

Goodbye to *Russia, Russia and Russia!*¹: Finland's New NATO Chapter Within the Framework of Shelter Theory

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Abstract

One significant impact on the international system of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War has been Finland's NATO membership. This article suggests that Baldur Thorhallsson's shelter theory is the most suitable explanation for Finland's decision. According to the theory, an alliance relationship with NATO will remedy the lack of hard security shelter of a state categorized as a small state in the literature. Many experts believe that this is a pragmatic choice by Finland against the Russian threat. On the other hand, Finland has a long history with Russia and is known for its neutral and peaceful policies, trying to establish a balance between East and West. For the above-mentioned reasons, membership in NATO is a much more difficult decision than it seems on the surface. In this framework, this article will first explain the place of Thorhallsson's theory in International Relations. Then, Finland's general foreign policy choices will be examined in light of current shelter relationships. Finally, in presenting the country's history with NATO, it will focus on the potential consequences of the membership.

Keywords: small states, foreign policy behavior, hard security, Ukraine-Russia war, shelter theory

Research Article | Received: 8 March 2023, Last Revision: 10 January 2024, Accepted: 12 January 2024

Introduction

Small states theories and studies have gained importance in the International Relations (IR) literature since the 2000s. A considerably high number of states, considered small according to various qualitative and quantitative criteria (Tür and Salık 2017: 3-23), seek to exist in the international system alongside global powers like Russia, the United States (US), and China, while also making efforts to remain visible and become influent. Even though experts studying this field do not have a common opinion about the definition of the small state (Tür and Salık 2017: 7), the maneuvering areas, foreign policy and alliance choices, the fields in which these states try to excel in the global system, constitute the primary subjects of research in the IR discipline.

1 This expression has been used by the Finnish defence minister Jyri Hakamies during his 2007 speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), in reference to Finland's 3 strategic problems (Dahl 2011: 7).

Today, Finland is in the small states category (Jesse and Dreyer 2016: 105; Archer 2016: 95; Jokela 2022: 1; Thorhallsson and Elínardóttir 2020: 13; Pedersen 2018: 217). Being one of the Nordic Five (N5) (Marklund 2017: 623) countries, and in line with the general aims of other Northern European states, Finland is prominent at the global level in soft power areas such as the environment, human rights, international cooperation, mediation (Ingebritsen 2006: 11). The country also builds up projects in said areas within the frame of the international organizations of which it is a member; thus, projecting an image of harmlessness and helpfulness (Bailes and Thorhallsson 2013: 103). As it does not support military engagement, Finland is known for its long-lasting neutrality/non-aligned policy (Jokela 2022: 3). However, the situation seems to have changed after the 2022 NATO application made by the country, a decision that divided the experts on whether it was predictable or not.

This study aims to make sense of Finland's full membership application to NATO, which is an international military organization. The country, who has a long-lasting history with NATO, took this decision with the outbreak of the Ukraine-Russia war. This move, interpreted as a shift from 'soft security' to 'hard security' (Thorhallsson and Bailes 2017: 55) in the literature, has placed Finland in the immediate frontier position in the north, between Russia and the Baltic states (Rinehart 2022: 431). The present study considers that this move, in short term, will impact Finland's role as a small state in the international system, its relations with regional powers, and its domestic policies. Moreover, Finland's historical dilemma about whether it being Northern or Nordic (Joenniemi 2002: 203), may perhaps be answered for good thanks to its recent NATO membership.

In the study, shelter theory as developed by Baldur Thorhallsson, is considered the most satisfactory explanation for Finland's 2022 NATO membership application. Shelter theory, considered to be one of the alliance theories, explains Finland's foreign policy choice in a more comprehensible way than classic IR theories. For example, balancing and bandwagoning concepts developed by Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, pioneers of the realist theory, have been applied to Finland in prior studies (Pedersen 2018: 217; Archer 2016: 99). These can be respectively resumed as the alliance of two or more states against a powerful or threatening state and the relation that a weak state establishes with a stronger state (Bailes, Rickli and Thorhallsson 2014: 26), is not sufficient for explaining Finland's NATO membership, i.e., the international organization/state relations. On the other hand, the buffer state concept, which refers to small neutral states being surrounded by big powers and making their foreign policy choices accordingly (Partem 1983: 3), is also not sufficient for the present study because it is solely based on geographical position. Institutional and social constructivist theories are more successful at explaining small states' relations with international organizations (Bailes, Rickli and Thorhallsson 2014: 26). For example, NATO's evolution from a defense alliance into a security community can be explained within the frame of the constructivist theory (Çakır 2021: 62). Finland's desire to join NATO can be rationalized from this point of view; however, small states theories and therefore shelter theory are needed for understanding the timing of this membership. Finland as a case study will be analyzed in the light of recent events as well as its foreign policy strategies, choices, and tendencies. This study aims to contribute to the literature by analyzing a new theory of IR with a small state's current foreign policy choices.

Theoretical Framework: Shelter Theory as an Explanation for Small States' Choices

Experts study small states alongside classic theories like the realist, liberal, constructivist, etc., ones, aiming to explain the foreign policy behavior of the state actor in the international system. They also try to create theories specially or specifically explaining this kind of state behavior. The general opinion believes that these states' foreign policy behaviors are naturally influenced by physical disadvantages (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2017: 4). As said disadvantages are taken into consideration, scholars agree on some foreign policy behavior key points like multilateralism choice, issue-specific power use, the strategies of image-building and coalition-building, flexibility, and good diplomacy (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2017: 2). Baldur Thorhallsson is the founder of the shelter theory, which builds the theoretical framework of the study and believes that the existing classic alliance theories are insufficient for explaining small states' behavior (Thorhallsson 2011: 324-336; Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 18). Thorhallsson has offered to the literature an alternative concerning small states' behavior that he deems to be more appropriate and unique.

To alleviate their unique vulnerabilities and satisfy their unique needs, small states seek what we refer to as shelter, which is provided by larger states and international organizations. Small states' chances of survival and prosperity crucially depend on the nature of the shelter they find. Accordingly, shelter theory addresses three interrelated issues to common concern to small states: the reduction of risk before a possible crisis event; assistance in absorbing shocks when risk goes bad and help in recovering after such an event. (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 24)

In the paragraph above, Thorhallsson mentions almost all the key words constituting the essence of the theory; 'assistance', 'vulnerability', 'survival', 'prosperity', and 'crisis'. For example, according to Thorhallsson a small state's need of shelter is an 'assistance' or 'support'. Small states need this support to survive and prosper in the international system. He describes small states not as 'weak' but as 'vulnerable', and this vulnerability is dangerous especially in times of crisis or shock. Another concept that Thorhallsson does not like to use is the concept of 'dependance'. He does not describe small states as weak and qualifies the shelter protection provided by big states or international organizations not as dependence but as 'help', 'easing the problems' or 'support in times of crises (Martin 2022: 106). To resume, the logic behind small states' foreign policy behavior is different from big states' (Thorhallsson, Steinsson and Thorsteinn 2018: 541). The theory enhances small states' role as actors in IR and creates a positive perception.

Thorhallsson says that small states need shelter especially in three areas: political, economic, and societal (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 24-44). The political support includes the military, administrative and diplomatic areas; however, the subject he underlines the most is the 'security' dimension. According to Thorhallsson, security is one of the weakest points of small states and they consequently have out of proportion spending in this domain. Security worries push these states into making alliances, thanks to which they become less of a target and can feel safer, thus being able to make long-term planning (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 27). According to the theory, in terms of political shelter, international

organizations are the most advantageous options for small states. International organizations allow small states to come forward in areas they are strong, in another saying earn them a ‘status’ (Pedersen 2018: 217), while reducing the costs² or sacrifices required by the shelter (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 30-31).

On the other hand, economic shelter is also considered a necessity for small states that are vulnerable in the subjects of productivity, investment, resources, domestic markets, trade, sectoral diversity, export dependence, fiscal institutions and economic fluctuations. According to the theory, shelters provide small states access to markets, economic integration, assistance in crises, stability, and insurance (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 35-40). Societal shelter, which is the last pillar of the theory, brings a new point of view to classic theories that usually explain alliance tendencies from political and economic perspectives. Thorhallsson states that shelters in the areas of technology, innovations, education, and culture will benefit small states with limited resources. Inter-societal interaction, transparency of borders, cultural sharing, new ideas, and innovation benefit all states; however, being under the wings of another actor in societal terms is a type of alliance that can happen only between similar states – and Thorhallsson acknowledges this situation in his theory (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 41-45).

As Thorhallsson argues, “for this relationship to be considered shelter, the price can never be higher than the gains the smaller partner receives” (Bailes, Thayer and Thorhallsson 2016: 14). If a good balance policy is not achieved, shelter alliance can have heavy consequences for small states. How the gains and losses can be calculated is perhaps the most important question the theory needs to answer in long term; in fact, concerning the Finland and NATO alliance shelter relation, the result of this equation is for now unknown. The role of governing leaders and political parties is crucial to prevent these long-term alliances from having severe outcomes. The reaction of public opinion is also very important. “It’s a unique form of alliance relationship with a great power or regional or international organization whereby the small state yields effective control of its political decision-making in specific areas” (Bailes, Thayer and Thorhallsson 2016: 10). Thorhallsson argues that small states do not lose control in this relationship. Alliance shelter is neither a “complete subordination or annexation nor one of formal equality and autonomy” (Bailes, Thayer and Thorhallsson 2016: 14). Yet, in our opinion, these alliances built on ‘good’ intentions at the beginning can result in an over-dependency to the sheltering organizations or big states (Martin 2022: 106).

Selection of Case: Finland as an ‘Old’ Comfort Zone in the North

Finland is one of the states used as an example of the shelter theory by Thorhallsson (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 27). Considering that the theory aims to explain small states’ behavior, all Nordic States are likely to be case studies in this aspect. Thorhallsson displays actors with whom Finland had a shelter relationship in two separate tables (see Table 1, 2 and 3) made respectively in 2013 and 2020, with 2023.

2 Thorhallsson uses here David Vital’s work of costs calculations for small states alliances; ‘a price must normally be paid in terms of sacrifice of autonomy in the control of national resources and loss of freedom or political maneuver and choice’ David Vital, *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small in International Relations*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967 in (Thorhallsson, Bailes and Johnstone 2013: 6).

Table 1. Shelters of the Nordic States – 2013

Shelter type	Economy	Currency union	Political	Societal	Hard Security	Soft Security
FINLAND	EU	EU	EU	EU/NC	-	EU/ SCHENGEN
SWEDEN	EU	-	EU	EU/NC	-	EU/ SCHENGEN
NORWAY	EEA/ EFTA	-	NATO	EEA/NC	NATO	SCHENGEN
ICELAND	EEA/EFTA	-	NATO	EEA/NC/WNC	NATO/ USA	SCHENGEN
DENMARK	EU	DKK (EU)	EU/NATO	EU/NC	NATO	EU/ SCHENGEN

Source: (Thorhallsson, Bailes and Johnstone 2013: 6)

Table 2. Shelters of the Nordic States – 2020

Shelter type	Economic	Political	Societal
FINLAND	EU	EU	EU/NC
SWEDEN	EU	EU	EU/NC
NORWAY	EEA/EFTA	NATO/ SCHENGEN	EEA/NC
ICELAND	EEA/EFTA	NATO/USA/ SCHENGEN	EEA/NC
DENMARK	EU	EU / NATO	EU/NC

Source: (Thorhallsson and Elnardóttir 2020: 129)

Table 3. Shelters of Finland (Examples for the 1992-2023 period)

	Shelter Provider	Shelter Type
1992	USA	Political - security
1995	EU	Political, economic, societal
1996-2001	SCHENGEN AREA	Political, economic, societal
1994	NATO	Political (PfP)
2009	NORDEFECO	Political - security
2014	SWEDEN	Political - security
2018	UK	Political - security
2022	USA	Political - security
2023	NATO	Political - security

Source: (Thorhallsson and Vidal 2023: 13)

What is noteworthy about the tables is that Thorhallsson's 2013 table displays the 'hard security' and 'soft security' nuance. Said differentiation is important for the present study because NATO and therefore Atlanticism, represents 'hard security shelter' (Thorhallsson and Bailes 2017: 56). Although he lists a wider number of shelter providers for Finland in the Table 3 like the the US with the 'F-18 agreement' in 1992 or the UK with 'Defence Cooperation Agreement' in 2018 (Thorhallsson and Vidal 2023: 13), in our opinion, European Union (EU), Nordic cooperation (NC) and finally NATO are the main shelter providers. The EU is omni-present in every dimension of the theory but has yet been able to provide hard security shelter.

Geohistory of Finland

Geography has a great impact on defining a state's foreign policy and its role in the system (Jesse and Dreyer 2016: 113). Finland's geography has deeply influenced its identity and foreign policy, which today territorially constitutes the frontier between East and West in the north (Jesse and Dreyer 2016: 112). From a political geography point of view the Russo-Finnish border is one of the longest and oldest in Europe that dates to the 14th century (Marin 2019: 331). Considering the historical ties between two states, geographical proximity with Russia has always been an issue for Finland, which identifies more as Scandinavian. Modern Finnish history is shaped around two factors: geographical proximity to a superpower situated on its border and Finland's desire to be accepted as a Scandinavian state (Jesse and Dreyer 2016: 106). This argument from Jesse and Dryer is important, as it indicates Finland's desire to be 'Scandinavian' beyond being 'Nordic'.

It is a given fact for the IR discipline that today Finland is a member of the Nordic five, which confirms the above assertion. However, creating this image has not been easy considering the history of the country and the cultural differences with the other countries. Finnish people are believed to have immigrated to these lands from the Baltic states, their ties with the Vikings are weak, and unlike Scandinavians, their language belongs to the Finno-Ugric family (Larousse 2022).

The country remained under the rule of their neighbor Sweden until 1809, and under the rule of another neighbor, Russia, until 1917 (Voici la Finlande 2022). The period until the Second World War in Finnish history is considered a "history of subordination and well-timed moves" (Ingebritsen 2006: 75). During the Russian reign, Finland had a quite autonomous structure. It had its own internal organization, capital, army, and two official languages: Swedish and Finnish. This freedom of the Grand Duchy of Finland started to trouble the Tsarist government during the period preceding the Russian Revolution and periodically gave birth to 'russification' policies (Schnakenbourg and Maillefer 2010: 249; Voici la Finlande 2022). Despite considering itself closer to its Scandinavian neighbors, Finland remained under Russian rule for almost a century, which greatly influenced Finnish people in various areas, from art to lifestyle, and architecture to politics. Considering these historic and cultural ties, despite not being a shelter, Russia has had a great influence over Finland. Especially in terms of cultural ties, 'saying goodbye to Russia' has probably not been easy for the Finnish people. The anti-NATO poll results that remained unchanged until the Russian invasion of Ukraine is one of the hints.

As it was not yet an independent state, Finland's relationships with Russia and Sweden prior to 1917 cannot be explained with the shelter theory. However, referring to the theory it can be said that the independence process has been a great success for a small state usually considered to be vulnerable in the security realm. In the literature, this success is known as the Mannerheim doctrine, and the relationships are regulated by the 1920 Tartu Treaty (Jesse and Dreyer 2016: 107-118). Moreover, independence from Russia is accepted as the beginning of the general Finnish security policy, hence the importance of this date. It is worth noting that this was achieved without the help of the Nordic countries. Starting from this date, Finland began developing a 'long-term Soviet security strategy' (Jesse and Dreyer 2016: 116). This

strategy has been present in many aspects from the neutrality decision to the Finlandization process, from regional cooperation to today's NATO membership. On the other hand, this long-term Soviet security strategy came along with the 'long-term NATO integration strategy'. According to Thorhallsson, the country's current day NATO membership is in fact the result of a long-term shelter-seeking strategy ongoing since the Cold War (Thorhallsson and Vidal 2023: 2), which coincides with the same period as Finlandization. The process described as the long-term shelter-seeking strategy by Thorhallsson is a search for a hard-security shelter and according to this study, NATO is the only actor capable of being the provider for Finland.

Finlandization: An Art of Balance Policy

In early 2022, French president Emmanuel Macron, said that the Finlandization option is "one of the models on the table" for solutions concerning the Russo-Ukrainian war (The New York Times 2022). The Finlandization concept, born from Finland-Soviet relationships, has become one of the well-known IR concepts today and was mentioned during the search of solutions for many conflicts, with the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war being one of them.

The Second World War was a breaking point in the history of Finland. This small state first fought against the Soviets during the Winter War (1939-40) and lost some land during this conflict. The country sided with the Germans in the War of Continuation (1941-44), hoping for recovery, but lost still more lands to the Soviet Union. The economic and military consequences of the war were heavy for Finland (Marin 2019: 331). Finland excelled as a small state during the Russian Revolution, the independence process, and the First World War and once again took a firm stand against strong powers. However, the great losses suffered during the Second World War urged the Finns to search for a pragmatic policy for recovery. Finlandization was born in the above-mentioned context. "The term refers to Finland's strict neutrality during the Cold War, enshrined in a 1948 treaty with Moscow when tensions between the Soviet Union and the West were at a high" (The New York Times 2022).

In the scope of Finlandization, the country promised the Soviet Union that it would not join NATO and has restricted its relationships with the West, especially with the US, for instance in not receiving Marshall Plan aid (Lundestad 2017: 255); on the other hand, it did not join the Warsaw Pact either (Marin 2019: 331). Even though Finland could not act in a totally autonomous way – for example, concerning membership to international or regional organizations like the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1986, in which it has recently been compared to Denmark, Sweden and Norway, who were the founders of the organization, or Nordic Council in 1956, which took a while due to the Stalin effect – at the end of the day its economy has not become dependent on Russia. For instance, the country became an OECD member in 1969, which described Finland as "a country with the heavy weight of agriculture" (World Economic Forum 2023) or the Nokia corporation founded in 1967, which represents an "ICT miracle" (Hirvonen 2004: 1) for Finland's economy. Moreover, Finland did not have a communist regime and did not allow Russian military bases on its territory (Bret 2022: 24). Even if some experts argue that "Finlandization made Finland Russia's backdoor" (Jesse and Dreyer 2016: 119), this balance policy is seen as the wisest and the most preventive policy for that period by many experts and the Finnish people. In the literature, Finlandization

shows the ability to coexist with a neighboring superpower rather than being coerced by one (Rinehart 2022: 429). It also shows the maneuvering skills of the Finnish politicians (Dahl 2011: 7), which proves the success of the diplomats who constitute one of the strongest aspects of small states. Finland, which takes a pragmatic approach to international events, has managed to defend itself for a long time against Russia's increasingly aggressive behavior in the international system thanks to this balance policy.

We should not forget that this foreign policy decision taken at the beginning of the Cold War and the following neutrality policies are a geopolitical necessity, as well as a 'realpolitik' outcome for Finland, which was in the middle of the ideological conflicts in the bipolar system (Dahl 2011: 7). This foreign policy strategy implanted during the Cold War ended with the country's 2022 NATO membership application (Bret 2022: 24). In fact, Finland's relationship with NATO became more active since the 1990s, especially with the adherence to the Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) in 1994 and to the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997, which brought active contributions to NATO-led operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq (NATO 2023). However, the 2022 application can be considered as the official end of the balance policy and the country's military non-alignment policies.

Europeanization and EU Shelter: A Mutatis Mutandis Behavior³

Finland, alongside with the Finlandization policies established to balance a neighboring superpower, is also known for its neutrality policies. Neutrality is a principle adopted by Finland for many years out of fear of losing its prosperity, sovereignty, political and economic independence, which is a valid concern for all Nordic countries (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2019: 29). Neutrality, embraced during the World Wars as well as the Cold War, officially ended in the 1990s when the country joined the EU. Like the neutrality approach, Finland also maintained the 'non-alignment' principle during the Cold War, which also ended when it joined the EU. The source of Finnish non-alignment flows directly from its past with Russia. Over eight centuries, several dozen wars were fought with Russia over Finnish territory (Binnendijk and Rodihan 2020: 10).

The end of the Soviet Union encouraged the country to adopt a security approach beyond non-alignment or neutrality and started the period called the military non-alignment era. "Military non-alignment for Finland is a mix of reluctance to provoke Russian aggression and confidence in self-defense" (Binnendijk and Rodihan 2020: 11). After joining the EU, Finland focused its attention on the security community side of the EU and a "narrow notion of military non-alignment" (Archer 2016: 98).

The Europeanization process that took place in the 1990s is called the "post-neutral" (Möller and Bjereld 2010: 364) period in Finnish history. After the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, also with the influence of the economic crisis and of public opinion, Finland once again took a pragmatic decision and joined the EU in 1995, which became the main shelter provider in almost every area. Neutrality, because of the conjuncture, was no

3 Alyson J.K. Bailes and Baldur Thorhallsson, "Instrumentalizing the EU in the Small States Strategies", *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 35, No 2, 2013, p. 104.

longer a viable option (Ingebritsen 1998: 5). This foreign policy strategy can be interpreted as achieving 'stability' (Forsberg and Ojanen 2000: 115).

However, the decision to join the EU still receives criticism in Finland, where the neutral mind endures (O'Hanlon 2017: 95). It was exactly this neutrality that made Finland and Sweden stand out among the Nordic countries, which aimed for leadership in soft power areas. In a way, neutrality underlined their 'difference'. The public opinion that supported military non-alignment for a long time and thus was against NATO membership, reflected an updated version of this neutral mind in accordance with current day realities. Moreover, in addition to being a strategy of the public mind, we should not forget that neutrality has also become a part of the Finnish people's identity (Tiilikainen 2020). For this reason, even if EU membership officially ended Finland's neutrality, according to some experts this principle did not truly end until the NATO membership application (Le Monde 2023). In our opinion, without a major act like Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which marked a breaking point in the system, Finland would not have become a NATO member in the near future and would have continued hanging on to military non-alignment. The EU was a satisfactory choice for Finland as a shelter provider in political, societal, economic and soft security areas.

As previously stated, while NATO represents 'hard security shelter' for Finland, the EU constitutes the 'soft security' element of the theory. Thorhallsson argues that the shelter provided by international organizations like the EU or NATO protects small states from over-powerful or hostile external powers, like the Russian example in the study (Bailes and Thorhallsson 2013: 104). He also argues that Finland's need of economic and societal shelter, which was fulfilled by actors such as the EFTA, OECD, or United States during the Cold War, was met by the EU after the Cold War (Thorhallsson and Vidal 2023: 11).

The first point that encouraged Finland to join the EU was the union's cautious attitude towards the hard security role. Unlike the 2023 NATO membership, Finland has never opted for military engagement in its general foreign policy choices (Forsberg and Ojanen 2000: 118). Being strong in soft power areas is a privileged behavior not only for Finland but for Nordic countries in general. Therefore, the EU membership was free of hard security expectations. The EU is an optimal actor against Russia; it cannot destroy the balance if it remains in the soft security and economic zone. The EU does not either contrast the role or the image that Finland wishes to endorse in the international system. Finally, the EU is a shelter expected to be attentive to the security issues of the Nordic and Baltic regions (Forsberg and Ojanen 2000: 118). Even if this soft security shelter does not ensure military engagement, it provides a security protection in a large panel of subjects such as health, environment, migration and energy (Bailes and Thorhallsson 2013: 101). The EU provides a shelter for small states against global multi-dimensional security issues and offer opportunities to maximize their influence in the international system (Thorhallsson and Wivel 2018: 4). From this point of view, it has many advantages for a small state like Finland. Moreover, it can be observed that Finland, especially in the framework of projects like the "Northern Dimension Initiative" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2022), has reached a very enthusiastic (Steinmetz and Wivel 2010: 10), active, and visible position in the EU. The EU also has a positive influence on the

foreign policy aims of Nordic states in terms of being regional “bridge-builders” (Miles 2015: 29). Considering elements like soft security and visibility, the costs and benefits balance of the shelter theory seems to be to the advantage of the Finns. The EU as a shelter is important for understanding Finland’s expectations from the actors with which it has a shelter relationship, and also for opening the way for NATO. The membership to this organization in 1995 led to an “all-options-are-open policy” according to Rinehart (2022).

Juha Jokela from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs suggests that Finland was trying to remedy the lack of a security shelter not with NATO membership, but with the EU and furthermore with Europeanization (Jokela 2022: 2). The actions taken within this scope are highlighting the EU’s role after Brexit, enhancing bilateral defense policy cooperation with the UK, and finally strengthening the role of Finland in the New Hanseatic Group, which includes Latvia, Holland and Denmark (Dahl 2011: 3-10). Even though Jokela’s 2022 study is based on Thorhallsson’s shelter theory, it does not mention the theory’s hard security dimension. As stated in the study, the relationship with the EU gained a new security dimension after Brexit but this did not constitute a solution to Finland’s hard security shelter shortfall. The EU’s loss of momentum in the system (Brommesson 2016: 2), however, created significant uncertainty about the future for Finland.

From Natural Allies to Allies-to-be: NATO as a Shelter

“Finnish defense planning has, for decades, been directed almost solely at defending the country against attacks from Russia” (Olesen and Sorensen 2019: 25). Finland has faced the fact that it is a small state and has quit its neutrality policies, turning to bilateral and multilateral cooperation. However, it was a conscious decision that was driven by the economic and soft security guarantees provided by this cooperation, and additionally its bridge-builder role between Russia and the West could not protect the country against a potential regional or international conflict. The new international system, has multiple superpowers and has shifted from unipolarity to multipolarity (Mearsheimer 2019: 8), provides new openings for small states but also new vulnerabilities.

In a report written in 2016, Aurélie Domisse (2016: 6) posits that Finland’s NATO membership can be possible according to two scenarios; “a shocking event” on the global level or reaching the membership stage “in incremental steps”. Finland’s relationships with NATO have gained depth especially after 2010 and the country was already the organization’s “informal ally” (Wieslander 2019: 196). On the other hand, the decision to apply for NATO membership was taken due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which had a great impact on the system. Based on these two assertions, it can be argued that both of Domisse’s scenarios have come true. So, how did Finland’s NATO process shape up?

After the Cold War, NATO announced a new network of partnerships including approximately 40 states on the global level. Finland was quick to join the Partnership for Peace in 1994, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in 1997, and the Enhanced Opportunities Partners (EOP) in 2014. A step further came with the 2014 EOP Wales Summit, which named Finland one of the five closest states to NATO (Wieslander 2019: 195). In

addition to defense cooperation, there was also participation in the Planning and Review Process (PARP), which developed military capabilities and interoperability (Moller 2019: 250). Furthermore, the country made military contributions to NATO's interventions in the Balkans, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Finland, which participated to all meetings since 2016, maintains an active dialogue with NATO especially concerning the Baltic Sea Region (Domisse 2016: 2-3). The country officially applied for NATO membership on May 18, 2022, and following the July 4, 2022, Madrid NATO Summit, the accession protocols have been signed and submitted to the member states for ratification (NATO 2023). Finland became the 31st member of NATO on April 4, 2023 (NATO 2023).

It is worth noting that to join NATO, Finland needed the approval of all member states. Since the beginning of the meetings on May 25, 2022, Finland tried to ease Türkiye's – which is a great power NATO member – security concerns during its membership process. On March 31, 2023, Türkiye approved in the National Assembly the membership of Finland to the organization (BBC Türkçe 2023). On the other hand, Hungary approved Finland's NATO membership on March 27, 2023, despite not making it part of its parliamentary agenda for a long time (France 24 2023). While the process was ongoing, the country declared that it shared Türkiye's concerns, without making any other official statement (BBC Türkçe 2023).

From a domestic policy point of view, the National Coalition Party has gained most votes at the last parliamentary elections on April 2, 2023 (NBC News 2023). Concerning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the NATO membership process, the new Prime Minister Petteri Orpo reminded the public that his party has supported NATO membership since 2006 and stated his opinions as follows: “We believe that Finland's (...) NATO membership would improve not just our own security but the overall defense of Europe. Regarding NATO's defense of Northern Europe, Finland is valuable piece due to our military capabilities and geostrategic position between the High North and the Baltic Sea.” (Kokoomus 2023). Moreover, Orpo underlined that even if “the principles of good relations” are mutually adopted, when national interest is the topic, relations with Russia can change very swiftly (Kokoomus 2023). Similar declarations were made by the previous government and the former prime minister Sanna Marin. “Ukraine must win the war,” she declared in an interview, adding: “They are representing all of our values, European values, and they are fighting for all of us” (CBS News 2023). From these declarations it can be concluded that Finnish political parties, independent of their ideology, have been worried by rising Russian aggression and have been more favorable to NATO adhesion since the 2000s. Finland's humanitarian and material assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the war has surpassed one billion euros (Ministry for Foreign Affairs Finland 2023).

Finland, together with Sweden, during the entire process was qualified in the literature as ‘informal ally’, ‘half-members’, ‘virtual members’, ‘natural allies’ (Wieslander 2019: 196). Even these terms show that Finland was not an ally only on paper. The reasons for not being a member despite such a close relationship can be summarized as the previously mentioned historical roots, geopolitical situation, and the relationship with Russia resulting from these, as well as strategic culture and domestic politics in harmony with the balance policy (Pedersen 2018: 234.) The most important example of the domestic reasons in Finland was the opposition

of political parties before the 2008 Georgia crisis – except for the pro-NATO Conservative National Coalition Party (Murphy 2020: 5) – and of the great majority of the population⁴ to NATO membership (Marin 2019: 329). Finally, it must be remembered that Finland, like other Nordic states, has been prominent in the system due to its pacifist policies. Not making a military engagement like NATO membership for all these years comes also from the desire of protecting this image.

So why now? Taking a glimpse at the IR research of the last two years, there were very few experts predicting Finland's full membership application to the organization because of the above-mentioned reasons. In fact, the rising Russian threat and aggression in the international context, which greatly affects Finland especially concerning the Arctic (Olesen and Sorensen 2019: 22) forced Finland to take an important step in order to fill the void in the area of hard security shelter. Besides, the 2008 Georgia crisis and the intensification of the Ukrainian crisis since 2014 as well as President Putin's ultimatums to NATO and the West in 2021 (Thorhallsson and Vidal 2023: 18) sent Finland alarming messages about Russia (Dahl 2011: 7).

However, at this point explaining the 'crisis' concept mentioned by Thorhallsson is necessary. Did what happened in Georgia in 2008 or Crimea in 2014 not constitute 'crisis enough' for the application to NATO? It is obvious that an act of 'offensive on the entire territory of Ukraine', in another saying 'a major event' like in Domisse's scenarios, is much more suitable for Thorhallsson's theory of shelter. It can be noted that after Russo-Georgian War in 2008, Finland strengthened NORDEFECO, and after the Crimean invasion in 2014, it concluded the Defence Cooperation Agreements with Sweden, the US, and the UK (Thorhallsson and Vidal 2023: 13). This is to say that 'crisis' leads to bilateral and regional measures, but a 'major act or major threat' opened the way to NATO, i.e., 'hard security shelter'.

From the Nordic cooperation point of view, which could be an alternative to NATO, the regional common security and defense that could not have been established after the Second World War came to life in 2009 under the name NORDEFECO following the Stoltenberg report (Dahl 2014a: 2). At the end of the day, NORDEFECO is an important initiative for the Nordic States, which want to stay within their core group, and is a less controversial and therefore 'safe' choice (Archer 2016: 99). It also allowed the revival of the "Nordicness" (Brommesson 2018: 391) concept. However, it did not provide sufficient shelter against our day's alarming developments. On the other hand, despite the F-18 agreement in 1992 and the Defence Cooperation Agreement in 2022, the US under the Trump Administration from 2017 to 2021 created mistrust towards the US among the Nordic countries (Thorhallsson and Elinardóttir 2020: 116). Trump's policies were anathema to the Nordic countries, which prefer cooperation to conflict and act within the framework of pacifist policies. For Finland, which has a stance close to Atlanticism, NATO and not the US can provide the necessary political support. Moreover, establishing a main shelter relationship with an international organization and not a superpower like US is a more harmonious option with Finland's "security community"⁵

4 2017 poll numbers are 51% NO and 21% YES to NATO membership (YLE News Finland 2023; Mouritzen 2019: 143).

5 Karl Deutsch's security community is an IR concept applied to the Nordic States through the constructivist approach. It is compatible with NATO's objectives such as 'we-feeling', 'cooperative action', 'trust and mutual consideration'.

(Wieslander 2019: 199) image. In addition to this, in today's context, NATO and Finland have the same security concerns. NATO needs Finland and Sweden for the protection of the Baltic Region (Wieslander 2019: 217). This membership will bolster the alliance's presence around the Baltic Sea and enhance its position in the Arctic (The Washington Post 2023).

Concluding Remarks

Russia has never been a shelter for Finland, which, identifying as a Nordic country, stood close to the Western world and its regional integration in every area they needed support. On the other hand, Finland managed to maintain their balance policies with their Slavic superpower neighbor from their independence to today. The Russian invasion of Ukraine marked the beginning of Finland's NATO membership process as the result of "a shocking event" to quote Domisse; however, this application is not a surprise at all. The context forced Finland, which was already prepared for the NATO membership, to take the decision. In need of a hard security shelter, it applied for NATO membership "in a moment of crisis" and "with security worries," to channel Thorhallsson's words.

Since the NATO membership application, Russia's attitude towards Finland has become more aggressive. Russia has manipulated the Russian diaspora living in Finland and instrumentalized the flow of illegal migrants. In response, Finland became more vigilant, especially about manipulations in the media, and started to further develop the dialogue with the EU and the Nordic countries, which are already its shelters (Marin 2019: 336). After the membership announcement, Russia declared that it would be forced to take 'retaliatory measures' and warned that it will bolster forces near Finland, if NATO sends any additional troops or equipment (NBC News 2023).

Finland's choice of 'hard security shelter' is a turning point for small states' general behavior patterns. These states, which are disadvantaged by nature, usually prefer diplomatic/economic options to military tools according to small states theory; they adopt neutral positions and have a rather low level of participation in global matters (Key 2003: 5). Finland's NATO membership creates a contrast to small states' said political tendencies. The reason behind this behavior is the environment created by the actual global system; small states which usually opt for low politics, are strong in diplomacy, and wish to remain in the soft zone, needing a hard security shelter or a military engagement as much as societal or economic shelters. Finland is a great example of this situation. On the other hand, this example, despite being in contradiction with small states' usual behavior patterns, shows their adaptation and maneuvering skills in the name of survival.

In the nuclear age after Finland's NATO membership and the potential membership of Sweden, Northern Europe will become the border between Russia and the West (Helsinki Times 2022); it will transform from a buffer zone into a tension zone (Bret 2022: 25). In today's system, where the efficiency of international organizations is questioned, the membership of two states with neutral minds and the following expansion wave may perhaps be an advantage for NATO. On the other hand, Finland took a great risk by changing the traditional security doctrine in place since its independence. Moreover, Finland joined NATO without Sweden

and so the impact within Nordic cooperation, which has a ‘one for all, all for one’, could be negative. This hints to a change not only in Finland’s security doctrine but also in its political discourse. As previously said within the framework of shelter theory, security worries push small states into making alliances or security is one of the weakest points of these states. The Russian threat pushed Finland to leave Sweden behind for now. “We should not leave the impression ... that Sweden is left alone,” said Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO, noting that full membership for Finland will help keep Sweden safe, too (The Washington Post 2023).

There are two possible scenarios for Finland as outcomes of this study. In the first and best-case scenario, the NATO membership can become a ‘small states success story’ for Finland. Why? The country gave up its longstanding balance policy and made a clear choice to be ‘Nordic’, instead of ‘Northern’. Considering its past with Russia and their common border, this is a daring move for a small state. In the short term, it will bring visibility to Finland in the international system. Moreover, the country, which now has found the ‘hard security shelter’ it was looking for, will feel safer against the Russian threat and will further integrate into the Western world. Besides, Finnish public opinion seems to favor the change (Helsinki Times 2022) after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and there is now a new government, which has supported joining NATO since 2006. Consequently, we can argue that there won’t be any trouble in domestic policies in the near term.

In the second and worst-case scenario, Finland, trying to lead on the global level in soft power areas such as mediation, international cooperation, international norms, environmental awareness, and human rights, and with its neutral mind and bridge-builder qualities, may damage this image in the short term. For example, the future of the EU project ‘Northern Dimension Initiative’ including Russia or of the Arctic Council, which is a great case of international cooperation, is uncertain with this decision. Moreover, in the long term, if Finland does not receive the necessary shelter support from NATO, it may be constantly tormented about its border security with its superpower neighbor, as it became the direct frontier between NATO and Russia. Finally, the outputs of this new shelter relation established with NATO remain unclear in comparing the theory’s costs and benefits.

All things considered, this new shelter alliance with NATO can be a pragmatic choice, but we will see if it’s the ideal one for Finland’s future. As mentioned before, in our opinion, without the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Finnish people ‘still’ having a neutral mind would not have abandoned the balance policy or military non-alignment principles, and so Finland remains one of the ‘unique’ countries that resists today’s multipolar system dynamics.

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Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the reviewers and the editors of *Uluslararası İlişkiler* and her beloved friend Mrs. Serda Etyemez Grondin for their insightful comments and suggestions.