

Change and Continuity in North European Security: Finland and Sweden's Membership in NATO

Kuzey Avrupa Güvenliğinde Süreklilik ve Değişim: Finlandiya ve İsveç'in NATO Üyelikleri

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the change and continuity in North European security after Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO. With this purpose, firstly the history of the countries in the region is analyzed to detect the general trends in their relations with Russia. Russia's lack of respect for the sovereignty of its neighbors since 2008 and lastly its invasion of Ukraine have urged Finland and Sweden to leave their long-standing non-aligned status and caused the invalidation of the concept of 'Finlandization'. The study secondly focuses on the effect of this radical change on the security understanding of Northern Europe by concentrating on the role of NATO. The findings of this study indicate that recent NATO enlargement is vital for regional states to be able to counter Russia through pooling their resources in the Baltic and Arctic regions. Russia has been implementing 'hybrid warfare' tactics as an unreliable regional power and got stuck in Ukraine since February 2022. Therefore, NATO should learn from the Russia-Ukraine war and prepare against Russia's conventional superiority over its neighboring states as well as its use of asymmetrical means since it is hard to claim that Russia's next steps will not violate the sovereignty of other regional states.

Keywords: Finland, Sweden, North European Security, NATO Enlargement, European Security

Öz

Bu çalışma, Finlandiya ve İsveç'in NATO üyelik süreçleri sonrasında Kuzey Avrupa Güvenliğindeki süreklilik ve değişimi analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, öncelikle devamlılıkları tespit etmek için bölge ülkelerinin tarihi incelenmiştir. Rusya'nın 2008 yılından beri komşularının egemenliklerine saygı göstermemesi ve son olarak da Ukrayna'yı işgali, Finlandiya ve İsveç'i uzun süreli tarafsızlık konumlarını terk etmeye zorlamış ve 'Finlandiyalaşma' kavramının da geçersiz kılınmasına sebep olmuştur. Finlandiyalaşma olgusunun sona ermesi bu anlamda ayrıntılandırılmıştır. Bu çalışma, ikincil olarak, bu radikal değişimin Kuzey Avrupa güvenlik anlayışı üzerindeki etkisine ve NATO'nun rolüne odaklanmaktadır. Araştırmanın bulguları, Baltık ve Arktika bölgelerinde Rusya haricindeki bölge ülkelerinin NATO'nun genişlemesi çerçevesinde bir araya gelebilmesinin Rusya'ya karşı koyabilmeleri açısından hayati olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Rusya, 'hibrit savaş' taktikleri uygulayan güvenilemez bir bölgesel güç olarak Şubat 2022'den itibaren Ukrayna'da zor durumdadır.

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Rusya'nın sonraki adımlarının diğer bölge ülkelerinin egemenliklerini ihlal etmeyeceğine kimse garanti veremeyeceği için NATO, Ukrayna savaşından gerekli dersleri çıkarmalı, Rusya'nın bölgedeki konvansiyonel üstünlüğüne ve kullandığı asimetrik araçlara karşı hazırlıklarını tamamlamalıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Finlandiya, İsveç, Kuzey Avrupa Güvenliği, NATO Genişlemesi, Avrupa Güvenliği

1. Introduction

The relations between Russia and other North European states have gained importance in light of the increasing role of this region and the Arctic region in global politics. After the Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008, annexation of Crimea in 2014 and invasion of Ukraine in 2022 North European states have intensified their contacts with each other. Voronov asserts that despite all the historical disagreements in the region, Northern Europe forms a special and sensitive sub-regional international political complex (Voronov, 2021b) which remained strong during the transformation of the international system since 1991. However, the latest Russian moves violating the national sovereignty of Ukraine threatens this complex. Voronov also suggested the revision of the security and defense policies of five Nordic countries (Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland) and viewed the intensification of practical cooperation between Sweden, Finland, and NATO as a risk. (Voronov, 2021a). He foresaw a change in Swedish and Finnish positions towards NATO only in the case of force majeure circumstances in the region, which happened after February 2022.

Finland and Sweden's accession to the Alliance will strengthen the Transatlantic community and contribute to burden-sharing. Not only causing an increase in military capabilities but also creating civil robustness against Russia aims at deterring Moscow from repeating its breaches of international law. The shifting nature of the US engagement in the region, which became apparent in the Donald Trump era, taught North European states to view their region as one military and political geostrategic area (Conley, Scheffer, & Weber, 2023). In this regard, this study aims to elaborate on the historical background that sheds light on how today's 'Russia' and 'the others' distinction emerged. The main purpose of the study is to analyze the change in the security understanding of Northern Europe regarding the recent accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO. The short-term and long-term effects of the enlargement in line with Russia's destabilizing maneuvers are also discussed.

2. Historical Background

Security concerns of the Russian state historically included Swedish and Finnish territories. Especially the founding of St. Petersburg moved the attention of the Russians from Eastern Europe to the North towards the Baltic Sea coasts. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR radically changed the geopolitical status of many countries in Eastern Europe located at the NATO-Warsaw Pact border. Countries of the South Caucasus as well as Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic countries until 2004 served as a buffer zone between Russia and the West. Russia

was not perceived as a huge threat in the West during these years. However, the enlargement of NATO and the Russia's revisionist policies in the first decades of the new millennium reignited the hostilities in the region.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine once again brought the security concerns of Northern Europe to the attention of the international community. Estonia, Latvia, and Norway as NATO members, and Finland and Sweden as potential members at the time were viewed as direct contact zones between NATO and Russia. The historical background of the relations as well as today's military capacities became matters of debate directly affecting contemporary maneuvers in Northern Europe.

It was during the Great Northern War (1700-1721)¹ that Peter the Great decided to build a city where St. Petersburg is located today. The "Peter and Paul Fortress" was built in Swedish territory at that time, showing Peter's plans to move the center of gravity of the Russian Empire. The question that emerged with this decision was how to secure this city, especially after constituting it as the capital of the Tsarist Russia. In the 18th century, Sweden and Russia fought two more wars. The loss of the first one by Sweden resulted with the subjugation of Finnish cities by the Russian Empire. The second war began with a Swedish attack which resulted in Russia's acceptance not to interfere in the domestic affairs of the Swedish Kingdom. However, the Russian occupation of some parts of the Finnish territories continued.

Estonia and the northern part of Latvia were already under Russian control since the Great Northern War. The first decade of the 19th century witnessed the dismantling of Prussia and the meeting of Alexander I and Napoleon to define spheres of influence in Eastern and Northern Europe. As a result, Russian troops entered Finland in 1808 and thus hindered the march of any foreign troops to the capital city St. Petersburg. Turning the Gulf of Finland into Russian internal waters and taking the Åland Islands under control symbolized the reaching of Russian hegemony to the center of the Baltic Sea. However, Russian dreams about gaining a free exit from the Western Baltic Sea came to an end with the confrontation between Germany and Russia over Northern Europe before the First World War. Finnish sympathy toward the German culture, art, and science was regarded by the Russians as a threat to their rule in the Grand Duchy of Finland. Possible Finnish cooperation with Germans against Russia urged Tsarist authorities to implement strict policies in the Grand Duchy such as the launch of the first Russification period (1898-1905)². Undoubtedly these policies led to anti-Russian sentiments historically within the Finnish society (Suchoples, 2023).

Despite the Russification policies of Moscow, no uprising against Russia happened in the Grand Duchy of Finland during the First World War. However, although the October Revolution dethroned the Romanov dynasty in 1917, it became clear that the new government under

1 A conflict between two coalitions; one led by Tsardom of Russia and the other by Swedish Empire, contesting over the territory in today's Northern, Central and Eastern Europe.

2 Government policy during the last decades of the Tsardom to limit and finally terminate political autonomy and cultural uniqueness of the Grand Duchy of Finland between 1899-1905 and 1908-1917.

Kerensky and then the Bolsheviks did not have the intention to end the hegemony in Finland. That is why Finland's "Declaration of Independence" was viewed as the only solution in December 1917. Lenin's acceptance of the Finnish independence request on the last day of the year was not a decision of sympathy for the Finnish cause, and rather depended on the expectation that the world would understand that the Bolsheviks respected the right of national self-determination in accordance with their socialist ideology. A possible victory of the radical left in Finland would be the real solution according to Vladimir Lenin (Suchoples, 2023), however the radical left in Finland was later defeated. Eventually, The Finnish independence and the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in 1918 shifted the Russian border to the gates of Petrograd (St. Petersburg), and the Bolsheviks moved their capital to Moscow accordingly.

The interwar period witnessed negative perceptions in both Finland and the USSR about the other country. Finnish authorities tried to solve the problem by separating themselves from Eastern Europe and becoming part of a neutral Scandinavia. On the other hand, the Japanese threat in the east forced the Soviet authorities to sign a non-aggression pact with Finland in 1932. However, the Finnish government could not receive support from its neighbors when the Soviet army attacked Finland in November 1939. The war ended in March 1940 with the signing of a peace treaty in Moscow creating a shift of more than a hundred kilometers in the border to the west in Eastern Karelia. For the Soviets, the following years in the Second World War witnessed the realization of the fearful attack that was expected but never happened in the last 150 years: the usage of Finnish territories for an attack on the Russian lands. The Finnish army fought against the Red Army together with the German Nazis. Limited changes took place in the border, but the Red Army's hegemony on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea made the USSR more secure in the region.

1947 Paris Peace Treaty between the USSR and Finland stated that both countries would not join any alliances or coalitions established against one another. The signing of the "Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance" between the USSR and Finland in April 1948 was possible only under these circumstances. Due to these agreements, Finland followed Sweden and chose the option of staying non-aligned when Denmark, Norway, and Iceland preferred to join NATO in the later years. Nevertheless, Finnish authorities had to take the opinion of the Soviet leaders into consideration until the collapse of the USSR. The end of the USSR and the signing of the "Treaty of Foundations of Mutual Relations" provided more freedom to Finland in the implementation of foreign policy in parallel with the end of Soviet hegemony over the Eastern European states. The only Russian port in the Baltic Sea was St. Petersburg and the Baltic States preferred the integration with Western Europe surrounding the Gulf of Finland.

The non-aligned status of Finland did not prevent the country from joining NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program as early as 1994. Full membership in the EU in 1995 helped Finland to feel more secure and become more politically stable. Nevertheless, since the end of the USSR, Finnish public opinion supported the policy of neutrality and joining NATO was out of question until the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in February 2022. Public opinion radically

changed in both Finland and Sweden after this invasion and the authorities in both countries applied for full membership in NATO in May 2022.

Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO means transforming the Gulf of Finland into internal waters of NATO as well as turning the Russo-Finnish border into the longest border between Russia and the Alliance.

3. The Changing Security Understanding: Enemy-Partner-Enemy

During the Cold War, only Norway (since 1949) and Türkiye (since 1952) were countries that had a land border with the Soviet Union. The USSR was a key factor in these countries' defense planning. The Kola Peninsula, which is part of the Murmansk Oblast and located in the northwestern part of the Russian territory, was the main basing position for the Soviet navy including nuclear forces. This region formed the line of contact until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The demise of the USSR ended the line of contact with Türkiye in the Caucasus and three independent South Caucasus states emerged between the two countries. Thus, Norway remained as the only country within NATO that had a land border with Russia. But the shift in global politics was reflected in the security understanding over time and NATO's strategic focus shifted accordingly from deterrence and collective defense to crisis management and cooperative security (Åtland, 2016). The enlargement of NATO caused the emergence of new NATO members at the border of the Russian Federation. For instance, Poland with more than 200 kilometers of land border with Russia's Kaliningrad region joined the Alliance in 1999. Baltic countries which all have equally long land borders with Russia followed the suit in 2004 by joining NATO. Although Russia was critical about NATO enlargement at the time, it did not define Russia as an enemy. However, each enlargement wave of the Alliance strengthened Russian threat perceptions about NATO – even causing them to believe that they were being contained similar to the Cold War period. Russia's threat perceptions about NATO peaked with NATO's declaration in Bucharest in 2008 which implied future membership to Ukraine and Georgia. Eventually, when Russia became more aggressive in foreign policy beginning with the 2008 military intervention in Georgia, the security understanding of both the Alliance and the countries in the region changed. Russian policies altered NATO's threat perceptions especially after Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. NATO's strategic concept once again shifted towards 'deterrence', and a 'deterrence by denial' posture has been adopted as a long-term goal (Wieslander, Adamson, & Lehto, 2023).

Russia's direct violations of international law with the annexation of Crimea and involvement in the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine left no doubt about Russian aggressive tendencies in Eastern Europe which urged the countries of the region to increase their partnership with NATO and the neutral states of Northern Europe were also obliged to think about their role as a buffer zone between Russia and Western Europe. Back in 2016, officials of these countries stated that

membership in the EU and being part of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) were not sufficient in dealing with emerging strategic challenges and that there was no hope to meet their security demands this way in the foreseeable future. The only option was deepening regional cooperation in the short term and following the developments in the regional and international conjuncture in the long term (Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, & Tiilikainen, 2016). Accordingly, NATO boosted its presence in the region as a short-term measure. The number of troops increased almost tenfold and multinational battlegroups have been transformed into brigade size. The aim was to reach a permanent force of 300,000 troops in high readiness under the leadership of the US headquarters in Poland (Pesu & Iso-Markku, 2022).

NATO adopted a new posture based on ‘deterrence-by-denial’ as a long-term target. The essence of this posture was enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Eastern Europe and the preparation of a defense policy based on air, sea, and land forces, including cyber and space areas (Wieslander et al., 2023). This was perceived as the only way to stand against Russia’s military strategy that includes both conventional and modern tools. In this respect, NATO began preparations for conducting its largest military exercise since the end of the Cold War with more than 90,000 troops: “Steadfast Defender 2024” held between January-May 2024 is based on a scenario in which a member of the alliance is target of aggression and the alliance responds by activating Article 5 of the NATO charter (NATO, 2024).

3.1. A New Type of Fighting: Hybrid War

A different paradigm for the solution of the problems in the region has been used since 2008. Russia’s military intervention in Georgia, which resulted in Russian recognition of the independence of South Osetia and Abkhazia proved that Russia was ready to resort to direct military confrontation to settle disputes. The war in Chechnya in the 1990s showed Russian weakness in terms of military equipment and military capabilities, but Putin’s program to modernize the Russian army seemed to be successful to a certain extent in almost ten years.

Disinformation operations, different forms of economic pressure and cyber warfare have increased opportunities for the states in the recent years. Russia has also made use of these tactics in international disputes during the last two decades. When used in a coherent and coordinated fashion, the so-called “hybrid warfare” tactics have the potential to maximize the effect of the military campaign. As Clark stated, Russia has a different understanding in that it defines a “hybrid war” as a strategic-level effort to shape the governance and geostrategic orientation of a target state in which all *actions, up to and including the use of conventional military forces in regional conflicts*, are subordinate to an information campaign (Clark, 2020) (emphasis in original).

Kremlin’s hybrid war during the 2014 invasion of Crimea accompanied by “little green men” without their badges of rank became a symbol of Russian understanding of the war in recent history. The use of private military companies (PMCs) is also a part of this understanding of war

as seen in many other countries such as Syria and Libya besides Ukraine. However, the recent armed uprising by Wagner PMC leader Yevgeny Prigozhin will undoubtedly affect the future Russian operations in the region (Soldatov & Borogan, 2023). Although the dramatic end of Prigozhin in a “coincidental” plane crash symbolizes the Kremlin’s decisiveness in showing its authority, instability in the Russian army could hinder its achievements in Ukraine.

The conduct of hybrid warfare necessitates the adoption of some measures that have already affected the security understanding in Northern Europe. The first and foremost measure is to centralize the decision-making in civilian government bodies and military circles as well as the media. It will make it easier to conduct information campaigns not only towards the enemy but also within the country to increase patriotic consciousness that is viewed as a prerequisite for hybrid wars by the Kremlin. The improvement of conventional expeditionary capabilities is the second measure in hybrid warfare. The usage of the PMCs and proxy forces is seen as a third way to improve Russian capabilities in modern wars although they create problems in their military circles besides international law (Clark, 2020). The “successful” Georgian and Crimean operations that ended quickly without huge military losses might have urged the Kremlin to choose the same option in other regions such as the Donbas region since 2014 and Ukraine since February 2022.

3.2. The End of Finlandization

For almost seven decades, the concept of Finlandization was understood as not taking sides between the two dominant blocs of the Cold War. Neither the USA (and NATO) nor the USSR (and the Warsaw Pact) could provide a security guarantee for Finland during the Cold War. However, Russian aggressive policies that began with the 2008 military intervention in Georgia and then the 2014 annexation of Crimea alarmed the states that were used to stay non-aligned. Thus, the changing security environment in the region brought an end to the concept of “Finlandization” due to the Russian threat knocking on their door.

Boldyreva and Bolyrev claim that the end of Finlandization was already in the making since 1995. Finland began to distance itself from Russia after the termination of the military and technical limitations of the 1947 peace treaty with the demise of the USSR. (“Treaty of Peace with Finland, 1947,” 1948). In the meantime, the Swedish political elite agreed on preserving Sweden’s neutrality and investing in their defensive capacity by relying on the fact that they did not have a land border with Russia (Zavada & Palok, 2022). It was their accession to the EU in 1995 that forced both countries to accept the joint European security and foreign policies defined by the other EU members who were already NATO members. That is why, especially when it came to the security policies towards Russia, these countries’ neutrality was only a phantom (Boldyreva & Boldyrev, 2018).

Russia’s aggressive moves in Europe were clear but limited before 2022. February 2022 marked the start of a direct and unlimited endeavor to invade the whole of Ukraine, with Russian military forces surrounding the capital city Kyiv. Even though Russian forces failed to capture Kyiv, this

was the end of an era for the regional states. Finland and Sweden could no longer stay neutral in this new environment. Besides, even Switzerland declared that it would cooperate with NATO although membership of this country does not seem likely in the near future (Revill, 2022). Thus, the very result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is the end of Finlandization (Gunter, 2022). The meaning of the term will perhaps change significantly. In fact, the 1,340 kilometer-long border between Finland and Russia has now turned into the longest border between Russia and a NATO member country.

Both Finland and Sweden are going to contribute to NATO's security while benefiting from the security umbrella of the Alliance. Finland, which implements a policy of general conscription, already has a well-trained and well-equipped army while Sweden has modern defense industry capabilities. Both states have special military capabilities that enable them to operate in the Arctic region. Russia's military prospects in the Baltic Sea were already limited due to the military presence of Denmark, Germany, and Poland in the region. However, the full membership of two Scandinavian countries in NATO converted the Baltic Sea into almost a "NATO lake" except the Russian coasts. This development made not only the Baltic region but also the whole of Eastern Europe more secure and it will make things harder for Russia in the military sphere in case it decides to attack another country in the region. Thus, it could be argued that there remains no neutral state in Eastern and Northern Europe due to the recent Russian aggression.

4. Recent Security Situation in the Region

The so-called Russian "special military operation"³ in Ukraine has negatively affected the security situation in Northern Europe. Footprints might be detected since Russian naval and aerial activities increased to the disadvantage of the Baltic states and Scandinavian countries after Russia's annexation of Crimea. Three areas of confrontation emerged between Russia and the regional countries: the land borders, the Baltic Sea, and the Barents Sea.

Until the recent membership of Finland and Sweden in NATO, Norway, Estonia, and Latvia were the only members that had land borders with Russia in the region. In Scandinavia, Norway was the only NATO member state that had almost a 200-kilometer-long land border with Russia. Moreover, Norway had a relatively peaceful history of relations with Russia compared to Finland and Sweden. For instance, Norway and Russia never waged war against each other, and on the contrary, collaborated during the Second World War. The Cold War and the geographical difficulties limited the interactions between the two countries until the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region Cooperation in 1993. The following years witnessed the development of Norwegian-Russian relations in the region. In addition to their historically peaceful relations, the fact that the number of Russian people in Norway is quite negligible, unlike the Baltic countries, decreased the Norwegians' threat perceptions about Russia even after the events in

3 The term is officially used by the Russian government and pro-Russian sources to denote the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, aiming to minimize the repercussions of the invasion in world politics.

Crimea and the Donbass region. It should be noted that even in cities located at the Norway-Russia border the Russian population is less than ten percent which is also the case with many Finnish cities that are close to the Russian border. From a historical viewpoint, Russians are well-integrated in the Norwegian or Finnish societies and they do not feel an existential threat to themselves coming from the state, but the same cannot be said for the Baltic countries.

Both Latvia and Estonia are home to a large Russian minority and they both have land borders with Russia. For years, Russia has directed severe accusations against the authorities of these two states for discriminating ethnic Russians. A similar – and perhaps a more severe process – was experienced in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine since ethnic Russians constituted the majority of the population in these two regions. Russian authorities even questioned the existence of ethnic Ukrainians and asserted that their existence as a separate state was a result of the Soviet policies. Similarly, both Latvia and Estonia were ruled directly by the Soviet Union and their negative historical memories about the Soviet rule compelled them to perceive the war in Ukraine as a direct threat to themselves.

Since the accession of the Baltic states to NATO in 2004, the Alliance's role as a security provider was strengthened in Northern Europe. Norway and Denmark were the founding members of the alliance in 1949. They were later joined by Germany (1955), Poland (1999), and the Baltic states (2004) which meant that the only non-aligned states in the region were Finland and Sweden. Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland had already formed the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFKO) in November 2009 to strengthen the national defense of the participants (NORDEFKO, 2023). Among them, only Finland and Sweden were not NATO members until 2023 and 2024 respectively. They were in a disadvantaged position since they were not covered by the collective security clause of the Alliance. The main goal of NORDEFKO was the integration of the armed forces of Nordic countries, however, the focus has shifted to developing operational military capabilities driven by security concerns within the ten years of its establishment. Beginning as a Norwegian-Swedish initiative the NORDEFKO soon became dominated by Swedish-Finnish and Swedish-Danish cooperation (Saxi, 2019).

After Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, both Finland and Sweden strengthened their ties with NATO. However, their security concerns became alarming after Russia's invasion of Ukraine started in February 2022 which immediately urged both countries to apply for membership in NATO. The NATO membership process was faster for Finland and slower for Sweden due to the veto of Türkiye which criticized Stockholm's tolerance for the activities of terrorist groups (i.e. PKK) in its territories.⁴ However, it should be recalled that Finland and Sweden are historically bound to act together as also indicated by their EU accession process. In this sense, Finland's NATO membership without Sweden becoming a NATO member would leave Finland as a strategic outpost of NATO against Russia without territorial continuity. Following Finland's accession to NATO, Sweden finally received green light from Ankara after the 2023

4 For a wide coverage of Türkiye's hard security concerns, and the approach of the NATO countries as a determining factor in strained relations, see: Atatorun, 2023.

general elections in Türkiye. In January 2024, the Turkish Parliament ratified Sweden's accession to NATO, and President Erdoğan approved the decision swiftly on the same day.

Today, NATO is an alliance of 32 countries, leaving only Russia as the non-NATO country in the Baltic Sea. NATO has a clear conventional advantage in comparison to Russia at the aggregate level. However, it is difficult to say the same thing for the smaller countries in East Europe that are neighbors of Russia. Russia still enjoys conventional superiority over these states. For instance, Åtland argues that it is certain that Norway will never be able to match Russian superiority in terms of the naval, air, and ground forces located in the Kola Peninsula (Åtland, 2016). Therefore, the best option for NATO to choose in the near future is to analyze Russia's hybrid warfare methods and learn from the Ukraine example.

Russia's military engagement in Ukraine could be viewed as an opportunity for NATO to build stronger and more efficient deterrence mechanisms. One of the first steps should be establishing airspace dominance over Northern Europe, most probably by investing in the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) which already includes the Baltic states, Germany, Norway, the UK, and Finland. Sweden should also join the initiative urgently (NATO, 2023). Creating a joint Nordic Air Force where combat aircraft of all these countries may conduct exercises through a Nordic Air Operations Center would force Russia to think twice about its violations of airspace in this area (Wieslander et al., 2023). Anti-access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategies aimed at denying access to Russia in the region are crucial in this respect (Kemp, 2020).

Other areas where NATO would benefit from Finland and Sweden is their possible contribution in the Arctic and the Baltic region through their sub-water capabilities. Russian covert underwater operations may be deterred by Swedish forces' support in submarine and seabed monitoring missions. Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities should urgently be made interoperable. The Nordic-Baltic countries, who are all members of NATO now, should speak with one voice especially while addressing security needs (Wieslander et al., 2023). The EU membership should also provide a platform to support logistical flows and build critical infrastructure in the region.

There is no doubt that Finland and Sweden's recent accession to NATO will affect both regional and international security strategies. However, Russia's unsuccessful attempt to capture Kyiv profoundly changed the strategic situation in Europe. Russia's harsh criticism against these two countries' close relations with NATO after the Cold War has lost its effect on the Finnish and Swedish decision-makers. Therefore, Russia's long-standing intimidation strategy became unfruitful since there was very little room of maneuver for Moscow to stand against NATO's new wave of enlargement while it was withdrawing from Kyiv after its failed attempt to capture the city. This could also be regarded as a failure according to the "National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation" which stated that NATO enlargement was still a threat to Russia's national security (O Strategii Natsional'noy Bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2021).

The Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation prepared a declaration on the changing security situation after the accession of Finland to NATO, which argued that this development would make a dramatic change in Northern Europe since the length of the line of contact between NATO and Russia has grown significantly. Diplomatic sources in Russia also stated that retaliatory measures of technical and military nature should be taken including concrete measures to counter Finland's military steps in order to integrate into the Alliance especially in the Russian border ("Kak Rossiya Otvetit Na Vstupleniye Finlyandii v NATO," 2023). An earlier report published by Finland's Foreign Ministry discussed Russia's possible response to NATO enlargement and compared the situation with the fighter jet crisis between Türkiye and Russia of November 2015. According to this report, Russia may increase pressure on the Baltic states' borders, try to politically manipulate the ethnic Russians both in the Baltic states and Finland, and inflict damage on the trade relations (Bergquist et al., 2016). Yet, it should be remembered that while previous NATO enlargements, including those that happened in the bipolar world order of the Cold War period, drew significant criticism from the Soviet and Russian authorities, eventually status quo prevailed.⁵ Exceptional cases were the Georgian and Ukrainian attempts to strengthen their relations with NATO, which urged Russia to use military force in order to prevent changes in the status quo. However, due to its failure to capture Kyiv in the Ukraine war, it seems very difficult for Russia to take the risk of resorting to military power once more in other parts of the region in the short term.

5. Conclusion

Russia's lack of respect for the sovereignty of its neighbors in Northern Europe caused a deterioration in regional security especially since 2014. Economic hardships and the long-lasting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic made it more difficult for other European states to cope with this situation. For Sweden and Finland, one of the ways to counter the Russian threat was to end their decades-long non-aligned status. In the short-run, this was undoubtedly a crucial step in deterring Russia within the Northern European security area. However, the strategic implications of the end of the concept of "Finlandization" and bringing Russia and NATO face-to-face along a land border that is longer than 1,000 kilometers will be revealed in the long run.

Although NATO has superiority over Russia at the aggregate level, the opposite can be said in terms of conventional forces at the regional level. Especially before February 2022, limited forward presence caused scholars to make such analyses while comparing the military capabilities of Russia and NATO. Finland and Sweden's membership in the Alliance which was concluded in a rapid way will most likely decrease the chance of a potential military Russian response to NATO on the one hand. On the other hand, their membership in NATO will complete the unity of the Baltic region and Scandinavia enabling them to counter Russia both in their region and in the Arctic. Otherwise, it would not be possible for Norway to match Russia's superiority in terms of

5 Türkiye (1952), The Federal Republic of Germany (1955), the former German Democratic Republic (1990) through reunification, Poland (1999), the Baltic States (2004).

naval, air, and land forces located in the Kola Peninsula. However, Russia's use of sophisticated non-military and asymmetrical means to influence the situation in Ukraine must be taken into consideration while planning the military moves to counter Russia in Northern Europe. Since small countries in the region are not capable of countering Russia on their own in this sense, NATO should prioritize multinational cooperation.

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