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Internalising NATO membership: Finland and Sweden's expanded position as hard security actors

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Author:
Alexander Wainwright

Supervisor(s):
Dr Bradley Reynolds (University of Helsinki)
Dr Laura Ekholm (University of Helsinki)
Dr Riitta Välijärvi (University College London)

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Abstract: This thesis concerns Finland and Sweden as hard security actors since their decision to join NATO in 2022. It aims to provide insight into the positioning and self-representation of both countries after handing in their application request to NATO. In public discourse, both countries had portrayed as 'abandoning neutrality', despite the evident fact of significant co-operation and interoperability efforts with NATO prior to 2022. The context of security being thought of in narrow and realist terms since 2022 incorporates a realist theoretical framework to provide greater understanding in the current security context. It outlines two core research questions; the first being: 'How do Finland and Sweden depict their hard security environment'? and the second: 'Which hard security means do they pursue in response to the depiction of their environment?'. Using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as its methodological framework, it builds on extant themes within the text and takes a comparative approach to reinforce the analysis of Finland and Sweden's position. It concludes that Finland and Sweden have expanded their hard security positions from a national to a European level, through their internalisation of NATO's hard security framework and repurposing of historical aspects of them as security actors. As one of few early studies on security regarding Finland and Sweden after their joint NATO application, it offers an initial understanding of the direction of both countries during the period 2022-2026 and leaves a foundation for future studies of both countries as security actors.

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1 Introduction

2022 was a highly consequential year for security around the world, let alone in Europe. The topic of security in Europe was centred around the Russian invasion of Ukraine which brought security to the forefront of political and media discussion across the continent. European countries sought to react to a full-scale Russian invasion that was forecasted[1], but inconceivable to many on the morning of February 24th.

The war and its consequences brought about a significant attitude shift towards security in militarily and non-militarily aligned countries alike, with security being thought about in increasingly military terms between states after decades of increased focus on terrorism and the climate crisis as a threat to security. Such a shift also brought NATO back into the spotlight after decades of its European members acting frugally on defence and previously being questioned as redundant during the so called 'end of history' (Cottey, 2004).

With this shift back towards thinking of security in military terms, security actors also had to reconsider how they positioned themselves with the full-scale interstate war occurring on the European continent. Much discourse emerged internally and externally regarding the position of Finland and Sweden as the two 'neutral' nations that were in closest proximity to Russia since the expansion of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and Russian hostility towards so called 'Gayropa' (Гейропа) in state propaganda discourse.

This thesis concerns the positioning of Sweden and Finland as 'hard' security actors since their decision to join NATO together on the 18th of May 2022. By assuming a realist approach to security studies, I argue that, as a consequence of NATO membership, both countries have positioned themselves internationally in closer proximity to Europe, rather than nationally, in their hard security affairs. It employs a comparative approach in analysing both countries with similar dispositions and security traditions to factor this into the observed change in

[1] US intel predicted Russia's invasion plans. Did it matter? | AP News

positioning and self-representation. Through textual analysis using Qualitative Content Analysis on eight government documents concerned with hard security from both countries, it examines their position and particularly how they self-represent as hard security actors, highlighting similarities and differences in their perceived agency, agenda and aims to explain their shift to being more internationally focused, hard security actors.

1.1 Research gap

Despite extensive empirical research within security studies, the recent shift back to thinking of security in military terms between states has changed the empirical environment in which studies pre-dating 2022 were conducted. This does not make them irrelevant in any form but offers new scope for research on security affairs considering the environmental change. This thesis strives to be a time piece of this environmental change in the immediate years after Finnish and Swedish NATO membership.

As smaller states on the global scene, Finland and Sweden receive attention disproportionate to them in areas commonly associated with the Nordic cultural branding (Haarder, 2016) such as literature, entertainment, economics and societal values. Security-related academic studies on these countries are few and far between and empirical security studies tend to focus less on these countries in comparison to others. To contribute to an expanded focus on Sweden and Finland, this thesis seeks to add to a greater understanding of both countries as security actors in a redefined environment for hard security.

As one of even fewer but growing academic studies on both countries since their NATO membership decision, this thesis will contribute to a growing and clearer understanding of both countries' hard security thinking within the temporal context of recent developments surrounding the topic.

2 Contemporary context

2.1 The context surrounding NATO membership

Since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the European security landscape has undergone a radical change because of two major political shocks. Political shocks are often considered as catalysts for shifts in inter-state relations (Gordell & Volgy, 2022) and thus the security and defence arrangements of state actors also shift. I identify two such shocks since 2022, the first being the aforementioned Russian invasion – bringing large scale inter-state war back to the European continent, and the second being the US pivot away from Europe – requiring European states to take more agency for security in Europe.

As a part of this trend, security is being increasingly talked about in traditional (thus military) terms in public and academic discourse (Rittiman, 2022, Parent, 2024). On the wider political front as a part of public discourse, there has been no shortage of calls from European leaders to prioritise and act for European security. A key emphasis in these calls is placed on NATO, to be the means which will ensure hard security in Europe. Stemming from these political shocks led to both Finland and Sweden jointly applying for NATO membership in 2022 (Forsberg, 2023).

The media narrative of this decision has been that Sweden and Finland abandoned their historic neutrality in favour of NATO membership. This is an incorrect and simplistic misrepresentation however, as Finland and Sweden had both positioned their hard security affairs closer to NATO before 2022. This took the form of co-operation within NATO hard security frameworks for interoperability purposes since 2014[2][3] (in the wake of the annexation of Crimea), and further back when Sweden was active in NATO deterrence planning during the Cold War (Frankson et. al., 2023) and Finland contributed to NATO led military missions during the war in Afghanistan (Mustasilta, 2022).

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[2] https://www.wsj.com/articles/sweden-ratifies-nato-cooperation-agreement-1464195502/
[3] NATO fighter jets join nordic countries in Arctic military exercise | CBC News

Dialogue and engagement with Russia had also been a long paradigm of both countries security policy alike. In Finland this had been a point of necessity since the end of the Continuation War and gave rise to the coined term of 'Finlandization' – explaining the ceding of agency in foreign and security policy to a larger power, to maintain political independence and national sovereignty (Petersen, 1991). Dialogue and engagement with Russia were also important to Finland during the 21st century prior to 2022, although not to the extent that the term 'Finlandization' entails, especially given Finland's proximity and cross-border connections to the Russian Federation.

Sweden too held a similar position with regards to Russia, albeit to a lesser extent, and much more driven by solidarity with Finland, and fears that military alignment with NATO would place Finland's non-aligned status at risk. This placed both countries, especially Finland, in an uncomfortable middle point as security actors. They were unable to move closer to NATO on hard security positions without the threat of retaliatory hard security measures from Russia.

Upon the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this dialogue was no longer a limiting factor in their security positioning, as European states cut all ties to Russia. This has allowed Sweden and Finland to be freer in their self-narration on hard security. From their initial applications to NATO in 2022, Finland and Sweden have been often commended externally for bringing their military expertise into NATO and being able to contribute effectively to hard security goals (Græger, 2025, p. 318), but it is also important to find out how they see themselves as a security actor, from their own perspectives.

3 Research aims

3.1 Overall research aims of the study

With this context in mind, it is my intention to investigate how Finland and Sweden have changed their positioning as 'hard' security actors since they chose to pursue full NATO-membership. As previously stated, it would be simplistic to conclude that Finland and Sweden changed their 'hard' security positioning in joining NATO by default, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine making NATO membership necessary. This rationalisation implies the flawed assumption that policy drives positioning, when the reality is more symbiotic as outlined by realist security studies.

On top of this, the effect of NATO membership on their hard security positioning demands a rational and justified answer. I find it more insightful to research their rhetoric and attitudes to their new hard security environment and how they seek to operate within it. By looking at how Finland and Sweden talk about their hard security position in these two aspects, and through a subsequent comparison of both countries, I build a well-rounded picture of both countries' initial position as hard security actors within their new NATO context.

The nature of having two neighbouring countries with shared histories and similar experiences of 'hard' security allows for the comparison of similarities and differences. This provides additional grounding for the conclusion on their presentation as 'hard' security actors within NATO.

With that said, it must be acknowledged that the full consequences of their NATO membership on their hard security position are not fully developed and known; therefore, it would be futile to draw a comprehensive conclusion of them as security actors overall. The paradigms of the ongoing invasion of Ukraine and US pivot away from Europe, as well as conflicts and turmoil in the Middle East, Africa and the Greenland crisis have all altered the context of their security environments and undoubtedly there will be future events that cannot be predicted nor accounted for. Considering these ongoing and possible future events, it would be too hasty to conclude their complexion as security actors, as such I hone my focus

on how they perceive and present themselves on hard security affairs and the direction in which they are going.

3.2 Previous studies

As the topic concerns recent developments, there is a lack of established research and publications in this topic area, although the amount is not zero[4]. As such this provides an excellent opportunity to conduct a study on how Sweden and Finland have changed on their self-perceptions as hard security actors since becoming full NATO members.

3.3 Research material

The analytical focus of this project comprises government publications that concern 'hard' security assessments since 2022. Whilst interviews and media sources are useful, they are produced for public consumption and are performative because of this audience. Other official documents from the source of government give this thesis a more reliable overview of both countries pursuing 'hard' means of security. Documents such as national security strategies are produced not only to set out the relevant states' position to partners but also to states that are considered threats or challenges. This means that such documents must be clear in their positioning of Finland/Sweden to both parties and consequently are more relevant to my research.

Due to the fact that I am not drawing a holistic conclusion on Finland and Sweden as security actors (which requires a much more extensive research project) and because the current security situation means they are continuously evolving and adapting their security policies, my research material comprises a selected number of similar documents that deal with hard security assessments since 2022. These documents have equivalents in the other country which allowed for an improved analysis and comparative approach.

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[4] See: Cottey, A., 2025. *Security in 21st century Europe*. Bloomsbury Publishing. or Matthijs, M., 2023. The three faces of German leadership. In *Survival 58.2* (pp. 135-154). Routledge.

Starting with individual analysis of the texts from Sweden and Finland respectively in the framework of QCA. I complement the analysis through a comparative approach, to find both similarities and differences between the countries. In using the research material in this way, I offer a conclusion on their overall positioning as 'hard' security actors after their decision to apply for NATO membership.

3.4 Time framing

I justify 2022 as the moment in which they both committed to explicit alignment within NATO, thus their position on 'hard' security should logically have been present with how they self-define themselves after this moment. 2014 also has a special relevance to the timeframe of my thesis, as the Russian annexation of Crimea led to Finland and Sweden both becoming Enhanced Opportunity Partners in NATO (Græger, 2025) within the Partner Interoperability Initiative (PII) with the aim of deepening interoperability and enabling contributions to NATO-led operations[5]. However, their public hard security narrative at this point was still one of firm non-alignment, especially given a lack of public support for NATO membership (see Appendix 1 for past and present polling data) and thus military alignment.

Whilst 2014 as a starting point for analysis would have been insightful, it also would have been too large for this thesis. It holds relevance as the point where 'hard' security alignment with NATO started to be practiced but not positioned explicitly upon. That is the reason it has been factored it into my contextualisation of my research dilemma in the section on the contemporary context.

Having 2022-2026 as a temporal range is useful in having a concise and defined research period for thorough analysis. This period additionally means the research material is from a period after deciding to join NATO, so the context in which the texts are produced are largely aligned.

Yet, their observed positioning is not as relevant in the analysis without a core understanding of the historical context prior to NATO membership. For this reason, I have compiled a

[5] Partnership Interoperability Initiative | NATO Topic

literature review on Finland and Sweden as historical security actors, before the analysis starting on page 35. This comes before my analysis, which adds depth to the analysis of how they position themselves on hard security affairs. In relation to the time framing the project, both Finnish and Swedish military non-alignment was ingrained in their identity from the Cold War (Aunesluoma & Rainio-Niemi, 2016), therefore this identity was also present in the narrative during their decision to apply for NATO membership. My section dealing with the historical context discusses the academic understanding of their security policy and sets up their position prior to 2022.

3.5 Geographical lens

My thesis frames Sweden and Finland as hard security actors for within the NATO framework. Consequentially, the thesis' geographical lens incorporates primarily Europe but also the transatlantic element of NATO to a lesser extent. The theoretical framing of 'hard' security also requires the limitation to these geographical areas. As small states, their hard security capabilities are in the European sphere. For this reason, the project does not include the Asia region in its analysis despite it being present in the documents, as it does not appear often in combination with 'hard' security issues.

The European security area is extremely broad, so it is necessary to define what I mean by European Security. There are many organisations that Finland and Sweden work within that deal with European security such as; the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), European Union (EU), Nordic Council of Ministers and NATO to name a few. These comprise the main European security architecture that is referenced in the document and this is what I take European security to mean to both countries as actors.

The general trend since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, with security being thought in increasingly harder terms, lends itself to analysing these nations through their NATO membership as the documents highlight it implicitly as the foundation for their hard security frameworks. Additionally, recent statements by European heads of states place the

emphasis on NATO as the vital framework for European states' security[6], with individual state actors contributing the important military and political resources to it. As NATO ties in the transatlantic link, and in combination of the other organisations that I mentioned above deal with European security, my geographical lens is set as primarily Europe and the Transatlantic hard security environment.

The chosen lens of a realist approach to security, combined with NATO as a hard security framework in this geographical setting, contributes to a solid theoretical basis and stable framing on which to base the analysis and comparative aspect of this research project. I now proceed to my hypothesis and research questions which serve to further detail my aims to contrast and compare Sweden and Finland as security actors, within NATO.

3.6 Hypothesis

My initial hypothesis is; Finland and Sweden, in the context of the threat posed by Russia and US lack of engagement with European security, have positioned themselves more internationally as 'hard' security actors as the result of internalising the NATO framework in the centre of the European security architecture of which they comprise. This hypothesis draws on the analysis and subsequent comparison of government publications as well as historical context and other studies previously conducted.

Below are two operational research questions that I have identified. the first is the starting point of analysis, with the second offering a logical development of the first. This adds extra nuance to the analytical conclusions that I am able to draw upon before comparing the two countries positions.

3.7 Core Research Questions

How have Finland and Sweden depicted their 'hard' security environment since pursuing NATO membership?

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[6] https://www.presidentti.fi/en/statement-by-denmark-finland-france-germany-the-netherlands-norway-sweden-and-the-united-kingdom/

This question enables me to assess the specifics of how Finland and Sweden see their position in the external 'hard' security environment. By analysing the conditions in which they see themselves as operating within, the conditions can better indicate the metrics by which they position themselves and can offer a clear understanding of their position itself. Certain emphases on their position through perceived challenges that are behind said environment, as well as the current threats to their position as 'hard' security actors forms a key line of investigation to this question.

Their overall measurement of the strategic disposition and their locationality in the environment are related to this research question and offer the chance to observe explicit references to their position in a literal sense. These factors combine well with the theory of 'hard' security in its association of geographically structured power with security to better conclude on their self-representations.

This aspect is especially relevant as Finnish and Swedish NATO membership expanded NATO's presence within the Baltic Sea Region. The expanded presence means this area is of particular interest in the document's sections' concerning operating environment as well as the pursuit of security.

With the benefit of the historical contextual knowledge on their security environment and both countries as security actors from before and since 2014, I am able to observe the changes in their justifications of their positioning on 'hard' security matters that I.

What 'hard' security measures are mentioned in the pursuit of security in response to their depiction of the security environment?

Analysing Finland and Sweden's stated means of responding to challenges in their self-defined security environment is a logical evolution of my first research question. The linearity within security theory (which I develop upon in my theoretical framework) follows the direction of: changes in the security environment (research question 1) -> state response to changes (research question 2) -> state position as a security actor.

The position of both countries within the NATO framework is pronounced in the documents as their contribution to and participation in the framework can be greater emphasised than

previous interoperability efforts could. It is worth investigating if, as actors they self-perceive as having a more leading role or reduced agency as security actors through NATO membership. NATO as an organisation presumes co-operation between members by default, however with recent US apathy on its role as the leader of NATO in Europe, there are now greater possibilities for European allies to assume the role being left by the US.

As the scope of my research is not limited to NATO but rather the context of it, other mentions of hard security organisations and frameworks are an appropriate measure of positioning on hard security affairs.

4 Theoretical framework

4.1 Security studies

To complete a comprehensive and in-depth research project that analyses security actors' positioning, there is a natural requirement for a concrete engagement and understanding of security studies to support my research.

The debates and critique of traditional security studies rose after the fall of the Soviet Union when the agenda no longer revolved around the conflict between the Soviet bloc and NATO (Morgan, 1992). From this, there emerged diverse axes within the reform movement which have attempted to redefine the concept away from its neorealist foundations (Krause and Williams, 1996) but there has not been a universally agreed upon conceptualisation of security, so engagement with the security debates is vital.

Thus, the fundamental of security studies deals with what security itself is. After the end of the Cold War, as many new critical approaches emerged within the field (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006) and despite extensive literature over many decades, there has been no single agreed definition within the discipline. As a central point of contestation in security studies, sometimes being referred to by scholars as an 'essentially contested concept'[7] (Buzan, 1984) makes the initial task of outlining what security 'is' for my analytical framework is no straightforward one. However, acknowledging such a standpoint is to accept it and render conceptual analysis useless (Baldwin, 1997), which cannot allow for the kind of empirical analysis that this project undertakes.

I have chosen to use a realist interpretation of security for my analytical framework, as it appears the most relevant to the scope of my research problem. As realist perspectives of security studies emphasise the anarchic international system on security issues (Baldwin, 1995) and current rhetoric of the fragmentation of the global order and return of power politics has seen the revival of realist strategic thinking in security matters (Evans et. al.,

[7] For the original formulation, see W B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, N.S., 56 (1956), pp. 167-98.

2024), the current empirics align well with the realist interpretation. As realist thinking emphasizes the anarchic international system as well as the state as the primary object of security (Krause and Williams, 1996), it provides the most useful basis for analysing Finland and Sweden's position as state actors within their current hard security environment and the wider European security order.

Security, and particularly national security revolving around the state, as a concept has its roots in the Cold War, where it developed a narrow understanding, based on the military, the threat of conflict with the Soviet bloc, and thus deterrence (Buzan, 1997). Given the current narratives of a 'New Cold War'[8] between East and West, a similar analytical lens is also useful in analysing Finnish and Swedish state positioning as security actors.

In the neorealist approach to security, the state is central as the subject of security and with its absence there can be no security (Krause and Williams, 1996). This is known as the 'security dilemma' which presumes a state of anarchy without the rational individual state actor. A state centric approach, therefore, rejects the widening of security's definition because they fail to threaten the acquired values that the state holds and the state itself (Wolfers, 1952). As my thesis is concerned with 'hard' security, which I will shortly develop upon, having a narrow view of what constitutes security is helpful, so that a widened concept does not confuse or divert from my stated research aims. Therefore, I acknowledge that other security threats exist in opposition to realist security thinking, such as climate change and epidemics. However, these threats threaten individuals and society much more than an artificial organ like the state and given the current return to thinking of security in narrow, military terms, they do not constitute a solid theoretical basis from which to analyse Finland and Sweden as state actors on hard security. Additionally, neorealists would argue they are not matters of security and because of these two reasons are absent from my research and analysis.

[8] The New Cold War | Council on Foreign Relations

This is the standard point of departure for the other axes of security. The supposed differences do not pose a theoretical dilemma to this research, as my realist criteria is based upon empirical necessities and utility to them, rather than theoretical preferences.
I also highlight that delving deeper these differences have been noted by some academics as less of a chasm between the neorealists and new security thinking, and I believe that Baldwin's article on their differences provides a good conceptualisation of security that adequately accommodates the variety of schools of security thought. It (security) is defined as: 'a low probability of damage to acquired values' (Baldwin, 1997, p.13). This is how I view security overall within my framework which must also be applied to concept of 'hard' security.

4.2 'Hard' vs 'soft' security

The concept of 'hard' security is omnipresent in my thesis and central to my research framework. The term is usually thought of in terms of power, as coined by Joseph Nye, where 'Hard power is the use of coercion and payment. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes through attraction.' (Nye, 2009, p. 160). Whilst not commonplace terms in security studies, there has been some literature that has developed on this terminology, namely Fatić who outlined 'hard' security as responsive to external, inter-state threats, involving the ability to respond with a credible threat or actual use of military force which is structured geographically (Fatić, 2002). This framework delineates well the type of positioning of Finland and Sweden that I analyse in this project, it avoids the potential risk of conceptual debate and semantics in a project that is focused on the empirical side of security.
Thus, linking Baldwin's (1997) definition of security, with my chosen concept of 'hard' security means that Finland and Sweden are assumed to be rational individual actors within an international anarchical system seeking security of their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence through the ability to respond with a credible or actual threat of military force to other states. This is the basis of my analysis and argumentation that Finland and Sweden increasingly position themselves closer to European allies in the face of Russian state

antagonism and US unreliability by building up military assets and co-operating for such ends.

4.3 Total defence

A concept that repeatedly appears in the documents in relation to 'hard' security matters is that of "total defence" (*Totalförsvar* in Swedish, *Kokonaismaanpuolustus* in Finnish). Total defence is a whole-of-society approach to hard security of the state that builds on national defence by the Armed Forces in both Finland and Sweden to incorporate society into security planning through resilience (Chandler, 2014) and its role in resisting threats[9][10]. Total defence has been historically important to both countries, particularly as both countries have maintained conscription systems for over a century. Its importance was particularly relevant as a way of building hard security assets as small non-aligned nations.

The history of total defence also means hard security has a different preconception in Finland and Sweden compared to other countries. Due to its whole-of-society approach, total defence means hard security is a matter for the whole of society in service of the state rather than a matter for the state as it would be in the United Kingdom for example. This also means hard security positioning carries a lot more weight and significance given its basis on total defence.

4.4 Theoretical summary

With this said, I arrive at my concluding summary of the theoretical framework. I define security as: "a low probability of damage to objects important to state values from state-actions". This conceptualisation aptly functions as it both outlines the states' aims of safeguarding its independence and territorial integrity, which are values and incorporates the presence of threats from state actors, in line with a realist security definition. From this we can also apply the definition to cover wider the European security architecture, in the positioning of Finland and Sweden within international frameworks for hard security. This

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[9] Kokonaisturvallisuus – Turvallisuuskomitea (In Finnish)

[10] Totalförsvar - Regeringen.se

synthesises well with my second research question in the case of Sweden and Finland's actorness being focused on a more international scale as leaders.

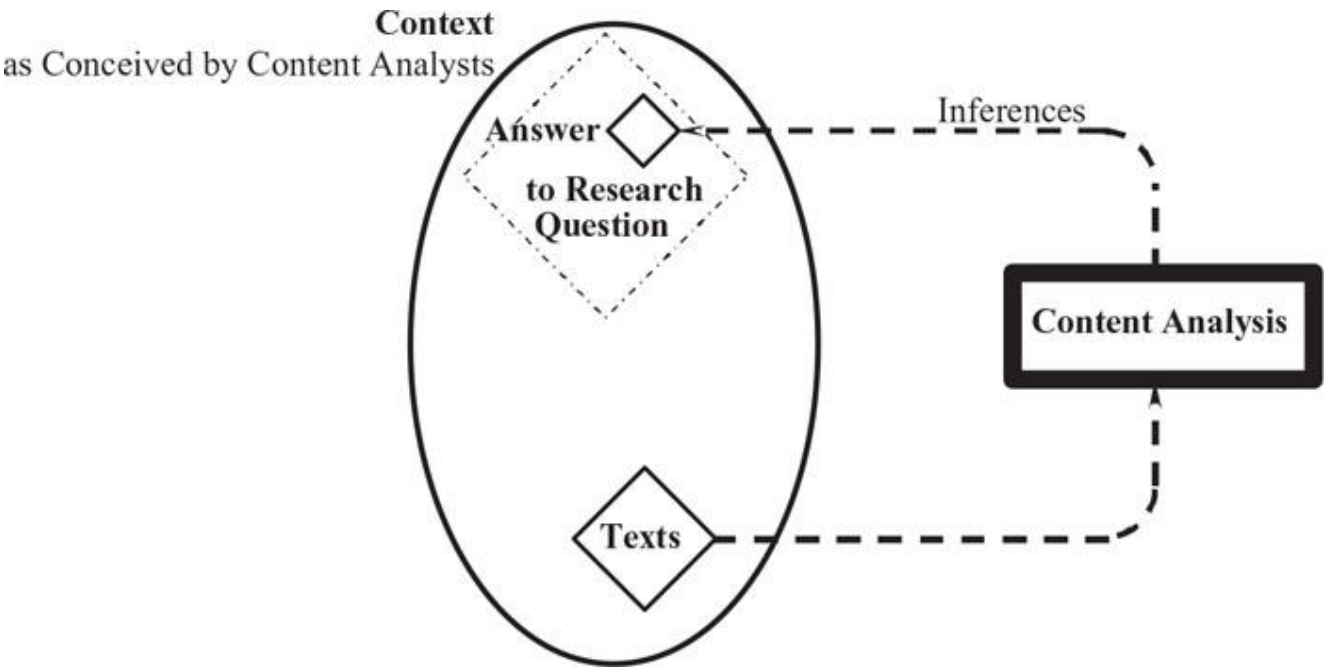
This definition also assumes that Finland and Sweden form a part of a rational individual actor group that work for said European security. This work encompasses the domain of hard security discussed in section 4.2, which covers any coercive or payment means to achieve my definition of security. This can comprise of sanctions, military assets, defence planning or collective deterrence. To summarise, these are the optics through which I analyse and conduct my comparison of both countries' hard security positioning.

5 Methodology

5.1 Methodological framework

My methodology is centred around Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). I have chosen this research method because the extensive nature of the context to my research topic and the texts within it help me to sample texts well and code within them effectively. Figure 1 provides a simple diagram that shows how QCA functions in a research project.

Figure 1: A simple diagram of the functioning of Qualitative Content Analysis



The importance of context in QCA cannot be understated. This is stated by Krippendorff (2004): 'In a content analysis, the context explains what the analyst does with the texts … The context specifies the world in which texts can be related to the analyst's research questions' (p.33). Finland and Sweden's adjudged 'abandonment' of neutrality in the wake of Russian aggression and the US' pivot from European hard security matters is my explicit context here. The answer to the research question through content analysis is the observed shift in their positioning as hard security actors after NATO membership and as such I have selected the following documents from the period 2022-2026 (See Table 1 in the following subsection).

5.2 Research material

Table 2: Resources used as Research Material

Finland	Sweden
Government report on foreign and security policy (2024) – **FI1**	Defence commissions report on security policy (2023)* - **SE1**
Security Strategy for Society (2025) – **FI2**	Swedish National Security Strategy (2024) – **SE2**
Joint Statement with the UK (2022)* - **FI3**	UK Joint Leaders Statement (2023)* - **SE3**
Government report on changes in the foreign and security policy environment (2026) – **FI4**	Total Defence Until 2030 (2024) (In Swedish) – **SE4**

* - Document was published prior to NATO accession.

For references within the texts, I have labelled each text with either FI or SE for their origin, followed by a number. These labels are in the table of texts above also for clarity.
I have chosen these documents as they are all primarily concerned with 'hard' security issues, are within the timeframe mentioned above and had a similar equivalent from the other side of the Baltic Sea. The table is organised as such to place similar documents from each country on the same row.

5.3 Research limitations

I would like to highlight that the NATO membership process in both countries was not completed until 2023 in Finland and 2024 in Sweden, as such some of the documents preclude official NATO membership (marked with an asterisk). However, I do not see this as

altering or confusing the key context of my research as the decision on NATO membership had been taken before these documents were written.

Another point regarding the timeframe, the Swedish documents span 2023-2024 which is considerably shorter than Finland's which are 2022-2026. This was the result of trying to select texts that were similar between both countries, and not by design, but there is potential scope for the Swedish texts to have a smaller context than that of the Finnish texts, which I factor into my conclusion. In addition, the Total Defence Until 2030 (2024) document is in Swedish. As a fluent speaker I have decided to translate the relevant quotes myself, but as a non-native speaker I acknowledge that this entails incorporating my own learned experience of the language for understanding it, but I believe this does not detract from the analysis to a great extent.

5.4 QCA Operationalisation and coding

QCA has been defined as similar to thematic analysis but differs in the key terminology and features (Lyhne et.al., 2025). Of importance to this research project is that QCA uses research questions to extract the relevant data then coded into descriptive categories and explanatory themes (Schreier, 2012). The research questions I introduced on pages 15-16 are purposed to these ends in my analysis, in addition to seeking to answer them, by formulating them beforehand will be conducted to extract the relevant data in the texts I have selected.

From the research questions, and after extraction of data from the texts, I have outlined two main group codes: environmental and means. 'Environmental' refers to passages of texts that mention Sweden/Finland's operating environment in relation to their hard security actorness. On the other hand, 'means' refers to stated 'hard' security actions within the text. Both main codes support the understanding of both countries as security through emphasis on the practice and context of security (Gjørv, 2012). Both code groups were given subcodes based on the themes in the documents. I would like to point out that whilst all codes were present within the research material, some often appeared in conjunction with other codes or

lacked clarity on the implications for hard security positioning and as a result not all codes have a specific section within my analysis.

Coding:

- Environmental
    - locationality
    - Power politics
    - Russian relations
    - Strategic disposition
    - Threat presence
    - Unpredictability
    - US relations
- Means
    - Co-operation
    - EU membership
    - National defence
    - Deterrence
    - NATO membership
    - Rules-based order
    - Sanctions

Before proceeding with my analysis, I have structured the historical context of both countries as security actors to come first, to provide extra oversight and depth to the analysis of their positions.

6 The Historical Context – Finland and Sweden as security actors

To provide a reinforced overview of the context, I have completed a literature review to have oversight of both Finland and Sweden as security actors before 2022. This review goes back to the early stages of the Cold War, when both countries followed a neutrality policy as well as their position from 2014 until 2022. Many public figures talking about their accession to NATO often framed it as some form of 'historic shift' or a reversal of long-term non-alignment policy[11]. Due to these discourses, I feel it appropriate to start at a period where there was a clear neutrality policy which is at the start of the Cold War.

6.1 Finland as a security actor - historically

Scholarship on Finland's position in the Cold War views Finland's situation from a realist perspective (Fischer et. al., 2016). It argues that sharing a long border with the Soviet Union forced Finland to impose neutrality on itself to maintain national sovereignty. Using realism, however, only paints a partial picture in understanding the Finnish position during the Cold War. It must also be supported with the notion that Finland's lack of power in the bipolar system as a small state requires the lens of a 'small state realism' (Laamanen & Railo, 2010). The early stages of the Cold War through this lens saw Finland consciously trade its agency over security policy to maintain national sovereignty on the doorstep of the Soviet Union, which gained the moniker 'Finlandization'. This dynamic of trading agency is supported by Aunesluoma, noting that 'Finland's length border with the Soviet Union was bound to have a direct influence on Finnish foreign and defence policies' (2016, p.53). The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) is seen as a representation of this; a mechanism to promote neutrality out of necessity (Pakkasvirta & Tuominen, 2024, p.36). Especially in the early phases of the Cold War, without the idea of *détente*, Finland was willing to compromise on hard security arrangements to avoid being a theatre for conflict between the Soviet Bloc and NATO. This is called the 'Nordic balance' where the Nordic area

[11] Sweden formally joins Nato military alliance / Finland moves to join Nato in historic step – EUobserver

aimed to keep clear of militarisation and being a theatre for conflict and tension. From this it can be said that as a security actor Finland was limited and without full agency, compromising on its pursuit of security by 'hard' means to secure independence and instead relying on diplomacy with the Nordics, NATO and especially the Soviet Union to ensure security, with total defence as a last resort.

The latter part of the Cold War for Finland has been explained through a more liberal lens on security policy, once again through the perspective of a small state actor. Finland is cited for having played an active role in mediation between the two power blocs, most famously the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which resulted in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 which helped cement the behaviour of Finland playing balancing act between the blocs (Pakkasvirta & Tuominen, 2024, p. 38). As a third party, Finnish security concerns benefited from the reputation as a reliable diplomatic actor, reinforcing Finnish sovereignty and credibility. This is especially important given that the Finnish neutral status had no domestic or international legal foundation (Fischer, 2016, p. 7). With more ideas of *détente* after the Cuban missile crisis, the main Finnish security aims of territorial integrity and national defence (Lödén, 2012, p. 41), were pursued with soft means in organisations such as the CSCE and the UN.

In summary, Finland's position as a hard security actor was one of strict isolation for its own security given its precarious situation and locationality between two power blocs. Isolation meant that it could not publicly position itself on hard security matters internationally which has undoubtedly played a factor in the media narrative of it abandoning neutrality when it chose NATO membership in 2022. It additionally means that hard security positioning was limited to national defence in line with concept of total defence.

This began to change, as Finland had built up a partnership with NATO over many years since the Cold War ended (Forsberg, 2025), and by 2014 it had already been an EU member state for 19 years. As an EU member state, it had signed up to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU. Therefore, by 2014, Finland had already started to move

closer to NATO alignment in terms of values and institutional frameworks by association (Winn, 2003) and marked a change in its hard security positioning.

In terms of practicing this 'hard' security alignment, Finland had already started interoperability efforts within NATO frameworks. As early as 2009 it had taken part in the NATO BALTOPS exercise in co-ordination with Baltic NATO member states' navies[12]. More substantially Finland signed a 'host Nation Support Technical Arrangement' with NATO in September 2014 which allowed for Finland and NATO to host exercises together within Finland, as well as confirming that NATO security assistance would be provided to Finland in situations including disasters, disruptions and threats to security[13]. Finland also had been a major customer for US aircraft, first having bought the F/A-18 Hornet during the 1990s and choosing in 2021 to enter a procurement contract with the US for the F-35 Lightning[14]. This shows that there was an effort for interoperability and co-ordination with NATO countries on 'hard' security matters. For all intents and purposes, this doesn't entail Finland being militarily non-aligned as a security actor prior to 2022 as it was often portrayed when deciding to join NATO.

However, we can see also the context of requiring dialogue with Russia, on a pragmatic basis. Former President of Finland Salu Niinistö mentioned in 2018: 'the four pillars that our security rests on: our national defence, our Western integration and partnerships, our relations with Russia, and the international rules-based order – we must attend to all of these pillars equally'[15]. This statement quite clearly self-defines Finland's position as between NATO and Russia, particularly the use of 'our Western integration' says that Finland itself is situated outside of the West. We can also empirically see this positioning with Finland being the location of choice for the US-Russia summit of 2018 in Helsinki, positioning Finland as a mediator between the two powers.

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[12] Navy exercise "Baltops 2009" takes place in Baltic Sea :: The Baltic Course | Baltic States news & analytics

[13] Could Putin's Russia push neutral Finland into NATO's arms? - CSMonitor.com

[14] F-35 Programme - Puolustusvoimat - The Finnish Defence Forces

[15] President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö's speech at the opening of the 227th National Defence Course on 5 November 2018 - Tasavallan presidentti Sauli Niinistö

To conclude, Finland's hard security position was isolated to a national level by default during the Cold War. It developed into shifting to be more western aligned after the Cold War ended but still took into consideration the necessity of dialogue with Russia, limiting its positioning as well as maintaining a national focus on total defence.

6.2 Sweden as a security actor historically

Sweden, whilst having shared a similar Cold War neutrality, is explained in different terms as a security actor, primarily focused on values. The general judgement is that Swedish neutrality, unbowed by the proximity of a land border with a large power, was much more normative and identity based (Pakkasvirta and Tuominen, 2024, p. 39). This explains the extensive Swedish action within international organisations like the UN and Nordic council, at a deeper level than Finland, which notably refrained from criticising the Soviet Union in international forums (Forsberg, 2023). Sweden, particularly under the leadership of Olof Palme in the late 1960s and 1970s prescribed an international role in its foreign policy activism (Lödén, 2012). Through the doctrine of a 'Third Way' and participating heavily in international frameworks for soft security (such as the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission on Korea), Sweden heavily relied on diplomacy based on values and morals that raised its own profile as a reliable and truly neutral nation to further its security aims. Resulting from this it has been said that Swedish security during the Cold War was engaged with on the Nordic and global levels, limiting European engagement to economic questions only (Makko, 2017, p. 37). It also shows a tradition of soft rather than hard security internationally, limiting hard security to a national level supported by its strong domestic defence industry.

Whilst Sweden had more of an idealistic view of security policy than Finland historically, its large defence industry allowed it to be more independent of NATO on 'hard' security assets and planning. Its defence industries' strength led to successive Swedish governments having a domestic focused positioning on hard security, but the rapidly globalising economy and supply chains exposed the weakness of this position during the OPEC crisis of 1973 (Jansson

et. al., 2026) and exacerbated it after the *Whiskey on the Rocks* submarine incident almost caused conflict with the Soviet Union[16]. These incidents led to an internal shift of Swedish hard security positioning towards the West at the end of the Cold War, whilst maintaining the façade of being a stand-alone hard security actor.

Furthermore, whilst Russia is still somewhat close in proximity to Sweden (via Gotland to Kaliningrad), Sweden lacks the land border that Finland has which meant the importance of dialogue with Russia was less pronounced than would otherwise be necessary.

Sweden also entered the EU and thus signed up to the CFSP like Finland in 1995 and participated in BALTOPS exercises. Additionally, Sweden played an active role in NATO-led missions in Bosnia through IFOR and SFOR, Kosovo as part of KFOR and Afghanistan in ISAF. These were predominantly peacekeeping missions without the intent to conduct warfare. However, Sweden also contributed some of its Air Force assets[17] in Libya during Operation Unified Protector which saw NATO military intervention overthrow the Gaddafi regime. Sweden also ratified a similar NATO agreement to Finland, allowing joint NATO exercises on Swedish territory as well as support in times of threats to Swedish national security[18]. In fact, even NATO officials had considered Sweden a 'shadow member of the alliance' (Wivel, 2017, p. 495) and this is backed up by Swedish participation in NATO-led exercises. These actions show a clear trend of increasing co-operation of 'hard' security efforts within NATO frameworks and as such a move in positioning towards the West and NATO.

In rhetoric however, whilst the Moderate party (*Moderaterna* – the centre right, conservative party in Sweden) were in favour of NATO membership for Sweden, there was no ambiguity about Sweden's position as a 'hard' security actor. The requirement for dialogue with Russia was partially a factor in keeping Swedish 'hard' security outside of NATO, an example being Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statements against Swedish NATO membership in

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[16] Aftonbladet: Rysk officer: Vi skulle följt ordern (in Swedish)
[17] Sverige skickar Jas Gripen till Libyen - Nyheter - Senaste nytt | Expressen - Nyheter Sport Ekonomi Nöje (in Swedish)
[18] Sweden Ratifies NATO Cooperation Agreement - WSJ

2016[19]. There were also other factors in Sweden choosing to maintain its public facing 'hard' security outside of NATO.

A good example of this was the Swedish feminist foreign policy[20], which sidelined 'hard' security measures in foreign policy, placing the emphasis on the stated goals of championing women's rights globally (p. 16). Externally then, Sweden similarly positioned itself as non-aligned on hard security matters as a consistent pattern. Internally it had also been nationally focused during the Cold War, before gradually shifting its position again westwards and towards NATO

6.3 A summary of the historical context

When comparing both countries as security actors during the Cold War, it is accepted that Finland took a more realist position than Sweden, which encompassed values more into its security policy. There are, however, similarities between the two countries as well. Authors acknowledge large territorial defence forces in both countries (Pakkasvirta and Tuominen, 2024) (Makko, 2017), and the positioning as a 'Third Way' in multilateral diplomacy between the East and West is also acknowledged (Aunesluoma, 2016).

The identity of neutrality was built up both internally and externally during the Cold War, with both countries' security goals being defined around the concept of territorial integrity and the maintaining of the Nordic balance; the idea that the Nordic region should be free of great powers (Brundtland, 1966). When the security situation suddenly changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this is explained as causing a questioning of identity the security policies of both countries; 'neutral Sweden suddenly found that there was nothing left for it to be neutral about' (Kuldkepp et al., 2021, p.271) and the 'neutral countries lost the need to promote neutrality as it wasn't necessary any longer' (Pakkasvirta and Tuominen, 2024, p.41).

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[19] Sweden urged to boost alliances but avoid NATO – POLITICO

[20] Available at: https://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/uploads/gichd/GDEI/9._Sweden_s_feminist_foreign_policy.pdf

The easing of tensions in the European security environment led both countries to seek and obtain EU membership in 1995, which was a step in the equalising of both countries' security relationship (Forsberg, 2025).

It also marked the beginning of positioning themselves on hard security affairs more in line with Europe and NATO, albeit not explicitly or quickly. Their actions as hard security actors after the end of the cold were characterised by preoccupations about Baltic security (Kuldkepp et. al., 2021) but remained 'soft' as they sought greater economic security through membership in the EU. Membership in the EU was also a shift from non-alignment (Forsberg, 2023), and further integration with NATO in European security further exemplifies that Sweden and Finland were acting less as individual countries on security matters.

In summary, Sweden and Finland maintained large territorial defence forces for securing national independence, keeping hard security as a national matter. Soft security in both countries functioned primarily through diplomatic or 'soft' actions internationally. Finland and Sweden were successful in using these means during the Cold War to maintain their neutrality and non-aligned status, and soft measures of EU integration after the Cold War continued this trend. However, it is important to note that both countries retained 'hard' assets and measures for security, such as conscription and the extensive Total defence framework which incorporated businesses and individuals alike into hard security planning. This leaves several problems in explaining their positioning as security actors, if both countries had already extensively developed hard security co-operation with NATO prior to 2022, then why was the narrative that both countries had taken the 'historic'[21] choice to 'drop non-alignment'[22]? This clashes with the previous stating of both countries as so-called shadow members and key partners. It is understandable that the prior necessity of dialogue with Russia completely disappearing after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was

[21] Ukraine war: Sweden and Finland confirm Nato plans in historic shift
[22] Finland joins NATO in historic shift, Russia threatens 'counter-measures' | Reuters

the factor, but it is far too simplistic to conclude that it was the reason they changed their position as hard security actors.

Given their shared history of official non-alignment and neutrality between a dichotomy of NATO alignment and the perceived threat from the East, it is paramount to conduct an analysis of their self-perceptions as 'hard' security actors since joining NATO, to see what has changed in their outward positioning as hard security actors.

7 Analysis: Finland

7.1 Environmental factors in Finland's hard security environment

I start my analysis of each country individually, in the format of looking at the environmental code group first, and subsequently the means coding group. A comparative approach will be employed after to make the analysis of each country clearer individually. Upon the conclusion of my analysis, I conduct a thorough comparison between my findings to lead me to a rational and comprehensive conclusion.

7.1.1 Unpredictability, complexity and power politics

Beginning with Finland and the effect of the 'hard' security environment on it as an actor, the theme of an unpredictable, complex and deteriorating security environment is presented as a challenge for Finland's 'hard' security responsibilities and abilities to operate, yet one it can meet the challenges of. The unpredictable, complex and deteriorating Finnish security environment is categorised by and as: 'growing uncertainty' 'rapidly changing' and 'difficult-to-predict' (FI4, p.6) (FI1, p. 8, p.10). These characterisations are also observed as wider 'hard' security paradigms, but they are often internalised to the Finnish security environment themselves. I see this as a by-product of joining NATO, broadening the 'hard' security environment across the alliance from a previous more local environment of Finland and its neighbouring areas. On the contrary, the proximity of Finland to Russia is also certainly a factor in Finland seeing it's hard security environment as it states: 'Finland's security environment has deteriorated fundamentally and in the long term especially due to Russia's aggressive actions' (FI1, p. 22). These actions refer to instances of Russian hybrid attacks to Finnish state infrastructure[23] as well as threatening rhetoric since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine[24].

[23] Finland boards oil tanker suspected of causing internet, power cable outages | Reuters
[24] Russia issues new warning about Finland, Sweden joining Nato | Yle

The theme of an unpredictable, complex and deteriorating security environment, however, is often positively responded to in the documents by saying Finland is a security actor that is capable and operate with this perceived change confidently. The documents describe Finland as 'reacting to changes in its operating environment with determination' (FI1, p. 9) and 'well prepared for times of uncertainty. Finland is a driven and impactful actor' (FI2, p. 6). The message of determination and preparedness makes clear that the deteriorating security environment has not altered Finland's capabilities as a security actor. I see the rhetoric of determination and preparedness as an intentional act, targeted towards other hard security actors. Firstly, potentially as a veiled message to Russia that Finland is not weakened or susceptible to the changed environment. Yet also believe there is another hidden element of imagery to NATO allies as well, in the form of presenting Finland as a capable and reliable hard security actor within an expanded framework. The depiction of Finland's operating environment as such also expands Finland's position to be more international given its focus of 'possibility that Russia will be willing to use military force in Europe in the future as well.' (FI1, p. 12) which it details as threatening Finland's security community of NATO.

Both the internalisation of wider developments in the hard security environment and the resolve shown to external actors to react to those developments in a determined manner, shows that Finland as a hard security actor positions itself as more proactive in its environment. In addition to this proactivity, I see the widening of the hard security environment which it sees itself as operating in, as a reflection upon Finland aiming to play a wider role in hard security affairs. This is significant as although Finland had already started interoperability alignment with NATO, the tradition of Finnish hard security revolving around its own territory and total defence is markedly different to this positioning of deeper and wider engagement in its approach.

Intrinsically linked to the deterioration of Finland's hard security environment, is the theme of states pursuing their interests with disregard for the positions of other states, often through hard security means. I have coded such elements in the texts as 'power politics'. When such elements in the security environment are mentioned, Finland invokes the

necessity of values in response. 'The significance of shared values is being put to the test as greater emphasis is being placed on the pursuit of immediate interests' (FI2, p.5). This rhetoric stresses the necessity of values in hard security matters, particularly among like-minded security actors, hence the presence of 'shared' values. Additionally, in saying this, it positions Finnish actorness in hard security matters as resolute within the current emphasis on power politics. This means that Finland, as with the environment being unpredictable and complex, strives to operate in such an environment, but that it is not its preference as it is opposed to Finnish fundamental values on hard security matters.

The invoking of values in a shared manner points towards a position of Finnish leadership on hard security. The shared values also act as a message to like-minded security actors to operate in tandem with Finland, to help manage the hard security environment. This is demonstrated in: 'it is more important than ever for Finland to uphold and strengthen the rules-based international order' (FI2, p.6). This move promotes Finland's role in an international position on hard security matters, in order to counteract the environmental security pattern of working pragmatically. This is done by seeking co-operation and values that can manage the hard security environment responsibly.

This shows that Finland aims to be more engaged, from an international position on hard security matters since 2022. It demonstrates once again, further proactivity on Finland's role as a security actor, positioning itself as a leader on hard security matters. Since joining NATO in the narrative of a deteriorating security environment, I observe several efforts to co-ordinate the response to said deteriorations.

It is possible that NATO membership could have contributed to Finland seeing its position as more secure due to hard security guarantees, placing it as a security receiver. However, that isn't supported by the proactivity shown in the documents, where Finland is defining itself as determined and engaged in its new operating environment. Therefore, I think it is more plausible that NATO membership in this sense, has given Finland a new medium of acting on 'hard' security, elevating its position to one where it can be engaged with other actors and promote shared values.

7.1.2 Threat presence and Russian relations

The next area I would like to highlight is the theme of threat presence, specifically the threats to Finland's hard security environment that affect it as a security actor. The threats are consistently ascribed to Russian military assets and their presence, particularly in Finland's hard security environment. Aspects such as 'Growing tensions and military presence as well as harmful actions by Russia have also become increasingly visible in the Baltic Sea region.' (FI2, p. 7) highlight the presence of immediate threats to Finland's position as a security actor. Another reference to the presence of threats is: 'Finland is not facing an immediate military threat, but it must be prepared for the use or threat of military force against Finland' which is developed upon: 'the threat of Russian military operations expanding beyond Ukraine cannot be ruled out', (FI1, p.10). The consensus within this trend is that state threats that challenge Finland's position as a security actor, are growing. In this case, the threats fit my theoretical framework. As they are able to potentially damage Finland's ability to respond with a credible threat or actual use of military force, structured geographically (Fatić, 2002). Building upon the general trends of Finland's security environment being unpredictable and deteriorating, the Russian threat to said environment is linked explicitly; 'Europe's security environment remains unstable as Russia continues its war of aggression against Ukraine' (FI2, p.5). In such a statement we can see the previous need for dialogue with Russia eliminated since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Furthermore, by linking the Russian threat to the unstable security environment in a linear manner, Finland positions itself at odds with Russia in terms of hard security. Such positioning characterises Finland's security position to Russia as a 'zero-sum game', where Russian security rhetoric from the Kremlin weakens Finnish security, and vice versa.

Supporting this are a few direct mentions of Finland's relationship to Russia, with them being mentioned as fundamentally affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and that Finland has 'refrained from political relations with Russia because Russia's war of aggression is a blatant violation of international law and the UN charter' (FI1, p. 11). This builds upon their hard security relationship being fundamentally at odds, despite previously having political

relations as a necessity of proximity, we clearly see the desire to isolate and position Finland away from a Russia that negatively acts against Finland's security.

This marks a fundamental change since before Finnish NATO membership. Finland previously placing emphasis on dialogue and mediation with and between Russia and other powers was a key paradigm of its security policy and took a soft security approach. Now the momentum is in the other direction moving away from building security through attraction towards security through coercion (hard security). The Russian threat presence being linked to a more unstable operating environment suggests Finland sees itself in stark opposition to Russia.

7.1.3 US Relations

Before I investigate more explicit references to Finland's positioning and strategic standing on hard security. The theme of US relations is consistently present with relation to Finland as a security actor. The trend that emerged reminded me of a quote from the first Secretary General of NATO, Lord Hastings Ismay, who said that the purpose of NATO was: 'to keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down'[25]. The first part of that quote is what emerges from the text. The US placed as an essential partner regarding Finland's position as a hard security actor on multiple occasions. 'The bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between Finland and the United States is significant for Finnish security as it constitutes the foundation for cooperation carried out with the United States in Finland in all security situations' (FI1, p.25) positions the US in close proximity to Finland as a partner that is present within hard security arrangements in Finland itself.

Additionally, it is also stated that 'the United States' commitment to NATO and its military presence in Europe are of central importance to the security of Finland' (p.13) once again implying that Finland as a security actor is dependent on the US being closely aligned on hard security matters. Some extra insight on these points is required. As both quotations

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[25] See David Reynolds ed., "Introduction," in *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives* (Yale University, 1994), p. 13, citing Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), p. 412.

come from the Government report on foreign and security policy (2024), which was published before the Trump administrations pivot away from Europe on hard security. As such, I will also highlight the following section from the later Government report on changes in the foreign and security policy environment (2026). 'The United States is a key ally for European security. This alliance is built on a long term and multidimensional partnership. In many fields, Finland's cooperation with the United States is closer than ever. Finland's goal is to continue strengthening cooperation that promotes Finland's and Europe's foreign and security policy and economic interests over the long term.' (FI2, p. 11). Considering this, the acknowledgement of the US importance to Finland's position as a hard security actor is still present, however this position is no longer implied as being taken for granted.

Therefore, the topic of US relations with regard to Finland as a hard security actor is still seen as important to Finland's position, but not in such a way that ties Finland's position to that of the US position. Resulting from the latter document on US relations, Finland positions itself closer to Europe on hard security matters, not just because of declining US interest in European hard security affairs, but because of Finland necessitating co-operation as a hard security actor for its own national security and wider European security.

This is significant as it demonstrates a major difference in positioning since Finland joined NATO. Previously US relations would not have been specified as so central to Finland regarding hard security measures, whilst there were some shallow levels of co-operation with the US, explicitly positioning Finland in as close proximity to the US as it does here, would've caused issues with Finland's bilateral relationship with Russia.

The concern towards the US taking less interest in European hard security affairs is also telling of Finnish integration within NATO, as prior to membership Finland's total security was the main pillar of its capabilities as a security actor, yet here it is implied that NATO Allies are integral. Thus, the topic of US relations leads me towards the opinion that whilst Finland maintains importance on being able to act for its own security, NATO membership has moved its position to being more dependent on Allies in its standing as a hard security actor.

7.1.4 Locationality and strategic disposition

This section of my analysis on Finland deals with the explicit references to Finland's positioning of itself as a hard security actor. The main finding throughout all four documents was that Finland positions itself as much as benefiting from NATO membership as well as providing security also through NATO. Firstly, Finland is placed as concretely within NATO, not just as a recent member, but as an integral one: 'NATO membership places Finland even more firmly in the European and transatlantic security community' (FI1, p.13) and 'Finland has not set any national restrictions on its NATO membership' (FI1, p.35). This makes it quite clear that Finland's NATO membership is final and non-negotiable, placing it firmly within the alliance. The benefit of NATO to Finland's hard security position is also mentioned: 'NATO membership has raised the threshold for the use of military force against Finland. NATO's deterrence and defence are of fundamental importance to Finland's security.' (FI1, p. 13). With NATO membership Finland has positioned itself well within hard security frameworks in Europe and sees its actorness as strengthened due to said position.
It is worth noting in relation to the previous paragraph however, that Finland, whilst positioning itself central to NATO and European Security, does not only see itself as a net beneficiary from NATO membership, but also a provider. The repeated emphasis on Finland's ability and willingness to contribute to NATO and European security more widely is also mentioned in tandem with its positioning of centrality within NATO. In its hard security planning, it states: 'All preparedness measures are carried out as part of the Alliance so that they serve both Finland and NATO.' (FI4, p.65), which shows a position of fully committed NATO member that does not only prioritise itself. In this area, there is an element of positioning Finland as a hard security actor with a strong set of capabilities that benefits NATO: 'Finland is … contributing to the strength of NATO's deterrence and defence.' (FI2, p.13). The point of Finland also being portrayed as a capable hard security actor within NATO must be understood through the context of the US pivot away from Europe in hard security measures however, so whilst the Finnish government certainly positions Finland as a capable

contributor to NATO because that is the case, there is a performative element in signalling to the US that it isn't simply a freeloader as a hard security actor.

With consideration to Finland's positioning of itself in NATO, the key takeaway is that Finland strongly positions itself as a capable hard security actor, that is entrenched within NATO as an actor but also working diligently with other NATO actors for hard security interests beyond Finland's borders in Europe.

Also, a key pattern in Finland's positioning is Finland's promotion of geographical areas of interest that NATO membership has allowed it to strengthen and co-operate on affairs on. One of these is the Arctic region, which is noted for increasing importance of hard security affairs as it 'is an inseparable component of both European security and the unity of the transatlantic region. With Finland and Sweden in NATO, the Arctic region and Baltic Sea form a unified geostrategic area.' (FI2, p.17). As a security actor in NATO, the Arctic allows it to: 'maintaining and increasing the situational awareness of Arctic security and making Finland's Arctic competence available to NATO.' (FI1, p.37). Here we see continuity in Finland taking a particularly important role in Arctic hard security as an Arctic country, but further ability to strengthen its position through co-operation with Allies.

Another region that Finland already heavily positioned towards regarding hard security is the Baltic Sea, and similar rhetoric in this area exists to that of the Arctic region. A specific detailing is mentioned within the Joint Statement with the UK (2022), prior to NATO membership; 'Finland welcomes the United Kingdom's strong commitment to the security of the Baltic Sea region, including British troops in Estonia as a part of NATO's presence and the United Kingdom led Joint Expeditionary Force, of which Finland is a committed member.' (FI3, p.1) and after NATO membership: 'Finland's and Sweden's NATO memberships also make it possible to deepen security policy cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic countries in Finland's neighbouring areas.' (FI1, p.24)

Finland positions itself within the Arctic and Baltic Sea regions as having a profound interest in them, and that NATO membership will strengthen Finland's position, on top of pre-existing hard security organisations and efforts already present. However, on top of the Baltic

Sea and Arctic region, Finland has also positioned itself to a position of greater significance within the whole European security order.

This rhetoric used to position Finland is often powerful and shows that Finland wants to be seen as a leader and a bastion of the European Security order. 'We (Finland and the UK) are committed to defending the principles of the European security order' (FI3, p.1), such a statement, whilst locationally positioning Finland in the centre of the European security order, also suggests an ideological binding to it rather than just one based on necessity and pragmatism.

The elements of necessity and pragmatism is also present though, when positioning Finland as more European-centric in hard security measures: 'European states must bear the primary responsibility for the security of the continent, particularly with respect to conventional defence.' (FI2, p.12), this phrasing also implies that Finland is trying to take a role of a leader on European hard security matters too, similarly to the themes of its security environment being unpredictable and power politics.

Another important reflection on Finland as a hard security actor and where it positions itself locationally on affairs is the often interchangeable mentioning of European hard security interests and Finland's own such as: 'From the perspective of Finland's and Europe's security interests, a bad peace deal would increase uncertainty', 'From the perspective of Finnish and European security, it is of key importance that these commitments lead to an actual increase in defence capability in all member countries' (FI2, p.9. 13). These are especially present in the most recent government report on the security environment in 2026, which is a further sign of Finland portraying its interests as symbiotic with those of the European security order. Causality of this positioning is likely spurred on by US hard security policy decisions which were labelled as: 'The United States is pursuing its national interests in a novel manner, and its policy is more strongly driven by transactionalism than before.' (FI2, p.5), leading to a closer positioning with Europe specifically.

To answer the first core research question, Finland depicts its hard security environment on the European scale, to be an environment that is rife with unpredictability and uncertainty

due to a long-term threat from Russia. It sees the US role in that environment as wavering, and therefore it depicts a gap in the European security environment that it has responsibility for filling. This perspective of the hard security environment explains why Finland takes a proactive approach as a national actor, and the more general trend of expanding its hard security position to be wider than itself. With the hard security environment depicted as expanded and deteriorated, it makes logical sense that Finland must also expand and take leadership if it feels that other security actors do not share the same vision of the environment. In that case, the perspective of coming from outside NATO to within it can also said to be a factor here.

7.2 Means of Finland as a hard security actor

7.2.1 NATO membership

I would now like to look at some of the means that are mentioned. These include specific actions that represent how Finland acts as a security actor which will provide some depth to the analysis.

There are plentiful mentions of NATO and how Finland seeks to operate within it. I think that 'Finland is actively building a more European NATO and is contributing to the strength of NATO's deterrence and defence' (FI2, p.13) is of relevance, as it shows a position of relative agency within NATO that is focused on the European side of the Alliance. This is a sign of how quickly Finland has integrated into NATO, both within the framework and positionally as a security actor. This is supported in the National Security Strategy for Society (2025) which says: 'As a NATO member, Finland's total defence arrangements must cover the Allied troops on Finland's territory in addition to the troops of the Finnish Defence Forces.' (FI4, p.66), showing that Finland is quickly adapting as a security actor within the NATO framework.

This is significant because previous paragraphs have shown that Finland positioned itself as a full-fledged NATO member, without ambiguity, but it is also important that this is reinforced with provided evidence of action within NATO. What can be drawn from Finland positioning

itself in such a way regarding NATO membership is that it aims to be seen as a credible and capable hard security actor that is a net positive for NATO.

7.2.2 The European Union (EU)

The EU should be mentioned in any analysis of Finland as a security actor, as it has long been a member and signed up to the CFSP. This of course has not changed since 2022, but as an area of analysis it is relevant when looking how Finland positions itself within it as a hard security actor. Whilst the EU is often mentioned as partially a soft security actor; 'The European Union is Finland's most important political and economic frame of reference and community of values' (FI1, p. 31), it is also evident that Finland also sees the EU as important in its hard security positioning 'The war has strengthened the role of the EU as a foreign, security and defence policy actor' (FI1, p. 12). The self-representation of Finland as a hard security actor within the EU framework is primarily focused around providing a medium for Finland's sanctions policy as a means of hard security. 'We use our influence to have the EU intensify its sanctions as Russia's war of aggression continues' (FI1, p.34), shows this as well as positioning Finland in a leadership role within an area of hard security.

With Finland in NATO, it is also evident that EU membership also provides Finland opportunities to strengthen itself as a security actor. Providing evidence for this is: 'The EU also plays a significant role from the perspective of European legislation and defence resourcing.' (FI4, p.65) when talking about national defence capability. Therefore, this draws the conclusion that Finland also positions itself as a strengthened hard security actor using its pre-existing security co-operation frameworks by leading and working with like-minded member states. Of note is that the EU is underlined as being less central to Finland's position than NATO though.

7.2.3 National Defence

The final means of security which provides evidence for how Finland positions itself as a security actor is the reinforcement of national defence using the theory of total defence. As I

mentioned in my theoretical framework, total defence was important in building Finland's position as one of strength in hard security matters before it was militarily aligned with hard security matters. In the texts, it is quite clear that it is still highly important to how Finland presents itself as a capable security actor, but its scope has increased since joining NATO to being important beyond national borders.

This is shown in: 'Finland maintains and develops its own strong defence capability under any circumstances, taking account of NATO's common goals and the obligation under Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty to maintain and develop its individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack. The key functions of Finnish defence have been integrated into NATO's joint structures and operating models.' (FI1, p.26) whereby Finnish total defence planning has been repurposed and reinforced to consider Finland's broadening positioning as a hard security actor that NATO membership has required. Also demonstrating this 'Finland's robust national defence contributes to strengthening NATO's collective deterrence' (FI1, p. 36). Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that Finland as a hard security actor since joining NATO has positioned itself as strengthened, in a symbiotic way where its national hard security capabilities complement its ability to act within international hard security frameworks and international hard security capabilities.

To summarise, the means that Finland talks about in response to its depiction of the security environment revolves heavily around expanding its national capabilities to serve an international level, both through NATO and the EU. As part of this widening of the hard security domain to NATO and the EU, Finland emphasises its own strength of capabilities as a potential for it to work for shared NATO and EU goals and be a leader on this work of strengthening its hard security environment.

8 Analysis: Sweden

8.1 Environmental factors in Sweden's hard security environment

8.1.1 Unpredictability, complexity and power politics

Sweden's operating environment is similar but not the same as Finland's, however the theme of unpredictability and instability of the Swedish hard security environment is also mentioned; 'The security situation both in Sweden's immediate neighbourhood and globally is characterised by instability and unpredictability.' (SWE1, p.15). These environmental factors are presented as risks for Sweden's position as a security actor; 'Dessa osäkerhetsfaktorer, enskilda eller samlade, innebär en förhöjd risk för att det säkerhetspolitiska läget snabbt kan försämras ytterligare med allvarliga konsekvenser för Europas och Sveriges säkerhet' (These factors of instability, individually or combined, induce a heightened risk for the security political environment that can quickly deteriorate further with serious consequences for Europe's and Sweden's security) (SWE4, p. 22). Within these two excerpts the operating environment for Sweden as a hard security actor is shown in a way that affects its ability to act. Also, of note however, is the emphasising of both European *and* Swedish security when talking about the security environment, positioning Sweden as a security actor within the European security architecture.

Despite the negative tone of the unpredictable and unstable security environment for Sweden as an actor, NATO membership is also presented as an antidote to these factors as it 'increases predictability, strengthens deterrence against attacks against Sweden and our Allies, thus making our neighbourhood more secure.' (SWE3, p. 28). The dynamics of this messaging portray Sweden's position as a subordinate security actor to NATO, that is a net recipient from its hard security framework. On the other hand, it also suggests its NATO membership also benefits Allies underlining a clear positioning of Sweden more internationally as a hard security actor.

8.1.2 Threat presence and Russian relations

The presence of threats in Sweden's hard security environment is defined by Russia, as expected, but they predominantly talk about this threat presence regarding Sweden as a hard security actor itself, rather than on a wider regional level. The Swedish Defence Commission's report on security policy (2023) extensively talks about Sweden's position in this manner. 'Because of Russia, a large-scale war is raging in Europe. The impacts of the war are not limited to Ukraine. Therefore, Swedish security policy has fundamentally changed.' 'An armed attack against Sweden cannot be ruled out. Nor can it be ruled out that military means, or further threats of such military means, can be directed against Sweden.' 'The Defence Commission finds that Swedish security and defence policy must be shaped to deal with the long-term threat posed by Russia to European and global security.' (SWE1, p. 1). The last quote references the Russian threat as being a matter of importance to a Swedish positioning on hard security on a more regional security perspective, however they all relate the threat to Sweden as a hard security actor itself. This positions Sweden as a security actor as more inward than outward looking as a security actor.

Building upon this the National Security Strategy (2024) states that 'Russia poses the most serious threat to our national security in the period up to 2030' and 'The external factor that has had the greatest impact on our security situation for more than a decade is Russia's gradual development into a militarily armed, externally aggressive and internally repressive autocracy' (SWE3, p. 15, 19), once again positioning Sweden as acting more in the interests of its own national security.

There are references to the Russian threat presence in Sweden's security environment being on a regional basis such as 'Swedish security policy must consider the risk that Russia's war against Ukraine escalates into a larger war in Europe' (SWE1, p. 3) and 'Russia poses a serious threat to security throughout Europe.' (SWE3, p.16) but these are presented as less critical. These points are less developed upon as Swedish hard security interests, more associated generally to threat presence in the European environment. 'Som Försvarsberedningen framhåller innebär denna bedömning dock inte att Ryssland saknar

förmåga att agera millitärt i Sveriges närområde' (As the Defence Commission maintains however, this does not mean that Russia lacks the capability to act militarily in Sweden's local area) (SWE4, p.26), encapsulates this as detailing the Russian threat to be directly capable of affecting Sweden's position as a security actor. Therefore, whilst there are references to the Russian threat being a matter of importance to Sweden as a security actor regionally, the focus and elaboration on Sweden as a national actor is more profound.

8.1.3 US Relations

In terms of the role of US relations for Swedish positioning as a security actor, the trend emerges that Sweden positions itself as near and incorporates the US position into its own hard security positioning. This is done by portraying Sweden's position as identifiable with that of the US, such as 'Sweden's immediate neighbourhood continues to be the region in Europe where Russia's interests are most clearly opposed to the interests of other European countries and the United States.' (SWE1, p.11) placing Sweden alongside European countries and the US as having the same position on hard security matters geographically, specifically within Sweden's local area. This is repeated and enlarged to a greater scale in the National Security Strategy (2024) in 'Russia considers itself to be in permanent conflict with a Western world perceived to be led by the United States' (SWE3, p.19), firstly positioning Sweden as a part of that Western world in its actorness but also the US as the core actor that leads that Western world. I later discuss the positioning of other hard security actors in relation to Sweden as a hard security actor, but the linking of the US as integral to Sweden's hard security positioning is without doubt, significant.

In the context of diminishing US interest on European hard security affairs, Sweden positions itself as more reactive than proactive as a security actor. This positioning takes the form of acknowledging this shift on the part of the US and the necessity to work through it, 'Sweden's security policy needs to take into account the shift in the focus of US security policy towards the threat from China and the fact that the United States' willingness to contribute to Europe's security could be affected by domestic political conditions.' (SWE3, p. 31), given the

publishing date of the National Security Strategy in 2024, the extent of the US rhetoric towards hard security in Europe wasn't fully known and thus could be a factor in the reactivity rather than showing proactivity. The Total Defence until 2030 document expresses further reactivity in Swedish hard security positioning: 'Genom Sveriges medlemskap I Nato förbättras förutsättningarna för att fördjupa det bilaterala samarbetet med USA även utanför Nato.' (Through Sweden's membership in NATO improves the conditions for deepening the bilateral cooperation with the USA even outside of NATO) (SWE4, p. 36). It is therefore, rational to conclude that Sweden positions itself as more of a reactive hard security actor that seeks to position itself close to the United States.

8.1.4 Locationality and strategic disposition

Moving onwards to investigate the explicit positioning of Sweden through my coding of locationality and strategic disposition. These areas contain multiple elements of national positioning and regional positioning, but there is no doubt that Sweden positions itself firmly within NATO. The importance of joining NATO is quite clear on Swedish positioning making it clear that through 'Swedish membership, NATO will become Sweden's most important defence policy arena. Sweden's defence capabilities will be a part of the Alliance's collective defence and contribute to security both in Sweden's immediate neighbourhood and in the entire Euro-Atlantic area.' (SWE1, p.4) placing Sweden's position firmly within the NATO framework for hard security, specifically collective defence under Article 5. On Article 5, this commitment is reinforced with the declaration: 'Sweden shoulders this responsibility and fully embraces the opportunity to facilitate the collective defence not only of Sweden but also of our neighbours' (SWE3, p. 28). These statements make it clear that Sweden positions itself as a full NATO member without any ambiguity of it being a recent member or having any separate status because of that. On the integration into NATO it is stated: 'Full integration into NATO – political, civil and military – is the single most important and urgent measure to strengthen Sweden's security, and of great importance to our Allies' (SWE3, p.28) reiterating

that it is not only *de jure* that Sweden is a full member, but that it also *de facto* is acting as a full NATO member as a hard security actor.

On the theme of locationality, there is key positioning of Sweden as regionally important in its local area since joining NATO. 'Sweden's NATO membership thoroughly strengthens both Sweden's and its neighbouring countries' security.' (SWE2, p.13) outlines a wider engagement of Sweden as a hard security regionally, being able to contribute regionally to NATO on top of being able to meet its own hard security demands as well as improving its own standing as a security actor. The capabilities of Sweden are also talked up in its positioning regionally, especially in the UK-Sweden Joint Leaders Statement (2023) where Sweden is stated as 'strongly aligned with NATO principles and values, has years of experience training and operating with Allies … and will bring a modern and well-trained military into the Alliance' with the aim of 'meeting regional and global security challenges' (SWE2, p. 1).

The document on Total defence until 2030 also supports this analysis and expands on regionality in hard security by specifying it as *Nordeuropa* (Northern Europe). It says that: 'En huvuduppgift för Sverige inom Nato bör vara att underlätta och effektivt delta I det kollektiva försvaret av Nordeuropa. Som allierad behöver Sverige starker förmågan att uppträdä större förband utanför svenskt territorium främst i grannländerna, vara en integrerad del I Natos marina planering för Östersjön' (A main task for Sweden within Nato should be facilitating and effectively contributing in the collective defence of Northern Europe. As an ally Sweden needs to strengthen its capability to field larger units outside of Swedish territory primarily in neighbouring countries, be an integrated part in NATO's naval planning for the Baltic Sea) (SWE4, p.40). It appears to me that Swedish NATO membership has shifted its hard security positioning to one where it portrays itself as a key actor in its local area and important to regional security. It sees itself in an important role where it can now act in hard security measures beyond its borders, especially in the Baltic Sea region. I believe that the emphasis on expanded Swedish hard security regionally in the Baltic Sea region can be traced back to its strong defence industry. As well as the proactivity of Sweden

acting for the security of its sovereignty in the Cold War, in the wake of Soviet submarine incursions. This capability and potential since joining NATO seems to have been repurposed and expanded, taking Sweden to a more expanded actorness in hard security matters.

There is also a hint of NATO dependency on Sweden with its new positioning as a core NATO member. This comes in the form of positioning Sweden geographically as indispensable to NATO's ability to operate in Sweden's local area; 'Sweden's geographic location and ability to support other Allies is crucial to NATO's ability to operate effectively in our region' (SWE3, p. 28) tells that Sweden's NATO membership is a positive by default, but also positions Sweden as being more subordinate to NATO as it frames Sweden being used out of utility in hard security planning in Northern Europe.

The positioning of Sweden outside of purely a national perspective as a hard security actor is not strictly limited to the regional level either, but to a global level, with the caveat that more emphasis is placed on Sweden as a regional actor within a transatlantic framework. This can be factored in with locating Sweden in a position of essentiality to the Alliance, as previously mentioned. 'Swedish and Finnish territory will become central to the Allies' defence of Northern Europe and the transatlantic link' (SWE1, p.22) personifies this, placing the hard security of Northern Europe first but also stating that the current Swedish position benefits the transatlantic link of the alliance by default as is mentioned on the previous page: 'Sweden's NATO membership strengthens the transatlantic link; (SWE1, pg. 21). It is consequential that the transatlantic link is referenced as a default of Swedish positioning on its NATO membership, as firstly it places Sweden's position as integral to NATO as a whole but also that simply its presence in the Alliance is a positive on the transatlantic basis, whilst for Northern Europe it is detailed as having more specific agency and capabilities.

When states speak security, it is also important to note what is not said as well as what is in understanding a states' positioning (Fatić, 2002). Whilst there are mentions of the Arctic region in some parts of the Swedish texts, they do not mention Sweden or Swedish positioning in relation to the region. The Defence Commissions Report (2023) simply mentions that 'the overall conflict between Russia and the West also affects the security

situation in the Arctic. It shows the military strategic importance of the Arctic.' (SWE1, p.11) but does not offer any reference to Sweden in relation to the region. This is surprising as Sweden is one of eight member countries of the Arctic council and states its intentions in the Arctic to keep security policy tensions low[26], yet fails to offer any specific hard security positioning on it. By lacking any positioning of itself on the Arctic region, it is plausible that Sweden does not envision the region as compatible with hard security matters in its positioning towards the region. Therefore, implying believes that soft measures on security take precedence in the Arctic region. Whilst that is speculation, it is still of relevant importance that Sweden didn't position itself in terms of hard security on the region. Summarising Sweden's depiction of its security environment, it is unpredictable, marked by power politics and seen to be on the European scale as a result of threats from Russsia. It sees said environment as reinforced by NATO and its Euro-centrality is categorised by its special attention paid to the role of the European Union to do more. This is a result of the importance it places on the role of the United States which, in the context of its potential withdrawal from the European hard security architecture, justifies its focus on Europe. Such a depiction of its environment coupled with its locality described as essential to its local area of the Baltic Sea, leads it to take a reactive and cautious approach to building hard security in co-operation with like-minded security actors.

8.2 Means of Sweden as a hard security actor

8.2.1 The European Union

Sweden positions itself in relation to the EU on hard security affairs as complementary to that of the role of NATO, saying it must 'build security together with others, as a loyal member of NATO and the EU' (SWE1, p.4), and as such the Sweden presents its EU membership as important as its NATO memberships on pursuing hard security measures. The theme of co-operation also is repeatedly mentioned in conjunction with the EU and

[26] Sweden | Arctic Council

stated to have a similar importance as co-operation within NATO; ‘Swedish security policy is based upon the idea that threats to our security need to be met, as far as possible in cooperation with other countries and organisations. Cooperation within NATO and the EU is of particular importance in this respect’. (SWE3, p. 23). Although Swedish co-operation and engagement within the EU on hard security matters are nothing new (Browning, 2007) it points to a further decline of exceptionalism in Swedish security policy, which in turn has changed its positioning in terms of hard security actorness to being more European-centric. Another clear example of the elevated EU importance in hard security is: ‘Sverige ska aktivt verka för en fortsatt utveckling av det säkerhets- och försvarspolitiska samarbetet inom EU’ (Sweden will actively work for a continued development of security and defence policy coperation within the EU) (SWE4, p. 35). The most pertinent point arising from this statement is that; unlike how Sweden positions its role within NATO, its role within the EU is shown to be one of more leadership and active engagement, whereas its positioning on NATO seems to be more reactive and subordinate. Regardless, the explicit need for further co-operation at the EU level is an indicator that Sweden is positioning itself closer to Europe on hard security affairs.

8.2.2 National defence

In relation to my coding of national defence as a theme, the integration of Sweden’s total defence to NATO’s hard security framework is considered essential for Sweden as a credible NATO member. This is mentioned throughout the documents in various ways: ‘An armed attack by Russia on Sweden or one of our Allies is the pacing threat for the total defence that is now being built up within the framework of NATO’s collective defence’ (SWE3, p.19) ‘Sverige ska upprätthålla en stark nationell försvarsförmåga för att bidra bade till det nationella försvaret och till det kollektiva försvaret I enlighet med artikel 3’ (Sweden shall maintain a strong national defence capability to contribute both to national defence and to collective defence in accordance with article 3) (SWE4, p. 38) ‘Sweden and its total defence will be an integral part of NATO’s defence of Europe‘ (SWE1, p.17) . All three quotes maintain

that Sweden's national/total defence as being necessary to be integrated into NATO frameworks, I argue that this is significant because Sweden had historically placed importance on total defence as a paradigm of its neutrality policy prior to NATO membership (Nilsson and Wyss, 2016). Now it appears to place total defence as a paradigm of its NATO membership, which marks an adaption of Swedish hard security policy in order position itself as an effective NATO member.

8.2.3 The international rules-based world order

As I mentioned in the context section, Sweden has traditionally incorporated moral values extensively in its security policy when it was non-aligned as part of its security positioning. There are also elements of this within the documents, positioning Sweden as a moral actor for the rules based international order, however, the documents also incorporate the 'European security order' alongside the traditional liberal world order; 'Sweden must continue to promote the fundamental values of Swedish foreign and security policy. Within NATO, and in the EU, the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, Sweden must protect the rules-based world order, the European security order' (SWE1, p.6). As a means of hard security in its operating environment, there is less observable change in this aspect, given Sweden has long been a staunch security actor when it comes to values. However, they have not been traditionally associated with hard security, which is a new manifestation here in relating the international-rules based world order to the European hard security order. This is an indicator for an incorporation of the historical security tradition of liberalism into hard security matters since applying to join NATO. It implies that NATO membership has overseen a shift in Sweden's hard security positioning, which it is supporting and justifying through the maintaining of historical aspects of its security policy. However, I would exercise caution in this judgement, as it is only explicitly present in this single quote regarding Swedish self-perceptions of hard security.

Summarising the means it emphasises in relation to its depiction of the hard security environment, the theme of co-operation within NATO and the European union are self-

evident. The integration of total defence as national defence into an expanded hard security framework is also a key trend in the means mentioned as well as positioning itself in defence of the international rules-based order, which it increasingly ties into the European security architecture as a new form of positioning on a historical area of importance in security. All three of these means are reinforced by NATO membership.

8.2.4 Limitation of analysis

As I pointed out in my methodology section, the timespan of the Swedish documents is significantly shorter than the Finnish documents. This includes two (half) of the documents being published prior to NATO membership, although it is acknowledged that Sweden will become a full NATO member: 'We confirm our unwavering commitment to continue working together for the successful finalisation of Sweden's NATO membership ahead of the Vilnius Summit in July' (SWE2, p.1). My analysis takes into account that the full positioning of Sweden as a NATO member cannot have fully materialised itself before Sweden fully integrated into all NATO hard security frameworks. However, the research material does not become redundant despite this temporal issue. As stated, the accession protocol had already started at the time of publication for all documents, so NATO membership was still tangible even if not a fact at the time of publication.

Another one of the analysis problems with this is that the paradigm of the US withdrawal from hard security engagement in Europe manifested itself (as of the date of this thesis) in 2025 and became particularly explicit during the escalation of the Greenland crisis in December 2025 through to January 2026, after the publication of all Swedish documents used as research material in this dissertation. The Greenland crisis was particularly felt by Finland and Sweden as fellow Nordic countries with Denmark[27]. As a result, the analysis of Sweden is partially limited due to this factor, and the developments and relations towards the US should be considered as relevant but within the context of a limited view of the US disengagement with European security. Swedish positioning as a hard security actor

[27] Joint statement by the Nordic Foreign Ministers on Greenland - regjeringen.no

therefore should be considered likely to have changed because of these recent developments, yet I believe the trends and outcomes in the analysis still show the direction of becoming more international as security actors and are thus still of consequence in this dissertation.

9 Comparison

9.1 Similarities

When comparing the two countries, both have seen a shift in their positioning since NATO membership in 2022, and there are both similarities and differences. The main similarities revolve around *where* they position themselves, and the differences around *how* they position themselves.

The main similarity is that both locate themselves as key NATO members, despite only having joined in the past 3 years. This is constituted by both seeing the end goal of full NATO integration in their hard security affairs as vital for them as security actors. They also highlight the lack of restrictions on their NATO memberships respectively, extinguishing any ambiguity around their status. Regarding this point, they also both acknowledge the necessity of joining NATO at the same time, although this is not the focus of this study, it is still an interesting point that emerges from the documents.

It is also quite clear that both position themselves further towards Europe in their hard security affairs locationality, co-operation is a repeated means in their goals of how they seek work for hard security ends. This means not only through NATO, as I have covered on certain areas but also other hard security frameworks such as the OSCE, JEF, NORDEFCO and increasingly the EU. This is the most significant similarity between both Finland and Sweden, as it demonstrates that NATO memberships have allowed themselves to be positioned within these frameworks from a more grounded standpoint, rather than as a lone non-aligned actor.

It also arises that both countries have internalised their hard security position to NATO membership also, demonstrated by their highlighting of total defence, as now superseding its historical national use to both countries as hard security actors and adapting it to serve NATO as well.

This is reinforced by their shared incorporation of the total security framework into the framework of NATO. This is a pertinent example of the expanded international positioning on hard security. I have previously mentioned the importance of total security given that in is

a whole-of-society approach that each individual has a stake in in the respective countries, and adapting its hard security implications to the NATO framework only serves as another example of how both countries are expanding their hard security position outside of their national borders.

Both strongly consider Russia to be an existential threat to themselves as a security actor and an actor of instability within their areas of interest. Whilst this differs slightly in both countries in terms of how Russia threatens them, this is due to the factor of geography. On this matter, Finland positions itself as more preoccupied with its national security through instrumentalised migration along its border whilst Sweden places more emphasis on Critical National Infrastructure (CNI). It is logical that joining NATO would by default cause a shift in their position to be more wary of Russia in hard security affairs (or perhaps not in the case of Slovakia recently), the extent in which the Russian threat is perceived as existential induces the conclusion that the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a real political shock, as stated in the introductory context section.

On the other side of strategic relations, both Finland and Sweden place heightened importance on their position to the US. This is both before and after the extent of the US pivot away from European hard security affairs was known, with the disclaimer that the Swedish research material was published prior to 2025 and the Trump administrations actions. The importance placed on the US to their shared hard security positioning is significant. Despite various co-operation efforts on hard security with the US prior to 2022, as outlined in my context sections, the essentiality of the US to their hard security position was not explicitly mentioned in the manner that it is in the research material. Consequently, there is a shared shift in their positioning on their relationship with the US concerning hard security. However, given the development of the transatlantic relationship away from US involvement in European hard security, I would analyse this similarity as less significant and likely subject to change in the future.

Regardless, given both countries prior external positioning on hard security to be strictly on the national level, the research material points towards a major shift in their self-perceptions

and positioning being much more internationally based due to a fundamentally altered hard security environment in Europe, and the possibilities offered by NATO membership to act in co-operation and dialogue with other Allies and members of shared hard security frameworks.

9.2 Differences

On the side of differences, the main difference is *how* they position themselves. The most extant feature of this is the way in which they describe themselves as hard security actors. Both have a self-narrative of being capable hard security actors, yet in Finland's case this is often justified to take proactive measures, such as keeping the sanctions focus in other EU members, or dedicating hard security resources to provide extra arctic training for NATO allies. Sweden takes a more reactive perspective, and whilst citing its military prowess and resources, refers to these as means as contributing to NATO's collective deterrence as well as improving Sweden's hard security position overall. An explanation for this is the differences in both countries historical attitudes towards security; where Sweden was much more idealist and Finland comparatively more realist.

On proactivity, Sweden seems to position itself as more of a leader on hard security in the EU than Finland. Sweden emphasises often the potential of increasing the EU's role in hard security compared to Finland, whether it be through expanding policy frameworks or giving the EU greater powers over hard security measures in general. This is of particular interest as it shows a dynamic of being reactive in NATO and proactive in the EU as an actor in Sweden, but the reverse for Finland. This is not to say that Finland doesn't see itself as concerned with hard security on the EU level, but rather that its ability to contribute is better fulfilled in NATO than the EU for hard security, and vice versa for Sweden. Whilst this is a perceived difference, the trend also points towards increased internationality in how they position themselves for hard security, which is a similarity as well.

The values referenced in their positioning on hard security also differs across the research material.

Interestingly, Sweden talks much more often about the hard security benefits of being a NATO member to itself. Both see themselves as safer actors within NATO (otherwise they logically wouldn't have taken the decision) and making NATO more secure as well. It takes the form of going beyond what Finland says, such as the threshold level of threat to Finland has been raised to explicitly take the position of Sweden being safer as a drawn conclusion. When comparing how secure both countries feel in their positioning, Sweden's case strikes me as more of a justification for NATO membership than anything else. The references to national security and safeguarding Sweden's ability to act as a national actor can be explained by the opinion polling on NATO membership in Sweden to be generally lower than in Finland[28], and therefore the state may seek to justify NATO membership through national security, to reduce the scope of possible scepticism of its hard security decisions.

Finland offers a much more defined position on itself as a leading hard security actor within the Arctic region compared to Sweden, which lacks further detail on its position in the region. This evidence points to being related to Finnish proactivity and desire to take a leading role within NATO, where Sweden is somewhat more cautious.

[28] See Appendix 1 for polling data.

10 Conclusion

10.1 Concluding Remarks

Through my research analysis and the comparison of both countries self-positioning on 'hard' security matters, the most significant outcome can be defined as both countries having moved to define themselves as more international, specifically European in their position on hard security. This is marked by Finnish rhetoric of leadership capability in its position to be a role model for others on hard security affairs within NATO. In Sweden's case, the rhetoric places less emphasis on its agency, in maintaining that its hard security is now co-dependent with NATO. However, it has a similar rhetoric to Finland's of leadership capability when it comes to the EU.

It emerges also that because of this more international positioning, both countries see an increase in the scope of possibilities for their ability to act within the sphere of hard security. As my introduction and context highlights, this does not draw a simplistic conclusion that these countries have gone from being soft security actors to hard ones, in fact plenty of the documents, and particularly Finland's Security Strategy for Society (2025) heavily incorporates soft security both internally and externally. Due to this my conclusion does not argue that Finland and Sweden have fundamentally changed as hard security actors, but rather that their position has adapted in the wake of their NATO membership.

10.1.1 A more international position on hard security affairs

Their more international position on hard security affairs marks a significant change in their position pre-NATO membership before 2022. This is due to the internalisation of the NATO hard security framework on their pre-conceived hard security framework that was nationally orientated through ideas of total defence and positioning themselves to the world as non-aligned actors.

The internalisation of NATO's hard security framework is underpinned by the point that they want to be seen as full-NATO members without caveats. Even points which have been

traditionally contentious, such as nuclear weapons in Norden as a nuclear weapon free zone[29], agreed on by all Nordic countries seems to be off the agenda. Finland accepts the position that NATO will 'remain a nuclear alliance' (FI1, p.47) with the intention to not 'station nuclear weapons on its territory in peacetime' (FI2, p.14), which is telling as there is no legal mechanism to enforce such a policy and leaves the possibility to host nuclear weapons in certain hard security situations. This is significant because such hard security rhetoric would have been unthinkable in the public sphere a decade ago.

Sweden also acknowledges that it stands behind NATO as a nuclear alliance: 'Som allierad är Sverige en del av alliansens samlade avskräckning och försvar, inklusive den nukleära avskräckningen' (As an ally Sweden is a part of the alliances collective deterrence and defence, including nuclear deterrence) (SWE4, p.39). This highlights the significance as Sweden was traditionally one of the strongest countries to speak out against non-proliferation and it was a big part of its hard security positioning as a demand from Swedish society[30].

I did not factor nuclear deterrence into my analysis as it goes beyond the coercion dynamics of hard security theory, by assuring a state's destruction regardless of its ability to coerce another state. However, the attitudes of two traditionally wary states towards nuclear weapons shifting towards acceptance is a key marker that both have fully internalised their NATO membership on hard security affairs.

10.1.2 Finland shows the historical traits of realism and Sweden of liberalism

I point out that this is not a dichotomy of Finland being exclusively realist and Sweden liberal on hard security policy, rather that, a general pattern that emerges in the analysis. In all documents Finland repeatedly says its position on security is grounded in 'value-based realism' (*Arvopohjainen realiismi*), and its rhetoric regarding an unpredictable and

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[29] https://web.archive.org/web/20050316125139/http:/www.regeringen.se/content/1/c4/16/35/1cdddce.pdf (in Swedish)

[30] A 1694/hållbart: Medlemsforslag om en kärnvapenfri zon i Norden (in Swedish)

deteriorated security environment being that of a challenge to meet, shows determination and the desire to gain ground in a zero-sum game hard security environment. Co-operation with other security in this regard expresses itself as an opportunity for Finland to further its hard security goals, showing a pattern of proactivity as a hard security actor that wants to be seen as capable and proactive. As also historically being more realism focused regarding security policy, it makes sense that joining NATO has rebuffed realist ideas and given them a new medium for expression as a consequence of NATO membership.

By contrast Sweden shows more traits of liberalism in its co-operation ideals, seeking to co-ordinate with rather than lead on hard security issues in its operating environment. This is underlined by a more reactive and cautionary approach regarding aspects such as the Russian threat to Sweden's security actorness and its envisioned place within the EU. Similar to the case of Finland, this can be placed as an effect of NATO membership bringing forward a new medium for expression in Swedish positioning on hard security affairs. Such a possibility leads to a continuation of the ideals on which Swedish hard security positioning has been historically founded upon, and as a consequence, lead to their re-expression on a more international position on hard security affairs.

To summarise this section, both countries have continued their values of which their security policy has been founded upon, and these values were outlined in the historical context section. NATO membership has given both countries an expanded manner in which to communicate these values in hard security frameworks. This itself doesn't answer my research question, nevertheless, the fact that these historical trends re-emerge because of NATO memberships adds to the conclusion that membership itself is pertinent and provides ground for their hard security position to be more international.

10.1.3 Proactivity and reactivity

Finland's position is stressed in a proactive manner consistently. Within the context of increasing Russian aggression and its long border with Russia, this rhetoric bears the hallmark of its realist security policy tradition and a major change in Finland's hard security

positioning since applying for NATO membership in 2022. This assessment is explained best as Finland being historically and contemporarily nationally focused on hard security affairs in its realist past, to now seeking a leading role within the European security architecture and lacking any restraint or restrictions on its hard security position from Russia.
Sweden's reactive rhetoric on its positioning also contains the traces of liberalism in its security policy traditions. It is also reasonable to conclude that its reduced proximity to Russia does not necessitate the level of Finnish proactivity within hard security frameworks by taking my definition of security to imply that greater distance reduces the likelihood of damage to objects important to state values from state actions. This also explains the emphasis placed on the utility of Swedish territory to logistically NATO's eastern flank in the documents. With that in mind though, it still constitutes a change in hard security positioning as it conveys Sweden as a useful and reliable member of the alliance that is working towards hard security ends, just not driving those efforts as in the case of Finland.

10.1.4 More international, but at a cost?

Whilst both countries are positioning themselves increasingly international on hard security affairs, it occurs to me that this may also not factor in an unexpected potential consequence of expanding their hard security position to be more international. Sweden and Finland both see their hard-security agency as rebuffed by NATO membership, allowing them to be more secure within the alliance and also pursue their hard security goals to a greater extent as a part of NORDEFCO, JEF, the OSCE and the EU. However, and this cannot be yet empirically proven, but the more international position which by nature itself requires co-operation, could lead to a loss of agency on hard security matters.
NATOs framework of unanimity[31] may in time to prove to be a restrictor of their agency on hard security affairs, as now their position must be shared with the other 31 allies. This is no

[31] https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/consensus-decision-making-at-nato

assured eventuality, as was demonstrated in their membership bids being stalled by Hungary and Turkey (for a considerable period of time in Sweden's case).

Therefore, given the important place that NATO is said to have in both countries' hard security positioning, the unintended consequences of reduced agency may also occur, but this thesis does not strive to answer that hypothesis explicitly and it would be a valuable future research area with the passing of time.

10.1.5 Summary

To summarise both countries have changed their hard security positioning as a result of NATO membership. They both associate their hard security domain as greater than but still including their national delineations. This domain is anchored around NATO and the environmental difference that the threshold for the use of force against either country has been significantly raised. Their positioning within NATO is fully anchored as well with no ambiguity or apprehension towards the scope and possibilities for their actorness considering this policy change. Whilst both position themselves from a perspective of increased agency post-2022. Finland comparatively seems to have internalised NATO's hard security framework to a greater extent than Sweden, in portraying itself as a regional leader and capable actor. Although it must be acknowledged that Sweden has similar rhetoric, it is expressed reactively rather than proactively.

Their shift to an international position on hard security affairs is not just visible on their attitudes to NATO though, it also encompasses Finnish and Swedish engagement with the EU as well as the UK-led JEF and the OSCE. NATO membership seems to have given both countries extra agency, means and aims in these hard security domains as well.

Several historical themes can be seen in driving this change such as the historical realism in Finland and liberalism in Sweden, as well as their geographic situations and relative proximities influencing their position. They also reiterate that their relative positions are built from historical values that they still place great importance on in their hard security affairs as well.

10.2 Future Research Possibilities

In the current security environment, there have been and will continue to be numerous developments which are unforeseen and impossible to predict. As I brought up in my research aims, the consequences for the security environment and its actors cannot yet be fully known or concluded upon.

The passing of time will change the possibility of future research regarding Finland and Sweden as security actors. As they develop into longer-term NATO members and more events occur in their security environment, the scope for research on both countries will only widen and deepen as more research material becomes available and their current position becomes hindsight. Therefore, I hope this thesis will have its use in providing evidence for the hard security positioning of Sweden and Finland in the period 2022-2026 in any future research on the topic area.

10.2.1 Potential research directions

Whilst I cannot factor in future developments in the security environment I would suggest the usefulness of other research techniques within this topic area.

Firstly, a study using the methodological framework of discourse analysis (DA) to investigate how areas of hard security are securitised is worth exploring. Such a study would enable the research to focus on one of the themes in my analysis section by using DA to research on the word level. This kind of study lends itself to securitisation theory, centred around speech acts and the performative nature of how states 'speak' security. Using securitisation theory and the work of the Copenhagen school, analysis of Finland's or Sweden's priorities as security actors and the reasons for *why* they position themselves in certain ways will be of great interest and use as an empirical study of security, as well as a contribution to the external understanding of Finland and Sweden.

A second future study, revolving around comparison, would be useful in the comparison of the neutrality of Finland and Yugoslavia. Whilst not building upon this Masters' thesis, it came to my attention during my historical research for my context that both countries are often mentioned in Cold War neutrality (Fagerlund, 2006) (Kott & Gharibian, 2024), yet there is a gap in existing research regarding their shared position of being between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Finland has been much compared in its neutrality to Austria and understandably Sweden but a potential study on their Cold War neutrality would have been useful contextually in this Masters' thesis, and particularly relevant within the IMESS programme's scope of Eastern Europe and Eurasia geographically.

Finally, I recognise the future need for study within the paradigm of ontological security, that is the security of the state's identity and self-conception. This revolves heavily around identity and values. Whilst I touched on values in my analysis, it was in what they tell about how Finland and Sweden position themselves as security actors. As countries that have historically been strong supporters of values and morals in security matters, studying their status within their security policy since NATO membership would provide continuity in the historical narrative of them being actors in a region *for* and *of* peace. I touched upon this in my context section that this narrative is a misrepresentation given their engagement and interoperability with NATO before becoming members, but such a large change in security policy provides the research problem of how their ontological security has changed.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Polling data on public support for NATO membership (prior to the executive decision in Finland and Sweden)

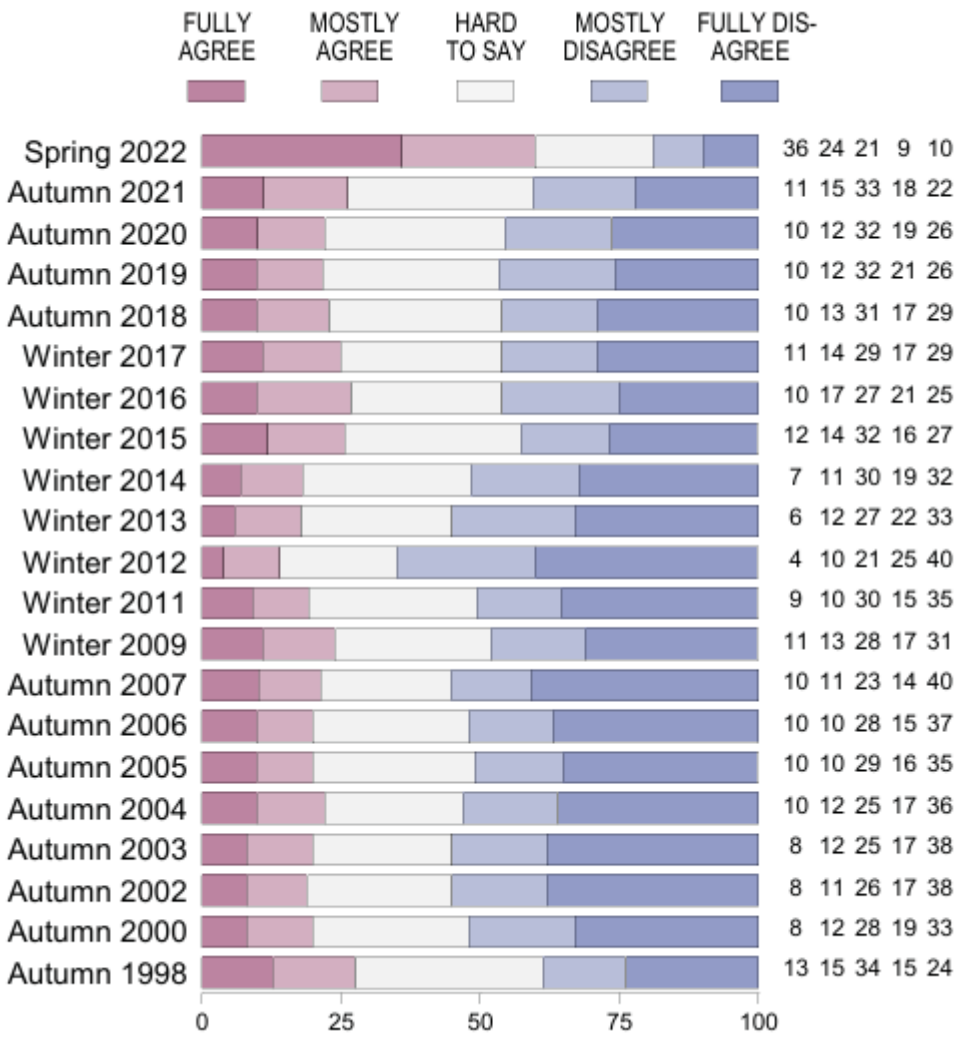

Figure 1.1 - A poll of Finnish public support for NATO membership prior to applying for membership. (Source: Taloustutkimus)

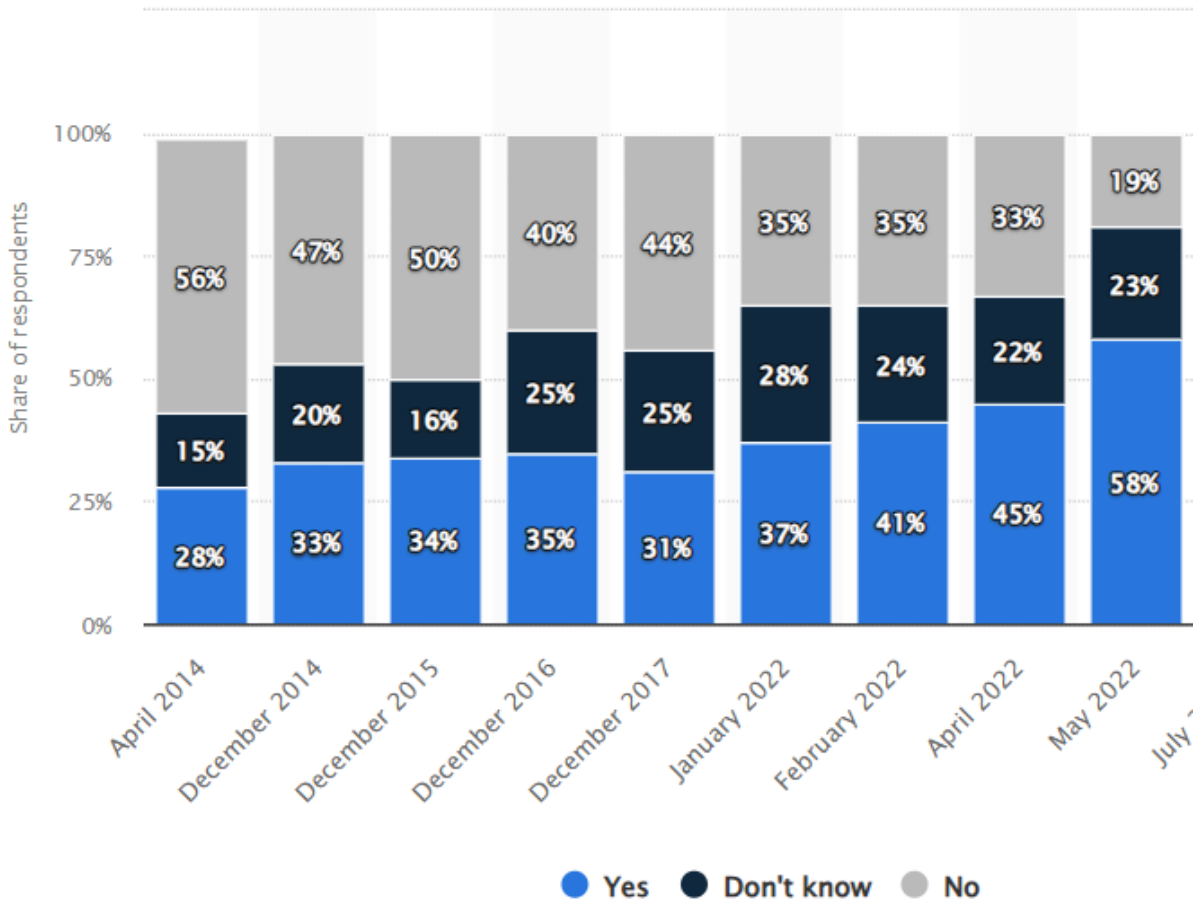

Figure 1.2 Polling data for Swedish public support for NATO membership prior to applying for membership (Source: Statista)

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