

## Key points

1. Admitting Finland into NATO constitutes a permanent defense commitment by the alliance. In the case of the United States, it also entails a further extension of its nuclear umbrella. Such moves warrant a fulsome public debate, not a rush to action.
2. Consideration of the defensibility of Finland must take into account a revitalized, long-term Russian threat, not just the force currently mired in a grinding war in Ukraine.
3. More thorough discussion is needed about Finland's capacity to defend itself and the level of outside support it would require from NATO and, specifically, the U.S. military.
4. Regardless of whether it admits Finland, NATO should support it in any future crises with Russia. But the nature of that support changes depending on whether Finland is an alliance member or not, with attendant implications for the level of risk NATO incurs.
5. U.S. forces cannot be everywhere at once. New, permanent security commitments in northern Europe need to be examined relative to other U.S. global priorities.

With an apparent agreement reached at the Madrid Summit to remove Turkish opposition to Finnish and Swedish membership in NATO, their candidacies will soon be formally considered by the United States and the alliance's other members.<sup>1</sup> At issue is whether Finland and Sweden's addition makes strategic sense for the alliance. This paper does not take a definitive position on the question one way or the other. Rather, its central argument is that Finland's candidacy, in particular, warrants a robust public debate, not a rubberstamp. Adding a formal commitment to Finland's defense could present significant challenges in the long term to both NATO and the United States. While Russia's current imbroglio in Ukraine argues against an imminent strike on Finland, prudence requires assuming Russia could reconstitute its forces and adapt from the lessons of the current war further down the road. After all, if there were no viable risk of a Russian invasion at some future point, Finland would not be seeking NATO membership now. That eventuality needs to be weighed in terms of the resources that would be required to adequately defend Finland and the risks such action would entail. Finally, there is arguably no more solemn step in U.S. foreign policy than the extension of its nuclear umbrella, an act implicit in any enlargement of NATO. This, too, requires careful deliberation.

## Underlying assumptions of the analysis

Three assumptions undergird this analysis. The first is that the discussion of Finnish NATO candidacy should move beyond basic affinity; Finland is easy to like and its strategic position engenders natural sympathy. Nor is anyone questioning its democratic credentials. But these factors in themselves are not enough to warrant extension of the nuclear umbrella and an Article 5 guarantee.<sup>2</sup> Doing so also should make strategic sense for NATO and the United States.

The second assumption is that the United States and NATO would aid Finland in some manner in the event of a Russian attack, even if Finland were not a member of the alliance. Questioning the addition of Finland to NATO should not be seen as synonymous with abandoning it in the face of new Russian aggression. But incorporating Finland into NATO transforms the nature of support the alliance is obligated to supply in a crisis, significantly raising the stakes if Russia violates Finnish territory.

Finally, the paper assumes that Finland warrants special consideration. As has been frequently noted, its addition to the alliance would more than double NATO's common frontier with Russia. While Sweden's candidacy should also be carefully weighed, the bulk of its territory is under less direct threat than Finland's.

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<sup>1</sup> "Statement by President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinistö on 28 June 2022," President of the Republic of Finland, June 28, 2022, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/news/statement-by-president-the-republic-of-finland-sauli-niinisto-on-28-june-2022/>.

<sup>2</sup> "The North Atlantic Treaty," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 4, 1949, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm).



The paper proceeds in four parts. First, it briefly examines Finland's history with NATO. Second, it provides an overview of the country's military capabilities and geography as it relates to defense planning. Third, it touches on the question of basing foreign troops and nuclear weapons in the Nordic states. Finally, the remainder of the analysis constitutes a series of questions that ideally should form the basis for a careful debate about the implications of adding Finland to NATO.

## Overview of Finland's relationship with NATO

In 1948, Helsinki signed the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) with the Soviet Union. The treaty pledged Finland to pursue neutrality and not act contrary to Moscow's interests on the world stage. The FCMA essentially left Finland as a vassal state, with some capacity to pursue its own economic interests and domestic policies, although Moscow occasionally meddled in the latter, infamously influencing the outcome of the 1962 Finnish presidential election.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the FCMA paved the way for the departure of Soviet forces from Finnish territory and kept Finland free of foreign troops from 1956 onwards.<sup>4</sup> Finland also fared better in its economic development than the states of Eastern Europe, which were saddled by Moscow with communist systems.

From NATO's perspective, there was thus never any prospect of overt cooperation with Finland during the Cold War, although the country wasn't unimportant to the alliance's interests. It was largely assumed that in the event of war, any Soviet move against Norway would also encompass Finland's northern territory of Lapland.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, at least as early as the Eisenhower administration, U.S. planning assumptions allowed for support to Sweden in the event of a Soviet attack.<sup>6</sup> Finland would, by default, have been the main conduit for a westward Soviet thrust toward Sweden.

Following the Cold War's end and Soviet collapse, Finland moved with alacrity to reorient its foreign and defense policies. It quickly negotiated a new treaty with Russia in 1992, obviating the provisions of the FCMA. Next, it applied for and received membership in the European Union (EU), entering the economic and political bloc in 1995 along with Austria and Sweden. During this time, Finland also acquired 64 F-18s from McDonnell Douglas to refurbish its air force. The move was seen as groundbreaking at the time in terms of Finland's defense ties to the West. This was due both to arms sale's scale—the deal was valued at \$3 billion—and the simple fact that it was a direct purchase from the United States.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of its relationship to NATO, Finland proceeded more cautiously. It joined the Partnership for Peace and generally increased cooperation with the alliance, including contributing forces to NATO-led stability operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.<sup>8</sup> On the specific question of NATO enlargement, however, Helsinki expressed what could be described as complex pessimism. At the time of the first round of post-Cold War expansion in 1999—encompassing the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—Finnish officials worried the move might be viewed provocatively in Russia. Yet having suffered for decades under the restrictions of the FCMA, the Finns were loath to extend Russia veto authority over any other sovereign state's security decisions.<sup>9</sup> Thus, while not initially keen on NATO enlargement, Finland nonetheless supported both the alliance's right to accept new members and the right of any country to apply.<sup>10</sup>

Finland continued this cautious approach in the early 2000s, preferring to see the EU take the lead in the Baltic states. Yet Helsinki offered no objections to NATO's incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in 2004. Finland also became an

<sup>3</sup> "Domestic Developments and Foreign Politics, 1948–66," in Eric Solsten and Sandra W. Meditz, eds., *Finland: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988) <http://countrystudies.us/finland/25.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> From 1947 to 1956, the Soviet Union "leased" a naval base on Porkkala Peninsula. In addition to naval units, the Soviets also maintained an army garrison of 10,000 troops at the base, which is adjacent to Helsinki. For more on Porkkala's role in the early Cold War relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union, see Risto E.J. Penttillä, *Finland's Search for Security through Defense, 1945–89* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) 61–79.

<sup>5</sup> John C. Ausland, *Nordic Security and the Great Powers* (New York: Routledge, 2018) [First Printing: Westview Press, 1986], 81.

<sup>6</sup> "Statement of U.S. Policy Toward Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden)," National Security Report (NSC 6006/1), April 6, 1960, Document 300 in Office of the Historian, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Western Europe*, Volume VII, Part 2, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v07p2/d300>.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Crossette, "Finland in \$3 Billion Deal for 64 McDonnell Douglas Combat Jets," *New York Times*, May 8, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/08/world/finland-in-3-billion-deal-for-64-mcdonnell-douglas-combat-jets.html>.

<sup>8</sup> "Relations with Finland," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Updated May 18, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49594.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49594.htm).

<sup>9</sup> Charles M. Perry, Michael J. Sweeney, and Andrew C. Winner, *Strategic Dynamics in the Nordic-Baltic Region* (Dulles: Brassey's, Inc. 2000), 123–129.

<sup>10</sup> In a prescient open letter in 1998, the Finnish and Swedish defense ministers jointly argued that neither country sought NATO membership as the alliance undertook its first post-Cold War expansion. However, they would not preclude entering the alliance at some point in the future should security conditions warrant it. See Bjorn von Sydow and Anneli Taina, "Our Neutrality Is Not a Given," *Dagens Nyheter*, June 13, 1998, English-language translation in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *West Europe Daily Report*, FBIS-WEU-98-168.



informal “big brother” to Estonia on the defense front, furnishing Estonia with excess military equipment, providing training opportunities in Finland for Estonian forces, and helping Tallinn develop its own territorial defense concept.<sup>11</sup>

Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 significantly altered Finnish calculations with respect to NATO, accelerating cooperation between Helsinki and the alliance. A key step in this regard was the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on host-nation support between Finland and NATO, which paved the way for alliance forces to deploy to Finnish territory.<sup>12</sup>

This led to multinational participation in Finland’s annual Arrow wargame maneuvers. In addition to British, Dutch, and Estonian forces, U.S. Marines deployed to Finnish territory with prepositioned tanks from Norway in 2018 and again the following year.<sup>13</sup> Marine F-18s have also operated from Finnish airbases as part of the Scandinavian countries’ Arctic Challenge exercise in 2019 and 2021.<sup>14</sup>

## Strategic position and military capabilities

Because of the distortion that occurs in the polar regions on Mercator projections, most maps exaggerate Finland’s size. This is not to say the country is small, but at 130,000 square miles, Finland has only about half the area of the U.S. state of Texas. At the same time, its expanse is amplified by the country’s small population—just 5.5 million. Most of these are concentrated in Finland’s southern cities, with Helsinki alone accounting for more than 10 percent of the population. Large portions of the northern regions are sparsely populated.<sup>15</sup>

Finland is longer than it is wide, measuring about 700 miles north to south. Yet it is not terribly deep along the east-west axis, the one oriented toward Russia. Finland is just more than 300 miles wide at its thickest point in the south but narrows to about 130 miles toward the country’s middle section and averages less than 160 miles in width in the northern regions. In the south, Helsinki itself sits precariously close to the Russian border, just 100 miles away. By comparison to current NATO capitals, Helsinki is roughly the same distance to the Russian border as Tallinn and slightly closer than Riga. Strategic depth is not one of Finland’s assets.

Finland maintains a relatively small standing army of 13,400—of which only 4,400 are professional soldiers—but is capable of raising a massive reserve force of 280,000 within 30 days.<sup>16</sup> Finland augments its land force with a small, but capable, air force. The F-18s purchased in the 1990s are set to be replaced by 64 F-35s under an agreement with the United States formalized earlier this year.<sup>17</sup> Once delivered, Finland will operate more of the stealth jets than any current NATO member, excepting Italy and the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> The Finnish navy is less formidable, consisting mainly of minelayers and minesweepers, as well as some missile-armed patrol craft.<sup>19</sup> The navy will receive a modest increase in capability over the next decade, with the addition of four multi-role corvettes.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Perry, Sweeney, and Winner, *Strategic Dynamics in the Nordic-Baltic Region*, 129–131.

<sup>12</sup> Charly Saloniuss-Pasternak, “Friends with (Some) Benefits: How Non-Allied Sweden and Finland View Long-Range Conventional Precision Strike,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 27, no. 1-3 (2020): 69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700.2020.1810888>. Full text of the MOU is available through the Finnish Ministry of Defense: [https://www.defmin.fi/files/2898/HNS\\_MOU\\_FINLAND.pdf](https://www.defmin.fi/files/2898/HNS_MOU_FINLAND.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Woody, “The Marines Pulled Tanks Out of Caves in Norway for War Games Close to Russia’s Border for the 2nd Year in a Row,” *Business Insider*, June 8, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-army-marine-corps-tanks-join-finland-arrow-19-exercise-2019-6>.

<sup>14</sup> Jim St. Clair, “169th FW Wrap Up Arctic Challenge Exercise in Sweden,” U.S. Air Force, June 10, 2019, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1870898/169th-fw-wrap-up-arctic-challenge-exercise-in-sweden/>; Finnish Air Force, “United States Marine Corps F/A-18s to Visit Karelia Air Command in June,” May 7, 2021, <https://ilmavoimat.fi/en/-/united-states-marine-corps-f-a-18s-to-visit-karelia-air-command-in-june>.

<sup>15</sup> “Finland,” *The World Fact Book*, Central Intelligence Agency, Updated June 21, 2022, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/finland/#geography>.

<sup>16</sup> “Chapter Four: Europe,” *The Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022): 102; Gene Germanovich, James Black, Linda Slapakova, Stephen J. Flanagan, and Theodora Ogden, *Enhancing U.S.-Finnish and Regional Defense Cooperation: An Exploratory Analysis* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2021), 1, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1424-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1424-1.html).

<sup>17</sup> John A. Tirpak, “Finland Formalizes Deal for 64 Block 4 F-35s,” *Air Force Magazine*, February 11, 2022, <https://www.airforcemag.com/finland-formalizes-deal-for-64-block-4-f-35s/>.

<sup>18</sup> Italy and the United Kingdom will eventually operate 90 F-35s and 138 F-35s, respectively. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program* (RL30563) Updated May 2, 2022, 32–33, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/weapons/RL30563.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> For the Finnish navy’s full order of battle, see “Chapter Four: Europe,” *The Military Balance*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Gerard O’Dwyer, “Finland to Bolster Navy’s Surface Fleet with New Ships, More Missiles,” *Defense News*, January 13, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/surface-navy-association/2020/01/13/finland-to-bolster-navys-surface-fleet-with-new-ships-more-missiles/>.



For most of the past decade the Finnish defense budget's share of gross domestic product (GDP) averaged somewhere between 1.2 percent and 1.4 percent, but this is changing due to increased fears of Russian aggression.<sup>21</sup> Finland will spend just under 2 percent of GDP for 2022 and should cross the 2 percent threshold in 2023.<sup>22</sup>

If there is a glaring deficiency in Finland's force structure, it is the absence of effective missile defenses. Finland operates NASAMS, a capable mid-range air defense system also in service with some NATO countries.<sup>23</sup> But while NASAMS is effective against manned aircraft and has some capability against cruise missiles, it has no ability to shoot down ballistic missiles.<sup>24</sup> Given Russian use of theater ballistic missiles against civilian and military targets in Ukraine, this would seem to be a potential weakness for Finland.

In contrast, Finland's most impressive military asset is arguably its long-range strike (LRS) systems. For a small country, Finland has invested heavily in this capability. In 2018, it became only the third country after Australia and the United States to operate the AGM-158 Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Munition (JASSM), which can be deployed by Finland's F-18s.<sup>25</sup> JASSM has a range of approximately 230 miles, but there also is an enhanced variant (JASSM-ER) with almost three times the reach.<sup>26</sup> Finland intends to acquire 200 JASSM-ER's as part of the broader F-35 purchase.<sup>27</sup>

On land, Finland also operates the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS), having procured 22 second-hand MLRS launchers from the Netherlands in 2006.<sup>28</sup> In 2021, Finland was given permission by the U.S. State Department to purchase extended-range munitions for use with these systems, significantly augmenting their capacity to strike targets inside Russian territory.<sup>29</sup>

Finland needs these LRS assets largely to counter Russian air defenses. From its own territory, Russia can range most of Finnish airspace with its S-300 and S-400 systems. This is a point worth dwelling on: Finland's lack of strategic depth enables Russia to essentially target aircraft throughout Finnish airspace from ground-based systems on the Russian side of the border. The S-400 covers almost all of Finland, while the S-300 provides redundant coverage over the eastern half of Finland.<sup>30</sup>

In turn, the ability to strike and destroy those air defenses from Finland's side of the border—thus keeping Finnish airspace open to resupply from other countries—is thought to be the primary mission of its LRS capabilities.<sup>31</sup> That said, in theory, Finnish LRS systems could be used to strike a variety of targets in northwestern Russia, including on the strategic Kola Peninsula.

During 2019's Bold Quest exercise, Finland explored its capacity to connect its LRS assets with NATO sensors.<sup>32</sup> At one point, Belgian controllers directed strikes by a Finnish MLRS launcher, cueing off targeting data provided by an alliance sensor.<sup>33</sup> This was a significant technological achievement and demonstrates the high level of interoperability Finland already has with NATO.

<sup>21</sup> "Share of Defense Budget of GDP (%)," Finnish Ministry of Defense, Accessed June 15, 2022, [https://www.defmin.fi/files/5209/TAE\\_2022\\_GDPshare\\_27.9.2021.pdf](https://www.defmin.fi/files/5209/TAE_2022_GDPshare_27.9.2021.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Heljä Ossa and Tommi Koivula, "What Would Finland Bring to the Table for NATO?" *War on the Rocks*, May 9, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/what-would-finland-bring-to-the-table-for-nato/>.

<sup>23</sup> NASAMS stands for "National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System," but is more commonly known by its acronym.

<sup>24</sup> "National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS)," Air Force Technology, June 22, 2021, <https://www.airforce-technology.com/projects/national-advanced-surface-to-air-missile-system-nasams/>.

<sup>25</sup> Saloniemi-Pasternak, "Friends with (Some) Benefits," 66.

<sup>26</sup> The JASSM-ER (AGM-158B) has a range of approximately 620 miles. "JASSM/JASSM ER," Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Updated July 30, 2021, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/jassm/>.

<sup>27</sup> "Finland—F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft with Air-to-Air Missiles and Air-to-Ground Precision Guided Munitions," Defense Security Cooperation Agency (Transmittal No. 20-66), October 9, 2020, <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/finland-f-35-joint-strike-fighter-aircraft-air-air-missiles-and-air>.

<sup>28</sup> "Finland Hopes to Soon Acquire Multiple Launch System Missiles," *Defense News*, November 18, 2015, <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2015/11/18/finland-hopes-to-soon-acquire-multiple-launch-system-missiles/>.

<sup>29</sup> "Finland—Extended Range Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System," Defense Security Cooperation Agency (Transmittal No. 21-16), February 17, 2021, <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/finland-extended-range-guided-multiple-launch-rocket-system>.

<sup>30</sup> See "Figure 1," in Saloniemi-Pasternak, "Friends with (Some) Benefits," 68.

<sup>31</sup> Saloniemi-Pasternak, "Friends with (Some) Benefits," 67.

<sup>32</sup> Bold Quest is a revolving series of exercises conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Joint Staff, designed to test technical interoperability with various U.S. allies and security partners. See "Bold Quest 19.1 Coalition Demonstration Commences in Finland," The Joint Staff, Accessed June 14, 2022, <https://www.jcs.mil/Media/News/News-Display/Article/1844343/bold-quest-191-coalition-demonstration-commences-in-finland/>.

<sup>33</sup> Saloniemi-Pasternak, "Friends with (Some) Benefits," 70.



## NATO basing and nuclear weapons in the Nordic states

The prevailing view is that neither Finland nor Sweden will seek permanent NATO bases on their territory.<sup>34</sup> This is not only seen as limiting Russian concerns about alliance encroachment, but would also be in keeping with the policies of current Nordic NATO members, Denmark and Norway. Neither of these states permanently hosted foreign forces during the Cold War, and each eschewed deployments of nuclear weapons on their soil.<sup>35</sup> Finland and Sweden are likewise expected to forego a nuclear role.

It should be noted that this “Nordic exception” was never quite absolute during the Cold War. For example, Denmark permitted a U.S. base and nuclear deployments at Thule, Greenland, a facility that remains important to U.S. operations today.<sup>36</sup> And the fifth Nordic nation, Iceland, allowed a permanent U.S. base at Keflavik, which was in continuous use through 2006, and still receives periodic deployments by U.S. air forces.<sup>37</sup> Finally, as renewed concerns developed about the Soviet threat to northern Europe in the early 1980s, Norway signed an MOU with the United States that permitted the Marine Corps to permanently preposition equipment on its territory, in a cave complex near Trondheim.<sup>38</sup>

Assigning the Marines primary responsibility for reinforcing Norway made sense from the standpoint that Norway was essentially an island in regard to the rest of NATO. There was no contiguous allied territory from which it could be resupplied or reinforced.

After the Cold War’s end, the Marines continued their relationship with Norway and still maintain prepositioned equipment at Trondheim.<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting here that Trondheim remains the only site on the Scandinavian Peninsula with U.S. or NATO prepositioned equipment for land warfare. The U.S. Army maintains five such sites to the south on the main body of the European continent, with a sixth under construction at Powidz in Poland.<sup>40</sup> However, there is no direct land route through allied territory from any of these Army sites to Finland.<sup>41</sup>

## Considering Finnish membership in NATO

There is much in the preceding overview to commend Finland’s NATO candidacy. In some ways, it would seem to be the ideal “turn key” ally. It is committed to its defense; has modern, effective weapons in its force structure; and has exercised extensively with NATO, demonstrating a high degree of interoperability. Yet fundamental questions remain about exactly how Finland would be defended, what a future Russian threat could encompass, and what level of commitment would be

<sup>34</sup> Carl Bildt, “NATO’s Nordic Expansion,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 12, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2022-04-26/natos-nordic-expansion>.

<sup>35</sup> Ausland, *Nordic Security and the Great Powers*, 42–43, 50.

<sup>36</sup> Brett Tingley and Tyler Rogoway, “The U.S. Can’t Buy Greenland But Thule Air Base Is Set To Become More Vital Than Ever Before,” *Drive*, December 1, 2019, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/29541/the-u-s-cant-buy-greenland-but-thule-air-base-is-set-to-become-more-vital-than-ever-before>.

<sup>37</sup> On Keflavik’s history and its role in the Cold War relationship between Iceland and the United States, see Gudni Th. Jóhannesson, “To the Edge of Nowhere: U.S.-Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War,” *Naval War College Review* 57, no. 3/4 (Summer/Autumn 2004) 115–137; For an overview of recent operations, see Christopher Woody, “With Another Historic Trip to Iceland, U.S. Stealth Bombers Are Building ‘Muscle Memory’ as the Arctic Heats Up,” *Business Insider*, September 22, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/historic-b2-deployment-to-iceland-reflects-increasing-us-arctic-focus-2021-9>.

<sup>38</sup> Zsofia Budai, “Defense and Deterrence on NATO’s Northern Flank: Strengthening the U.S. Marine Corps’ Role in Europe,” *MCU Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2019), 95, <https://doi.org/10.21140/mcu.2019100206>.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher P. Cavas, “Cave-Dwellers: Inside the U.S. Marine Corps Prepositioning Program-Norway,” *Defense News*, September 20, 2015, <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/modern-day-marine/2015/09/20/cave-dwellers-inside-the-us-marine-corps-prepositioning-program-norway/>; Christopher Woody, “The U.S. Marine Corps’ Big Plans to Redesign Its Force Means Changes to What It Stores in Secret Caves in Norway,” *Business Insider*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/marine-corps-force-redesign-means-taking-tanks-from-norway-caves-2020-8>.

<sup>40</sup> The five current Army pre-positioned sites are Zutendaal, Belgium; Dülmen and Mannheim, Germany; Livorno, Italy; and Egelshoven, Netherlands. “Fact Sheet: Army Prepositioned Stock,” U.S. Army Europe and Africa Public Affairs Office, Accessed June 14, 2022, <https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/Portals/19/documents/Fact%20Sheets/APS%20Fact%20Sheet%2011202020.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> The Øresund Bridge links Denmark and Sweden, but it is unclear from open sources whether this structure would meet the specifications needed to transport cargo with the size and weight of armored forces. There also would be the question of the security of the five-mile span (and connecting bridges and tunnels) in the event of war. Finally, equipment arriving in Sweden would still need to transit around the Gulf of Bothnia, as in the case of Trondheim in Norway. British Army units did cross the Øresund Bridge en route to NATO’s 2018 exercise, Trident Junction, in Norway. However, they did so in trucks, Land Rovers, and light tactical vehicles, like the Foxhound, not with heavier infantry fighting vehicles or tanks. See “UK Forces Test Military Mobility En Route to NATO Exercise Trident Juncture 2018,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, October 10, 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/photos\\_159626.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/photos_159626.htm).



required from U.S. and other NATO forces. The role nuclear weapons would play in defense of Finland constitutes another crucial area for discussion. Ideally, all of these subjects should be examined in depth before a decision is made on admitting Finland into the alliance. At a minimum, the five questions set forth below should form the basis for an informed debate as the United States contemplates a permanent security commitment to Finland through NATO.

## Question 1: What threat could Russia pose to Finland in 10 to 15 years?

When news first began to break about Finland's potential NATO candidacy, social media quickly filled with memes lauding Finns' legendary status as "Russian killers." That reputation was largely earned in action during the Second World War. Finland fought the Soviet Union twice, first in the Winter War (1939–1940) and then in the Continuation War (1941–1944). Often ignored is that Finland lost both conflicts. In the first, Finland put up brilliant initial resistance but eventually succumbed under withering artillery attacks from the Red Army.<sup>42</sup> In the second, Finland attempted to reclaim lost territory, this time with materiel support from Nazi Germany, and was again defeated.<sup>43</sup> This illustrates an essential fact: Skilled as its fighters might be, Finland is still susceptible to the superior numbers and firepower of its eastern neighbor. Russian capabilities thus must figure prominently in any realistic assessment of Finnish defensibility.

Much about the outcome of the Ukraine War remains in doubt at the time of writing. After its initial blunders, the Russian army appears to have regained some level of effectiveness, making slow, incremental gains in the south and east as it again leverages its advantage in artillery over a weaker opponent.<sup>44</sup> Yet even if Russia is able to attain something it can label a victory in Ukraine—which is far from a certainty—the war will have inflicted immense damage on the Russian military. In May 2022, the U.S. Defense Department estimated almost 1,000 Russian tanks had been destroyed to that point.<sup>45</sup> That same month, British intelligence reported it believed Russia had already lost a staggering one-third of the forces with which it entered Ukraine.<sup>46</sup> This erosion of Russian manpower and materiel should not be underestimated.

How long it will take Russia to reconstitute its forces is uncertain, as is whether Russia will absorb the operational lessons from its failings in Ukraine. In the interim, Finland has a clear window where it can enter NATO without fear of a direct military response. As some observers have noted, the situation is analogous to the prolonged period following the Soviet collapse when the Baltic states were able to gain membership in NATO unopposed.<sup>47</sup> While arguments were proffered at the time regarding defensibility, these concerns were largely dismissed in favor of the perceived democratic gains NATO enlargement could bring and the limited threat Russia then posed.<sup>48</sup> Yet a decade later, as the Russian military rebounded and seized Crimea, serious concerns grew about whether NATO could truly defend Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. A series of influential RAND wargames drove this point home, in the process reviving debates about tactical nuclear use in defense of alliance territory.<sup>49</sup>

The same mistake should not be repeated with Finland. The question that needs to be addressed now is whether Finland can be defended against a robust Russian threat, one that could conceivably emerge in the 10- to 15-year timeframe, although possibly sooner. That should be the minimum baseline for considering what NATO and its main security contributor, the United States, are signing up for by accepting Finland into the alliance.

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<sup>42</sup> William Trotter, *A Frozen Hell: The Russo-Finnish Winter War of 1939–1940* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2013) Kindle edition.

<sup>43</sup> Finland and the Soviet Union signed an interim peace treaty to end the Continuation War. Among other provisions, it required the Finns to cede territory, pay reparations, limit the size of their armed forces, and grant the Soviets the lease on Porkkala Peninsula. Its provisions were subsequently replaced by the FCMA in 1948. See "The Continuation War," *Finland: A Country Study*, <http://countrystudies.us/finland/20.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Matthew Luxmoore, "Russia Exploits Artillery Advantage as Ukraine Braces for Attacks on More Eastern Cities," *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-exploits-artillery-advantage-as-ukraine-braces-for-attacks-on-more-eastern-cities-11654945658>.

<sup>45</sup> Ryan Pickrell, "U.S. Believes Russia Has So Far Lost Nearly 1,000 Tanks in Putin's War with Ukraine, Defense Official Says," *Business Insider*, May 26, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-estimates-russia-tank-losses-in-ukraine-2022-5>.

<sup>46</sup> "Britain Says Russia Has Lost a Third of Its Forces in Ukraine," Reuters, May 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/britain-says-russias-donbas-offensive-has-lost-momentum-2022-05-15/>.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Poast, "Before Finland and Sweden Join," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 7, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/06/07/what-nato-needs-to-do-before-finland-and-sweden-join-pub-87262>.

<sup>48</sup> For contending views on the Baltic defensibility question at the time, see Kent R. Meyer, "U.S. Support for Baltic Membership in NATO: What Ends, What Risks?" *Parameters* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 67–82; Mark Kramer, "NATO, the Baltic States and Russia: A Framework for Sustainable Enlargement," *International Affairs* 78, no. 4 (2002), 731–756.

<sup>49</sup> David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2016), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html); Paul K. Davis, J. Michael Gilmore, David R. Frelinger, Edward Geist, Christopher K. Gilmore, Jenny Oberholtzer, and Danielle C. Taraff, *Exploring the Role Nuclear Weapons Could Play in Deterring Russian Threats to the Baltic States* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2781.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2781.html).



## Question 2: How much external help will Finland require in its defense?

Cursory discussions of Finnish defense capabilities usually allude to its large territorial defense force. Yet it is important to recognize that this reserve is not a force in-being, but essentially a national militia that must be mustered, equipped, and deployed in the event of a crisis or attack. As noted earlier, the open-source estimate is that mobilization would take 30 days. Finland exercises mustering a small percentage of the total force each year, with approximately 10 percent being mobilized in 2022.<sup>50</sup> But that is far from the full force, estimated at 285,000.

It is not to impugn Finnish intentions to question how successfully it would carry out full mobilization in wartime. Mustering over a quarter million citizens in a month would be a daunting task for any country, and it has been over a generation since there was a real prospect of Finland needing to implement this option. Perhaps Finland's territorial defense plans will function exactly as intended, but it seems prudent to consider that there could be difficulties or delays or that the forces fielded are not as effective as expected. It is worth recalling here that Ukraine had a standing military of more than 195,000 when it was attacked by Russia.<sup>51</sup> Another question: How long could Finland maintain full mobilization—as an economy and a society—if there were an ongoing Russian threat, similar to the year-long period of “heavy metal diplomacy” that presaged the eventual invasion of Ukraine?

It is thus not unreasonable to believe Finland would need reinforcement from NATO forces, particularly during the early stages of a crisis or active fight, before full mobilization of Finland's reserve force can be achieved. Likewise, specialized assets unavailable in Finland's inventory will also be required, most notably missile defenses. A 2021 study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies suggested two Patriot battalions would be required to reinforce Finland in wartime.<sup>52</sup> That figure might now be considered low given the robust use of cruise and ballistic missile by Russia in Ukraine.

Even high-quality military assets that Finland has, or is in the process of acquiring, might not be available in sufficient numbers in the event of a full-scale military attack by Russia. For example, Finland's 64 F-35s will be an impressive force for a small country, but still might not be enough for a prolonged, high-intensity fight against a revitalized Russia. Also, it will be 8 years before all 64 aircraft are in service with Finland; delivery of the F-35s won't begin until 2025, with completion of the order not expected until 2030.<sup>53</sup>

In the event NATO ground forces are required, there is the important question of how they'll arrive. Moving armored forces exclusively via air transport is a painstaking process. The U.S. Army's prepositioned stocks to the south have no direct land route to Finland. This limitation would also apply to other NATO militaries based on the main body of the European continent. In Scandinavia itself, both Norway and Sweden have small armies—8,300 and 6,850 troops, respectively—and could be hard pressed to send meaningful ground reinforcements.<sup>54</sup>

That leaves the Marine Corps' stock of prepositioned equipment in Norway. Trondheim is about 500 miles from Helsinki as-the-crow-flies, but the Gulf of Bothnia interposes, severing southern Finland from the Scandinavian Peninsula. Land transit must move north toward the Arctic Circle and then south through Lapland to reach Finland's most populous areas. This can almost double the travel distance between Trondheim and Helsinki and requires favorable weather. When the Marines participated in the Arrow wargames, they did so in the warm summer months, not the depths of the Finnish winter.

Conceivably, solutions can be found, including building new prepositioned equipment sites in southern Finland, assuming Helsinki would allow this. But such a step, obviously, will cost money and require the allotment of dedicated U.S. or NATO equipment for the task. The point to emphasize is that there will be real costs to adding Finland to the alliance.

### Implications for U.S. force structure

<sup>50</sup> Ossa and Koivula, “What Would Finland Bring to the Table for NATO?”

<sup>51</sup> “Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia,” *The Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022), 211.

<sup>52</sup> Mark F. Cancian and Adam Saxton, *Future NATO Enlargement: Force Requirements and Budget Costs* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021), 102, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/future-nato-enlargement-force-requirements-and-budget-costs>.

<sup>53</sup> Tirpak, “Finland Formalizes Deal for 64 Block 4 F-35s.”

<sup>54</sup> “Chapter Four: Europe,” *The Military Balance*, 133, 151.



A related question, from the U.S. side, is what impact the requirement to defend Finland will have on its national force structure and the availability of forces for other missions and theaters. As the service traditionally tasked with reinforcing Scandinavia, the Marine Corps would be most directly affected. The Marines are currently in the process of transitioning to a more agile force structure, one optimized for fighting in the littoral, as contingencies in the western Pacific would require.<sup>55</sup> Part of this process involves divesting the force of certain heavier capabilities, including the tanks the Marines deployed with as part of the Arrow exercises. Defense officials have suggested the force structure changes being implemented would leave the Marines well-positioned to defend strategic, outlying islands belonging to Finland and Sweden.<sup>56</sup> This seems like a fair judgment. But what about a more traditional land battle along the Finnish-Russian frontier?

Perhaps at some point the Army will instead assume primary responsibility for Scandinavia. Units from an Army Stryker brigade have also participated in past Arrow exercises and were the sole U.S. representative at the 2022 iteration of the Finnish wargames.<sup>57</sup> The Army also recently stood up an airborne division in Alaska dedicated to Arctic warfare.<sup>58</sup> The Army thus might be a more natural fit for the defense of Finland particularly given that it retains large armored forces. But that would require changes in prepositioned arrangements at Trondheim in addition to discussion of potential new sites for Army equipment in Finland. Fundamentally, it would necessitate acknowledging that some U.S. ground force (or a NATO equivalent) is going to be needed to fight in Finland under worst-case scenarios.

Those discussion should be had now—to include the true costs of planning for deployment and sustainment—before Finland is accepted into the alliance. There also should be a broader debate on how a new defense commitment to Finland and Sweden affects other U.S. global priorities, as the contending demands on the Marine Corps illustrate. To cite another example, moving two Patriot battalions to Finland in a crisis might not seem like a stretch, but consider the high global demand for these assets—and the trained crews to operate them.<sup>59</sup> Simply put, U.S. forces cannot be everywhere at once. At some point, choices need to be made.

### Question 3: Does NATO emphasize “forward defense” moving ahead?

NATO will also have to decide how central “forward defense” is to its strategy if Finland is brought into the alliance. “Forward defense” essentially argues for meeting an aggressor at the alliance’s border, stopping it before any penetration of NATO territory. The alternative is “defense in depth,” a strategy that trades allied land for time, while NATO forces are mobilized and organized into a counterattack to reclaim lost territory.

Throughout the Cold War, there was an intense debate over which should be NATO’s preferred approach. Publicly, the alliance did not want to admit that it might have to cede territory during the course of a war. Privately, military planners understood that stopping a Soviet-led conventional attack at NATO’s eastern border might not be feasible. This often led to a dichotomy between NATO’s official position and the reality of how the defense of allied territory would have played out in practice.<sup>60</sup>

Russian war crimes in Bucha and the devastation visited on Ukrainian cities like Mariupol have revived this debate in alliance circles. For example, both the Lithuanian president and the Estonian prime minister have called for a return to forward defense as NATO policy, with an attendant increase in alliance forces in the Baltic states to back up such a strategy.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> United States Marine Corps, Department of the Navy, *Force Design 2030*, March 2020, <https://www.marines.mil/News/News-Display/Article/2711668/force-design-2030/>.

<sup>56</sup> Sam LaGrone, “Swedish Officials Ask Pentagon to Increase U.S. Naval Presence in Baltic Sea,” *USNI News*, May 19, 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/05/19/swedish-officials-ask-pentagon-to-increase-u-s-naval-presence-in-baltic-sea>.

<sup>57</sup> Finnish Army, “Army Mechanized Exercise Arrow 22 to Be Arranged at Niinisalo,” April 14, 2022, <https://maavoimat.fi/en/-/army-mechanised-exercise-arrow-22-to-be-arranged-at-niinisalo>.

<sup>58</sup> Steve Beynon, “Army Forms 11th Airborne Division Amid Focus on Arctic Warfare,” *Military.com*, June 6, 2022, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/06/06/army-forms-11th-airborne-division-amid-focus-arctic-warfare.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Aaron Stein and Becca Wasser, “Low Density and in Demand: The Patriot Missile,” *Middle East Brief*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (podcast audio), March 19, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/multimedia/2020/03/low-density-and-in-demand-the-patriot-missile/>.

<sup>60</sup> James A. Blackwell, Jr., “In the Laps of the Gods: The Origin of NATO Forward Defense,” *Parameters* 15, no. 4 (1985), 64–75, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA509967>.

<sup>61</sup> See John Grady, “Baltic Presidents: ‘Forward Defense’ Needed to Deter Russia,” *USNI News*, March 30, 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/03/30/baltic-presidents-forward-defense-needed-to-deter-russia>; Kaja Kallas (@kajakallas), “At @NATO, go from forward presence to forward defence. This means more combat-ready allied troops stationed permanently in the Baltic States, supported by long-range artillery, air defense and other enabling capabilities.” Twitter, May 24, 2022, 3:19 AM EDT, <https://twitter.com/kajakallas/status/1506893451526348801>.





Debates over forward defense would obviously apply to Finland and could have implications for the level of forces required to defend Finland's 830-mile border with Russia. To what degree is NATO willing to provide Helsinki with a guarantee against any incursions along this frontier? Or are the Finns content with a defense-in-depth approach?

The forward defense question also speaks to various scenarios short of full-scale war in which Russia might attempt to occupy adjacent allied territory. The intention would be to present NATO with a *fait accompli*, challenging the alliance to then escalate to offensive operations to retake the territory, possibly risking a nuclear response. If NATO were unwilling to do so, the logic goes, the alliance would damage its credibility and weaken the Article 5 guarantee.

In the wake of Russia's seizure of Crimea, concerns were frequently expressed that the Russophone enclave, Narva, in Estonia could be the target of such a gambit by Russia.<sup>62</sup> These fears echoed worries from the 1960s of a so-called "Hamburg Grab," in which Warsaw Pact forces would reach across the East German border and occupy that West German port city in a quick strike.<sup>63</sup> Whether such moves truly would have undermined NATO's credibility remains a source of debate, but the point to emphasize here is that Finland's expansive frontier with Russia would present ample opportunities for Moscow to enact such a strategy if it chose to do so.

#### Question 4: Would Finland make NATO stronger?

Related to a clear understanding of the costs of admitting Finland must be an assessment of what the country would bring to the alliance. Does Finland make NATO stronger? Looking exclusively at geography, the answer is mixed. One school of thought holds that the addition of Finland and Sweden will transform the Baltic Sea into "a NATO lake."<sup>64</sup> Yet, in truth, it has largely been one since at least the 2004 round of expansion when the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania added to NATO's existing Baltic coastline. The reunification of Germany and the admission of Poland into the alliance had already strengthened NATO's position on the sea's southern coast during the preceding decade.

Arguably, any real claim to dominion over the Baltic Sea by Moscow began to fade with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disbandment of the Warsaw Pact. By one estimate, the fleet Russia inherited from the Soviet Union lost 60 percent of its mooring berths in the Baltic Sea and 75 percent of its ship repair facilities in the region.<sup>65</sup> In terms of main naval bases, Russia was left with just Kronstadt, at the far eastern end of the sea near St. Petersburg, and Baltiysk in Kaliningrad. Not surprisingly, Russia leans heavily on land-based anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles for contesting control of the Baltic Sea today.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, NATO retains the most important geographic trump card in the Baltic region, Denmark, which dominates the Danish Straits and all egress routes from the sea. Finland and Sweden thus might enhance the alliance's position in the Baltic Sea, but the gains will be marginal from the perspective of maritime geography. And of the two, Sweden will likely be more relevant because of the strategic placement of Gotland Island near the center of the Baltic Sea.

#### Finland's double-edged geography

Moving onto land, Finland's contribution to NATO becomes more complicated. Finland's geography renders it extremely vulnerable to Russian attack while simultaneously making it an excellent base for conducting strikes into Russia. That mutual vulnerability means Finland potentially brings as many disadvantages as advantages to NATO.

<sup>62</sup> Josh Rubin, "NATO Fears That This Town Will Be the Epicenter of Conflict with Russia," *Atlantic*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/01/narva-scenario-nato-conflict-russia-estonia/581089/>.

<sup>63</sup> Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), 397–400.

<sup>64</sup> Zachary Seldon, "Will Finland and Sweden Joining NATO Deepen the Alliance's Problems?" *War on the Rocks*, May 31, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/will-finland-and-sweden-joining-nato-deepen-the-alliances-problems/>.

<sup>65</sup> Jonas Kejellén, *The Russian Baltic Fleet: Capabilities and Organization within the Armed Forces* (Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Agency, 2021), 18, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R-5119-SE>.

<sup>66</sup> Russia's deployment of anti-air and anti-missile systems in the Baltic region has given rise to a rich body of analysis, encompassing a range of views on Russian capabilities and their effectiveness. See, for example, Stephan Frühling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, "NATO, A2/AD, and the Kaliningrad Challenge," *Survival* 58, no. 2 (2016), 95–116, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1161906>; Alexander Lanoszka and Michael A. Hunzeker, "Confronting the Anti-Access/Area Denial and Precision Strike Challenge in the Baltic Region," *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 5 (2016), 12–18, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2016.1253367>; Guillaume Lasconjarias, "NATO's Response to Russian A2/AD in the Baltic States: Going Beyond Conventional?" *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 2, no. 1, 74–83, <http://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.18>; Robert Dalsjö, Christofer Berglund, and Michael Jonsson, *Bursting the Bubble: Russian A2/AD in the Baltic Sea Region: Capabilities, Countermeasures, and Implications* (Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Agency, 2019), <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R-4651-SE>.



Recall Finland's long-range strike capabilities and its capacity to network them with NATO as demonstrated in the Bold Quest exercise. When Finland receives the JASSM-ER with its F-35s, it will be able to strike more than 600 miles into Russian territory from the Finnish side of the border. That includes not only the entirety of the Kola Peninsula, but also Moscow itself, in addition to St. Petersburg. And the JASSM's stealth characteristics will complicate Russia's ability to defend against it. How might a revitalized Russia respond to that vulnerability? Or how might a weakened one that is overly reliant on nuclear weapons for ensuring its security?

Readers will understandably blanch here at concern over Russia's "feelings." To be clear, Russia has launched an unprovoked act of aggression against Ukraine and committed multiple war crimes in the process. To suggest consideration be given to Russian reaction to Finland's admission to NATO is not to extend Moscow a veto in this matter. Recognizing Russian neuralgia should not be confused with endorsing it.

Rather it is to point out that a Nordic expansion of NATO is not consequence-free. Realistic assessments need to be made of the possible military reaction the alliance could face from Russia at some future date. NATO is a defensive alliance, and Finland has legitimate reasons for maintaining its LRS capabilities (i.e., to counter Russian air defenses that could otherwise close Finnish airspace in the event of war). But that doesn't change the fact that these capabilities could still be viewed as threatening in a future crisis by Russia and prompt a response with which NATO must contend.<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, if conflict comes, it is necessary to understand that Finland launching strikes into Russian territory assumes a different hue depending on whether or not Finland is in NATO, particularly with respect to Russian options for counterstrikes. Does Russia confine its response only to Finland if it fires on Russian territory as a member of the alliance? Those questions make it difficult to parse whether Finland would truly add or subtract from NATO's overall security.

### **A Nordic front?**

A related debate concerns how Finnish membership in NATO would change Russian force deployments along its northwestern border. Testifying before Congress in May 2022, NATO's incoming Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR), Gen. Christopher Cavoli, argued that the addition of Finland would stretch Russia troop requirements by forcing them to consider the possibility of an attack along the Finnish frontier, a contingency Russia has not had to seriously contemplate since the Second World War. Indeed, Gen. Cavoli noted Russia traditionally does not deploy a large number of ground forces in this area.<sup>68</sup>

Gen. Cavoli's logic is sound from an operational standpoint. But from a strategic one, it raises the question of whether Nordic expansion creates tension in northern Europe that currently does not exist. Put differently, does NATO (or Finland) want Russia devoting more resources to an area that has been relatively quiescent?<sup>69</sup> Again, Russia likely cannot spare the ground forces to do so now. But recalling the need to look at the risks over a 10- to 15-year timeframe, it certainly is possible that Russia could militarize its side of the border with Finland to a far greater degree than it currently does. Does that serve NATO or Finland's best interest?

### **Question 5: What role would nuclear weapons play in the defense of Finland?**

A final area to explore is what role, if any, nuclear weapons could play in Finland's defense. There has been precious little public discussion of this topic, but some facts can be established. First, the Finnish prime minister, Sanna Marin, stated that

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<sup>67</sup> See Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978), 167–214, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2009958>.

<sup>68</sup> See Gen. Cavoli's comments in response to Senator Tom Cotton, beginning at approximately 0:33:00 in U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, "NATO Commander Confirmation Hearing," C-SPAN, May 26, 2022, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?520453-1/nato-commander-confirmation-hearing&live=>.

<sup>69</sup> This point largely applies to the situation on the ground. In the air, the Nordic-Baltic region has already been the source of a disturbing number of close calls between Russian and NATO aircraft, as part of the broader trend of "near misses" across the European theater in recent years. See Ralph Clem, "Risky Encounters with Russia: Time to Talk About Real Deconfliction," *War on the Rocks*, February 18, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/02/risky-encounters-with-russia-time-to-talk-about-real-deconfliction/>; Ralph Clem and Ray Finch, "Crowded Skies and Turbulent Seas: Assessing the Full Scope of NATO-Russian Military Incidents," *War on the Rocks*, August 19, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/crowded-skies-and-turbulent-seas-assessing-the-full-scope-of-nato-russian-military-incidents/>.



NATO has not requested to deploy nuclear weapons on Finnish territory as part of membership negotiations.<sup>70</sup> She also underscored in an interview with the Italian press that existing Finnish law would bar such deployments.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the Finnish foreign minister, Pekka Haavisto, specifically flagged Russian nuclear and chemical weapons as the reason his country needs NATO membership. In an interview with *Foreign Policy*, he essentially argued that Finland could handle its own conventional defense but required alliance support for dealing with threats involving Russian weapons of mass destruction.<sup>72</sup> Prima facie this would seem to set up a situation in which Finland benefits from NATO's nuclear umbrella without actually participating in it. It also makes clear that Finland has at least given serious consideration to what NATO membership would mean from the perspective of nuclear weapons. But has the United States?

"NATO's nuclear weapons" are really U.S. national assets that it loans to the alliance, specifically B61 tactical gravity bombs. There are estimated to be about 100 B61s in Europe for delivery by NATO aircraft from four countries—Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands.<sup>73</sup> Authorizing release of NATO nuclear weapons remains a murky process, one that over the alliance's history has involved SACEUR, NATO bodies such as the Defense Planning Committee and the Military Committee, and member states' national governments. The one constant in this somewhat opaque system has always been the U.S. president, who ultimately would have to authorize release of the B61.<sup>74</sup>

The U.S. and British navies also have a submarine-launched tactical nuclear weapon in their inventories that could be employed in NATO contingencies.<sup>75</sup> In truly worst-case scenarios, both nation's strategic arsenals would also come into play in an all-out war with Russia.<sup>76</sup> However one looks at it, the United States is at the center of NATO's nuclear capability. Which raises the essential question: Would the United States really employ nuclear weapons on Finland's behalf? Admittedly, this might be an extreme scenario to contemplate, but it serves neither Finland's nor the United States' interest for Washington to extend a nuclear guarantee it later could balk at fulfilling.

Finland agreeing to host nuclear weapons on its soil and to commit to equipping and training its air force to deliver B61s could increase its stake in the alliance nuclear umbrella. But it is doubtful this would be acceptable to the Finnish public and also would severely exacerbate tensions with Russia over NATO's Nordic enlargement. More than likely, the nuclear issue will continue to be brushed aside as Finland's NATO candidacy progresses. It should not be. The nuclear guarantee is the essential matter in any debate over whether Finland should be admitted into the alliance, particularly from the U.S. national perspective.

## A lasting commitment

As this paper was nearing completion, the Estonian prime minister, Kaja Kallas, called for the deployment by NATO of a division each to her country, Latvia, and Lithuania. Combined, that could be nearly 75,000 troops.<sup>77</sup> Whether NATO will accede to the request is doubtful, though some measures are likely to be forthcoming to enhance the alliance's presence in

<sup>70</sup> "NATO Does Not Plan Nuclear Arms or Bases in Finland, PM Tells Paper," Reuters, May 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/nuclear-arms-or-nato-bases-finlands-soil-pm-tells-paper-2022-05-19/>.

<sup>71</sup> Paolo Valentino, "Sanna Marin on Finland Joining NATO: 'We Want to Protect Our Nation. Putin Won't Stop Until He Is Stopped,'" *Corriere Della Sera*, Updated May 20, 2022, [https://www.corriere.it/esteri/22\\_maggio\\_19/sanna-marin-on-finland-joining-nato-we-want-to-protect-our-nation-putin-won-t-stop-until-he-is-stopped-d7d0396c-d6d8-11ec-a70e-c4b6ac55d57f.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/esteri/22_maggio_19/sanna-marin-on-finland-joining-nato-we-want-to-protect-our-nation-putin-won-t-stop-until-he-is-stopped-d7d0396c-d6d8-11ec-a70e-c4b6ac55d57f.shtml).

<sup>72</sup> Gordon F. Sander, "Finland's Foreign Minister on Why Helsinki Is Moving Toward NATO Now," *Foreign Policy*, May 7, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/07/finland-nato-foreign-minister-haavisto/>.

<sup>73</sup> B61s are also believed to be based at Incirlik, Turkey, but it is unclear if Turkey currently participates in the nuclear delivery mission. See Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "United States Nuclear Weapons, 2022," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 78, no. 3 (2022), 176–177.

<sup>74</sup> For historical examinations of what is known about NATO's internal decision-making process for nuclear weapons release, see Catherine McArdle Kelleher, "NATO Nuclear Operations," *Managing Nuclear Operations*, eds., Ashton B. Carter, John D. Steinbruner, and Charles A. Zraket (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1987), 457–464; Jeffrey H. Michaels, "No Annihilation without Representation": NATO Nuclear Use Decision-Making during the Cold War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2022.2074405>.

<sup>75</sup> Kristensen and Korda, "United States Nuclear Weapons, 2022," 172.

<sup>76</sup> France is also a nuclear power but does not participate in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group nor engage in integrated nuclear planning with the alliance, as the United States and the United Kingdom do. See "NATO Nuclear Deterrence," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, February 2020, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/2/pdf/200224-factsheet-nuclear-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/2/pdf/200224-factsheet-nuclear-en.pdf); Bruno Tertrais, *French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, and Future: A Handbook*, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, Updated February 2020, 50, <https://www.frstrategie.org/en/publications/recherches-et-documents/french-nuclear-deterrence-policy-forces-and-future-handbook-2020>.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Milne, "Estonia's PM Says Country Would Be 'Wiped from Map' under Existing NATO Plans," *Financial Times*, June 22, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/a430b191-39c8-4b03-b3fd-8e7e948a5284>.



the Baltic states.<sup>78</sup> The key point here is that two decades ago, when Baltic NATO candidacy was being considered, few observers thought deploying three divisions to those countries would ever be a realistic point of debate.

To be clear, Kallas has every right to make her request. Her country *is* in NATO and as such the alliance must consider Estonia's defensive needs. That's the point: If a country joins NATO, its defense is no longer a mutable concern, but a concrete priority for other members.

If this paper has taken a critical eye of Finland's candidacy, it is not done from a place of malice with respect to the Finnish people or their understandable desire to secure their country. But rather this analysis is meant to underscore that there are real costs and consequences to admitting Finland, one that current NATO members—and, in particular, the United States—must weigh carefully and balance with their own competing needs and defense commitments. Once Finland is in NATO, it is a permanent condition, one that could affect U.S. defense planning and resourcing for decades.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, if Finland were to remain outside NATO, the alternative policy option should not be abandonment by the West. NATO can continue to cooperate with Finland and should support it in a crisis with Russia. But if Finland is a member of the alliance, NATO's freedom of action and exposure to risk is different than if Finland is not a formal ally. That is worth serious consideration.

That said, the questions raised in this paper do not inherently preclude Finnish membership in NATO. But a great many aspects of how NATO will function with Finland as a member still need to be resolved. They deserve time for close examination not a rush towards an arbitrary deadline. From the U.S. perspective, some of its concerns could be assuaged by iron-clad commitments from current European allies to provide forces to backstop Finnish capabilities in a crisis. Unfortunately, NATO's track record on such matters does not create cause for optimism. Even if such contributions were forthcoming, the United States still needs to carefully weigh the further extension of its nuclear umbrella. Ultimately, the United States must assess its global priorities and determine where incorporation of Finland into NATO responsibly fits.

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<sup>78</sup> In comments prior to the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg indicated that NATO force levels in the Baltic states would likely rise. As well, the alliance is planning a significant increase in its rapid reaction force, from 40,000 troops to 300,000 troops. Some of these will exercise regularly in the eastern member states. See Samuel Petrequin, "NATO to Boost Rapid Reaction Force, Ukraine Military Support," *Washington Post*, June 27, 2022, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/nato-to-boost-rapid-reaction-force-ukraine-military-support/2022/06/27/29d77c64-f616-11ec-81db-ac07a394a86b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/nato-to-boost-rapid-reaction-force-ukraine-military-support/2022/06/27/29d77c64-f616-11ec-81db-ac07a394a86b_story.html).

