

SUGGESTED READINGS

Finland and Sweden Joining NATO: Implications for Arctic Security

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The internet is filled with perspectives and opinions. These lists, compiled by academic subject matter experts, are intended to help direct policy makers, practitioners, and academics to credible, open-access sources, available online, free of charge, that reflect leading-edge research and thinking. The compilers of each list have been asked to select readings that are accessibly written (i.e. they are not filled with excessive jargon), offer a diversity of viewpoints, and encourage critical thinking and debate.

After 30 years of close partnership with NATO, Finland joined the Alliance on 4 April 2023 and Sweden did so on 7 March 2024. Both countries' partnerships with NATO were historically based on their policies of military non-alignment, which changed following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.¹ These readings provide insights into this dramatic change, its implications for the alliance, and Russian and Chinese responses.

James Black, Charlotte Kleberg, and Erik Silfversten, [NATO Enlargement Amidst Russia's War in Ukraine](#), RAND, 2024.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the Ukrainians' determined defence have served to refocus the transatlantic community on the importance of collective defence and of investing in the underlying resilience of military forces, industrial capacity, non-military levers and societal will to fight. By pushing Finland and Sweden to join NATO, the Kremlin's plans for its "special military operation" have ultimately backfired – as they have too on the battlefields of Ukraine. Where Russia had hoped to undermine NATO's cohesion and credibility, and to further fragment Europe, instead it has achieved the opposite: directly bolstering the Alliance's capabilities and presence in the Nordic-Baltic region and the High North.

Katherine Kjellström Elgin and Alexander Lanoszka, ["Sweden, Finland, and the Meaning of Alliance Membership"](#), Texas National Security Review, 2023.

Rationalist understandings of military alliances argue that a formal treaty underpinning the security relationship is crucial for deepening and rendering more

efficient defense cooperation between countries. However, Sweden's and Finland's cooperation with NATO prior to 2022, when the two countries announced their intentions to formally join the alliance, was far more substantial than what rationalist explanations would expect. Traditional approaches to military alliances overlook the importance of ontological, or identity-based, considerations that come with being a formal member of an alliance. Accordingly, not only is signing a treaty functionally important, it is also significant in terms of what it implies for national identity in terms of security policy. For Sweden and Finland, this suggests that the greatest change with NATO membership will be with regard to identity and strategic culture.

Tuomas Forsberg, "[Finland and Sweden's Road to NATO](#)," *Current History* (2023).

In May 2022, Finland and Sweden both announced that they had decided to apply for membership in NATO. This was a dramatic shift in both countries' foreign and security policies, but a logical consequence of their European Union membership and close partnership with NATO in the post-Cold War era. For both Finland and Sweden, the key motivation for joining NATO was the need for greater strategic stability in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The swift decisions to cast aside their traditional military nonalignment cannot be understood without considering the strong emotional response in public opinion to Russia's unprovoked war.

Janne Kuusela, "[As a New Arctic Ally, Finland Contributes to Arctic Security and Defence](#)," *Wilson Center*, 1 March 2024.

In this short piece, the Director General for Defence Policy in the Finnish Ministry of Defence outlines how the strategic position of Northern Europe is assuming a new shape as Finland and Sweden join NATO. Alliance membership and closer bilateral cooperation arrangements between the Nordic countries and the United States – notably the new and existing Defence Cooperation Agreements – strengthen the stability and security of the Baltic Sea region and Northern Europe. In the north, NATO is forming a strong and united region from the Baltic Sea to the Arctic region. Accordingly, this means that the defence of the Euro-Atlantic region is being planned, exercised and implemented as a whole.

Adam Lajeunesse, "[Chinese Media Reactions to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and NATO Expansion in Sweden and Finland](#)," *NAADSN Policy Primer*, September 2023.

Lajeunesse observes that Chinese political and media narratives surrounding the Russo-Ukrainian war remained largely consistent over the first year and a half of Russia's most recent invasion of Ukraine and largely paralleled Russia's own media frames and political narratives. In the Arctic information environment, Chinese messaging surrounding Sweden and Finland's application for NATO membership fall into Beijing's broader NATO narratives. Here, the alliance expansion is described in Chinese media (both English and Chinese language) as destabilizing, an example of American imperialism, and likely to backfire. The author emphasizes that China's interests in the region extend well beyond the Arctic, with Sweden

and Finland looked upon as damaging precedents of alliance expansion that Beijing worries may extend to its own backyard.

Nicholas Lokker, Jim Townsend, Heli Hautala, and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, “[How Finnish and Swedish NATO Accession Could Shape the Future Russian Threat](#),” Center for a New American Security (2023).

The authors explain how Russia’s aggression in Ukraine compelled Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership—leading to an expansion of the very alliance that Russia purports to be opposing in Ukraine. Their accession into the Alliance will permanently reshape the European security architecture, which Moscow is likely to see as a threat to its own security and therefore use as a basis for adjusting its calculus. Even though Moscow has not explicitly retaliated against Finland and Sweden for joining NATO beyond expressing displeasure, the Kremlin is nonetheless likely to respond, including in ways that will pose challenges to the alliance in both the near and long term. This memo discusses how Finland’s and Sweden’s entry into NATO will shape Europe’s security landscape, how Russia is likely to see these changes and respond, and how the allies can address the future challenges stemming from these changing dynamics.

Stefan Lundqvist, “[A Convincing Finnish Move: Implications for State Identity of Persuading Sweden to Jointly Bid for NATO Membership](#),” *Studia Europejskie - Studies in European Affairs* (2022).

This article examines the decision by Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership and consequences for Sweden’s state identity. It explores Sweden’s initial formulations of a policy of neutrality, as well as the rapprochement between Finland and Sweden after the end of the Cold War. The article critically discusses how Sweden reformulated its concept of neutrality into a nebulous concept of non-alignment and adopted a security policy rooted in a cooperative security approach. It explains the processes that led Finland and Sweden to jointly apply for NATO membership and concludes with a forward-looking assessment of how a Swedish NATO membership will ultimately stabilise Sweden’s state identity and the Nordic countries’ regional military strategy.

Jason Moyer and Henri Winberg, “[Sweden’s Contributions to NATO: Bolstering the Alliance’s Defense Industry and Air Capabilities](#),” Wilson Center, 23 January 2024.

The authors explain how Sweden’s highly advanced military brings a considerable boost to NATO capabilities. As a member of NATO, Sweden will provide the Alliance with: support from its strong defense industry, high-technological competence, and a significant air force. These contributions will be crucial in preparing the Alliance to combat modern threats, as well as providing a dramatic multiplier to NATO’s capacity in two vital regions—the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic.

Sergey Sukhankin, P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Adam Lajeunesse, “[Russian Reactions to NATO’s “Nordic Expansion,”](#) NAADSN *Strategic Perspectives*, July 2023

This analytical overview of Russian responses to Finland’s and Sweden’s applications to join NATO draws on Russian official statements, news media coverage, and intellectual and think tank commentators. Describing Russia’s reaction and respective information campaigns, the authors observe a more modest Russian response to Sweden’s application for NATO membership than to Finland’s. They also analyze major themes from academic and think tank coverage, exposing the complexity and multifaceted approach in Russian propaganda.

Anne Wieslander, “[What Makes an Ally? Sweden and Finland as NATO’s Closest Partners,](#)” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* (2019).

From 2013 onward, Sweden and Finland gradually distinguish themselves from all other NATO partners in order to meet the growing challenge how to defend the Baltics. In the analysis, the concept of ‘informal ally’, in contrast to ‘formal ally’, is introduced. A synthesized analytical framework is used to evaluate the process of ever closer partner cooperation and its shifting focus from cooperative security to collective defense. For NATO, the concept of informal allies is central to address. How do informal allies impact NATO in decision-making, operational planning and crisis response? How can NATO balance in solving its core tasks efficiently, without undermining itself as a multilateral institution?

Katharine Wright and Annika Bergman Rosamond, “[Sweden, NATO and the Gendered Silencing of Feminist Foreign Policy,](#)” *International Affairs* (2024).

Sweden was the first state to adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in 2014, drawing on its state feminist tradition and support for the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Following the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and Sweden's move to seek NATO membership, the author observe a gendered silence on FFP. NATO membership was viewed as incompatible with FFP. Yet, NATO has long sought to project itself as a gender-just actor, including through engagement with the WPS agenda. Further, Sweden—as a NATO partner—had been a stalwart of the alliance's work on WPS. This article discusses the role of gendered silences in shaping strategic narratives, in this case concerning Sweden's NATO membership bid. It provides insight for policy-makers and diplomats on the impact gendered silence can have on the wider efficacy of FFP and WPS, even during processes such as NATO enlargement which might otherwise be viewed as ‘gender neutral,’ particularly when imbued with urgency.

Official Documents

Finland, [Government's Defence Report 2021](#).

[Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy](#) (2021).

[Sweden's Strategy for the Arctic Region](#) (2021).

[The Swedish Defence Commission's report on security policy, 2023](#) (excerpts)

[Swedish Total Defence 2021-2025](#) (2021).

Notes

¹ NATO, "Relations with Finland," https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49594.htm; NATO, "Relations with Sweden," https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52535.htm.