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Waking the Neighbour - Finland, NATO and Russia
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A large, stylized globe graphic in the bottom right corner, showing the outlines of continents and a grid of latitude and longitude lines. The globe is rendered in a light tan color against a darker tan background.

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Key Findings

- Because of both history and geography, the Finnish relationship with Russia is unique in Europe. At the same time the Finnish perception of Russia as a source of security challenges is acute.
- Finland is engaged in a debate over whether it would be desirable to seek membership of NATO in order to mitigate these challenges. A full and frank debate has been difficult because it is constrained by a range of political and societal taboos; nevertheless there are indicators that a move toward NATO is not impossible in the foreseeable future.
- If Finland were to opt for joining NATO, this would register in Russian defence and security thinking as a serious concern. Unlike the Baltic accession in 2004, the response from the newly assertive Russia could potentially be swift and damaging.
- This would also have implications for Russian relations with the EU, of which Finland has been a member since 1995. Many in Finland see the EU as a security provider, and there is confusion in the national debate between EU or Nordic security policy cooperation and an actual defensive alliance.
- Finland's NATO argument is a complex and multi-faceted one, made even more so by regional and cultural specifics; but it needs to be understood because its result could have a major impact on Russia's relationships with both NATO and the EU.

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Waking the Neighbour – Finland, NATO and Russia

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Introduction

*“Generations to come - stand here upon your own ground,
and never rely on outside help.”*

Inscription above the King's Gate at the Suomenlinna fortress complex, 1753

Because of both geography and history, Finland occupies a unique position in relations between Russia, the EU, and NATO. As the oldest EU member state on Russia's borders, Finland presents Russia with a trading opportunity which it has seized eagerly; but as a neighbour state which believes firmly in strong defence, if Finland were to consider accession to NATO, this would be perceived in Russia as a serious and immediate threat which needed to be countered.

The Finnish debate on whether to join NATO at present remains inconclusive, with strong arguments on both sides. The desire to be fully integrated with Western security structures conflicts with ingrained alarm at the prospect of antagonising Russia; and this same well-founded alarm at the behaviour of the eastern neighbour conflicts with distaste for recent trends in NATO. Historical experience of three wars with the Soviet Union during the 20th Century involving shifting and inconstant alliances¹ contributes to a strong belief in the need for Finland to provide for its own defence, embodied in the quotation at the head of this introduction; while at the same time modernists argue that in the 21st century no one country can ensure its security in isolation.

While the membership debate continues, Finland is already one of the closest non-member NATO partners. Finland participates in NATO-led operations, and the Finnish Defence Forces have undergone changes seeking NATO compatibility. Formally Finland is ready for membership; the question remaining is whether Finland is ready to make the last step and actually seek to join.² This paper will examine the arguments put forward in Finland for and against seeking membership in NATO, placing them in a domestic and regional context and measuring them against the biggest single factor in Finnish security: the relationship with the eastern neighbour.

Defending Finland

Conscription and Territorial Defence

“One Finnish soldier is a match for ten Russkies!”

“Fine, all right... so what about when the 11th one arrives?”

The dialogue above is from the Finnish classic novel and film *Unknown Soldier*, following an infantry platoon during the war with the Soviet Union. It illustrates the enduring perception which forms the foundation of Finland's traditional defence posture: that the main task is holding out while vastly outnumbered by an overwhelming mass of invading Russians.

Finland's traditional way of dealing with this challenge is through territorial defence and general conscription. The national defence system based on conscription is widely popular; 74 per cent of Finns support it and only 15 per cent call for a more selective conscription

system.³ National service is often seen as an important part of the national identity, with a broader rationale than issues directly linked to defending the country.

The problem now facing Finnish defence thinkers is how to adapt the Finnish Defence Forces model in the face of procurement inflation and perceived (if not actual) demographic shrinkage. The last few years have seen a long-running debate between those who favoured slimming down the mobilised strength of the Defence Forces from 350,000 to 250,000 or fewer, while ensuring that the smaller forces are better equipped, and those who argued that mass was vital for maintaining the traditional territorial defence.

Perhaps unusually, Adm Juhani Kaskeala, serving as Chief of the Finnish Defence Forces until August 2009, argued for manpower cuts, while the parliamentary cross-party group assessing security threats on the other hand called for maintaining current numbers until at least 2015. Chair of the group Juha Korkeaoja concluded that Finland should maintain defence spending at its current level, maintain the size of the Defence Forces, and sacrifice investment in modern equipment, stockpiling older kit for mass mobilisation.⁴

In Kaskeala's view, smaller numbers of well-equipped troops are preferable to larger numbers with a lower per capita investment, because "there is no point in sustaining troops who cannot survive a modern battlefield".⁵ The argument for smaller, better-equipped forces was summarised by a senior member of the Ministry of Defence's policy department: "You can't just send everybody out with a rifle and a rucksack full of anti-personnel mines any more. Apart from anything else, the mines are banned now."⁶

The debate was settled in favour of contraction. In 2016 onwards, because of the diminution in size of age groups, mobilisation strength is now planned to decrease to 250,000, to be compensated for in theory by better-equipped forces. Thus despite current plans to increase military spending, this will only postpone the reduction of conscription and shutting down garrisons from 2011 to approximately 2015.⁷

There are different proposals for how to manage the expected reductions in manpower. Some calculations show that if the maximum age of reservists is extended from 35 to 40 only half of the current yearly intake of conscripts would be necessary to maintain the mobilisation strength of 250,000, prompting a debate over whether younger reservists would be preferable to superannuated ones.⁸ In either case, what is beyond debate is that the manpower of the Defence Forces has reduced by 35 per cent over the past ten years, and it is going to decrease further in the near future. As Kaskeala has pointed out, in the 1960s 95 per cent of men completed conscription and now the number is 70 per cent. It thus takes the same number of year age groups to form an army which is just half the size it was then.⁹ Another angle to the current debate is how much further the proportion carrying out national service can fall and it still be claimed that Finland has general conscription as opposed to selective.

Kaskeala has called for increased female participation in the Defence Forces, and has suggested extending the obligation to appear before call-up boards to women.¹⁰ The Ministry of Defence and the defence forces have been cautiously enthusiastic about this idea, but Minister of Defence Jyri Häkämies has stated that there are no plans to extend conscription to women.¹¹

Nevertheless, the proposed changes do not alter the fundamental emphasis on conscription and mass mobilisation. Arto Nokkala, of the Finnish National Defence University, points out that Finland emphasises continuity – while other European countries have emphasised the differences between the Cold War and current situation and thus the need to change ways of defence and security thinking, Finland on the contrary has maintained that no major changes in the Finnish way of organising defence are needed.¹²

As explained by one source in the defence administration: “All defence matters have a link to Russia. If we only needed to prepare for crisis management operations we would not need conscription or territorial defence and we would not have to worry about the will to defend the country. But because we have this threat near our borders we need to make sure that we have all of these.”¹³

Budget and Equipment

“Like beauty, a credible defence posture is in the eye of the beholder.”
Brig-Gen Lauri Kiiainlinna¹⁴

Unexpectedly for many, instead of the budget cuts common across the rest of Europe, Finland’s Security and Defence Policy report of 2009 promised “full compensation for annual price and cost increases as well as an annual 2 per cent increase in defence appropriations as of 2011.” Some took this as a guarantee that the current system would be preserved unchanged. Minister Häkämies nevertheless pointed out that change is inevitable, and the spending increase is necessary to maintain a credible defence by building the bridge between larger reserves and smaller, better-equipped troops. Maintaining spending at the current 1.3 per cent of GNP would mean “a deteriorating army”, Hakamies said.¹⁵

An attempt to square the budget circle is already being made through increasing national centralisation of many defence activities, involving a move away from regional commands capable of independent military operations. Territorial defence remains an underlying principle, but the most capable brigades can be “concentrated as an army corps in an area covering several military provinces - in other words, where the situation requires it”.¹⁶

Spending is not the only area where Finland can be perceived as being out of step with modern trends. There was criticism when Finland wanted to stay outside the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty, with land mines being a key element of defence planning against mass invasion. In the end Finland did join the agreement, and replaced land mines in its defensive preparations with cluster munitions – which promptly themselves in turn became the object of international disapprobation.¹⁷ The Finnish emphasis on a strong artillery force, born from historical experience of the specifics of national defence for Finland, is criticised as demonstrating that there is “too much of the Winter War still in the national psyche”.¹⁸ And the UN, the EU and Amnesty International have repeatedly expressed their disapproval on Finland’s (relatively gentle) treatment of conscientious objectors and those choosing non-military service.

Domestically, defence realists have to work in a political climate where wishful thinking, idealism and doublethink are significant in determining defence posture. For example, SDP party leader Jutta Urpilainen argues that Finland is “swimming against the current” by proposing modest increases in defence spending while other nations disarm – omitting to mention that Russia next door records regular 25 per cent increases in its defence budget as well as frequent announcements of multi-billion procurement programmes. Similarly, Urpilainen says that there is “no confrontation between countries in Europe”, but that at the same time Finland has an obligation to defend as “an EU border country”. By contrast, Adm Kaskeala notes that Finland has now enjoyed the “longest era of peace so far”, and as there is “no point believing in eternal peace, [he is] grateful for every day it lasts”.¹⁹

A Difficult Neighbour

“When it comes to Finland’s security environment, the most important questions relate to Russia’s political and economic stability and to the evolution of its international relations.”
Finnish Government Security and Defence Policy report, 2009²⁰

In spite of looming large in Finnish security policy, it is commonly agreed that Russia does not actively seek at present to pose any threat to Finland. Finland can in fact be seen as the exception among Russia's neighbours – the damage Russia has caused to the Finnish economy has been incidental instead of the deliberate actions it has taken towards its other neighbours.

So, for instance, despite energy dependence on Russia, Finland is officially unconcerned about the risk of energy cut-offs like those that have affected Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia. Typically, however, even when relations are stable and friendly as with Russian energy provision to Finland, there is unpleasant baggage in tow. Unlike Russia's other neighbours, for Finland energy imports from Russia also carry immediate environmental concerns. The Leningrad Nuclear Power Plant in Sosnovyy Bor, west of St Petersburg, exports 25 per cent of its output to Finland; but despite Finnish financial support, its reactors are criticised as unsafe by the Finnish Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (STUK), and the Norwegian nuclear safety foundation says spent fuel is stored in leaking facilities just 90 metres from the Gulf of Finland.²¹

A recurring theme in Finnish government discussion of Russia is the risk of future developments leading not necessarily to open and deliberate conflict, but to dangerous instability on the other side of the border. When asked directly if the Russian threat had passed, Adm Kaskeala pointed to Russia's unpredictability, and Finland needing to guard against the external consequences of internal Russian upheaval.²² As one commentator put it, Russia causes a security problem just by being there, even before starting to assert itself.²³

Scenarios for Russia's development produced by well-informed and intelligent observers abound and are constantly updated. What is both understated and striking about the projections issued in the last four to five years is that the option of a Western-style democratic Russia, subscribing to international norms and pursuing normal good-neighbourly relations with surrounding countries, has been quietly shelved.²⁴ Russia will continue to be a challenge to any of its neighbours; in fact, the English-language summary of the Finnish Ministry of Defence's compendious 2007 study of Russian development paths is entitled simply "Russia of Challenges".

The following section will look at a selection of these challenges in detail, to examine how being situated next to Russia has a practical effect on the Finnish economy and security position even before any shift in relations between the two countries. The extent of the influence Russia has over the Finnish economy, and the number of levers at Russia's disposal for causing Finland difficulties at little or no cost to itself, is highly significant for the viability of NATO as a credible alternative for ensuring Finland's future security.

Case Study: Timber Tariffs

"The Finnish national economy stands on a wooden leg."

The saying above may have been more apt in a former age when Nokia was best known for making rubber boots, but it is still true that forestry resonates as an emotive subject in Finland. Paper manufacture and timber processing are still major sectors of the economy, and four-fifths of the wood imported into Finland to feed these industries comes from Russia. So when in 2008 Russia announced that it would start to raise export tariffs on timber from 15 to 50 euro per cubic metre by early 2009, this threatened an immediate and devastating effect on a large number of businesses and jobs in Finland.²⁵

From a Russian point of view, the huge tariff hike fits into a 12-year Russian government plan to develop the timber industry, replacing imported processed products with Russian manufactures and also developing exports of processed items rather than raw materials.²⁶ By imposing export tariffs Russia also hoped to force foreign companies to invest in Russia's

forestry sector. It is tempting also to read into these objectives, and the way Russia sought to achieve them, the Russian tendency to seek zero-sum outcomes, and an assumption that in order to develop the Russian timber processing industry, the Finnish one has to be neutralised.

The Finnish forestry industry and government argued that this was a misguided way to pursue the Russian goal, and that in the words of Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Paavo Väyrynen, "Russia will shoot itself in the foot with these tariffs".²⁷

Finland sought to negotiate the issue with Russia bilaterally, as well as attempting to attract the attention of the EU to the problem. Negotiations about the tariffs were also included in broader talks on Russia's World Trade Organisation (WTO) membership, but this approach (highlighted in the Finnish Government's "Russia Action Plan" of April 2009) seems likely to be a dead end now that Russia has effectively torpedoed its own WTO application by saying it will join as a customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, for which the WTO has no provision.²⁸

In October 2008 Prime Minister Putin announced during a visit by Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen to Moscow that the increase in tariffs would be postponed. Putin said that this decision was made to help Finland during the financial crisis as the tariffs might have social consequences such as increased unemployment. He nevertheless emphasised that the postponement was only temporary.²⁹ By this late stage, of course, postponing the decision meant little since much of the economic damage in Finland had already been done, with companies forced to shut down factories and convert to using more Finnish coniferous wood.³⁰ To secure the supply of timber to industry, in July 2008 the Finnish Government cut the tax on proceeds from the sale of wood.³¹ Minister of Finance Jyrki Katainen also urged forest owners to cooperate at a national level, warning that there might be catastrophic consequences otherwise.³²

Many Finnish commentators have stated that the decision to postpone the tariffs was the outcome of an unsuccessful game played by Russia. The proposed increase in tariffs had not increased investment in Russia, but instead by forcing Finland to move away from Russian imports it had paralysed the economy across the border in Russian Karelia.³³

Case Study: The Border

The 1,300-km long border between Finland and Russia is the source of several challenges to bilateral relations. The route of the border itself still rankles for some, representing the annexation in 1944 of approximately 10 per cent of Finnish territory by the USSR, causing the evacuation of almost a quarter of the population. Calls for the return of territory are becoming fainter with the change of generations, with the children and grandchildren of those born in annexed Karelia more accepting than those who remember life as resettled evacuees; but the border still receives attention in other ways as trade and movements of people between the two countries increase, along with their side effects, organised crime, illegal immigration and smuggling.

With the importance to the Russian economy of transit through Finland to and from the EU, it might be assumed by an idealist that Russia would be keen to facilitate smooth and efficient border transit and customs clearance. But one of the enduring images of the border is of immensely long lorry queues, stretching for miles and days, caused by the extent of Russian bureaucracy that has to be undergone for goods to enter or leave the country. This serves as a continuing irritant both in bilateral and transit trade.

Russia has made earnest noises about wanting to cooperate in reducing border queues by introducing such radical innovations as a "one-window" system where drivers only have to deal with one set of Russian customs officials instead of undergoing multiple clearances.³⁴ But many other steps billed as intended to ease the situation seem at first glance to be

curiously unhelpful; for instance, reducing the queues of vehicles being imported at eight border crossing points by the simple measure of banning them from crossing the border there at all.³⁵

Another instance of unilateral Russian decisions threatening havoc and expense on the other side of the border is the Russian initiative to restrict the entry of goods containers entering Russia to rail traffic only. Not only would this traumatise the road freight industry in Finland, but major changes would be essential in railway networks and harbour freight terminals. After Russian intransigence led to an impasse in bilateral talks, Finland has tried to influence Russia by aiming to lift this issue to the agenda in EU-Russia relations.³⁶

Case Study: Gulf of Finland

The economic, political and strategic importance of the Gulf of Finland is growing. The Baltic Sea is becoming a highway for oil from Russia – described by some as the Nordic counterpart for the Persian Gulf.³⁷ The first stage of Russia's Sever oil project, with a pipeline to the port of Primorsk and a light oil trans-shipment terminal there, was declared complete and officially opened by Vladimir Putin in May 2008. The Primorsk terminal, built for the express purpose of bypassing ports in the Baltic States,³⁸ can receive vessels of up to 80,000 tonnes.³⁹

According to figures cited by Defence Forces Commander Adm Kaskeala, the amount of oil transported in the Gulf of Finland has grown seven-fold in the last decade, and is expected to pass 200m tonnes annually by 2015 following the completion of the new Russian oil terminals.⁴⁰ As well as the obvious economic impact on the Baltic States, Russia's efforts to use the Gulf of Finland and Baltic for energy exports cause an additional level of environmental concern on top of already existing complaints over Russian pollution.⁴¹

Russian use of the Gulf of Finland as an energy corridor also brings hard security concerns. Finnish Defence Forces Chief of Intelligence Commodore Georgij Alafuzoff says growing Russian economic strength is a concern for Finnish security policy, as Russia is now "to use military strength for promoting political goals". Alafuzoff pointed in particular to increasing use of the Gulf of Finland and Baltic as an "umbilical cord" for Russian energy exports, increasing still further the strategic significance of littoral states to Russian interests.⁴² Prof Timo Vihavainen notes that Russia's dearth of usable outlets to the sea makes those that are available all the more important, and further that "mastery of the Gulf of Finland has been a high priority to Russia for centuries and this cannot be expected to change in the near future".⁴³

The Nordstream project intends to bring Russian gas directly to Germany by a pipeline under the Baltic, bypassing the transit countries with which Russia has had occasional fractious disputes leading to energy cut-offs and challenges to both sides' definitions of energy security. The eventual construction of the Nordstream pipeline will increase the importance of the Gulf of Finland still further, with a resultant impact on Finnish-Russian relations since Finnish approval is required for the pipeline to proceed. When the two countries' prime ministers met in Moscow in November 2008, according to civil servant sources Putin just "kept going and going on" about the pipeline.⁴⁴

Putin's visit to Finland in July 2009 caused leading newspaper Helsingin Sanomat to call Putin the "Emperor of the Baltic Sea", and the pipeline his favourite project. Yet again, in a meeting between Prime Ministers Vanhanen and Putin in Gdansk in September 2009 Putin once more pushed the schedule for Finland's approval for the pipeline. The pipeline appears to be the top priority in Putin's, if not necessarily in Russia's, political agenda with Finland at the moment.⁴⁵

Finland is considered to be the most complaisant partner for Russia in discussions of plans for Nordstream. Estonia, Sweden and Poland have expressed their fear of the possible

security problems the pipeline might bring.⁴⁶ Finland on the other hand has emphasised that it sees the project mainly as an environmental question and is ready to approve the gas pipeline project as long as it is built environmentally safely.⁴⁷ Startlingly, Environment Minister Paula Lehtomäki has said that the Nordstream pipeline has no security implications for the Baltic, basing this conclusion on the grounds that “a gas pipeline does not have to be defended militarily in the case of a crisis or a terrorist strike... In the event of a crisis one simply closes the valve.”⁴⁸ The next day President Tarja Halonen went a step further and said that Nordstream “was a way to improve Europe's energy security”.⁴⁹

Yet military analysts point to Russian statements that the Baltic Fleet will be in charge of safeguarding the pipeline, and to the number of shore installations around the Gulf of Finland that Russia could claim were under threat and therefore demand the right to take them under protection. This scenario would call to mind a modern echo of the demands for basing and transit rights which Finland and other countries faced from the USSR in late 1939.

According to Minister Häkämies “I believe what we are seeing from Russia is strengthening the military to guarantee the country's economic interests – for example, the oil and gas facilities in the Baltic Sea.”⁵⁰ A Finnish military expert on Russia agrees: “the Russian military is to be prepared to assist in defending economic interests. This is documented.”⁵¹ Some Finnish members of parliament have therefore started to demand that the Government provide a report on the security implications of the pipeline, to be discussed by the parliament before the official permit is given.⁵²

The academic community is also not unified in its view on Nordstream. For example Arto Luukkainen of the Renvall Institute and Alpo Juntunen of the Finnish National Defence University point out that the pipeline will bring security threats as well, and should not be discussed solely as an environmental issues. But Teija Tiilikainen, who will take up the influential post of Director of the Finnish Institute for International Affairs (FIIA) in 2011, countered that the security and strategic implications should not be overemphasised and suggests that the pipeline increasing interdependence between Europe and Russia is a benefit not a threat.⁵³

The pipeline is intended to pass to the north of the mid-Gulf island of Hogland, formerly Suursaari, which is seeing corresponding military development by Russia – just 40 km south of the marina and manicured leisure gardens of Kotka on Finland's south coast, and much closer to the Gulf of Finland National Park marine reserve.⁵⁴ During August-September 2009 Russia held the Ladoga-2009 military exercise near the Finnish border in the area of Lake Ladoga. The common assessment among military experts from Sweden, Finland and Russia was that one of the aims of the exercise was training to secure the Nordstream pipeline. Taken with the permission granted to Russian corporate entities including Gazprom to form their own protection forces, this supports the conclusion that Russia is preparing to be able to defend Nordstream militarily beyond the bounds of Russia if it feels the need.⁵⁵

Yet Finland does not appear inclined to hinder the progress of Nordstream in any other way than by means of environmental considerations. In the course of the difficulties with timber tariffs, some politicians and observers suggested that Finland should link the tariff issue to approval of Nordstream. Prime Minister Vanhanen and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Väyrynen nevertheless both denied that this was under consideration. “Some kinds of rumours are circulating that Finland would try to slow this [pipeline] matter down, but this is not the case”, Väyrynen said, with Vanhanen adding that the government would not influence the environmental permit process in any way. For Poland and the Baltic countries who have strongly opposed the pipeline, Finland's approach has been a disappointment, and the press in these countries have accused Finland of “treachery and a new wave of Finlandisation”.⁵⁶

Baltic: “NATO Lake” or “Russian Umbilical Cord”?

Beyond the Gulf of Finland, the wider Baltic Sea provides a further cause for irritation given Russia’s status as “polluter-in-chief” from Leningrad and Kaliningrad Regions. Environmental issues cause alarm in littoral states neighbouring Russia: according to a 2008 poll 94 per cent of Finns and 91 per cent of Estonians (but only 83 per cent of the more distant Swedes) see pollution there as “a problem that urgently needs to be addressed”.⁵⁷ The communication on the EU Commission’s Strategy for the Baltic Sea adopted on 10th June 2009 once again emphasised that “many of the challenges can only be met by good cooperation with Russia”. Finland has constantly emphasised the importance of integrating Russia with the Strategy, but has met limited cooperation from the Russian side.

This limited cooperation has led to a situation where other countries in the area have felt they have no choice but to take on responsibility for improving environmental conditions in Russia. An important framework for dealing with the environmental questions of the Baltic Sea is the EU’s Northern Dimension Policy, with an environmental programme concentrating especially on Russia’s north-west. The programme finances, for example, improvement of the St Petersburg waste water facilities in order to prevent untreated waste entering the Baltic Sea.⁵⁸ The situation where EU taxpayers finance the treatment of Russian sewage arises not because of any shortage of funds in Russia, but because of an unwillingness by Russia to meet the same standards of environmental good-neighbourliness commonly accepted by other littoral states.

In marine navigation, extensive cooperation has already been achieved in the Baltic, reducing the threat of severe accidents, but in other aspects cooperation is more difficult. Sweden, Norway and Finland have discussed joint air traffic control, but in the southern part of the Baltic the situation is different. The entire Baltic Sea has four aerial surveillance systems: those of NATO, Russia, Sweden, and Finland, and making them compatible appears to be a decades-long ambition.⁵⁹ There has been a repeated pattern of Russian intrusions into Finnish airspace, usually blamed on navigational error, leading to a March 2008 agreement that Russian military aircraft flying over the Gulf of Finland would be fitted with GPS equipment, and flight plans for aircraft of both countries and Estonia would be shared between the three countries. At the time of writing, the practical impact of these measures has yet to be publicly assessed.⁶⁰

The Special Relationship

“Of all the countries directly on our borders – both historically and as a result of the collapse of the USSR [sic] – this is Russia’s most peaceable neighbour. There are no unresolved political problems in our relations, nor danger of inter-ethnic conflict. Against the background of both existing and potential threats to the security of Russia along the perimeter of her borders, the frontier with Finland appears the most stable.”
Yuriy Deryabin, first Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Finland, and Head of the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Northern Europe Centre.⁶¹

Despite the irritants described above, Finland and Russia share far better relations than Russia does with most of its other neighbours. According to Sergei Lavrov’s description, “our countries are bound by relations of traditional good-neighbourliness. We cherish these relations and regard Finland as a reliable partner.”⁶² Finnish and Russian leaders meet on a regular basis, leading the Finnish daily Aamulehti to comment that if the quality of relations is measured by the number of visits, Russia-Finland relations are in an excellent state.⁶³

Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev has recently started to use this least troublesome neighbour as a place to talk to the world. One of the presentations of the Russian proposals for a new security structure for Europe took place in Finland,⁶⁴ and the role Medvedev is offering Finland as host country and “midwife” in the process resembles the one Helsinki and

Finland filled in facilitating the CSCE negotiations leading up to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975.

A further example of Finland reprising its Cold War role as a neutral ground for negotiations was a meeting between American Admiral Michael Mullen and Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Nikolay Makarov, which took place in Helsinki in October 2008. The meeting was the first time the two countries' highest-ranking military leaders had discussed matters since the Georgian crisis in August that year, and it was thought to mark the resumption of military relations. The request to Finland to be the host reportedly came from Russia.⁶⁵ Juhani Kaskeala, commander of the Finnish Defence Forces until mid-2009, said he was told by CGS Makarov that Russia sees Finland as a stabilising factor in its neighbourhood.⁶⁶ The legacy of constructive bilateral engagement on some defence and security issues between Russia and Finland is cited as one benefit of Finland not being a member of NATO.⁶⁷ Russia's Minister of Defence Anatoliy Serdyukov has suggested that Finland and Russia should carry out joint exercises in peacekeeping and counter-terrorism work, as well as offering to modernise the Russian equipment used by the Finnish Defence Forces.⁶⁸

Personal relations are particularly relevant in Finnish-Russian affairs, especially in respect of the role of President Halonen, who is seen to have excellent relations with both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin. Halonen was the only foreign state leader invited to an economic forum in St Petersburg in June 2009, joining the Russian political leadership and the representatives of Russia's most important enterprises. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov said that Halonen played a significant role in Russia's decision to postpone the increase in timber tariffs. Director of the Aleksanteri Institute (Finnish Centre for Russian and Eastern European Studies) Markku Kivinen also notes that President Halonen does have a decisive role in Russia relations. Kivinen thinks that Prime Minister Vanhanen has a low importance in the relations and that Foreign Minister Stubb is just "a beginner". Halonen herself has commented on the issue, claiming that the atmosphere between the prime ministers is respectful but adding that "it is of course a different matter when you have been cooperating over ten years".⁶⁹ It is a matter of speculation how much Halonen's strong resistance towards NATO membership weighs in having these excellent relations.

As the old guard of politicians including Ms Halonen steps aside, it remains to be seen whether Finland will seek a different position in its relations with Russia. Some, such as Foreign Minister Stubb, have stated that as a member of the EU Finland cannot take on the role as a bridge between east and west, but should concentrate more on being a player in the European team.⁷⁰

Finland's traditional role during Soviet times as a transit country for those few Westerners making the journey to the USSR by land, and as a bolthole for when the USSR all got a bit too much, has been transformed but sustained, with Finland still in many ways Russia's "closest neighbour". A new high-speed rail link between Helsinki and St Petersburg is to reduce the transit time to three and a half hours in 2010. The number of Russian tourists visiting Finland every year is now approaching two million, making Finland the principal overseas destination for Russians – in 2008, there were eight million crossings of the Finnish-Russian border.

Although disquiet has been voiced over the growing numbers of Russians in Finland, particularly given Russian promises to "protect the interests of its citizens" abroad, there are no hints of serious ethnic discord. Finnish companies in a position to take advantage of the new cross-border trade and tourism have prospered. Property sales to Russians in eastern Finland have been both a bonus and a source of unease: owners of properties around areas popular with Russians feel the benefit from prices pushed higher by Russians looking for second homes, even though some have misgivings over "taking over Finland one cottage at a time", and there is a total lack of reciprocity which means that Finnish companies or individuals cannot acquire real estate on the other side of the border.⁷¹

Russians make up the largest group of foreign citizens residing in Finland, accounting for just over a fifth of the total number of foreigners.⁷² This has to be seen in the context of Finland being exceptional among European countries; Finnish society remains remarkably homogenous, with net immigration running at just over 20,000 per year. Immigrants make up just two per cent of the population, and the official number of foreign citizens residing in Finland in 2006 was just 121,739.⁷³ In publicity shots used by the Finnish Ministry of Defence showing massed conscripts with heads bared for swearing the oath, the few non-blonds stand out strikingly.

This cultural homogeneity means the shock of the new can have disproportionate effects (according to one commentary, “minor conflicts related to cultural misunderstandings over life in apartment buildings can escalate to the point of civil unrest”).⁷⁴ Russians do attract comment because of their different standards of social and communal responsibility (and, it is occasionally said, personal hygiene); but in terms of relative public disapproval, this pales compared to the far more visible and unnerving phenomenon of Roma beggars who have taken advantage of EU accession by Romania to freely travel North in search of rich and easy pickings from bewildered but conscientious Finns.⁷⁵ Russians, while still foreign, are a known quantity of which Finnish culture and society has the measure.

Closer Engagement?

*“It is in Finland’s national interest to know Russia as well as possible.”
Finnish Government “Russia Action Plan”, April 2009⁷⁶*

Where Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb does voice firm opinions is on engaging with Russia as a civilised country and not as a problem. “I personally believe that the best way to appeal to Russia and Europe is Russia’s closer integration into Europe,” Stubb said when opposing the Estonian proposal to veto the conclusion of a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Russia.⁷⁷

In this context, the Finnish goal has been to increase cooperation and interdependence between Russia and Europe. For Finland, the correct policy is to influence Russia through deepening cooperation, not through sanctions or freezing relations; Finland strongly opposed all proposals for EU sanctions against Russia following the Georgian crisis in 2008.⁷⁸ The EU’s Northern Dimension, heavily promoted by Finland, is a specific example of this aim to promote cooperation between Russia and Europe, and in particular its northern part.⁷⁹

Stubb has also called for acceleration towards visa-free travel between the EU and Russia, despite widespread misgivings within Finland and opposition with practical objections from the Finnish Border Guard and other government agencies. At present Finland rejects up to 6,000 visa applications a year from Russians, on behalf of Finland and other Schengen nations,⁸⁰ and the Border Guard have long-established procedures for dealing with the “unreliability” of Russian identity documents.⁸¹

Yet despite this Finnish policy of closer engagement, many in Finland would argue that Russia’s behaviour is not, and never has been, that of a civilised neighbour. More often it is described as a rising power trying to regain its superpower status. This includes, as Chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee Pertti Salolainen described it, a tendency to be “sensitive as a princess” in all security questions.⁸² If from the other end of Europe the UK’s House of Commons Defence Committee complains of Russia engaging in “not the actions of a friendly nation” which “risk escalating tension”, how much more intense must this sensation be in a country actually next door to Russia.⁸³

Stubb himself has had to admit that working with Russia is not always as easy as he sometimes wants to assume. For instance, a slight edge could be detected to the polite platitudes produced at the final press conference for Stubb’s first meeting with Russian

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. On learning that Stubb first visited Moscow in 1982 as part of the Finnish youth hockey team, and that team lost, Lavrov hoped that “since then you have drawn some conclusions”. Stubb wondered if his admission of a minor transgression during that visit at age 14 would please the Russian tabloids; Lavrov bridled and replied “there are no Russian tabloids”.⁸⁴ And Lavrov could not resist publicly pointing out Stubb’s novice status by looking forward to further meetings when Stubb would have full command of the issues at hand.⁸⁵

Stubb has chosen to deal with these sometimes prickly political relations by emphasizing that things have changed from the Cold War days - Finland is now a dutiful member of the EU. Stubb has presented a goal of “modernising” relations with Russia, and said that “we must see Russia without traumas about what the Soviet Union once was”.⁸⁶ As noted by Stubb in an interview with the Russian newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, “I regard Russian-Finnish relations from the standpoint of the European Union. Finland is an EU member and it abides by the existing Russian-EU agreements.”⁸⁷ During a meeting with Stubb, Lavrov suggested that in its quality as a neutral country, Finland could promote Russian proposals for a new security treaty to Europe. Stubb immediately responded that Finland is not neutral: “We have been politically aligned with the EU since January 1st, 1995, and we work in close military cooperation with NATO, among others.”⁸⁸

This is not what Russia hopes. Andrey Fedorov, an expert on Russia’s foreign policy and a former deputy minister of foreign affairs, has said that “bilateral relations are ten or hundred times more important than the relations between Russia and Finland as an EU member state. We do not keep in touch with Finland through Brussels just as we do not keep in touch with Germany through Brussels. We will continue treating Finland as good ground to introduce new ideas.”⁸⁹ And Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept specifically names bilateral relations with Finland and a range of other countries as “an important resource for promoting Russia’s national interest in European and world affairs”.⁹⁰

Despite regional initiatives and Stubb’s best efforts, a succession of minor instances from recent years suggest a trend from the Russian side, deliberate or otherwise, of gradually increasing distance in relations. In the summer of 2006, Russian law enforcement bodies began rejecting Finnish requests for cooperation in cross-border investigations, stating that henceforth questioning of a suspect is only possible in cases where a crime was committed in Russia, and that all investigations should only take place in Russia.⁹¹ And successive adjustments to the restricted zone on the Russian side of the border have added significant complications to visits by Finns to their former family homes in Karelia and other areas annexed by the USSR, which at one time were carried out relatively freely.⁹² During Putin’s visit to Helsinki in June 2009, Members of Parliament Eero Heinäluoma and Kimmo Kiljunen claimed publicly that Putin used “unusually harsh words”, and deduced that the atmosphere of the relations might be changing for the worse. In addition, Pertti Salolainen described Putin’s behaviour and Russia’s policy as “edgy”.⁹³ Cyber and human intelligence-gathering activities by Russia against Finland are increasing rapidly, with Finland now “a focal point of eastern surveillance activities”.⁹⁴ The amount of surveillance activities in Finland is now at the same level as during the Cold War, after a drastic drop during the early 1990s. According to the Finnish Security Police (SUPO) Finnish defence policy as well as support for NATO membership are subjects of interest.⁹⁵

It can be seen from the case studies and illustrations above that Russia has the ability to exert influence on the Finnish economy, and quality of life in Finland, at will and in some cases at negligible cost to itself. In a common phrase, “Russia makes Finland sleep like a dog – always one eye open.”⁹⁶ This has particular relevance when considering potential Russian reactions to the developing relationship between Finland and NATO, which will be discussed further below.

Public Opinion

*“For most western and central European countries NATO is the answer to their defence prayers. Not for Finland.”
Defence Minister Jyri Häkämies⁹⁷*

Awareness of 20th-century history, and the high level of cultural homogeneity, mean that Finland benefits from an acuity of threat perception among the public which most Western defence planners can only envy. There can be few in Finland who doubt which direction immediate security challenges come from: the complication arises when deciding who is allowed to say it.

In Finland, a number of unique constraints restrict public debate on NATO membership. When Defence Minister Häkämies said in September 2007 that “the three main security challenges for Finland today are Russia, Russia and Russia”, this unprecedented frankness sparked a political storm – giving rise to headlines like “Three R-Words that Shook Finland”.⁹⁸ The content of the debate over this breach of taboo highlighted traditional dividing lines among politicians, academics and journalists, and gave a foretaste of the political anguish that would accompany any serious move toward NATO membership.

Many have described the Finnish NATO discussion as emotional rather than analytical (“a weird tale, borderline metaphysical”, in the words of one respected Finnish analyst), and certainly it is grounded in deeply-held historical and social convictions. The public discussion is indeed filled with myths and monsters. Advocates of NATO membership have been accused of using the old fear of “Russkies” and pointing to threats that actually do not exist. The “antis”, on the other hand, portray NATO as an uncontrollable political force dominated by the USA, which would drag Finland into conflicts where it doesn’t belong, and force Finns to give up the still-popular conscription system.

Risto Penttilä, director of the Finnish Business and Policy Forum (EVA) and a leading light of the Finnish Atlantic Council, offers a neat characterisation of the divergent Finnish attitudes on engagement with the world around them. The traditional views, he says, are split between ardent Finnish nationalists, dubbed “Kalevala Finns” after the title of the Finnish national epic; and hard-nosed realists – the “Koivisto Finns” after Mauno Koivisto, president of Finland during the turbulent years in Finnish-Soviet relations from 1982 to 1994. Set against these are modernists, divided into the pragmatist “Nokia Finns” who believe in full Finnish integration into a globalised world, and the idealist “Moomin Finns” who shun NATO involvement on the grounds that if Finland minds its own business and avoids joining the alliance, it can thereby stay out of trouble.⁹⁹

The most important reasons given for opposing membership is the desire to keep Finnish troops from fighting in “foreign” wars and the likelihood of a negative Russian reaction. The most important reasons for joining are that the Finnish Defence Forces cannot defend the country alone, and that membership in NATO would improve Finland’s defence and security position. According to one influential poll, currently 60 per cent of Finns think that Finland should not apply for NATO membership.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, annual surveys on Finnish opinions and attitudes toward security and defence policy suggest that in recent years support for Finland’s military non-alignment, as well as opposition to NATO membership, has decreased. This shifting attitude shows in the higher proportion of persons responding with “no opinion” in recent polls, by contrast with the 2008 poll which showed citizens increasingly critical of Finland-NATO cooperation. The higher share of people with no opinion has been read as showing Finns “moving to observation positions”.¹⁰¹

Although the number of “antis” has decreased, this has been a slow process. Even conflict in Georgia in August 2008 made no significant impact on poll results; armed conflict between Russia and a neighbour provided arguments for both NATO supporters and opponents, with opponents not wishing to jeopardise Finland’s current good relationship with its powerful

neighbour through alignment with NATO. An argument often used was that as Finland still has territorial defence and conscription, the crisis did not bring any reason to change the Finnish system but instead reaffirmed the value of the current system.¹⁰²

One reason given for why Finland is still divided on the membership is lack of political leadership.¹⁰³ For instance Chairman of the Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee Pertti Salolainen has stated that “if the President and Prime Minister held a briefing tomorrow saying that they are in favour of membership in NATO, public support for membership would be 80 per cent the week after that”.¹⁰⁴ This trait was highlighted in 1995 with Finland’s accession to the EU, when most of the political, intellectual and media elite declared their support for Finland’s membership as soon as it was politically encouraged to do so. The government of the time, led by Prime Minister Esko Aho, carried out the biggest information campaign in Finnish history to inform every household about the implications of EU membership.¹⁰⁵

Thus, opponents of NATO membership regularly use negative poll results to back a call for a binding referendum on entry to NATO. But as public opinion in Finland often reliably follows the publicly-voiced opinion of the political leaders, it can be argued that when the President and Prime Minister refer to public opinion on NATO they are referring to an opinion they themselves have created.¹⁰⁶

Both President Halonen and Prime Minister Vanhanen have reserved attitudes towards NATO membership. Also, Russia did not perceive Finland’s membership in the EU as a threat in the way it would Finland’s membership in NATO. But despite these differences, there are broad similarities between today’s attitudes to NATO and the pre-EU referendum situation. A range of leading media including Finland’s largest broadsheet, Helsingin Sanomat, have already declared in favour of membership. In addition, before joining the EU journalists could attend voluntary education courses on the Union which were perceived as important in achieving the transformation from anti-EU attitudes towards favouring membership. Recently the same kind of process has been started with NATO membership, with for example a seminar called “Atlantic Security Policy for Journalists” organised in April 2009.¹⁰⁷

This helps to explain apparently contradictory poll results: although the majority of Finns still say they oppose membership, as long ago as 2000, 55 per cent of Finns believed that Finland would join NATO by the year 2010.¹⁰⁸ This has actually given rise to a new word used in the public discussion – NATOttaa – which refers to the slow but determined movement towards NATO pushed forward by pro-NATO opinion formers.

Don’t Mention the War

“Some distorters of history from our first wave of ‘democrats’ said that ‘little Finland was a mouse in the claws of a huge cat’. To this I replied that if you are to make that comparison, you would be better thinking of Tom and Jerry, where the little mouse often turns out to be cleverer and more agile than the cat.”
Yuri Deryabin, former Russian ambassador to Finland¹⁰⁹

One unique constraint on a full and frank debate on NATO is the deeply-ingrained political instinct to avoid any action or statement which would cause offence to Russia. Within living memory, this stems from the accommodations which Finland had to make during and after the Second World War in order to avoid occupation by the USSR. After a series of desperate defensive battles, Finland signed a peace treaty with the Soviet Union in 1944, accepting punitive terms and surrendering territory, industries and resources, but preserving sovereignty and a measure of independence far greater than countries in eastern Europe.

The post-war Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) was the legal embodiment of Finland’s status as an independent sovereign nation which nonetheless

practised careful restraint of its sovereignty in order not to offend its larger neighbour. “Finlandisation” became a catch-word for pervasive Soviet-friendly policies, punctuated by occasional acts of self-abasement at Moscow’s will – for instance the return to exile or death in the Soviet Union of refugees from Ingria and Russian Karelia, or the trial and imprisonment in the post-war years of former army officers convicted of conspiring to defend Finland in the event of Soviet invasion.

This acceptance of heavy losses and a degree of subservience in order to preserve what is of fundamental importance is summed up in the phrase “bend but not break”, and personified in post-war President Juho Paasikivi, who consistently sought a pragmatic *modus vivendi* with domination by the eastern neighbour. Understandably, it has historically given rise to mixed feelings within Finland, with idealists unwilling to accept the compromises and resenting the “Finlandised” label. This social division has mirrors in earlier times. At the end of the 19th century, with Finland an autonomous Grand Duchy attached to the Russian empire, an unprecedented drive for Russification began in Finland under the then governor-general, Nikolay Bobrikov. Despite strong popular unity against Bobrikov's repressive measures, Finns were divided on how best to respond to them: some (including, later, the young Paasikivi) argued that as Finns were powerless to resist the Russian measures, the best policy was to comply in order not to invite worse retribution. In the event, the intensive Russification eased when in an uncharacteristic step, a young Finnish nationalist assassinated Bobrikov.

The terms of the FCMA treaty, while ostensibly describing a partnership of equals, severely limited Finland’s freedom of manoeuvre as an independent state. The kind of relationship envisaged by Russia under a treaty of this kind is exemplified by the fact that South Ossetia and Abkhazia, client states proclaimed as independent republics by Russia, signed treaties with Russia in late 2008 which are also entitled “Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance”.¹¹⁰

Two noted crises in Finnish-Soviet relations stand out during the FCMA period: the 1958 “Night Frost” and the 1961 “Note Crisis”, referring to a diplomatic note calling for “consultations” under Article 2 of the FCMA treaty – essentially a prelude to military intervention by the USSR. In both cases the Soviets were objecting, among other things, to domestic political developments in Finland, and in both cases the end result was in effect a change of government there. Russia is not the Soviet Union, and the FCMA treaty is no longer available as a lever, but the examples are instructive for considering the dynamics of Finland taking decisions which may antagonise its more powerful neighbour.

Formally, at least, treaty relations with Russia no longer prevent Finland joining NATO. FCMA was replaced in 1992 by a new treaty including negative security guarantees, which is of much less pervasive significance for Finland and raises no obstacle to Finland joining any defensive alliance.¹¹¹ But the long shadow cast by Russia still causes sizeable numbers of Finnish public figures instinctively to glance over their shoulder before commenting on subjects which are known to be sensitive in Moscow.

The effect is still felt in the public narrative. The Nordstream debate discussed above is an example of when Finland cites environmental criteria when there is a strong argument that the issue at stake is actually Russia. Another instance of where this can hinder open debate is energy dependency. Finland imports all of its gas, and most of its oil and hard coal, from Russia,¹¹² as well as electricity generated at Russian nuclear facilities that give rise to concern as noted above. Despite criticism at home, Finland is engaged in construction of additional nuclear power facilities, to increase the nuclear share of domestic energy production from the current approximately 27 per cent.¹¹³ In public, the need for this new nuclear power is primarily legitimised by environmental reasons. Nuclear power is argued to be essential for Finland to reach the EU's climate and environment targets - even though the greater part of Finland’s energy is already provided by renewables and the official environmental party, the Greens, opposes nuclear power. The Russia factor is more quietly

stated in the background. According to Minister of Economic Affairs Mauri Pekkarinen, speaking in October 2009, decisions already made on increasing nuclear power will guarantee that Finland can increase domestic electricity generation capacity by 2020 to the extent that "it will be enough to replace the current imports from Russia, and cover consumption even when it rises to the level before the recession and even above that".¹¹⁴ And Finance Minister Jyrki Katainen has admitted that "we need one nuclear power plant to replace the imports from Russia".¹¹⁵ But Mauri Pekkarinen says public opposition (largely citing environmental and safety grounds) is not surprising, as there is a lack of understanding of the need for additional energy sources given the prevailing and official view of Russia as a reliable energy partner.¹¹⁶

Non-Alignment

"It [policy of non-alignment] represents the earnestness typical of the Finnish character; its peaceful, moderate and realistic attitude towards the world. It represents common sense inherited from previous generations and the will not to interfere with foreign matters. It also reflects our clear and realistic understanding of our own capabilities."

Former President Urho Kekkonen¹¹⁷

A further complication for Finland considering membership of the Alliance is the country's traditional intermediary, non-aligned role in international relations and conflict resolution; summarised in a well-worn Urho Kekkonen phrase: "Finland does not want to be a judge, but a doctor". Finland's exceptional role in international cooperation is as a respected non-aligned honest broker in conflict resolution and international disputes.¹¹⁸ It is this respect and perceived impartiality that allows Finns (surprisingly often in the person of Martti Ahtisaari) to provide the structure for overseeing the decommissioning of weapons in Northern Ireland, to broker peace deals between Indonesia and restive provinces, or to host secret talks between Iraqi Sunni and Shiite factions.

This characterisation still holds and is reflected in Finnish-Russian relations even today, but sometimes becomes blurred with the strong instinct in Finnish foreign policy to avoid any form of confrontation with the eastern neighbour, as discussed above. While the Baltic States and even Sweden have felt able to criticise anti-social behaviour by Russia freely, Finnish politicians generally avoid making strong statements which could be seen as provocative.

For example the comments on Russia's Duma elections in December 2007 by President Halonen and Prime Minister Vanhanen differed markedly from those made by other European leaders. Vanhanen called the result "convincing", and mostly criticised those who had questioned Putin's victory with "somewhat indefinite" accusations of fraud. For Halonen, it was enough that Russians had given their support for continuing Putin's tenure "in one way or another". She said this was acceptable to Finland.¹¹⁹ Comment by PM Vanhanen on the Russian presidential election in March 2008 was also subtly different from that of most other leaders: although the election "included a number of characteristics that were unusual from a Western perspective", this was because Russia has a "different kind of democracy than what we are used to in the West", and the key point was that the election showed that "a clear majority of the Russian people support the policies of Putin".¹²⁰

Generalised backing for Putin by top political figures has given rise to accusations that he has been elevated above criticism. Vanhanen has stated that Putin is the kind of prime minister that suits Finland, and in May 2005 Halonen addressed the summit of the European Council in Warsaw with an optimistic speech saying that she was convinced that Putin wanted to advance human rights and the rule of law. This was shortly before the widely-criticised Russian move of applying the rule of law by stripping the Yukos oil company of its assets and jailing its former chief Mikhail Khodorkovskiy.¹²¹

This line of policy towards the common neighbour differs significantly from that of the Baltic States, who have no such instinctive leaning toward non-alignment. In the EU Finland has been careful not to be associated too strongly with the Baltic States and their critical stance towards Russia.¹²² President Halonen has irked the Baltic States with comments on their behaviour in the EU, saying that the Estonians are suffering from “post-Soviet stress” and contrasting them with Finnish foreign policy which “did not suffer from this kind of post-traumatic condition”. Estonia’s president Toomas Hendrik Ilves responded by saying that Estonia has never criticised another EU country’s foreign policy actions in such a way.¹²³

Others on the Finnish side, including former Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen, have suggested that Estonia should be less active in supporting Georgian and Ukrainian aspirations to join the West, if it harms relations with Russia.¹²⁴ Mihkel Mutt, columnist and writer, answered in Tallinn Postimees that if Moscow were friendly toward Estonia, surely “we would speak less of ideals and would be more pragmatic - just like Finland”. Mutt continued by suggesting that Lipponen had given a clear sign that “Finland does not fear that it will be attacked so much as it fears having to come and help Estonia, for example. At least at the state level, Finland certainly wishes to avoid that.”¹²⁵

A vignette of this differing approach to commenting on Russia can be taken from media coverage of the Russian decision in January 2008 to close offices of the British Council in Russia. Editorials in Latvian newspapers fulminated about “brutal blackmail” and the “methods of banditry”, saying that “Russia expects Britain to yield on issues which simply cannot be accepted in a democratic country in which the rule of law prevails.” Meanwhile, the Helsingin Sanomat editorial of the same day said that it might be unfortunate, but pointed out Russia’s sovereign right to decide who does what on its territory.¹²⁶

Criticism for the Finnish way has also arisen among Finnish politicians, with “pragmatism” and non-alignment being criticised as appeasement of Russia. For example, former Ministry of Defence permanent secretary Lt-Gen Matti Ahola strongly criticised political leaders during the Georgian crisis for taking over three weeks formally to express a view on the conflict. Ahola suggests that this was an act of fear.¹²⁷

NATO membership – “Red Rag to a Bull”

“I do not like this hush-hush attitude. Someone proposes an initiative, and suddenly he is categorised, dismissed, pigeonholed, considered odd, rejected.”
Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb on the foreign policy discussion in Finland

Alexander Stubb is not alone among the younger generation of Finnish politicians in criticising the level of discussion in Finland. Minister of Finance Katainen has complained that foreign policy has become “occultism” in Finland and Defence Minister Häkämies has complained that one cannot present any new view points without being persecuted.¹²⁸ The other end of the “free speech” spectrum can be seen in Tarja Halonen’s comments expressing disapproval of the media for constantly provoking discussion on the decision to stay outside NATO.¹²⁹ But there is no doubt that the emotional tone of the NATO debate does make politicians of all colour wary of discussing membership in public; raising one’s voice either way on NATO leads quickly to being labelled as an unreconstructed right-wing militarist or a fluffy left-wing idealist. According to the FIIA report on NATO membership, it is not even possible to have the necessary debate, so long as NATO is “to many Finns like a red rag to a bull.”¹³⁰

Hence, when discussing NATO, a degree of conformity among the political elite is the norm, and deviations from the party line attract a lot of attention. So it was not very surprising when Alexander Stubb, who as an MEP was an outspoken advocate of membership and critic of non-alignment, as soon as he was appointed Foreign Minister immediately toned down his opinions and pointed out that foreign policy is also decided by President Tarja Halonen.¹³¹ “Finland’s foreign minister advocates what it says in the government platform,” he added

when pressed.¹³² Meanwhile, as if to emphasise the point, Stubb's predecessor Ilkka Kanerva suddenly felt free, after leaving the job, to voice outspoken views advocating NATO and rubbishing the idea of "EU security guarantees."¹³³

Although it seems that becoming foreign minister has changed Stubb's public attitude towards Russia, his view still differs from many of those representing the older generation in politics. For instance, the interpretations of the Georgian conflict and its effects on the Finnish security and defence policy decisions clearly reflected the "age division" in the Finnish political scene. Minister for Foreign Trade Paavo Väyrynen (who was already a minister in the 1970s) saw the conflict as reinforcing the argument for Finland *not* joining NATO. Stubb on the other hand perceived the crisis as a reason to reconsider current defence policy choices, and said that the war was a wake-up call to Finns: "we have been lulled into a false security, and Georgia is a harsh reminder of the reality".¹³⁴

Some have hoped that the Finnish security and defence policy atmosphere is at the edge of change as younger politicians rise to top positions in almost all the major parties. These politicians in their thirties are the first generation to have had an entire professional career in the post-FCMA world, and have been described as the post-Finlandisation generation. They do not carry the same emotional baggage as their predecessors, either towards Russia or towards NATO.¹³⁵ The possible impacts of the change of generation were seen in a report by the Finnish Foreign Policy Youth Forum, a group founded by the foreign ministry to give their view on defence and security policy issues. The forum's assessment suggested that Finland's national defence solution must be based not only on selective conscription but also on a military alliance.

At the same time the younger generation might not bring such dramatic change as could be expected. A poll conducted by Helsingin Sanomat among the young politicians named by the parties as their "hopes of the future" showed that a clear majority was against NATO membership. In addition, in keeping with the political leadership and conformity issue described above, the younger generation seems to adjust to the dominant political culture even more firmly when they rise to positions with more responsibility.¹³⁶

"Next Report Please"

"I have yet to receive a memo that would convincingly argue for Finland's membership in NATO."
President Tarja Halonen¹³⁷

It seems that President Halonen's wishes were taken seriously, as the Finnish NATO discussion is steered from one major public report to the next. As the question of who has the right to say what remains a significant issue, "neutral" reports are a convenient way of approaching the subject. The aim in general is to increase public knowledge on the Alliance and dispel some tenacious myths; to make the issue more objective. Former Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva described the role of the reports "as a travel guide to NATO".¹³⁸

The two most influential NATO reports to date have been produced by FIIA and by a senior Foreign Ministry official, Antti Sierla. Both restrain from giving any clear recommendations, but both have still been interpreted as offering more arguments for joining than for staying away from NATO. The Foreign Ministry report was described as "exuding a pro-NATO spirit both on the lines and between the lines".¹³⁹

The reports seem to have succeeded in improving the quality of discussion, refraining from strong statements and presenting their findings in discreet analytical style. By providing more balanced analysis, they lessen the tendency for both sides in the debate to be highly selective about the aspects of the problem they choose to discuss, or to highlight specific difficulties out of all proportion. Helsingin Sanomat opined that the reports played an important role in moving the NATO debate to a greater basis on facts rather than emotions.

Still, as Antti Sierla himself said, the influence of the reports is limited and they certainly will not be read “in every cottage”. It has been said that if the membership issue were decided by independent reports, Finland would be a member already.

NATO, Nordic or EU Security?

*“We are already the defenders of Sweden. This would be just making it official.”
Green Party leader Tarja Cronberg on proposals for security guarantees between
Sweden, Finland and Norway.¹⁴⁰*

Nordic and EU cooperation have been presented in public discussion as possibilities and even alternatives to NATO membership. Hopes of improving Nordic cooperation in particular enjoy wide support, with increased public attention in 2008-9 compared to the “EU option”.¹⁴¹ At the time this paper went to press, Nordic and Baltic defence ministers were preparing to meet in Helsinki to discuss defence cooperation among other topics.¹⁴²

The Stoltenberg report published in February 2009 presented a number of suggestions for deepening co-operation between the Nordic countries. Although improving cooperation is widely supported and most of the suggestions were easy to approve, some of the suggestions caused debate - such as the idea of security guarantees and creating common Nordic air surveillance extending to Iceland. The Finnish parliamentary defence committee stated that it does not see any possibility of Finland participating in the air surveillance of a NATO country.¹⁴³ Thus Finland not being a NATO member creates complex dynamics in the already existing extent of Nordic cooperation as Sweden and Finland aim to cooperate more closely; because of Norway’s position within NATO, Nordic cooperation in air surveillance would lead naturally to Sweden and Finland joining the NATO air surveillance system.¹⁴⁴ In addition, the committee questioned the extent of the security guarantees, as the Nordics have different bases for their defence solutions; Norway and Iceland are members of NATO, Sweden and Finland of the EU and Denmark of both. It is considered impossible for the NATO countries to give any additional guarantees to countries outside the alliance.

Interestingly, the Nordic argument has been used as a reason to join NATO as well as being a solution itself. Defence Minister Häkämies presents the prospect of Nordic cooperation as an argument for NATO membership, calling for Finland and Sweden to join in order to increase military security and common regional defence in the Nordic region. He has claimed that membership would also help the Nordic countries to gain collective influence in NATO.¹⁴⁵

The Nordic argument is also used as a way to prove that NATO is not the belligerent behemoth painted by opponents: Adm Kaskeala points out that NATO already has members among the pacific Nordic community with values similar to those of Finland.¹⁴⁶ Former president and Nobel Prize winner Martti Ahtisaari agrees: “I see no reason why we could not join NATO. Norway is a member and so are Denmark and Iceland.”¹⁴⁷

Thus with wide recognition that some form of international cooperation is essential for coping with increasing defence expenses, Nordic cooperation is an easy alternative to accept for the majority of Finns; it does not require any major transformation of identity as NATO membership would, and could be seen as reinforcing the role of Finland and the other Nordic countries as peace builders in the world. As one editorial put it, “Nordic countries do not have a significant colonial history, they are not known for commanding ways of acting in international relations. Thus they are capable of creating a comprehensive approach to crisis management where the cooperation between civilians and peacekeepers will lead to sustainable peace”¹⁴⁸ Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, who has been a supporter of NATO, has even suggested that he sees Nordic cooperation as more important than NATO because it can tackle current security threats better.¹⁴⁹

It is easy also to identify clear and tangible benefits to cooperation with Nordic neighbours. One example is opportunities for cost savings in purchasing, for example on the already planned midlife upgrades for Norwegian and Swedish Leopard IIs and CV90s, both also operated by Finland.¹⁵⁰ Adm Kaskeala is emphatic that mutual dependency and cooperation with a view to cutting costs is not the same as an alliance, but it will nonetheless boost all parties' crisis management potential.¹⁵¹

A significant part of the Finnish Defence Forces' equipment continues to be Russian-made. This has led to concerns being voiced over the viability of some defence systems. Finland uses Buk-M1 air defence missiles for area defence, purchased from Russia in 1996 as part of a debt-for-arms deal; but according to some media reports, no changes could be made to the missiles' electronics so they are particularly susceptible to Russian countermeasures.¹⁵² Although the precise impact of relying on air defence systems originally produced by Russia to defend against Russian air attack was called into question by the Georgian experience in August 2008,¹⁵³ Defence Minister Häkämies announced in April 2009 that Finland will renew its anti-aircraft missile system by purchasing the Norwegian NASAMS 2 air defence system, as also used by some NATO members. With both Norway and Sweden using systems by the same manufacturer, this will ease the possible common air defence of the EU battle groups as well as aiding NATO compatibility.

Nevertheless, although it is rare to find opponents of deepening Nordic cooperation, many argue that this is necessary but not sufficient by itself. For example Minister Häkämies has said that "Nordic defence is not a replacement or a ruling out of any other alternatives, but has to be perceived as a complementary element."¹⁵⁴ This broad support for the uncontroversial option of Nordic cooperation means it can be pushed forward determinedly. A 2008 report by the commanders of the Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish armed forces strongly highlighted the importance of continuing and deepening co-operation, noting that good results have already been achieved in joint maritime surveillance of the Northern Baltic Sea.¹⁵⁵

Even so, the suggestion that deeper Nordic co-operation is an alternative in itself to NATO membership will not go away. This is an uncontroversial area for politicians to find popular support; an EVA Business and Policy Forum poll showed 92 per cent of Finns considering Nordic cooperation of greater importance than working with either NATO or the EU, as opposed to only seven per cent agreeing with the statement "The United States acts correctly in world politics and deserves the support of Finns".¹⁵⁶ These comments are seen as reflecting a reluctance formally to accept any responsibility for the Finnish armed forces operating abroad. Yet while it is recognised that Finland will not manage on its own and thus Nordic coordination is a necessity especially while support for NATO membership remains low, deeper Nordic cooperation would in no way prevent Finland from either joining NATO or retaining its own national defence arrangement.

Other countries in the region would be likely to welcome Finland and Sweden joining NATO. It has been argued that the proposed option of replacing Baltic Air Policing with a joint air defence agreement would only be feasible if Finland were to join NATO, "as the type of airspace security Estonia needs could only be carried out from bases in southern Finland".¹⁵⁷

But Nordic defensive cooperation also entails new complications in terms of the relationship with Russia. A closer defence relationship with Norway and Iceland will inevitably involve discussion of security and future development in the High North, another area of acute neuralgia for Russia. While talk of Russian militarisation of the Arctic and preparation for inevitable resource conflict is at present certainly overblown, it remains the case that the Arctic presents friction in the relationship with Russia, and significant potential for misunderstandings, which are not present in Finland's more immediate environment.¹⁵⁸

Sweden: "Hand in Hand"

*"I would definitely prefer that Finland and Sweden would proceed hand in hand in these issues and act within a Nordic perspective."
Former Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva¹⁵⁹*

With a similar position outside NATO and certain elements of shared history and world view, it is understandable that Sweden and Finland eye each other wondering which one will make the leap to NATO first, and looking for a degree of coordination. According to Swedish Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors there are three conditions for Swedish membership in NATO: political support for membership, public support, and Finland joining too.¹⁶⁰

The NATO debate in Sweden is also affected by taboos, although for different historical reasons; as one commentator put it, "the Swedish defence debate... deals with everything except how, where, and against whom we should defend ourselves."¹⁶¹

Nonetheless, Sweden's decision to give up conscription and decrease the size of its defence forces has been criticised both in Sweden and Finland. As put by one Swedish observer, "We want neither to pay to protect our border nor to make binding commitments within NATO. It is not necessary to have an overly lively imagination to figure out what reality-based Finnish defence experts think of that strategy." (The Finnish defence experts reply with acerbic comment about the uneven Swedish defence overhaul meaning that the country now has more generals than it has artillery pieces.)¹⁶² Hence some sections of the Swedish media have ridiculed the defence policy committee report "in which climate change is described as the biggest threat - as if St Petersburg lay somewhere in outer Mongolia rather than one hour by air from Stockholm".¹⁶³ Many defence experts both in Finland and Sweden have warned against writing off the Russian threat as long as the country is not politically or democratically stable. Active commentator on Swedish security issues Col (Rtd) Bo Pellnäs described Sweden's decision to close an airbase near Stockholm as "not far from treason".¹⁶⁴

As Sweden used to be considered the military backbone of the Nordic countries, its new line of policy affects the security situation across Scandinavia. This leads to claims that Sweden is now becoming a military freeloader. Even the normally restrained President Halonen has said that unfortunately Finland "cannot quite do the Swedish manoeuvre and leave our defence to our neighbours".¹⁶⁵ Conversely, some Swedish commentators have ridiculed Finland for being the only Nordic country that still retains a large army based on conscription and preparing itself for the threats of the Cold War, while the other Nordic countries have moved on to international tasks.

These differences in security policy decisions have not prevented Finland and Sweden deepening their cooperation. The Swedish and Finnish defence ministers issued a joint statement in 2008 saying:

"We intend to bolster our capacity to cooperate militarily, so that we can act jointly, both in our region and internationally. Sweden and Finland intend to deepen their defence and security-policy cooperation. We are doing this in a situation where Russia has raised its level of foreign-policy ambition. For Sweden and Finland, this involves improving our capacity to act jointly. We will concentrate on deeper cooperation on military training, exercises, and materiel procurement. Our countries will also seek cooperation with NATO, in order to share in the overview obtained from these countries' joint military air surveillance. We also intend to finance jointly certain international missions, for example in Afghanistan. In addition to these forms of cooperation between our two countries, we will continue our effort to develop Nordic defence cooperation in general".¹⁶⁶

Another viewpoint is that Sweden is sleepwalking towards NATO because continuing severe cuts to its military spending are giving rise to a Swedish “military vacuum” which can only be filled by NATO.¹⁶⁷

The two countries’ approach to NATO is strongly interconnected. Sten Tolgfors says that even though Swedish membership is “natural in the long term”, it should take place together with Finland – and Finland will be ready for membership no sooner than 2013.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, Finnish opinion polls suggest a much more favourable view of NATO membership if Sweden is on board: an EVA Business and Policy Forum poll showed 21 per cent in favour of joining alone growing to 41 per cent in favour if Sweden also becomes a member.¹⁶⁹

This desire to coordinate the approach to NATO was reflected in a joint decision to express interest in participation in the NATO Response Force (NRF). This gave rise to tension when following the joint statement, the process of making an official decision on participation seemed to go in different directions at a different pace. Finland, after a long political discussion, announced that it would participate in the NRF but not in the rotation of forces to it. Sweden was not able to make a decision, and this created concerns that Finland and Sweden were drifting apart in terms of their approach to NATO. This temporary difference in pace nevertheless turned out to be irrelevant as Finland’s decision was soon shown to be nonsensical, as will be discussed further below.¹⁷⁰

Norway: Leading the Way to NATO

Norway’s position differs from that of Sweden and Finland. Norway was an early member of NATO, having been convinced by the Second World War (unlike Finland) that there is no security without allies.¹⁷¹

Norway has changed its large defence forces based on conscription to better-equipped and smaller forces; today 40 per cent of men carry out national service. The rising defence expenses are nevertheless too much even for Norway, and the country has along with Sweden and Finland emphasised the importance of Nordic cooperation.

Cooperation with neighbours is not always hindered by incompatibility of defensive alliance: Sweden and Norway have made promises of mutual assistance in the event of attack on one or the other, even though Sweden is not a member of NATO and Norway is not a member of the EU.¹⁷²

Norway’s land border with Russia is a much shorter one than the border between Finland and Russia, but Russia plays a major role in Norway’s defence planning as well. The chief of the Norwegian Defence Force, General Sverre Diesen, has painted a possible threat scenario that resembles that of Finland; “The use of limited military operations to support political demands or the use of military power as part of broader political crisis management cannot be excluded in our time or in our adjacent areas.” Norway’s response is also similar than that of Finland – the defence forces try to close “the window of possibility” of the use of force against Norway and to maximize the risk involved in the use of force.¹⁷³

Norway’s key relevance to the Finnish defence debate is as an uncontroversial route to closer NATO cooperation, whether through Nordic defensive alignment or as a bright shining example that Nordic values are not incompatible with NATO membership.¹⁷⁴

EU “Security Guarantees”

“If Russia came across the Finnish border in Ala-Kurtti, could we depend on solidarity from France, Germany or the UK? They could put forward strong objections. And impose economic sanctions – cut the import of caviar from Russia. I am sceptical. Even if Europe had a common voice, it would be a weak one”
 Professor Esko Antola¹⁷⁵

Despite the avowed scepticism of the quotation above, as an alternative to NATO, the so-called “EU option” has gained a lot of ground in the Finnish debate. The Lisbon treaty raised hopes in some, especially left-wing, politicians that Finland would be able to forget NATO and “choose the EU” instead.

Although there are a growing number of EU critics in Finland, the EU still does not rouse emotions as NATO does and the Union is still a lot easier to accept as a security provider than the Alliance. In the national debate there has been confusion between EU or Nordic security policy cooperation, of which all are in favour, and an actual defensive alliance.¹⁷⁶ Paradoxically, even discussion on the EU’s putative security guarantees has reflected the Finnish inclination not to bind oneself too closely; although some supported the EU option, for many it was more important that the security guarantees would not change Finland’s position as a non-aligned country.

Hopes in the EU do also have their doubters in other ways. Suggestions that EU disunity, and member states pursuing their own interests in bilateral relations with Russia, mean the EU “has begun to behave as if it were subordinate to an increasingly assertive Russia”,¹⁷⁷ and the perception that the EU is not backing its member in the timber tariff discussions with Russia has caused disillusion with what the EU can do and will do for Finland.¹⁷⁸ Finland’s “Russia Action Plan” repeatedly notes the Russian propensity to exploit differences between EU member states and favour bilateral leverage, and calls for coherent and unified action on Russia.¹⁷⁹ The decision on holding back from full engagement with the NATO Response Force may well have been coloured by Finland’s experience providing troops for the EU rapid response units, which were available but sat unused while Finland and Sweden provided separate military and police assets for crisis management in Chad. The EU Battle Group (EUBG) was therefore both “a burden to Finland if a couple of hundred of its crisis management soldiers are regularly on inactive stand-by” and, as Jyri Häkämies put it, “a resource that is not utilised”.¹⁸⁰

In spite of this disillusionment, the “European choice” caused so much discussion that many, including Speaker of Parliament Sauli Niinistö, started to demand that Finland should thoroughly investigate the actual content of the so-called “EU security guarantees”. In consequence State Secretary Teija Tiilikainen of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was asked to write a public report on their nature. Tiilikainen’s message was clear; “The mutual assistance clause does not diminish the requirement for Finnish participation in defence policy and crisis management cooperation in other contexts.” This conclusion was strongly backed by the NATO report by the Finnish Institute for International Affairs (FIIA). The FIIA assessment of the EU’s separate role was unequivocal. The union “does not currently have any capacity to organize a collective defence of its membership”, the report stated, and continued that for now “any military security guarantees it provides are largely theoretical.”¹⁸¹

France’s rapprochement with NATO was also seen to lead to an arrangement whereby the EU security guarantees would, for practical purposes, be enforced only through NATO, wrote Tommi Koivula, special researcher at the Finnish National Defence University. As Risto Penttilä points out, despite the poll results, there is no “EU option”. Discussion of EU security guarantees is “said to increase the solidarity between EU member states and thus increase security. But so does the Eurovision song contest increase solidarity, but its value as a security policy tool is modest.” All of these conclusive statements have reduced the volume

of the discussion but not brought it to an end; Finnish politicians continue to announce their support for the European framework for security.¹⁸²

Some say that the easiest way to NATO might come from the improving relations between the EU and NATO; the closer the relations are, the easier it may be for the Finns to accept NATO as a framework to improve European security. Sauli Niinistö is a supporter of the “European way” to NATO. He sees further rapprochement between the EU and NATO eventually rendering membership in both alliances inevitable.¹⁸³

What will NATO do for Finland?

Current engagement with NATO

“We are doing the work but not accepting the pay cheques; I mean we are carrying the responsibility but not enjoying the benefits of the membership.”
Dr Pauli Järvenpää, Head of Defence Policy Department, Ministry of Defence¹⁸⁴

Finland signed the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Framework Document in May 1994 and joined the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in June 1997. In 2003, Finland was chosen as the first non-NATO nation to lead a multinational brigade in Kosovo.

Finland’s engagement with NATO creates an ambiguous position that politicians have used to argue for both for and against membership. Some argue that Finland is inseparably engaged with the Alliance already but not getting all the benefits of being a member. For others, participating but not having the final commitment is the best possible alternative for Finland.

It has been suggested that as a full member, Finland’s responsibilities would grow to an unmanageable level. This aspect of the debate came to the fore in Spring 2008, when the UK was asking other nations to share more of the burden of operations in Afghanistan, but not asking Finland to increase its contribution.¹⁸⁵ Very few in Finland have argued for increasing the size of its 100-strong contingent in northern Afghanistan. Countries such as Lithuania, who have found that the contribution to operations in Afghanistan is already stretching defence resources, are presented as warning examples,¹⁸⁶ and there is little doubt that the casualties and fatalities which would result from a more active role in Afghanistan would have a significant impact on the NATO debate as a whole.¹⁸⁷

While recognising that participation in NATO operations raises training standards at home, Finland is not quite ready to follow this line of thinking through to its conclusion. After NATO’s Bucharest summit, Tarja Halonen said Finland would respond to requests to contribute troops for operations in southern Afghanistan, but only by increasing development aid in the north – “not dictated only by Finland’s desire to do so, but also on what Finnish forces are trained to do”.¹⁸⁸ This fits the characterisation by one member of parliament of Finland’s role as “we do not want to be any kind of Rambo”. Precisely what Finland is doing in Afghanistan is also a matter of debate, with both former commander of the Defence Forces Gustav Hägglund and the Officers’ Union stating that Finland’s tasks there already resemble war.¹⁸⁹

NATO Response Force

“Finland is here holier than the Pope: the EU and NATO will just have to be able to find a way of working together better than they are doing so far.”
Defence Minister Jyri Häkämies¹⁹⁰

Meanwhile, the inability to make a firm decision either way constrains constructive work with NATO. Participation in the NATO Response Force (NRF) is a case in point.

At the end of March 2008, the Finnish parliament voted by 130 to 23 to approve a “compromise” decision on Finnish participation in NRF operations: participation would be limited in that Finland would not offer troops for immediate operational deployment, as with NATO member states, but would provide follow-up forces; in addition, Finland would not contribute to the duty rotas of forces kept on readiness, instead considering whether to participate in operations on a case-by-case basis at the time when a force was being assembled.¹⁹¹ Social Democratic Party chairman Eero Heinäluoma backed the motion with the caveats not only that Finnish participation in NRF missions would by no means be automatic, but also that Finland's commitments to the EU and to the EU's own rapid reaction forces would have priority, and that any NATO missions would only come after these. Finally, he set the condition that Finland should make its decision in conjunction with Sweden.¹⁹²

The parliamentary defence committee, in reaching this compromise decision on “partial” participation, noted that this would enhance Finland's capability to operate with EU forces, and develop overall military capability – but would not alter Finland's policy position on NATO membership.¹⁹³ This contrasted with FIIA director Raimo Väyrynen simultaneously predicting closer integration with the NRF and ruling out actual full membership of NATO “in the foreseeable future”.¹⁹⁴

By December 2008 it had become clear that the ambiguous decision on participation was turning out to be impracticable. The decision stated that Finland would participate in exercises but not in rotation – but NATO specified that PfP countries who do not participate in rotation cannot participate in exercises either. NATO itself nevertheless seems to have solved this NRF dilemma for Finland as the new NRF model will end the rotation model.

Benefits of Membership

“The logic of preparing for the worst in Finland's security and defence policy planning is clearly related to calculations concerning Russia.”
FIIA report “Et tu Brute! Finland's NATO Option and Russia”

The most significant perceived tangible benefit of membership in NATO is the security guarantees provided by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. As stated in the Finnish Foreign Ministry report on membership, “NATO membership and the resources of the NATO community would play a part in pre-emptively preventing military coercion, the threat of invasion or military invasion.” The supporters of membership have argued firmly that Finns live under an illusion of peace and a benign environment, and that NATO must be joined now before there is an actual threat. NATO membership is thus regularly compared to insurance.

Militarily non-alignment does leave Finland in an arguably vulnerable position, where the country is clearly a part of the West politically, but militarily stands alone. Many argue that alone, Finland can neither defend itself nor manage regional crises.¹⁹⁵ Finland's policy during the Cold War was to get as close to the West as possible, by applying for membership in the IMF, OECD, and EFTA – culminating in EU membership in the 1990s. This leads to an argument from advocates that Finland should take the last step and join the last remaining major Western organisation, NATO, in order to complete membership of the Western world.

Being a member in NATO is also sold as a means of improving Finland's position in the EU; as the organisations aim to deepen security cooperation, the argument goes, staying outside NATO might make it more difficult to stay in the core of the EU. If the EU and NATO continue the trend toward a closer working relationship in defence and security, this will be increasingly difficult for countries such as Sweden and Finland which are not members in both organisations. The benefits of refusing to apply for official membership might in the foreseeable future be clearly outweighed by the disadvantages.

As a Partnership for Peace (PfP) partner, Finland has access to some but not all benefits of association with NATO. A key omission is a voice in planning. It is complained that “in

practice, we are involved in all NATO activity, except that of taking part in making decisions involving ourselves and Europe".¹⁹⁶ For example, in April 2009 there was discussion on Sweden and Finland's position in relation to the NATO summit – the PfP countries were not invited to the summit, leading the head of the Defence Policy department in the Finnish MoD Pauli Järvenpää to point out publicly that Finland is still choosing voluntarily to stay away from the tables where Europe's security policy is negotiated.¹⁹⁷

Aapo Pöyhö, ambassador for the Mission of Finland to NATO, also referred to Finland's position as an outsider by saying in an interview with Helsingin Sanomat that sometimes Finland is not provided with all the information it needs, or only receives it after the fact.¹⁹⁸ Shared intelligence is also an important argument for membership. As one commentator said, "fortunately Estonia and other friends try to keep the Finns, who are hanging around in the hallways, up to date."¹⁹⁹

Gen Sverre Diesen, Commander of the Norwegian Defence Forces, has called for full access to NATO intelligence for Finland, saying that "if partner countries send their forces to the same missions and are exposed to the same dangers, and bear the same responsibility as NATO countries, then they should definitely also get the same information".²⁰⁰ But the rules appear to be applied patchily: according to the Finnish liaison officer at CENTCOM, there are no obstacles to receiving information and briefings from coalition partners, and "even the Finnish Defence Forces have not really comprehended yet the excellent position that Finland now enjoys within the general staffs of the United States and NATO".²⁰¹

As a counterweight to the arguments that Finland is not reaping the benefits of its involvement with NATO, former president Martti Ahtisaari has accused Finland and Sweden of freeloading, saying that "there are not many of these oddities that claim to be western democracies but are not members in all the organisations". Membership in NATO would simplify Finland's position, and resolve current ambiguities, he argues.²⁰² During the Cold War Finland aspired to be a "normal" Western nation, but was forced to be an exception and handle its different situation. Now, there is a view that choosing to be the exception may bring benefits in certain occasions, but is complicating the position of Finland in many situations as well – and NATO membership would be a step on the way of "getting to the core of Europe" where Finland belongs, instead of insisting on remaining on the margins.

A View on Russia

"Debate over NATO membership is ultimately a debate over Russia, albeit indirectly."
Former minister and ambassador Max Jakobsson²⁰³

In terms of the challenges of dealing with Russia, Finland represents a pool of expertise and experience which potentially offers significant benefits for partners in NATO. Finland studies Russia closely through necessity, but there is also an enviably close working relationship at a security level: senior Finnish officers still attend the full course at the Russian General Staff Academy.

It could be argued that involving Finland, as a member, in discussions of how to manage the often fractious relationship between NATO and Russia would only be of benefit. As noted in a report by the UK Defence Academy's Advanced Research and Assessment Group, "we can rely on those neighbours of Russia who share our values and invest heavily in watching and working with Russia... [accessing] the Russia expertise in these neighbours will act as a force multiplier for our own efforts".²⁰⁴

Using membership of NATO to create a new channel for Finland to enhance cooperation and dialogue between Russia and the West would indirectly improve Finland's own security as well. This "bridge building" between West and Russia was the main channel of trying to improve Finland's own security environment throughout the Cold War, which leads to criticism that currently Finland is voluntarily choosing *not* to use NATO as a forum for doing

this. Staying outside NATO means that Finland has no say in NATO-Russia relations, to the detriment of its own security situation.²⁰⁵

What NATO Offers

Through the Finnish prism, NATO is more than a purely military alliance. For Finland's NATO supporters, NATO is "a community of democratic nations promoting international stability and security, through which Europe can make use of the colossal resources of the United States, and membership in such an organisation is an indicator of responsibility."²⁰⁶

Besides its military dimension, NATO membership is seen as a badge of a civilised Western European nation. This has led to Finnish commentators comparing it to membership of the "Golden Pig club" - a reference to a well-known children's marketing campaign involving piggy banks, which is now an ironic by-word for privileged and exclusive groups. When combined with a tradition of neutrality, this additional aspect creates an interesting tension. Neutrality is still valued, but on the other hand many feel that NATO membership would be the final step on the road to becoming a full member of the Western world. NATO supporters often point out that membership is natural and self-evident for most countries and thus should be to Finland as well; but this conflicts with a preference for NATO membership suggesting favouring the policies of the USA.

Another argument runs that NATO is an additional security policy option, and that it is not rational to rule yourself out of one more option to use in case of emergency. Voluntarily refusing the possibility of gaining influence in an additional arena is also seen as irrational. Increased interdependence and co-operation are seen as more suitable for the modern globalised world, instead of isolation and introspection.

Finland takes pride in the expertise of its peacekeepers, who have been a practical manifestation of the Finnish intermediary role in crisis resolution since the first contingent arrived in Suez in 1956. NATO supporters suggest that membership would give the best possible opportunity of capitalising on this experience. Although Finland is already more active in NATO's crisis management operations than many actual members, at present the full benefits of membership are still not available – particularly in the fields of information and communication networks as noted above. Thus Finland's position has been described as schizophrenic; "most of the time acting like a member but still insisting on not being a member".²⁰⁷

As defence expenses rise rapidly and threats become increasingly international, Finland recognises the importance of enhancing international cooperation as much as possible as no country can fight modern threats alone. Proponents of membership have tried to argue that Finland is not an exception even though it would like to believe that while others have joined alliances, Finland would be able to defend its territory without outside assistance. Former Commander of the Air Force Lt-Gen Matti Ahola has said that "it is not sensible to expect that any country in our neighbouring area would consider our defence policy and the official aim of defending the entire territory credible".²⁰⁸ This demands cooperation with western European countries, in which case, it is argued, NATO is a natural mechanism to work through.

A Smooth Accession?

*"Finland doesn't need NATO, NATO does need Finland."
Andrey Fedorov, former deputy foreign minister of Russia²⁰⁹*

During a visit to Helsinki in Spring 2009 NATO Assistant Secretary-General Martin Erdman called Finland the "model pupil" in NATO and said that the alliance's doors are "wide open" to Finland. Finns have also been lulled into a sense of security over the ease of accession to

NATO by similar statements by leading US diplomats, giving assurances that Finland would be welcomed with open arms.²¹⁰

This is strikingly different from the message to another neighbour of Russia, Ukraine, from US Senator Richard Lugar in January 2008, warning that some NATO members would be guided primarily by their relations with Russia, and would therefore oppose a Ukrainian Membership Action Plan as a destabilising factor.²¹¹ This message was underscored at NATO's Bucharest Summit. The hesitation shown by many European leaders, led by Germany and France, to opening the Membership Action Plan to Ukraine and Georgia was seen as a clear sign of change in membership policy. Although Finland cannot be in any way compared to the former Soviet states, writes Olli Kivinen, an independent columnist in Helsingin Sanomat, "after that [the summit], it must be clear even to the most stubborn people that such concepts as Finland's NATO option and NATO's door being open only live in the minds and evasive speeches of Finnish politicians."²¹²

Many commentators share this fear that complacency over the ease of membership would be a political mistake for Finland. The Bucharest summit was perceived as a clear indication that from now on joining NATO is not a mere formality, and it is no longer realistic to assume that Finland could join whenever it wants. All member states need to agree to accept any new members, which means that non-member states are in the mercy of the current political situation and the ebb and flow of international relations, particularly those with Russia. This gives weight to the NATO proponents' argument that Finland should join during a "normal" situation, because during a crisis the doors might be closed and locked.

In relative terms, there have been few official statements at the highest levels of NATO on the subject of possible Finnish accession, with Jaap de Hoop Scheffer saying in Helsinki only that the Finnish NATO debate would be left to the Finns.²¹³ Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs chairman Konstantin Kosachev has observed wryly that the USA devoted enormous effort in Ukraine to influencing public opinion in favour of joining NATO, but apparently none at all in Finland.²¹⁴

Many thus worry that Finland has ironically voluntarily gone back to the same situation it suffered during the Cold War – leaving itself uninvited to the negotiation tables for European security. It raises concerns that countries that are not part of NATO will become "footnote countries" in security and defence planning. This trend is underlined as the EU and NATO hard security arrangements converge.

Missing the Boat or Missing the Point

*"Insurance needs to be taken out before your house is on fire."
Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen²¹⁵*

One of the few areas where pro- and anti-NATO adherents agree is that any movement towards the Alliance is unlikely while President Tarja Halonen remains in power – in other words, if Finnish politics proceeds at its normal pace, with no sudden foreign policy shocks, 2012 is the earliest date at which any official desire to join NATO could be publicly voiced. Some fear that this may leave everything too late.

The opportunity to join NATO during a period of relatively benign relations with Russia may already have passed. As Pertti Salolainen, puts it, "Is Finland losing its opportunity in the new military and security political environment of Europe?.. A few years ago NATO membership would not have been noticeable to them [Russia] in any way. Now, one can only imagine what effect it would have."²¹⁶

It is also generally held that it would be impossible to join NATO when the need for hard security guarantees had already become clear to all, because by that stage it would be far too late – NATO, the argument goes, would be unlikely to accept a new member already

suffering direct coercion.²¹⁷ Pertti Salolainen agrees: "It is an absolutely intolerable idea that Finland would decide to seek help only when we are in the middle of a difficult crisis. In that situation, NATO membership would really be a move that would seriously escalate the crisis and increase tension. Decisions of that kind cannot be made when the crisis is already there."²¹⁸

This leads some experts to conclude that the opportunity to join has already been missed. For others, it just makes joining NATO an even more urgent imperative; the boat is already pulling away from the quay, and if Finland wishes to jump for it, it needs to be soon or not at all.

Why Not to Join

"NATO was created during a period when it was important to keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans in line."

*Former Minister for Foreign Affairs Erkki Tuomioja on NATO's "redundancy"*²¹⁹

For every argument in favour of NATO, there is a counter-argument using the same proposition against membership. Even the keystone of NATO as a defensive alliance, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, has been described as irrelevant in modern confrontation between states.²²⁰

NATO may offer hypothetical protection against Russia: conversely, it is argued that staying outside NATO will better ensure that Finland is able to stay outside conflicts between Russia and the West, or indeed stay outside any conflicts where it does not belong. Finland's cherished and expert role as mediator in international tension and conflicts is seen as more compatible with remaining militarily non-aligned, and may be jeopardised by joining a defensive alliance.²²¹

NATO may augment Finland's defensive capabilities, but many also worry that NATO membership would detach or distance the people from national defence.²²² As the current system of conscription and territorial defence enjoys wide support, this is a strong and often used argument against NATO membership. Proponents for membership have tried to argue that NATO would not have to change either of these basic elements of Finnish defence, but the belief remains strong that NATO would enforce the introduction of a fully professional army and destroy the long-established and fully accepted Finnish defence system.

Opponents of NATO membership have a habit of seeking precedents in countries whose circumstances are entirely unlike Finland's. Juha Korkeaoja points out that "None of the countries that were outside military alliances - Austria, Ireland, Sweden, Finland, and Switzerland - has decided to join [NATO]. Old Warsaw Pact countries that already were in a military alliance have joined. That tells us something."²²³ The key factor omitted is proximity to Russia: Korkeaoja could equally well have pointed out that of Russia's nine Western neighbours, seven are in NATO or have expressed a desire to join, and the exceptions are Belarus and Azerbaijan, neither of which Finland would particularly wish to emulate.

As a further example of Finland drawing questionable comparisons with other countries that have stayed away from NATO, Tarja Halonen has cited Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern pointing out that there is no debate over joining NATO in Ireland. No matter how willing the "antis" may be to seize on Ms Halonen's suggestion, these comparisons tend not to be very productive, as Finland's position is very different from that of Ireland and the perception of hard security threats could not be further apart. The comparison overlooks the fact that Ireland is at the other end of Europe from Finland's most pressing security concern (in spite of all Ireland's historical complaints about being next to a larger and troublesome neighbour). In addition, with a 1,300-km land border with Russia, the Finns are not in a position to thank God they're surrounded by water.²²⁴

Under the Bush administration, perceived US leadership of NATO served as a powerful counter-argument, with one poll showing two-thirds of respondents wanting the EU to serve in world politics as a counterbalance to the United States.²²⁵ Now, political leaders in Finland have praised Obama's policy line as he is seen to put more emphasis on cooperation than his predecessor. The Obama administration decision to amend the plan for placing a missile defence system in Eastern Europe, with the ensuing conciliatory steps by both NATO and Russia, was seen as a significant milestone for improving West-Russia relations.²²⁶ For example Minister Häkämies judged that Obama's presidency might increase support for NATO in Finland; "Everything is interlinked. Correlation between the images of the USA and NATO is indisputable."²²⁷

There is even a counter-argument to the suggestion that joining NATO will economise through procurement and development cooperation. Brig-Gen (Rtd) Lauri Kiiainlinna points to the high cost in manpower and finance for Finland's small standing armed forces of posting liaison and staff officers to NATO offices and headquarters, and calculates that the cost of supporting 100 officers with families in Brussels, Norfolk, Washington and elsewhere is equivalent to the cost of maintaining many hundreds in Finland – meaning that joining NATO would inevitably entail further reductions in the mobilisation strength of the Defence Forces through financial reasons alone.²²⁸

Opponents of membership are alarmed that after joining, Finland could bear a disproportionate burden of NATO commitments. At present, old members of NATO (particularly the English-speaking nations) share a greater relative proportion of commitments than new members, but according to a US Army War College study, new members of NATO have on average a higher level of military expenditures than older members.²²⁹

Although NATO does not force its members to participate in any operations nor does it specify criteria for participation, many fear that as Finland has shown its tendency to act as a "model pupil" already in the EU, it would feel morally obliged to take an active part in more dangerous operations – in contrast to the noted German refusals to allocate additional troops to Afghanistan, or to use them in the south of the country.²³⁰ Thus, just as with the EU, Finland would suffer through holding itself to a higher standard than other member states – with the difference that the cost would not only be financial, but also potentially in the lives of young Finns.²³¹

Given this fine balance between the advantages and disadvantages of joining the Alliance, it is perhaps unsurprising that the debate in Finland remains so inconclusive. It would be thought that one clear and unambiguous benefit would be Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, designed to deter armed aggression against member countries and for some the *raison d'être* of the alliance – but even this is not an undisputed benefit of membership for Finland. Pro-NATO commentators note this as a key benefit for defence against the eastern neighbour. Nevertheless not only does this trigger national neuroses about the relationship with Russia, but the experiences of the Baltic States since accession call into question the true worth of this commitment.

Case Study: Baltic Experience

"NATO has a plan for how to defend Poland, Turkey and Norway but not how to defend the Baltics. The political leaders in Poland demanded one, but the leaders in the Baltics did not have the courage to demand one."
Lt-Col (Rtd) Leo Kunnas, Estonian Defence Forces²³²

The three Baltic States have a position not unlike that of Finland, as neighbours of Russia who are at the same time EU members. Although Finnish commentators are more likely to compare their situation with that of Sweden than with Estonia, there are nonetheless useful analogies to be drawn with the Baltic experience of NATO membership since 2004. Despite

being viewed as essential for the security of the Baltic States, this experience does not give entirely unequivocal support for the value of NATO membership.

The grounds on which the Baltic States joined NATO have been called into question by a growing realisation that NATO does not provide a failsafe response to local security concerns. An example is the response of major powers to alarm over Russia's new assertive posture. Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus's comments on moves toward a new Cold War were publicly slapped down as "hyperbolic nonsense" by then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, leading to Lithuanian media comment that clearly, "gnomes should not meddle in the affairs of the big countries".²³³ A similar rebuff to Finnish concerns would only sharpen the alarm felt in some quarters at joining an alliance dominated by the USA.

Another source of concern comes from the "NATO model" of manning the armed forces. Latvia was the first of the three Baltic States to abolish conscription of all forms after joining NATO, and is now struggling with recruiting. In Finland many still see a large army as the best protection against potential military threats, and are unconvinced by the trend in most NATO countries to switch to professional armies. The Baltic States are perceived as not having a credible defence; they are too small to defend themselves but neither has NATO extended sufficient protection. Thus for many, the best option for credible defence is the Finnish variant of a conscript manpower base and territorial defence – the opposite of the Baltic choice after joining NATO.

Nonetheless, Baltic misgivings over the move to "adventurer armies" instead of armed forces to defend their own territory, heightened following the Georgia conflict, appear to have found little sympathy within NATO. In a speech in London shortly before the end of his tenure as NATO Secretary-General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer underlined strongly that a Cold War style preparation for a visible and measurable threat was now outmoded, and the course toward more flexible and deployable forces for out of area operations would continue.²³⁴

Naturally enough, the Baltic States see a unified European defence as the best option for providing the real security guarantees they hope for, and therefore Finnish membership of NATO would be ideal for strengthening the alliance's Eastern border and reducing the exposure of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.²³⁵

The Baltic States and Article 5

"We want to be at the tables where decisions are made. And of course it [being a NATO member] means that NATO's Article 5 on collective defence applies for us as well. This is important for us."

Estonia's president Toomas Hendrik Ilves on Estonia's membership in NATO²³⁶

Because of the traumatic history of these three countries during the 20th century, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty plays a much more important role for the Baltic States than for many other European states – and certainly than for Old Europe. The Alliance's security guarantees are not a detail, but at the core of membership, and NATO is not seen not as an international crisis manager, but first of all as a defensive alliance. As early as 2002, a Finnish report noted that "the problem is that the Baltic States clearly aim to join the 'old' NATO".²³⁷

During 2007 and 2008, there was a crescendo of alarm in the Baltic States that the promised hard security benefits of joining the Alliance were not materialising. As summed up in a leading Estonian daily, Postimees, "Estonia's foreign policy leaders are hiding a big and unpleasant secret - in case of a possible attack by Russia, NATO soldiers will not come to the front at the Narva River, because the closest NATO units are located several flight hours away in Germany... It is a fact that NATO is incapable of defending Estonia; it can only recapture the country."²³⁸ After a period of doubt, Latvian Defence Minister Atis Slakteris confirmed in December 2007 that NATO had no plans for responding if Latvia were attacked.

"Such a state of affairs is not satisfactory to us. It is, however, a difficult political question, and it is currently being discussed," he added.²³⁹

A close look at the actual text of Article 5 does not give any grounds for the popular notion (and the idea that new members have signed up for) that NATO will automatically come to the defence of a member that comes under attack. The idea of "armed attack" on a member referred to by Article 5 is in the 21st century a very limiting one, leaving open a wide range of possible unfriendly actions to which the Baltic States have already been subjected; for example despite ongoing debate, there is little likelihood at present of cyber attack from whatever source being considered a trigger for Article 5. Furthermore, contrary to popular belief the text does not oblige any member state to any specific action -

"...if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."

So even in the case of military action against one or more of the Baltic States, NATO members are at liberty to deem that action is not necessary – well within the realms of the possible when seen through Baltic experience of being the victim of deals about your future being made over your head by larger powers, or the Polish experience of comparable alliances being of no practical benefit in September 1939. Cynics also observe that had Georgia been a NATO member in 2008, the functional annexation by Russia of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would have "restored security" by resolving and stabilising the frozen conflicts there, so no further action by NATO member states would have been necessary.

The development of NATO's new Strategic Concept will be watched with interest across the Nordic and Baltic states. The UK's House of Commons Defence Committee will not be alone in urging that "NATO needs to ensure that a continued commitment to mutual protection – Article 5 – is at the heart of the new NATO Strategic Concept. NATO's global role is vital, given the shared challenges the Member States face. Yet this should not come at the expense of the Alliance's commitment towards [sic] mutual defence."²⁴⁰

But at present, disappointment in the Baltic States provides grounds for Finnish NATO sceptics to argue that it is in Finland's best interest not to apply for membership – NATO might not in fact bring extra value to Finland's security situation, as the putative security guarantees appear to be on paper only.

NATO Commitments and Domestic Impact

*"It is obvious that Finland does not spit in the old well before the new one is ready. And it does not seem to need a new one."
Estonian columnist Mihkel Mutk²⁴¹*

Joining NATO entails commitments as well as benefits. It has been argued that the Baltic States have lost some of their freedom to choose their own course of action as NATO's leading country, the United States, "wants to get quite a lot for the guarantee of recapture".²⁴² Some feel that the Baltic countries have therefore ended up making sacrifices but not getting enough in return.

This threatens domestic tension, as it is increasingly difficult to explain to citizens why it is important to allocate resources to, for example, NRF forces when the "battle capacity of the NRF has several shortcomings, and in areas which are important to Estonia".²⁴³ In addition, the legitimacy of participating in international missions becomes weaker. The Estonian media has expressed doubts over the aim or relevance of an Estonian presence in Afghanistan, and

over its rationale: “in actual fact, it seems that we are not trying to improve the lives of the local people but - just like in Iraq - secure our own future by following the US and the UK.”²⁴⁴

According to Estonian Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo, “every step towards increasing Estonia's independent defence capability should be contemplated from the aspect of collective defence”. And some of Aaviksoo's other statements risk heightening the impression that national defence has already become a secondary consideration to social and foreign policy. When asked what the main goal of the development of Estonia's defence capability was, the minister is reported as saying: “We must work for the Estonian Defence Forces to be a well organised institution based on clear principles that acts for a common goal to be supported by society and to have the trust of our partners” – with no mention of actually defending the country at all.²⁴⁵

Russian Responses

*“The fact that Russia is Finland's neighbour makes the latter's NATO membership particularly difficult even if other factors supported the membership.”
FIIA report “Et tu Brute! Finland's NATO Option and Russia”*

Finnish commentators arguing against membership are just as willing to invoke the Russia factor as those who argue for it. Those in the “in favour” camp tend to say that membership in NATO would create a new forum for dialogue with Russia; those against, even if they see NATO bringing some security against military attacks, say that at the same time the inevitable deterioration in relations with Russia would cause far more harm than good to Finland's overall security situation.

Considering the probability or improbability of a range of Russian responses to Finland seeking to join NATO requires viewing the question from a Russian national security perspective, and remembering that what to Russia looks like a successful foreign policy outcome may not be what we would see as a desirable end state if measured by our own criteria. This refers in particular to the Russian capacity for accepting and absorbing temporary international disapproval in the process of pursuing objectives, as well as economic self-harm - in the words of the veteran British analyst on Russian security affairs Gordon Bennett, the way Russia gets things done is not efficient but effective. This section will therefore first expand in some detail on what in the Russian view constitutes a threat, and why from a Russian perspective counter-action is required, before looking specifically at what has been said on the form that counter-action might take in the case of Finland moving toward NATO.

Although Russia's official definitions of threats and prescriptions for counter-measures are still in flux, with the new National Security Strategy already issued but the new update of the Military Doctrine still to see the light of day, it is fair to say that according to Russian doctrine in force at the time of writing, Finnish membership of NATO would be a major and immediate danger which would tick all the boxes for a range of concerted pre-emptive action.²⁴⁶

The current Military Doctrine (which in Russia has legally binding status, with all the specifically Russian connotations this implies) defines a range of direct external threats which predicate action to neutralise them – including “expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of the Russian Federation's military security”. It requires “support (where necessary) for political activities of the Russian Federation by means of the implementation of corresponding measures of a military nature and a naval presence”.²⁴⁷

This document has been under review within Russia for a considerable length of time, and at the time of completion of this paper the schedule for release of the new version of the Military Doctrine was stated as the end of 2009. A key trend in early public development of the new Military Doctrine was replacement of non-specific threats like international terrorism with the

specific problem of NATO “approaching Russia’s borders”. This is mirrored in Article 17 of the new National Security Strategy in force from 2009: “The defining factor in relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation will remain the unacceptability for Russia of plans to bring the Alliance’s military infrastructure forward to Russia’s borders.”²⁴⁸

Many of the threats listed in the existing version of the Military Doctrine reflected the perception of the time, but much has changed since 1999 when it was being drafted. As recently as 2003, the then Russian CGS Yuriy Baluyevskiy could still say that “you have to determine who your enemy is. We still do not know.” In this context Russia was still capable of a “moderate” response to the Baltic States joining NATO; but the primary conditions for this moderation, Russian relative weakness and the remnants of a strategy of cooperation with the West dating from September 2001, no longer pertain. It follows that allowance must be made for Russian responses to similar NATO moves in future being more direct and more significant. Alternatively, staying with the Baltic States example, another possibility in the event of Finland seeking to join NATO is that the 2004 pattern could be repeated: prodigious noise and bluster generated from Russia before accession, followed by no direct action post factum but a steady campaign of awkwardness toward and occasional disruption of the new NATO neighbour.

It is almost universally argued at present that a military form of coercion against Finland is next to impossible in the foreseeable future. But this certainty received a jolt in August 2008, when those who had not been watching closely were astonished to find Russia in open armed conflict with a neighbouring sovereign state. For Russia, any international political or economic arguments against taking control of the situation in South Ossetia and proceeding to move on into Georgia and insist on a “security zone” there were trumped by doctrinal imperatives. Regardless of the temporary detrimental impact in international relations and (arguably) the economy, according to Russian criteria a number of key threats defined by law (unresolved conflict on borders, presence of hostile armed force, threat to Russian citizens abroad and more) have been resolved for the long term.

The Georgian scenario is entirely unlike the current state of relations between Finland and Russia. However any possible Finnish move toward NATO may be handled, it is unlikely to be impetuous and unnecessarily provocative toward Russia. As analysts observed in 2006 and 2007, Russia practised regularly and intensively the complex move of troops and armour to the Georgian border during the Caucasus Border “anti-terrorist” exercises; the picture of military relations and exercises in the North is quite different.²⁴⁹ As experienced Swedish observer Ingmar Oldberg points out, the fact that Russia’s Baltic Fleet has resumed practising beach assaults should not in itself be considered untoward, “because that’s what marines do for a living”.²⁵⁰ Even so, taken in the context of other Russian security developments which have been interpreted as preparing to defend the Nordstream pipeline beyond Russia’s territorial limits (see “A Difficult Neighbour” above), they do start to beg the question of who is now the “conditional enemy” against whom amphibious landings in the Baltic are being exercised.

By the time he was making public statements on the drafting of a new Military Doctrine in 2007, Yuriy Baluyevskiy was far more direct. “Russia must profess the immutable axiom that wars and armed conflicts will follow without interruption, since they are born of the unending competition of states,” he said. The key threat to Russia was “the direction taken by the US administration, to... expand its political, economic and military presence in regions of Russia’s traditional influence, and the implementation of the plans to expand NATO further.”²⁵¹

Preliminary discussions in 2007-8 suggested that the broader scope of the new doctrine would reflect widespread consensus that the West and NATO pose the major threat to Russian security – and that conceptual definitions would be adjusted to reflect that military conflict is just a sub-set of “war”, and that Russia may need to respond to non-military threats with military capacity.²⁵² The converse is also true. This approach chimes with Russia’s

relative willingness now expressed to see military force as a valid foreign policy tool among a range of others. According to the influential academic Army General Makhmut Gareyev:

“There can also be war without use of armed force; war above all is an economic, diplomatic, psychological and information struggle, and the role of armed force and armed warfare moves to the background... In recent years there has been a substantial change in the correlation of political-diplomatic, economic and information means of carrying out political goals. The significance and proportion of non-military means have grown considerably.”²⁵³

And furthermore, “It’s impossible to separate non-military and military threats from each other; they have to be examined in integral unity.”²⁵⁴

It remains to be seen whether the new Military Doctrine will reflect a perception in Russia of new international opportunities with the advent of Barack Obama - no doubt one of the reasons why the release of the updated document has been repeatedly postponed so that it is now several years overdue. It is entirely possible that this could lead to yet another re-think of the NATO threat picture in Russia, with as a consequence a less neuralgic response to the possibility of Finnish accession. The fine judgement to be taken, just as in 2004, would be whether the angry noises emanating from Russia (to be expected in either case) would be simply for form’s sake or indicative of a real problem.

The argument that Russia would not risk military or non-military punitive action against Finland because the consequences would be too damaging for Russia itself is important, but risks seeing the cost benefit analysis through Western rather than Russian eyes. While it is true that interest groups within Russia are at least as dependent on the proceeds of energy sales to Europe as Europe is dependent on receiving Russian energy, this has not prevented Russia from demonstratively cutting off energy supplies to its neighbours on a regular basis. Finland is not a transit country for oil or gas to other customers, and therefore there is no imperative for Russia to restore supplies urgently as there is in the cases of Ukraine or Belarus. In this respect Finland’s position is more like that of Lithuania, where Russian displeasure at the sale of the Mazeikiu refinery to a Polish rather than a Russian bidder led to the apparently permanent closure of the Druzhba (“Friendship”) oil pipeline “for technical reasons”.²⁵⁵ The prospect of Russian energy action against Finland is remote, but NATO membership is a more significant issue than selling an oil refinery to the wrong people.

Commentators who seek to play down Russia’s influence on the Finnish NATO decision tend to point out that Russia has no formal say on who should or should not join the Alliance. This is of course true; but it neglects the fact that even in the absence of a formal veto, Russia has a wide range of powerful levers for inflicting economic, political or social pain on its neighbours to make its point – far more accessible, subtle, affordable and (in Russian arguments) justifiable than the military option. The “Difficult Neighbour” section earlier in this document lists a number of ways in which Russia causes Finland difficulties without even trying. If this were replaced with a concerted deliberate campaign, different elements of which have been progressively tested on other states on Russia’s western periphery, the results for Finland could be both unpleasant and very expensive. In 2007 Jakob Hedenskog and Robert Larsson of the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) produced an excellent and thorough study of Russia’s methods of exerting coercive and unfriendly influence on former Soviet Union states and the Baltics. With very few exceptions, the methods they identified could be turned against Finland with almost immediate effect.²⁵⁶

The FIIA NATO report, on the other hand, believes the Russia factor should not be overstated. “Russian opposition to the NATO enlargement is to a large degree psychological,” it writes, which risks giving the impression that this means it can be disregarded – but whether the basis of the Russian viewpoint is “psychological”, paranoiac, or based on real and reasonable fears for Russian national security would make no

difference to the amount of damage Russia would be capable of causing Finland in an attempt to persuade against NATO membership, at very little cost to itself.

Threats to Date...

*"I think that the people who are trying to push Finland away from its traditional neutral policy are pushing your country to the slippery road of conflict."
Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin²⁵⁷*

According to some Finnish Russia experts, it is commonly believed in the Kremlin that Finland will join NATO within the next few years.²⁵⁸ Even before Finland makes any visible move towards publicly considering membership of NATO, Russian comment on the possibility has been clear, distinct, and unfriendly.

Leading Russian politicians have repeated the official line that NATO membership is every country's own decision. Still, this line is usually complemented by a comment that Finland's membership in the alliance would not improve relations between the two countries. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the issue of Finnish membership of NATO was not discussed at all during his first meeting with Alexander Stubb at the end of April 2008; although Lavrov immediately followed this brief statement with an expansive denunciation of "mechanical" NATO expansion.²⁵⁹

Officially it is strongly emphasised in Finland that Russia will not influence the NATO decision in any way; Russia or its reactions are not decisive factors in Finland's decision to join or not to join the Alliance. But even the possibility of membership seems already to affect Russia's stance. For instance, there were suggestions that public statements on NATO accession had hindered Finland's position in the timber tariff discussions with Russia. This was denied by trade minister Paavo Väyrynen.²⁶⁰

In October 2007, Vladimir Kozin, then attached in a diplomatic post at the Russian Embassy in Helsinki, made waves by telling the National Defence University and the YLE TV channel that Finnish NATO membership would pose a direct military threat to Russia. According to Kozin, Russia could not just stand by and watch Finland fulfil NATO obligations. His comments were swiftly disowned by the embassy, and energetically downplayed by Finnish politicians; although some, including chairman of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee Pertti Salolainen, pointed out that the comments were unlikely to have been made without the knowledge or support of Kozin's superiors. Tellingly, given the instincts for conciliation of Russia described above, there was harsh criticism of YLE for reporting the story at all: former Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja called reporting Kozin's comments an "unusually open and stupid campaign to frighten Finns into supporting NATO membership".²⁶¹

Shortly afterwards, former Soviet Ambassador Vladimir Stepanov implied in an interview that if Finland's leading politicians threatened to develop too close relations with NATO, the Russians certainly had in reserve plenty of unpleasant revelations about their past.²⁶²

Russian commentators further from the top have taken even stronger stances on Finland's membership. There is no shortage of messages from Russia reminiscent of the early stages of discussions over a path to NATO for Ukraine. Ukrainian aspirations eventually led to well-publicised Russian warnings of "serious consequences" and "a negative effect on the whole security situation in Europe".²⁶³ First Deputy Chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs Yuliy Kvitsinskiy has warned Finland about the consequences of membership, and said that this would lead to military, political and economic counteractions by Russia.²⁶⁴ And former Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Fedorov has said that militarily Finland's membership in the Alliance would not be a problem, but it would demonstrate that there is a lack of trust. "From Russia's point of view it is important that Finland's foreign policy will continue to be predictable."²⁶⁵

Finland has indeed done its best to pursue a predictable foreign policy. It has taken baby steps in getting closer to NATO – no doubt wisely, not only because the majority of citizens have reserved attitudes towards NATO, but also to preserve the best possible relations with Russia. It has always been recognised that rapid or unexpected changes in Finland's NATO position would provoke strong reactions from Russia. Russia expert Crister Pursiainen suggested in an interview in 2002 that Finland should inure Russia to the idea of Finland's membership in NATO and try to come up with ways to "sell" the idea to Russia to make possible accession as painless as possible.²⁶⁶

There is a strong sense, hinted at by Andrey Fedorov, that by opting for NATO Finland would be seen as having "betrayed" Russia. FIIA even named its 2002 study on Russian reactions to possible Finnish membership "Et tu Brute!"²⁶⁷

...and Action in the Future?

According to Finnish Russia experts of long standing like Esa Seppänen, "Russia is worried about Finland's NATO option, it will not stay passive if Finland joins the Alliance".²⁶⁸

As discussed above, the worst-case scenario includes some form of military action by Russia. Defence Minister Häkämies points out that "according to the Russian world view, military force is a key element in how it conducts its international relations".²⁶⁹ This possibility is recognised even in such moderate reports as the 2007 FIIA paper: "Finland's defence and security cooperation with NATO, however active but without opening the accession perspective, does not seem to cause major concerns in Russia. If Finland chose to join NATO, the political relations between the two countries would almost inevitably suffer to some degree, and some limited military remonstrations in the vicinity of the Finnish borders (which are now hard to specify) could occur."²⁷⁰

According to Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitriy Rogozin, "currently we have no strategic weapons in northern Europe. Our troops in the Leningrad district and Karelia are no danger to anyone. But if Finland becomes a member of NATO and the balance of power in northern Europe changes, it will lead to a very serious discussion in the Russian political class."²⁷¹ Meanwhile, in September 2009 Russia began the process of clarifying and streamlining the legal framework governing the unilateral deployment of its armed forces abroad for a range of purposes including protection of Russian citizens.²⁷²

As if a new NATO neighbour with a long land border close to strategically important areas were not alarming enough for Russia, Finland is also not a signatory to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty. At present Russia enjoys a comfortable position in conventional arms control, sitting back in a self-imposed "moratorium" on observance of CFE, while all other signatories continue dutifully to allow inspection visits and report their military strengths. Although Finland's defence organisation is relatively transparent, a move towards NATO by a non-CFE country would reinforce Russian arguments that CFE is outdated, does not reflect the post-Cold War security situation in Europe, and needs to be replaced with the panoramic security treaty now being proposed by Russia. At the same time, withdrawal from the CFE treaty with its flank limitations allows Russia to change its military posture opposite Finland at will, "depending on an appropriate reaction from our partners".²⁷³

But as discussed above, "military remonstrations" are only one of a wide range of options open to Russia (and far from the most likely one) to influence the Finnish NATO decision, as either persuasion or demonstration before the event, or punishment after it. The bilateral issues described in "Difficult Neighbour" above show how screwdriver adjustments on the Russian side of the border have sledgehammer effects on the Finnish side. While all difficulties created by Russia could be adapted to and adjusted for by Finland given time and money, it is easy to see how with no great effort Russia could create temporary havoc for the

economy of Finland, and for those who trade with Russia via Finland. And Finland's energy setup at the time of writing depends on Russia as a reliable supplier; the consequences of "technical difficulties" compromising energy supplies, as they have done for Lithuania, would be alarming during a Finnish winter even in those areas (e.g. oil deliveries) where alternative suppliers can swiftly be found.

While the issue at stake might be NATO, any serious Russian action against Finland would inevitably also involve the EU: the response by the EU as a whole would be definitive for the organisation's credibility in dealing with anti-social behaviour by Russia. Any public move by Finland towards NATO thereby stands a fair chance of leading to a serious test of unity in both Alliance and Union.

Conclusion

"Yes, things are worse today than they were yesterday. But, at least, they are better today than they will be tomorrow."

Attributed to former President of Finland Mauno Koivisto

Finland is approaching an important decision point. While any movement towards membership remains politically highly improbable before the next presidential and parliamentary elections, the urgency of making a definitive choice for or against NATO is growing along with the crescendo of discussion and public visibility of the issue.

The "Russian Responses" section above makes the case for not discounting the possibility of action by Russia intended to dissuade Finland from a particular foreign policy course. It is entirely possible that the present grim mutterings from Russia would not be turned into positive action; but there is also a danger that if Russia were to gradually increase the use of soft levers against Finland, by the time this reached the point of public and international perception and disquiet it might already have rendered Finland an unwelcome member in NATO because of the trouble it would bring – regardless of the actual extent of the real domestic impact of the Russian measures. So the argument for taking action while the situation is relatively benign, and weathering the possible storm from the East, is strong. If Finland were to join NATO, at least relations with Russia would have a clearly-defined foundation even if the new situation would take some getting used to on both sides. As noted in 2002, "Russia is in any event prepared for Finland's NATO membership or close co-operation with NATO in a crisis situation. Therefore Finland is already paying the military-strategic costs of NATO membership, without enjoying its possible benefits."²⁷⁴

There are strong and compelling arguments both for and against the final step of seeking membership in the Alliance, and strong reasons for backing both choices as being in Finland's immediate national interest.

The Finnish NATO debate is a logical continuum of Finnish political history and culture, and touches on fundamental parts of the Finnish identity. There is a fear of jeopardising the skills and attributes that have ensured survival next to a large and impetuous neighbour. Non-alignment and avoiding confrontation are seen as having served Finland well, and many argue that membership in NATO would mean abandoning these principles.

Others see Finland for the first time having an opportunity to become a full member of the Western institutions with which it belongs, instead of being forced to tread a delicate path between East and West as before. The former alarm at the prospect of being led into unwelcome and politically unacceptable adventures by the USA has largely evaporated with the arrival of President Obama, and the image and attractiveness of NATO is likely to continue to improve in Finland as the "EU alternative" proves to be hollow.

Finland and Sweden have brought themselves as close to NATO as is feasible without actually starting the process which culminates in membership. Both countries together remain bastions of Nordic non-alignment; but if one makes the leap, it will become even more difficult for the other to stay outside.

There is much historical justification for maintaining full defensive independence, and maintaining relations with Russia which are palpably different from those of a NATO member. Article 5 guarantees, while important, may in the end not be as fundamental to the Finnish choice as many NATO advocates currently suggest. Even without Article 5 proving threadbare on close analysis, Finland with its instinctive self-reliance and the unusually high profile and prestige accorded to national defence would be likely to preserve the concept of territorial defence and at least selective conscription even if joining NATO.

And this invokes precisely the essential part of the Finnish national character which will make a final decision on the extent of involvement with NATO so very difficult. The quotation with which we opened this paper still echoes today: "In the Finnish identity managing alone is important; we want to manage everything alone and we do not trust in help from others. That is our problem."²⁷⁵

Appendix: Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABDI	Advisory Board for Defence Information
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe
CGS	Chief of General Staff
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CV90	Combat Vehicle 90
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EUBG	European Union Battle Group
EVA	Elinkeinoelämän Valtuuskunta / Finnish Business and Policy Forum
FCMA	(Treaty on) Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance
FIIA	Finnish Institute of International Affairs
FOI	Swedish Defence Research Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NASAMS 2	Norwegian Advanced Surface to Air Missile System 2
NORSU	Norja-Ruotsi-Suomi / Norway-Sweden-Finland
NRF	NATO Response Force
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
SDP	Social Democratic Party
STUK	Finnish Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority
SUPO	Suojelupoliisi / Finnish Security Police
WTO	World Trade Organization
YLE	Yleisradio / Finnish Broadcasting Company

Endnotes

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