From Cold War 'Neutrality' to the West: Finland's Route to the European Union and NATO

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The meaning of neutrality is contested and has been used in various ways in different historical and political contexts. Originally, neutrality was interpreted as a legal term, referring to a state's non-participation in a war between other states. In the post-1945 period, it was superseded by a more political notion of neutrality as non-participation and impartiality in international conflicts in general, and East-West conflict in particular (Hakovirta 1988, 8). Instead of non-participation in conflicts, it came to refer to non-participation in military alliances. Hence, the Cold War framework modified the concept, and it received new meaning as a foreign policy orientation in peacetime. These orientations were the result of different compromises, and consequently there were various models of neutrality. Amidst this, the Finnish interpretation of neutrality is unique and nuanced, and comprehending the difference between the political and military dimension of Finland's neutrality helps to understand the evolving Finnish position.

Neutrality can be a temporary or permanent foreign policy choice. States may voluntarily choose to be neutral or be coerced by other states to remain neutral. In the Finnish case, the policy of neutrality is closely related to the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) with the Soviet Union, forming the basis for their bilateral relations between 1948–1992. This created a peculiar tradition to combine the FCMA and neutrality: On the one hand, neutrality was represented as a virtue – but, on the other hand, it was promoted out of necessity (see Rainio-Niemi 2021). Finland pursued a policy of neutrality to maintain its independence and avoided being drawn into conflicts between the Eastern and Western blocs. Through skillful diplomacy and social welfare policies, Finland managed to become a member of the Nordic Council (1955) and build firm relations with the West. However, Finnish neutrality was particularly vulnerable and dubious in the eyes of both blocs.

After the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Finnish position changed dramatically – even if Finland continued to stay outside of military alliances. In 1995, Finnish membership in the European Union officially ended its self-defined neutrality and was replaced by a strong commitment to military non-alignment. Since 1995, government reports on foreign, security, and defence policy have underlined the relevance of EU membership and military non-alignment – even though Finland has developed close partnership and interoperability with NATO and participated in various forms of international military cooperation and crisis management tasks. Finland has also continuously evaluated the changes in its security environment and consequences of military alignment through reports and studies, and a NATO- option has been maintained in government programs.

In 2022, because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Finland rapidly reassessed its security situation (Finnish Government, 2022) and applied for NATO membership. Joining NATO in April 2023 finally abolished the long-term practice of military non-alignment. Even if Finland no longer officially followed a policy of neutrality, key foreign policy documents continued to emphasise Nordic cooperation and its extant profile in international relations – once key elements of Finland's Cold War neutrality policy in line with other countries such as Sweden. The preference for neutrality and independence is especially relevant because of the preferred high international profile of the Nordics in crisis management, peace mediation and humanitarian aid (Wivel 2017, 490). This emphasises the evolving

interpretation of neutrality as a norm and both continuity and change in the Finnish positioning.

In this chapter, we will first discuss how neutrality can be approached from different theoretical perspectives, and we frame Finnish policy in this respect. Secondly, we look at the Finnish case and its background by acknowledging and discussing the structural, external, and domestic factors shaping its position as a neutral state. After that, we briefly discuss Finnish history, and analyse how the end of the Cold War and decision to join the EU fundamentally shook the foundations of the Finnish policy of neutrality. Finally, we reflect upon how the slow development towards NATO membership has pushed down the key elements associated with neutrality.

Different explanations for neutrality

Different theoretical approaches to neutrality may explain the decisions made by policymakers at different historical moments. These theories tend to outline rather pure, ideal, concepts whilst the picture is much blurrier in actual politics. The preconditions for adopting neutrality also vary from state to state, which makes it difficult to suggest any general explanations. However, realist, liberal and constructivist approaches can help to position the Finnish policy of neutrality in the wider European framework and explain foreign and security policy options and preferences at different times.

Realist explanations underline the influence of structural factors and external environment in the positions of states. During the Cold War, several European states – such as Finland and Sweden – adopted a neutral position as they were located between the two opposing blocs. However, the perceptions and misperceptions of others, mainly conflicting powers, influenced evaluations of neutrality (Hakovirta 1988, 32). As the states were located between the two blocs, their neutrality was 'suspicious' and both blocs found it difficult to fully trust the position. For example, the Soviet Union accepted Finnish neutrality without reservation only in 1989 (Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi 2016, 56). This reflected the obvious tensions between the policy of neutrality and the FCMA treaty. For the Western bloc, Finnish neutrality was particularly vague because of this same treaty. Internationally, Finland also refrained from publicly criticising the Soviet Union (Forsberg 2018; Möttölä 2021). For example, it abstained from the non-binding UN General Assembly resolutions concerning conflicts in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979).

The liberal position adopts a rather different focus as it underlines the importance of international law, multilaterally negotiated norms, shared values and principles. These provide instruments for small states to balance great powers and compensate for their own weaknesses. Importantly, close cooperation and support for international organisations such as the Council of Europe (CoE), the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) formed a beneficial strategy for small states. All the Nordic states have traditionally been keen supporters of these organisations and active advocates of associated norms. Instead of the military, strategic and economic aspects underlined by realists, the liberal position acknowledges the key role of values such as human rights, democracy and rule of law, and emphasises the interdependence of actors. These values are considered to strengthen the prospects of a peaceful order and lead to wider cooperation between states.

Liberalism acknowledges various domestic factors and decision-making levels influencing the foreign policy of states. Here, of course, opinions may be divided between parties, key decision-makers and even between the elites and public. On the one hand, for Finland the association with a Western worldview, liberal norms and values was important during the Cold War. On the other hand, neutrality was an important norm shaping the expected and appropriate behaviour of Finland's balancing between the blocs. Domestically, the 'neutrality doctrine' enjoyed wide acceptance among the public and policymakers (Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi 2016, 60). Many Finns still consider it as a success story of Finnish policy during the Cold War (Forsberg 2018). However, in the current understanding, norms are treated as flexible, constantly developing entities. In this respect, the understanding and interpretations of the neutrality norm may also evolve, which leads us to constructivism.

As neutrality is closely associated with state identity (Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi 2016; Forsberg 2016), in constructivist approaches, identities shape states' interests and understanding of appropriateness. Structures and external factors matter, but actors may interpret them differently. There are both collective and individual identity

narratives, which can be used politically. Policymakers and the public may promote several competing domestic identity narratives, leading to different lines of action. Political decision-makers have the freedom to choose which identities, or emphases, they use to justify specific policies (Forsberg 2016, 365). However, even similar identities can be used to rationalise contrasting policy options which makes identity a challenging concept to analyse.

Identity-based arguments are often influential in policy debates as they appeal to emotions and sense of community (Forsberg 2016, 365). Emphasising differences between 'us' and 'them' is one effective strategy showing how identities are used in policymaking. This leads to the construction of in- and out- groups to identify with. For Finland the essential background community was the Nordic group. During the Cold War, the peace-loving and rational Nordics aimed to differentiate themselves from conflict-prone Europe (Browning 2008, 27). The region, especially Sweden and Finland, represented themselves as non-aligned neutrals, as a third way and alternative between the capitalist West and the communist East (Wivel 2017, 492). However, there has always been a slight difference between Finnish and Swedish neutrality. The Swedish version is more normative and identity based, while the Finnish version relates more to strategic security interests and political (or realist) practice. Interestingly, Lödén claims that countries with comparatively limited identity-based neutrality would leave their non-aligned position sooner than those with much invested in identity. This point suggests that Finland might be more prepared to change its position regarding NATO membership than Sweden (Lödén 2012, 277). This is exactly what happened in 2022 when Finland rapidly changed its attitude towards NATO membership.

Realist explanations seem predominant in the case of small states such as Finland. Small states are considered weak, and they have no resources to resist great powers. Hence, they either join alliances or proclaim neutrality to survive. Finnish self-identity outlined in political speeches and documents underline its status as a small state. Smallness is also used to rationalise previous non-alignment policy (Forsberg 2016, 365). Yet, realists are less capable of explaining why neutrality would be the first option for small states instead of joining alliances (Lödén 2012). Geopolitical reasons are used to explain this choice – as for Finland and Austria, the need to adopt a policy of neutrality came from outside. As Rainio-Niemi (2021) notes, this represented neutrality as a compromise. The options of small states are limited, and often the main task for neutrals has been to convince others that they don't have any hostile military intentions, while simultaneously wanting to be militarily strong.

Structures and agency in shaping neutrality

According to Lödén (2012), it is important to acknowledge both internal and external factors that shape the foreign and security policies of neutrals. The small state status has prioritised realist explanations and the need to adapt to external changes. Mainly this refers to how Russia has developed, and what kind of security threats this development has caused. Furthermore, realist interpretations have been visible in discussions on Finland's NATO membership. Finland is considered too small to defend itself alone, and the EU or Sweden do not provide enough security guarantees (Forsberg 2018). The US role and relevance in European security structures has therefore been predominant.

Secondly, Finland's relations to international institutions such as the Nordic Council, EU, NATO and the UN have been important factors shaping its preferences, as liberals assume. The UN especially became a key arena in which to demonstrate a distinctive policy line and to monitor the other neutrals' stances on international disputes. From the 1960s onward, neutrality was increasingly associated with an active foreign policy stance (Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi 2016, 56). The neutral states acted as mediators and bridge- builders in UN forums. The Nordic states occupied a privileged position and a reputation as promoters of international peace and security (Wivel 2017). This can be seen, for example, via Finland's contribution to the UN's peacekeeping troops – like the other Nordics. Later, it developed mediation capabilities, analytical expertise and other 'good services' in the UN (Möttölä 2021, 219).

The Nordic states have had highly diverse institutional relations and have made their own distinct choices in foreign and security policy (Brommesson et al. 2023). In the Finnish case, the Nordic dimension has been preferred but has always been more reserved due to immediate security concerns (Ojanen and Raunio 2018). After the Cold War, the institutional arrangements and state priorities changed. The role of the UN was questioned and the importance of NATO and the EU and several other more informal organisations increased. The Nordic approach became an

integral part of the European/EU/Western approach, rendering a unique progressive model less visible (Wivel 2017). Due to Russian aggressiveness, there was also a convergence of Nordic threat perceptions and foreign and security policy choices (Brommesson et al. 2023).

Thirdly, changes in the security, economic and normative structures have shaped the potential of neutrality. As the Cold War ended, the neutral countries lost the need to promote neutrality as it wasn't necessary any longer. However, Finland's geopolitical location meant that security concerns remained essential. Maintaining strong territorial defence and conscription were uniquely Finnish features. The collapse of the Soviet Union had extreme effects on Finnish foreign trade, and the early 1990s saw one of the worst economic crises in Finland's history. European economic integration provided better possibilities to prosper. In that context, it was no longer necessary to build national identity around neutrality because European integration gave a better frame. It was normatively attractive for neutral Finland, Sweden and Austria. Furthermore, issues such as transnational immigration, environmental and economical threats had to be dealt with at a higher level (Agius 2011, 371). The influence of European states on each other's policies, horizontal Europeanization, strengthened common European values and collective identity.

Hence, despite the relevance of structural factors, state agency is reflected in the manner policymakers and wider society react to external realities. The constructivist approach emphasises the interaction between structural and agential factors. As reality is socially constructed, much depends on how the structural factors are interpreted and how actors react via their own agency to changing circumstances. During the Cold War, the idea of neutrality became deeply internalised in the minds of Finnish policymakers and the wider public, and an essential part of the Finnish national identity. However, as the Cold war ended, the dramatic structural change was not as strongly reflected in Finnish agency as was perhaps expected. There was still much continuity with the traditional neutrality policy, even if the adopted non-alignment policy excluded political neutrality. According to Forsberg, knowledge of psychological factors, domestic politics and national identity discourses gives essential insights into understanding Finnish post-Cold War policy and its relationship to NATO. As he demonstrates, the different views of political leaders and parties, as well as the general public, can be used to explain why Finland did not join NATO directly after the end of the Cold War – and instead preferred Finland's unique 'NATO- option' – to maintain domestic consensus (Forsberg 2018).

Even if many political leaders have emphasised cooperation as well as prudence and stability in the adopted policies, the potential for change has been maintained. Neutrality and non-alignment have been considered options maximising Finland's freedom of choice. When circumstances change, Finland can change its position as both its EU and NATO memberships have demonstrated. A supporting internal factor for rapid decision-making is Finland's consensus-oriented domestic political culture, especially in foreign and security policy. This orientation, and trust in political leadership, can be traced to the historical experiences and Finnish claims of neutrality (Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi 2016, 62).

Cold War Finland and Active Neutrality

In historical terms, the bedrock of Finland's security policy line seemed clear and unchanging. Neutrality has been useful in various periods, in different ways. Here we can differentiate clearly between external and internal factors. In short, Finnish foreign and security policy has been defined around three pillars: 1) Finland's relations with the USSR/Russia, 2) Finland's own defence ability and sovereignty, and 3) Finland's relationship with the West, including the neighbouring Nordic countries. If one pillar breaks, it must be compensated by another. Finland's route to neutrality – and from neutrality – has brought these pillars out clearly. When the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917, Finland became independent and looked first at the Baltic defence politics for ten years, and adopted neutrality. During 1939–1944, Finland's defence ability was challenged heavily, but relations with the Soviet Union were managed. During the Cold War, relations with the West and the other Nordics were developed step by step. After the Cold War, all pillars were maintained in some balance. In 2014, and especially in 2022, when Russia started its full-scale attack on Ukraine, the Russian pillar ceased to exist. Now, Finland does not opt for neutrality and its value seems quite weak for the foreseeable future.

Stories of violence and images of threats based on relations between Finland and the 'other' have always played a

role in Finnish national narratives. This highlights the identity-based interpretation of history. Especially since the October Revolution in 1917, Soviet Russia has been the other in the strengthening of Finnish national identity. The Finnish declaration of independence in December 1917 was followed by a brutal civil war (1917–1918) between the reds (socialist workers and landless peasants) and whites (the bourgeoisie and landowners) who won the war. While the official and strongly anti-socialist 'white state' equated Russians with communists, many old negative stereotypes of Russia and Russians strengthened in a new ideological way, and relations between the two nations remained tense (Nortio et. al. 2022). During the interwar period, Soviet Russia was naturally perceived as an existential threat since the key leaders of the 'reds' had escaped there, and it was widely believed that external assistance was needed to counterbalance Soviet power (Forsberg 2018).

At the beginning of World War Two, Nordic countries declared their neutrality but only Sweden was saved from being drawn into the war. In November 1939, the Soviet Union attacked Finland, soon after Stalin and Hitler agreed to a pact dividing up the neighbouring borderlands (the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and its secret protocol). During the war, Finland first fought a separate Winter War against the Soviet Union, followed by a Continuation War as a co-belligerent with Germany. During the wars, the Finns suffered 90,000 casualties and killed an even larger number of Soviets (320,000). In the peace treaty of 1944, Finland lost more than 10 per cent of its pre-war territory, including the major city Vyborg, to the Soviet Union. Finnish neutrality was essentially different from Austria, Sweden and Switzerland. Finland balanced between two tracks – its Eastern policy and policy of neutrality. Hence, the space of Finnish neutrality also varied in the Cold War tensions, and Finland needed the capability to adapt to ongoing crises. To the contrary, neutral Sweden was actively condemning both superpowers in international crises while Finland avoided such criticism (Forsberg and Vaahtoranta 2001, 70). Neutrality for Sweden was a prerequisite for a high profile in foreign policy (Lödén 2012).

Finnish neutrality after the Second World War, and especially since the 1960s, has been called 'active neutrality'. This is a foreign policy concept built under the leadership of President Urho Kekkonen, who tried to open more margins for action, developing his predecessor Juho Kusti Paasikivi's more cautious neutrality after World War Two. The idea of active neutrality was to retain Finnish independence while maintaining good relations and trade with members of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Paasikivi-Kekkonen doctrine emphasised the geographical facts, pragmatic relations and good communication with the Soviet Union – seeking for the peaceful coexistence of capitalist and socialist countries. This has later been connected to the notion of 'Finlandisation', a concept referring to the exceptionally problematic policy of neutrality in relations between Finland and Russia (e.g., Uutela 2020, Arter 2023). It has also been used more negatively to describe Finland as being heavily influenced by the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Moisio 2008).

It is of high, but often ignored, importance to understand the contextual relevance of the Nordic affinity and legacy in all its aspects for Finland's performance in the Cold War (Möttölä 2021, 215). The most visible success of the Finnish policy of active neutrality was the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, organised in Helsinki in 1975. This high-level political meeting did not have the force of a treaty, but it added to the atmosphere of détente in the Cold War, recognized the boundaries of post-war Europe and established a mechanism for minimising political and military tensions between the East and the West whilst trying to improve human rights in the Socialist Bloc.

Active neutrality is credited by many, not only for its practical and successful trade policies, but also for its manner of creating security and stability in Finland and in Northern Europe. It permitted Finland's market economy to have advantageous bilateral trade with the Soviet Union and to keep pace with Western Europe. Active neutrality allowed Finland to also gradually take part in European integration. However, the discourse of active neutrality was also misused, especially during the 26 years of Kekkonen's presidency. His authoritarian style of mastering foreign relations deeply affected domestic politics as his omnipotent divide-and-rule attitude silenced political opposition. Consequently, inside Finland, active neutrality somewhat weakened democracy. Yet, it was a success story in creating a margin of action (Arter 2023).

The road to the European Union and Finnish post-neutrality

The Finnish debate on European Community (EC) in the 1990s was preceded by the decisions of the two other

neutrals, Austria (1989) and Sweden (1990), to join the Union. Sweden's announcement came as a surprise for Finnish decision-makers who were not informed about it beforehand. This created anger, and even a crisis mentality, among the politicians. During the Cold War, Finland was eager to seek a similar international position with Sweden (Forsberg and Vaahtoranta 2001, 70) and saw their fates interrelated. Domestically, the political parties remained divided on the membership – and many parties had active and visible opponents in their rows. Interestingly, the critique included the argument that Finland would lose its own successful way of practising neutrality. Proclaimed neutrality also caused suspicions in the EU and the neutral states would need to show loyalty to the new Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) by signing a declaration that they would fully accept its contents.

The new Finnish government of 1991, led by Prime Minister Esko Aho, adopted a more flexible attitude towards European integration. This was despite the disagreement on the issue within his own party, the Centre Party. The National Coalition, the Social Democrats and the Swedish People's Party first advocated for membership in 1991, and these integration-minded forces became more influential across society. In February 1992, President Mauno Koivisto announced the intention of the Finnish government to apply for EC/ EU membership. However, opinion polls showed varying degrees of support for membership through 1990-94. In October 1994 when the consultative referendum was arranged, 57 per cent of voters accepted membership (Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003). In January 1995, Finland became a member of the EU, and was now politically aligned. The official Finnish view was that its neutrality ended at this moment.

The membership decision has been outlined in the literature as a complete reversal of foreign policy (Browning 2008) and re-identification (Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003, 11). Forsberg and Vaahtoranta (2001) and Agius (2011) use the term post-neutrality. However, the development has also been considered as a natural continuity from neutrality to the liberal West. The Finnish EU policy paradigm has many features from previous times – it has been described as pragmatic, cooperative and constructive. In the EU, Finland was more pro- integrationist and adaptive than Sweden or Denmark. Yet, as most of the EU member states were also members of the NATO, the non-alignment policy presented a dilemma. Finland and Sweden were concerned that they would not have an equal position with those member states belonging to NATO (Forsberg and Vaahtoranta 2001, 74).

In the mid-1990s, NATO announced its open-door policy – but as EU integration was prioritised, the NATO membership question was not seen as much in the Finnish debate. In post-Cold War Europe, NATO was related to crisis management and its role in broad-based comprehensive security cooperation was emphasised (Forsberg 2018). Secondly, the reference group for membership, consisting of eastern European countries, was considered distinct from Finland which positioned itself as a Nordic, or Western, country (Forsberg 2023, 43). Despite this, both Sweden and Finland declared their willingness to broadly cooperate with NATO through the Partnership for Peace Program (PFP) and via deployments to the Balkans, as these were considered essential for the European security structure.

EU membership had several positive implications for Finland – principally by allowing a route into the single market. Hence, for many, the main reason to join the EU was economic. Finnish businesses were able to trade more efficiently in the most dynamic region of Europe, and to benefit from common standards and regulations. Secondly, security-related reasons were also evident for many. Both explanations underline the relevance of material and security considerations, but from the constructivist viewpoint, the membership had wider relevance for Finnish identity and sense of belonging. It changed perceptions of Finland's position in Europe and in the world, giving Finland a seat at more important decision-making tables. Membership also confirmed and strengthened the Western identity and a sense of belonging to the same value community.

In the early 2000s, Forsberg and Vaahtoranta foresaw that changes in the Finnish and Swedish non-alignment policy would be likely to happen because of developments within the EU rather than because of changes in domestic politics or a threat posed by Russia (Forsberg and Vaahtoranta 2001, 88). Both countries became strong supporters of EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). And, after the Kosovo crisis they developed the EU's crisis management capabilities. However, strong UN mandates for operations remained important for the Nordic states as they represented wider normative agreements in the international community.

From EU-framed military non-alignment to NATO

After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the security situation changed dramatically. NATO membership was then seen as the best way to ensure Finnish national security (Arter 2023). Hence, an alliance was preferred instead of neutrality or military non-alignment. As demonstrated, domestic opinions on the matter had remained divided since the 1990s. Overall, only a quarter of the population had shown support for NATO membership (Nortio et. al. 2022; Weckman 2023). However, a change in public opinion after the Russian invasion was rapid. By May 2022, almost 80 per cent of the population supported membership. This is interesting, as the arguments during the four decades for and against membership did not materially change (Forsberg 2023). There were also citizens' initiatives to demand parliamentary action on the matter. Only the National Coalition Party and the Swedish People Party had declared NATO support before the invasion. Based on its report on changes in the security environment (Finnish Government 2022), the government proposed that Finland join NATO. Following the debate in the Parliament, in May 2022, its members voted (188–8) for Finland to apply for NATO membership.

Upon joining the EU, Finnish foreign policy acquired a new term: the 'NATO- option'. This option appeared in the government program of Paavo Lipponen in 1995 (a government of five parties, with both the Social Democrats and National Coalition). The program pronounced that Finland contributes best to the stable development of Northern Europe under the prevailing conditions by remaining outside military alliances and maintaining independent defence. The words 'under the prevailing conditions' were later understood and called as the Finnish NATO-option. Finland somehow had adjusted for NATO already in 1992, when Finland bought 64 F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets from the US. In 1994, Finland joined NATO's PfP Program. However, the foreign policy caution and the tradition of neutrality remained strong: In 1996, just after the pronounced NATO-option, the Defence Council stated that Finland would not apply for NATO membership.

After Finland's rapid entrance into NATO in April 2023, a long-existing Western- oriented anti-non-alignment opposition in Finland is more detectable. For example, the leading Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* reported how Finland's NATO membership was realised as result of decades of work by its supporters (Teittinen 2023). According to Forsberg, the foreign policy elite (consisting of civil servants, soldiers, and security policy experts) became largely in favour of Finnish membership in the early 2000s (Forsberg 2023, 43). Such figures refer to the balance between East and West, disputes over military exercises and the arms trade, and how President Niinistö was perceived as too critical of the US and NATO. In the opinion of many, Finland could have given up neutrality in the 1990s, as Russian relations would probably have remained quite good. Prolonging the NATO application gave the wrong signal to Russia that Finland was its eternal ally (Teittinen 2023). The Finnish president meanwhile argued that what many experienced as slowness was instead diligence and justified caution, based on traditional Finnish prudent foreign policy (Niinistö 2023).

On the one hand, for many Finns, NATO's expansion in the North seemed an unnecessary provocation. At that time, the Finnish tradition of active neutrality still enjoyed wide support. There was also another reason – that NATO was not considered a major threat to Russia. In 1994, when Finland joined NATO's PfP Program, Russia was actually involved. On the other hand, the relationship with NATO was promoted in many places, and in many ways. Finland participated in crisis management operations in the Balkans and also joined the Afghanistan operation that followed the 9/11 terror attacks – which NATO led from 2003. The Finnish Defence forces sought networks, experiences and possibilities to have the best Western weapons, even though the Iraq War temporarily cooled relations between Finland and the US. Yet, the EU-based security policy served as a brake on NATO membership, even as various Eastern European nations, including Baltic States, joined NATO. In this light, the right reference group for Finland's comparison was Sweden, not ex-Warsaw Pact countries.

If one part of the political elite in Finland can be envisioned as quite critical of the US whilst holding a desire to 'understand' Russia – at least from the foreign and economic policy point of view – most high-ranking military officers saw Russia as a direct threat. In 2008, when Russia invaded Georgia, the pro-Western and pro-NATO Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb saw the war as a turning point, showing that Russia had both the desire and the ability to use armed force as a tool against its neighbours. Stubb stated that there were strong grounds for reconsidering Finland's membership in NATO, but he did not suggest haste either (Stubb 2008). Meanwhile, public opinion polls

had kept the NATO-option alive in everyday discussions (Nortio et. al. 2022). In the end, Finland's NATO accession was approved amidst some critical voices arguing that various problematic aspects were not analysed and discussed in detail in the fast-track process. For example, the leading Finnish expert of international law Martti Koskenniemi has repeatedly criticized the legally vague 'strategic concepts' and the consensus mechanism in NATO which can significantly change some principles of NATO's policies and practical operations. Despite these critical arguments, the Finnish NATO-decision in 2022 reflected the essence of Finnish foreign policy. It was again (as so many times in earlier history) forged in the realist tradition, and by a wide consensus – and done so in contrast to Sweden's more identity-based foreign policy. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that in both Finland and Sweden, military aspects of neutrality took precedence over political ones. The traditional understanding of neutrality was broken because the military dimension now defined other policies.

Conclusions

Various external and domestic factors have shaped the position of Finland as a neutral state, and its model and interpretation of neutrality is unique. As we argued, Finnish foreign and security policy has been defined around three pillars: 1) relations with Russia, 2) Finland's own defence ability and sovereignty, 3) Finland's relationship with the West, including the neighbouring Nordics. This system is obviously defined by geography, built in a realist tradition and forged in historical terms with wide consensus. The Independent Finnish Republic adopted neutrality and looked first at Baltic defence politics during the 1920s and 1930s, and during the Cold War – despite the controlling Soviet gaze – relations with the West and the other Nordics was developed actively. After the Cold War, all the aforementioned pillars were maintained in some balance – and in accordance with the EU-based security policy. This was a new kind of post-neutrality. Finland became allied with the EU, but not militarily aligned. In 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the Russian pillar had to be entirely rethought. Finland bid farewell to its long tradition of neutrality and became one of the most Eastern parts of the West and of NATO. Traditional neutrality was broken because the military dimension suddenly defined and overrode other aspects.

Finland's neutrality, founded during the early years of its independence, did not allow the country to escape from participating in World War Two. Finland's exceptional foreign and security policy was developed during the Cold War era as a necessity, and neutrality was a compromise. Internationally, Finland was closely aligned to common Nordic positions, even if domestic differences existed. Realist neutrality was the best and probably only option to balance between the West and the East, and a unique historical form of neutrality in Europe. Because of its specific characteristics, it cannot truly be seen as a model for others to follow. The uniqueness of Finnish neutrality is not only based on voluntary state preference but is largely driven by external and structural necessities. Finnish neutrality was always vulnerable as it was seen as suspect by both blocs, but for different reasons. Clearly, Finnish claims on neutrality have had both positive and negative connotations in history. On the one hand, it has hindered more active foreign policy and demanded adaptation and flexibility. On the other hand, the neutral position, especially together with the other Nordic states, has strengthened Finnish visibility and status at the multilateral level. Even if the meaning of the neutrality norm has evolved, it has left certain tracks and provided a continuity in the Finnish foreign policy approach.

This chapter has also revealed interesting differences between 'realist' Finland and its closest peer, 'idealist' or identity-based Sweden, a country with a more traditional margin of action than Finland. Even if both states adopted a neutrality policy, their attitudes towards it differed. During the Cold War, Finland was keen to follow Swedish leadership. But EU membership in 1995 changed this position. In its post-neutrality policy, Finland was eager to align more closely with the core EU policies than Sweden – for example by joining the European Monetary Union. Finnish non-alignment policy was developed in tandem with Sweden and strived for a more effective common EU CFSP and a closer NATO partnership. The Swedish-Finnish bilateral security cooperation was intensified already in the 2010s, but when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Finland was more rapid in implementing its NATO option, taking a leading position most likely due to its different historical experiences, national identity, and domestic political culture.

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