

The Geopolitical Implications of NATO's Enlargement in The Nordic Region: The Accession of Finland and Sweden 2022 A Case Study

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to examine and analyse the geopolitical implications of NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region through the accession of Finland and Sweden.

Methods: Utilising the case study method, this study describes analyses and attempts to predict the phenomenon of NATO's enlargement through the membership of Finland and the prospected accession of Sweden to NATO. This method enables the researchers to provide an in-depth investigation and understanding of the correlation between different variables and dynamics that influenced NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region and the geopolitical implications of this enlargement.

Results: The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO carries significant geopolitical implications, which establishes NATO's preponderance in the Nordic region and encircles Russia's vital sphere. This turning point represents an extensive strategic challenge for Russia, as it doubles the common borders to approximately 2,500 km.

Conclusion: This study concludes that Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO marked a turning point in the geopolitical, security and balance of power landscape in the Nordic region. Furthermore, the enlargement of the common borders between NATO and Russia will lead to a new interaction pattern, with increased chances of unintentional military skirmishes. Moreover, despite the democratic policies held by Finland and Sweden, the *Realpolitik* approach in foreign affairs remains most appropriate for security and survival. Eventually, the study emphasises the importance of classical geopolitical assumptions and the significance of the Realism paradigm in interpreting international relations and issues.

Keywords: Geopolitical analysis, NATO's enlargement, Finland and Sweden NATO's accession.

التداعيات الجيوسياسية لتوسع حلف الناتو في إقليم الشمال الأوروبي: انضمام فنلندا والسويد 2022 كدراسة حالة

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ملخص

الأهداف: تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى بحث وتحليل التداعيات الجيوسياسية لتوسع حلف الناتو في إقليم الشمال الأوروبي، وذلك عبر انضمام فنلندا والسويد للحلف.

المنهجية: تنتهج الدراسة منهجية دراسة الحالة؛ لوصف وتفسير ومحاولة التنبؤ بمسار ظاهرة توسع حلف الناتو عبر عضوية فنلندا والانضمام المرتقب للسويد في حلف الناتو؛ حيث يُمكن هذا المنهج الباحثين من تقديم تحليل وفهم مُعمق للعلاقات الارتباطية والمتغيرات والديناميكيات التي تؤثر في توسع حلف الناتو في إقليم الشمال الأوروبي والتداعيات الجيوسياسية المترتبة على هذا التوسع.

الخلاصة: إن انضمام فنلندا والسويد لحلف الناتو يحمل العديد من التداعيات الجيوسياسية المهمة؛ حيث إنه يُؤسس لتفوق الحلف في إقليم الشمال الأوروبي ويُطوِّق المجال الحيوي لروسيا، وتُمثل نقطة الانعطاف هذه تحدياً استراتيجياً كبيراً لروسيا؛ حيث تتضاعف الحدود المشتركة بين الجانبين لـ(2500 كم) تقريباً.

النتائج: تستنتج هذه الدراسة أن انضمام فنلندا والسويد لحلف الناتو يعدُّ نقطة تحول في المشهد الجيوسياسي والأمني وتوازن القوى في إقليم الشمال الأوروبي، كما أن تضاعف الحدود المشتركة بين حلف الناتو وروسيا سيؤدي إلى أنماط جديدة من التفاعل بين الجانبين؛ حيث ترتفع احتمالات المناوشات العسكرية غير المقصودة. إضافة إلى ذلك، على الرغم من السياسات الديمقراطية التي تنتهجها فنلندا والسويد، فإن نموذج السياسة الواقعية في الشؤون الخارجية يبقى الأنجح لتحقيق الأمن والبقاء. وختاماً، تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية الأطروحات الجيوسياسية التقليدية، وأهمية النظرية الواقعية في تفسير العلاقات والقضايا الدولية.

الكلمات الدالة: التحليل الجيوسياسي، توسع حلف الناتو، انضمام فنلندا والسويد لحلف الناتو.

1. Introduction:

"To build a theory of international relations on accidents of geography and history is dangerous." Kenneth Waltz (1924-2013).

Nordic states, above all, Finland and Sweden, are regarded as successful role models in implementing democratic, welfare and social justice states. Historically, both states have tried to avoid any involvement in alliances on the European continent based on the principle of neutrality. Sweden has been neutral since 1812, and Finland has been entirely neutral since 1955. In 1995, the two states joined the European Union (EU), and thus, both states switched from neutrality to military non-alignment. The turning point in this neutral foreign policy of these states occurred after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which marked a turning point on the European security map. One of the direct effects was the reconfiguration of decades-old neutral Nordic states Finland and Sweden to apply for full membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Thus, the study examines the geopolitical implications of NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region via the accession of Finland and Sweden to the alliance after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The two Nordic states are shifting their security policies after the series of Russian unjustified aggressions over their neighbouring states. The essential benefit of this accession for both states appears in Article V of NATO's charter and the collective security principle with the massive military capabilities of NATO, which will maintain the security of NATO's members. Moreover, the study treats NATO as a geopolitical phenomenon in that geography plays an essential role in its strategic and military orientation; its intervention ranges and theatre of operations are drawn.

1.2. Study Problem:

The main problem of this study is that Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO will increase the common land and maritime borders with Russia, creating a new geopolitical reality and new hotspots of tension such as the Gulf of Finland in the South, Northern Finland, where Murmansk Oblast and the Kola Peninsula, which is prime importance to the defence of Russia, and its ability to project both strategic nuclear and conventional military forces. The White Sea to the North, the Arctic, and Gotland Island may impede maritime navigation in the face of the Russian fleet in the Baltic Sea. Also, we remember the geopolitical knot represented in the Kaliningrad oblast, which is the strategic window of Russia to the Baltic Sea. These new geopolitical realities could enhance the opportunities for NATO to contain and deter further Russian attacks and create new geopolitical restrictions on Russian actions.

1.3. Study Questions:

The previous problem raises essential questions, which are:

1. What are the geopolitical implications of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO in the Nordic region?
2. What is the geopolitical change after NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region, and what is the possible future of this enlargement?

1.4. Hypothesis:

This research hypothesises that Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO will increase efforts to contain and deter potential Russian threats in the Nordic region. Concurrently, these two Nordic states' accession might exacerbate tensions with Russia, potentially escalating confrontations in geopolitically sensitive hotspots.

1.5. Methods:

To answer the questions mentioned above and to test the fundamental hypothesis of this study, a case study approach will be employed in order to analyse primary and secondary literature on this subject matter, during which this method of research would enable the researchers to provide an in-depth investigation and understanding for the correlation between different variables and dynamics that influenced the NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region as well as the geopolitical

implications of this enlargement. Moreover, to develop an understanding of the implications of NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region in terms of describing, **analysing, and attempting to predict the geopolitical impacts of NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region.**

1.6. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework:

This theoretical and conceptual framework clarifies the main theoretical assumptions and concepts to supply the reader with a better understanding of various terminologies mentioned in this study and to give the study a well-defined to proven basis for the argument, which can be set as follows:

- **Balance of Power:** The Realism paradigm emphasises deliberation to enhance military capabilities and deterrence credibility; the sequences have two primary forms. Deliberate consequences occur when a state or coalition aims to weaken its competitor to gain or increase its superiority. Furthermore, unintended consequences occur when an actor does not have this goal, but its activities can adversely affect the structure of international security relations. Saying this does not mean that neorealists are structural determinists. It means only that they warn us that even unintended consequences can destabilise the entire structure of international security relations. Furthermore, this warning is essential and inspiring for studying NATO's post-Cold War enlargement and its aftermath.

Finally, all states have to deal with the balance of power, so states calculate power and seek it for maximisation as a means of survival and relative gain over rival states. (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 17-18).

- **Security Dilemma:** Since the process of NATO's enlargement has become the prominent bone of contention in NATO-Russian security relations, the model of the security dilemma process is applied to the study. Since the first wave of NATO's enlargement, we have witnessed a long and endless vicious circle, a complex process of measures and countermeasures, which the Russian leadership condemns the process of NATO Extension as a malicious and even aggressive strategy. They identify it with the supposedly cruel (aggressive) intentions of NATO, namely the United States of America U.S. as their hegemon, due to uncertainty of intentions. Similarly, the invasion of Ukraine is examined and explained as a result of Moscow's long-standing obsession with worst-case assumptions and worst-case scenarios in its analyses and interpretations of NATO's enlargement process and its consequences for the security of Russia. (Eichler, 2021, p. 19).

- **Geopolitical Analysis:** The geopolitical analysis of a geographical region characterised by unequal power distribution is the geographical method that studies describes, and predicts attitudes and outcomes resulting from relationships between opposing and distinct political practices for power redistribution. Further, it utilises their ideological metaphysics within the framework of the geographical complexes where these practices are implemented. (Mazis, 5. March. 2014), It is more than analysing geography's mutual impact and influence on power relationships and international relations. It provides an aspect through which the effects of location, terrain, vital interest, natural resources, and distance combine to provide a context for understanding the behaviour of states by examining its actions and interactions with their establishment and control of boundaries, strategically important areas, and sea routes and land corridors. (Mitchell, 2022).

Moreover, geopolitical theories are an instrument for analysing international politics that emphasise a state's position, closeness, and power as important reasons for its behaviour, goals, and constraints. It provides the tools to interpret and clarify States' foreign strategies and objectives and to analyse the natural causes of contemporary crises and the future of potential conflict regions where States compete for their vital interests. This study reaffirms the classical geopolitical assumption with a specific application of Nicholas J. Spykman's (1944) arguments in "The Rimland Theory", where he developed and countered the basics of Halford Mackinder's (1943) arguments in "The Heartland Theory". This study believes that the geopolitical location of Finland and Sweden in the Rimland aspect plays an essential role for NATO (naval\maritime) power in facing Eurasia (land\continental) power, where both forces persist in competing over the geopolitical Rimland to control the heartland.

- **Containment Policy:** Containment is a foreign strategy to prevent a prospective enemy from growing its geographical influence. During the Cold War, containment was the cornerstone of American foreign policy against Soviet Communism.

During the Cold War, containment of the Soviet superpower was the guiding principle of Western policy. Regional disputes were created as proxies to forestall a direct confrontation between the superpowers during that period. This world of bipolar superpowers no longer exists, and regional battles are no longer considered proxy warfare. If there are new containment strategies, they now target regional conflicts less out of a more vital moral concern to minimise loss of life and more out of a perceived need to prevent regional conflicts from expanding, from engaging weapons of mass destruction, and from attracting foreign fighters. (Griffiths, 2008, pp. 53-55).

This study will further emphasise that the containment strategy is the first alternative for NATO enlargement to impede and discourage any aggressive stance against Russia. With the membership of Finland and Sweden, the odds of effective containment and shrinking of Russia's vital zone will improve, particularly given the importance of their geopolitical location to this strategic purpose.

• **Enlargement:** This study's fundamental topic is enlargement, which will be employed without political or ideological connotations. The enlargement of NATO as a special and unique expansion will be examined on three levels. On the geopolitical level, acquiring new territory and its resources, which results in changes in the distances between states and plays an essential role in international security relations, will get the utmost attention. The first is the overseas deployment of expeditionary troops, the changes in the distances between military forces, the threat balances, and the security threats. Furthermore, on the intellectual level, the most frequent indication of growth is the imposition of new norms, a new ideology, and a new doctrinal mindset. (Eichler, 2021, p. 17).

Thus, NATO is presently undergoing an enlargement process rather than an expansion, which implies that states willingly join the alliance, a testament to NATO's success and ability to attract new members without coercion. The "open-door" policy outlined in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty enables this process. It is noteworthy that NATO does not compel other states to become members, as the decision to do so is entirely voluntary.

1.7. Literature Review:

Until previous days, there has been little agreement over the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO and its implications. Many researchers have published works considering the possibility of NATO's membership for Finland and Sweden in several aspects. Still, due to the novelty of this topic, the following literature is the most compatible works with this study, which are:

• Robert J. McStravick, authors of M.A. thesis entitled: *"The Transformation of The Scandinavian Security Policy Since The Crimean Annexation: Implications For U.S and NATO Policy"*, 2020, Naval Postgraduate School.

In this thesis, the author discussed how Sweden and Finland had a long history with one another and surrounding states that preceded the contemporary issue of security policies in the Baltic region and how both states changed their perception of Russia after the annexation of Crimea.

The differences between classical deterrence during the Cold War and modern-day deterrence are significant. While power and influence are viewed similarly, the conflict is not simply democracy versus communism. There are still differences in values between the US and Russia, as well as between the East and West, which lead to tensions and friction. Until broader meetings can be held between civil-military-political systems, East-West interactions will continue to challenge each other with varying degrees of aggression and hostility.

The Baltic Sea is crucial for Russia's security and neighbouring countries. Its historical and geopolitical significance shapes the security policies of the region. Naval forces play a pivotal role in trade and defence, with countries like Sweden and Finland emphasising naval power. (McStravick, 2020).

In conclusion, the author explores the geopolitical concepts of Sweden, Finland, and NATO. However, it should be noted that the thesis was written before the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine and, therefore, does not consider this event. Additionally, the author's analysis primarily focuses on the Baltic Sea region.

However, this research will study the geopolitical landscape in the Nordic region in light of geopolitical theories, focusing on the balance of power in the Nordic region between NATO and Russia.

• Daniel, J. Pedorotty, authors of M.A. thesis entitled: *“Prospects for Finland and Sweden to Pursue Closer Defense Cooperation with NATO”*, 2016, Naval Postgraduate School.

In this thesis, the author highlighted the essential advantages of the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, and he highlighted the Russian threats over the Baltic Sea and how the Russian Federation has identified its ability to regulate oil and natural gas exports as part of its national foreign and economic policy. Russia has used this advantage to abuse and blackmail its neighbours, including Finland and Sweden, through political pressure. Finland and Sweden can take place in the alliance's collective security.

According to the author, Finland and Sweden must choose to join NATO if they want to maintain their security in the face of increasing military and technological advancements. A country's political narrative needs to align with its actions. Finland and Sweden are considering possible NATO membership or closer cooperation with the alliance. However, this ambiguous stance could be misinterpreted by the Kremlin. The Russian government is eager to demonstrate its military power and has used threatening rhetoric and provocative military drills to achieve that goal. This has made some Western leaders nervous. It is important to note that joining NATO does not guarantee exceptional protection, and their status would be similar to that of other allies. Some Finns and Swedes believe that any closer cooperation with NATO should be done cautiously and deliberately to avoid provoking Russia. Others believe that their current policy of neutrality and non-alignment has worked well for them, and the benefits of changing their strategy do not outweigh the potential consequences. (Daniel J., 2006).

In conclusion, the author has focused on the implications of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO, emphasising the advantages for both states and the Alliance. The study particularly underscores the potential threats from Russia, with specific attention to energy concerns, but needs to explore the geopolitical concepts presented in this thesis comprehensively.

However, what distinguishes this research is its in-depth examination of the multifaceted dimensions and geopolitical ramifications of both state's accession to NATO. The variables that have occurred to the forefront between 2016 and the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022 are manifold, reflecting the intricate nature of the current geopolitical landscape.

1.8. Study Structure:

This study is divided into five chapters, each with a distinct focus as follows:

Chapter One outlines the research plan, including the problem, hypothesis, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks utilised throughout the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two comprehensively examines the history of NATO-Russian relations, spanning the post-Cold War era from 1991 to 2022. This chapter delves into critical turning points that have characterised the complex relationship between NATO and Russia.

Chapter Three focuses on the mutual perception of threats between NATO and Russia, shedding light on how each party views the other as a potential threat.

In Chapter Four, the research examines the underlying motivations that led Finland and Sweden to join NATO and how NATO membership enhances their security imperatives.

Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study by analysing and discussing NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region, considering the balance of power and geopolitical analysis. This section also proposes potential scenarios and predictions for the future of NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region.

2. The Historical Background of NATO-Russian Relations (1991-2022):

Since the Cold War ended and the USSR collapsed in 1991, the relationship between NATO and Russia has been complicated, with periods of cooperation and tension. The harmful legacy of the Cold War, lack of trust, and uncertainty about intentions have caused issues. The current situation resembles a second Cold War. The most significant phases of

this relationship can be summarised as follows.:

The new relations between NATO and Russia started when Russia became a North Atlantic Cooperation Council member in 1991. This platform for conversation was followed in 1997 by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which brought together all of the Allies and partner states in the region, including the Euro-Atlantic, after Russia became a member of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme in 1994 and sent peacekeepers to assist NATO-led peace-support operations in the Western Balkans in the late 1990s, a practical collaboration between the two parties began. (Adomeit, 2006, p. 12). The NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 established the official framework for bilateral ties between the two parties, including setting the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) as a platform for dialogue and collaboration.

Due to disagreements over the Kosovo crisis in 1999, Russia froze its relations with NATO. Following the conclusion of NATO's air campaign in Kosovo, however, Russia resumed participating in cooperative activities and meetings within the PJC, including its role as a member of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR). (Trenin-Straussov, 1999).

The NATO-Russia Council (NRC), formed in 2002 as a platform for dialogue, consensus-building, collaboration, joint decision-making, and joint action, replaced the PJC in 2002. This change helped to enhance the communication channel to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the two parties. Within the framework of the NRC, the individual NATO member states and Russia have collaborated as equal partners on a broad range of security concerns about areas of shared concern. (NATO-Russia Council, 2022).

By ensuring that a line of communication remained open between the NATO Military Committee in Brussels and the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, the MLM could positively contribute to the relationship between NATO and Russia. Keeping an open line of communication between the various military branches, with improved NATO capacity to forecast outcomes and lower the likelihood of misunderstandings, could lead to escalating the relationship. (NATO, Relations with Russia, 2022).

Because of Russia's excessive use of military force in Georgia in August 2008, official meetings of the NRC and collaboration in some areas were suspended. However, both conferences and cooperation were restored in the spring of 2009. Russia's decision to recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as separate states in Georgia has been and will continue to be strongly condemned by the Allies. NATO halted all civilian and military cooperation with Russia in April 2014 in response to Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and Russia's unlawful and illegitimate annexation of Crimea; this was carried out in retaliation for Russian aggression in Ukraine. (NATO, Relations with Russia, 2022).

Russia asked that NATO close the NIO in Moscow and the NATO MLM in Moscow in October 2021. Furthermore, Russia urged that NATO cease the operation of its diplomatic representation to NATO. (Isachenkov, 2021), NATO expressed disappointment at Russia's move to restrict political communication and engagement. NATO reaffirms its commitment to effectively using the military lines of communication that are already in place between the two parties to increase predictability and transparency and cut risks. It urges Russia to do the same. (NATO, Relations with Russia, 2022).

In conclusion, the relationship between NATO and Russia has been multifaceted since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. The dynamic between these two parties has alternated between cooperation and tension, with various challenges stemming from the lingering effects of the Cold War, a lack of trust, and uncertainties regarding intentions. Presently, the situation resembles a new iteration of the Cold War.

3. Mutual Perception of Threats:

The NATO-Russia relationship is influenced by a perceived threat from each other, dating back to the early stages of the Cold War. However, the images of mutual threat can be understood as follows:

3.1. NATO's Perspective of Russian Threats:

According to NATO's narrative, NATO extended multiple peaceful options for Russia to address disputes through negotiation. However, Russia has opted for aggressive actions towards Ukraine and other neighbouring nations, disregarding international laws and the United Nations Charter. Such conduct violates the principles of the NATO-Russia

Founding Act, and Russia has not upheld their obligations under this agreement. Russia must stop their hostile behaviour and comply with all international law to rebuild relations with NATO.

Anyhow, the Russian foreign policy over the past two decades gives pieces of evidence to the proponent's arguments for NATO's existence and enlargement, as post-cold-war Russia went to adjust the monumental geopolitical confusion left by the collapse of the USSR (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 88), and by aggressive means, Russia launched sequentially by; the war in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, eventually the ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine since February-2022, all these wars occurred because of the geopolitical vacuum of the USSR collapse.

As a result, Moscow's foreign relations and military strategy are meant to restore Russia's great power status while re-establishing the vital sphere it achieved before the end of the Cold War. In particular, it seeks to retake control over Russia's "near abroad" by demanding a purportedly historically justifiable "zone of privilege". This would compromise the sovereignty and security of neighbouring states. While Russia's actions may have defensive motivations, they are aggressive and unpredictable.

However, in the latest Strategic Concept (2022), NATO defined Russia's threats as "The most significant and direct threat to Allies": security, peace, and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. It seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation". (NATO, Strategic Concept 2022, 2022, p. 4).

Despite the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation played a vital role in the strategic mind of Western state leaders. The reasons for this can be summed up in five elements and do not revolve solely around possessing nuclear weapons: due to its massive military capabilities, the weapons of mass destruction, the vast land, and the most crucial element, the Russian geopolitical ambition, it became a non-satisfaction state after the collapse of the USSR. It loses polarity in the international system. Russia is the only transition state with a unique position in its relationship with NATO. (Bagratuni, 2011).

In conclusion, only Russia possesses nuclear and conventional capabilities that might jeopardise NATO member states' military security. Second, Russia aspires to be a global participant in international affairs. Its institutions have a unique understanding of the near regions that have grown significantly for NATO during the last two decades. Third, except the Baltic States, the whole post-Soviet territory where Russia has significant influence, both in terms of "hard power" and "soft power," is rife with latent tensions. (Kriz, 2015, p. 33).

3.2. Russian's Perspective of NATO Threats:

Russia perceives its relationship with NATO as a persistent threat across various military, economic, and social spheres. This mindset has contributed to the present conflict. In February 2007, Vladimir Putin delivered speeches at the Munich Security Conference, further emphasising this viewpoint. As his second presidential term drew to a close in 2007, Putin began to articulate his geopolitical aspect with greater clarity. His speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy outlined his vision for Russia's role in the contemporary world.

In contrast to his earlier statements, this address was well-organised and accessible. Putin expressed apprehension about the current international system and underscored the importance of a more equitable approach. The "Munich speech" is regarded as a seminal expression of Putin's geopolitical worldview.

However, The main points of the Munich speech towards NATO and its enlargement can be reduced to the excerpts from it: "NATO advances its frontline forces to our state borders, but we, strictly fulfilling our agreement, do not react to these actions at all." Moreover, "I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our Western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them." (Kremlin, 2007).

Thus, the Munich Conference can be interpreted as a comprehensive strategic guideline of Putin's administration toward NATO as a perception of threat to Russia; Putin forthrightly critiques NATO's eastward expansion, viewing it through a

lens that aligns with Russia's national interests and geopolitical analysis. Therefore, Putin evidently distances himself from the "liberal-democratic" rhetoric that seeks to veil the West's expansionist intentions, demonstrating a pragmatic perspective. (Dugin, 2015, p. 76).

However, the Russian perspectives on international relations often include criticism of the United States and NATO for neglecting Russia's strategic interests. Russian publications and analytical literature frequently highlight the perceived threat posed by Western powers and the necessity for Russia to defend itself. The 2014 Military Doctrine and the 2015 National Security Strategy identify the United States and NATO as a "risk" and "danger" to the Russian Federation and its objectives. (Thomas Frer, April, 2018).

Russia's historical imperative to mobilise its populace in defence against foreign aggression has instilled a profound sense of insecurity within its national consciousness. Consequently, Russia considers controlling territories beyond its borders necessary for security. This view of security as a zero-sum game has engendered scepticism towards the West, particularly in light of the economic shock and absence of a cohesive national identity following the dissolution of the USSR. Russia perceives NATO's expansion as encroaching upon its "sphere of influence" and alleges interference by Western nations from abroad. Moreover, the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings that swept through the Middle East and North Africa also fit into the Russian narrative of persistent Western attempts to topple hostile regimes, primarily through informational tools. (Janne, and Melnychuk, 2021, p. 9).

This is based on an assessment that, since the fall of the USSR, NATO member states have continuously undertaken unilateral overseas operations. In several instances, these activities have circumvented international legal systems in which Russia has a voice, such as the United Nations Security Council, allowing Russia to accuse NATO of undermining international institutions.

According to Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy, there is an observed increase in the use of force in foreign affairs. Russia perceives NATO's expansion of military capabilities and infrastructure near its borders, as well as its global functions that violate international norms, as a threat to its national security. Furthermore, the growth of NATO and Western organisations, such as the EU, has significantly impacted Russia's political landscape. (Thomas Frer, April, 2018).

Russia prefers bilateral negotiations with the US on European issues due to a precedent of past agreements and perceived bureaucratic lethargy within NATO's consensus-based decision-making process. Dialogue with NATO is perceived as obstructed by some member states, and changes to decisions are complex, leading to a "take it or leave it" stance. (Thomassen, 2022).

In conclusion, Russia's foreign policy has a discernible trend of the nation's reaction to the geopolitical landscape that followed the end of the Cold War. A disquietude with the territorial losses sustained during the Soviet era is also a prominent factor that has shaped the contemporary Russian mindset.

4. The Motives of Finland and Sweden for NATO's Membership:

The year 2022 witnessed the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, which created a heightened concern among neighbouring countries regarding the potential threat posed by Russia. In light of this, Finland and Sweden were left with a limited range of foreign policy options, which centred around three main choices, which are:

1- To persist in the traditions of military non-alignment, in the sense of the persistence of the *status quo*, where it passes the responsibility of "*Buck-passing*" deterring Russia to NATO, and not cooperating in preventing and containing Russia practically. This choice is determined by wishful thinking, where Russian threats are growing. Especially since Russia has vital interests in the Nordic region, which threatens the other states' security and interests. (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 269-270).

2- The second option is to join the NATO alliance and "*Bandwagoning*", where Finland and Sweden engage in the collective security alliance to contribute to containing Russia and to share the burden and benefit from NATO's enormous giant umbrella, particularly Article V of its Charter. This guarantees the two States' security depending on the collective security and the considerable capabilities of NATO and the other Western states due to the common values that both states

share with NATO. (Walt, 1985, pp. 3-41).

3- The third option is to balance the Russian threats by strengthening their national military capabilities, which this task becomes nearly impossible, especially considering Russian significant military capabilities and nuclear arsenal.

In that respect, Finland and Sweden decided to move forward with NATO's membership, where the circumstances and the context of their accession are the most appropriate, due to Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian war and NATO's renewed strength due to the context of Russian foreign policy, which revived the principles of collective security and its importance to NATO member states and thus contributed to the vitality of the alliance again. Finland and Sweden seek to ensure their security against the increasing Russian threats. Therefore, both states moved to a *Realpolitik* foreign policy to survive in this complex region in light of a substantially aggressor Russia.

Consequently, the analysis presented aligns with Mearsheimer & Rosato's (2023) interpretation of the balance of power, which assumes that states tend to respond to an increase in their rivals' capabilities by increasing their own and sometimes forming countervailing alliances. This finding is in line with this work and supports the notion that states act in their self-interest to maintain the balance of power. (Mearsheimer & Rosato, 2023, p. 184).

4.1 The Historical Cooperation Between Finland and Sweden with NATO:

Historically, Finland and Sweden have relied on their cooperative efforts with NATO to deter any potential aggression from Russia. However, following the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in February of 2022, these nations have abandoned their previous stance of neutrality and instead embraced a collective defence strategy to counter the threats posed by Russia's foreign policy. This significant shift in policy demonstrates a commitment to safeguarding regional security and stability and serves as a testament to the importance of international cooperation in addressing complex geopolitical challenges.

Despite their governments and public commitment to military non-alignment, political parties in Finland and Sweden have expressed their support for NATO membership. This decision aims to avoid escalating tensions with Russia while maintaining the long-standing tradition of neutrality both countries have upheld for years. Sweden has remained neutral since 1812, spanning an impressive 183-year period, while Finland has been neutral since 1955. Both countries joined the EU in 1995, and thus, they moved from neutrality to military non-alignment due to the standard agreements. Despite its historical posture of neutrality or non-alignment, Sweden maintained strong ties with NATO throughout the Cold War. With the conclusion of the Cold War, Sweden's integration into NATO's military command structure has increased. Sweden joined NATO PfP in 1994. In recent years, it has made further efforts to integrate its military with NATO by becoming an Enhanced Opportunity Partner as part of the PII. (NATO, Relation with Sweden, 2022).

Sweden's involvement in NATO's crucial exercises, such as the Trident Juncture, has been extensive, encompassing planning and implementation. The country's role in safeguarding the Baltics is also considered indispensable. Sweden, along with Finland, is a part of the Joint Expeditionary Force, which is a NATO Framework Nation Concept component. Despite officially being non-aligned (as opposed to neutral) after joining the EU in 1995, Russia still regards Finland and Sweden as neutrals. However, Sweden's Parliament recently allowed the country to join NATO in the future. Although the Swedish population is committed to military non-alignment, resistance has declined towards joining NATO due to increasing Russian aggression and willingness to use force. While public opinion on joining NATO is currently divided, with equal numbers in favour and opposed, several opposition parties in Sweden favour future membership. (Dahl, 2011).

Nevertheless, Swedish neutrality weighs significantly on decision-making and public attitudes, making joining an external alliance such as NATO a far more excellent choice than other nations. Members of NATO have expressed support for deeper military relations with Sweden.

While the possibility of Finland joining NATO has been discussed, many Finns prefer to remain neutral, unlike their neighbours in Sweden. However, if Russia becomes more active, this stance may change. Finland and NATO currently have an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program for a two-year term, outlining a framework for collaboration. Some Finnish politicians and experts have debated the potential benefits of NATO membership due to Finland's

involvement in NATO-led operations, but most citizens do not support joining. Unlike Sweden, where pro-NATO views have grown, Finland's historical conflicts with Russia and shared border of 1300 km create fear of provocation, impacting public opinion. (Väyrynen, 2009).

4.2. The Advantages of NATO Membership for Finland and Sweden:

The admission of Finland and Sweden into NATO is a crucial move that will bolster transatlantic security by bringing on board two nations with the political will and military capability to fulfil their commitments, which will enhance security in the Arctic, Baltic Sea, and Nordic regions and lower the risk of future conflict. There are several sound reasons why the integration of Finland and Sweden into NATO aligns with the alliance's security objectives. Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis (2022) have outlined six key benefits of Finnish and Swedish membership in NATO which deserve support, which are:

First, Finland and Sweden possess robust military capabilities. Both states would bring significant and advanced capabilities to the Alliance.

Second, NATO's focus on the Arctic would be more likely. Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership would mean that seven of the world's eight Arctic countries are now in the Alliance.

Third, the U.S. Has a long historical relationship with Finland and Sweden. The U.S. shares history, a strong trading relationship, and a mutual interest in peace and security in Europe with Finland and Sweden.

Fourth, regional security would improve in the Baltic Sea Region; Finland's and Sweden's entry into NATO would allow the Alliance to defend the Baltic states more quickly and deter Russian aggression more effectively. Russia has proven to be keenly aware of which states are and are not NATO members.

Fifth, both states have the political will to deploy forces. Since Finland and Sweden have had a tradition of being militarily neutral or non-aligned, both have contributed to overseas military operations.(Kochis, 2022).

As an adverse result for Finnish diplomacy in particular, Finland will no longer be able to play the role of a bridge between the West and Russia, as it used to embrace this diplomatic role during the era of *détente* (relaxation of tension) in the Cold War period, as Helsinki hosted many important agreements that contributed to reducing the tension during the Cold War. However, this diplomatic role for Finland is not comparable to maintaining its vital national interest, which is essential in national security.

5. Geopolitical Analysis and the Future of NATO's Enlargement in The Nordic Region:

The importance of the Nordic region is reflected in the fact that it represents the Northern part of the Baltic Sea, which links the European continent and the Arctic from the North. It is strategically important to NATO, which seeks to strengthen containment and encirclement policy to deter Russia from hostilities. This vital territory is crucial for Russia to go beyond the knot of warm waters that Russia has long suffered throughout history. Moreover, the Gulf of Finland is the main corridor between Saint Petersburg and the Baltic Sea, as well as a maritime link with the Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia. This significance is that Russia always assured that Finland and Sweden declare neutrality and, therefore, a military non-alignment strategy. These two States who would officially become members of NATO could be a shocking catastrophe for Russia's long-term strategy.

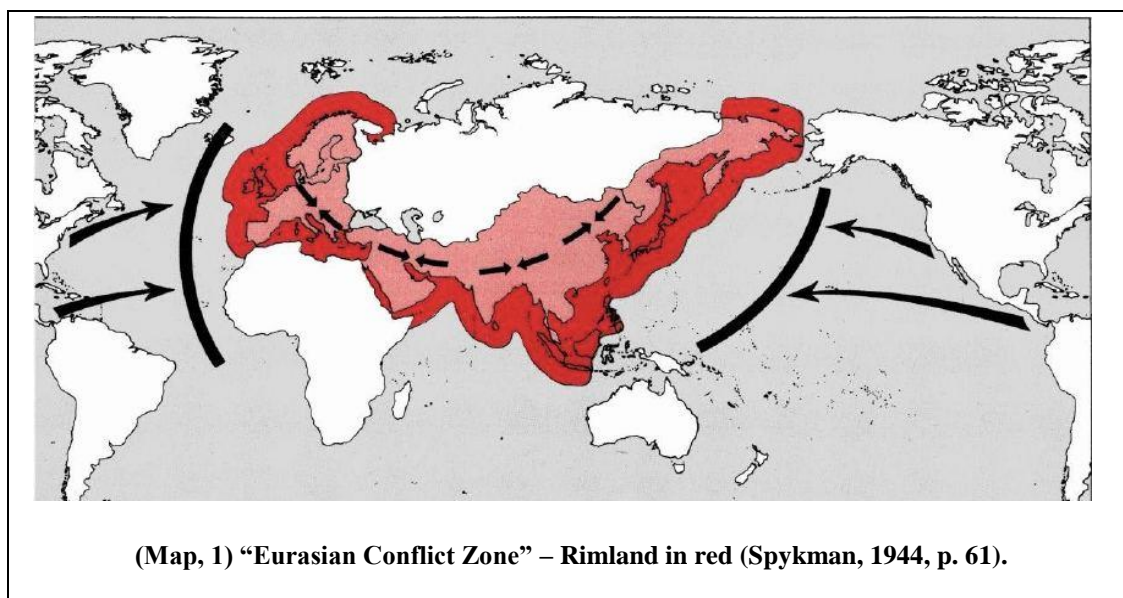
Moreover, the Nordic region reflects the competition between sea and land power, where they compete in classical geopolitical literature. It continues to stress its importance despite the emergence of modern theories, which genuinely explain the phenomena of conflicts in International Relations. However, these motives are encapsulated in different discourses.

The Nordic region appears in the Rimland theory of Nicholas Spykman (1944), the Rimland of the Earth, which reflects the Eurasian conflict zones; it may pose a buffer zone or a crush zone between land power and sea power, the significance of that "marginal ring", that ring of circumvallation which he called Rimland, as can be seen in (Map, 1), surrounding the land mass that constituted the essence of world power in the Mackinderian aspect of the heartland, an area whose control

would keep the power that dominated it isolated and unable to expand.

Consequently, it was not a question of controlling the heartland; it would be enough to encircle it. Spykman argued that geopolitical concerns and efforts should be directed at controlling Rimland; as he pointed out, whoever controls Rimland controls Eurasia, and whoever controls Eurasia controls the world's fate. (Herráez, 2021).

Hence, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO is underscored by maritime dominions like the U.S. and the United Kingdom, solidifying their presence as the concluding elements in Europe's Rimland. This is particularly significant given that the entirety of the Baltic Sea would transform into a NATO-dominated lake. All Eastern European states except Belarus align with NATO, indicating that the Rimland states collectively stand with NATO in opposition to Russia. Consequently, Russia, representing the Eurasian land power, is encircled and contained by NATO.



5.1. The Balance of Power in The Nordic Region:

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO with their advanced military capabilities and their vital geopolitical position on the borders of Russia, specifically Finland with a total of 1340 km borders with Russia, near the Kola peninsula, which is considered a tremendous strategic importance for Russia's military operations in the western Arctic region, due to its air and maritime capabilities which serve as a critical component for ensuring Russia's homeland defence, securing Arctic dominance, and projecting global power. (M.Melino, H. Conley, and J. Bermudez Jr. , 2020). Furthermore, the Swedish islands, with their significant coastline border with Kaliningrad oblast and their essential location, prospected to play a suffocating role in the navigation of the Russian fleet in the Baltic Sea. Indeed, the balance of power is in favour of NATO with the accession of the two Nordic states.

As structural realists believe, maintaining a reasonable balance of power between the parties is considered a preventer of wars or escalation. The power imbalance may generally lead to moves by the party that has become weaker to equalise this imbalance. Thus, the new situation leads to an escalation that may end in confrontations. (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 86-87).

In the light of the transition towards effective membership of Finland and Sweden in NATO, meaning the creation of military bases and the deployment of coalition forces on the lands of the two states will be matched by corresponding Russian measures, and until this moment, Russia did not move on the ground in front of the requests to join the two countries, but if the actual accession takes place, then it is assumed that the Russian military forces, especially the Eastern Military District Command, will intensify their presence to protect vital sites such as the significant city of St. Petersburg, the Kola Peninsula, and the Kaliningrad region, which is What the structural realist theory defines as the Kaliningrad Oblast,

which is what the structural Realism theory describes as the "security dilemma", which means the measures and countermeasures that states take against each other to enhance their national security, through calculations and counter-calculations, armament and deployment of forces, which is met by countermovement's, and all of this is occurred with an absence or a decrease in trust and uncertainty of intentions of the opposing parties, which exacerbates the difficulty of the situation and complicates the understanding of the movements of the other parties, any Swedish or Finnish move will be interpreted by Russia as intended by it and will be met with countermoves. This series of movements and countermoves will be reflected in the future of security in the Nordic region, the Baltic Sea and the relations between Russia and NATO.

As a result of these new geopolitical realities in the Nordic region, this study highlights the most crucial transformation as follows:

The most important geopolitical shifts appear in transforming the Baltic Sea into a closed lake for NATO (except for Kaliningrad Oblast for Russia), strengthening the alliance's power and the defence policy of NATO. Despite the new capabilities of NATO's centralisation in the Nordic region, contemporary issues in the geopolitical hotspots may emerge if the region moves towards a new arms race, with the security dilemma between NATO and Russia. The doubling of the joint land and sea borders between NATO and Russia will create a state of controversy that may make it difficult to predict the course of upcoming events.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, NATO shifted its strategic focus away from rotating temporary quick response forces around its eastern flanks that would need to be supplemented later with follow-on forces. At the Madrid Summit, NATO established a robust deterrence approach, focused on retaining a more significant and permanent military presence prepared and ready to oppose a Russian invasion of NATO territory. Members of the Alliance decided to boost forward deployed forces from battalions to brigades in Poland and the Baltics and Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. They also committed to increasing the number of combat soldiers under NATO command from 40,000 to 300,000, expanding air and naval forces, and investing in advanced defence technology and cyber security capabilities. (Dolan, 2023, p. 163).

Due to many transformations followed by the collapse of the USSR and the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, NATO forces could finally restrain Russia because the structural bipolar Cold War axis of counterbalancing had ended. During the Cold War, the West could not confine the USSR owing to its resistance entirely. However, it could now absorb other governments under NATO's control and transfer "military objects closer" to Russia's border. (Singh, 2023, p. 74).

In conclusion, NATO became preponderant in the balance of power in the Nordic region, especially after the accession of Finland and Sweden, their advanced military capabilities, and their essential geographical location. Thus, the imbalance of power and geopolitical shift may lead to an explosion of tensions between NATO and Russia.

5.2. The Future of NATO's Enlargement in The Nordic Region:

Considering this complex geopolitical landscape in the Nordic region and the complicated relationship between NATO and Russia, the phenomenon of NATO's enlargement in this region prospects to pass into one of three main scenarios, which are illustrated as follows:

5.2.1 The persistence of the *status quo*:

This study assumes that the continuation of the *status quo* is most likely in the short term, especially since, given the rationality of decision-makers on both sides, NATO and Russia. With the possession of nuclear weapons and mutual deterrence by NATO states and the other side, Russia with the massive nuclear arsenal, the accession of both states to NATO could exceed the Norwegian model, where Norway has been a fundamental member of NATO since 1949, with 195 kilometres of common land borders with Russia, NATO did not activate the membership of Norway for more than 73 years, and in the critical points of the Cold War. Furthermore, the two states will officially join the Alliance without establishing military bases. Without provoking Russia in its vital sphere, particularly in the Gulf of Finland and the border of the Kola peninsula, NATO's numbers and capabilities will increase. Still, the Nordic region will remain the same. Considering current global dynamics and various international factors, the proposed model offers valuable insights into the Ukrainian

war and Russia's involvement. By increasing pressure on the Russian administration, there is a possibility of bringing about a significant shift in Moscow's foreign policy approach. However, this shift could result in a broader range of hostile foreign policies towards other states rather than just a temporary reaction.

5.2.2 Enhancing Containment Policy:

This scenario assumes that the announcement of Finland and Sweden's NATO membership and the beginning of NATO military deployment in the Nordic Region would cause a significant shock to the Russian leadership, which is currently suffering in Ukraine, where it would be nearly impossible to deploy troops along its common Northwestern border with Finland. Instead of deploying in the Kaliningrad Oblast, which would have been a domestic crisis for Putin's administration, Ukraine was invaded to prevent it from joining NATO and maintaining its neutrality. Moreover, the expansion of Russia's shared border with NATO will occur due to Finland's participation. According to the balance of power, this new situation is in NATO's interest. It will inevitably restrict Russian interests in its vital centres, mainly if the movement of the Russian Baltic fleet is restricted and Russian navigation in the Baltic Sea with control of the Gulf of Finland and the centrality of the island of Gotland. This would be a security concern that strained Russia, which could lead to internal changes in Russia that result in the removal of President Vladimir Putin, alternatively for him to alter Russian foreign policy and end the Ukraine conflict, jeopardising the new NATO-Russian relations. This scenario depends primarily on changes to Russia's domestic policy for military action or force. As it advances, it may push towards a third scenario.

5.2.3 Exploding tensions and confrontation:

This scenario bears with it the seeds of a third world war since it is anticipated that the declaration of Finland and Sweden's full membership in NATO would result in an asymmetric balance of power in favour of NATO. This will lead to a realignment of Russian forces on the western borders, Baltic Sea, and Kaliningrad Oblast, establishing a new security dilemma to ensure military measures and countermeasures. This new security dilemma arises as a consequence of a lack of trust and scepticism about the intentions between Russia and NATO. The sequential crises will escalate in light of the mutual movement, where Russia could find its vital interest in danger, Saint Petersburg, Kaliningrad Oblast, and the Kola Peninsula; these three coasts reflect the geopolitical knot of Russia throughout history, which is to access to "the warm water", in that perspective Russia may enter in a deadly escalation to secure its vital interest. In addition, the enlargement of the common borders between the NATO member states and Russia will undoubtedly lead to a new pattern of interaction between the two parties, as the chances of skirmishes between the military forces will increase, raising the possibilities of intended or unintended military collision, with far-reaching consequences.

Conclusion:

As a result, this study reached several conclusions, which are the answers to the study questions, and the test of the validity of the hypothesis, which are:

- The accession of Finland and Sweden has several critical geopolitical implications, most notably that NATO has become preponderant in the balance of power in the Nordic region, especially when the advanced forces of Finland and Sweden are added to the total number of NATO forces, with the essential and distinguished geographical location of both states, and the Baltic sea has become like a closed lake for sea power led by NATO - except for the Kaliningrad Oblast -, and thus NATO's containment and encirclement of the Russian vital sphere has become complete approximately, where it helps NATO to encircle Russia's critical centres in the West and Baltic Sea and also balances Russian forces in the Arctic by activating the two-state membership, and this latest enlargement opens the door for accepting new members in the alliance.
- The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO represents a catastrophe and a fiasco for Russia's foreign policy, which has declared that its war in Ukraine since February 2022 is to prevent it from joining the alliance, resulting in Finland's -specifically- membership being compromised by common borders, reflecting the magnitude of the disaster that

Russia will endure as a result of such accession, as the border between Russia and NATO will double to approximately 2,500 km, which reflects the size of Russia's strategic disaster.

- Finland and Sweden have shifted from a tradition of historical neutrality and military non-alignment to a *Realpolitik* foreign policy due to increasing Russian threats in the region. This shift was inevitable, as Russia's war on Ukraine since February 2022 has eroded trust in its good neighbourliness.

- Despite the democratic policies held by Finland and Sweden within their domestic politics, a *Realpolitik* approach to foreign policy is the most appropriate for security and survival amidst an increasingly anarchic international system. This approach involves making decisions based on cost-benefit calculations and rational choices, highlighting the importance of the Realism paradigm in comprehending and forecasting various phenomena in foreign affairs analysis and international relations.

- The enlargement of the common borders between the NATO member states and Russia will undoubtedly lead to a new interaction pattern between the two parties, as the chances of skirmishes between the military forces will increase, raising the possibilities of intended or unintended military collision. However, in forecasting the future of NATO's enlargement in the Nordic region. The persistence of the *status quo* scenario is most likely in the short term, especially since a war-weary Russia, as a result of its involvement in the Ukraine conflict, will be unable to bolster the deployment of its military forces to balance the geopolitical realities in the Nordic region and Baltic Sea, and to ensure that NATO does not provoke Russia; "Norwegian model" approach to the membership of Finland and Sweden is the most successful model on the near future.

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