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INTRODUCTION

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has changed the stability in Europe, more so than Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014, and fueled Finland and Sweden to dismiss their isolationism and join NATO to ensure territorial security.¹ Finland and Sweden's decision to join NATO raises whether their induction into NATO would stabilize or destabilize NATO's eastern front, specifically the Baltics and the Baltic Sea.² Ultimately, the induction of Finland and Sweden into NATO will strengthen the Alliance and increase regional stability. In the past 25 years, Finland and Sweden's cooperation with European allies, the United States (U.S.), and regional institutions and organizations have supported the ease of induction of Finland and Sweden into NATO without destabilizing the region.³ Finland and Sweden's military contributions to NATO will also enhance NATO's strength and provide a means of increasing deterrence against Russian aggression in the Baltics and the Baltic Sea.

Additionally, the location of Finland, backed by the defense in depth of Sweden, provides a geostrategic advantage to NATO and burden shares NATO-Russia border security responsibilities. However, some commentators are concerned that Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO will only fuel Russia's aggression and destabilize the Baltic Region.⁴ Although Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is to limit NATO expansion and to secure the integrity of the Russian border and territory, the probability of Russian interference in Finland and Sweden joining NATO is unlikely.⁵

¹ Johan Raeder, "The Strategic Role of Gotland," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 2018), 122.

² Raeder, "The Strategic Role of Gotland," 123.

³ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 5.

⁴ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership*, 7.

⁵ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership*, 7.

The potential for increased regional instability must be analyzed to determine the course of action Russia may take as Finland is now a NATO member, followed shortly by NATO completing Sweden's membership process. Since the U.S. is the most powerful member of NATO and has been supporting diplomatic, economic, and military efforts through NATO, the U.S. is committed forces to support Finland and Sweden's transition to NATO.⁶ Finland and Sweden provide increased capabilities and forward-basing possibilities for the U.S., which ultimately supports whether this will increase or decrease regional stability in the High North, the Baltics, or all of Europe. Finland and Sweden's isolationism and neutral stance have survived the Cold War and continued Russian-NATO competition. However, Finland and Sweden's geolocation with respect to the maritime domain in the Baltic Sea and proximity to the Baltic States provides a significant foothold for NATO, and a major obstacle for Russia, which again prompts the question of whether Russia will or could interfere with the induction process and ultimately destabilize the region.

FINLAND AND SWEDEN'S LONG PREPARATION FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP

Since the Russian invasion of Eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014, both Sweden and Finland have increased defense cooperation and security within the E.U., NATO, and the U.S. as both countries feared that the years of just being NATO partners and E.U. members would not guarantee security without being a full NATO member.⁷ For more than eight years, both countries have built their resume for the Alliance. As the former Prime Minister of Finland Alexander Stubb eloquently stated, "Applicants do not get more NATO

⁶ Stephen F. Larrabee, Stephanie Pezard, Andrew Radin, Nathan Chandler, Keith Crane, and Thomas S. Szayna, *Russia and the West After the Ukrainian Crisis: European Vulnerabilities to Russian Pressures*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), 13.

⁷ Christopher S. Chivvis, *Sweden, Finland, and NATO Policy Brief*, no. 24, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2017, 2.

compatible than this."⁸ In 2017, Sweden's Prime Minister also mirrored Finland's sentiment, stating that "non-alignment has served them [Sweden] well in the past, but its future security would be best served by joining NATO."⁹ Both countries' preparation and integration with NATO make their membership application a means of formality and not a destabilizing effort for the region since their preparation has not been dismissed or overlooked by Russia. For this reason, the likelihood of Russia intervening now is low based on the cooperation and strength of the partnership that is now a formal NATO membership for Finland and a soon-to-be formal membership for Sweden.

Sweden and Finland have been well-integrated and fully interoperable with NATO for the last ten years. Their application for NATO membership in 2022 is more a formal means of membership than a means for security reasons. "Finland has developed a policy of engagement with all partners and organizations contributing each in their way to security in Europe, notably the OSCE, Nordic cooperation, the E.U., and NATO. Finland, like Sweden, is nearly as close to the Atlantic Alliance as it is possible to be for a non-member state, reaching a plateau."¹⁰ At the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Briefing in Washington DC in 2016, in preparation for the upcoming NATO Warsaw Summit Summer 2016, Dr. Hans Binnendijk, who was a Senior Fellow at the SAIS Center of Transatlantic Relations, reemphasized that Finland and Sweden are eligible for NATO membership and would most likely be accepted if they submitted for membership.¹¹ He also stated that he expected both countries to continue their stance on neutralism between NATO and Russia. However, the security cooperation with

⁸ Jonathan Masters, "How NATO Will Change if Finland and Sweden Become Members," Council of Foreign Relations (2022), 2.

⁹ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 3.

¹⁰ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership*, 5.

¹¹ *NATO's Warsaw Summit and the Future of European Security: June 23, 2016 Briefing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe*, Washington: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2016, 18.

Sweden and Finland as NATO partners would continue.¹² Dr. Binnendijk's analysis was that neither country was politically ready to submit for NATO membership.¹³ But Russia's aggression from 2014 and on continues to diminish Sweden and Finland's isolationism.

Russia's aggression in 2014 is one of the main reasons Sweden and Finland increased their defense budget in 2015. As members of the European Union (E.U.), Sweden and Finland would support the defense of a Baltic state or other Nordic E.U. member if attacked by Russia.¹⁴ Since then, NATO has continued to integrate Sweden and Finland into exercises and briefings to increase regional security, but also pave the way for an easy decision for Sweden and Finland to join NATO when the time is correct.¹⁵ Russia's latest invasion of Ukraine in 2022 solidified Sweden's and Finland's decision to join NATO; however, it is Russia's aggression over the past nine years that has ultimately fueled the commitment for Finland and Sweden to take the next step to submit for NATO membership since the E.U. does not have the military defense capacity to support Finland or Sweden in the event of Russian aggression.¹⁶

Finland and Sweden have provided military support to NATO since the Wales Summit agreement in September 2014.¹⁷ The increased defense cooperation by Finland and Sweden was no secret to Russia. Russia, since then, has implemented various economic, political, and indirect military actions, such as demonstration of force during Russian exercises both in the Baltics and the North Sea, to mitigate any further agreement by Sweden and Finland for NATO

¹² *NATO's Warsaw Summit and the Future of European Security: June 23, 2016 Briefing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe*, Washington: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2016, 18.

¹³ *NATO's Warsaw Summit and the Future of European Security*, 18.

¹⁴ Johan Raeder, "The Strategic Role of Gotland," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 122.

¹⁵ *NATO's Warsaw Summit and the Future of European Security*, 18.

¹⁶ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 5.

¹⁷ Stephen F. Larrabee, Stephanie Pezard, Andrew Radin, Nathan Chandler, Keith Crane, and Thomas S. Szayna, *Russia and the West After the Ukrainian Crisis: European Vulnerabilities to Russian Pressures*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), 11.

to use their airspace and territory against Russia, or for both Nordic nations to join NATO. Nevertheless, after years of blanket threats by Russia to Finland and Sweden against joining NATO, nothing significant has been done by Russia to stop NATO membership by both countries.¹⁸ Years of preparation have mitigated the potential for regional destabilization upon Finland and Sweden's induction into NATO.

FINLAND AND SWEDEN'S STRENGTHENING CONTRIBUTION TO NATO INCREASES DETERRENCE AND STABILITY

Finland and Sweden's ability to enhance the security and stabilization in the Baltic and Scandinavian regions is compelling to both NATO and the U.S. As stated in a 2017 policy brief by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, a non-partisan American public policy think tank that seeks to promote cooperation and understanding between North America and the European Union, "Finland and Sweden constitute a common strategic space and have compelling reasons to make the same fundamental choices as to their future security and defense, whether on the basis of the current policy of convergence with NATO, short of membership, or with a view to joining the Atlantic Alliance."¹⁹ This statement identifies Finland and Sweden's commitment to support each other and, ultimately, NATO. Their induction into NATO signifies a commitment to the world that these two Nordic nations will provide the defense of not only the Scandinavian peninsula but to that of integrating its defense capabilities with NATO. Sweden and Finland bring multiple capabilities into the NATO toolbox, which signifies why their addition of capabilities will strengthen and increase the stabilization of the Baltic region while

¹⁸ Larrabee, Pezard, Radin, Chandler, Crane, and Szayna, *Russia and the West After the Ukrainian Crisis*, 12.

¹⁹ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 6.

also providing a credible capability that is communicated to Russia via Sweden and Finland's NATO membership.

Finland provides multiple capabilities to counter Russia's aggression and enhance NATO capabilities in three main areas. First, Finland's proximity to Western Russian forces and maritime and air assets flowing to and from St. Petersburg provides a means to collect intelligence on Russia's eastern approaches.²⁰ Although Finland was in a partnership with NATO, it does not mean all intelligence collections are freely distributed from NATO and Finland, and vice versa.²¹ With the addition of Finland into NATO and the soon induction of Sweden, the distribution and consolidation of intelligence are increased based on NATO membership benefits, ultimately increasing the collective defense efforts by NATO. Consolidation and ease of information flow add the flexibility of increasing need-to-know sharing between not only NATO and the new members but also between the U.S. and Finland, and Sweden. However, intelligence collection and sharing are not the only credible capability that Finland provides to NATO.

Another significant capability Finland offers is cyber-defense. Since 2017, Finland has supported NATO via a "bilateral political framework arrangement on cyber defense."²² Finland and NATO have communicated this collaborative partnership for cyber defense increasing its deterrence by denial effect while also communicating the assured response by Alliance who respond if attacked: deterrence by punishment.²³ Finland is well recognized for being a leading

²⁰ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 51.

²¹ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The effects of Finland's Possible NATO membership*, 43.

²² Karoliina Honkanen, "Finland and NATO's Renewed Focus," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 2018), 143.

²³ Tami Davis Biddle, "Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners," *Texas National Security Review* 3:2 (Spring 2020), 101.

country in this non-kinetic capability, a capability that can counter Russia's offensive cyber capabilities, which are also well-developed.²⁴ Finland also specializes in hybrid warfare, which is another counter-capability to Russia's hybrid warfare capabilities that they have used over the last ten years.²⁵ These Finnish capabilities deter Russia from pursuing hybrid warfare activities against NATO, specifically the Baltic States. Finnish contributions also broaden and enhance NATO's capabilities to be a deterrence by denial to Russia and leverage in negotiations, hence increasing stability in the region without military action.

Furthermore, finally, Finland and Sweden support NATO's defense budget. Finland exceeded the suggested 2% GDP defense budget support in 2022, with Sweden following suit but projected not to meet the 2% GDP contribution mark until 2026.²⁶ The additional financial support to NATO assists with NATO security and deterrence operations that both deter further aggression from Russia and also assist NATO efforts to support Ukraine. The Nordic states' economic support and military capabilities contribute to NATO and create stability. Their geolocation enables NATO burden sharing and deterrence for Russia along the entire NATO eastern front.

FINLAND AND SWEDEN: A GEOSTRATEGIC ADVANTAGE TO NATO

The Baltic Sea is a highly constricted area, and any potential future conflict with Russia in the Baltic Sea would require the integration of NATO maritime, air, and land capabilities.²⁷ History has shown that “most military operations in the Baltic region require access to what is

²⁴ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership*, 43.

²⁵ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 43.

²⁶ NATO: Finland and Sweden Seek Membership, CRS Insight, CRS Report 2023, 1.

²⁷ Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Sweden and Finland, Partnership in Lieu of NATO Membership,” in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 130.

today Swedish and Finnish air, land, and sea operations.”²⁸ Currently, NATO relies on the cooperation and coordination of Sweden and Finland to deter Russian aggression in this region, whether from St. Petersburg or Kaliningrad.²⁹ Russia, the U.S., and NATO see this as a weak link in NATO's eastern front.³⁰ With the induction of Finland and potentially Sweden into NATO, Russia is now entirely flanked by NATO countries on all sides of the Baltic Sea. NATO may now expand its contingency framework to include Swedish and Finnish antiship, anti-air, and antisubmarine warfare capabilities creating a funnel of destruction and death for Russia to project power through the Baltic Sea.³¹

Sweden and Finland's induction into NATO creates options for contingency operations against Russia. The *sky's the limit* takes on a new meaning when it comes to the security of the Baltics and the Baltic Sea with the induction of Sweden and Finland. Gotland, a Swedish Island in the Baltic Sea, is a strategic advantage to NATO.³² This island is in the center of Baltic Sea maritime routes that flow to and from Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg. Sweden has allowed the use of Gotland airspace by NATO in the past, but it is not guaranteed since Sweden is not part of NATO. The introduction of Sweden into NATO provides regional security to the Scandinavian and Baltic states. Gotland can counter Russian air and sea efforts from Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg.³³ This creates NATO's anti-access area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the Baltics

²⁸ Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Sweden and Finland, Partnership in Lieu of NATO Membership,” in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 130.

²⁹ Jamie Shae, “NATO’S Role in Baltic Sea Security,” in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 39.

³⁰ Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Sweden and Finland, Partnership in Lieu of NATO Membership,” 131.

³¹ Jamie Shae, “NATO’S Role in Baltic Sea Security,” 39.

³² Karoliina Honkanen, “Finland and NATO’s Renewed Focus,” in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 148.

³³ Christopher Coker, “The West and Russia,” in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 55.

with the potential to damage Russian shipping, both military and commerce significantly.³⁴ Gotland increases NATO deterrence in the Baltic Sea tenfold. It is a significant supporting effort to defend the Baltics from Russian aggression against the Baltic States or elements of NATO in the Baltic Sea.³⁵ The induction of Sweden not only increases regional stability for NATO but also increases deterrence against Russia.³⁶

The expansion of NATO borders with Russia also creates security for the Baltic States, as well as Norway and Poland, as these states now can burden share the defense of NATO's eastern flank with Finland backed by Sweden, creating an in-depth defense capability for Norway and a multi-front problem for Russia.³⁷ The increase in NATO borders increases deterrence for Russia to conduct aggression on NATO's eastern flank due to collective defense along the entire western border of Russia, except for Ukraine and Moldova.³⁸ Additionally, Finland and Sweden's accession into NATO would "strengthen NATO's deterrence in the Arctic" now that all Arctic States, except for Russia, are part of NATO.³⁹ The expansion of NATO collective defense, including Finland and Sweden as NATO members, stabilizes the region and creates a dilemma for Russia on multiple fronts. This is one of the main reasons why the "Biden Administration and many Members of Congress support Finland and Sweden joining NATO, arguing that the addition of these two mature democracies with advanced militaries will enhance security in the Baltic Sea region and the broader Euro-Atlantic area."⁴⁰

³⁴ Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, "An A2/AD Strategy in the Baltic Sea," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 74.

³⁵ Johan Raeder, "The Strategic Role of Gotland," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 123.

³⁶ Raeder, "The Strategic Role of Gotland," 126.

³⁷ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 49.

³⁸ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership*, 49.

³⁹ Jonathan Masters, "How NATO Will Change if Finland and Sweden Become Members," Council of Foreign Relations (2022), 5.

⁴⁰ NATO: Finland and Sweden Seek Membership, CRS Insight, CRS Report 2023, 1.

COUNTERARGUMENT: RUSSIA'S THREAT TO NATO EXPANSION

Russia considers any NATO enlargement as adversarial and a threat to Russia.⁴¹ Russia's Foreign Ministry recently stated, "Russia will be forced to take retaliatory steps, both of a military-technical and other nature, in order to neutralize the threats to its national security that arise from this."⁴² Since Russia would object and most likely implement political, economic, and potentially military reactions, every effort has been made by NATO and Finland to speed up the accession process to mitigate Russia's ability to react.⁴³ Since the end of the Cold War in 1992, Russia has signaled that military action beyond its borders is on the table. It demonstrated this in 2008 in Georgia, in 2014 in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, and now in Ukraine in 2022.⁴⁴ Russia's intent to infringe on territorial borders was also evident in 2015 in a border dispute in Finland. This indicates that although Russia could not deter Finland and Sweden from joining NATO, they can still destabilize the region with aggressive acts, especially since Russian maritime and air assets are now close to NATO countries with the induction of Finland and soon to be the induction of Sweden into NATO.

Finland and Russia have historically had border issues and conflicts that date back at least one hundred years. As recently as 2015, Finland and Russia had a border conflict; although they resolved the issue without a significant conflict, future border issues between Finland and Russia may not be quickly resolved on the diplomatic table now that Finland is a NATO member. These are all factors that create a political rift between Finland and Russia. With the NATO-Russia border increasing by over 830 miles with the induction of Finland, the potential for

⁴¹ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 7.

⁴² NATO: Finland and Sweden Seek Membership, CRS Insight, CRS Report 2023, 2.

⁴³ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership*, 7.

⁴⁴ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership*, 12.

regional conflict and destabilization increases exponentially.⁴⁵ As ground and airspace border conflicts potentially increase, so does the maritime sea lines of communication in the Baltic Sea.

As stated before, the Baltic Sea lines of communication are a significant economic engine for Russia, which is also close to multiple NATO members.⁴⁶ An induction of Finland creates a potential for a blockade of the St. Petersburg port, and Sweden's Gotland Island adjacent to Kaliningrad increases the ability of NATO to implement Baltic Sea access and denial efforts. "NATO would be able to close off the Baltic Sea with little consequence for NATO members but with great costs to the Russians. A blockade would have potentially serious results for the Russian economy."⁴⁷ The Baltic Sea has already been challenged by Russia multiple times in efforts to undermine the Western defense and security system due to NATO's ability to blockade Russian commerce and military ships.⁴⁸ Proximity issues will most likely increase due to Russian maritime and air assets being funneled close to NATO assets in the Baltic Sea, creating regional instability.

Russia has been trying to mitigate the possibility of Sweden joining NATO and has increased propaganda in Swedish media to influence political developments. In a January 2017 report from the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Russian efforts to deter Sweden from NATO included the use of cyberattacks, infiltrating politicians' social media accounts, and sending fake messaging from Swedish politicians and leaders to other state leaders in an effort to create dissension amongst both non-NATO and NATO European states.⁴⁹ These non-kinetic efforts

⁴⁵ Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 53.

⁴⁶ Bergquist, Heisbourg, Nyberg, and Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership*, 51.

⁴⁷ Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, "An A2/AD Strategy in the Baltic Sea," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 79.

⁴⁸ Rasmussen, "An A2/AD Strategy in the Baltic Sea," 79.

⁴⁹ Jamie Shae, "NATO'S Role in Baltic Sea Security," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 42-43.

will most likely increase as Sweden and Finland draw closer to being NATO allies, which will destabilize the region.

REBUTTAL: US AND NATO COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT FINLAND AND SWEDEN

Well before Finland and Sweden decided to submit for NATO membership, the threat of Russia invading the Baltic States had been heightened for years, and the Ukraine invasion in 2022 justifies NATO's assessment of Russia's intentions: "We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity."⁵⁰ So Finland and Sweden's induction into NATO does not destabilize the region. Russia's unpredictability and aggression do. To counter this aggression and destabilization, Finland and NATO capabilities mitigate Russia's regional capabilities, provide leverage for NATO, and enhance deterrence against Russia. Additionally, Russia is well aware that the U.S. will support Finland and Sweden, NATO member or not, as stated by U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, who reassured Swedish defense minister Peter Hultquist at a meeting in Washington DC in 2017 that the "U.S. would support Sweden in the event of a Russian attack and referred to the nonaligned country as not only a friend but an "ally."⁵¹

Although Russia has demonstrated that they are willing to fight wars beyond its borders, Russia has not demonstrated its military effectiveness and degraded its ability to make credible conventional threats, especially against NATO. Their military performance in Georgia and Ukraine is evidence of Russia's inability to mass combined arms effects to achieve its

⁵⁰ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept adopted by heads of state and government at the NATO Summit in Madrid, 29 June 2022, 3.

⁵¹ Ann-Sofie Dahl, "Sweden and Finland, Partnership in Lieu of NATO Membership," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence and Reassurance*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 137.

objectives.⁵² Their past performance in Georgia and Ukraine does not reflect a multi-theater or multi-front war. Based on Russia's military performance, it is unlikely that Russia has the means to initiate military action in the Baltic Sea or the Scandinavian Peninsula to deter Finland, Sweden, or members of NATO from not continuing the accession process for Sweden. On the economic front, Russia's economy is faltering, and the prolonged war in Ukraine is only depleting its industrial reserves to support Russia's efforts in eastern Ukraine. This, coupled with economic sanctions by NATO and other countries, makes any effort by Russia to deter the accession process and create instability in Europe not credible.

CONCLUSION

Russia's aggression in 2014 set the path for Finland and Sweden to join NATO. Both Nordic states increased integration and partnership with NATO, E.U., and other organizations to the point that NATO membership is just a formality. For the past two decades, Finland and Sweden have increased their interoperability with NATO to support territorial security for both countries. Finland and Sweden's contributions to the security of the Baltic Sea and the Baltics and the burden sharing of the responsibilities of defending NATO's eastern flank increase regional stability and only increase NATO's resolve to deter Russian aggression. Geographically, Finland's border increases NATO's geostrategic advantage over Russia by increasing the NATO-Russia border by over 830 miles, creating a multi-front dilemma for Russia.

Although Russia may increase aggression, Finland, Sweden, NATO, and the U.S.'s efforts to integrate Sweden and Finland into NATO entirely makes any conventional effort by Russia non-credible, ultimately increasing NATO deterrence against Russia's aggression and

⁵² Mats Bergquist, François Heisbourg, René Nyberg, and Teija Tiilikainen, *The Effects of Finland's Possible NATO Membership: An Assessment*, (Ulkoasiainministeriö, 2017), 12

increasing regional stability. As Finland has already become a member of NATO, the US and NATO must continue the support of Sweden's accession to NATO. This also includes an increased US military presence in Sweden and Finland to reassure the Alliance and increase deterrence of Russian aggression to NATO's newest members. US policy to continue supporting NATO members and partners will increase deterrence by denial and stabilize NATO's eastern flank.

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