



STRATEGIC FORUM

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About the Author

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Key Points

- ◆ The United States has an overarching national security interest in European partners that broadly share U.S. values and are willing to help foster peace and security both regionally and globally. Since the early 1990s, Finland and Sweden have transformed their security policies and defense structures in ways that improve their ability to work closely with America.
- ◆ Finland and Sweden plan to maintain capable (albeit smaller) militaries, reflecting lingering doubts regarding Russia and rising concerns about other security challenges. Both favor close cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), despite their official stance of “military non-alignment.”
- ◆ While Finland and Sweden have not asked to join NATO, the pros and cons of possible accession are discussed within their political and defense establishments. Finland is better positioned politically than Sweden to make a decision to seek NATO membership, although the Finnish government is unlikely to make such a move before 2012. The situation could then evolve quickly, depending on internal political alignments and factors such as NATO performance in Afghanistan and Russian attitudes regarding further Alliance enlargement.

Finland, Sweden, and NATO: From “Virtual” to Formal Allies?

by Leo G. Michel

Does the “Open Door” Face North?

The “Open Door” policy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been an article of faith for Allies and aspirants alike for more than a decade. Its most recent formulation, approved at the November 2010 Lisbon Summit, states: “The door to NATO membership remains fully open to all European democracies which share the values of our Alliance, which are willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and whose inclusion can contribute to common security and stability.”¹

In practice, however, near-term prospects for further enlargement toward Eastern and Southeastern Europe have stalled for various reasons:

- ◆ At Lisbon, NATO reiterated its agreement (at the April 2008 Bucharest Summit) to invite the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to join the Alliance “as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached.”² Greece continues to object, however, to its neighbor’s insistence on using its constitutional name, which is the Republic of Macedonia.
- ◆ Montenegro participates in NATO’s Membership Action Plan (MAP), but has yet to fully implement its first annual national program, while Bosnia-Herzegovina has yet to fulfill the conditions for full MAP participation set by NATO foreign ministers in April 2010.
- ◆ Although NATO reaffirmed at Lisbon its agreement (also at the previous Bucharest Summit) that Georgia would become a member of NATO, several Allies oppose inviting Georgia to join the MAP, especially given

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its unresolved conflict with Russia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

- ◆ As for Ukraine, following his election in February 2010, President Viktor Yanukovich effectively shelved the previous government's declared aspiration to join the Alliance.

These developments should not be cause for undue alarm. NATO's successive rounds of enlargement in 1999, 2004, and 2009 have contributed to the Alliance goal of "a just and lasting peaceful order in Europe" based on democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law.³ Still, the enlargement process has not been pain free, and numerous NATO member state officials and experts privately suggest that Eastern and Southeastern Partners must better demonstrate that they will be reliable "security providers" rather than "security consumers."

Since the early 1990s, Finland and Sweden have transformed their national security policies and defense structures in response to major changes in their strategic environment. The dramatic collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 removed the most credible, near-term military threat to their territory and national independence. Over the following decade, the rapid waning of the Cold War ideological conflict and growing attractiveness of European integration eroded Finnish and Swedish motivations for pursuing neutralist foreign policies. The two countries now broadly accept the need to work closely with European and transatlantic partners to respond to security challenges in and beyond Europe.

Indeed, since joining the Partnership for Peace (PFP) in 1994, Finland and Sweden have developed such close ties with NATO, including their participation in NATO-led operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan, that they are now widely regarded as "virtual Allies." Neither country has asked to join the Alliance, in contrast with the dozen former Partners in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe that have become members since 1999.⁴

Finnish and/or Swedish accession to NATO would depart from the enlargement paradigm set over the past 11 years. Finland and Sweden are longstanding democ-

racies and EU member states with advanced, generally high-performing economies.⁵ Their military forces were never subordinated to the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact, and they already have accumulated considerable experience in overseas (mainly peacekeeping) missions. Moreover, their regional security environment is relatively stable, especially when compared with the Balkans and South Caucasus. Thus, even Finns and Swedes who see NATO membership as an attractive option are generally disinclined to argue (as did their Baltic neighbors) that it is an urgent strategic imperative.

Finnish and/or Swedish accession to NATO would depart from the enlargement paradigm set over the past 11 years

Why might Finland or Sweden want to change the status quo? How might Russia react to an eventual bid, by one or both countries, for NATO membership? What would be NATO's equities? These are important questions as NATO considers how best to implement the enhanced dialogue and cooperation with Partners promised by the new Strategic Concept and Lisbon Summit Declaration.

Views from Helsinki

The Finnish debate over joining NATO has simmered at varying degrees of intensity for nearly a decade. At a geostrategic level, it is framed by Finnish relationships with Russia, other European partners, and the United States.

Russia. Russia is "the most important factor in Finland's security environment," according to the *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2009* (hereafter "Government Report").⁶ Finnish preoccupation with Russia is understandable, given the legacy of two bloody wars with the Soviet Union during 1939–1944 and Finland's susceptibility to, and resentment of, security, political, and economic pressures exerted by Moscow over the

next 45 years. Indeed, Finland's self-declared neutrality during the Cold War was primarily an exercise in realpolitik intended to protect the country from being drawn further under Soviet influence rather than to separate the country from the West.

In public, Finnish officials typically eschew any explicit suggestion that Russia poses a military threat to their country. However, they are adept at signaling their concern with Russia's foreign policy assertiveness and its long-term intentions, especially in the wake of that country's armed conflict with Georgia in August 2008. For example, Defense Minister Jyri Häkämies dismissed "any actual military threat against Finland" in an April 2010 speech, but he quickly added: "According to the Russian world view, military force is a key element in how it conducts its international relations. . . . If [Russia's] military procurement program [is] financed as expected, it will mean a much stronger Russia in military terms by the end of the next decade."⁷ Similarly, the Finnish Defense Command's public assertion that "Finland's defense is not built on any specific enemy or threat" seems belied by its subsequent clarification that the "focal point in developing Finland's defense is planning how to prevent and repel a surprise strategic strike."⁸ While unnamed, the hypothetical origin of such a strike is presumably no mystery to Finnish readers, especially when an accompanying chart of regional peacetime military forces depicts Russian quantitative advantages over Finland by factors of 1.25 for troops, 3.6 for surface ships and submarines, 6.8 for armor, and 7.1 for combat aircraft.⁹

Finnish security interests regarding Russia are not limited to the military sphere. Finnish border guards, police (including counterterrorism units), and customs authorities focus their resources on securing the 1,200-kilometer land border with Russia and closely monitoring its maritime activities in the northern Gulf of Finland. Some Finnish analysts cite widespread allegations of Russian involvement in the serious disruption of Estonian cyber networks in 2007 as an example of Moscow's ability to intimidate neighbors while maintaining plausible deniability. Others cite ineffectual Russian en-

vironmental policies and practices as a major source of air and water pollution in and around Finland. Reported lapses in Russian safety standards and enforcement related to nuclear energy production and waste management are additional sources of Finnish nervousness.

In response to such concerns, Finland has not simply retreated into a defensive crouch. Instead, while keeping a close watch on Russian military- and security-related developments, it has pursued a broad agenda of cooperation with its neighbor. Indeed, Russia was Finland's leading trading partner in terms of exports and imports in 2009, and Finland relies entirely on Russia for its natural gas supplies.¹⁰ In April 2009, the Finnish government's "Russia Action Plan" emphasized the importance of building broader contacts, bilaterally as well as within European Union (EU) structures, to increase political dialogue, trade, tourism, investment, transportation links, cultural exchanges, and "to prevent negative phenomena which also impact Finland, such as crime and health hazards."¹¹

European Partnership. The EU, as a rule, enjoys pride of place in Finnish official statements, research papers, and press commentary on foreign policy matters. Finland regards its membership in the EU as an "integral element of (its) security policy," according to the Government Report. The EU is a key actor in many nonmilitary areas that directly affect Finnish security in the broadest sense of the term, including immigration, energy, transportation, environmental change, and infectious diseases. In addition, since 1999, the EU has built new structures and taken on increased responsibilities in the areas of crisis management operations and development of civilian and military crisis management capabilities. Through its EU membership, Finland "aims to develop the European Union into an increasingly efficient and coherent actor (that) would directly contribute to Finland's security and international position."¹²

Overall, Finland has actively promoted development of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) as a means of advancing the common security of EU member states and the EU's global influence.¹³ For example, during the Finnish Presidency of the EU

in 1999, its officials shepherded the launch of the ambitious “Helsinki Headline Goal,” whereby EU member states agreed to develop, by 2003, the ability to deploy up to 50,000–60,000 military personnel within 60 days and sustain them for at least 1 year in missions ranging from humanitarian and rescue actions to peacekeeping and separation of warring parties. Over the past decade, Finnish officials have served in responsible positions in the European Union’s defense- and crisis management-related structures.

In line with its support for CSDP, Finnish personnel have participated in several EU-led military and civilian crisis management missions. Some 300 Finnish soldiers participate in the Nordic and German-Dutch “battlegroups” within the EU’s rotating system of rapid reaction forces; both battlegroups will be on standby status during the first half of 2011. (The EU has yet to deploy a battlegroup formation. Finnish parliamentarians recently questioned the cost-effectiveness of their country’s participation, noting that the 29-million-euro cost of keeping Finnish units on standby for the EU is nearly twice as much as the annual training cost for 26,000 reservists, and Defense Minister Häkämies has agreed to review the issue.) In addition, Finland plans to deploy a minesweeper with the EU antipiracy operation *Atalanta* in early 2011.

During the negotiations on the Lisbon Treaty, Finland strongly supported provisions aimed at improving EU defense capabilities and crisis management mechanisms. However, Finnish officials draw a careful distinction between the EU’s modest capabilities to conduct military crisis management tasks outside EU territory and the organization’s inability to provide for the collective defense of its member states.¹⁴ According to these officials, CSDP likely will have some beneficial effect on Europe’s ability to defend itself by facilitating intra-European cooperation on defense capabilities—notably through the European Defense Agency (EDA)—and broadening European experience in multinational operations. They also credit the Lisbon Treaty’s “mutual assistance” obligation with bolstering the EU’s political

solidarity, thereby helping to deter external aggression against its member states.¹⁵

However, many of these same officials pointedly note that the EU has no planning or headquarters structures to support a collective defense mission. Moreover, many Finnish experts doubt that the EU would be able, in the foreseeable future, to muster the military capability and political will necessary to deter or defeat a potential aggressor. Their view remains essentially identical to a former Finnish official’s observation in 2005: “A separate European defense would be possible only if we could be completely certain that it will not be put to the test in a real situation.”¹⁶

Finland sees regional cooperation as another element of its national security. Accordingly, it has expanded bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Sweden and NATO Allies Norway, Denmark, and Iceland in recent years. In late 2009, for example, the five countries agreed to consolidate previously separate arrangements into a single structure: the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO). Today, this structure covers a broad spectrum of strategy development (ranging from cooperative studies to research, development, and testing); capabilities (including armaments and logistics); human resources and education, training, and exercises; and cooperation (including planning and execution) in NATO- and EU-led—and, potentially, future UN-led—operations. To cite one noteworthy example, the Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish air forces conduct regular cross-border training exercises of their respective air defense and air-to-ground strike capabilities. The three countries also have cooperative air transport arrangements for their troops and supplies to and from Afghanistan.

The geographical proximity of NORDEFECO countries, their many shared foreign and security interests (including overseas peacekeeping missions), and their increasing attention to environmental and security implications of energy production and transit in the Nordic and Arctic regions almost certainly will spur expanded cooperation in the future. Thanks to the membership of NATO Allies, NORDEFECO may be

a useful channel for Finnish (and Swedish) access to information on NATO's activities and thinking.

However, Finnish officials do not see NORDEFECO as a stepping stone to a mutually binding guarantee of a common Nordic response to external attack "or undue pressure," as recommended by former Norwegian foreign and defense minister Thorvald Stoltenberg in a 2009 report.¹⁷ Among other reasons, these officials do not believe the Nordic countries, acting together but without support from NATO, necessarily could deter or defend against a serious external attack.

Finland also has developed broad defense-related ties with Estonia, which has embraced Finnish mentorship. While Finnish analysts assess that the Baltic states' membership in NATO benefits Finland by promoting regional stability, they do not believe it has changed their country's fundamental strategic situation vis-à-vis Russia.

The United States. Keeping the United States actively engaged in European security matters has emerged as a primary strategic objective of Finnish policymakers, albeit one that is seldom acknowledged explicitly. The Finnish government readily acknowledges the key U.S. role in shaping the international security environment. According to the Government Report, "the United States is the only great power with global interests and the capability for global power projection. . . . [It] continues to play a predominant role in the stability of Europe and the Baltic Sea region."¹⁸ In private conversation, leading Finnish experts go even further, suggesting that for European security in general—and their region in particular—it would be more accurate to describe the U.S. role as vital or essential. To that end, Finnish officials have pursued both multilateral and bilateral tracks.

From a Finnish perspective, their Partnership relationship with NATO (see section below) represents the most important multilateral track precisely because the United States has made it clear that it regards NATO as the key forum for security cooperation with Europe. To be sure, Finnish officials highly value NATO's role in promoting intra-European cooperation on a wide range of military and political-military issues, but they view the Alliance's trans-

atlantic dimension as its unique, critical, and long-term advantage—especially as an ultimate guarantor of European security in the event of a future threat from Russia.

Finnish officials also support close EU bilateral relations with the United States. However, they accept that insofar as defense- and security-related issues are concerned, Washington's strong preference will remain to work with Europe through NATO, where Americans have a seat at the table.

Finland has sought to complement its multilateral defense tracks with an increasingly close bilateral defense relationship with the United States. For example:

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- ◆ Some 60 U.S.-manufactured F-18 Hornets (armed with Sidewinder and AMRAAM air-to-air missiles) are the backbone of the Finnish air force's air defense capability, and a mid-life upgrade will provide an air-to-ground capability as well.
- ◆ Finnish ground forces are being equipped with U.S.-origin multiple launch rocket systems.
- ◆ Finland and the United States are cooperating on several maritime projects, including the use of aluminum mono-hulls, ice breaker technologies, and advanced hovercraft.
- ◆ The two governments recently updated their 1991 reciprocal defense procurement memorandum of understanding, which will further increase cooperation between their respective defense industries.
- ◆ In addition, a small number of Finnish officers serve in liaison roles at the headquarters of U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) in Norfolk,

Virginia, and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) in Tampa, Florida, and Finnish officers regularly attend U.S. professional military education institutions, including the National Defense University in Washington, DC.

Finnish Defense Transformation and NATO

Finland's relationship with NATO has facilitated the transformation of its defense forces in ways that influential Finnish defense and military officials believe are necessary in their own right. While this transformation is still a work in progress, it has made appreciable headway in terms of personnel and capabilities.

Finland does not accept any direction by NATO in determining its force levels, structures, or methods of recruitment

Since 2004, the “wartime” force has been reduced from nearly 500,000 to approximately 350,000 military personnel, comprised of 250,000 personnel designated for the largely static “regional” forces and 100,000 for the more mobile and capable “operational” forces. Currently, there are roughly 8,800 active duty military personnel; most serve as cadre forces supported by conscripts (in peacetime) and reservists (in a crisis situation). The Government Report forecasted a long-term reduction in the wartime force by cutting a few major formations, but did not announce a specific figure for lowering the wartime strength, despite some military advice to do so.¹⁹ Over the past year, however, senior defense officials have suggested that the wartime strength should be reduced to 250,000 or lower over the next few years, with savings to be used for improved training and equipment.²⁰ These officials have not advocated ending conscription, which remains politically popular,

but have noted that problems with the conscript pool might necessitate changes in its organization.²¹

Finland began shedding its Cold War legacy equipment in the mid-1990s, gradually introducing more modern platforms, C⁴ISR, and logistics systems.²² The current focus is on upgrading air defense capabilities. Under current plans, the focus will shift to modernizing the army's regional troops during 2012–2016 and, thereafter, to upgrading the operational troops. Although the Government Report tends to stress the relevance of modernization programs to territorial defense, Finnish military experts emphasize the importance of a “one rail” approach that seeks to ensure, to the maximum practical degree, compatibility between capabilities needed for national defense and those needed for crisis response operations abroad. Overall defense spending is expected to remain at about 1.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Assessing NATO's influence on specific Finnish decisions on personnel and capabilities is not a straightforward proposition, since senior Finnish officials acknowledge that their pre-2004 structures were simply unsustainable for financial and demographic reasons. Still, the cumulative impact of the Finnish-NATO relationship is substantial.

For example, Finland participates in the Planning and Review Process (PARP), which is the Partnership for Peace counterpart to NATO's process of identifying the military capabilities necessary to meet the level of ambition agreed to by the Alliance political leadership and of periodically reviewing each Ally's performance in meeting its agreed-upon force goals. Since the PARP force goals must be mutually agreed upon by NATO and the individual Partner countries, Finland does not in fact accept any direction by NATO in determining its force levels, structures, method of recruitment (professional vs. conscription), or capabilities development programs. Rather, participation in the PARP is a window into NATO that provides the Finnish defense establishment with an in-depth understanding of NATO requirements, force structures, standards, and planning disciplines. The PARP, in turn, improves Finland's defense planning skills

and helps it to frame national decisions in ways that favor a high degree of interoperability with NATO forces.

Beyond the PARP, Finland's relationship with NATO opens opportunities to join collective approaches that save on operating, maintenance, and other costs, providing capabilities that many individual countries could not afford on their own. For example, Finland participates along with 10 Allies (plus Sweden) in the Strategic Airlift Capability Initiative, which operates three C-17 strategic air transporters.²³ In addition, through military liaison arrangements with Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and the participation of both military and civilian officials in various NATO education and training courses, Finnish authorities can keep abreast of and contribute to NATO's ongoing transformation efforts.²⁴ Finland also participates in an array of NATO-led field and table-top exercises, which improve its ability to perform in actual operations. In October 2010, the Finnish government approved the contribution of a deployable chemical-biological-radiological-nuclear laboratory (including some 60 personnel) to the NATO Response Force reserve forces pool during 2012.

Finland's role in NATO-led operations is among the most striking demonstrations of the country's post-Cold War transformation. In 1996, Finland dispatched several hundred soldiers to NATO's Stabilization Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina; the contingent stayed, although in smaller numbers, until 2003. Finland has been a troop contributor to NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) since 1999, deploying some 900 soldiers during peak years of the operation. Moreover, in 2008, Finland became the first Partner to serve as a "framework nation" for one of KFOR's three regional multinational task forces. Finland officially discontinued its KFOR contingent in December 2010 and will withdraw all but 20 of its remaining soldiers during 2011.

Afghanistan has been Finland's most demanding overseas commitment. Finland joined the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2002. Around 180 Finnish troops serve in a Swedish-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in northern Afghanistan, where

they increasingly focus on training Afghan security forces.²⁵ Faced with growing public questioning about the conflict, Finnish political leaders take pains to stress that these troops serve under a UN mandate and are not at war.²⁶

From a Finnish military perspective, the lessons learned from Afghanistan have been significant. For example, according to press reports, Finnish troops complained in 2007 that equipment shortages—notably in armored vehicles, weapons, and night vision devices—impaired their operational capabilities and security. According to Finnish security experts, this forced a reexamination of national procurement and logistics procedures, but it also demonstrated the practical benefits of pursuing greater NATO interoperability. In addition, some Finnish officers who previously served with ISAF credit that experience with having strengthened a warrior ethos in their ranks.

Political Debate Advances—But Slowly

At first glance, the decade-long Finnish debate on whether to seek NATO membership appears stuck among three deep-seated but irreconcilable lines of argument, raising the prospect that it will remain unresolved for many years to come. On closer examination, the debate is less clear-cut than frequently portrayed:

- ◆ Outright opponents of membership exist at both ends of the political spectrum. Some in this group argue that history proves that Finland cannot rely on others for its defense. In their view, joining NATO might actually weaken Finland by discouraging its national defense programs and/or diverting its limited forces and resources to fighting "the wars of others"; for many in this camp, "others" means the United States. Some opponents are motivated more by neutralist and/or pacifist beliefs. They tend to emphasize that as Finland becomes more integrated into a globalized world, any entanglement in broad security cooperation, whether through NATO or the EU, risks unnecessary involvement in international crises that

might escalate into military conflict. For many membership opponents, fear of provoking Russia apparently adds to their concerns.

- ◆ A second school of thought favors, in effect, an indefinite deferral of any decision to apply for membership. Its adherents generally avoid the nationalist strains evident among some outright opponents, although many share an underlying worry about Russian reactions. They emphasize, instead, that Finland already has excellent relations with NATO, and they hold that the country would gain little additional advantage—and, indeed, would incur substantial new obligations—as a result of membership. Some within this group also believe that NATO membership would detract from their goal of advancing intra-European defense cooperation through the EU. Still others believe that Finland could rapidly apply for and gain NATO membership if the security environment were to deteriorate.
- ◆ Like the other two groups, proponents of near-term NATO membership are not a monolithic bloc. Many are deeply skeptical of Finland’s ability to go it alone in the face of potential future security threats emanating from Russia. Doubting the EU’s ability to develop a reliable common defense, they see NATO’s Article 5 (the collective defense provision of the 1949 Washington Treaty) as a strong guarantee of transatlantic—and especially U.S.—protection. Others are less preoccupied with Russia, but see NATO as a vital instrument for multinational cooperation to deal with security challenges beyond territorial defense that affect important Finnish interests. In their view, Finland’s Partner status, while beneficial, is too constrained.

Over the past several years, the debate has shifted in subtle but important ways, and it is now dominated by the latter two groups. One reason for this is the spate of published reports—by government ministries, government-

and parliament-appointed commissions, and respected nongovernment think tanks—that have examined NATO’s roles, missions, and organization and their relationship to Finnish security and defense policy.

For example, a February 2004 report prepared by an expert working group of the Defense Ministry and Defense Staff provided the first comprehensive look at the effects of possible NATO membership on five functional areas: political and economic; defense and military; resources; security (of information); and legal questions.²⁷ The watershed report, which included detailed cost estimates, did not contain a recommendation on whether Finland should join a military alliance or continue its “militarily non-aligned” policy.²⁸ However, its thoroughness and objectivity set a high standard for the treatment of NATO-related issues in subsequent reports by the Foreign Ministry, Prime Minister’s Office, and the independent Finnish Institute of International Affairs—all of which have received extensive media attention. Their cumulative effect has been to better inform the Finnish political class and broader electorate on these issues and to explode some of the pervasive myths regarding NATO; these include misperceptions that NATO could force Finland to participate in operations against its will, acquire capabilities “dictated” by NATO authorities, or abandon conscription.

A second reason for the shifting debate is the “dual enlargement” of NATO and EU membership.²⁹ Today, 21 of 27 EU member states are also NATO Allies. As Finnish observers point out, this means that roughly 95 percent of the EU’s population now lives in states that belong to both organizations. Moreover, two developments likely have strengthened the argument of proponents of NATO membership that Finland’s position is out of step with most fellow Europeans: the marked shift since 2005 toward closer practical cooperation between NATO and the EU—a process strongly supported by the Finnish government; and the 2009 decision by France (a leading proponent of autonomous EU defense capabilities) to return to full participation in NATO’s military structure.

Opinion polling over the past decade reflects somewhat contradictory attitudes regarding NATO.

According to one respected survey conducted in late 2010, 80 percent of respondents believe that Finnish defense policy has been conducted “extremely well” or “fairly well” during recent years, when Finland has steadily increased cooperation with NATO as well as the EU.³⁰ The survey also indicates that the population, while divided roughly in half over whether Finland could defend itself in a conventional war, prefers by a substantial majority to remain “militarily non-aligned.” Asked specifically about NATO, 68 percent of respondents opposed membership, with 25 percent in favor; in 2007, a similar poll showed 69 percent against and 26 percent in favor. The most important single reason given for opposition to membership (50 percent of respondents) was that Finnish soldiers “would be sent abroad to take part in foreign wars,” with a much smaller number (29 percent) citing concern that membership would “increase the threat from Russia.”

According to some Finnish political observers, opposition to NATO membership is soft, and a majority of Finns would switch relatively quickly to supporting membership if their top political leaders were to advocate it openly. While that has not happened, increased public discussion of NATO membership is making it more difficult for the politicians to completely sidestep the issue, even if their declarations are artfully ambiguous.

For example, the official view of the four party center-right coalition government (National Coalition Party, Center Party, Swedish People’s Party, and Green League), as reflected in the 2009 Government Report, is that “strong grounds exist for considering Finland’s membership in NATO. As regards a decision on possible membership, broad political consensus is essential, and it is important to take public opinion into account.”³¹ Since her appointment in June 2010, Prime Minister Mari Kiviniemi (Center Party) has not commented extensively on NATO. Other Center Party figures hold that the issue cannot be seriously addressed until after the April 2011 parliamentary election.

The National Coalition Party is the only center-right party where the level of support for NATO mem-

bership (48 percent, according to the 2010 poll) runs significantly higher than that of the population as a whole.³² Its key leaders, including Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb and Defense Minister Häkämies, openly champion deeper cooperation with NATO, which they describe as an essential part of European security and the bedrock of transatlantic cooperation. While generally avoiding references to the virtues of “military non-alignment,” they are careful not to deviate publicly from the coalition government’s agreed-on language.

Among the center-left parties, President Tarja Halonen (of the Social Democratic Party) is a longstanding advocate of “non-participation in military alliances.” She favors close cooperation between Finland and NATO, but not membership.³³ Her personal popularity and constitutional authority to direct foreign policy in cooperation with the government ensure that Finland will not make any decision to seek NATO membership before her term ends

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in early 2012. Social Democratic leader Jutta Urpilainen supports “keeping the option open” to join NATO, while insisting that there is no threat that would justify seeking membership anytime soon—in any event, not before the next parliamentary term ends in 2015.

While polls indicate that among Social Democrats opponents of NATO membership outnumber supporters by approximately three to one, some prominent former Social Democrat politicians have distanced themselves from the current party leadership on this issue. For example, in a December 2010 television interview, the widely-respected former Finnish president (and Nobel Peace Prize winner) Martti Ahtisaari regretted that the domestic debate on NATO was not “moving forward.”³⁴ Emphasizing that NATO is a “central

peacekeeping operation” and poses “no threat to Russia,” he asked rhetorically: “We have to look and see what group we belong to. Are we ending up in the same group as Ukraine and Belarus?”

According to Finnish political analysts, the NATO membership issue is unlikely to play a major role in the April 2011 parliamentary elections. However, a victory by the incumbent four-party coalition, especially if led by the National Coalition Party, might raise the profile of the membership issue in the January 2012 presidential contest. If the next president were to favor NATO membership—and incumbent President Halonen, who won by a 3.6 percent vote margin over her National Coalition Party opponent in 2006, cannot run for a third term—the government would have several options.

For example, according to one scenario, Finland would enjoy a window of opportunity in early 2012 to apply for membership in time to receive a formal invitation to join at that year’s NATO summit, which will be held in the United States. (Such a meeting likely would take place during the first half of 2012, before the U.S. presidential campaign enters its most intensive phase.) Under a less ambitious scenario, the Finnish government might use the planned revision of its Report on Security and Defense Policy in 2013 as a launching point to build a consensus for a membership bid in the 2014–2015 timeframe.³⁵ Alternatively, Finland might opt for the “status quo plus,” consisting of continued Partnership with an increased level of involvement in selected NATO activities.

View from Stockholm

Despite their geographical proximity, historical ties, and increasingly close cooperation in many areas of government and economic activity, Sweden and Finland possess distinctive strategic cultures. This is not surprising; Sweden, unlike its neighbor, has been at peace for nearly 200 years. In particular, Sweden’s brand of neutralism during the Cold War, while progressively diluted and eventually sidelined

in the 1990s, still colors its security policy debates in important ways.

First among these is the contradiction between Sweden’s longstanding declaratory policy of “military non-alignment” and the reality that during much of the Cold War, its leaders believed “the West would provide military help in case neutrality failed and Sweden was attacked by the Soviet Union.”³⁶ Indeed, as documented by one Swedish defense expert, successive governments undertook multiple and detailed measures during the 1950s to “facilitate wartime military cooperation” with several NATO Allies—notably the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, and Denmark—and, albeit to a lesser degree, with NATO itself.³⁷ A significant number of the political and military elite reportedly were aware of these arrangements despite their public denials. The arrangements were allowed to lapse following the Social Democrats’ return to government in 1982.

A second important factor was the shift in Swedish government circles and public attitudes—beginning in the late 1950s and accelerating in the 1960s, as U.S. involvement in Vietnam expanded—from a “pragmatic neutralism” aimed mainly at avoiding entanglement in East-West conflicts to a “more puritan declaratory doctrine” with “overtone of moral rectitude.”³⁸ By the 1970s, prominent Swedish political and public figures had become outspoken advocates of nuclear disarmament, with many engaging in one-sided criticism of Western reliance on nuclear deterrence. At the same time, this moralistic strain in foreign policy both encouraged and facilitated greater Swedish activism in peacekeeping and observation missions under UN auspices. Hence, while the current debate in Sweden over joining NATO is framed, as it is in Finland, primarily by the country’s relationships with Russia, other European partners, and the United States, the context and implications of those relationships are viewed somewhat differently by Stockholm.

Russia. Overall, Russia figures less prominently in Swedish discussions of defense and security policy than in Finland. Swedish officials acknowledge that they cannot “rule out the risk of military conflicts” in the Baltic

Sea region, although they believe Sweden is unlikely to be singled out for armed attack for the foreseeable future.³⁹ However, with few exceptions, Swedish government officials and security experts are even more circumspect than their Finnish counterparts when addressing potential security challenges emanating from Russia.

For example, although Foreign Minister Carl Bildt publicly criticized Russia's "aggression" and "authoritarian direction" in the immediate aftermath of its armed conflict with Georgia, such rhetoric largely disappeared from Swedish official declarations by late 2009. The "Statement of Government Policy," delivered by Foreign Minister Bildt to the parliament in February 2010, contains only passing references to Russia that welcome "the Russian President's statements on the importance of a functioning rule of law and an extensive modernization of Russian society" and the conclusion of a new U.S.-Russian strategic nuclear arms reductions treaty.⁴⁰

For their part, defense ministry officials carefully avoid explicit mention of Russia as a potential threat, emphasizing that its military as a whole is relatively weak (compared with its Soviet antecedents) and suffers from a poorly performing economy (except for the energy sector) and depressing demographic trends. However, as Defense Minister Sten Tolgfors stated in a July 2009 speech, the "old, large-scale invasion" scenario is not Sweden's greatest concern. Russia, he observed, is concentrating on developing "rapidly mobile operational units . . . intended for operations in Russia or very near Russia." "If anyone were to act against a Baltic State the way Russia acted against Georgia," he added, "that would have fundamental security policy implications."⁴¹

Like Finland, Sweden is concerned about a variety of nonmilitary security and environmental challenges involving Russia, especially those associated with energy flows and maritime security in the Baltic Sea. Stockholm has sought to engage Moscow in cooperative efforts to address these challenges, but with an emphasis on coordination through the EU. This is explained, in part, by the relatively modest bilateral leverage available to Sweden. For example, according to 2008 figures, Russia did not figure among Sweden's

top five trading partners, and crude oil accounted for nearly 70 percent of Swedish imports from Russia.

European Partnership. In the mid-1990s, some Swedish officials and nongovernment opinion leaders were reluctant to see the EU gravitate toward greater involvement in security and defense matters, apparently fearing that it might generate momentum for a European army that would be fundamentally incompatible with Swedish policy. Today, however, the EU's CSDP normally enjoys top billing in Swedish official statements and think-tank analysis. In his February 2010 statement, for example, Foreign Minister Bildt argued that Swedish membership in the EU means it "is part of a political alliance and takes its share of responsibility, in the spirit of solidarity, for Europe's security."

Like Finland, Sweden has participated actively in a range of CSDP-related activities. Sweden has provided land forces to EU-led military operations in Africa (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Chad) and Bosnia Herzegovina, and serves as "lead nation" for the Nordic battlegroup. The Swedish navy has participated in the EU-led antipiracy operations off the Somali coast. Sweden also is an active member of the EDA, reflecting in part its dependence on the European market for arms exports.⁴²

One consequence of Sweden's involvement in EU security and defense matters has been to legitimize the government's moves to distance the country from its official policy of "military non-alignment" without taking the politically risky path of explicitly renouncing it. Specifically, the government's "solidarity declaration," adopted in 2007 (and expanded in 2008) with the approval from all the political parties seated in parliament, states inter alia: "Sweden will not remain passive if a disaster or an attack would strike another EU member state or a Nordic country. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is similarly affected. . . . Sweden, in light of this, will have both the ability to receive and provide military support (in crisis and conflict)."⁴³

Swedish officials describe the declaration as a "statement of political will" and note that Sweden will decide how to act on a case-by-case basis. Notwithstanding

such qualifications, the declaration's open recognition of Sweden's security interdependence with its fellow EU members and Nordic neighbor (and NATO Ally) Norway represents a major watershed in Swedish security policy. As Defense Minister Tolgfors suggested in July 2009, the declaration makes clear that Sweden's defense does not begin at its borders; instead, "incidents, conflicts and war must be prevented from reaching our borders."

The declaration also has fueled discussion within Swedish defense and foreign policy circles over whether the EU might eventually assume a collective defense role and become, in effect, an alternative to NATO. Although leading government experts are skeptical of the EU's capability to fulfill such a role, they nevertheless point out that within defense ministry ranks, two experts work full-time on NATO issues compared with some two dozen focused on CSDP.

Like their Finnish counterparts, leading Swedish officials and security analysts support increased regional cooperation, especially on maritime security in the Baltic and High North regions. As previously noted, Sweden also cooperates on air defenses with Finland and Norway. However, Swedish officials, like their Finnish counterparts, dismiss the potential of regional structures (such as NORDEFECO) to ensure Sweden's territorial defense in the face of a major military contingency.

The United States. Swedish officials and non-government experts generally are more reluctant than their Finnish counterparts to acknowledge publicly the important U.S. role in European security, largely for political reasons. According to Swedish political observers, public attitudes toward the United States have improved since late 2008. They caution, however, that the legacy of widespread criticism of U.S. policy during the Cold War, which was rekindled by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, makes a rapid turnaround unlikely. Indeed, in 2009 a respected Swedish public opinion poll found that for many respondents, the United States ranked close behind Russia and China as a "problem for peace and security globally."⁴⁴ Simi-

larly, during the campaign preceding the September 2010 parliamentary elections, the "Red-Green" alliance (Social Democratic, Environment, and Left parties) called for the closure of all U.S. overseas military and "nuclear weapons" bases. Hence, positive mentions of specific U.S. contributions to Swedish and European security—for example, Defense Minister Tolgfors's praise for the U.S. role in the Baltic Sea region—are often subsumed by broad references to the benefits of NATO and a strong transatlantic link.

Most defense and military interactions between Sweden and the United States occur within the framework of NATO-led operations or Sweden's PFP-related activities. These are increasingly complemented, however, by a range of bilateral relations. For example:

- ◆ Sweden operates eight U.S.-built C-130 transport aircraft (upgraded under a 2004 agreement) and one C-130 refueling aircraft. In September 2010, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency notified Congress of a possible sale to Sweden of 15 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters at an estimated cost of \$546 million. The sale is intended, in part, to meet Sweden's requirements for combat search and rescue and medical evacuation in operations such as Afghanistan.
- ◆ Sweden's multirole combat aircraft, the Gripen, includes U.S.-licensed components, and the two countries are involved in joint development and production of the Excalibur advanced precision-guided artillery projectile.
- ◆ A small number of Swedish officers serve in liaison positions at USJFCOM and USCENTCOM and attend U.S. professional military education institutions.

Some Swedish experts who are skeptical of their government's willingness to join NATO would favor expanded bilateral defense ties with the United States as a means of improving Swedish capabilities while enhancing interoperability with the U.S. and other Allied

militaries. They acknowledge, however, that this would be an uphill battle within their government bureaucracy and some of the major political parties.

Swedish Defense Transformation and NATO

Sweden's defense reforms over the past several years stem from its leadership's acknowledgment that their nation could no longer rely on conscription-based structures when, in the event of a serious threat, approximately two-thirds of the armed forces would not be operational for at least 1–3 years—manifestly too late to protect the country. Nor could Sweden, which foresees growing demands to participate in international crisis management under EU, NATO, or UN auspices, continue to sustain two separate force structures, one for national operations and one for international engagements. Hence, Sweden has shifted its defense paradigm to develop smaller, all-volunteer armed forces that are more useable and relevant for all operations (territorial, regional, and international) and able to cooperate with international partners.

If current plans hold, by 2014 Sweden's force structure will total approximately 50,000 volunteer military personnel, including 28,000 soldiers in "high availability" units (versus about 12,000 today) and 22,000 in strengthened "Home Guard" units.⁴⁵ This will enable Sweden to continually deploy some 1,700 military personnel on international operations, with an additional 300 available as high readiness reinforcements; this represents roughly a doubling of current capacity. In parallel with personnel reforms, the military will be acquiring new medium-heavy helicopters for increased tactical mobility (for both national and international use), surface ships, and advanced air-to-air missiles, while modernizing its four conventional submarines and maintaining some 100 Gripen advanced combat aircraft. Overall defense spending is expected to remain at about 1.4 percent of GDP.

As with Finland, Sweden's defense reforms were not directly driven by NATO. However, they have been

shaped, in part, by Swedish participation in the PARR, the Strategic Airlift Capability Initiative, liaison arrangements with key NATO commands, and especially in NATO-led operations.

Sweden's operational experience with NATO began with its participation in the NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which transitioned to an EU-led operation in 2004. In Kosovo, a Swedish contingent—now approximately 250 soldiers—has served in KFOR since late 1999.

Sweden joined ISAF in 2002 and currently deploys approximately 500 troops in Afghanistan. Most of these serve in Mazar-e-Sharif, where Sweden is the only non-NATO European country to lead a PRT.

Sweden has shifted its defense paradigm to develop smaller, all-volunteer forces that are more useable and relevant

Sweden also fields an Operational Mentor and Liaison Team embedded with Afghan army forces and plans to augment its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) contribution with a helicopter unit and health-care assets. In December 2010, the Swedish parliament renewed, with little opposition, the mandate needed by the government for participation in ISAF through 2011, provided the UN Security Council–approved mandate remains in force.

Swedish officials characterize their participation in ISAF as an expression of solidarity with, and acceptance of responsibility pursuant to, the UN mandate, and intentionally play down the role of NATO. For the most part, they express confidence that public support for the Afghanistan mission can be maintained over the next few years, but their recent public statements have warned that security in the area where Swedish troops are active is unlikely to improve significantly anytime soon. According to press reports, Swedish

units engaged in 65 combat incidents during 2010, suffering three killed in action.⁴⁶

Swedish defense experts observe that the Afghanistan experience has brought home the need for: modernized equipment (including armored vehicles) better suited to demanding stabilization missions; more structured predeployment training and rotations for deployed units; and greater interoperability across the board with NATO forces. Sweden's close operational ties with NATO also have helped pave the way for greater cooperation on major exercises. For example, in June 2009, Sweden hosted Exercise Loyal Arrow, where nearly 900 participants from NATO's airborne early warning component, eight Allied nations, and Finland tested deployment, reception, and redeployment procedures for elements of the NATO Response Force. In keeping with its increased cooperation with NATO, Sweden has been a leading advocate within the EU for adopting NATO standards in the development, training, and potential employment of EU battlegroups.

Low Profile Political Debate

Despite occasional public mention of the possibility of seeking NATO membership, the issue has not been the focus of sustained debate between Sweden's main center-right and center-left political coalitions; nor has it received extensive critical examination by nongovernment think tanks or the media. Swedish opinion surveys help to explain the cautious approach of the major parties. According to a respected 2009 poll, 35 percent of respondents favored NATO membership "as soon as possible" or "eventually"—twice as many as in 2004–2005—but 38 percent favored staying "outside" (down from 67 percent in 2004–2005) and 27 percent were "on the fence."⁴⁷

Beyond previously-mentioned factors—especially the lingering hold of neutralist sentiments and mixed views regarding the United States—Swedish political culture puts great stock in achieving a broad consensus on major foreign policy issues, as was the case when the

government sought EU membership. In contrast with Finland, however, leading government officials, parliamentarians, and party officials have been reluctant so far to undertake the preliminary step of commissioning one or more government or think-tank studies to methodically identify and assess the potential implications of NATO membership, which would lay the groundwork for a more informed public debate on its pros and cons.

There appear to be several reasons for this reluctance. The center-right alliance (comprised of the Moderate, Liberal, Center, and Christian Democrat parties) is divided on the issue. Only the small Liberal Party has openly advocated near-term NATO membership, while some in the Center Party strongly oppose such a move.

Swedish political culture puts great stock in achieving a broad consensus on major foreign policy issues

Within the Moderate Party—by far the largest party in the alliance—there reportedly is significant support for eventual NATO membership and, as a first step, growing interest in a "Finnish style" governmental or independent experts study on the implications of membership. In October 2010, two Moderate parliamentarians introduced a motion that stressed the advantages of membership, especially the "greater opportunity to both influence international operations and ensure Swedish and European security," and called for a "clear presentation of NATO and what possible accession would mean for Sweden."⁴⁸ The motion will be reviewed in early 2011 by the parliament's foreign affairs committee. However, it is unlikely to be approved absent a prior gentleman's agreement between Moderates and the major center-left party, the Social Democrats, since leading Moderates hope to avoid politicization of the study from the outset.

So far, the Social Democrats have shown no interest in giving a green light to a NATO study. Indeed, some

influential Social Democrats believe their support for the “solidarity declaration” has been intentionally overblown by alliance politicians and conservative-leaning defense analysts who want to portray the declaration as a watershed in Swedish strategic thinking. According to these Social Democrats, NATO remains a military organization with little appeal for most Swedes, especially since (in their view) the country is not threatened.

At first glance, the results of Sweden’s September 2010 parliamentary elections appear to have hurt prospects for a serious near-term discussion of possible NATO accession. The center-right parties emerged with a plurality of seats, but the unexpected success scored by the populist and—according to many analysts—xenophobic Sweden Democrats party will force the alliance coalition to govern without a stable majority. Hence, despite significant interest in accession among Liberals and Moderates, the alliance as a whole will need to proceed carefully with respect to NATO to avoid an open break with the center-left, which could force early elections and result in even larger gains by the Sweden Democrats.

Meanwhile, the Social Democrats, while remaining the country’s largest single party, emerged with far fewer seats in parliament than in the past. As a result, they will choose a new party leadership in March 2011 and have promised to review key policy issues. Their new leadership is unlikely to abandon the party’s traditional “military non-alignment” stance anytime soon, but they might see advantages in allowing a review of the pros and cons of NATO membership, arguing that it demonstrates a more serious and pragmatic approach to foreign affairs than was evident during their 2010 campaign. In this way, the Social Democrats might hope to attract more centrist supporters in the run-up to the next parliamentary election in 2014.

External Factors

During the run-up to the Lisbon Summit, Finnish and Swedish policymakers, parliamentarians, and security experts used a variety of bilateral and multilateral channels to explain their priorities and advance sugges-

tions to NATO member governments and its civilian and military leadership. These included the March 2010 seminar in Helsinki that focused on the new Strategic Concept—a high-profile event hosted jointly by the Finnish and Swedish governments.⁴⁹

The fact that key Summit themes tracked closely with Finnish and Swedish preferences likely has served, at a minimum, to bolster their domestic support for continued close cooperation with NATO. For example:

- ◆ *Crisis management and partnership mechanisms.* As previously noted, crisis management has been a key incentive, vehicle, and domestic justification for growing Finnish and Swedish cooperation with NATO since the mid-1990s. The Strategic Concept and Lisbon Summit Declaration pay tribute to the “concrete and valued contribution” of partner relationships to NATO. They also promise “operational partners” a “structural role in shaping strategy and decisions on NATO-led missions to which they contribute.” NATO’s specific mentions of the continuing importance of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the need for flexible formats to discuss security challenges and enhance political dialogue respond, in part, to Finnish and Swedish expressions of concern that their relations with NATO should not be held back by the lackluster performance, capabilities, or political will of other PFP members.
- ◆ *Comprehensive approach.* The Summit’s emphasis on applying a comprehensive civilian and military approach to crisis prevention and crisis management in and beyond Afghanistan is consistent with Finnish and Swedish thinking. NATO’s prominent mention of its desire to strengthen the strategic partnership with the EU and improve cooperation with the UN also reflects longstanding Finnish and Swedish preferences.
- ◆ *Article 5, Russia, and emerging threats.* The Strategic Concept, Lisbon Declaration, and NATO–Russia Council Joint Statement respond well to Finnish

and Swedish desires to balance a positive and cooperative stance toward Russia with a reaffirmation of collective defense as one of NATO's essential core tasks. NATO's assessment of other dangers—from terrorism to proliferation to cyber attacks—also reflects growing Finnish and Swedish concerns regarding the potential impact of 21st-century threats on their security and the need for closer cooperation with their North Atlantic and European partners.

However, Lisbon's long-term effect on Finnish and Swedish views regarding membership will depend first and foremost on NATO's performance, beginning with Afghanistan. Although their respective commitments to ISAF receive stronger public support than is the case in many other parts of Europe, this is due in part to the Finnish and Swedish governments' emphasis on ISAF's UN mandate and support for humanitarian actions such as promoting education and respect for women's rights—areas where Nordic nongovernmental organizations are very active. Such support would be eroded by a perceived NATO inability to contain the counterinsurgency, significant loss of life among Finnish or Swedish troops, or a dramatic unraveling of Allied political and military solidarity behind the operation. If such developments were to occur, NATO's credibility as a potential guarantor of Finnish and/or Swedish security would no doubt suffer—although the degree and duration of any such setback are hard to quantify in advance.

There is no doubt that Russia would react negatively to a Finnish and/or Swedish bid for NATO membership. In a February 2010 interview, President Dmitry Medvedev stated that “the never-ending enlargement of NATO through absorbing the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union or happen to be our closest neighbors” constitutes a “threat,” adding that “[o]ur Armed Forces should therefore be ready to accomplish their missions in light of the changes we have seen.”⁵⁰ Finnish analysts note that Russian officials have periodically sent more pointed warnings in their direction, and a 2007 report by one influential

Finnish institute concluded that if their country were to apply for membership, “political relations (with Russia) would almost inevitably suffer to some degree, and some limited military remonstrations in the vicinity of the Finnish borders could occur.”⁵¹

Moscow's overall strategy likely would be aimed at persuading the Finnish and Swedish publics to reverse their respective government's decision before the NATO accession process could be completed. However, Russian tactics likely would depend in large part on the wider international context at the time.

If the Finnish and/or Swedish decision were taken during a generalized spike in tension with the West—as occurred, for example, immediately following the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict—Moscow might feel emboldened (or compelled by domestic political pressures) to take relatively visible actions; these might include a limited redeployment of military units toward the St. Petersburg region, stepped up naval and military aviation exercises in the Baltic Sea region, and cutbacks on energy deliveries.

Even in a relatively benign international context, Russia likely would couple diplomatic protests with demands for strict limits on access by other Allied militaries to Finnish or Swedish territory and infrastructure. (As Allies, Finland and Sweden would assume the political commitments contained in the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, including those related to the nondeployment of nuclear weapons or additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces on the territory of new members.⁵²) In addition, Russia might seek to punish Finland and Sweden with trade-related measures, including the manipulation of tariffs and customs clearances.

However, Russian policymakers would need to balance such measures, which might hurt Finland and Sweden more than Russia in the short term, against their declared strategic interest in multifaceted cooperation with the EU in particular, and the West in general. There is ample precedent for such calculations: Moscow acquiesced, albeit grudgingly, to Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian membership in the Alliance after a long period

of declaring it would be a “red line” for Russian security policy. Moreover, unlike Latvia and Estonia, Finland and Sweden do not have significant Russian-speaking minorities. A concerted effort by NATO, Finland, and/or Sweden to be transparent about the accession process, while stressing their common desire to broaden cooperation with Russia through the NATO–Russia Council, as well as through the EU and regional fora, likely would lessen Moscow’s suspicions over time.

Risks versus Benefits

For Finnish and Swedish policymakers trying to anticipate how these external developments will play out, the key questions with respect to NATO membership are and will remain very straightforward.

- ◆ First, since NATO’s policies and actions will profoundly affect Finland’s and Sweden’s security environment for the indefinite future, are their national interests better served by having a seat at the table inside every level of Alliance political and military structures where those policies and actions are formulated and implemented?
- ◆ Second, assuming that the overall (albeit unsteady) trend of NATO–EU cooperation continues, are Finland and Sweden at a disadvantage in shaping that cooperation compared to their 21 fellow EU member states that also belong to NATO?

Indeed, Finnish press stories following the Lisbon Summit reflect a growing tendency to couch the debate in such terms. According to one Finnish newspaper, for example, the renewed emphasis on the NATO–Russia Council as a forum for “hard security” matters is a game-changing development that could put opponents of NATO membership “on the defensive.”⁵³

Finnish and Swedish political analysts speculate that if their respective governments were to opt for NATO membership, they would strongly prefer to act together—as “tandem riders,” according to one Finnish observer. In their view, a coordinated approach

would significantly diminish domestic political opposition in both countries, ensure rapid approval by the Allies, and facilitate smooth integration into Alliance military and political structures. Some also believe that if faced with tandem riders, Russia would be more cautious in its reactions.

engineering a coordinated decision between Helsinki and Stockholm would be difficult in practice

While attractive in principle, engineering a coordinated decision between Helsinki and Stockholm would be difficult in practice. In addition to the above-noted differences in historical legacies and strategic cultures, the Finnish body politic, thanks to the multiple and extensive government and nongovernment studies of NATO, is arguably much better prepared to debate the issue on its merits.

What’s in It for NATO?

With few exceptions, Allied governments apparently have given little serious thought to possible Finnish and/or Swedish accession. This likely is due, in large part, to their preoccupation with more pressing concerns such as Afghanistan. That said, according to a range of Allied diplomats and military officers, both countries enjoy positive reputations as capable and reliable contributors to NATO operations, mentors and role models in outreach and cooperation programs involving other Partners (including Russia), and active promoters of a comprehensive civilian-military approach to stabilization missions in which NATO–EU cooperation should play a prominent role. But as Partners, their ability to inform, shape, and implement NATO policy at every stage is constrained by many organizational and political factors. Put simply, Allies rightfully will not extend unfettered access to their inner councils to nations who are not similarly bound to

NATO Treaty obligations, including participation—if necessary—in collective defense.

There is little doubt that the Baltic and Nordic neighbors of Finland and Sweden would welcome their full integration into the Alliance. In their view, it would boost Finnish and Swedish contributions to deepening regional security cooperation. For example, remaining impediments to full Finnish and/or Swedish participation in NATO's "air police" operation over the three Baltic Allies and the NATO Response Force would be quickly removed. Moreover, by virtue of their military capabilities, existing infrastructure, and geographic location, Finland and Sweden would strengthen NATO's ability to deter and, if necessary, defend against any external threat to the Nordic-Baltic region.

From an American perspective, and in addition to the above considerations, Finnish and/or Swedish accession would be consistent with the Quadrennial Defense Review (February 2010) and U.S. National Security Strategy (May 2010), which together stress the importance of strong and capable European partners that broadly share U.S. values and are willing to help shoulder responsibility for fostering peace and security both regionally and globally. By enhancing security in the Nordic and Baltic region, Finnish and/or Swedish accession would complement U.S. policies aimed at pursuing new opportunities for NATO cooperation with Russia. At the same time, U.S. policymakers likely are under no illusion that Finland or Sweden would either substantially expand planned defense expenditures and operational commitments or shy away from criticizing specific U.S. policies simply as a result of joining the Alliance.

In the event one or both countries were to seek membership, they should expect a more detailed examination on several fronts. For example, some European Allies likely will be especially attuned to Russian sensitivities regarding further enlargement. While Finnish expertise on Russia is widely respected within the Alliance, some Europeans might seek reassurance that, once inside NATO, Finland will not alter its longstanding

emphasis on cooperative relations with its eastern neighbor. In the case of Sweden, its attitude toward nuclear weapons and disarmament might be closely scrutinized by member states who are especially intent on preventing any erosion of the Alliance consensus, as expressed in the Strategic Concept approved at Lisbon, that "[a]s long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance." (Finnish security analysts generally do not perceive a strong or pervasive "nuclear allergy" within their public, given the country's historical experience with the Soviet Union.) Both countries would be expected to participate fully in any negotiations involving NATO and Russian conventional forces in Europe. In addition, a number of Allied governments and parliaments—including the U.S. Senate, whose advice and consent to ratification would be required for any NATO accession protocol—would look for evidence that such a move enjoys broad public support within Finland and/or Sweden.

Conclusion

Given the distance that Finland and Sweden already have traveled toward recasting their security policies, transforming their militaries, and establishing close ties with the Alliance, membership might seem a logical next step. Yet, it is not an inevitable one. Moreover, as suggested by the careful wording of NATO's open door policy, a broad consensus exists within the Alliance that enlargement cannot be viewed as an end in itself.

Hence, NATO should be patient. If it stays on the course charted by the Strategic Concept, implements necessary reforms to its military and civilian structures, and above all demonstrates solidarity and effectiveness in the face of 21st-century threats, it will remain the essential force for Euro-Atlantic stability and security that has attracted Finland and Sweden ever closer to its ranks. If one or both opt to remain Partners, NATO must make clear that their contributions, ideas, and sacrifices are valued. Alternatively, if Finland and/or Sweden eventually seek membership, their citizens must be prepared to accept a fair share of the responsibilities and burdens to-

ward an Alliance that will be better prepared, in return, to protect them.

Notes

¹ Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon, November 19, 2010, available at <www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68580.htm>.

² Lisbon Summit Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government, November 20, 2010, available at <www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-61351483-06DCCB49/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm>.

³ Alliance Strategic Concept 1999, available at <www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm>.

⁴ The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined NATO in 1999. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined in 2004. Albania and Croatia joined in 2009.

⁵ Finland and Sweden formally acceded to the EU in 1995. Finland belongs to the Eurozone; Sweden does not.

⁶ *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2009* (hereafter “Government Report”), February 2009, available at <www.vnk.fi/julkaisukan-sio/2009/j11-turvallisuus-j12-sakerhets-j13-finnish/pdf/en.pdf>.

⁷ Speech to India’s Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis, April 27, 2010.

⁸ *Facts about National Defence*, Public Information Division of Defence Command Finland 2008, available at <www.puolustusvoimat.fi/wcm/58926d804fc07da3914af7fa0e27a8ed/facts_about_national_defence_08.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&ACHEID=58926d804fc07da3914af7fa0e27a8ed>, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34. It should be noted that Finland does not have any submarines.

¹⁰ Based on combined value (in euros) of Finnish exports to and imports from Russia, according to Statistics Finland, available at <www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_kotimaankaupa_en.html>. Overall, Finland relies on Russia for two-thirds of its energy imports (by value). See <www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aO8i_gg5fDmc>.

¹¹ Russia Action Plan, Government Resolution, Government of Finland, April 16, 2009, available at <<http://formin.finland.fi/public/download.aspx?ID=42535&GUID={448538DA-BD92-4814-9B57-3590FB386721}>>, 94. In December 2010, President Halonen, Prime Minister Kiviniemi, and Russian Prime Minister Putin inaugurated high-speed train service between Helsinki and St. Petersburg.

¹² Government Report, 70–71.

¹³ Under the Lisbon Treaty, EU structures and activities previously known as “European Security and Defense Policy” were renamed “Common Security and Defense Policy.”

¹⁴ The EU does not currently have competency to provide common defense. Article 24 of the EU Treaty (as modified by Lisbon) states: “The Union’s competence in matters of common foreign and security policy shall cover all areas of foreign policy and all questions relating to the Union’s security, including the *progressive framing* of a common defence policy that might lead to a common defence.” (Emphasis added.)

¹⁵ Article 42 of the EU Treaty reads: “If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. Commitments

and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation.”

¹⁶ Commentary by former ambassador Leif Blomqvist in “A Dual Pillar NATO Alliance Is Not in Europe’s Interest,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, January 8, 2005.

¹⁷ Thorvald Stoltenberg, “Nordic Cooperation on Foreign and Security Policy: Proposals Submitted to the Extraordinary Meeting of Nordic Foreign Ministers in Oslo on 9 February 2009,” 34.

¹⁸ Government Report, 37.

¹⁹ Government Report, 127. For example, the Report previews the elimination of the two “Jaeger” brigades and the reorganization of six “regional brigades” into five “regional battle groups.”

²⁰ Some Finnish experts believe a force of 100,000, if properly trained and equipped, would constitute a credible defense.

²¹ The initial conscript training periods range from 180 to 362 days, depending on rank and duties. According to official estimates, some 20 percent of conscription-age Finns fail to meet the military’s minimum physical and mental standards. According to a 2009 poll, 72 percent of Finns support a general conscription system for males. Available at <www.defmin.fi/files/1516/The_ABDI_Survey_2009_pictures.pdf>. The Green Party, however, has proposed phasing out conscription.

²² C⁴ISR=command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

²³ A similar approach has been discussed for helicopters.

²⁴ According to press reports, the Finnish army has used its artillery expertise to train allied military personnel from several countries who will serve in NATO Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams in Afghanistan.

²⁵ The Finnish government decided in early 2010 to raise this total to 195 by February 2011.

²⁶ To date, Finnish forces in ISAF have suffered one fatality and several wounded.

²⁷ “Effects of a Possible Membership in a Military Alliance to the Development of the Finnish Defence System and to the Defence Administration,” available at <www.defmin.fi/index.phtml?l=en&cs=207>.

²⁸ The 2004 report estimated Finland’s annual contribution to NATO’s military and civilian budgets would total 45 million euros, with additional procurement costs (for example, to ensure interoperability of command and control systems) of 25 million euros annually. The report also noted: “In general, it can be estimated that all NATO membership costs could be covered by current level defence budgets by refocusing annual operation and maintenance costs and procurement plans.”

²⁹ In May 2004, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Cyprus, and Malta joined the EU. Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in January 2007.

³⁰ See Advisory Board for Defence Information, 2010 report overview, available at the Finnish Ministry of Defence Web page at <www.defmin.fi/files/1685/MTS_survey_2010.pdf>; detailed results are available at <www.defmin.fi/files/1686/MTS_Survey_statistics_2010.pdf>.

³¹ Government Report, 81.

³² Advisory Board for Defence Information, 2010 report; detailed results are available at <www.defmin.fi/files/1686/MTS_Survey_statistics_2010.pdf>.

³³ See, for example, her February 2000 speech, available at <www.tpk.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=173545&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>.

³⁴ Interview on Finnish Broadcasting Company, December 18, 2010, reported in *Helsingin Sanomat, International Edition* (in

English), December 20, 2010, available at <www.hs.fi/english/article/Ahtisaari+Staying+outside+NATO+weakens+image+projected+by+Finland/1135262517865>.

³⁵ A referendum on NATO membership is not required by the Finnish Constitution, but many Finnish political observers believe the government would organize a referendum on the issue to demonstrate a national consensus behind the move.

³⁶ Robert Dalsjö, *Life-line Lost: The Rise and Fall of "Neutral" Sweden's Secret Reserve Option of Wartime Help from the West* (Stockholm: Santerus Academic Press, 2006), xi. Sweden also figured in early U.S. thinking about transatlantic arrangements for the defense of Europe. For example, according to declassified National Security Council staff memoranda, in April 1948—1 month after the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg signed the Brussels Treaty, which contains a strong collective defense provision—President Truman's top diplomatic advisors recommended that the United States encourage Sweden (along with Norway, Italy, Denmark, and Iceland) to accede to the Brussels Treaty and begin negotiations on a "North Atlantic Collective Defense Agreement" to include those parties, the United States, and Canada.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁹ See "Sweden's Security Policy," Government Offices of Sweden, available at <www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/3103/a/116839>.

⁴⁰ See <www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/13/96/94/8a6b32fe.pdf>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² The majority of Swedish arms exports (totaling \$1.9 billion in 2009) went to European customers. *Defense News*, March 2010, available at <www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4533390>.

⁴³ Speech by Swedish Defense Minister Tolgfors, July 3, 2009, available at <www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/12091/a/129883>.

⁴⁴ *Opinioner 2009*, Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), Stockholm (December 2009), available at <http://www2.msb.se/Shopping/pdf/upload/Publikationsservice/MSB/0132_09_Opinion_2009.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Current troop strength includes approximately 16,000 active duty and 47,000 reserves (including Home Guard). The future force will be composed of career and "contract" personnel; most "contract" military will have their main jobs outside the defense forces but will be subject to mobilization for operations within 24 hours.

⁴⁶ "Record Number of Battles for Swedes," SvD Online, December 2, 2010.

⁴⁷ *Opinioner 2009*.

⁴⁸ See <www.riksdagen.se/webbnav/index.aspx?nid=410&dok_id=GY02U229>. In a separate motion, two other Moderates suggested that ongoing defense reforms focused on improving Sweden's

capabilities for overseas operations would increase the need for Allied assistance in the event of a direct threat against its territory. They also criticized the Social Democrats as "hard-core opponents of (NATO accession) for sentimental rather than rational reasons."

⁴⁹ Key speakers at the event included Finnish President Halonen and former President Martti Ahtisaari; top Finnish and Swedish foreign and defense ministry officials; NATO Secretary General Rasmussen; and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, General Stéphane Abrial.

⁵⁰ Interview with *Paris-Match*, February 25, 2010. The relevant exchange (as published on President Medvedev's official Web page) reads:

Question: "Russia's new military doctrine envisages, among other things, military operations outside the country to counter a possible aggression, and views NATO as a major threat to its security. Do you think that we are sliding back to the Cold War era?"

Response: "No, I certainly don't think so. It is not about our military doctrine, but about the never-ending enlargement of NATO through absorbing the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union or happen to be our closest neighbours, such as Romania and Bulgaria. This is the threat. NATO is a military alliance which has expanded itself right to our borders. Our Armed Forces should therefore be ready to accomplish their missions in light of the changes we have seen. It does not mean that we are sliding back to the Cold War, but we must take this new situation into consideration."

Available at <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2010/02/25/0900_type82916_224466.shtml>.

⁵¹ Some of these warnings have been crude and counterproductive. In 2007, for example, a mid-level Russian diplomat hinted, on Finnish television, at a "military" reaction by his country. Recent examples have involved only slightly more nuanced warnings. Thus, the Russian Ambassador to NATO stated in early 2008 that "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."

⁵² Among these are NATO statements regarding: 1) nuclear weapons—"The member States of NATO reiterate that they have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members, nor any need to change any aspect of NATO's nuclear posture or nuclear policy—and do not foresee any future need to do so"; and 2) conventional basing—"NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces." See Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, available at <www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25468.htm>.

⁵³ "Parties Launch NATO Debate Again," *Helsingin Sanomat, International Edition* (in English), December 20, 2010, available at <www.hs.fi/english/print/1135262526689>.

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