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俄烏戰爭後芬蘭選擇加入北約的決策分析

An Analysis of Finland's Decision to
Enter into NATO after the Ukraine War

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俄烏戰爭後芬蘭選擇加入北約的決策分析

An Analysis of Finland's Decision to Enter into NATO after
the Ukraine War

本論文係 陳樂鋒 君（學號：R10322030）在國立臺灣大學政
治學系完成之碩士學位論文，於民國 114 年 7 月 31 日承下列考
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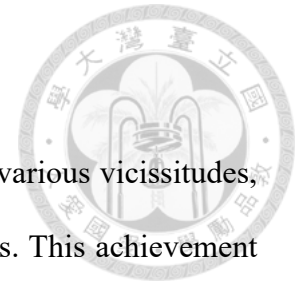
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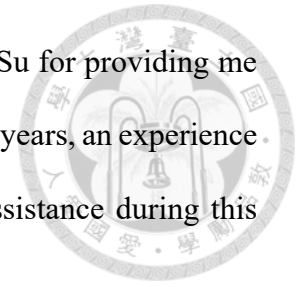
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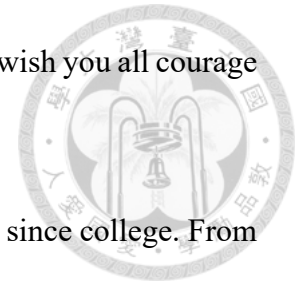


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I hereby declare that in the preparation of this thesis, I have utilised two generative AI tools, Perplexity and Consensus, to assist with the collection and organization of relevant data and literature, and grammar and vocabulary checking. Nonetheless, all data

presented in this thesis have been personally verified by myself, and the content has been
entirely written by me.



Sincerely,

CHAN Lok Fung, Desmond

11 August 2025

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在此聲明，本論文撰寫過程中使用了 Perplexity 及 Consensus 兩項生成式 AI 工具，協助進行資料與文獻的搜集和整理，以及文法與用詞檢查。然而，論文中所有資料均經本人親自核實，內容亦完全由本人撰寫。

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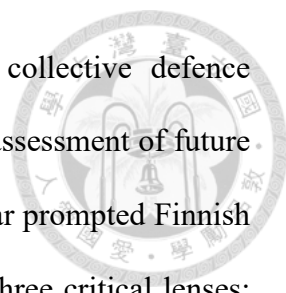
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Abstract

This thesis examines Finland's decision to abandon its longstanding policy of military non-alignment and join NATO following the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War. Through a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis grounded in Graham Allison's Rational Actor Model, this study investigates how the conflict fundamentally altered Finland's strategic calculus, leading to its rapid NATO accession within three months of the war's commencement.

The thesis employs a dual theoretical framework combining the Rational Actor Model with Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat Theory to explain Finland's unprecedented foreign policy transformation. Whilst the Rational Actor Model provides the analytical foundation for understanding Finland as a unitary decision-maker seeking to maximise national interests, the Balance of Threat Theory illuminates how Finland's perception of Russian aggressive intentions, rather than mere military capabilities, drove its alliance decision.

The analytical framework divides independent variables into cost-related factors and benefit-related factors. Cost-related variables primarily concern the likelihood of Russian military retaliation before Finland's formal NATO accession. The analysis reveals that Russia's military degradation in Ukraine—evidenced by unfulfilled war objectives, massive force reallocations from northern regions, substantial personnel and equipment losses, declining troop morale, and widespread mobilisation difficulties—significantly reduced the probability and severity of potential Russian reprisals against Finland, thereby lowering the relative costs of NATO membership.



Benefit-related variables focus on the value of NATO's collective defence guarantees under Article 5, which correlates directly with Finland's assessment of future Russian threats. The thesis demonstrates how the Russia-Ukraine War prompted Finnish decision-makers to reassess Russian aggressive intentions through three critical lenses: historical memory connecting the conflict to Finland's Winter War experience, Russia's intensified focus on Northern European regions, and the perceived escalation of Russian imperialism and expansionism under Putin's increasingly unpredictable leadership.

The research employs qualitative document analysis of Finnish government reports, parliamentary debates, official statements, and defence assessments. Comparison of Finland's 2021 and 2024 Defence Reports illustrates the transformation from military non-alignment emphasising autonomous defence capabilities to full NATO integration prioritising collective security guarantees.

Key findings demonstrate that Finland's NATO accession represented a rational strategic choice based on decreasing costs and increasing benefits. The thesis advances understanding of small state security decision-making under asymmetric power conditions and demonstrates how historical experience enhances rather than distorts rational threat assessment. It reveals that threat perception, particularly regarding aggressive intentions, proves more decisive in alliance formation than aggregate power calculations, offering insights for small states navigating complex geopolitical transformations in an era of great power competition.

Keywords: Finland, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Russia-Ukraine War, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Small State Security Studies, Balance of Threats Theory, Military Non-alignment

摘要

本碩士論文探討芬蘭在 2022 年俄烏戰爭爆發後，如何放棄其長期奉行的軍事不結盟政策並加入北大西洋公約組織（NATO）的決策過程。透過基於格雷厄姆·艾利森（Graham Allison）理性行為者模式（Rational Actor Model）的全面成本效益分析，本論文研究俄烏衝突如何根本性地改變了芬蘭的戰略考量，導致其在戰爭開始後三個月內迅速加入北約。

論文採用雙重理論框架，結合理性行為者模式與史蒂芬·沃爾特（Stephen Walt）的威脅平衡理論（Balance of Threat Theory），解釋芬蘭前所未有的外交政策轉變。理性行為者模式為理解芬蘭作為追求國家利益最大化的統一決策主體提供分析基礎，而威脅平衡理論則闡明芬蘭對俄羅斯侵略意圖（aggressive intentions）的認知，而非僅僅軍事能力，如何驅動其聯盟決策。

分析框架將自變量分為成本相關因素和效益相關因素。成本相關變量主要涉及芬蘭正式加入北約前俄羅斯軍事報復的可能性。分析顯示，俄羅斯在烏克蘭的軍事退化——體現在未能實現戰爭目標、從北方地區大規模調兵、人員裝備重大損失、部隊士氣低落，以及廣泛的動員困難——顯著降低了俄羅斯對芬蘭潛在報復的可能性和嚴重性，從而降低了北約成員資格的相對成本。

效益相關變量聚焦於北約第 5 條集體防禦保障的價值，這與芬蘭對未來俄羅斯威脅的評估直接相關。論文展示俄烏戰爭如何促使芬蘭決策者透過三個關鍵視角重新評估俄羅斯的侵略意圖：將衝突與芬蘭冬季戰爭經驗聯繫的歷史記憶、俄羅斯對北歐地區日益增強的關注，以及在普京日益不可預測領導下俄羅斯帝國主義和擴張主義的感知升級。

此論文採用質性文獻分析方法，檢視芬蘭政府報告、議會辯論、官方聲明和國防評估。比較芬蘭 2021 年和 2024 年國防報告顯示了從強調自主防衛能力的軍事不結盟政策向優先考慮集體安全保障的全面北約整合的轉變。

此論文表明，芬蘭的北約加入決定基於成本下降和效益增加，代表了理性的戰略選擇。本論文透過提升對不對稱權力條件下小國安全決策的理解，論述歷

史經驗如何增強而非扭曲理性威脅評估。論文更揭示威脅認知，特別是對侵略意圖的認知，在聯盟形成中比總體實力計算更具決定性，嘗試為小國在大國競爭時代應對複雜地緣政治變革提供了其見解。



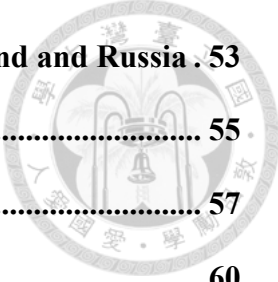
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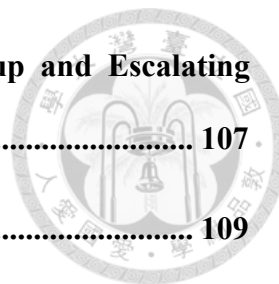
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Chapter 1 – Background

On 4 April 2023, Finland officially became the 31st member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (NATO, 2023b). Finland is now fully integrated into the military alliance's collective defensive system and covered by the "security guarantees" of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO, 2023c). Finland's decision to join NATO represented its abandonment of its long-lasting principle of "non-alignment" in handling foreign policies (Arter, 2023).

Finland's decision reflects the possible impact of the war in Ukraine on Europe's security architecture, prompting traditionally non-aligned states to reconsider their security arrangements. Examining how the Ukraine war shaped Finland's decision to end its policy of non-alignment and join NATO offers valuable insights into contemporary security dilemmas. Additionally, while NATO's collective-defence guarantee has long been available, Finland historically refrained from invoking it (NATO, 2023c). In the war's first ninety days—when the conflict's trajectory remained uncertain—Finland nonetheless expedited its accession proceedings (Arter, 2023). Investigating the factors influencing Finland's rapid wartime decision lies at the heart of this thesis. Furthermore, the mechanisms by which a country with a deep-rooted non-alignment tradition accelerated its domestic legislative and administrative processes to join NATO deserve scrutiny, offering guidance to other small states facing comparable regional upheavals.

1.1 The 2022 Russia-Ukraine War

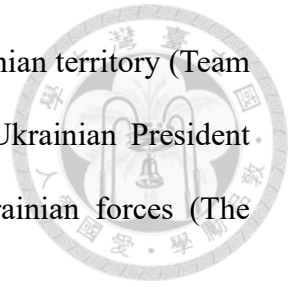
In late 2021, Russia started its military mobilisation and amassed nearly 100,000 to 190,000 troops along Ukraine's border in January 2022. Russian movements raised huge concerns from the West, even though Russia repeatedly denied any plans to invade Ukraine (Brown, 2022). The United States then held High-stakes diplomatic meetings with Ukraine and Russia separately (Marquardt & Hansler, 2021). In December 2021, Russia further demanded legally binding guarantees from NATO to end all military exercises in Eastern Europe and reject all membership applications from former Soviet states, including Ukraine. Russian demands were then dismissed by NATO and its members, including the United States (Reevell & Finnegan, 2022). The Russian troops then remained on standby along Ukraine's border. NATO and the United States then began to place forces in Eastern Europe, and the United States started to provide vital military assistance, including the United States-made Stinger surface-to-air missiles, to Ukraine (Bertrand et al., 2022).

Even the Ukrainian leadership denied Western allies' prediction of imminent war with Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the United States and its allies had ignored Russia's top security demand (BBC, 2022a; Toosi & Ward, 2022). Russia started to mobilise its largest number of troops since the end of the Cold War in Belarus for joint military exercises (Polonska, 2025). Putin called the troops mobilised as "peacekeepers" in the separatist-held territories (Kottasová et al., 2022).

In the early morning on 24th February 2022, following the message from Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia initiated a full-scale invasion of Ukraine after its previous annexation of Crimea in 2014 in the name of a "special military operation." The claimed objective of the "special military operation" was to "demilitarise and denazify"



Ukraine by ending a possible genocide of Russians within the Ukrainian territory (Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, 2022). The Ukrainian President Zelenskyy then declared martial law and began to mobilise Ukrainian forces (The Presidential Office of Ukraine, 2022).

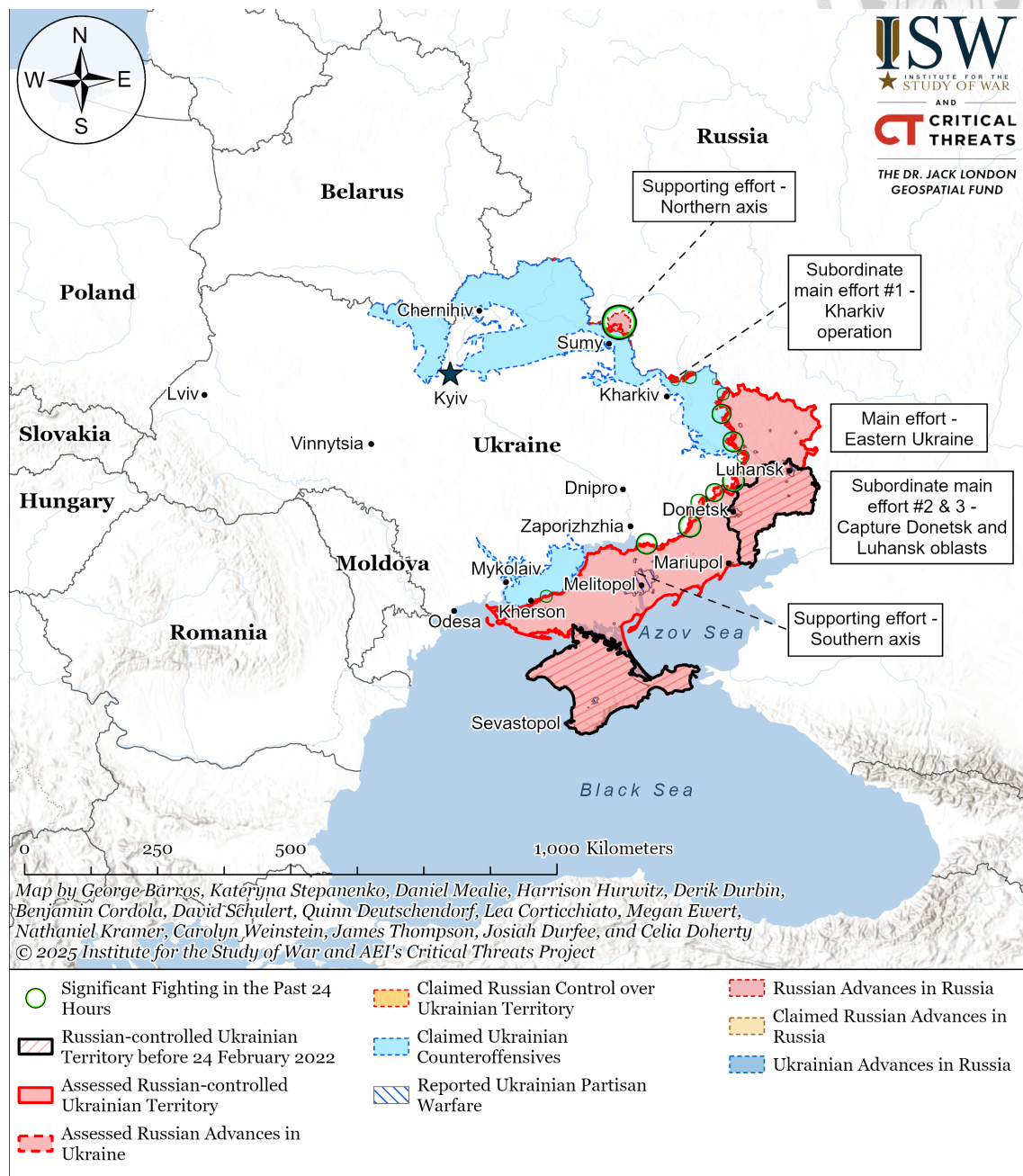


Russia had planned to capture Kyiv within a very short period, but it failed until 2025 (Inskeep et al., 2022). As of July 2025, Russia controls approximately 19% of Ukraine's total territory, consisting of both lands seized since the February 2022 full-scale invasion and areas occupied before 2022. Apart from Crimea and parts of Donbas that Russia had already annexed before 2022, it formally annexed four more Ukrainian oblasts after the 2022 military operations. Nonetheless, Russian forces made marginal gains in 2025, which only captured less than 1% of Ukrainian territory since January 2024 (Evans et al., 2025).

Russia and Ukraine both suffered severe military and civilian casualties during the war. According to a June 2025 Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report, the Russian army has suffered about 950,000 casualties, including approximately 250,000 soldiers killed and 700,000 soldiers wounded (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2025). On the other hand, Ukraine have had nearly 400,000 casualties with between 60,000 and 100,000 deaths (Edwards, 2025). Russian officials have reported that at least 621 Russian civilians have been killed and 3,217 have been wounded since the start of the war as of May 2025 (The Moscow Times, 2025). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as of July 2025, there are 47,735 total civilian casualties, consisting of 13,580 civilians killed and 34,155 injured (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2025).

Figure 1

Russian-Occupied Regions of Ukraine (as at 12 July 2025)



Note: This map shows areas under Russian occupation as of 12 July 2025. From *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, July 12, 2025*, by Angelica Evans, Jennie Olmsted, Olivia Gibson, Anna Harvey, Jessica Sobieski, and Frederick W. Kagan.

1.1.1 International Responses and Assistance

The 2022 Ukraine War has raised awareness from political leaders in Finland and other Western countries regarding a more challenging security environment and economic situation. Finland's former President Sali Niinistö advocates a "comprehensive security" model to deter possible Russian aggression (Niinistö, 2024). The incumbent Prime Minister of Finland, Petteri Orpo, also pledged significant increases in defence budgets (Helsinki Times, 2025). Before the Ukraine War started in 2022, Finland spent €4.49 billion on defence and then it spent €6.89 billion in 2023 after the war. Defence expenditure accounted for 1.67% of Finnish GDP in 2022 and surged to 2.46% in 2023 (Hackett & International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022, 2023). It aims to spend 3% of GDP in 2029 and then 5% of GDP in 2032 on the defence budget. It implies that Finland will spend a few billion euros more on defence (Helsinki Times, 2025).

Apart from military security, Finland and other European countries have contended with severe disruptions regarding their energy supply following years of partial dependence on Russian fuels. One of the immediate consequences of the war was a surge in energy costs, which led to significant fiscal strain and economic instability (Directorate-General for Energy, 2023). In response, politicians from Finland and other European countries started to put tremendous efforts into achieving energy independence as soon as possible, even though energy prices in Europe have retreated from their 2022 peaks (Huttunen, 2025).

Since the outbreak of the war, Finland, like other countries worldwide, has provided multifaceted support to Ukraine. Finland stands out as one of the most enthusiastic supporters. As of December 2024, the international community committed €399.8 billion in assistance to Ukraine, mainly financial and military aid (Policy and

Management Consulting Group, 2025). The United States committed €119 billion of the total assistance, while the European Union institutions contributed €162 billion. (Administration Team of the EU Delegation to the United States, 2025; Hutzler, 2025). While Finland has allocated about €3.7 billion in assistance to Ukraine, Finland's total aid to Ukraine represents approximately 1.05% of its gross domestic product (GDP). Finland ranked fifth among all countries supporting Ukraine when measured by percentage of GDP (Ferretti et al., 2025; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2025). By comparison, the United States has committed approximately 0.53-0.55% of its GDP (Ferretti et al., 2025).

1.1.2 Before Finnish NATO Application

Like other cases of NATO enlargement, Finland's decision to join the alliance has inevitably provoked opposition from Russia. Russia has consistently argued that NATO's expansion threatens its interests and national security. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov emphasised that Finland's NATO application "did not contribute to strengthening stability, security and predictability on the European continent". Peskov also warned that Moscow would "take countermeasures to ensure our own security both tactically and strategically," noting that these measures would unfold as "a process extended over time" (Eruygur, 2023).

Back in 2016, as recalled by the then Finnish President Sauli Niinistö during an interview in 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared, "When we look across the border now, we see a Finn on the other side. If Finland joins NATO, we will see an enemy" (Lokker & Hautala, 2023). Also, as discussed in the earlier passage, Russia has maintained its opposition to NATO enlargement. Throughout the diplomatic manoeuvring before the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia demanded commitments from NATO to cease its expansion policies. It can be readily anticipated that, regarding official rhetoric, Russia comprehensively articulated its opposition to Finland's NATO accession and issued threats concerning potential consequences (Reevell & Finnegan, 2022). Nevertheless, the Finnish government and parliament submitted their NATO membership application within roughly three months following the commencement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (NATO, 2022b).

Finnish leaders kept providing much support to Ukraine while they often related the future of the Ukraine war to the future of Europe and Finland's national security. The 46th Finnish prime minister, Sanna Marin (2019 - 2023), mentioned, "The only country

that is threatening Europe's security and openly waging a war of aggression is Russia" in May 2022 (Government Communications Department, 2022c). The incumbent 47th prime minister of Finland, Petteri Orpo, in the early time of still being the opposition leader of the Finnish parliament, stated that "... the European security changed" after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 (Orpo, 2022). Orpo reiterated his stance by saying, "We must help Ukraine win this war. The security of Ukraine and Europe is at stake" in the European Parliament in 2024 (Prime Minister's Office, 2024).

The 12th President of Finland, who served from 2012 to 2024, Sauli Niinistö, addressed that "The threat of war is growing at the borders of Ukraine, and Russia is challenging the foundations of European security" and "Even though there is no military threat against Finland, the situation also touches us deeply" (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2022). Then, the incumbent 13th Finnish President, Alexander Stubb, during his February 2025 Support Ukraine Summit address, pointed out that the war "... is not only about Ukraine, but this is also about Europe" (Office of the President of the Republic, 2025).

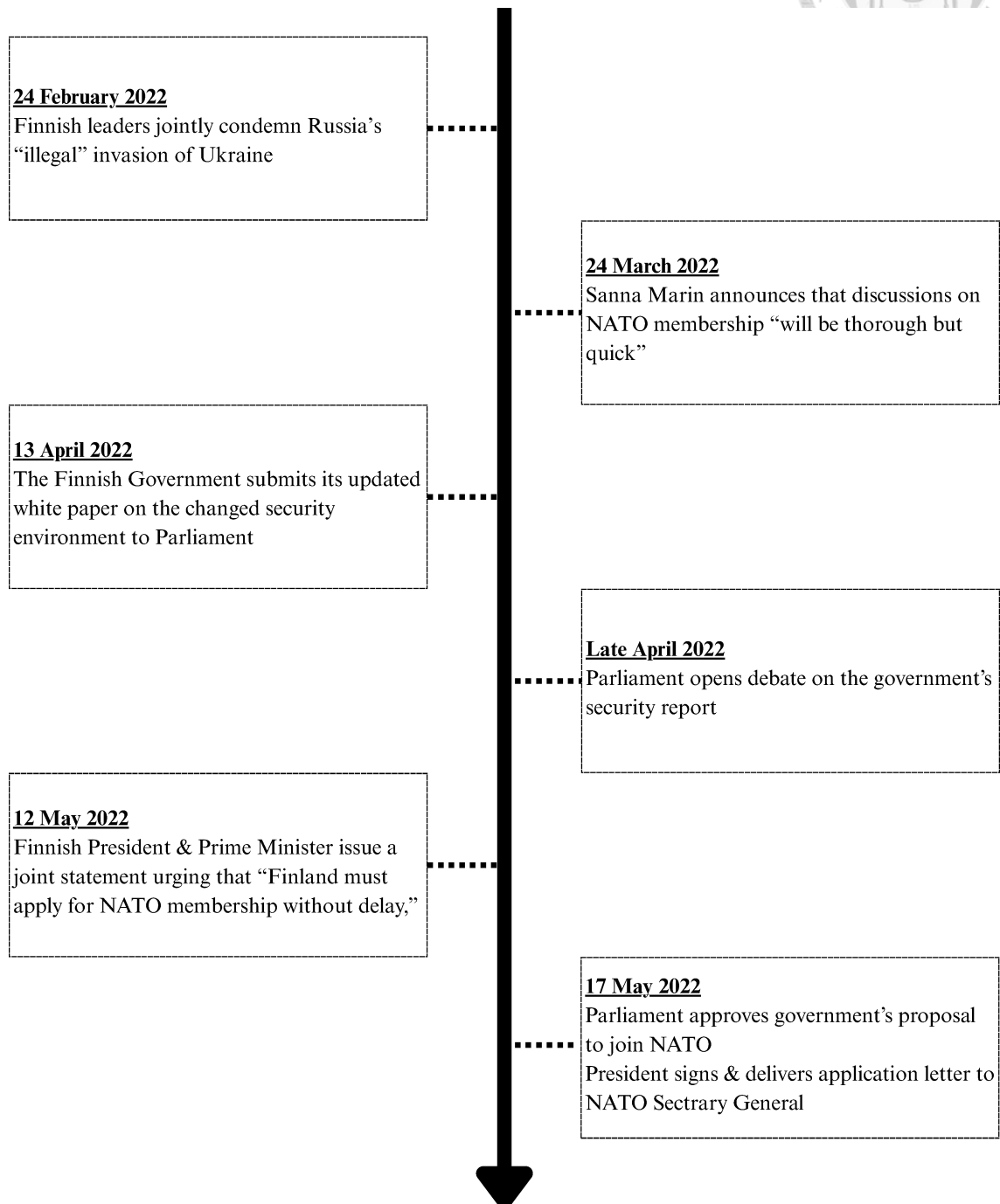
When Finnish politicians from various political spectrums perceived the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a significant sign of changing European and Finnish security environment, Finland decided to reverse its long-lasting principle of "neutrality" and then "non-alignment" in making foreign policies and embarked on the discussion and process of applying the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after the very beginning of Russian invasion in Ukraine (Arter, 2023).

Dating back to the Russian Empire, Finland has endured a persistent security threat emanating from Russia (Suchoples, 2023). Meanwhile, Russia has consistently

opposed NATO expansions over the recent decades. Moscow's shift in policy toward Ukraine and the subsequent invasions were in response to Ukraine's aspiration to join NATO (Reevell & Finnegan, 2022). Although Finland shares more than 1,300 km of frontier with Russia, it nevertheless opted to seek NATO accession despite the risk of Russian countermeasures - the decision-making process behind Finland's swift accession warrants further academic study (Kauranen, 2025).

Figure 2

Finland's Timeline: Post-Conflict to NATO Bid

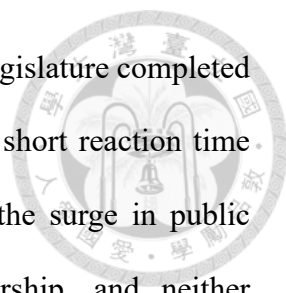


1.2 Research Questions

Three dimensions inherent in the background above will be explored in this thesis. Firstly, it will examine the evolving process of Finland's approach to managing national security from the Cold War era to the present day. Beginning in the former Soviet Union era, Russia's security threat, as perceived by Finland, did not end with the end of the Cold War. Still, it continued with Russia's ongoing aggressive activities in neighbouring regions, especially the 2008 Georgian military intervention and the 2014 Crimean annexation, before its 2022 invasion. These evolving processes prompted Finland's transformation from Finlandization (neutrality tradition) to non-alignment, and eventually to advocating collective defence, considering NATO application as the optimal decision for national interest maximisation.

It is noteworthy that under Russia's potent military threat since the imperial past, Finland had chosen principles of "neutralisation" and then "non-alignment" to prevent any possible escalating conflicts (Arter, 2023). These diplomatic principles were established on the premise that benefits from other countries' military guarantees could not effectively counter the high likelihood of Soviet or Russian backlash and retaliation. Consequently, one of the primary objectives of this study is to understand how Russia's aggressive 2022 invasion altered Finland's calculation that NATO accession would yield greater benefits while potentially incurring reduced costs.

Secondly, from a theoretical perspective, this thesis seeks to analyse Finnish decision-making calculus for evaluating external threats (specifically Russia) and formulating foreign-policy decisions. Existing literature on Finland's NATO accession often highlights shifts in public support and their significant influences, but rarely probes the decision's impact on Finland's national security and interests. After Russia's full-scale



invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Finnish government and legislature completed NATO membership discussions and decisions within a remarkably short reaction time and streamlined administrative process (NATO, 2022b). Notably, the surge in public support did not antecede government deliberations on membership, and neither presidential nor parliamentary records attribute their decisions to shifts in public opinion, instead emphasising post-accession benefits, the intensified security threat from ongoing warfare, and Russia's expansionist policies (Forsberg, 2024). Official reports by the then-president and prime minister concentrated on NATO accession's positive and negative implications for national security and interests (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022a). Furthermore, although officials repeatedly referenced the Russian threat, Finland has long monitored Russia's military posture and actions across Europe; that threat was persistent, and there was no sudden leap in Russia's military strength (Arter, 2023). Consequently, this research also aims to investigate Finland's threat-assessment mechanism concerning Russia.

Thirdly, this thesis examines how Finland's pathway to NATO membership offers insight into how states suffering from their main rivals' military preponderance address mounting geopolitical threats. When a powerful neighbour embarks on expansionist campaigns and instigates conflicts beyond its borders, the "smaller state" must reevaluate its strategic responses. As noted earlier, Finland – sharing a long border with a powerful neighbour – has treated geopolitical crises as perpetual national issues (Kauranen, 2025). Finland's responses have historically ranged from armed resistance to Finlandization, non-alignment, and multiple bilateral and multilateral partnerships to counter Russian aggression (Arter, 2023). In contrast to Russia's post-Soviet actions in Europe, such as

the 2014 annexation of Crimea, this study investigates how Finland identifies evolving geopolitical dynamics and adapts its strategic doctrines.



Accordingly, the research questions for this study include:

1. How did Russia's 2022 invasion reshape Finland's cost-benefit calculus to favour NATO accession?
2. How did Finland's threat-assessment mechanism under sustained Russian pressure shape its foreign-policy decision-making process?
3. What strategic factors did Finland consider when distinguishing Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine from previous aggressive actions?
4. When their powerful neighbour pursues expansionism, how do small states choose the most appropriate security strategies under geopolitical pressure, and what lessons does Finland's experience offer?

1.3 Research Significance

1.3.1 Finland's Adaptive Foreign Policy Evolution

This thesis traces Finland's remarkable capacity for strategic adaptation across different historical epochs, demonstrating how small states systematically recalibrate their foreign policy orientations in response to shifting Russian behaviour and intentions. From Finland's independence from the Russian Empire, through the traumatic experiences of the Winter War (1939-1940) and Continuation War (1941-1944), to the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) during the Cold War and subsequently military non-alignment in the post-Soviet era, Finland consistently developed sophisticated mechanisms for assessing Russian capabilities and intentions whilst maintaining strategic autonomy. The thesis reveals how Helsinki's policymakers employed the decision-making mechanisms for continuous threat evaluation, enabling timely but calculated responses to geopolitical transformations. This thesis demonstrates that Finland's 2022 NATO application might not be an abrupt departure from neutrality, but rather the culmination of decades of strategic learning and institutional development designed to respond to evolving Russian behaviour patterns.

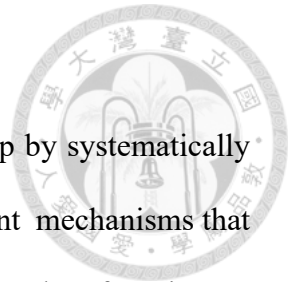


1.3.2 Theoretical Contributions to International Relations Scholarship

This thesis makes theoretical contributions to the “Rational Actor Model” in crisis decision-making by demonstrating how small states systematically evaluate costs, benefits, and strategic alternatives under severe time constraints and existential pressure. This thesis reveals how resource-constrained actors adapt theoretical frameworks to maximise strategic outcomes despite limited capabilities. More importantly, this thesis advances the “Balance of Threats Theory” by emphasising the critical importance of perceived aggressive intentions over the traditional focus on aggregate power, geographical proximity, or offensive capabilities. Whilst existing scholarship tends to privilege quantifiable military indicators, this thesis further demonstrates how a state’s assessment of adversarial intentions—derived from behavioural patterns, rhetorical signals, and historical precedents—often proves more decisive in strategic decision-making than raw capability assessments. The analysis shows how Finland’s evaluation of Russian intentions regarding Ukraine provided crucial insights into Moscow’s broader revisionist agenda, ultimately proving more influential in Helsinki’s NATO decision than just calculations of military balance or geographical vulnerabilities.

1.3.3 Filling Critical Gaps in Small State Security Studies

This thesis addresses a gap in small state security scholarship by systematically examining how states develop and operationalise threat assessment mechanisms that translate international events into strategic policy adjustments. Rather than focusing on survival strategies, this study reveals the decision-making mechanisms through which small states evaluate adversarial intentions and update their strategic calculations accordingly. The analysis demonstrates how Finland employed the analytical mechanism for assessing Russian behaviour patterns, enabling policymakers to update its diplomatic and security policies. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to understanding how small states draw connections between relatively distant international events and their own security environments. The study shows how Finnish analysts used Russia's conduct in Ukraine to reassess Moscow's long-term intentions towards Finland, revealing how states extrapolate from third-party conflicts to evaluate threats to their own security. This contributes to the theoretical understanding of how states process information about adversarial capabilities and intentions, and how international events serve as revealing indicators of great power strategic behaviour.

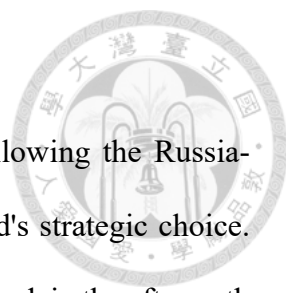


1.3.4 Historical Experience and Foreign Policy Analysis

This thesis extends analytical frameworks for understanding how historical considerations shape strategic decision-making processes, emphasising the policy relevance of historical memory in contemporary security choices. It demonstrates how Finland's extensive historical experience with Russia created sophisticated analytical frameworks for assessing Russian intentions and capabilities. The legacy of the Winter War, Continuation War, and subsequent Finlandisation provided Finnish policymakers with institutional knowledge and pattern recognition capabilities that enhanced rather than distorted rational strategic calculation. It reveals how historical experience enabled Finnish analysts to identify early warning indicators of Russian revisionist behaviour, drawing parallels between contemporary Russian actions and historical precedents whilst maintaining analytical rigour. It contributes to understanding how states develop security expertise in assessing particular adversaries, creating institutional advantages in threat evaluation that complement rather than compete with rational analysis. This thesis shows how Finland's historical encounters with Russia generated valuable intelligence regarding Moscow's strategic behaviour patterns, enabling a more accurate assessment of Russian intentions during the Ukraine crisis than would have been possible through purely contemporary analysis.



1.4 Theoretical Framework



This thesis focuses on Finland's decision to join NATO following the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, examining the cost-benefit analysis of Finland's strategic choice. More specifically, this thesis will concentrate on examining how Finland, in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, re-evaluated and recalibrated the relative benefits and costs of 'pursuing NATO membership at present' vis-à-vis its former stance of preserving the 'NATO Option' whilst remaining outside the alliance. The central question is whether the benefits of NATO accession increased for Finland post-war, or whether the variables and costs underpinning Finland's previous policy of non-alignment were reduced. The decision-makers of Finland's diplomatic policies, encompassing the then-president, prime minister, and members of parliament, have explicitly connected the NATO membership decision to considerations of national security and interests.

As Finnish politicians from both government and opposition, alongside official documentation, have consistently referenced the NATO membership decision as conducive to national interests and security, this thesis proposes that this significant transformation of foreign strategy and policy was genuinely regarded as the preferable policy alternative from Finland's standpoint, indicating that political leaders of the time considered that retaining the "NATO Option" without accession no longer represented the option that would yield greater national security and interests for Finland. Therefore, this thesis will employ Model I (Rational Actor Model) from Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow's 'Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis' as its principal analytical framework.

According to the Rational Actor Model, it conceptualises the state as a unitary decision-making entity that rationally weighs objectives, possible options, and outcomes

to determine actions. Under this model, government behaviour is interpreted as a calculated process designed to maximise state utility, distinct from outcomes driven by bureaucratic procedures or domestic political bargaining. Following the assessment of available information, identification of national goals, viable options, and their respective costs and benefits, rational actors make choices that best align with their interests (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

By applying the Rational Actor Model mentioned above, Finland made its optimal decisions, and attempted to maximise its national security and interests following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war. In this thesis, the primary analysis will focus on the criteria Finland applied when deciding to “apply for immediate NATO membership” following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, explaining the variables Finland assessed and evaluated before selecting its ultimate foreign-policy decision to maximise its own utility. Put differently, this thesis emphasises Finland’s decision-making process—viewing it as a mechanism aimed at maximising national interests—rather than the mechanics of how that decision-making framework was formed.

When calculating the costs and benefits of NATO membership again shortly after the Russo-Ukraine War, one factor that could not be ignored, and was consistently mentioned by Finnish politicians at the time, was the military threat posed by Russia. To elaborate, in terms of military capabilities, Russia’s military strength has undoubtedly exceeded Finland’s by a considerable margin even since the imperial era. Despite this enduring disparity in military capacity between the two countries, Finland has historically pursued a variety of different diplomatic strategies. The differences in nominal military power alone cannot adequately measure Russia’s threat to Finland or Finland’s subsequent responses. Therefore, within the main analytical framework, if we try to define the threat

Russia poses to Finland, and considering that Finland acted as a proactive actor in the decision and action to “join NATO,” how Finland evaluates the threat Russia poses requires further investigation.



As noted above, despite enduring military gap with Russia, this thesis seeks to draw upon the “Balance of Threats” theory, focusing on Finland’s reassessment of the Russian threat. This thesis is then examining how Finland’s evaluation of external threats or offensive intentions, and the availability of reliable alliances, varied over time, and how these shifts precipitated a significant change in its diplomatic strategy within a remarkably short period.

The “Balance of Threats” theory builds upon Kenneth Waltz’s neorealist “Balance of Power” theory while emphasising the difference between power and threat. The alliance behaviour of states is determined by the threats they perceive, rather than purely by the distribution of power (Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979). More specifically, a power but status quo state may be less threatening than a weaker but aggressive one. It helps explain the reasons of why alliance formations not always following pure power balancing logic. States tend to unite against the most threatening actors, the more common response pattern known as “balancing”, while very weak states tend to choose “bandwagoning” (Walt, 1987).

Walt identifies four principal indicators that shape one state’s perception of another’s threat: aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive capabilities and aggressive intentions (Walt, 1987). The fact that Russia and Finland share a border exceeding one thousand kilometres means that proximity itself constitutes a persisting threat. Whether Russia’s aggregate power and offensive capability displayed during the

Russia-Ukraine war caused Finland to change its assessment deserves an in-depth study. As for aggressive intentions, Walt suggests that states exhibiting “extremely dangerous ambitions” and “likely to provoke others to balance against them” are perceived as most threatening; in other words, any state viewed as seeking to overthrow or dominate others should engender widespread opposition (Walt, 1987).

Walt posits that threat perception differs from simple capability evaluation because foreign-policy choices hinge on “what states intend to do” rather than “what they can do”. Walt argues that “perceptions of intent are likely to play an especially crucial role in alliance choices.” In discussing Cold War alliances in the Middle East, he argues that one must analyse how these states ‘perceived’ US and Soviet intentions, guiding them to ally with the power perceived as ‘least aggressive’ (Walt, 1987). This involves a relatively more subjective assessment of another state’s intentions: decision-makers observe actions, rhetoric or policy directions and infer intentions—essentially asking “what observers (the decision-making states) believe that the state intends to do”.

Walt supports this with the 1907 Eyre Crowe memorandum, where Britain declared it would offer ‘determined opposition at the first sign of British or allied interests being adversely affected’ despite not opposing German development; here the “sign” highlights the weight of perceived intentions over capabilities. In the case of Nazi Germany, he further argues that “changing perceptions of German aims helped create the Triple Entente”, referring to the World War II alliance of Britain, France and the Soviet Union (Walt, 1987). These examples underscore not only the importance of assessing perceived aggressive intentions but also the relatively dynamic nature of such perceptions over time.

Despite the persistent power disparity between Finland and Russia, Finland has historically chosen diverse strategies. This thesis will apply the Balance of Threats theory to investigate Finland's updated perception of Russia's aggressive intentions. It will explore how Finland, observing events on the other side of Europe after the Russia-Ukraine war began, reassessed Russia's aggressive intentions, thereby illuminating why Finland applied for NATO membership within three months. Put differently, the thesis examines Finland's foreign-policy shift by tracing its dynamic threat assessments and subsequent alliance decisions.

1.5 Research Framework

The following research framework is established in this thesis, which examines how the Russia-Ukraine war motivated Finland to apply for NATO membership. Overall, this study's dependent variable (DV) is Finland's strategy toward Russia, specifically, whether to join NATO based on practical outcomes. The independent variable (IV) consists of Finland's various observational indicators from the Russia-Ukraine war, analysing both cost and benefit components of potential policy alternatives through the Rational Actor Model framework.

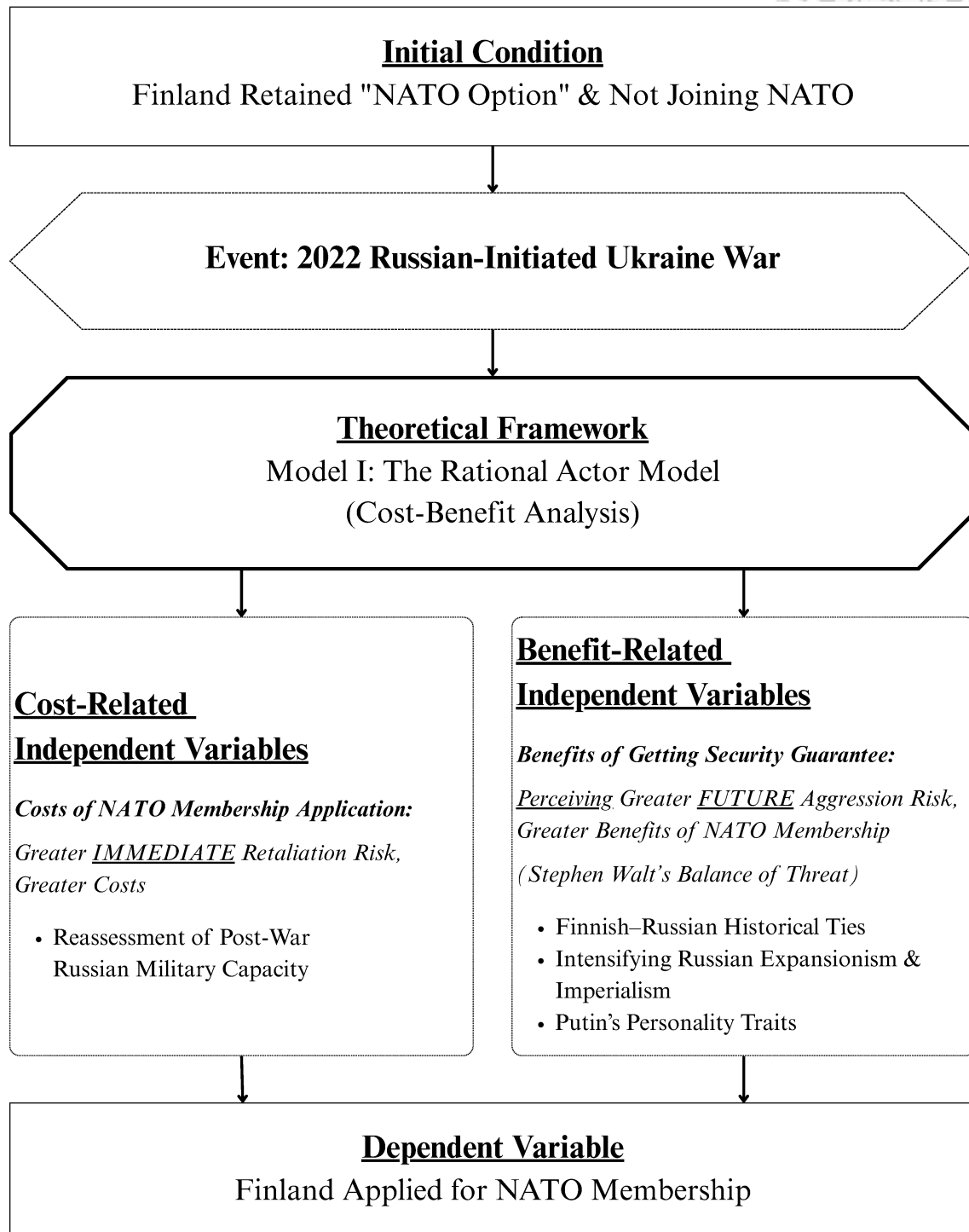
The cost-related independent variables primarily concern the assessed possibility and impact of Russian retaliation that Finland might face during its application period and formal NATO accession. In other words, it refers to Finland's re-evaluation of Russian military capacity after the invasion but before Finland granted formal NATO membership. It can also be interpreted by 1) Russia's capacity to terminate the Ukrainian conflict and establish strategic advantage within a compressed timeframe (prior to Finland's completed NATO accession); and 2) Russia's present actual military capabilities (whether sufficient for concurrent military operations against both Ukraine and Finland). Put differently, this part explores how Finland, observing Russia's initial wartime attrition and force redeployments, critically evaluated whether Russia's real combat capability matched its nominal or previously anticipated strength. These wartime assessments allowed Finland to temper its expectations of potential Russian retaliation following NATO membership, suggesting that the threat might be less acute than conventionally assumed.

Meanwhile, the benefit-related independent variables primarily concern the benefits Finland would gain from Article 5's collective defence guarantees after joining

NATO. The extent of benefits that collective defence guarantees could bring to Finland is positively correlated with the assumed possibility of Russian aggression against Finland after Finland formally joins NATO (NATO, 2023c). Beyond the persistent military power gap between Russia and Finland, this thesis primarily investigates 1) how the Russia-Ukraine war allows Finland to connect with its historical memories concerning Russia; 2) how the Russia-Ukraine war allows Finland to perceive and derive that Russia has strengthened its imperialism and expansionism; and 3) how Finland reassesses Putin's volatile personality traits. Therefore, these are organised into the following framework diagram presented below.

Figure 3

Research Framework



1.6 Research Methods

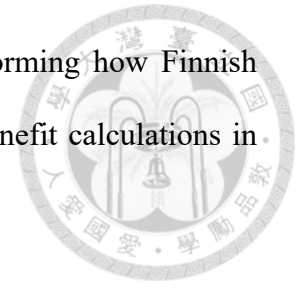
This thesis adopts a qualitative approach, employing document analysis as the primary research method to examine how the Russia-Ukraine war influenced Finland's decision to apply for NATO membership (Altheide et al., 2008). Drawing on the pre-defined independent variables mentioned in the previous section (cost-related variables and benefit-related variables), the research utilises documental analysis to trace shifts in cost-benefit assessment among Finnish decision-makers and their European counterparts. How they updated their assessment on Russian threats after the war would also be investigated.

The primary sources of data and information are drawn from four primary categories of textual materials, each contributing distinct perspectives on Finland's NATO accession decision-making process. First, Finnish primary documents constitute the core data source, encompassing official speeches, press releases, and parliamentary debates delivered by key decision-makers, including the President, Prime Minister, and relevant committee chairs, after the Russia-Ukraine war began. These materials are also supplemented by key reports published by the Finnish government regarding its relations with Russia.

Second, a comprehensive collection of European and Western leadership statements, including public interviews, joint communiqués, parliamentary records from prominent NATO and EU member states, and institutional communications from the European Councils, would be reviewed too.

Third, academic and think-tank analyses, publications, and reports of Russian military capabilities before and especially after 2022 offer critical insights into changes

in Russia's force posture and operational behaviours, thereby informing how Finnish decision-makers recalibrated their threat reassessments and cost-benefit calculations in favour of alliance membership.



Finally, to ensure contextual richness and capture the broader discourse surrounding Finland's strategic transformation, the analysis incorporates media transcripts and interviews archived by major Finnish, European, and international news outlets, providing additional layers of interpretation and public commentary on the decision-making process.

By applying the documental analysis within this structured research framework, this thesis seeks to conduct a detailed investigation into how Finland, and by extension other smaller states, calculate the costs and benefits of strategic choices under acute geopolitical pressures. The methodology's emphasis on textual interpretation and thematic dissection provides the analytical depth necessary to understand the complex decision-making processes underlying Finland's historic strategic transformation.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Current State of Scholarship on Finland's NATO Accession

Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the following Finnish application for NATO membership, there have been several scholars writing regarding this issue. However, many were not focusing on the reasons for the Finnish decision on the membership application. Since Finland has been working closely with NATO since the end of the Cold War, a certain proportion of academic papers focused on “predicting” the impacts if Finland finally joined NATO as a formal member. This included Finland's possible contribution to those regions (Ålander, 2023; Bowman et al., 2022; Bremmer, 2022; Herman, 2025; Ojanen, 2022; Pesu & Iso-Markku, 2022). The other scholars studied the possible response from Russia, the United States, and other Western countries. They discussed the future of the Nordic, Arctic, Baltic, and European security and corresponding dynamics (Coffey, 2022, 2023a, 2023b; Conley & Arts, 2023; Dobbins, 2022; Guenther & Musgrave, 2022). After Finland submitted its application, some scholars started investigating the opposition from Hungary and Turkey. They discussed the reasons for their blocks and their roles in the alliance in the future (Ashford et al., 2023; Bağbaşıoğlu, 2023; Hyde et al., 2022; Kali, 2023; Kenar, 2024; Kimmage, 2022; Levin, 2023; Siebens & Droin, 2023; Tuncer, 2022; Ünlühisarcıklı & Svensson, 2022; Wall & Wegge, 2023; Zagorodnyuk, 2023).



2.1.1 Public Opinion-Centred Studies

Many scholars have focused on surging public support for membership applications when studying Finland's determination to join NATO. Sebastian Glassner and Annalena Fuchschuber applied post-structuralist discourse theory to explain the relationship between increasing public support for NATO membership applications and Finland's actual application. They argued that foreign policy must be discursively legitimised in liberal democracies like Finland, enabling swift decisions when elite and public opinions align (Glassner & Fuchshuber, 2023). However, one problem remains unresolved; while the authors identified the Ukraine War as a reality shock that surged Finnish public support, they failed to elaborate why Finland, including both politicians and the public, perceived different threat levels from Russia compared to previous Russian military actions in the same region, ultimately deciding to support formal NATO membership.

Tuomas Forsberg emphasised the importance of rising public support in facilitating the final NATO membership decision, arguing that the decision was driven from the bottom of society, particularly in liberal democratic societies, prompting governmental officials to make corresponding policy changes based on shifting public opinion. Nonetheless, Forsberg also mentioned the importance of considering realist factors, noting the impact of Finnish historical experience on NATO application decisions without further elaboration or empirical proof. He suggested that realist considerations should play a more important role in Finnish leaders' decision-making than rising public support, with increasing polls eliminating the "excuse" of low public support previously used by Finnish politicians to reject applications (Forsberg, 2023a, 2023b, 2024). However, the author did not focus on explaining how realist factors, Finnish threat

assessments from Russia and the “more important” variables for NATO membership application developed and led to Finland’s decision to apply, which would provide more benefits than costs to Finnish national interests.



2.1.2 Process-Focused and Institutional Studies

Some scholars investigated increasing poll support for formal NATO membership, studying different sub-groups regarding their social and economic backgrounds and the depolarising political stance toward supporting Finnish NATO membership through internet discussions. However, these scholars concentrated more on the composition of changing public support for NATO membership rather than on how variables contributed to the final decision (Weckman, 2023; Xia et al., 2024). Yannick Lahti and Emilia Palonen studied how the Finns Party, Finland's right-wing populist party, played a relatively more active role in facilitating NATO membership applications and condemning Russian behaviour in the Ukraine war compared to other European parties in similar political spectrum positions (Lahti & Palonen, 2023).

Vesa Koskimaa and Tapio Raunio noted that domestic institutions would be depolarised under radical change, enabling several Finnish political parties to achieve strong institutional coordination in a fragmented political environment, thereby enabling significant policy change, applying for formal NATO membership (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2024). Nevertheless, the reason why joining the alliance immediately was evaluated by Finnish elites as beneficial to Finnish national interests requires further empirical research. Only the process of facilitating Finland's final decision was discussed, rather than studying the decision's underlying reasons.

2.1.3 Realist Security-Focused Studies

Other scholars have focused on the realist perspective, analysing Finland's NATO application decision. Katherine Kjellström Elgin and Alexander Lanoszka mentioned why formalised alliances would be formed and needed, suggesting more assured security guarantees as a potential reason for Finland's alliance membership. However, they also noted that Finland enjoyed close NATO relationships similar to those of formal alliance members even before membership (Elgin & Lanoszka, 2023). Consequently, the reasons Finland sought "more security guarantees" despite deep NATO cooperation require further explanation, with potential NATO membership costs remaining unmentioned.

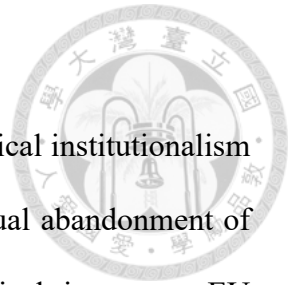


2.1.4 Shelter-Seeking and Small State Studies

Thorhallsson, Thomas Stude Vidal, and Yeliz Kulalı Martin elaborated on applying continuous shelter-seeking strategies to Finland's formal NATO membership decision. They acknowledged that small states like Finland seek shelter when they are more prone to crises. After the Cold War, Finland found different Western states, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, and their affiliated regional and international organisations, including the European Union, Euro-Atlantic Council, and Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) (Kulalı Martin, 2024; Thorhallsson & Stude Vidal, 2023). Baldur Thorhallsson and Thomas Stude Vidal argued that Finland's formal NATO membership application might not represent a radical option (Thorhallsson & Stude Vidal, 2023). Although these two papers, grounded in the Shelter Theory, map the ways in which relatively weaker states, including Finland and other Nordic nations, periodically adopt various social, economic, political and security shelters, they offer only limited insight into the underlying decision-making processes. Notably, why Finland chose, in the wake of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian conflict, to move from the European Union's soft-security shelter to the hard-security shelter of NATO remains underexamined and warrants deeper inquiry (Kulalı Martin, 2024; Thorhallsson & Stude Vidal, 2023).

2.1.5 Historical Institutional and Geopolitical Perspectives

Yang provides a significant contribution by employing historical institutionalism and geopolitical frameworks to explain Sweden and Finland's gradual abandonment of neutrality policies. Yang's analysis demonstrates how three critical junctures, EU accession in 1995, the Crimean crisis in 2014, and the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, created sequential path dependencies that progressively undermined neutrality policies through self-reinforcing mechanisms and positive feedback processes (Yang, 2024). However, Yang's historical institutionalist approach contains several analytical gaps, including an inadequate explanation of strategic continuity under prolonged Russian pressure. Finland chose to remain "neutral" under tremendous pressure from the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and then loosened the principle to "military non-alignment" after the Soviet Union's collapse. When Russia started the war in Ukraine, Finland could have had an opportunity to revise its stance and strategy to a more "neutral" one, but it applied for NATO membership eventually. In addition, there is insufficient analysis of the transition from "neutrality" to "non-alignment", and the absence of a detailed analysis regarding how Finland's evaluation of the Russian military capabilities and aggressive intentions evolved between 2014 and 2022.



2.1.6 Economic and Option Theory Studies

Vesa Kanninen attempted to use option pricing theory and cost-benefit analysis to explain Finland's NATO decision, mentioning that when Finland assessed increased uncertainty regarding its security environment, greater benefits would emerge from exercising the option: a formal NATO membership application. He argues that heightened uncertainty about Finland's security environment raised the value of exercising the 'membership option,' and that the risk of Russian retaliation constituted the primary cost. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, according to Kanninen, Moscow's military focus on Ukraine diminished its capacity to retaliate against Finland, thereby lowering that cost and encouraging accession. He further maintains that changes in Finnish public opinion merely hastened or delayed membership rather than altering the country's underlying decision, yet paradoxically devotes much of his paper to tracking opinion-poll dynamics. In contrast, his account of the benefits Finland gains from NATO's collective-defence guarantee remains limited to an unchanged, long-term alliance framework, without analysing why those benefits have become especially appealing to Finland. Although he concludes that public-opinion effects on Finland's ultimate decision are marginal, the paper focuses heavily on modelling shifts in domestic sentiment, leaving insufficient attention to the empirical validation and detailed role of each modelled variable in Finland's broader foreign-policy calculus (Kanninen, 2022).

2.2 Intended Dialogues with the Existing Literature

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that only limited scholarly work focuses on why Finland decided to join NATO during such a specific and compressed timeframe. In addition, no comprehensive study has attempted to provide a complete analysis of Finnish threat reassessment and subsequent calculations regarding the potentially rising benefits and declining costs of formal NATO membership. Furthermore, the existing literature fails to address why Finland's strategic environment assessment in 2022 represented a qualitative departure from previous Russian actions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014), both of which prompted incremental NATO approximation without triggering membership applications.

To summarise, the existing literature regarding the reasons for Finland's application for NATO membership did not fully address the complete mechanism for evaluating its corresponding benefits and costs. First, no current literature elaborates on Finland's reevaluation of Russian military capacity after the 2022 Ukraine War. Second, while many scholars attribute Finland's decisions to rising public support for membership, Finnish politicians seldom consider this the reason for joining the alliance. Third, instead of simply fortifying deterrence against Russia, Finland's perception of Russian threats and evaluation of Russian intentions after the Ukraine War are missing from the literature and will therefore be examined in this thesis.

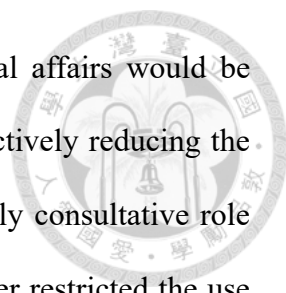
Chapter 3 – Finland’s Strategic Evolution before the 2022 Invasion



3.1 Finland’s Historical Ties with Russia

Russian threats have constituted one of Finland’s most significant security concerns throughout its modern history, fundamentally shaping Finnish foreign policy decision-making from its inception as an autonomous entity (Arter, 2023). Following Russia’s territorial acquisition of Finnish lands from the Kingdom of Sweden during the Finnish War of 1808-1809, the Grand Duchy of Finland was established in 1809 within the Russian Empire (‘Finland’, 1910). Despite enjoying considerable autonomy, the development of Finnish national identity was further accelerated during this period (Finnish Government, n.d.).

Following the establishment of the Grand Duchy of Finland, the Finnish population remained generally satisfied with their considerable autonomy and “quasi-independent” status within the Russian Empire (O’Neill et al., 2019). The Grand Duchy enjoyed an independent parliament, legal system, administrative structure, and even military organisation, with only foreign policy remaining under the direct control of the Russian Tsar. However, as Finland began to develop its distinct national consciousness, coinciding with the rise of democratic movements across the European continent in the late 19th century, the Russian Empire perceived this as a threat to its autonomy (Alapuro, 2019). Simultaneously, domestic Russian nationalism and Pan Slavism were gaining momentum within the empire, prompting the implementation of Russification policies across various grand duchies, including Finland, to strengthen centralised control (Alapuro, 2019; Harju, 2020; Musynske, 2009; Saari, 1944).

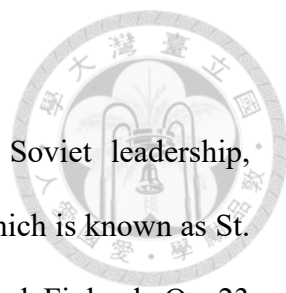


The February Manifesto of 1899 stipulated that all imperial affairs would be determined by the Russian State Council or Russian ministers, effectively reducing the parliament of Finland from its previous legislative status to a merely consultative role (Jussila, 1984; Saari, 1944). The Language Manifesto of 1900 further restricted the use of Finnish and Swedish languages in Finland, establishing Russian as the official administrative language (Kurunmäki & Liikanen, 2017). Subsequently, several Finnish government officials were replaced by Russian appointees to enhance Russian administrative and personnel control over Finland (Jussila, 1984). The Army Law of 1901 replaced the Conscription Act of 1878, which provided for Finnish local military forces, requiring all Finnish men to serve in the regular Russian army. These measures by the Russian Empire were designed not only to suppress the rise of Finnish nationalism but also to guard against Germany's growing regional influence at the time. However, they inevitably provoked strong Finnish resentment (Solsten & Meditz, 1988).

The Finnish population experienced acute dissatisfaction under a series of Russification policies, whilst the Russian Empire's domestic politics concurrently encountered severe difficulties, encompassing various socialist movements within both Russia and Finland (Solsten & Meditz, 1988). Certain Finns initiated resistance to the Russification policies from their outset, pursuing independence from the Russian Empire. Some individuals secured assistance from Germany, consequently creating an ongoing rivalry between Germany and the Russian socialist movements for influence and control within the Finnish independence movement (Alenius, 2024). The Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership formally obtained power in Russia in November 1917. During the 1918 Finnish War of Independence, Germany successfully supported Finland in defeating the Soviet-backed "Red Guards" independence movement, resulting in successful

independence and the formal declaration of sovereignty. Finland subsequently severed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, though frontier demarcation issues between the two nations persisted. Following Juho Kusti Paasikivi's diplomatic mission to Petrograd in 1918 and subsequent diplomatic exchanges, Finland and Soviet Russia signed the Treaty of Tartu in 1920, whereby Soviet Russia relinquished claims to Finland and ceded the ice-free Arctic port of Petsamo in exchange for Finnish neutrality during the Russian Civil War (Solsten & Meditz, 1988).

3.2 The Winter War and the Continuation War



Finnish independence presented a strategic challenge to Soviet leadership, resulting in the loss of a crucial buffer zone protecting Leningrad, which is known as St. Petersburg nowadays, prompting Soviet territorial ambitions toward Finland. On 23 August 1939, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was signed—its clandestine protocol conceding Finland, Estonia and Latvia to the Soviet sphere of influence. Having first consolidated control over the Baltic states, the Soviet Union then demanded territorial and frontier concessions from Finland to secure more advantageous positions (Solsten & Meditz, 1988). Finland's refusal was met with the Shelling of Mainila on 26 November 1939 (Yle News, 2009). In his 1970 memoirs, Nikita Khrushchev later cast doubt on the official account, revealing that intercepted telephone reports had shown Soviet guns firing first and that Finnish forces had merely returned fire; he concluded that, both legally and morally, the Soviet assault could only be justified as an act to safeguard the USSR's own interests and security (Khrushchev, 1971). The Winter War (1939-1940) erupted four days afterwards. Soviet setbacks in this conflict drove Finland into alignment with Nazi Germany, its sole remaining partner, with the aim of regaining lost lands and igniting the Continuation War (1941-1944) (Solsten & Meditz, 1988).

However, the Soviet Union failed to achieve complete Finnish subjugation. The primary factor was that the Finnish forces, with merely 250,000 troops, inflicted disproportionately severe casualties upon the Soviet military during the Winter War (Shvangiradze, 2023). The situation did not improve in the subsequent Continuation War either. Consequently, although both Finland and the Soviet Union sustained significant personnel losses and economic damage, the war ultimately concluded with the Moscow Armistice in September 1944. Finland ceded the Karelia Isthmus, Ladoga Karelia, the

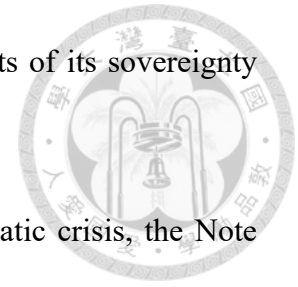
Salla region, Petsamo, and several islands in the Gulf of Finland, which collectively represented approximately 10% of pre-war Finland's territorial area. The Soviet Union simultaneously secured a fifty-year lease on the Porkkala Peninsula. Additionally, Finland was required to pay \$300 million in the form of goods within six years, legalise the domestic Communist Party, and proscribe political parties deemed fascist by the Soviet Union (Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, 1944; Solsten & Meditz, 1988).

3.3 Finlandisation

Following Finland's successful defence of its independence, the country signed the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) with the Soviet Union on 6 April 1948 in Moscow. Article 1 of this bilateral treaty established the framework for joint defence against potential German or German-allied aggression. Article 4 simultaneously constrained both nations from joining alliances directed against each other, a policy framework that became known as "Finlandisation" and formed the cornerstone of Finnish neutrality. Under the FCMA regime, Finland was compelled to consider Soviet interests when formulating foreign and domestic policies, thereby institutionalising Soviet influence over Finnish decision-making processes (Aunesluoma & Rainio-Niemi, 2016). Nonetheless, Article 3 allowed Finland to engage in UN-compliant peacekeeping missions, thereby providing Finland with continued opportunities for international participation (*The Agreement of Friendship, Coöperation, and Mutual Assistance*, 1948).

Notably, in the aftermath of the conflict, Russia (then the Soviet Union) represented an unmistakable security threat to Finland, driven by its clear European ambitions and expansionism. Having engaged the Soviet Union militarily and suffered defeat, Finland subsequently entered into a treaty that implemented Finlandisation and preserved its neutral status. Another noteworthy point is that when Finland signed the FCMA with the Soviet Union in 1948, NATO had not yet been formally established. Consequently, Finland had no possibility of NATO membership, particularly given that the treaty was signed after the war (NATO, 2022c). As Danish scholar Hans Mouritzen termed Finlandisation, "adaptive politics," in contrast to a fully puppet state, Finland

voluntarily makes strategic concessions to preserve critical elements of its sovereignty (Mouritzen, 1988).



During this period, Finland encountered its greatest diplomatic crisis, the Note Crisis of 1961. The Soviet government suddenly delivered a diplomatic note to Finland, claiming that West Germany's military expansion and NATO member states (Denmark and Norway) posed a potential military threat to the Soviet Union through Finland, and demanded military consultations with Finland under Article 2 of the FCMA. Finland's active neutrality principle faced a severe challenge, with the possibility that Soviet military forces entering Finland could damage Finland's independent status. This compelled the then-serving Finnish President Urho Kekkonen to return home prematurely from his visit to the United States, whereupon he dissolved the Finnish Parliament and personally travelled to Novosibirsk to placate Soviet authorities. The crisis was resolved three days later, and Kekkonen's personal prestige was consequently enhanced (Penttilä, 1991). This crisis not only demonstrated Soviet influence over Finland at the time but also revealed Finland's efforts to maintain national security and sovereignty through actively maintaining a "neutral" course and flexible diplomacy.

3.4 From Neutrality to Non-alignment

Finland's shift from neutrality to non-alignment represented a fundamental transformation in its foreign policy, occurring primarily and shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 led Finland to fundamentally reassess its diplomatic strategy and its corresponding policies. In January 1992, Finland and Russia formally cancelled the FCMA treaty, marking the end of the legal framework that had constrained Finland's foreign policy and prevented it from joining Western organisations and alliances since the Cold War had begun (Kansikas, 2019). In March 1992, Finland's official neutrality doctrine was formally superseded by the conceptual framework of "military non-alignment during the peacetime," coinciding with its submission of the European Community membership application (Uutela, 2025). A more flexible approach that accommodated deeper ties with the institutions from the West while deliberately avoiding firm military commitments that might provoke Russian reactions.

"Non-alignment" could be identified as the loosened version of the previous "Finlandisation" and "Neutrality". "Finlandisation" required Finland's impartiality in all international conflicts, and Finland was required to make mandated consultation with the Soviet Union on foreign policy matters. Moreover, Finland was not permitted to join and participate in most of the organisations and alliances from the West, which the Soviet Union opposed. On the other hand, "non-alignment" refers to Finland's maintenance of not joining any military alliance, while also indicating its freedom and authority to participate in numerous other international organisations and cooperation frameworks (Pesu, 2017). This provided Finland with opportunities to join other international organisations and further engage in European integration, while also alleviating other EU

countries' concerns about potential contradictions between Finland's original "neutrality" principle and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Ojanen, 2000). Another noteworthy point is that although Finland committed to remaining outside military alliances, this did not mean Finland rejected all military cooperation activities beyond joining military alliances. Consequently, Finland opened military cooperation with other countries and military alliances without formally joining them (Arter, 2023).

In 2006, Finland further passed its government's 2005 amendment bill, expanding its definition of "peacekeeping missions". Therefore, although Finland still wished to nominally maintain participation only in military missions and cooperation at the "peacekeeping" level, it also expanded this to include "Crisis Management" affairs. During the previous "Finlandisation" period, Finland could only participate in peacekeeping missions approved by the United Nations Security Council. However, after the amendment, Finland could participate in peace missions defined by other organisations, such as the European Union, after authorisation by its parliament. It could even participate in "Peace Enforcement" missions (referring to missions that use force without the consent of warring parties to restore international security or peace), which more precisely met the requirements for participating in the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Kuutamo, 2023).

Table 1*Comparing Finlandisation and Military Non-Alignment*

	Finlandisation (Neutrality)	Military Non-alignment
Origin	Treaty of FCMA with the Soviet; Ending the Continuation War	Diplomatic Statement; Self-Defined Scope
Time	Cold War	Post-Cold War; After the Soviet's Collapse
Constraints	Soviet's Veto over Finnish Foreign Policy	Self-imposed Constraints on Military Alliance Membership
Flexibility	Lower	Higher; Joining the European Union
Military Development	Severely Constrained	Intensive Cooperation with the European Union and NATO; Military Independence
Strategic Stance	Actively Neutral between the Soviet and the West	Closer Relations with the West; Accommodating Russia

3.5 Structured Partnership with NATO

Since the Soviet Union's collapse, Finland has pursued the "NATO option", remaining open to the alliance's membership without formally applying (Ålander, 2023; Vanhanen, 2022). In January 1994, at the Brussels Summit, Finland joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, replacing its Cold War policy of strict neutrality with a stance of military non-alignment (Pyykönen, 2016). Finland then crafted a bespoke collaboration agenda under PfP, including participation in the Planning and Review Process (PARP) from 1995, which enhanced interoperability with Allied forces. In 1997, Finland further institutionalised dialogue by joining the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), integrating into NATO's regular political and security consultations (NATO, 2025b).

After the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, Finland hosted Exercise Uusimaa 2008 under NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), deepening crisis-management cooperation (NATO, 2008; Yle News, 2008). Following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, Finland signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Host Nation Support (HNS), standardising procedures to receive allied assistance. It became an enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP) at the Wales Summit, gaining earlier access to exercise planning and high-level policy dialogue (Government Communications Department, 2014; NATO, 2014, 2024a). Through these incremental steps, PfP, PARP, EAPC, HNS, and EOP, Finland methodically transformed its security neutrality to a tailored, robust partnership with NATO in response to each Russian action in Europe while remaining the principle of "military non-alignment", at least nominally (NATO, 2024c).

3.6 Finland's Pathway to NATO

On 24 February 2022, at the outset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, then Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin announced that Finland would reopen debates on NATO membership even in the absence of any "immediate military threat" (Yle News, 2022b). After that, despite explicit warnings from the Russian Foreign Ministry, domestic support for a parliamentary debate surged, resulting in over 700,000 petition signatures in favour of examining NATO accession (Paúl, 2022; Simpson, 2022). On 13 April, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs published an updated security assessment, concluding that Finland's preparedness was insufficient for the evolving threat landscape (Foreign Ministry of Finland, 2022). Prior to the parliamentary debate on 20 April, Marin urged swift parliamentary action on membership (Yle News, 2022c).

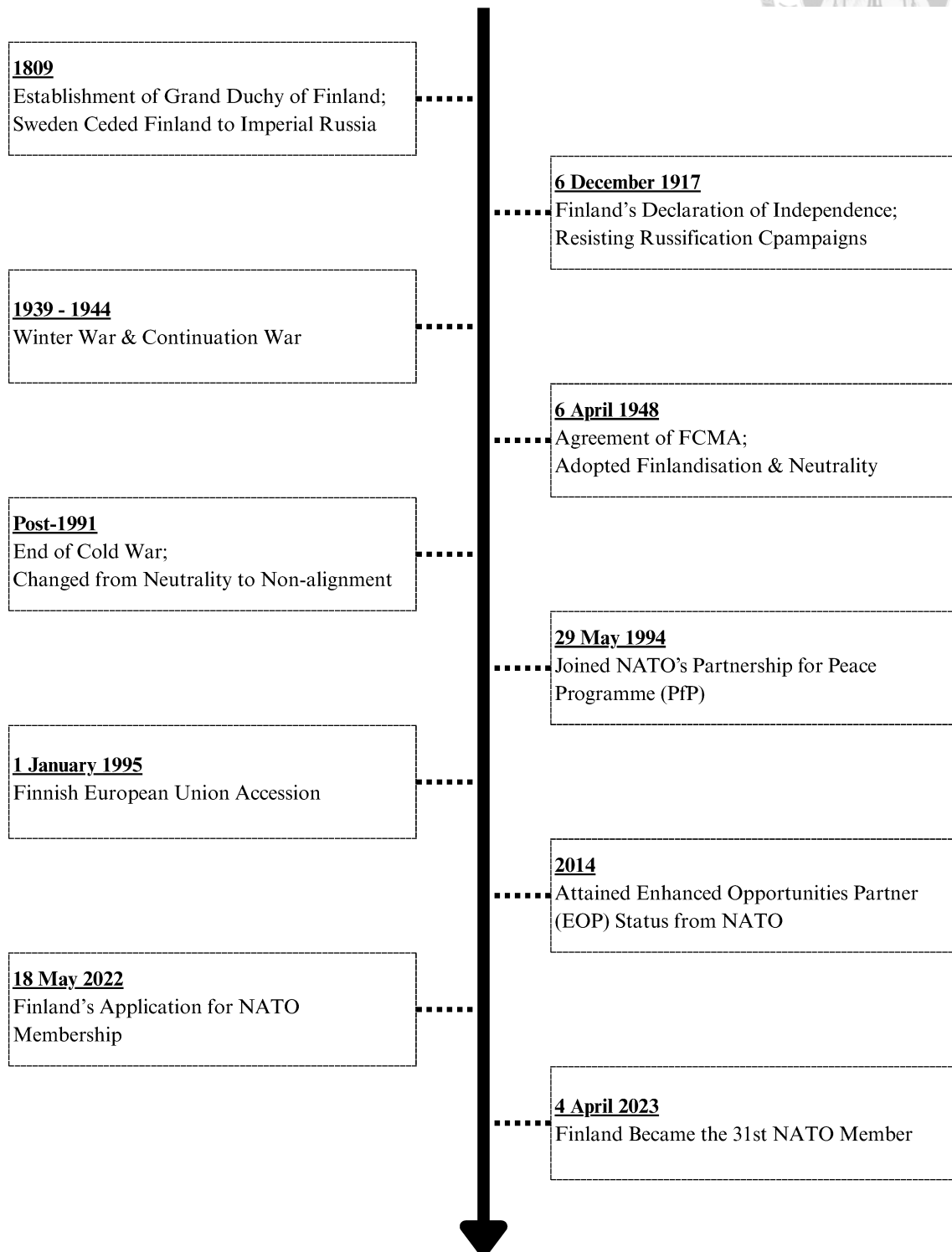
On 15 May 2022, the then-serving Finnish President Sauli Niinistö and then-serving Prime Minister Marin jointly declared that Finland would apply for NATO membership "as soon as possible" (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland & Prime Minister's Office, 2022). That same day, the government endorsed its NATO application report, and a supermajority of 188 out of 200 MPs across party lines voted in favour (Isoaho et al., 2022). Finland formally submitted its accession protocol on 17 May 2022. Invited by NATO on 5 July 2022, Finland overcame initial objections from Hungary and Turkey to become the Alliance's 31st member on 3 April 2023 (Bayer, 2023; Foreign Ministry of Finland, 2023).

3.7 Summary: Continuity through Adaptation

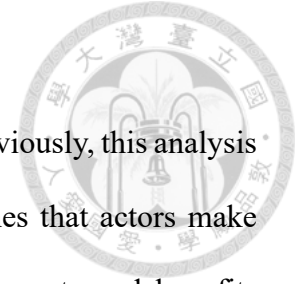
In this chapter, it can be observed that Finland has maintained comparable approaches in its foreign and security policy formulation from the past to the present, consistently facing various threats from Russia while necessitating strategic adaptability based on international conditions and the level of Russian threat. From the Grand Duchy of Finland under the Russian Empire, through wartime struggles for sovereignty, autonomy, and independence, Finlandisation and “neutrality”, “military non-alignment”, from limited NATO cooperation to formal NATO membership, Finland has displayed flexible calculations and varied diplomatic decisions across different eras to protect national security and interests. Continual responsiveness and ongoing reassessment of international situations and Russian threats have allowed Finland to overcome successive crises, achieving greater degrees of autonomy and independence while maintaining its sovereignty. Finland’s present decision to apply for and successfully obtain NATO membership following the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war undoubtedly represents another major transformation in diplomatic principles. The following chapter will conduct further analysis of the decision-making processes underlying Finland’s choice.

Figure 4

Finland's Diplomatic Milestones: From Tsarist Rule to NATO



Chapter 4 – Cost-Benefit Analysis



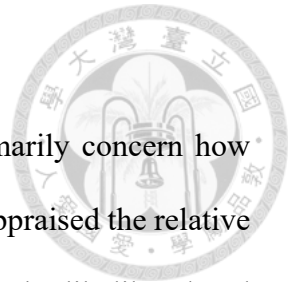
Based on the theoretical and research framework outlined previously, this analysis builds upon Graham Allison's Rational Actor Model, which assumes that actors make decisions aimed at maximising national interests after calculating costs and benefits (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). In this research, the actors are Finnish foreign policy decision-makers, including the then-President, Prime Minister, Cabinet members, and parliamentarians, while their ultimate decision, the dependent variable of this study, was to abandon the principle of "military non-alignment", further balance against Russia, and immediately join NATO.

This chapter analyses the various independent variables within this framework, including cost-related independent variables that assess whether Russia's military capabilities at the time were sufficient to launch substantial, large-scale retaliation against Finland. The less capable Russia was, the higher the costs of Finnish NATO membership would be.

Meanwhile, the benefit-related independent variables concern the relative gains from collective defence guarantees after joining NATO, which positively correlate with the assessment of Russia's future aggressive intentions. The greater Russia's future expansionist intentions, the higher the relative benefits of obtaining NATO's collective defence protection.

4.1 Cost-Related Independent Variables

Regarding the cost-related independent variables, these primarily concern how Finland, in the short interval after the Russia-Ukraine war began, reappraised the relative costs of ‘applying for NATO membership’. This analysis centres on the likelihood and severity of potential Russian military retaliation before Finland’s formal accession. It examines two main observations: first, whether Russia possessed sufficient capability to conclude the war in Ukraine swiftly and successfully; and second, a reassessment of Russia’s actual military capacity based on wartime performance. Factors include Russia’s military objectives and progress, losses and reallocation of forces, and whether Finnish politicians perceived Russian power to be as formidable as pre-war estimates suggested. If, during Finland’s application process, Russia’s ability to retaliate against Finland became implausible—or if any retaliation would prove less effective than anticipated, as evidenced by Russia’s setbacks in Ukraine—then the probability and severity of Russian retaliation would decline. Consequently, the relative cost of applying for NATO membership would fall, thus prompting Finland’s significant shift in foreign-policy decision-making.

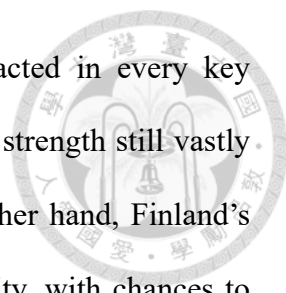


4.1.1 Pre- and Post-War Military Capacity in Finland and Russia

In this part, according to the annual reports of “Military Balance” published by The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the relevant information regarding the military capacities of both Russia and Finland before and after the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War will be investigated (Hackett & International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022, 2023). The changes in Finland’s relative cost of NATO membership application shortly after the war will then be studied.

Even after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, a pronounced military asymmetry has persisted between Russia and Finland. In 2022, Finland fielded approximately 19,250 active troops and 238,000 reservists, whereas Russia maintained roughly 900,000 active personnel, over forty times Finland’s figure, and about 2 million reservists, nearly ten times as many. The disparity in equipment was equally stark. Finland possessed 212 infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) and 613 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), while Russia deployed nearly 20,000 IFVs and a comparable number of APCs. Russian preeminence extended to artillery, where it outnumbered Finnish systems by a wide margin (Hackett & International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022).

In the air domain, Russia operated almost twenty times Finland’s combat-aircraft inventory and fielded more than 500 attack helicopters, whereas Finland had none. Naval power exhibited similar lopsidedness. Russia’s fleet included over fifty submarines, while Finland had no sub-surface capability (Hackett & International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022). Fiscal indicators reinforced this gap. Russia continued allocating more than 5% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defence, translating into a budget more than ten times larger than Finland’s, which marginally exceeded 2% instead (Nan et al., 2024).



To summarise, even though Russia's ground forces contracted in every key category during the opening phase of the war in Ukraine, its armed strength still vastly surpasses Finland's, maintaining a significant advantage. On the other hand, Finland's military strength remained stable in numbers but improved in quality, with chances to procure new artillery and increase its defence spending afterwards. Undoubtedly, the gap in absolute numbers remains vast, but Russia's adequate combat power and readiness have been degraded, while Finland's resilience and modernisation have increased (Hackett & International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022, 2023). However, this situation has still led Finland to systematically re-calculate Russia's military power—especially its substantial capacity to project force in the Arctic and Baltic areas affecting Finland and neighbouring nations—and to incorporate these revised estimates into its strategic appraisal of the costs and benefits associated with joining NATO. Crucially, even in the event of major Russian military action against Finland during its NATO accession, Finland would then remain more skeptical about the actual extent of potential damage such action could inflict.

4.1.2 Unfulfilled Russian War Goals

Although Russia's military strength continues to maintain a substantial gap with Finland on paper, various signs from the early stages of its war with Ukraine have already raised public doubts about whether its "massive military capabilities" are as formidable as initially perceived. As mentioned earlier, Russia hoped to end the war quickly before the conflict began, believing that Ukraine would rapidly collapse under the unexpected assault. According to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Russian military planners anticipated completing their war objectives within 10 days before the conflict. Some scholars and military experts further indicate that Russia only prepared three days' worth of supplies when the war commenced, demonstrating extreme confidence in its military capabilities and strategy (Zabrotsky et al., 2022).

However, actual events contradicted Russian expectations. Even by early March 2022, Russia faced enormous difficulties in achieving its "encircling Kyiv" objective (Lieven, 2022). Think tanks and scholars such as the AL Jazeera Centre for Studies suggest this was related to pre-war miscalculations, with Russia confronting material supply shortages then (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2022b; Chupryna, 2023; Solchanyk, 2023). In contrast, logistics for transporting supplies encountered significant difficulties (BBC, 2022b; Martin et al., 2023; Rai, 2022).

Naturally, the original goal of rapidly capturing Kyiv quickly failed, forcing Russia to shift its battle front to the Donbas and other southern regions of Ukraine. This strategic adjustment was evident in the large-scale withdrawal of Russian forces from Kyiv Oblast in April 2022 (Loh, 2022; Seyler, 2022). Later, in June, Russian President Putin also acknowledged that Russian forces had once been "very close to encircling"

Kyiv, but Russia had “no intention of storming” the city (NBC News, 2024; Ukraine Today, 2024).

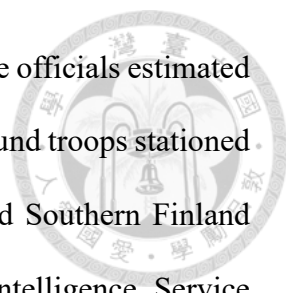
From the data above, it can be observed that Russia’s objective of achieving a swift victory over Ukraine undeniably failed. At the same time, strategic goals were indeed repeatedly modified even in the early stages of the war. This not only raises questions about Russia’s actual military and combat capabilities but also demonstrates its inability to launch a quick, decisive military operation. What applies to Ukraine may equally apply to Finland. At a minimum, regarding the costs of Finland joining NATO, the probability or intensity of facing actual Russian military retaliation during the “window period” before formal alliance membership would be smaller than pre-war expectations. Put differently, in addition to the diminished probability of Russian reprisals before Finland’s formal NATO accession, attributable to Russia’s missteps and unmet objectives in Ukraine, there is a possibility that Russia would commit comparable errors in any military action against Finland, thereby accelerating Finland’s decision to join the alliance.

4.1.3 Reallocation of Russian Forces

Since the Russia-Ukraine war eventually turned protracted, which had been far from Russian expectations, it then required massive troop deployments and significant military force reallocation from the country's other territories, especially from the North, including the Arctic, Nordic and Baltic regions. In other words, operational exhaustion from the prolonged war with Ukraine has forced Russia to reconfigure its military posture in historically fortified border regions.

This subsection first explores Russia's force posture prior to the Ukraine crisis. In 2021, Russia's total military personnel reached roughly 900,000, with about 149,000 deployed in Crimea and on the Ukrainian border, according to Ukraine's defence minister, including 30,000 stationed in Crimea alongside pro-Russian separatist elements of Ukrainian origin (Brown, 2022; Hackett & International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022). On the eve of the invasion, Russian troop concentrations on the Ukrainian border were estimated at 190,000, while the combined Baltic and High North commands fielded only about 50,000—tasked with Arctic, Nordic and Baltic Sea responsibilities (Baker, 2022a; Sergunin & Konyshchev, 2015; Wills, 2023; Żyła, 2019). Despite Ukraine's active force of nearly 200,000—tenfold Finland's—and similar nominal defence spending, Finland outspent Ukraine in 2021 (Hackett & International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022). Ukraine's resilience against Russia's initial offensive caused a shift to prolonged warfare and Western aid. Consequently, Finland could reasonably reassess whether Russia, still embroiled in a stalemate, could mount a powerful reprisal against Finland as once feared.

After the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war began, regarding the Arctic and Northern Fleet Forces of Russia, it was reported that as much as 80% of Russian land forces stationed in



the High North were sent to Ukraine (Nilsen, 2023). European defence officials estimated that by late 2022, only about 6,000 of the original 30,000 Russian ground troops stationed in Kaliningrad and the Baltic region facing the Baltic countries and Southern Finland remained in place (Gramer & Detsch, 2022). The Norwegian Intelligence Service confirmed that land forces on the Kola Peninsula were reduced to only one-fifth of their original strength. Key Arctic Military Units, including the 200th Separate Motor Rifle Brigade, the 61st Separate Guards Naval Infantry Brigade and the 80th Arctic Motor Rifle Brigade, had departed for military missions in Ukraine. Nonetheless, personnel and troops among all these brigades eventually suffered enormous losses and deaths in Ukraine. The Northern Fleet also contributed significant naval assets, including two Ropucha-class landing ships, “Olenegorskiy” and “Georgiy Pobedonosets,” plus the Ivan Gren-class “Pyotr Morgunov,” which sailed from the Kola Peninsula to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Nilsen, 2023).

On the other hand, the Kaliningrad region, Russia’s Baltic exclave, experienced substantial troop withdrawals too. Lithuanian then-serving Defence Minister Laurynas Kasčiūnas confirmed that Russia had withdrawn significant numbers of troops from Kaliningrad to deploy them in Ukraine to counter Ukraine’s Kursk offensive (The New Voice of Ukraine, 2024). Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski echoed and stated that Russia had pulled the majority of troops from Kaliningrad for redeployment elsewhere (Zoria, 2025).

During the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia redeployed forces and weapon systems from various regions to the Ukraine theatre, revealing both its inability to meet its initial war objectives in the short term and the insufficiency of the troops and equipment initially positioned for Eastern Europe defence (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2022b; Chupryna,

2023; Lieven, 2022; Solchanyk, 2023). Consequently, Finland recognised that, even if Moscow wished to retaliate militarily against Finland, its northern forces had weakened to the point where a rapid strike was unlikely (Nilsen, 2023). Moreover, with Russia's forces tied down in a protracted struggle against Ukraine, mounting a substantial counterattack on Finland would become increasingly complex. Even if Russia were to mount a military response to Finland's decision to join NATO, Finland would inevitably revise downward its estimates of the operation's severity and force. As the feasibility of Russian retaliation diminished, so too did the anticipated costs to Finland of applying for NATO membership, thereby enhancing Finland's incentive to join the alliance.

4.1.4 Russian Arms and Soldier Losses

Another factor revealed during the early stages of the Russia-Ukraine war was the discrepancy between Russia's actual military and combat capabilities and previous estimates. Even in the initial phase of the conflict, beyond the aforementioned failures of Russia's early war goals and the necessity to reallocate troops and weapons from other regions to the Ukrainian battlefield, observers noted the significant personnel casualties and weapon losses Russia faced already during the war's opening period. Particularly during the first two months of the war, coinciding with Finland's foreign policy deliberations, Russia experienced its most considerable casualties and equipment attrition since the post-Soviet era (Coelho, 2022; Inskeep et al., 2022).

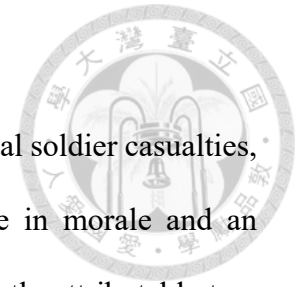
In September 2022, Russian officials estimated 5,937 soldiers killed, but other think tanks and national governments considered this figure vastly underreported compared to actual losses (Meduza, 2022). The BBC, citing leaked United States' intelligence sources, reported that Russia had suffered 110,000 total casualties by February 2023, while the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) estimated that Russia lost 5,000 to 5,800 soldiers monthly during the war's first year. This compelled Russia to mobilise reserve forces, as the war's prolongation continuously depleted Russian military strength (Jones et al., 2023; Kirby, 2023).

On the other hand, Russia also suffered enormous equipment losses during the conflict. These included thousands of tanks and armoured vehicles, hundreds of artillery systems, over a thousand artillery pieces, and at least 55 Russian fixed-wing aircraft and 54 helicopters lost in the first eight months (with most losses occurring in the first month), plus hundreds of drones (Axe, 2022). Due to massive equipment losses and production

capacity unable to match the attrition rate, Russia was forced to retrieve and refurbish previously decommissioned, obsolete weapons.

Whether considering massive soldier casualties or extensive equipment losses, both directly reflected Russia's overestimation of its original military capabilities and inability to achieve a rapid victory. It represented a steep decline in Russian military power during the war's early stages (Coelho, 2022). For Finland, this again indicated that the relative costs of NATO membership had decreased, as Russia faced greater difficulty both in capability and the probability of implementing massive military retaliation against Finland's foreign policy decisions.

4.1.5 Troop Morale and More Difficult Personnel Mobilisation



In addition to enduring severe equipment losses and substantial soldier casualties, the Russian armed forces have experienced a pronounced decline in morale and an escalating challenge in maintaining troop strength, an outcome directly attributable to a stalled war effort that has evolved into a protracted engagement (Atlamazoglou, 2024). Official figures indicate that from February 2022 through mid-December 2024, a total of 50,554 Russian military personnel were registered as absent without leave (AWOL), notably 22,577 in the Southern Military District and 13,769 in the Central Military District (Harward et al., 2025; Litnarovych, 2025). When it came to 2023, Russian courts processed 5,024 AWOL cases. They initiated 148 desertion prosecutions—a six-fold increase on the previous year—thereby underscoring an acute deterioration in personnel retention under sustained high-intensity operations and insufficient troop rotation (The Moscow Times, 2023).

What was initially envisaged as a swift, short-duration campaign evolved into an interminable conflict accompanied by heavy casualties, and multiple organisations and think-tanks have reported that Russian troop morale plummeted accordingly. It was reported that continued Ukrainian support and persistent drone and long-range strikes “worsened the morale of Russian troops,” even provoking panic and disintegration in front-line units (Mappes et al., 2023). Existing supply shortages and logistic failures compounded psychological strain and combat fatigue, fostering risk aversion and undermining the will to fight (Massicot, 2023). Even after the partial mobilisation introduced in September 2022 and stringent controls on discharge and leave, personnel exhibited a tendency to resign at the first opportunity, as shown by a five-times surge in AWOL incidents and a six-times increase in desertion prosecutions—clear indicators of

conscription fatigue and a desertion wave (Massicot, 2023; The Moscow Times, 2023). A case in point occurred in November 2023 when a formation of the 41st Combined Arms Army in Novosibirsk erupted in riot over the poor treatment of wounded soldiers, vandalised their barracks and *fled en masse*, exposing both command breakdown and a collapse of *esprit de corps* (Atlamazoglou, 2024).

These patterns of workforce loss and morale decline, which manifested early in the Russo-Ukrainian War and rapidly deteriorated, made it clear to Finland that Russia's capacity to mount military reprisals against Finland would be severely diminished. In other words, Russia's armed forces were unlikely to sustain another confrontation with Finland, thereby lowering the relative cost of Finland's accession to NATO. Were Russia to retaliate militarily in response to Finland's NATO bid, Finland would necessarily downgrade its estimations of the likely scale and intensity of the response.

4.1.6 Finnish and International Political Assessments of Russian Force Levels

First of all, Finnish leaders from all political parties hold opinions similar to those mentioned above. In September 2022, the then-serving Prime Minister Sanna Marin argued that “Russia’s actions have unified the West as never before, while Russia is lonelier than ever” (European Parliament, 2022). In December 2022, during an interview, Sanna Marin emphasised again that Russia did not have the capacity to sustain the war. In other words, Marin believed that Russia’s military capabilities were absolutely insufficient to end the war with Ukraine in the short term (Government Communications Department, 2022g). Moreover, due to facing rejections and even sanctions from more countries to varying degrees, Russia could receive less support, while the “unified West” could effectively balance Russia (Mills, 2025). This demonstrates that Marin re-evaluated Russia’s actual troop strength and offensive capacity, identifying discrepancies with previous statistical estimates, and believed the possibility of Russian military retaliation had decreased, and even if retaliation were attempted, the chances of success had become relatively low, thereby reducing the relative costs of Finland’s NATO membership application.

The then-serving Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto also believed Russia’s military capabilities fell far short of pre-war estimates. In a public speech in August 2022, he stated that Russia’s ambitions were vast, but Russia did not possess “the capacity to resolve the war quickly” (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2022). Even when he ran for president in 2023, he reiterated his views at that time, arguing that Russia had not only suffered severe setbacks militarily in the post-war period but had also encountered significant economic blows and economic crises, making it more difficult to sustain a prolonged war. He emphasised that Russia’s inability to end the war with Ukraine quickly meant that the

intensity and probability of Russian retaliation against Finland's decision to join NATO would not be particularly high, representing relatively lower costs for its NATO membership application (Telang, 2023).

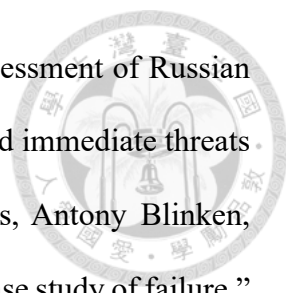


Regarding then-Finnish President Sauli Niinistö, in his 2023 New Year address, he cautioned against underestimating Russia's aggressive ambitions and military capabilities, whilst highlighting that Russia had repeated the same mistake made during the Winter War, believing it could capture Helsinki within a short timeframe, only to encounter fierce Finnish resistance. Similarly, in the current conflict with Ukraine, Russia faced comparable miscalculations, having overestimated its own capabilities and made grave errors in judgment by assuming it could rapidly capture Kyiv (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2023). In the following year's New Year speech, he reiterated the disconnection between Russia's aggressive intentions and its actual capabilities, arguing that whilst Russia should not be underestimated, "Russia is never as strong as she looks". His meaning was straightforward. Russia could not conclude the war with Ukraine in the short term. Under such circumstances, it would be even less capable of launching a swift and substantial counterattack against Finland, once again confirming that the costs of NATO membership had diminished (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2024).

Senior figures from Finland's prominent opposition party, the National Coalition Party (*Kansallinen Kokoomus, Kok*), likewise reassessed Russia's military strength after it initiated the invasion of Ukraine. Petteri Orpo stressed in March 2024 that "it is crucial to recognise that Russia's military capabilities are limited, despite its attempts to hide this fact" (Government Communications Department, 2024). Similarly, Alexander Stubb noted in September 2023 that, in invading Ukraine, "Putin made three fundamental

mistakes: he overestimated the capabilities and commitment of the Russian military;...a humiliation of the Russian military. Putin's aggression will go down as the biggest strategic, tactical and military failure in recent history" (Stubb, 2023). These assessments underscored a revised estimation of Russian failure in recent history. These assessments underscored a revised estimation of Russian strength. They reinforced the conclusion that the likelihood and potential severity of a military counterstroke against Finland has diminished, thereby lowering the perceived costs of Finland's NATO application.

Foreign Leaders and international organisations echoed Finnish political figures in questioning Russia's military strength and ability to sustain a rapid campaign and even the potential retaliation against Finland, reinforcing the view that Finland's prospective NATO accession would entail relatively low costs and offer greater diplomatic autonomy. In 2022, then-NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg observed that Russia was "actually losing on the battlefield" and conceding ground because it lacked the capability to halt Ukrainian advances (D'Andrea, 2022). On the same day, then-President of the United States, Joe Biden, described Russian President Putin as a "rational actor who has miscalculated significantly," noting that Moscow's assumption of a swift, unopposed victory in Kyiv proved entirely unfounded (Agence France-Presse, 2022). Early analyses by the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies further highlighted severe ammunition shortages and logistical bottlenecks that rendered Russia's planned rapid victory untenable, forcing a transition to a protracted conflict (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2022a). Even Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez acknowledged in September 2022 that "the aggressor realises he's losing," signalling widespread recognition of Russia's diminished battlefield potency and underscoring the reduced risk to Finland during the interval before granting formal NATO membership (Cué, 2022).



Subsequent reflections in 2023 and 2024 reiterated this reassessment of Russian military capacity and its strategic setbacks, further lowering perceived immediate threats to Finland's security. Then Secretary of State of the United States, Antony Blinken, declared in June 2023 that Russia's vaunted military had become "a case study of failure," exposing equipment, strategy, and morale deficiencies (U.S. Embassy Tbilisi, 2023). European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen characterised Moscow's battlefield setbacks as evidence of "desperation [and] delusion" in February 2023, while then-German Chancellor Olaf Scholz bluntly stated in March 2024, "Russia is not as strong as people think" (Moller-Nielsen, 2023; RBC-Ukraine, 2024). More recently, then-Estonian Prime Minister, the incumbent Foreign Policy Chief of the European Union, Kaja Kallas, warned against overestimating Russian power, insisting that "Russia sometimes seems like a mysterious power that cannot be defeated. This is not true" (RFE/RL's Hungarian Service, 2025). These declarations collectively confirm that Russia's post-invasion military reverses have significantly weakened its capacity and willingness to retaliate against Finland, thereby diminishing the costs and risks associated with Finland's decision to join NATO and enhancing Helsinki's strategic autonomy.

4.1.7 Analysing Cost-Related Independent Variables

This chapter reassesses the cost-related independent variables: Finland's re-evaluation of Russian military capacity at that particular period. It means whether Russia can conclude the war in Ukraine rapidly, and whether Russia retains the capacity to open a second front against Finland while still engaged in Ukraine. Finnish post-invasion reassessment of Russian military power has been reflected. Although the quantitative gap between Russian and Finnish forces remains undeniable, Russia's repeated failure to meet its short-term objectives in Ukraine, evidenced by heavy personnel and equipment losses, force reallocations from other theatres, drowning morale among Russian troops, issues regarding the personnel mobilisation and widespread acknowledgement (including Finnish political leaders' statements) of Russia's declining capabilities, demonstrates that Moscow can no longer mount a significant military retaliation against Finland. In turn, the probability and scale of any Russian response have diminished, reducing Finland's perceived costs of applying for NATO membership during this period.

4.2 Benefit-Related Independent Variables

Regarding the benefit-related independent variables, these primarily concern the relative advantages Finland would gain from the “collective defence” guarantees provided by Article 5 following formal NATO membership (NATO, 2023c). The magnitude of benefits that “collective defence” would offer to Finland’s national interests depends fundamentally upon the likelihood of Russia undertaking military action or even aggression against Finland in the future. Therefore, this section will provide a concise analysis. It examines how Finland connected the Russia-Ukraine war to its historical memories, and how Russia’s conduct in this conflict enabled Finland to perceive Russia’s expansionism and even imperialism in Europe.

Even if Russia’s real military capacity, as noted above, fell short of prior estimates, understanding that Russia’s future aggressive intentions were intensifying indicated that NATO’s ‘collective defence’ would be particularly beneficial and robust for Finland. Even though, as repeatedly explained in previous chapters, Finland had historically chosen different strategies such as armed resistance, “Finlandisation,” and “Military Non-alignment” under conditions of persistent massive military disparities, this section argues why Finland notably concluded after the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war that immediate NATO membership application represented the most beneficial approach for its national utility, compared to Russia’s various military actions in Europe during the post-Soviet period (Arter, 2023).

4.2.1 NATO's Article 5 and Collective Defence

Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty states:

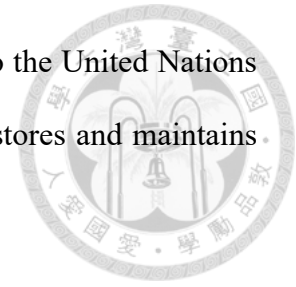
“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and... will assist... by taking forthwith, individually and in concert... such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council...” (NATO, 2023c)

In other words, it refers to NATO's commitment that an attack on one Ally is an attack on all, triggering a flexible but binding response mechanism. The scope of commitment, then, is well defined as attacking member territory in Article 6(NATO, 2023c). Article 5 has only been invoked once after the 911 Incident by the United States. The member states agreed that the attacks by the terrorists were “actions covered by Article 5” (Green, 2024). NATO has also employed collective defence measures upon request by Türkiye in 1991 (Patriot missile deployment), 2003 (Operation Display Deterrence during the Iraq crisis), and 2012 (Operation Active Fence in response to the Syrian conflict) (Los Angeles Times, 1991; NATO, 2003, 2013).

The invoking process of Article 5 in NATO first requires assessment by the North Atlantic Council (NAC). The NAC determines whether an armed attack has occurred and whether it falls under Article 5. Then, any invocation must be agreed upon by all member states in the NAC, which means that the decision to invoke should be a consensus. Afterwards, the Secretary General of NATO would need to inform the Secretary General



of the United Nations. The member states should report measures to the United Nations Security Council, and the measures will end when the Council “restores and maintains international peace and security (NATO, 2023c).

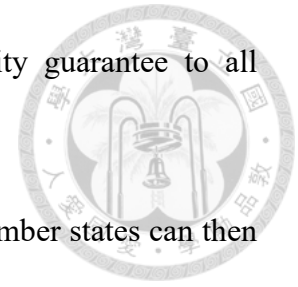


Nonetheless, collective defence under Article 5 lets each member state choose the form of assistance, and this flexibility originated from the compromise by which the United States avoided any automatic military pledge while committing to mutual assistance. Assistance could be military, such as troop deployments, air and naval patrols or missile batteries. On the other hand, states can also provide non-military assistance through intelligence sharing, base access, and logistics. All member states enjoy the autonomy to decide how it is assisting based on their own capabilities and national procedures (NATO, 2023c).

Collective defence within NATO extends beyond the guarantees of Article 5. In peacetime and under crisis-management scenarios, the Alliance employs various defence measures. For example, the NATO Response Force (NRF) is a multinational rapid-reaction formation of around 40,000 personnel, including a 5,000-strong Spearhead Force (the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force). When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, NATO deployed the NRF to its Baltic members. Following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO doubled the size of its battlegroups on the eastern flank to eight and maintains 24/7 air policing and integrated air/missile defence across the Alliance (NATO, 2025a).

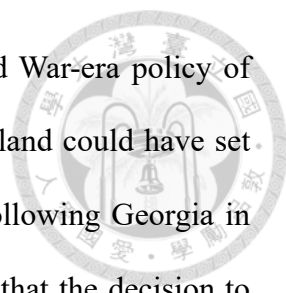
Furthermore, Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty provides for political consultation whenever a member’s territorial integrity, political independence or security is threatened. This mechanism preceded formal collective-defence action and reinforces

deterrence, thereby delivering a more robust and resilient security guarantee to all Alliance members (NATO, 2023d).



Apart from the above mutual defence guarantees, NATO member states can then participate in various cooperative activities. First, NATO maintains the Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDT) Strategy to facilitate the development, acquisition and responsible use of cutting-edge capabilities (NATO, 2025e). Relevant military technology exchange and advancements among the member states should then be fostered by programmes such as the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and the NATO Innovation Fund. Programmes such as the Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (JISR) and the Alliance Data Sharing Ecosystem (ADSE) under NATO promote information exchange among member states (NATO, 2022d, 2024d, 2025c, 2025f). Through several military exercises, platforms for resource integration and logistics, and ensuring partner and Allied forces operate under a common standard and procedures, NATO members can then integrate into the Alliance's collective defence, enhance their national capabilities, and contribute to transatlantic security across the full spectrum of military, technological and logistical domains (NATO, 2023e).

It is important to note, however, that the collective-defence arrangements available to NATO members remain relative: only when confronted with significant external threats do these mechanisms yield substantial benefits for a member state. As the preceding discussion illustrates, NATO membership grants access to multiple layers of collective defence guarantees, thereby enhancing national security and deterring aggression. Crucially, most of these measures predate the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war. For example, Article 5 was enshrined in 1949, as mentioned previously.



Finland's case demonstrates this point well: despite its Cold War-era policy of “Finlandisation” and post-Cold War “Military Non-Alignment”, Finland could have set aside its non-alignment principle and sought NATO membership following Georgia in 2008 or Crimea in 2014, yet it did not (Arter, 2023). This suggests that the decision to join NATO cannot be justified simply by the existence of collective defence guarantees; one must also assess how much security benefit these guarantees actually confer upon the member. In other words, if a state faces little or no external threat, additional defence guarantees offer minimal incremental security value. Consequently, this chapter will examine — first objectively and importantly, from Finland's own perspective — how Finland's appraisal of Russia's potential threat evolved in the wake of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war.

4.2.2 NATO's Nuclear Deterrence

Nuclear weapons remain a central element of NATO's deterrence and defence posture (NATO, 2025d). In line with the 2022 Strategic Concept and the 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, the Alliance sustains an “appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities,” augmented by space and cyber assets (NATO, 2023a). NATO's nuclear forces exist to preserve peace, prevent coercion and deter aggression, with political authority over employment retained at all times (NATO, 2025d).

Strategic nuclear forces, principally the United States triad, together with the independent United Kingdom's and France's arsenals, constitute the ultimate guarantee of collective security, complicating adversaries' decision-making by dispersing command authority. Under nuclear-sharing arrangements, selected non-nuclear member states host US B61 gravity bombs and train dual-capable aircraft (DCAs) for delivery under presidential authorisation. Participating states jointly consult, plan and maintain the necessary delivery platforms and infrastructure; in wartime, the United States' control of the weapons may be conditionally transferred to host nations upon authorisation (NATO, 2022a).

Policy and planning consultations take place in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), which comprises all member states except France, while annual exercises, most notably Exercise Steadfast Noon, employ DCAs (without live warheads) to verify readiness, safety and security. This robust nuclear use and delivery framework not only deters potential aggression against NATO members but also provides non-nuclear Allies with enhanced security guarantees, thereby increasing their national coverage (NATO, 2022a).



In 2024, Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs released a report titled *NATO as a Nuclear Alliance: NATO’s Nuclear Capability and Its Evolution in the International Nuclear Order*. A dedicated chapter explores the relevance of NATO’s nuclear deterrence to Finland. Finland has long advocated a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Northern Europe and has strongly supported the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). However, this report reaffirms the position of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo’s 2023 Government—“Finland will participate fully in all NATO activities, including NATO’s collective peacetime missions” and “Finland will participate in NATO’s missions and operations, international exercises, and committees and working groups, including the Nuclear Planning Group”—and stresses that Finland should maintain a pragmatic stance towards nuclear arms. In particular, Finland remains cautious about permitting the movement or storage of nuclear weapons on its territory unless such steps receive unanimous backing from all nuclear-armed states (Pesu et al., 2024).

Following its NATO accession bid, Finland acknowledges that NATO’s nuclear deterrence constitutes an essential element of its national defence. The United States’ nuclear umbrella is viewed as indispensable to the security of the Baltic Sea region. The report asserts that “NATO’s nuclear deterrence policy opens up a new political playing field for Finland, providing Helsinki with several different options as regards the level of ambition and activity.” This “nuclear option” thus creates new avenues for Finnish foreign and security policy. Accordingly, despite the current domestic prohibition on transporting nuclear weapons and Prime Minister Orpo’s view that no immediate legislative changes are necessary, Finland nonetheless preserves the possibility of transporting or basing nuclear weapons in the future and will fully engage in Alliance exercises, including those involving nuclear operations (Pesu et al., 2024).

4.2.3 Russia's Heightened Focus on Northern European Regions

Russia has fundamentally changed its approach to the Arctic, Nordic, and Baltic regions since the 2010s, marking a decisive shift from post-Cold War cooperation to strategic competition and militarisation. These regions have been more important to Russia's national interests in terms of military and economic development. Although Russia has traditionally adopted a relatively cooperative stance in the Arctic region, the area's increasing strategic significance has led Moscow to prioritise its development, and its attitude towards neighbouring states, including Finland, has become noticeably less collaborative.

Economically, the region contains approximately 85 trillion cubic metres of natural gas and 17 billion tons of oil on Russia's Arctic continental shelf alone, representing a strategic reserve central to its energy security and export plans (Bellona.org, 2024). It is estimated that there are approximately 30% of the world's undiscovered natural gas in the Arctic Basin, with Russia's onshore and offshore sectors accounting for a significant share (Long et al., 2008). At present, extraction rates of these substantial reserves will sustain production for over three decades for oil and well over a century for gas (Bellona.org, 2024).

The Northern Sea Route (NSR) also becomes the cornerstone of Russia's Arctic strategy due to the exacerbated greenhouse effect and melting icebergs. This route now offers a 30-40% shorter shipping distance between Europe and Asia than traditional routes through the Suez Canal (The arctic review, 2025; Yermakov & Yermakova, 2021). Rotterdam–Shanghai voyages, for instance, are reduced by roughly 24% in distance, translating to lower transit times and costs. Despite opposition from the United States, Russia's current legislation on navigation through the Northern Sea Route has been



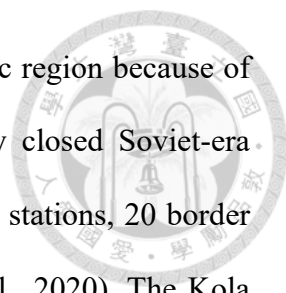
formulated in accordance with Article 234 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Russia stipulates that any commercial vessels transiting the NSR that require compulsory pilotage and ice-breaker support services must notify the Russian authorities in advance. In addition, Russia's new law on the NSR, signed on December 5, 2022, introduces stricter regulations specifically for foreign warships navigating through the internal waters of the NSR for security reasons (Todorov, 2023). As greenhouse-gas emissions accelerate glacial melt, the future of the NSR appears ever more promising, and Russia will seek to secure greater strategic advantages therein (Ålander, 2023).

Figure 5

Northern Sea Route and Traditional Route

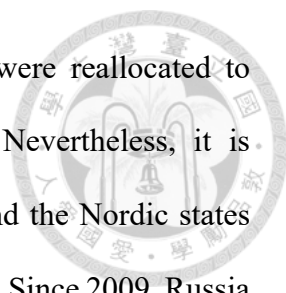


Note. From Polar bearings, by The Economist, 2014, <https://www.economist.com/china/2014/07/12/polar-bearings?fsrc=scn%2Ftw%2Fte%2Fpe%2Fpolarbearings>



Russia has also strengthened its military buildup in the Arctic region because of its rising geopolitical significance. Russia reopened 50 previously closed Soviet-era military posts, including the refurbishment of 13 air bases, 10 radar stations, 20 border outposts, and 10 integrated emergency rescue stations (Conley et al., 2020). The Kola Peninsula constitutes the core of Russia's military strategy in this part of the Arctic. It serves as the base for Russia's most powerful naval assets, including nuclear-powered submarines (Defence Security Asia, 2025). In addition, at least five Russian nuclear bases in the region have undergone development since 2022, including upgrades to facilities that now house around 100 tactical nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad (Hodunova, 2024). The Novaya Zemlya nuclear test site is also located in the Arctic region and has undergone augmentation in recent years (Eckel, 2023). The enhanced militarisation aims to boost its homeland defence and economic interests, especially in the future. On 1 January 2021, the Northern Fleet was redesignated as Russia's fifth military district. Although this change did not bring significant practical differences—and the Fleet was subsequently disbanded and absorbed into other military districts amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict and related developments—the accompanying rise in High North patrols and drills demonstrates the expansion of Russia's strategic interests in the Arctic, thus bolstering its aggressive intentions (Hackett & International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022; Luzin, 2024).

Russia has also strengthened its presence in the Baltic region by further militarising the Kaliningrad Oblast since the 2010s (Ministry of Defence, 2024). Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski argued that nearly 100 nuclear warheads have been allocated in the oblast, and his view was echoed by the Lithuanian Defence Minister Arvydas Anuškas (Eckel, 2023; The New Voice of Ukraine, 2024). As mentioned



previously, many of Kaliningrad's military personnel and troops were reallocated to Ukraine due to the unexpected, protracted war (Nilsen, 2023). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that Kaliningrad, the wider Baltic region and the Nordic states remain of paramount strategic significance to Russia (Bilefsky, 2022). Since 2009, Russia has markedly strengthened its military presence in Kaliningrad Oblast, converting it into an Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) bastion (Sukhankin, 2019). Military exercises in the Baltic Sea have continued without interruption, and NATO reports an escalating tempo of Russian hybrid operations in the region, ranging from GPS jamming to undersea cable sabotage. These activities, occurring both before and after the war between Russia and Ukraine (Boulègue, 2024; Jack et al., 2025; Lecca, 2024).

It is clear that Russia's threats to the Baltic region and the Arctic intensified long before 2022, and that the conflict with Ukraine had been escalating for some time. However, for Finland, the security guarantees offered by NATO alone were insufficient to justify a membership application, until Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine prompted Helsinki to apply for accession within days and complete its domestic legislative procedures in a matter of months. As earlier chapters have shown, Russia's early failures in Ukraine reduced the probability of significant military retaliation against Finland, thereby lowering Finland's perceived costs of joining the military alliance. In the forthcoming part, we will argue that the war also compelled Finland to reconnect with its historical experiences and to reassess Russia's future aggressive intentions in Europe, threats that inevitably extend to neighbouring Finland. Consequently, the relative benefits of NATO membership rose sharply, eventually driving Finland's decision to apply for NATO membership.

4.2.4 Recalling Historical Memory with Russia

Following the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War, Finnish politicians have frequently drawn connections between the 2022 conflict and Finland's historical confrontations with the Soviet Union — namely the Winter War and the Continuation War — whilst simultaneously condemning Russian aggression (Government Communications Department, 2022a; Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2023). These historical parallels illuminate Russia's broader ambitions within the European sphere, demonstrating that Moscow's objectives extend beyond Eastern Europe. Consequently, this historical perspective reveals a more substantial threat to Europe generally and Finland — given its proximity to Russia — in particular (Kauranen, 2025). In other words, owing to these historical precedents, Finland perceived Russia's expansive European ambitions as rendering NATO membership an increasingly attractive security guarantee.

In his 2023 New Year's Address, the then-incumbent Finnish President Sauli Niinistö connected Russia's war against Ukraine with Finland's historical Winter War, observing that “One cannot avoid thinking about the similarities the situation has with our Winter War when the Soviet Union assumed that they would march into Helsinki within two weeks.” He subsequently drew parallels between Russian President Putin and former Soviet leader Stalin, stating, “As leaders of a country under authoritarian rule, Stalin and Putin failed to recognise a key factor” (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2023). The President argued that both leaders and Russia possessed ambitions that exceeded their military capabilities, contending that they habitually underestimated the resilience of neighbouring nations and frequently believed they could easily invade various European countries.

The then-serving Prime Minister of Finland, Sanna Marin, demonstrated greater frequency in drawing connections between Finland's historical memories and the Russia-Ukraine War. In March 2022, she first observed, "This past Sunday marked the anniversary of the end of the Winter War. We, too, fought for our independence then, and now the citizens of Ukraine are in the same situation" (Government Communications Department, 2022a). In April, she reiterated the parallel by stating, "In [Marshal Mannerheim's] last order of the day at the end of the Winter War, Mannerheim said, "You did not wish for war, you loved peace, work and progress; but you were forced into battle." Our thoughts are now with those in Ukraine who are forced to fight in a war against their will" (Government Communications Department, 2022b).

In December 2022, Sanna Marin expressed that Russia's aggressive ambitions posed an evident future threat to Europe, including Finland, once again invoking Finland's historical experience with Russia, arguing that the current situation mirrored Finland's confrontation with the Winter War. She contended that Finland and Europe remained insufficiently strong to counter Russia's future aggressive intentions and possibilities, even though Russia, like the former Soviet Union, had again underestimated its opponents and faced retaliation. However, this did not preclude Russia from launching further aggressions in the upcoming years (Government Communications Department, 2022f).

In Sanna Marin's 2023 New Year's Address, she again emphasised Finland's capacity for empathy with Ukraine's plight through reference to Finland's Winter War experience, stating, "For us Finns, Ukraine's fight is our fight. Furthermore, we have shown our support and helped Ukrainians in all possible ways. We have sympathised with their plight and felt their distress. The people of Ukraine will always remember the help

and support they have received from Finns, just as we ourselves remember the help we were given in times of war” (Government Communications Department, 2022g).

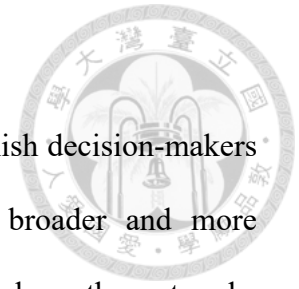
Sanna Marin drew connections from the Russia-Ukraine War to Finland’s Winter War experience, extending to other European nations similarly violated by Russia, then observing Ukraine’s current ordeal to infer potential future experiences for other European countries, including Finland. She perceived Russia’s future aggressive intentions and possibilities through the lens of the war, arguing that Europe needed to strengthen its defences, whilst for Finland, NATO’s collective defence security guarantees represented increasingly attractive national interests.

When Finnish leaders repeatedly drew connections between the Russia-Ukraine War and the historical Winter War and Continuation War in their public statements, the significance extended beyond merely articulating empathy for Ukraine or describing Russian ambitions in Europe. Regarding Russia’s purported strong intentions in Europe, when Finland analogises the Russia-Ukraine War to the Soviet Winter War, this represents more than a comparison between the former Soviet Union and contemporary Russia vis-à-vis Finland then and Ukraine now — it serves to link contemporary Russia with the historical Soviet Union.

When Finland engaged consecutively in the Winter War and Continuation War during the early 1940s, the Soviet Union’s sphere of action was not limited to Finland alone; the Soviet Union simultaneously conducted invasions, annexations, and hybrid operations — including continuous propaganda and diplomatic coercion — against Poland, the Baltic states, eastern Romania, and indeed the whole of Europe (HISTORY.com Editors, 2009; Nelsson, 2025; Wołek, 2018). If Russia's current war

against Ukraine aims, as it explicitly states, to incapacitate Europe's principal military alliances, Finland's recollection of the Soviet Union during the Winter War period leads to the inference that Russia will become only more aggressive in the future, undertaking different actions across various European regions. Given Finland's proximity to Russia, the threats they anticipate are extraordinary; consequently, given the disparity in military capabilities, NATO's collective defence security guarantees become increasingly attractive to Finland, representing a higher value for its national security and interests (Kauranen, 2025).

4.2.5 Russian Intertwined Ideological and Strategic Motivations



Beyond evoking the Winter War and Continuation War, Finnish decision-makers contend that the Russia-Ukraine war conflict reveals Russia's broader and more aggressive ambitions on the European continent. Their discourse interlaces three strands: (1) a resurgent Russian nationalism that has mutated into an empire-wide project directed at Europe; (2) an expansionist pursuit of state interests that disregards established borders; and (3) President Putin's personal display of heightened irrationality and belligerence. Taken together — spanning the structural level of Russian power politics, the emotive narrative of national glory and “historic wrong,” and the apparent deviation of Putin's decision making from rational calculation — these elements are said to underpin a mounting threat to Europe. Faced with the likelihood of greater external peril, Finnish leaders argue that NATO's collective-defence guarantee becomes ever more valuable to Finland. The ensuing overview assembles key states by Finland's leading political figures, who are also decision-makers of Finnish foreign policies.

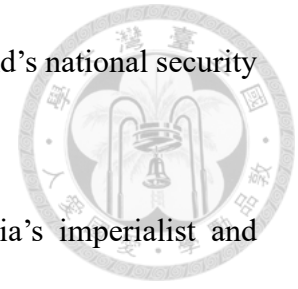
The then-serving Finnish President Sauli Niinistö placed strong emphasis on the fact that Russian President Putin's behavioural style on the international stage exhibited an apparent alteration following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War. During the initial phase of the war, the then-serving Finnish President Sauli Niinistö declared that “That was a change in [Putin's] behaviour,” maintaining that Putin had exhibited conduct markedly different from his previous approach, demonstrating increased aggressiveness in both diplomatic and military spheres (Kim, 2022). In a subsequent BBC interview, he again addressed Putin's ruthless character, challenging the feasibility of conducting peace negotiations with the most ruthless international actor and leader, namely, Putin himself (BBC, 2022c). During a Fox News interview, he characterised Putin as a dangerous figure,

arguing that regarding the Ukraine war, Putin was willing to stake everything, akin to a poker player going “all in,” once more emphasising that Putin’s international behaviour had become enhanced returns, increasingly favouring confrontation over cooperation (Aitken & Trulio, 2022). The underlying implication was manifestly that the probability of future Russian-Finnish confrontation had escalated, Finland’s prospective geopolitical and military vulnerabilities had intensified, and the comparative advantages of securing NATO’s collective defence guarantees had correspondingly increased.

The then-serving Prime Minister of Finland, Sanna Marin, concurrently invoked Russia’s imperialism, the resurrection of expansionism across the European continent, and Russian President Putin’s increasing aggressiveness and irrationality. First, regarding Putin’s own personal influence, in a joint meeting with the incumbent President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the then-serving President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, Sanna Marin expressed her desire to “wish for a quick end to this madness” (Finland Today Editorial Team, 2022). In a CBS 60 Minutes interview, she reiterated: “I don’t think that Vladimir Putin is someone you can reason with. I think his actions are very emotional... (Alfonsi, 2023)” By the end of the year, in a BBC interview, she further observed that Putin and Russia’s “mentality” had become highly proactive and expansionist (Davies, 2022).

These remarks indicate that Marin believed Russia had become highly proactive and expansionist. These remarks indicate that Marin believed Russia had abandoned the norms it once tentatively upheld in international affairs and would henceforth engage in even more “mad” behaviour, inevitably targeting various European states. Unpredictable actions from Russia, she warned, were foreseeable, raising the forthcoming threat level and uncertainty facing the continent, including Finland, and consequently rendering

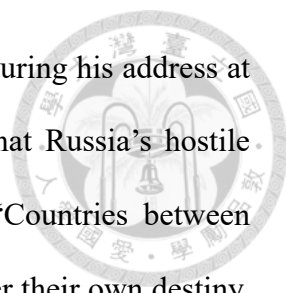
NATO's collective-defence guarantees markedly beneficial to Finland's national security and interests.



Additionally, Sanna Marin systematically articulated Russia's imperialist and expansionist objectives throughout the critical period of 2022. In May 2022, Marin's position crystallised further: "Europe must act in unity. If we allow Russian aggression to go unchecked in one place, it will only spread—and that will directly imperil the security of all of Europe, reiterating her conviction that Russian ambitions across Europe would continue to intensify, thereby necessitating deeper European cooperation" (Government Communications Department, 2022d).

During her September 2022 European Parliament address, Marin then emphasised that Finland would be strengthened through NATO membership. Additionally, Marin acknowledged that previous approaches to "coexistence with Russia," constraining Russian prospective aggressive ambitions, as Russia proved willing to accept the severance of European economic cooperation in pursuit of Russia's self-determined "national development and glory" and national security objectives (Government Communications Department, 2022e). Therefore, Finland recognised the necessity for enhanced military cooperation and national security partnerships with other European nations, thereby rendering NATO membership an increasingly compelling strategic option for Finland.

Both the then-serving Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto articulated in their public discourse and interviews their perception of the immense threat to Europe emanating from Russia subsequently, as demonstrated through the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Haavisto asserted during the war's initial phase that "Russia's military pressure on Ukraine is a



threat to the security of all of Europe” (Yle News, 2022a). In May, during his address at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, he elaborated that Russia’s hostile ambitions for controlling non-NATO European states escalated: “Countries between NATO and Russia would not have full sovereign rights to decide over their own destiny. Their security interests would be permanently subjugated to Russia’s.” He additionally noted that “Indeed, even some NATO countries would not have full rights as alliance members. This interpretation was confirmed by Russia’s attack” (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022b). Haavisto’s statements confirmed his assessment that the Russia-Ukraine War had transformed a European entity that had previously “willingly joined the European security order” into one willing to employ increasingly extremist measures to influence all neighbouring European nations and restrict their autonomous decision-making, with Finland naturally included among those to be affected.

Concurrently, Pekka Haavisto further emphasised establishing the relationship between Russia’s radical operational methodologies, evidenced in the war, and the consequent threat to Europe’s future security. He noted that “Russia was able and willing to gather over one hundred thousand soldiers against a single neighbouring country” (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022b). This capacity reflected Russia’s enhanced military capabilities and aggressive intentions. For the pivotal cabinet figure responsible for foreign policy formulation, Russia’s extremism, rejection of cooperative approaches, and intensified desire for European dominance indicated that whilst Russia currently remained preoccupied with the Ukrainian theatre, future threats to the European continent—including Finland’s national interests and security—would inexorably intensify. Finland must therefore implement responsive measures to address this evolving

situation, and for Finland, NATO's collective defence security guarantees represented a means to augment Finland's national security and strategic interests.

Finland has contended that Russia and President Vladimir Putin harbour ambitions embracing the whole of Europe and, at a minimum, intend to extend their reach into the High North and Baltic region neighbouring Finnish territory. Comparable concerns have been voiced by politicians from other Nordic states since the Russo-Ukrainian conflict began. They have drawn attention to Russia's expansionist, imperial and nationalist trajectory, as well as Putin's reputed irrationality and unpredictability, as forthcoming serious threats to regional security.

At the onset of the war, Sweden's Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson warned: "If Russia succeeds in placing Ukraine under its supremacy, it opens up similar demands on other countries," contending that the war would reverberate throughout Europe, including the Nordic neighbourhood (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022). In 2024, Foreign Minister Tobias Billström added: "Russia's objective with its war of aggression is to control Ukraine, recreate an empire and violently overturn the European security order—to replace right with brutal might" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024). Both remarks point to Moscow's more aggressive intention to revive continental expansionism.

Norwegian officials delivered parallel assessments. In 2022, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre noted that the conflict had exposed Putin's heightened boldness and readiness to assume greater risks (The Office of the Prime Minister, 2022). Defence Minister Bjørn Arild Gram similarly informed the Atlantic Council that Norway now faced "an imperialistic Russia, which claims the right to spheres of interest" (Ministry of Defence of Norway, 2024).

Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen denounced Putin's wartime behaviour as evidence of "unscrupulous cynicism" and, in 2025, restated: "Russia does not want peace. They want war. I think they are willing to attack again in Ukraine, or another place in Europe," foreseeing continual Russian aggression on the continent (Tostevin, 2025; Wenande, 2022).

Iceland's Foreign Minister Thórdís Kolbrún Reykjörd Gylfadóttir described the conflict at its outset as "fuelled by xenophobia, discrimination, violent nationalism and authoritarianism", later affirming in a bilateral security pact with Ukraine that Russia's invasion represented "Russia's expansionist and aggressive behaviour" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, 2022; The Presidential Office of Ukraine., 2024).

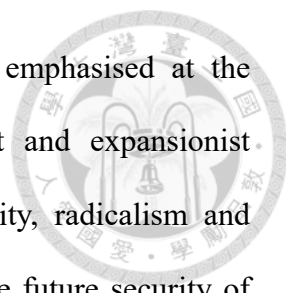
The Baltic states have similarly expressed comparable perceptions in the aftermath of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Estonia's then-serving President Alar Karis stated in 2022 that "the empire next door had awakened", contending that Russia would be aiming to destroy the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, thus expounding on Russia's imperialist and expansionist aspirations (Mathurin, 2022). Estonia's then-serving Prime Minister Kaja Kallas asserted that Putin "will not stop at Ukraine if he succeeds in conquering it", viewing Russian aggression against other European nations as merely a question of timing (Roushan, 2022; Sahuquillo, 2024).

Latvia's then-serving Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš recognised early in the initial phase of the 2022 war that it constituted an expression of Russian "neo-imperialism", later supplementing this by stating that Russia's aggressive designs on Europe "will not stop...can only be stopped" (Barigazzi et al., 2022; Chiappa, 2024). His then-serving Defence Minister Artis Pabriks likewise maintained that Putin and Russia

were endeavouring to restore the Soviet Union, stressing that European countries must mount strong opposition to such efforts (Brennan, 2022a).

Lithuania's then-President Gitanas Nausėda had already acknowledged by 2022 that Russia and Putin possessed ambitions extending beyond the present Russo-Ukrainian war, encompassing “bigger plans. Such as destroying the entire Euro-Atlantic security architecture” (Office of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2022). His then-Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė has spoken on multiple occasions in public venues about the clearly discernible “imperial ambitions” demonstrated through the Russo-Ukrainian conflict (Brennan, 2022b; Ford, 2024). Should these Baltic states all conclude that Russia will pursue its imperialist and expansionist goals more assertively and aggressively in future, or attempt to recreate Russia's past splendour from epochs such as the Soviet period or even the imperial age, this indicates that the Baltic states, Finland, and other European nations will similarly confront significant threats.

Poland, as one of Finland's neighbouring countries, has seen its political leaders echo similar assessments. Poland's then-serving President Andrzej Duda explicitly linked Putin with Hitler, questioning both the necessity and the objective of maintaining communication with the Russian leader in the post-war context (DW, 2022). During, the then-serving Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki declared that “This Russia is totalitarian, it's nationalistic, it's imperial” (Koutsokosta, 2022). Poland's then-serving Defence Minister Mariusz Błaszczak likewise noted that “Imperialist tendencies are present there constantly and in full force”, contending that Russia's imperial and expansionist ambitions were unmistakably apparent (Sonko, 2023).



In addition, political figures across various organisations emphasised at the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war that Russia’s imperialist and expansionist tendencies, together with the Russian President Putin’s irrationality, radicalism and abnormal personal characteristics, constituted a serious threat to the future security of Europe, including Finland. During the 2022 EU Ambassadors' Annual Conference, the then-serving High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell, remarked that Putin was using “radical nationalism” as the driving force behind his “ideological motivations” for pursuing radical measures in Ukraine and other parts of Europe (The Diplomatic Service of European Union, 2022). Meanwhile, the then-serving President of the European Council, Charles Michel, characterised Russia’s invasion as “geopolitical terrorism,” asserting that Putin had “launched a brutal, massive invasion of Ukraine—an unjustified and unprovoked war based on despicable lies” (European Council, 2022). They contended that Russia’s radical nationalism, amplified by Putin’s ever more assertive personal behaviour, supported Moscow’s expansionist aims and signalled a perceived forthcoming and intensifying threat to European stability.

4.2.6 Analysing Benefit-Related Independent Variables

From the Finnish perspective, it is evident that Russia's sudden offensive and military operations in Ukraine represent a marked departure from previous patterns of behaviour. Russia now appears willing to assume substantial risks and to undertake a range of aggressive actions whose targets likely extend beyond Ukraine and Eastern Europe to encompass the entire European region, including Finland. As a Nordic country on Russia's frontline, Finland can anticipate that threats from Russia, according to its surging aggressive and offensive intentions, will only increase and its national security will face growing challenges. Consequently, NATO's collective-defence guarantees become ever more attractive to Finland. In other words, had Finland decided at that time to implement the "NATO option" immediately, the relative benefits it would have gained would have been considerably greater.

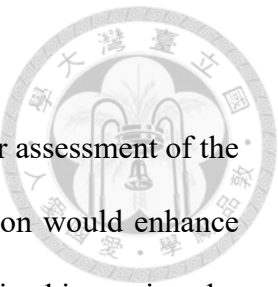


4.3 Finland's Strategic Alternatives Post-2014 and 2022

While this chapter thoroughly explains how Finland's post-war assessment of the Russia-Ukraine conflict identified that an expedited NATO application would enhance Finland's "net national interests" while reducing its relative costs, in this section, by contrasting Finland's reaction to the 2014 Crimean crisis with its rapid 2022 application, we analyse why Finland deviated from its earlier stance and opted for immediate NATO membership in 2022. This comparison also shows how the balance of benefits and costs of NATO accession for Finland grew more favourable following the 2022 war.

The most striking difference in comparing Finland's two responses to the Russian military operations is undoubtedly the decision to apply for NATO membership. Following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, Finnish political leadership uniformly opposed joining NATO. Regarding the variance between the perspective previously outlined and that which he later adopted, the then-serving Finnish President Sauli Niinistö explained in a 2014 interview that he "does not support NATO membership now," on the grounds that it "would undoubtedly harm our relations with Russia." He further cautioned Finns "to try and understand how joining the alliance would appear to Russian eyes," conceding that collective defence had benefits but that the prospective costs—strained bilateral ties and possible Russian reprisals—were prohibitive (Yle News, 2014b).

At the same time, after the 2014 Crimean annexation, the then-serving Prime Minister of Finland (now President) Alexander Stubb asserted that accession "won't happen in this government's term in office," decoupling the membership debate from the Russian threat and emphasising that the decision should not be driven solely by Russia's actions (Yle News, 2014a). Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War, Alexander Stubb—then a leading figure in the National Coalition Party and a presidential



hopeful—told Bloomberg that “Putin has only himself to thank” for Finland’s NATO membership. His justification shifted from “it should not be about Russia” to “Russia’s aggression has forced Finland into NATO,” positioning Finland as transitioning from a self-reliant defence posture to a key contributor within a robust alliance (Baker, 2022b).

From these two long-standing politicians’ reversals, two points emerge. First, the relative costs of joining NATO had fallen, the necessity of accommodating Russia had diminished, and fear of Russian retaliation had lessened. Second, it was broadly acknowledged that the war demonstrated a heightened threat to Finland and Europe and revealed Russia’s ambitions more clearly. Accordingly, the relative value to Finland of Article 5 collective defence—and even nuclear deterrence—had risen.

By contrast, in 2014, Finland opted to deepen cooperation via NATO’s Enhanced Opportunity Partnership (EOP) and interoperability initiatives while eschewing full membership. That strategy sought to bolster Finland’s indigenous defence capabilities without firm reliance on collective guarantees (NATO, 2024a). The swift cross-party agreement in 2022 to seek NATO accession thus reflects how Article 5 assurances became critically important to Finland’s national security calculus (Hofverberg, 2022).

Regarding why Finland arrived at two divergent assessments and responses to Russia’s military actions, one can first compare the objectives of the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. A key objective of the 2014 Crimean annexation was protecting Crimean residents from perceived threats. Putin declared: “We could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress. This would have been betrayal on our part.” Putin also raised serious concerns regarding NATO expansion. He argued that Russians had been against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our

backyard or in our historic territory. By invoking the intricate maritime boundary disputes surrounding the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, Putin intimated that, beyond his stated resolve to ‘protect ethnic Russians in Crimea and other minorities such as the Crimean Tatars’, the military operation was likewise intended to secure greater influence and strategic leverage in the Black Sea (Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, 2014).

By 2022, however, apart from population protection and stopping NATO expansion, Russia’s declared goal had shifted to “demilitarise and denazify Ukraine,” extending its aims from only territorial adjustments to a broader systemic change regarding the Ukrainian government and even regimes. At least at the outset, in other words, President Zelensky’s government needs to be overthrown. The objective thus escalated from “Partial territorial control” to “complete regime change” (Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, 2022)

From Finland’s perspective, Russia’s intentions and ambitions had advanced far beyond those of 2014, becoming far more overt. Anticipating further Russian military threats while the gap in conventional forces remained vast, Finland saw that, in addition to bolstering its own defence capabilities, the most expedient route to maximising its national security and interests was to join NATO without delay (Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, 2014, 2022).

Moreover, the scale of Russia’s two military operations differed fundamentally. In 2014, the deployment of Russian forces to Crimea was limited and localised. At the outset, roughly 15,000 Russian troops were involved against approximately 14,600 Ukrainian service members, and the annexation concluded within a matter of weeks (Shuster, 2014;

Wilk, 2014). Putin claimed the annexation of Crimea had been completed with "not a single armed confrontation in Crimea and no casualties" (Voice of America, 2014). By contrast, in February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale "special military operation", immediately committing over 100,000 troops and personnel across multiple fronts, and the conflict has since transformed into a protracted war that, as of mid-2025, remains unsolved (Bowen, 2022; The Kyiv Independent news desk, 2025). In terms of duration, the 2014 operation was executed swiftly, whereas the 2022 campaign—originally planned as a rapid "special military operation"—stalled near Kyiv and devolved into a war of attrition, inflicting heavy casualties and equipment losses on both sides and extending well beyond initial expectations.

From Finland's perspective, these differences demonstrate a fundamental shift in Russian intent: from a limited, deniable operation in Crimea to an overt, large-scale invasion signalling broader ambitions and then aggressive intentions against the whole of Europe, including Finland. Consequently, Finland's assessment of the relative cost-benefit calculus of NATO accession changed: the risk of direct Russian retaliation diminished once Moscow was engaged on a prolonged front in Ukraine, thereby reducing the potential cost of joining NATO and increasing its relative security benefits.

Table 2*Contrasting Crimea 2014 with the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War*

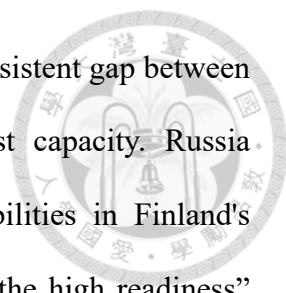

	2014	2022
	Crimean Annexation	Ukraine Invasion
Objectives & Purposes	Protecting Russian-speaking Populations; Protecting Strategic Interests in Black Sea; Preventing NATO Expansion	Demilitarising & Denazifying Ukraine; Overthrowing Current Ukrainian Regime; Blocking NATO Expansion
Involved Regions	Crimean Peninsula	~20% of Ukrainian Territory; Mainly Southern & Eastern Ukraine
Troops Deployment	Limited	Full
Preliminary Results	Fully Controlled Crimea within Weeks	Failed to Obtain Kyiv; Faced Fierce Resistance; Failed to Overthrow Regime
Casualties	No Casualties during the Annexation Phase	Massive Casualties
Objectives Attained?	Yes	No, Objective Shifted afterwards

4.4 From Autonomy to Alliance: Pre- and Post-Accession Defence Reports Assessed

This section examines Finland's pre-war/pre-NATO and post-war/post-NATO Defence Reports, published by the Ministry for Defence, to assess shifts in Finnish diplomacy and to pinpoint the drivers behind its NATO accession. The post-war report clearly reflects heightened security concerns: its length expands from sixty-three pages in 2021 to 118 pages in 2024. Mentions of "Russia/Russian" increase from twelve to ninety-five (almost eight times), and occurrences of "NATO" jump from thirty-seven to 512, roughly fourteen times more (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024).

Substantively, Finland's defence posture has also changed. The 2021 report still portrayed the country as "a militarily non-aligned state maintaining a credible national defence capability." The 2024 report, by contrast, labels Finland "a militarily allied country," repeatedly highlighting its NATO membership, stressing collective as well as national security, and committing to extensive involvement in NATO tasks and standards (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024).

Concerning Russian threats to Finland, the 2024 Defence Report employs far more straightforward and unambiguous language. Although the 2021 report recognised that Russia "seeks to strengthen its position and to weaken the unity of Western actors," seeking "a sphere-of-influence-based security regime in Europe," it also stated that "Despite the increasingly tense international situation, Finland is not under any immediate military threat." The 2024 report, conversely, identifies Russia as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area," representing "an incessant and protracted security threat to Europe and Finland" (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024).



Regarding military capabilities, both reports highlight the persistent gap between Russia's formidable military strength and Finland's more modest capacity. Russia continues to possess “significant conventional war-fighting capabilities in Finland's neighbouring areas” with the “ability to make rapid decisions and the high readiness” facilitating “rapid and unexpected operations.” By 2024, its military capacity in Finland's neighbouring regions has been systematically rebuilt and expanded, with increased emphasis on long-range fires and nuclear rhetoric. Additionally, Russia's tactics have become more comprehensive and multifaceted—termed “broad-spectrum influencing” by Finland—whilst its geographical scope has extended from the 2021 focus on Russia's Western Military District, including Crimea and Kaliningrad, to encompass the Arctic Ocean and the North Atlantic (the High North), thereby intensifying threats to Finnish national security (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024).

Concerning the balance between national defence autonomy and alliance strategies, Finland has evolved from emphasising self-reliance and multilateral cooperation in 2021 to complete reliance on “NATO Dependence” by 2024. The 2021 report placed considerable weight on Finland's possession and development of military capabilities adequate for countering external threats, expressing substantial confidence in its autonomous defensive capacity. Both in terms of coverage and sequencing, Finland then showed greater inclination towards military cooperation within EU structures than with NATO, viewing Alliance cooperation as beneficial whilst noting that “partnership cooperation neither includes any Article 5-based security guarantees nor obligations.” NATO was regarded as offering “cooperation possibilities based on mutual benefits,” with Finland preserving its discretionary right to pursue membership (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024).



There can be no denying that both national defence reports highlight the European Union's importance in the formulation of Finland's defence policy framework. In 2021, Finland described the EU as 'an important actor' in European defence collaboration, stressing its role in enhancing Member States' military capabilities and sustaining the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base. In 2024, the report states that 'the European Union's significance for Finland's foreign, security and defence policy will increase' and that 'it is essential that the European Union is strong and capable', noting that the EU's security and defence role intensified following the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war. At the same time, the 2024 report clearly designates NATO as Finland's 'primary security provider' after accession. Finland's endorsement of the EU's role has not waned, nor has its participation diminished; rather, NATO has become one of the central elements of Finland's defence posture, and the report encourages enhanced EU–NATO cooperation going forward (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024).

By 2024, NATO's significance within Finland's national security framework has grown exponentially. Finland "participates in the Alliance's activities across the spectrum, having set no national restrictions on its NATO membership." The Alliance's "ability to counter the threat of Russia is especially essential for Finland." Finland's defence now depends on being "supported by the forces and capabilities of the entire Alliance, including its nuclear deterrence as a last resort." Though Finland acknowledges the continuing necessity to maintain "first response with national capabilities," it equally stresses the critical importance of operating "as part of NATO's deterrence and defence." Finland accordingly provides robust support to NATO whilst actively engaging in Alliance security operations and missions across multiple geographical areas. Although

EU security cooperation retains its importance for Finland, it is now framed as “complementary and mutually reinforcing” to NATO (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024).

From these two reports, we can discern that Finland's post-war security strategy genuinely reflects "the greatest change to Finland's defence since the Second World War." This naturally includes comprehensive and continuous updates to assessments of European geopolitical circumstances and Russian capabilities, with the defence report featuring dedicated chapters examining developments in the Russo-Ukrainian war and Finland's future coordination with Ukraine. Since Finland had already successfully joined NATO by the publication of the 2024 Defence Report, and Russian hindrance or retaliation was actually quite minimal, a temporal disparity exists when retrospectively analysing the decision-making context regarding Finland's NATO membership during the early period of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024).

Regarding how the two defence reports further explain Finland's relative advantages gained from post-war NATO accession, we observe Finland's assessment of Russia's strengthened military deployments and threats in the High North. Russia's overall threat to Finland has transformed from the 2021 view that Russia posed no immediate military threat, to the 2024 report's indication that Russian threats are expanding, intensifying, and enduring rather than temporary (Ministry of Defence, 2021, 2024). As Finland perceives escalating future Russian threats, the collective defence guarantees and nuclear deterrence acquired through NATO membership will only continue to enlarge Finland's relative advantages.

4.5 The Other Side of the Equation: Inherent Trade-offs

The above analysis illustrates how Finland's reassessment of Russia in the wake of the Russia–Ukraine conflict reduced the relative cost and enhanced the relative benefit of the decision to join NATO. However, this does not mean that no costs were borne or existing interests sacrificed to Finland following the 2022 war. Following the war, Finland encountered significant challenges and changes in its economy, budgetary planning, and both short- and long-term defence and security strategies. This part will examine these areas in detail, aiming to reproduce Finland's contemporaneous domestic and external circumstances. The only crucial focus is to determine to what extent these difficulties can be attributed to Finland's post-war decision to apply for NATO membership, and whether any of these challenges were fully anticipated by Finland beforehand. This section will enumerate the principal challenges confronting Finland as a NATO member, evaluate their severity, and explore whether these negative consequences could have been averted had Finland opted not to join.



4.5.1 From Energy Dependency to Self-Sufficiency

Before the Russia–Ukraine conflict, Finland depended heavily on Russian fossil-fuel imports, which proved more economical than procurement from other sources. In 2018, Finland imported 65% of its energy, 63% of which came from Russia, yielding savings of €640–940 million compared with alternative suppliers and at least €200 million on natural gas alone (Lyyra et al., 2018). By 2021, Russia still accounted for 70% of Finland’s natural gas imports, over half its crude oil and petroleum products, and about one third of its coal and electricity (Bank of Finland Bulletin’, 2022). After the war, Russian energy accounted for only 1% of imports in 2023 (Statistics Finland, 2024). Finland’s 2022 budget attributed a near 5% inflation rate to cutting Russian energy ties and surging energy costs (Ministry of Finance, 2022).

While Finland’s energy dependency posed strategic vulnerabilities, the move to eliminate Russian imports was driven principally by EU-wide sanctions and Finland’s EU membership obligations, rather than its NATO accession (European Commission, 2025). Post-accession trade with Russia—including energy—fell further, and Finnish budgets have since prioritised domestic energy security and diversification (Ministry of Finance, 2022). Nevertheless, Finnish defence reports had already highlighted the need to reduce Russian energy reliance, so joining NATO had only a limited influence on Finland’s subsequent energy-autonomy expenses (Jääskeläinen et al., 2018).

4.5.2 Intensified “Broad-spectrum Influencing” from Russia

In its 2021 defence report, Finland defined “broad-spectrum influencing” as “a threat perception used in the context of Finnish military planning. It includes hybrid influencing, but it also contains the open use of military force” (Ministry of Defence, 2021). The 2024 report expands on this, noting that Russia “uses these tools continuously below the threshold of open conflict, flexibly adjusting intensity and range to pursue political objectives. Its aims include undermining national unity, impeding decision-making, manipulating public opinion, provoking confrontation, sowing fear and obscuring situational awareness” (Ministry of Defence, 2024).

Following Finland’s NATO bid and accession, these hybrid threats have become more pronounced. The 2018 Airiston Helmi case marked the start of Russian-linked intelligence activities near key Finnish infrastructure, but such operations intensified after February 2022 (Szymański, 2018). The Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (Supo) recorded increased Russian cyber-operations, with multiple incidents impacting undersea cables, notably the C-Lion1 link to Germany (Yle News, 2025). Officials report “at least six suspected sabotage incidents since 2022, with 11 undersea cables affected since 2023” (Jack et al., 2025). By 2025, pro-Russian groups like NoName057(16) were conducting coordinated Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks on almost all parliamentary parties during April’s elections, ostensibly in response to Finland’s anti-Russian policy (The Odessa Journal, 2025).

In October 2023, the Balticconnector pipeline between Finland and Estonia was cut in an act deemed deliberate by Finnish authorities (Hyndle-Hussein, 2023). The December 2024 ‘Eagle S’ incident further underscored the threat to critical infrastructure

when a Russian-linked tanker, part of the so-called ‘shadow fleet’, severed several undersea cables over a 62-mile stretch by dragging its anchor (Rosman, 2024).

Finland’s exposure to Russian hybrid threats increased after it sought NATO membership, yet similar threats had been evident before the war (Ministry of Defence, 2021). Hence, the extent to which NATO accession provoked additional hybrid operations requires deeper analysis. As an EU member imposing sanctions, Finland risked Russian retaliatory measures regardless of NATO status, necessitating enhanced defences that could further invite hybrid aggression. Membership of NATO also grants access to critical intelligence and technological support against such attacks (NATO, 2024b). Most significantly, if Finland expected Russia’s future aggressive intentions to be greater than previously assumed—potentially manifesting in large-scale conflict—the importance of NATO’s collective-defence mechanism would surpass the risks posed by hybrid tactics.

4.5.3 *Autonomy Challenges in Finnish Defence*

A further issue is whether Finland's defence self-reliance, highlighted in the 2021 defence report, would be challenged or even sacrificed by joining NATO, with implications for its national interest. NATO's spending target—requiring members to allocate 5% of GDP to defence by 2035—raises concerns that Finland might have to divert funds from other sectors (NATO, 2025g). The 2024 defence report, however, explained that Finland anticipates Russia's aggressive intentions to intensify, irrespective of its conventional strength, and concluded that an independently led defence posture would entail higher costs and uncertain effectiveness compared with NATO's collective security (Ministry of Defence, 2024). Thus, while Finland intends to boost its defence budget significantly, the NATO guidelines have not imposed undue restrictions on its fiscal planning.

Furthermore, accession raises concerns about Finland's Article 5 commitments, such as potential involvement in conflicts of marginal national interest and the handling of nuclear weapons on Finnish soil. As noted earlier, the alliance's doctrine permits flexibility in how members fulfil collective-defence obligations, allowing Finland to adjust its level of engagement when its interests are not directly at stake (NATO, 2023c). On nuclear matters, member states exercise discretion over basing, transit and use; some have not even enacted the requisite legislation (NATO, 2022a, 2025d; Pesu et al., 2024). Accordingly, Finland faces minimal immediate NATO-imposed constraints, though the broader, long-term impact remains to be assessed.

4.5.4 Russia's Military Posturing, Border Buildup and Escalating Threat Environment

Another undeniable consequence is the deterioration of Finland's military relations with Russia following NATO membership. Russian President Vladimir Putin described the expansion as the West “dragging” Finland into a military alliance, while Russian officials began designating Finland as an “unfriendly country” (Supo, 2023; Yle News, 2023). This classification has significant implications for Russian intelligence and influence operations. The 830-mile Finnish-Russian border effectively doubled NATO's direct frontier with Russia, creating what Russian strategists termed a “precarious security dilemma” (Gallagher, 2023).

Russia's military threat to Finland became evident through a systematic force build-up along their shared border, particularly after Finland's NATO accession in April 2023. Satellite imagery published by international media showed substantial expansion of Russian military infrastructure near the Finnish border, including new facility construction, fighter jet shelter renovation, and what appeared to be a new helicopter base (Nierenberg et al., 2025).

Major General Sami Nurmi, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Finnish Defence Forces, confirmed that Russia was “changing structures and building infrastructure close to our borders”, preparing to redeploy forces previously engaged in Ukraine. The build-up comprised “row upon row of tents, an increased number of military vehicles”, and other military preparations aimed at establishing a permanent threat presence (The New Voice of Ukraine, 2025).

Intelligence assessments suggested Russia could pose renewed threats to NATO within 3-5 years, with Danish military intelligence indicating Russia could potentially

invade neighbouring states six months after concluding the Ukrainian conflict (Johecová, 2025). The military threat was further evidenced by airspace violations, prompting Finland to summon the Russian ambassador in May 2025 following alleged violations by two Russian military aircraft near the southern coast (Connor, 2025).

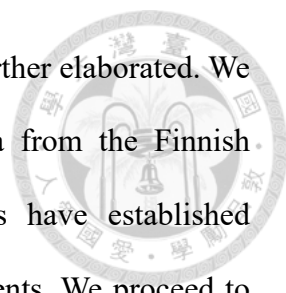
All of the above clearly shows that Russia has stepped up military operations close to Finland's frontier in recent years. If one assumes these moves were purely retaliatory for Finland's NATO membership—a cost no one contests—this chapter nonetheless argues that Finland's earlier choice to remain non-aligned was intended to safeguard its defence independence and avert full-scale Russian retaliation. Thus far, Russian reprisals have been limited in scope, far below the threshold of serious threats to Finland's security or loss of life. Although some of these 'light' military responses have occurred post-accession, NATO's collective-defence arrangements and enhanced security cooperation provide Finland with the resilience to absorb such pressures—a contingency Finland recognised in advance and which contributed to its accession decision.

4.6 Summarising the Cost-Benefit Analysis



This chapter explores Finland's foreign policy decision-making process regarding the immediate NATO membership application following the Russia-Ukraine War, demonstrating through cost-benefit analysis that this option represented the optimal choice for Finland's national interests and security under prevailing circumstances. In terms of cost-side independent variables, the analysis focuses primarily on the probability of Russian military retaliation against Finland prior to formal NATO accession. We examined Russia's actual military capacity degradation alongside Finnish political leaders' post-war reassessments of Russian military capabilities. Our findings indicate that after the war's commencement, Russia's military capacity suffered both depletion and indefinite extension due to the Ukrainian theatre, thereby diminishing the probability of large-scale Russian military operations in alternative regions, particularly the prospect of simultaneously maintaining dual fronts in Ukraine and Finland. Even if Russia were to mount a military response to Finland's decision to join NATO, Finland would inevitably revise downward its estimates of the operation's severity and force. Consequently, Finland's decision to pursue NATO membership at that juncture carried reduced risks of Russian military retaliation due to wartime constraints, thereby lowering the relative costs associated with NATO accession.

Regarding the benefit-related independent variables, these are fundamentally correlated with the likelihood of Russia presenting security threats to Finland in the future. In essence, the higher the probability of Russia posing security threats to Finland in the future, the greater the relative benefits Finland would obtain from NATO's collective defence security guarantees. We begin our discourse by examining the specifics of NATO's Article 5 and its related collective defence and nuclear deterrence provisions.



Russia's heightened focus on northern European regions was then further elaborated. We then investigate the historical factors linking Finland and Russia from the Finnish perspective, exploring particularly how Finnish political leaders have established connections between the Russia-Ukraine War and historical precedents. We proceed to analyse ideological factors pertaining to Russia and Putin, including historically evident expanded imperialism, expansionism, and Putin's increasingly brutal, aggressive, and irrational behaviour, all of which indicate that Russia's aggressive intentions and ambitions toward Finland and Europe generally will not decrease but will only continue to grow and become more apparent in the future. In light of this, as future military threats from Russia escalate, the relative benefits Finland would presently gain from joining NATO and securing collective defence guarantees will correspondingly increase.

Through contrasting Finland's post-2014 and post-2022 responses to Russia's military interventions in Ukraine, we deepen our analysis of how each conflict's goal, scale, process, and results shaped Finland's evolving understanding of Russian aims and threat levels, leading to distinct strategic decisions. In 2022, Russia's declared goal of overthrowing Ukraine's government and its comprehensive mobilisation proved far from successful in practice. Such outcomes reinforce that Finland's prompt application for NATO membership after the 2022 war was based on higher relative national benefits and lower relative costs.

We conducted a comparative review of Finland's 2021 and 2024 Defence Reports issued by the Ministry of Defence, analysing Finland's defensive doctrine and geopolitical threat appraisal before and after the Russo-Ukrainian war and its accession to NATO. The 2021 Report described only conditional, limited collaboration with NATO and asserted that enhancing national defensive capabilities alone would best safeguard

Finland's security. In contrast, the 2024 Report highlights NATO's collective defence as integral to Finland's future military planning and substantially expands its discussion of Russia's projected long-term threat to both Finland and Europe. This evolution in emphasis confirms that Finland's NATO membership has delivered increasing relative benefits in the aftermath of the war.

Ultimately, we have outlined the significant domestic and external challenges Finland confronted throughout and following its accession to NATO. While Finland undeniably bore economic and security burdens, the collective-defence assurances gained from NATO provide a compelling strategic benefit in the face of potentially escalated Russian aggression. The causal relationship between accession and certain difficulties warrants deeper examination, and many of these events were foreseeable and factored into Finland's decision to seek membership.



Table 3

Finland's Cost-Benefit Analysis for NATO Membership Decision (2022)

Variable Category	Specific Variables	Pre-War Status (2014-2021)	Post-War Assessment (2022)
Cost-Related Variables	Russian Military Capacity Reassessment	High perceived capability	Significantly degraded capability
	Probability of Russian Retaliation	High likelihood of severe retaliation	Reduced likelihood due to Ukraine engagement
	Russian War Goals Achievement	Successfully annexed Crimea quickly	Failed to capture Kyiv, objectives unmet
	Force Reallocation from Northern Regions	Strong presence in Arctic/Baltic regions	80% of High North forces redeployed to Ukraine
	Russian Personnel and Equipment Losses	Minimal losses, intact force structure	Massive casualties (950,000+ total)
	Troop Morale and Mobilisation Issues	High morale, effective mobilisation	Low morale, widespread AWOL/desertion
	International Assessment of Russian Capabilities	Viewed as formidable military power	Viewed as militarily weakened

Benefit-Related Variables

NATO Article 5 Collective Defence Guarantees

Available but less attractive option

Highly attractive collective security guarantee

NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Framework

Nuclear umbrella available but not prioritised

Essential deterrent against nuclear threats

Russia's Heightened Focus on Northern Europe

Strategic interest but cooperative approach

Militarisation intensified, A2/AD strategy

Historical Memory with Russia (Winter War parallels)

Historical caution, managed relations

Strong parallels to Soviet aggression

Russian Expansionist and Imperialist Intentions

Limited territorial ambitions (Crimea focus)

Broad European ambitions, regime change goals

Putin's Increased Irrationality and Aggressiveness

Rational actor with calculated risks

Increasingly unpredictable and confrontational



Chapter 5 – Conclusion



This thesis reviews Finland's decision-making process to join NATO following the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war. As the war unfolded swiftly and then reached an impasse, Finland rapidly initiated discussions on NATO membership. Within a few months, it completed the necessary domestic procedures and acceded to the Alliance. We argue that Finland's accession involved a rigorous cost-benefit calculation. The independent variables are divided into costs and benefits. On the cost side, we discuss Finland's relative costs, primarily associated with the likelihood of substantive military retaliation by Russia prior to formal accession. The higher the probability of such reprisals, the greater the relative cost of joining NATO. On the benefit side, we consider Finland's relative gains from accession, linked to the future threats Russia poses. The greater the anticipated threat or risk of Russian aggression, the higher the relative benefit of securing collective defence under Article 5.

This thesis draws its theoretical framework primarily from Graham Allison's Model I (Rational Actor Model), outlined in *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. We adopt the premise that state decision-makers prioritise national interest maximisation in foreign policy formulation, treating the state as a single, coherent actor capable of defining overarching objectives and systematically comparing all plausible courses of action. They choose options that optimise national benefit after evaluating alternatives, undertaking a structured process of goal identification, option enumeration and utility assessment (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). This approach corresponds to our cost-benefit analytical framework for studying Finland's NATO membership, as it allows us to model Helsinki's decision-making as a deliberate calculation of expected gains and

losses, grounded in empirical assessments of Russian capabilities and intentions, and diplomatic opportunities.



In analysing future Russian threats, we observe that despite Finland's longstanding military disadvantage vis-à-vis Russia, its strategic choices have fluctuated dramatically across historical periods—from active warfare to neutrality and “Finlandisation,” through “military-non-alignment,” to eventual rapid application for NATO membership. Thus, when examining future Russian threats to Finland, military power asymmetries alone cannot sufficiently explain the divergent threat perceptions informing each strategic choice.

Therefore, this study incorporates Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory. Beyond military capacity considerations, states respond to perceived threats, particularly others' aggressive intentions. According to Walt, it is the subjective appraisal of an adversary's intentions—grounded in actions, rhetoric and historical behaviour—that often proves decisive in alliance formation, rather than a mere tally of hard power resources. Barring extreme relative weakness (which produces bandwagoning), dominant states exhibiting pronounced aggressive intent will trigger balancing responses and possible alliance formation amongst other actors. In this respect, Walt's framework emphasises that the willingness to use force, demonstrated through strategic decisions and public pronouncements, can alter threat perceptions more rapidly than changes in aggregate capabilities (Walt, 1987). We utilise this theoretical lens to illuminate how Finland assessed evolving Russian threats during its NATO membership deliberations. By applying the Balance of Threat theory to the Finnish case, the analysis foregrounds how perceptions of Russia's expansionist aims and ideological motivations influenced

Helsinki's decision to abandon non-alignment and pursue collective defence within the Alliance.

Concerning research sources, we examine Finland's historical foreign policy transitions, analysing how it discarded previous diplomatic doctrines and embraced new principles. We also provide a detailed examination of Finland's post-war NATO accession process. For cost-related independent variable analysis, we explore both objective Russian military degradation in equipment and personnel during the immediate post-war period, and more importantly, Finnish political leaders' contemporary assessments of Russian military capacity changes, encompassing Russia's initial strategic failures, material losses, and casualties. Even should Russia undertake military retaliation following Finland's NATO accession, Finland would reassess and diminish its estimates of the likely scale and effectiveness of such reprisals.

For benefit-related variable analysis, we elaborate on the objective advantages of NATO Article 5 membership, including collective defence and nuclear deterrence provisions. We also examine how Finland's perceived Russian threat levels affect the relative benefits of NATO accession, encompassing political leaders' deliberate connection of the war to historical contexts, Russia's increasingly overt expansionism and imperialism, and Putin's escalating personal ambitions, irrationality and unpredictability. From the analysis, Finland perceived that, even though Russia's military capabilities fell short of earlier expectations, its aggressive intentions and associated threat would only intensify in the future, thereby enhancing the relative benefits of Finland's NATO accession.

Then we contrast Russia's 2014 and 2022 Ukrainian military interventions, demonstrating how differences in objectives, process, scale, and outcomes explain Finland's divergent post-intervention responses. This includes how Russia's 2022 wartime difficulties convinced Finland that NATO accession costs (probability of substantial Russian retaliation before formal membership) had decreased, whilst decision benefits (heightened future Russian threat intentions) had increased. These analyses collectively explain Finland's swift 2022 NATO application.

We have also presented the key challenges Finland faced at home and abroad in the period of its NATO accession and thereafter. Despite the undeniable economic and security strains, the collective-defence guarantee obtained through NATO membership represents a significant strategic advantage against any future intensification of Russian hostility. Further inquiry is needed to ascertain how directly some of these challenges stem from accession, noting that many were anticipated and influenced Finland's choice to join.

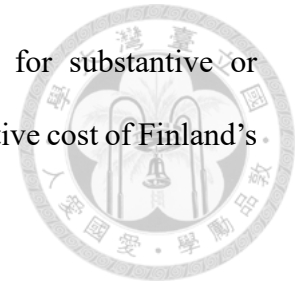
5.1 Research Findings

5.1.1 *Restoring the Cost-Benefit Assessment of Finland's NATO Accession*

Concerning research outcomes, this section seeks to answer the research questions established previously. In the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war, we contend that Finland used cost-benefit calculations to maximise national interests before deciding its subsequent foreign policy direction. This thesis first reviews Finland's trajectory from the independence struggle and successive conflicts under the Russian Empire, through Finlandisation and the policy of active neutrality, to its post-Cold War military non-alignment, accession to the European Union, and progressively closer relations with NATO and Western states. When examining NATO membership as a policy option, Finland concurrently evaluated costs (likelihood of immediate Russian military retaliation) and benefits (relative advantages of collective defence, correlated with Russia's future potential threats). Following an assessment of decreasing relative costs and increasing relative benefits, Finland chose to join NATO.

While NATO had long been a viable diplomatic choice for Finland, this thesis finds that the Russo-Ukrainian war fundamentally altered Finland's cost-benefit analysis of Alliance membership. Concerning cost-related variables, it argues that, before Finland's formal entry, the probability and severity of Russian military or substantive retaliation against Finland were indeed reduced in the war's aftermath. Empirically, Russia's military strength was degraded by the conflict's prolongation and abandonment of its initial war goals, necessitating the redeployment of armaments and troops to the eastern front, as well as sustaining significant material losses and personnel casualties. These dynamics undermined Russian force morale and caused persistent mobilisation challenges, trends that attracted the attention of Finnish and broader Western political

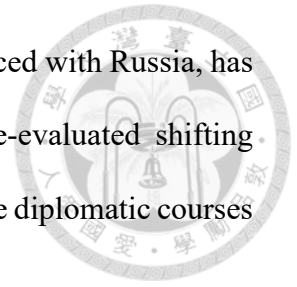
circles. Consequently, Finland recognised that Russia's capacity for substantive or military retaliation had genuinely declined, thereby lowering the relative cost of Finland's NATO application.



In terms of benefit-related variables, the collective-defence guarantee and its nuclear-deterrence framework have long been available. However, Finland's ultimate choice depends on its reassessment of national relative gains. Suppose Finland judges that Russia's future threat and proclivity for aggression against Finland and the wider European region will escalate. In that case, the value of NATO's collective-defence guarantee and nuclear deterrent correspondingly grows. The thesis finds that Russia's aspirations in Northern Europe are expected to expand, and that, following the Russo-Ukrainian War, Finland has drawn parallels between the current conflict and its own history with Russia. The war has further underscored Russia's resurgent imperialism and a more assertive, unpredictable Putin. Consequently, Finland recognises that the relative benefit of NATO's collective-defence guarantee will continue rising, and, with benefits increasing and costs diminishing, Finland promptly applied for NATO membership at the outset of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Among Finland's numerous historical decisions, having completed a cost-benefit analysis of NATO membership, this thesis also deliberately compares the temporally and contextually proximate cases of Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea and the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War. These two Russian military operations differed markedly in objectives, duration, outcomes, and international responses: Russia's 2014 action was relatively swift and successful, employing a comparatively modest military force, whilst the 2022 military operation proved entirely contrary, involving expanded objectives, protracted warfare, unachieved strategic goals, and the deployment of substantially larger forces.

This also underscores how Finland, as a comparatively small state faced with Russia, has continuously adjusted its assessment of Russian intentions and re-evaluated shifting international and geopolitical circumstances, thereby selecting diverse diplomatic courses to safeguard its national security, autonomy and sovereignty.



5.1.2 *Small States' Timely Security-Policy Transitions*

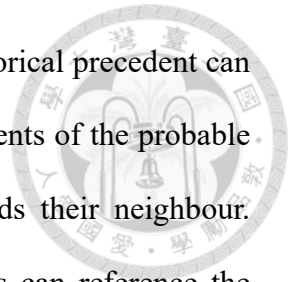
Reviewing the evolution of Finnish foreign policies, we can also discern how a “relatively” small state alters its foreign policy decisions when neighbouring great powers exist in different conditions. Finland's case demonstrates how small states can navigate asymmetric security dilemmas by carefully assessing costs & benefits, maintaining strategic autonomy, & making decisive policy shifts when international conditions change.

Firstly, with respect to strategic flexibility, this research shows that small states can dynamically alter their security policies despite historical power imbalances with large neighbours. Through careful observation of factors such as neighbouring states' offensive intentions and international developments, these states can swiftly adjust their foreign-policy and defence postures, calibrating relationships—whether collaborative or confrontational—with other powers to safeguard and advance their national interests.

Secondly, the Finnish case illustrates that small states must conduct continuous, exacting and prompt reassessments of their foreign policies to attain the greatest measure of security. Diplomatic strategies risk becoming outdated as international conditions evolve, potentially undermining national interests and security. Consequently, the optimal course will differ from one period to the next, and the window for effecting change may be narrow. Small states must therefore remain alert to changes, recognising that any given policy has a limited lifespan and that successful adoption of new measures depends on acting at precisely the right moment.

Finally, the appeal of incorporating historical experience into small states' diplomatic decision-making is clear. Through prior engagements with their neighbour, small states develop a nuanced understanding of the neighbour's operational conduct—

assessing both actual force levels and offensive aims. Naturally, historical precedent can also enable small states to acquire faster and more accurate assessments of the probable consequences and efficacy of distinct diplomatic strategies towards their neighbour. Regardless of persistent or evolving power disparities, these states can reference the neighbour's actions in other theatres to gauge changes in strategic context and capability, guiding more immediate and precise foreign-policy responses. Far from leading to suboptimal outcomes, these experience-based insights can bolster the efficacy and utility of a small state's security and diplomatic strategies.



5.1.3 Progress and Insight in Theoretical Application

From a theoretical application perspective, this thesis demonstrates that Graham Allison's Model I Rational Actor Model can effectively explain Finland's decision-making during its NATO application period. The theory posits that states consider the costs and benefits of policy options when formulating foreign policy, thereby selecting diplomatic decisions that maximise national interests at the given time (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). This thesis attempts to analyse Finland's assessment of the relative costs and benefits of "NATO membership" following the Russo-Ukrainian War, leading to its ultimate diplomatic decision. Looking ahead, the Rational Actor Model offers a valuable tool for analysing the decision-making of small states by showing that governments can modify their diplomatic and military policies to pursue maximal national interest and security. Even when faced with profound geopolitical upheaval or a neighbour's sudden aggressive posture, states can still swiftly evaluate the evolving cost-benefit profiles of available options and implement strategic adjustments without delay.

Given that Russian threats against Finland have remained virtually constant, simply analysing the military imbalance between Russia and Finland fails to explain Finland's perception of NATO's collective defence guarantee as especially beneficial post-accession. This thesis appropriately incorporates Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory within its analytical framework. It examines how Finland has adapted its diplomatic responses to Russian actions across different international contexts, specifically addressing Russia's deeper aggressive or threatening intentions (Walt, 1987). The thesis contends that Russia's escalating aggressive intent increases NATO's collective defence guarantee's appeal and relative advantage to Finland, thus motivating its diplomatic decision.

Overall, by incorporating the “Balance of Threat” theory and examining the long-term evolution of a state’s foreign policy, this thesis shows that long-term gaps in fiscal and conventional military capacity alone cannot explain a neighbour’s evolving foreign-policy strategies. Even where one state possesses superior armed forces, this does not translate into uniform offensive intent against all neighbours. A more comprehensive understanding arises from including the decision-maker’s threat assessment—using specific incidents and signals to gauge a neighbour’s intentions—thereby better accounting for variations in diplomatic strategy.

5.2 Research Limitations

This thesis has two principal limitations arising from its research focus, objectives and length. First, although Finland has adopted diverse foreign-policy stances in the face of Russia's longstanding military superiority, our analysis is confined to comparing Russia's military interventions in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. By contrasting the nature and outcomes of these two campaigns, we illustrate how our theoretical framework and proposed independent variables influenced Finland's foreign-policy decisions. A comparison of Finland's NATO accession with its much earlier diplomatic choices lies beyond this study's scope.

Notably, this thesis and the following case study of cost-benefit analysis benefited from both elite agreement on the need for immediate policy reappraisal and widespread public endorsement of a new diplomatic and alliance approach, which simplified and accelerated Finland's foreign-policy process. Were these favourable circumstances absent—if, for example, deep political divisions or popular backlash had arisen—it is doubtful whether the government could have maintained a strategy of maximising national interest or exploited the best timing for policy shifts. The present thesis does not explore the upper limits of rational state behaviour; its principal achievement is to show that, under certain conducive conditions, the Rational Actor Model and Balance of Threat analysis effectively account for swift, rational recalibrations of foreign policy.

Lastly, this thesis underscores how Finland's internal decision-making calculus factored in evolving international, geopolitical and Russian-specific developments to determine the diplomatic path most conducive to national interest and security. Three years later, there remains no definitive indication that Finland's NATO bid incurred net strategic losses or represented a departure from rational choice. Rather, the study confines

itself to detailing Finland's internal decision-analysis process aiming to maximise its own national interests and security, without passing judgment on whether the choice indeed maximised outcomes or achieved full rationality. Similarly, though this work employs Balance of Threat Theory and historical experience to frame threat perception, it does not delve into how Finland's analytic mechanisms were established, how its diplomatic apparatus was formed, or how historical influences have gradually moulded its decision-making system.

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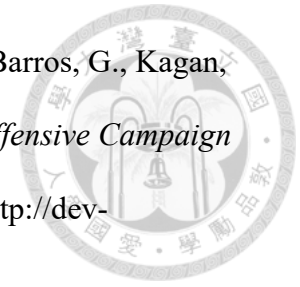
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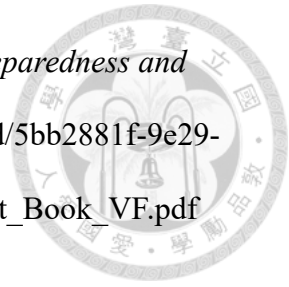
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