

BALANCE OF THREAT: FINLAND'S RESPONDS TO POTENTIAL THREAT FROM RUSSIA POST RUSSO-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT ESCALATION

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ABSTRAK

Dua peristiwa mendadak terjadi dalam kurun waktu 2022-2023. Invasi Rusia ke Ukraina pada Februari 2022 dan permohonan keanggotaan Finlandia ke NATO pada akhir tahun tersebut mengguncangkan situasi geopolitik di Eropa. Potensi ancaman yang dibawa Rusia kepada tetangga terdekatnya, Finlandia telah menghasilkan perilaku *balancing* yang dilakukan oleh Finlandia. *Finnish Paradox*, perkembangan militer Rusia, dan sejarah pasif-agresif yang dimiliki oleh Moskow hanyalah beberapa faktor yang melatarbelakangi respon Finlandia kepada potensi ancaman Rusia. Penggunaan teori Balance of Threat akan menjelaskan mengenai bagaimana Rusia menjadi potensi ancaman bagi Finlandia dan bagaimana keputusan ini akan membentuk keputusan geopolitik Finlandia. Penelitian akan berporos kepada pertanyaan "Bagaimana Finlandia merespons potensi ancaman dari Rusia paska eskalasi konflik Rusia-Ukraina?" dengan hipotesis yaitu "Finlandia bergabung dengan NATO di 2023 karena melakukan "balancing" kepada Rusia sebagai akibat potensi ancaman yang Rusia miliki kepada Finlandia". Sehingga, penelitian ini akan meneliti mengapa dan bagaimana Finlandia merespons kepada eskalasi konflik Moskow-Kyiv. Opsi militer Rusia yang beragam ditambah dengan perilaku agresifnya di masa lalu, total kemampuan militer, & kedekatan jarak dengan Finlandia sudah cukup untuk dikategorikan sebagai ancaman kepada Finlandia. Maka dari itu, perilaku *balancing* Finlandia kepada Rusia adalah valid.

Kata kunci: *Balance of Threat; Finlandia; Geopolitik; NATO; Rusia*

ABSTRACT

Two abrupt geopolitical events happen between 2022 and 2023. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and Finland's application for NATO membership later that year shocked the geopolitical situation in Europe. The potential threat Russia brought upon its closest neighbour, Finland, has resulted in the Balancing action by Finland. Finnish Paradox, the development of Russia's military, and Moscow's passive-aggressive history are a few factors that led to Finland's response to Russia's potential threat. Balance of Threat theory will be used to explain the potential threat to Finland from Russia and how it shapes Finland's geopolitical decision. The research will surround the question of "How does Finland respond to the potential threat from Russia Post Russo-Ukrainian Conflict Escalation?" and the hypotheses of "Finland joins NATO in 2023 because it is taking a balancing action towards Russia due to the potential threat Russia poses against Finland". Thus, this research will scrutinize why and how

Finland responded to the Moscow-Kiev conflict escalation. Russia's numerous options of military strength added to its past aggressive behaviour, total aggregate and offensive power, and proximity to Finland, are adequate to be considered a threat to Finland. Therefore, Finland's balancing action towards Russia's potential threat is valid.

Keywords: *Balance of Threat; Finland; Geopolitics; NATO; Russia*

INTRODUCTION

The European continent has always been a fierce battlefield contest between ideologies and approaches toward international politics and security. Historically, the European continent has been divided due to two world wars happening on this continent. The rise of ideologies within European nations has resulted in a "timebomb" for the European countries. World War I and II created a chain reaction felt until today. The difference between the Liberal-Capitalist ideology, which is growing in the Western European nations, and the Communist ideology in the Soviet Union has proven to create a staggering division between nations in the current state of geopolitics. Both ideologies are pivotal in determining the scheme of European geopolitics, as we can see today.

In northern Scandinavia, Finland is notorious for its neutrality principle in every geopolitical contestation around the region. Finland highly regards the "two-feet" foreign policy doctrine, which translates into strategic cooperation between the Western bloc of European Union countries and the United States of America and Russia in a comprehensive bilateral and regional cooperation. Finland strategy to neutral geopolitics stances are based on The Finnish Paradox, a strategic set of policies that declares Finland will cooperate and work with the Western nations as much as they do with the Eastern nations (Saukkonen, 2012). The Finnish Paradox creates Finland's foreign policy doctrine that puts forward the neutrality principle. Finland and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (FCMA Treaty) in 1948 as part of Finland's commitment to remain neutral between the two Cold War powers until the Cold War ended. On the other hand, Finland and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) cooperation starts with weapons procurement, as Finland trusted NATO for its "crisis management" capabilities during the Cold War era. The commitment Finland put to NATO strengthened with its involvement in the NATO Response Force since 2008 and becoming the Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP) of NATO in 2014 (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022).

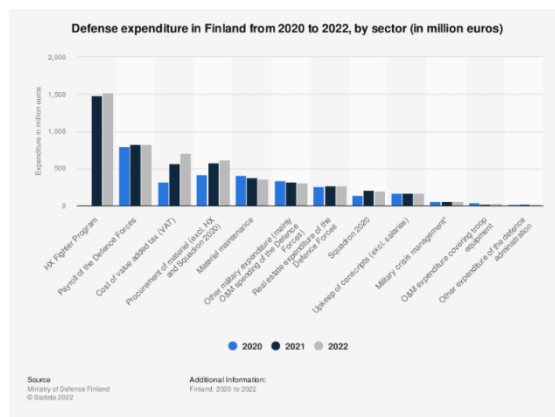
Bordering Russia directly on the range of 1340 km, Finland maintained its relation with Russia during the Cold War (re: Soviet Union) through "hedging," a foreign policy action that enabled Finland to be close with the eastern and Western blocs simultaneously. This "hedging"

action would later be known as “Finlandization” (Phan, 2022). The Finlandization movement was strengthened by the situation of a “small-state dilemma”. Finland, as a small state amongst big states power are predominantly tend to benefit from both blocs in different ways. Finland joins EU in 1995 marking the manifestation of Finns cooperation with west and have been home for NATO-EU European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats since 2017, a sign of strategic partnership of Helsinki and western states (Suchoples, 2023). While carefully approaching the west, Helsinki would remain close to Russia through keeping the dialogue doors with Moscow by hosting the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Helsinki on 2025 (Michalski et al., 2024).

In the post-soviet and Cold War era of 1995, Finland joined the European Union and ever since has been NATO’s closest ally in the Nordic region. This cooperation, marked by the establishment of Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) in 2009 motorized by Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. With Iceland, Norway, and Denmark already part of NATO, Finland automatically started the era of foreign policy & security tendency swaying away from the East to the West (Pillai, 2022). On the addition, Finland is increasing their defense budget annually, and the cooperation in the security sector between the two nations has declined ever since NORDEF was founded. After Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 & 2022, Finland “strongly condemned” Russia and supported the European Union’s sanction of Russia.

In Finland, the reaction caused by Russia’s sudden invasion of Ukraine creates worry amongst the Finns as the nation borders Russia directly. Research conducted by Finland’s Think Tank Elinkeinoelämän Valtuuskunta (EVA) after the Russo-Ukrainian war started shows that 95% of Finns consider Russia a severe threat to Europe and Finland. In comparison, 74% consider Russia as an untrusted ally (Haavisto, 2022). In governmental policy-making, Finland decided to increase their defense budget gradually for four years with €788 million additional budget for 2023 and gradually increase until 2026 with a €2,19 billion total increase on the budget (AFP, 2022). The comparison of Finland’s defense expenditure from 2020-2022 are shown on the table below:

Figure 1. Finland's Defense Expenditure 2020-2022



Source: Ministry of Defence Finland via Statista, 2023

According to the graphic, the expenditure increases exponentially, especially in 2022, when the Russian invasion of Ukraine is happening. The increase in Finland's defense expenditure is a concrete reaction to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Further, the reception domestically is approving these steps, which opens up a total evaluation of NATO's membership prospect in 2022. The desire and urgency to apply for NATO's membership prospect are considered inevitable. Finland perceives the Russia's action as "unacceptable and Russia has shown that Russia did not respect the sovereignty of other states and willing to deploy military operations to accomplish their purposes" (Svensson, 2023),

On July 5th, 2022, Finland, along with Sweden, applied for NATO membership with the signing of *The Accession Protocol for Finland* by NATO members during the NATO Madrid Summit 2022, which formally invited Finland and Sweden to join NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022). The Accession Protocol abandons Finland's long withstanding policy of non-alignment in military sector, a strategic policy they have conserved over the past two centuries. This process signifies the new chapter of Finland's relations with NATO and Russia, also marks the ends of Finland's military alignment neutrality and the starts of Finland's alignment with western allies.

The reasoning behind Finland's NATO membership would have been seen from the lens of threat as Finland's decision for application coincides several months after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. In determining whether Finland's decision to join NATO is solely based on the Russia invasion to Ukraine, domestic and identity factors play a part. The factors such as Finland's long aligned stance with the West in its decision making since the end of the Cold War and the history of Winter War and Continuation War with Russia back in the 1940s, could be the overlooked factors.

Therefore, this paper will scrutinize the use of the Balance of Threat theory in answering the question of Finland's decision to join NATO due to the potential threat from Russia in the era after Russia's invasion. The decision on using Balance of Threat theory derives from the timing of the decision and the nature of policy made by Finland in abandoning their long-standing policy on neutrality between both blocs. Balance of Threat theory perceived as the correct theory to be used as it's pivotal strength on analyzing reasons of state actions during a time of crisis. The reason includes the time where Russia invade Ukraine and cause geopolitical unrest for the rest of its neighbors including Finland.

With the main research question of "How does Finland respond to the potential threat from Russia Post Russo-Ukrainian Conflict Escalation?" while in today's situation Finland have been heavily anchored to the western allies, the writer will use the Balance of Threat theory to scrutinize the reason behind it. The purpose of this writing is to prove whether Finland's action in applying for NATO's membership in 2022 and later joining the alliance in 2023 aligns with the hypothesis that "Finland joins NATO in 2023 because it is taking a balancing action towards Russia due to the potential threat Russia possess against Finland". This research will use the qualitative method to underpin the steps taken by Finland, which are considered a balancing towards potential threats from Russia.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Balance of Threat

Balance of Threat theory was developed by Stephen Walt on "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power" in 1985. Developed under the Neorealist and acting as the anti-thesis of Balance of Power, the main idea of this theory is that states tend to form or join with an alliance for *balancing* against the external threat" (Walt, 2005). Balancing is defined as a threatened state effort to join the Anti-Thesis of primary threat sources (Walt, 1985). Walt described the threat as a combination of power, proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intention that sources from an entity or state. Further, Walt elaborated that "the big power nation-states" located in the "core" international system tend to commit balancing against threats from dangerous states. Also, Walt proposes that states will join an alliance to prevent potential threats from more enormous powers. These statements contradict the assumption that threatened nations will choose to cooperate with their threat. To build the theory and perfect it, Stephen Walt divides the Balance of Threat theory into four variable categories, which are Aggregate Power, Aggressive Intentions, Geographic Proximity, and Offensive Power (S. Cooper, 2003).

Aggregate Power is defined as "The greater a state's total resources (i.e., population, industrial and military capability, technological prowess, etc.), the greater a potential threat it can pose to others" (Walt, 1985). Aggregate Power speaks volumes of other threat variables that could disturb and shock a nation. A stronghold nation that possesses aggregate power would not trigger a balancing act by another nation to join another alliance unless this particular nation is considered a massive threat by international actors in one way or another. Aggregate Power defines a broad combination of threat elements and great power as the critical factor in "balancing against threats".

The other factor, *Aggressive Intentions*, is elaborated as "A nation's tendency to show aggressive behavior will provoke other nations to do a balancing against that particular nation" (Walt, 1987). On another definition, Aggressive Intentions could be seen as the aggressive behavior of nations to increase their military capacity, especially if they tend to do expansionism and Offensive Intentions in their history. Walt suggests that detecting aggressive intentions is difficult. Thus, he supports the idea of nations creating peacebuilding by forming or joining an alliance to ease the aggressive intentions of such states.

The *Geographic Proximity* variable offers a preposition of Proximate Power, which is defined as "States will acclimate their response against the nearest threats from their position, due to the circumstances of the threats are imminent rather than a threat that located far from their position". To strengthen his opinion on Geographic Proximity, Walt stated that "States that nearby poses a greater threat than those that are far away" (Walt, 2005). Walt described the Proximity factor as the "under-the-radar" aspect in explaining a threat due to the circumstances where it oftens underestimated. In the current geopolitical status quo, proximity is not a significant challenge for states to launch an attack or to be a threat to others. The development of technology and weaponry is a crucial aspect that neglected the particular "range" factor to be diminished as a threat. As a result, the states have been "borderless," and the "enemy is closer than expected" to the current status quo.

As the last factor to be emphasized, Walt offers a preposition on the *Offensive Power* variable that the Offensive Power means "States that possess a strong offensive military capability such as manpower and weaponry tend to provoke an alliance rather than the states that military is weak or have defensive foundations." In another part of his writing, Walt said that states that possess tremendous military power will always consider each other a threat and potential enemy because one state cannot guarantee how other state will use their power.

Power, in Walt's definition, becomes the central pivot in the Balance of Threat theory explanation because power is "one of the factors that influences tendency to balance. Nonetheless, by having power, a state tends to choose whether or not it will choose to ally

with stronghold states. Offensive Power variables analyzes the possibility of states improving their capabilities to unlock balancing possibilities against incoming threats. Walt also explains that a state could be increasingly dangerous when they possess a new and sophisticated military power at a certain level that gives them geopolitics power and leverage on the scale of international and multilateral.

The enhancements of this theory provided three variables that improved the hypotheses. First is balancing against threat is likely when a states are faced with regional military threat, second is states do balance against threat at the regional level and the third is external balancing against threat is more prone to happen when the balancer states couldn't engage with the most threatening actor (Bock & Henneberg, 2013). Hence, based on the explanations of the four variables above, the formulation of the research theory for this article will be as follows:

Table 1. Research Operationalization

Variable	Indicator	Operationalization
Aggregate Power	Technological Prowess	Russia's military and defense technology proficiency
	Military Industrial Capability	Analysis of Russia's military and industrial capability through military industry development
	Population	Statistics of Russia's citizen involved in Russia's military manpower compared to Finland's
Aggressive Intentions	Aggressive Behaviour	Scrutinizing Russia's military activity against Finland since 2014 and historically overview Russia's aggressive behavior in the region.
Geographic Proximity	Geographical Distance	Calculating the importance of direct borders between two nations through geopolitical policies and relations.
Offensive Power	Weapon Possession	Russia's armaments possession in defense equipment and technology

	Armed Forces Power	Calculating the total of Russia's military branches strength
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RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter will unfold the reasoning behind method in collecting and scrutinizing data for this research. Using the Balance of Threat theory by Stephen Waltz, this chapter wants to emphasize the correlation between the theory and the research method used through four main variables, Aggregate Power, Aggressive Intentions, Geographic Proximity, and Offensive Power. Further, this paper is bound to find the reasoning behind Finland's decision to join NATO in responding the potential threat from Russia, their next-door neighbor.

With the main research question of "How does Finland respond to the potential threat from Russia Post Russo-Ukrainian Conflict Escalation?" This research will be pivoting on the qualitative research method with a secondary deductive approach to answer the research questions through findings. According to John W. Creswell, the qualitative research method relies heavily on text, data, graphic charts, unique data analysis, and diverse procedures of analytical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Automatically distinguish the method from the quantitative research method. Also, Creswell defines the qualitative method as a way to test the theory proposed by a researcher using literature study and putting the researcher as the critical factor in deciding the success of a research. Also, the researcher will be put in task to process and possess the ideas through a bird-eye point of view while also deducting the ideas coming from research resources.

Based on the explanation above, the research questions will be answered through various literatures, divided into four main variables and seven indicators to develop the answers. The data found throughout the reason would then be tested through cross-checking in enhancing the quality and validity of data written on this research.

The primary resources utilize the research subject's beliefs, values, actions, and decision-making, while the secondary method relies on data provided by third parties. The technique used to gain the data for this research analysis, and data will be through the primary and secondary methods. The main research resources will be based on Finland's, Russia's, and NATO's official data as the primary resources obtained through their website and official publications, and the secondary data will be obtained through various resources on books, article journals, reports, and websites that could strengthen the research results. All the data collected in this article for the seven indicators would be sourced from 2008 – 2024 literature

and case study based on the first tipping point when Ukraine to the current escalation timeline of Russia with Ukraine when Ukraine started an effort to join NATO in 2008.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Aggregate Power

In light of aggregate power, one thing that needs to be taken into consideration is the status of Russia as one of the world's superpowers in the military. Their military capacity and capability, plus the addition of nuclear warheads, has established Russia's status as one of the world's military strongholds. In analyzing the calculation of Aggregate Power Russia possessed, it is essential to take into account three indicators: Technological Prowess, Military-Industrial Capability, and Population.

In March 2018, President Vladimir Putin announced the usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) mechanics for Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) (Bendett et al., 2021). Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) are a set of transformative nature in warfare on using modern technology that could be traced back to the 1990s until early 2000s. Elinor Sloan, a political scientist of Carleton University Canada stated that RMA in the current world is consisted to five themes: 1) Militaries are structured to more deployable, lighter, and more expendtionary forces; 2) is "battlefield mobility"; 3) Integration of the three armed services to reach military objectives; 4) Navy roles transitioning into littoral combat to support Army & Air Force and; 5) air-powered orientation relying on standoff forces and cutting-edge weapons (Collins & Futter, 2015).

Russia cutting-edge policy by using AI is one of three sections of Russia's military technology development is seen as a justification of RMA as it fits the number 1 criteria stated by Sloan previously. The other two sections are the modernization of nuclear and non-nuclear technology and the integration of technologies into revamped Russia's weapon system that was part of Russia's policy and budgetary priority until the year 2022 which falls into number 2 and number 5 criteria of a country considered as RMA (Binnendijk et al., 2023). These three paths of defense breakthrough have boosted the technological prowess of Russia in military capacity in combatting the similar steps taken by NATO. Their resurgence of military products revolution are coherent with the growth of it's action in the conflicted areas proven by the development of K-300P Bastion-P and 3K60 Bal defense missile systems which is a pre-emptive strategy to ensure full control of Russia in the Gulf of Finland, a highly regards area for both Russia and Finland (Cranny-Evans, 2022).

The increase in Russia's technological prowess means more power in its accounts, resulting in a greater potential threat to its neighbors. A study carried out by CSIS predicts that Russia could carry out a "coup de main" on Sweden, a close neighbor of Finland, by deploying its Bataylon Tactical Groups (BTG) alongside enhanced AI technology in its weapon and drone system even though it will face logistical challenges (Freeman, 2021). Further, Russia also has improved their intercontinental ballistic technology to hypersonic which oversee the introduction of Avangard, Tsirkon, and Kinzhal missile system in late 2019 (Jankowski, 2021). The hypersonic capacity is balanced with the development of AI. Following Putin's introduction of New Look in 2018, Russia crafted a national guideline and strategy for AI usage and development through the early 2030s. This development would prove Russia is onto the biggest capability as the world's number 2 military.

In the realm of its military industry, Russia has a broad vision for its development, spending 7,1% of its GDP in 2024 or accounting for more than ₺ 6,4 million for the national defense industry and development (J. Cooper, 2023). This military budget is used to develop their artillery and arms. The defense industry of Russia has rolled out more than 1000 tanks per year in addition to their production of armored fighting vehicles that reach more than 2.500 productions per year. Later, Russia's defense industry has actively produced its ballistic missiles, namely Iskandr and 9M727 Cruise Missiles, amidst Russia's current war against Ukraine (Watling & Reynolds, 2024). However, with their current budget, Russia yet to produce many artilleries using new materials but instead recycling some of its former artillery in the past. This fact, however, did not close the fact that Russia still produces some of the best heavy machinery in the military in the form of their Intercontinental ballistic missiles project, RS-28 Sarmat or the 2S19 Msta-S tank, all of which are currently used on the Ukraine battleground or for projected future conflicts. The S-400 Anti-Aircraft Missiles has also been projected near the Finns border, ultimately exhibiting Russia's true intention to prepare for war against western states.

The growth of Russia's military industry is forecasted to be a resurgence; the conflict in Ukraine has grown Russia's military needs to a high end. A study has shown the gradual increase of the National Defense (ND) and The National Security and Law Enforcement (NLE) budget of Russia over the past decades has significant highs from 2014-2016 and 2021-2022 with a decline from 2016-2017 (Luzin, 2023).

Figure 2. Russia’s NSLE and ND budget over the past decades. All figures in trillion of Rubles.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
ND	1.52	1.81	2.1	2.48	3.18	3.78	2.85	2.83	3	3.17	3.6	~5.5	>5.1
NSLE	1.26	1.84	2.1	2.1	1.97	1.9	1.92	1.97	2.1	2.23	2.34	>4	>4.4

Source: Foreign Policy Research Institute

One point that could be taken from the data above is that the gradual increase of budget is due to the high tension of Russia and its western counterpart. On the high point section of 2014-2016, Russia was involved in a peak-tension situation with Ukraine and western nations as Russia annexed Crimea during the year of 2014, thus create the more enormous needs for artillery, weaponry domestically. The economy sanction and embargo dropped by western nations post this action has caused Russia to spend more money to it’s military industry, notably growing it’s military industry further. The same occasion happens from 2021 through 2022 where the year of 2022 has Russia latest full-scale military operation to Ukraine which oversee the attacks on Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kiev. The level of budget spend during this period marks a significant demand to the Russia’s rearmament program.

The resurgence of Russia’s military products also creates an appealing market to its partners. As one of Russia’s allies in military and technology, China ordered 24 Sukhoi-35 aircraft and S-400 air defense systems in 2019, all of which are domestically produced (Kirchberger et al., 2022). India signed two deals. First is the \$5 billion air-defense deal in 2018, and second is the \$3 billion agreement to lease Russia’s nuclear-powered submarine in 2019, which saw the submarine as part of India’s defense equipment until 2029. In total, there are more than 50 countries with which Russia has military industry cooperation, signaling the appeal and capacity of Russia’s domestic military products.

One of the factors to be considered as Russia’s aggregate power is the population number. With a total population of 142 million and more than 3,5 million of military manpower consisting of 1,3 million active soldiers, 2 million reserve forces, and 250.000 paramilitary units, Russia overhauled the number of Finland’s in the same category (Statista, 2024). In contrary, Finland has 5,5 million population and approximately 950.000 military manpower which made up of around 19.000 active soldiers, more than 878.000 reserves and 53.000 paramilitary personnel (Ossa & Koivula, 2022). The reserves are on a vast numbers due to the annual

conscription enacted by the Finnish government in part to geopolitical escalation in the region over the past decade. Russia's 138th Motor Rifle Brigade in Kamenka around 50km from Finland's border is an example of Russia's military manpower usage. Another example is the show of power by Russia in deploying more than 600.000 soldiers in Ukraine for the past decade, this is a glorification of Russia's true power, a signs of what could be deployed to Finland if the war breaks out. The "small-state" syndrome hits Finland as it has been outnumbered in many aspects by Russia, practically searching for a safer options from Russia's threat.

Comparing both nation's military manpower, clearly, Russia has the advantage over Finland with the scale of comparison 1:3,6 of manpower. The advantage Russia possesses is considered to be a potential threat to Finland and NATO as an alliance entirely due to Russia having more extensive, sophisticated, and modernized technology in defense equipment. The growth of Russia's military complex and its advantage in manpower numbers compared to Finland is also a decisive considerable factor of incoming threat that could blow up time in the volatile situation of Europe.

In recent years, Moscow has doubled more than it's already deployed 19.000 troops in the western border of Russia which in direct border with Finland (Mackinnon, 2024). Russia also possessed more military bases in the Arctic Circle area of which is closely located with the Finland's territory, the advantage of military bases of Russia possess compare to western allies is used to conduct military joint-exercises between Russia and it's allies, practically threatening the function of Arctic Council and western states in the Arctic area (Gronholt-Pedersen & Fouche, 2022).

Beside strengthening it's military manpower, in a staggering number Russia has increased their military expenditure in 2023 to an estimated \$109 billion or 24% more than 2022 (Tian et al., 2024). This expenditure was used to bought artillery, combat vehicles including tank, and airplanes while also strengthening their missile capability. Russia are reported to have more than 50.000 Strategic Rocket Forces which includes 38 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM), 328 Nuclear Warheads while also possess a thorough strength in other branches such as Army, Navy, and Aerospace Defence Command which overhaul Finland massively as Finland did not possess Strategic Rocket Forces nor does Nuclear Warheads like Russia do nor that it's manpower surpasses Russian number (IISS, 2024). This fact shows that Russia are far more superior in their military capability compared to Finland, hence possessing a major threat to it's neighboring countries as Russia could dominates Finland in future precedent.

Aggressive Intentions

In its history, Russia has been notoriously known for its aggressive behaviour towards neighbouring nations and nations with different perspectives than theirs. Categorized as a superpower nation, Russia is the biggest state of a former USSR and thus inherited the majority of military power, ideology, behaviour, and international recognition, such as the status of a permanent member in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Jach et al., 2023). The power Russia possess thus creates a sense of need for a global power hence Russia act swift to secure what they perceived are theirs. Within the past two decades, Russia has been involved in 3 direct conflicts with its neighbouring states. Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the latest full-scale military operation to Ukraine in 2022 proved Russia's determination to expand its territory to nearby states.

Finland as the neighbor of Russia has also been a victim of Russia's behaviour. In 2015 Russia was accused on doing weaponization of migrations by sending undocumented imigrants towards the border of Russo-Finns. Russia facilitated these undocumented imigrants towards Finland's which alleged purpose is to intervene Finland's domestic policy by unstabilizing Finland and creating issues on Finland's border security (Rene, 2024). The situation was worsened by the re-activation of an automated brigade in the area of Alakurtti, which is located only 50km from the Finn border and many Russian aircraft activity are reported within the Finn airspace in 2015, is a hindsight signal Russia is sending its neighbours to disturb Finland's stability (Szymański, 2018). In 2016, Russia continue to show it's offensive intentions by moving their s-400 missile defence systems near Finland's border of Imatra and Svetogorsk, two cities in the direct border of Russia. Russia also positioned their S-400 Triumf defence missile systems near Saint Petersburg, making it on a strike range to Finland.

The polar politics and militarization have been an intensive signal of threat coming from Moscow with the Kola Peninsula positioned as the hotzone for both Russia and NATO alongside Finland and serves as the main military build-up for Russia. The establishment of Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation in 2019 near the Peninsula is an effort to secure the survivability of Rusia from the potential of nuclear weapons by western nations while it also signals Russia's intention to increase its presence in the Peninsula (Boulègue, 2019). The Russians 5th military branch for the Arctic's Northern Fleet was launched in January 2021. This branch operates Russia's recent advance weapons of Iskander 9K720 short-ballistic weapons and 9M729 Southpaw cruise missile (Chipman, 2020). A warning signal flew from Moscow to both Helsinki and Brussels due to the Northern Fleet launching.

On December 2021, President Putin already warned Finland if they join NATO in the next enlargement plan, this warning was followed by a joint military exercise by Russia and

Belarus called “The Union State exercise”, which took place in the southern and western areas of Belarus in January 2022, a month before the full-scale operation to Ukraine happened (Ålander & Paul, 2022). In the post-Ukraine invasion in February 2022, Russia continued its military gestures with naval firing exercises and establishing warning areas alongside the northern waters of the Kola Peninsula near Finland’s territory.

These series of actions Russia took increased the tension in the Eastern European states; Russia’s aggressive behaviours have scared other states, thus causing these states to look for other significant powers in the area. These types of activity were also alarming to Finland, whether as a signal that Russia might invade them or only for a routine exercise because in the year prior, Russia annexed Crimea as a strong show of power Russia could deploy if they wanted something. Therefore, while it is clear what Russia is trying to send to its neighbouring states and Western nations, the potential threat possessed by Russia against Finland is a threat on the horizon. As history shows, it could occur again with different countries on the border of Russia.

Geographic Proximity

Lies between East Finland and West Russia is a 1370km border between Imatra and Svetogorsk. As a neighbouring state, Finland needs to ensure their safety and domestic security from any potential external threat. This is the case they are trying to make when bordering a nation full of aggressive behaviour in the past, Russia.

Figure 3. The Russia-Finland Border with Official Border Points



Source: ResearchGate

The 1370km border possess significant key and weak points of Russia-Finland relationship. The potential within this region is enormous as the border is located near the North Arctic which becomes one of the main location for Finland's military training and a strategic route for Arctic Trade. This border has a long-standing history of conflict such as mentioned previously a weaponization of migration case and the invention of the migration route on the Finns-Russo border in 2016 is one example of how Russia could not be trusted as a neighbouring state (Szymański, 2018). Russia, as documented in the past, invariably interfered with the public opinion of its neighbouring states through their leaders. This example set a deep suspicion that the migration route was built with Russian participation. With no regard, it is increasing the tension between both nations and once again shows how Russia could act upon its neighbours.

In the light of Finland's joining NATO, a significant inclusion is the tension shifting on Finland's southern border with Russia as NATO expands its membership to former Soviet Union states in the Baltic area. This practically resulted in the Russian sources of threat closer to Finland's southern region. The heightened military operations near the border are another consideration Finland has in an encounter with Russia. Historically, Finland has always considered Russia as its threat and challenge to sovereignty and security; Finland consistently plays "two feet" politics with Russia and its Western allies. In the past, the Finno-Soviet Treaty served as the bridge between Moscow and Helsinki; this bridge helped Finland get closer politically to Russia. However, the tides have shifted in the past decades, and Russia could no longer be seen as a feasible partner for Finland.

With the geopolitical instability in the Eastern European states, both Finland and Russia, on multiple chances, engaged in tension due to Finland's active participation as NATO's Strategic Partner status and on one occasion, was also fueled by President Sauli Niinistö first discussion over crossing the aisles to join the NATO (Gallagher, 2023). The relations between Moscow and Helsinki were nothing short but an up and down tides. The tides, however, shifted heavily after February 2022 operations.

Post-Russia operations in Ukraine, Russia suggest that they might increase their troop presence alongside the border with Baltic nations and Finland to "preserve" their sovereignty and in preparation for a prolonged clash with the Western countries. This action fuels the current instability in the area. Finland heavily condemned the action and took immediate action through the Arctic Council Cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022). In the eyes of Finland, Russia was a potential threat that became a real threat. In response, Russia has send a similar warning to NATO and Finland by intensifying military activities in the Baltic

Sea particularly near the Viro Strait area, an area located near the Gulf of Finland. The Viro Strait has been vital to the shipment and deployment of military equipment and troops for Finland, Russia, and Estonia. The violation of Viro Strait airspace is visible as Russia's military jet are visibly crossing the Finland and Estonia airspace without permit many times and the usage of Viro Strait as a threat for Finland and NATO was fueled by its strategic functions for military submarine warfare practice (Lott, 2022). Hence, it is deemed a great possibility that a potential conflict escalation between Russia and Finland could happen within their border.

Offensive Power

Contributing to the high percentage of the state's offensive power is the nuclear warheads possessed in its inventory. Holding one of the most atomic warheads among other nations, Russia continues to raise its possession of this Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) technology. Per 2022, Russia is estimated to own close to 6.000 nuclear warheads, of which more than 1.500 are on active measurements and deployment (CACNP, 2022). These atomic warheads possessed by Russia could be implied as a potential threat to its neighbours. The accession of former Baltic states and Poland to NATO was driven by the significant Moscow's nuclear warhead developments. The nuclear warhead development could potentially be the consideration of Finland's decision to move one step closer to NATO in 2022, especially during the heightened tension between Moscow and Kyiv, which oversaw many nuclear usage threats conveyed by Moscow to Kyiv. The outcome would be Finland's policy is leaning towards NATO closer day by day.

In different sectors, the development of AI & automation-based military technology in Moscow has seen a significant increase over the past decade. The adoption of "Concept for the Use of Robotic Systems for Military Use until 2030" in 2014 kickoffs Moscow's desire to develop more automated and sophisticated types of weapons (Nadibaidze, 2022). Through the year 2019, Moscow has developed "Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development of the Russian Federation" and "National Strategy for the Development of AI Through 2030". These grand strategies are desired to be guidance and pivot for Russia's military AI & automation project.

The expansion to AI and Automation military tech by Moscow has created many new weapon projects, such as the Sukhoi S-70 *Okhotnik* heavy strike drone, which is due to be developed in 2024, and the Uran-9 Tank, which is notoriously known to be operated by autonomous or remote control. Moscow's interest in AI and automation could change the current landscape led by China and the USA. The landscape of geopolitical leverage will be dynamic as the three nations continue to develop their weapons, particularly Russia.

On a military manpower basis, Russia's Battalion Tactical Group (BTG) has been making names in the international conflict stages for a while. Considered as a semi-permanent group of armies, the Group consists of brigades and regiments from the Russian Ground Forces, Navy, and Airforce. As a specialized task force, they are tasked to do arms combat missions, performing deep raids into enemy territories, which included flank manoeuvres to enemy bases (Grau & Bartles, 2022). The BTG was involved closely in Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, and serves as the pivot for Russian military attack to Ukraine in 2022. The BTG is considered the most substantial group of armies Moscow has and is acting upon the order from President Putin.

Behind BTG, Russia's navy and airforce continue to grow. Russia Aerospace Forces (VKS) is involved heavily in the Ukraine war, signifying its military power by deploying Tu-160 & Tu-95MS bomber aircraft, Sukhoi-34, Sukhoi-35S, & Sukhoi-30SM fighter jets, and AA-12B air-to-air missile to target area in the Ukraine (Bronk, 2023). The display of power by Russia in the air sector are followed by its navy strength. Russia's Navy presence is crucial in Moscow's offensive plan. The Black Sea Fleet based in Sevastopol, Crimea, has increased their power by building a new sea-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) called SS-N-32 BULAVA (DIA, 2017). The domain of the navy continue to expand to the farthest part of Russia, such as the Arctic exploration mission and is one of the military branches that operate the nuclear-powered missile submarines amongst Russia's other branches. Currently, the aforementioned military weaponry and machinery are positioned to prepare for further potential escalation between Russia and Finland or NATO.

On aggregate strength, the total power of Russia's military is considered really powerful compared to its neighbouring states. The fear and worries about Russia's growing power have significantly created instability in the region. With unprecedented moves that could be taken by Russia soon, the security of Finland could be jeopardized as the comparison of military power between two nations is equal to "David vs Goliath". Therefore, this Offensive Power factor is significant in swaying away Finland to the side of NATO post-February 2022.

CONCLUSION

In the calculation of four factors, it is deemed that Russia possesses a potential threat against Finland. Finland would act to balance this potential threat by joining NATO in 2023 after applying as a member in 2022. The non-military alignment principle of Finland had to be broken due to the more significant potential threat of Russia's post-Russo-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022. The coalescence of Finland to NATO expands the geopolitical game in eastern Europe. Finland's decision to join NATO is influenced by a series of geopolitical actions Russia has taken in the past decades, including further potential threats from Russia to Finland.

By joining NATO, Finland is protected by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which gives it additional security guarantees from Russia. It is highly anticipated what and how Russia will act upon Finland's membership in NATO and further shape the geopolitical world in Europe.

One important points to be taken away is the Balance of Threat theory are missing out on potential factors in decision-making including individual analysis level on the head of the command and public opinion that pushes the agenda of Russia poses a threat to the Finland as it is to Ukraine similar to the ideas mentioned on the introduction. Hence, driving the policy-making to be more accomodating and considering the people's opinion in the battle of geopolitical in the north. These potential factors are hoped to be scrutizined using different theory in the future research.

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