to the support of Tsarism that Finnish was officially recognised as the second official language in Finland. This policy also served the own interests of the Russians, who assumed that the Finnish Swedes were a destabilising force, naturally allied with Sweden (Vihavainen, 2010, p. 187). At the same time, for several reasons, there was no significant resistance in Finland against tsarist rule. First, Finland gained significant internal autonomy, retaining its own legal system, administration and Lutheran religion. This allowed for a certain degree of independence in arranging internal affairs. Second, loyalty to the Tsar was the result of Alexander I's liberal policy towards non-Russian areas. Additionally, Finnish society retained linguistic and cultural diversity, and significant decision-making freedom in internal matters corresponded to the social expectations of the time. Moreover, Finland experienced cultural and economic development, which contributed to an increase in the level of social satisfaction and a lower

tendency to resist the authorities (Grzybowski, 2007, pp. 10-13). Only Russia's policy towards Finland during the rule of Nicholas II (1894-1917) , the last tsar of the Russian Empire, changed this situation and had a significant impact on the further development of Finnish-Russian relations. During his reign, Finland experienced a series of political changes that were intended to increase Imperial Russia's control over the region. Nicholas II, striving to strengthen the unity and centralisation of the Russian Empire, appointed Nikolai Bobrikov as Governor-General of Finland in 1898 , whose task was to gradually limit Finland's autonomy. This process included a series of actions aimed at integrating Finland with the rest of Russia, both administratively and culturally. Russian was introduced as the official language, replacing Finnish and Swedish in offices and education, and Russian officials and military officers were placed in key positions in the Finnish administration (Gredecka , 2016).

One of the most significant changes introduced in Finland by Russia was the reform of the electoral system and the establishment of a unicameral parliament - Eduskunta - in 1906, which made Finland the first country in the world where women obtained active and passive voting rights. This pioneering decision was an important step towards equality and democratization of Finnish society. However, the decisions of the Finnish parliament were not signed by the tsar, which was a direct result of the conflict between the Finns' independence aspirations and the centralization policy pursued by tsarism. Russia, seeking to strengthen control over Finland's territory, introduced various measures limiting Finland's autonomy, including legislative restrictions. The tsar's refusal to sign the parliament's decision was a manifestation of these tendencies and was intended to maintain Russian dominance. Ultimately , this led to a tightening of the relations between the two countries and an increase in the independence aspirations of the Finns.

All these actions caused anti-Russian sentiment to grow in Finland. When, as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution, tsarism collapsed, on December 6, 1917, Finland declared independence. At the same time, the social divisions existing in the country became visible. A civil war broke out between the "reds" who were steeped in the ideas of the communist revolution and their opponents - the "whites". Ultimately, thanks to Germany's financial and military assistance, the war ended with the victory of the "whites". Those events meant that in the future, Germans were perceived by Finns as natural allies and Russians as enemies (Partacz, 2022, p. 156).

The next period that determined Finland's subsequent relations with its eastern neighbour was World War II, which, in the context of Finland, took place in three stages. The first was the Winter War, lasting from November 30, 1939 to March 13, 1940, resulting from the aggression of the USSR. Despite the significant numerical and technological superiority of the Red Army, Finland managed to retain its independence but lost part of its territory. The second stage, known as the continuation war, lasted from June 25, 1941 to September 19, 1944. It began almost two years after the end of the Winter War, when Finland, seeking to regain lost territories, joined Germany in its attack on the USSR. At that time, Finland, although formally an ally of the Third Reich, was conducting its own separate campaign, focused primarily on regaining lost areas. The last stage is the so-called Lapland War, which lasted between September 15, 1944 and April 27, 1945. It was a consequence of Finland concluding a separatist peace with the Soviet Union, which obliged it to remove German

troops from Finland (Partacz, 2022, pp. 158-159). After the end of World War II, Finland found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence. Despite maintaining the market economy system and considerable freedom in conducting internal policy, the foreign policy of this country consisted of maintaining neutrality and avoiding actions that could be perceived as hostile towards the USSR. The term Finnishization, used in the context of international relations, is derived from Finland's policy at that time, and refers to a situation in which a smaller or weaker state decides to adapt its foreign policy to the interests of a superpower in order to avoid confrontation or threat from that superpower.

2. Finland in the shadow of the USSR: foreign and security policy in the post-war period

In the Armistice Treaty, which was confirmed in the 1947 Treaty of Paris, Finland lost about 12% of its territory. The size of the army and its weapons were limited. Finland was obliged to pay \$300 million in war reparations, and in political trials, Finnish leaders were convicted of collaborating with Germany. The ban on the activities of communist organizations was lifted. At the same time, there was internal pressure, supported by the USSR, to transform Finland into a communist state. In the parliamentary elections held in March 1945, the communists won 25% of the seats in parliament, becoming the second largest political force and briefly entering the government (Pihkala, 1999, pp. 28-33).

At this point, the question of why Finland did not become a communist country. The main reason was that the Red Army never occupied Finland. The Finnish social order and the institutions on which the rule of law is based remained unchanged, and a market economy operated. Free elections were held. In the spring of 1948, Finland agreed to conclude a military treaty with the USSR called the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Assistance (Finnish: Ystävyys, Yhteistyö ja Avunanto Treaty, YYA Treaty, YYA Treaty). However, it was more limited than similar agreements signed with other Eastern European countries (Forsberg, Pesu, 2016, p. 478).

Another turning point came in 1955, when Finland became a member of the Nordic Council and the United Nations (UN), and the Soviet Union gave up its military bases in Finland in exchange for an extension of the YYA Treaty. Finland began moving towards a neutral position and in 1961 joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) as an associate member. During the intervention of Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia in 1968, Finland took the initiative to convene the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The CSCE summit in Helsinki in 1975 consolidated Finland's position as a neutral state. At the same time, in 1973, Finland signed an association agreement with the EEC (Forsberg, Pesu, 2016, p. 480).

Despite numerous difficulties in relations with the USSR, Finland maintained its independence, effectively balancing its political, economic, and cultural relations with both the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finnish politics took a significant turn. The process of Finland's integration with Western European economic and military structures has accelerated (Kaczmarek, 2019, pp. 149-150). The military agreement with the Soviet Union was terminated (Häkkinen, Kaarkoski, 2024, p.11). In 1995, Finland joined the European Union and in 2002 it adopted

the euro as its currency. To sum up this period, it should be noted that Finland's relations with the USSR and later with Russia in the years 1945-1995 were complicated and multi-faceted, characterized by a unique mix of dependence, careful diplomacy and strategic balancing.

3. The Russian dilemma in Finland's foreign and security policy

Historically, the issue of Finland's foreign and security policy has largely been related to events in Russia and the threat it may pose to Finland. Over time, Russia became a specific actor that defined the identity of Finland's foreign policy and was sometimes defined by Finnish diplomats as an insoluble dilemma (Vanhanen, 2017). The basis of this historical and political interpretation is the concept of a neighbour being a superpower. Russia can be considered to have created a recurring potential security policy risk for Finland for two reasons. The first is the tension between Russia's superpower identity and the need for the survival of its system, which is manifested in the country's inability to adapt to the rules of the international system. The second is the structural imbalance in bilateral relations between a small state and a superpower based on power politics. This limits Finland's ability to influence Russia's overall activities. The dynamics of relations also depend largely on changes beyond bilateralism, on which Finland has no influence (Vanhanen, 2017).

Over time, the combined effect of these two factors has often led to Finland having to seek balancing solutions to ensure its security. Examples include relying on a policy of neutrality during the Cold War and deepening Western defence cooperation in the shadow of the crisis in Ukraine. Ukraine showed that the security problem related to Russia did not actually disappear from the world after the Cold War. According to the pillar solution of the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, before 2022, the Finnish ways of managing the Russian dilemma were based on external and internal balance, avoiding provocations and strengthening the international system (Vanhanen, 2017).

It can also be assumed that Finland maintained relative independence from the USSR during the Cold War due to its marginal importance to Moscow and its peripheral location. At the same time, maintaining good relations with both the East and the West, it could be a place of informal meetings of representatives of hostile powers (Kaczmarek, 2022, p. 90). This meant that Moscow needed a country with the same status as Finland. However, after the collapse of the USSR, Russia experienced internal crises and Finland increasingly integrated with the West.

However, despite its neutrality, Finland was preparing for a potential attack from the USSR throughout the Cold War. This did not change later, and after the collapse of the eastern bloc, Finland was one of the few countries in Europe that never stopped accumulating strategic stocks (Kaczmarek, 2020, p. 176). This results from the concept of comprehensive security implemented in this country, which assumes preparing the entire society for crisis situations (Szacawa, 2024).

The YYA Treaty bound Finland to the Soviet Union. It obliged Finland to prevent Germany or its NATO allies from using Finnish territory to attack its eastern neighbour. The agreement provided for joint consultations in the event of a threat. From the very beginning of the YYA, the Finnish Defense Forces had to carefully conceal that the army was preparing for

a threat from the east. The Finnish army command developed secret national defense plans already in the 1950s under the pseudonyms "Fuel Purchase" (1952) and "Valpuri" (1957). The plans were drawn up to nominally prepare Finland for a Western attack, and Soviet threat assessments were not even noted in them. However, at the group level, detailed grouping and deployment plans indicate preparation to repel the threat from the east (Juonala, 2022). The fact that the Finns are preparing for threats from the east may also be evidenced by the fact that the main communication routes in Finland run meridian, which may impede the movement of Russian forces in the event of potential aggression.

Maintaining neutrality for many years and conducting policy in such a way as not to provoke the authorities in the Kremlin meant that, unlike the Baltic states, Finland retained its independence. At the same time, it expanded its military potential. After a period of apparent lack of threat from Russia, Finland's situation began to change.

After the collapse of the USSR, in order to adapt to the new security environment, Finland began to look for new forms of international cooperation. The first step was joining the Partnership for Peace programme initiated by NATO in 1994. It can be considered that this was the beginning of Finland's involvement in international defense initiatives (NATO, 2023). The following year, 1995, on January 1, Finland joined the European Union. This was important not only for its foreign policy and economy, but also opened new paths of cooperation in the field of security. Although membership in the European Union did not automatically mean participation in defence structures, it was a platform for tightening political and military cooperation with other member states.

Over the following years, Finland continued to intensify its activities in favor of international security. In the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century, this country took part in peacekeeping and stabilization missions under the aegis of the UN, NATO, and later also the EU. Its involvement in operations in the Balkans in the 1990s and in Afghanistan after 2001 highlighted the growing importance of international cooperation in Finland's defense policy (UN, 2024; NATO, 2023). Another turning point was the Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. These events prompted the Finnish government to increase defence spending and intensify regional cooperation, among others organisation, through the Nordic , established in 2009. Defence Cooperation (NORDEF), which strengthened the defence cooperation of the Nordic countries (Haugevik , Svendsen , Creutz , Olesen , Regnér , Schmidt, 2021, p. 2). Although without formally pursuing membership, in the following years Finland intensified its cooperation with NATO. During the same period, Finland's increased involvement in the European Union's security and defence policy was also marked, especially through participation in initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), launched in 2017 as part of the EU's common security and defense policy (The Council of The European Union, 2017).

Finland pursued a balance policy until 2022. After Russia's attack on Ukraine, Finland's geopolitical position changed, and the decision to join NATO clearly showed that many decades of the policy of military non-engagement had come to an end (Kaczmarek, 2023, p. 205). Finland's current defence strategy assumes, in addition to increasing defense spending, strengthening international cooperation (Szymański, 2021). It is also important that

the authorities of this country base the increase of its defense potential on strengthening the potential of the alliances and international organizations in which it participates (Puolustusministeriön, 2020, p. 7).

4. Synergy in cyber defence: Finland, NATO and challenges in cyberspace

Technological progress has meant that modern armed conflicts have largely moved to cyberspace. In the event of serious crises, operations in the IT space can be a tool of influence that complements traditional armed forces. (Karpiuk, Pizło, Kaczmarek, 2023, p. 647), and digital threats may have far-reaching consequences (Bencsik, *et al.*, 2023, p. 1).

In this context, it should be emphasized that Finland is one of the most digitized countries in Europe and in the world. (Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022 Finland, p. 3). At the same time, ensuring cybersecurity is one of the main tasks of the state (Karpiuk, 2021, p. 46). In the context of this increasing digitalisation, it becomes particularly important to consider the possibility of cyberattacks and their impact on national security. In this light, it becomes understandable that attacks carried out in cyberspace may be treated as grounds for introducing one of the states of emergency (Czuryk, 2021, p. 84). In special cases, it may be martial law. When considering cyberspace attacks and their potential effects, one cannot ignore the aspect of defence and the need to secure critical infrastructure. Therefore, it seems necessary that to ensure the proper functioning of the state and the implementation of tasks using cyberspace, it is necessary to ensure cybersecurity also in the military dimension (Bencsik, Karpiuk, 2023, p. 20). Cyberspace protection in the military dimension is one aspect of a broader issue covering the comprehensive management and protection of a complex global network of ICT connections (Karpiuk, 2023, p. 188). In this context, the full cooperation of NATO countries is of particular importance, and Finland's experience has the potential to increase the security level of the Alliance. Especially since Russia has always been a constant threat to its security and digitalization has provided it with new channels of access to Finland in the form of cyberattacks. Currently, the level of cyber threat in Finland is extremely high, and cyber attacks on this country take place almost constantly (Himka, 2023). However, in the case of hostile activities in cyberspace that are attributed to third countries or organisations associated with them, the Finnish authorities are reticent in informing the public about their countermeasures. During a press conference devoted to the intrusions into the network of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs detected in 2013, the then Secretary of State in this ministry, Peter Stenlund, only stated "the perpetrators know that we know who they are, and that is enough" (Dziennik. pl, 2014). Currently, no information or data regarding cyberattacks, especially of an espionage nature, on Finland is published. You can only find the unofficial private opinions of people responsible for security. However, even in such cases, they are general and refer to global trends (Spolander, 2023). An example is General Mikko's statement Heiskanen: "The countries that carry out cyberattacks are well known. The motives behind their actions are also known" (Lindgren, 2021). There is also no publicly available information on how Finland deals with cyber threats. However, based on reports of closer cooperation between the United States and Finland in the field of cyber defence, it can be concluded that Finland has the greatest achievements in this field (United States European Command, 2024). It seems that the lack of information about Finland's

activities in cyberspace may be useful information for other countries. It should also be taken into account that any data disclosed, even in private statements, may constitute an element of information warfare.

Another threat to countries related to digitalisation is disinformation. Understanding cyberspace as a global network that connects various systems leads to the conclusion that one of the aspects of cybersecurity is counteracting disinformation, which most often uses social networks. Because social media publish content regarding all spheres of social life and disseminate it in real time, they have become an area of organized activity of interest groups that may threaten national security (Chałubińska- Jentkiewicz, 2021, p. 12). It should be noted here that Finland also has extensive experience in this area. All the more so because for decades it has had to oppose all hostile activities of Russia (Kari, Hellgren, 2021, pp. 163-165). At the same time, the Finnish authorities have never directly accused their eastern neighbor of hostile actions. They were forced to take effective defensive measures, which at the same time remained unnoticed.

Conclusions

The imperial policy pursued by Russia has meant that in the current geopolitical situation there is no longer room for neutrality or military noninvolvement. This applies especially to small countries such as Finland, located in its immediate vicinity. This growing geopolitical pressure, combined with growing security concerns, has found expression in the attitudes of Finnish citizens, especially after Russia's aggression against Ukraine. According to research conducted in May 2022, Finns' support for their country's accession to NATO has increased to the highest level in history, 76%. This was a significant increase compared to the results of research conducted exactly one day before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which gave a result of 53% (Yle , 2022). This change in the perception of national security and the response to changing international realities was a response to the growing threat from Russia. Finland's accession to NATO clearly defined the country's future ties with the West and its full integration, not only economically, but also militarily, with democratic countries.

Finland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation finally ended its long-standing policy of military non-alignment. Not only the European, but the global security map has changed. There are no longer democratic countries on the map of Europe that border directly on Russia and do not belong to Western military structures. From the Alliance's point of view, Finland's accession is an added value, and this country's greatest advantage is its knowledge and experience in dealing with Russia.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight that in today's security environment, there is no longer room for either neutrality or military non-engagement. Future research on this issue should approach it in a holistic way, treating the security environment as the sum of military and digital security. Although these two aspects are intertwined, it should not be forgotten that activities in each of them can take place independently.

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