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**Finland and Sweden's NATO Accession: Between Military Alignment and Preservation of
the International Order**

Master in Peace, Security and Development

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List of abbreviations

CBSS: Council of the Baltic Sea States

CSDP: Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU

EU: European Union

ES: English School

EOP: NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partners

EI2: European Intervention Initiative

EPC: European Political Community

Forward Land Forces (FLF)

FLF: NATO's Forward Land Forces

JEF: Joint Expeditionary Force

JFC Norfolk: Joint Force Command Norfolk

Hybrid CoE: Hybrid Centre of Excellence

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NRF: NATO Response Force

NB8: Nordic-Baltic cooperation

NORDEFECO: Nordic Defence Cooperation

PfP: Partners for Peace

OSCE: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PESCO: Permanent Structured Cooperation

SACEUR: Supreme Allied Commander Europe

SAFE: Security Action for Europe

UN: United Nations Organization

US: United States

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Abstract

Finland and Sweden's NATO membership is a clear signal of the crisis of the international order. Their military alignment with the West seeks to support the norms and institutions of the current international order, aiming to maintain a rules-based international order led by Western countries, where the US keeps playing a relevant role. The war in Ukraine represented the inflection point where the policy of neutrality and military non-alignment were no longer a guarantee for their security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. Nonetheless, that decision aimed to support the norms and institutions that are the basis of the international order, not only a military alignment based on *realpolitik*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The invasion of Russia into Ukraine in February 2022 is definitely an inflection point in international relations. It is the primary factor that led Finland and Sweden to revise their foreign and security policies, from neutrality to military alignment, altering the dynamics of the international order. The historical shift of Finland and Sweden's positions has sought to influence the European security landscape and reinforce a rule-based international order, while simultaneously establishing their membership in a military alliance to guarantee their own security.

After four years of conflict in Ukraine, the confrontation between NATO members and Russia appears to be escalating, expanding their interest in taking control over the Baltic Sea and the Arctic. Finland and Sweden's membership in the Transatlantic Alliance has escalated tensions, making it difficult for both sides to perceive a reasonable solution. In that regard, from a realist perspective, there is a strategic competition to expand spheres of influence, thereby restoring the state's security as the primary rationale for action in international relations, as in the Cold War (Kugler, 1996; Montero Moncada & Velandia García, 2019; Sperling, 2019). The Russian–Georgian War in August 2008 was considered one of the first warnings about Western overexpansion into what Russia believes is its sphere of influence. With the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia sought to send a more explicit message about the limitations the West should face regarding NATO's eastward expansion, thereby initiating a spiral of strategic actions to demonstrate power and establish a more precise boundary. NATO's enlargement appears to have further limited options for political dialogue and understanding between East and West through the formal institutions established before Russia annexed Crimea (Montero Moncada & Velandia García, 2019).

In a broader perspective, the war in Ukraine has exposed the limitations of the international order and its institutions created after the Second World War. The breach of international law by the great powers at different moments has diminished trust and questioned the efficiency of formal institutions such as the United Nations, as well as longstanding institutions such as diplomacy, the rule of law, and respect for international law and its principles. The challenge now is to rebuild a stable, rule-based, and peaceful international order, focused on cooperation, with a broader perspective on global security. After four years of the war in Ukraine, and with new conflicts arising, it is evident that the current international order has failed to provide peace and security

around the world. It has increased the sense of the necessity of its transformation or the creation of a new one, as it has not prevented countries from breaching international law and from respecting the principles inscribed in the UN Charter.

There are few analyses about Finland and Sweden's foreign and security policies that have led these countries to seek their security through cooperation with NATO, putting aside the ambiguity that previously existed, and institutionalizing their relations and cooperation, as well as the effects of internal politics, identity, and normative aspects.

A constructivist perspective analysed the changes in the identities and opinions of both peoples regarding their participation in NATO, based on surveys and other elements that facilitated the governments to change their foreign and national security policies (Wood, 2024). However, there is limited work on whether NATO membership of these two countries aimed to strengthen the international order by reinforcing principles such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention.

Regarding the relations between NATO and Europe, the influence of the US within the Alliance is seen as a factor that weakens regional integration, institutionalization, and interstate cooperation and leads to realist thinking, focused on power and military geostrategy (Stivachtis & Webber, 2011). However, authors such as Webber (2011) sustain the English School perspective, arguing that the Alliance is part of the European regional international order. From this standpoint, the inclusion of Finland and Sweden in the Alliance strengthens the international order, as they become more closely connected through NATO's institutional, political, military, and social practices, and it contributes to a sub-global international order.

While realism, neorealism, and liberalism provide strong frameworks for analysing power relations, military confrontations, and the institutional framework, this research aims to approach Finland and Sweden's membership from the English School perspective, bringing to the table other elements that help to understand the new scenario after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, while studying the specific roles that Finland and Sweden play, defining and supporting the ruling institutions of the current international order.

The research question proposed for this study is: Why did Finland and Sweden join NATO despite their long-standing commitment to neutrality? Were their decisions motivated by the preservation of the ruling institutions and norms of the international order, or simply by military alignment? How has Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership influenced the international

order since then? In that regard, the hypothesis tested is that Sweden and Finland have sought to preserve and strengthen the governing institutions and norms of the international order through their NATO membership. This includes explaining their roles within the military alliance and the mechanisms that will enable them to participate actively in NATO, ensure their own security, and their efforts to influence the international order, and to explain the changes that the international order is currently going through.

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO is significant because it is a critical case, as defined by Roselle et al., (2020). Thus, the research will reflect the values, ideas, and perceptions identified by policymakers as reasons for joining the military alliance after decades of neutrality. At first glance, the two countries have distinct historical contexts that could lead them to different positions on the war in Ukraine, NATO enlargement, and their roles in shaping Europe's collective security. However, both have decided to join NATO and are implementing their security and foreign policies within their respective domestic contexts. Their levels of engagement depend on their capacities, but within a normative commitment to the European security framework and international law.

The study will be valuable to scholars because it seeks to explain this phenomenon from a perspective distinct from traditional international relations theories. It will also consult primary sources, such as discourses, security, and foreign policy documents, which provide readers with information that could lead to further research into any flaws this study might uncover.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the increasing number of academic publications, literature reviews are crucial for organizing and analysing research on the same topic. Gathering and synthesizing information provides valuable insights for identifying biases, patterns, tendencies, and approaches across variables. Additionally, literature reviews help us determine the challenges authors face in research, the techniques used to explain certain phenomena, contributions to the conceptual framework, gaps, and unresolved issues (Knopf, 2006). In light of this, it is essential to conduct a literature review on the effects of the breach of international law by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has prompted Finland and Sweden to reassess their neutrality in the region. It is necessary to have a deeper understanding of developments in Northern Europe over the coming years, along with the internal factors affecting each country (Seyaz, 2024; Sokur et al., 2025). At the same time, it is relevant to question the reasons and implications of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, and their influence on the international order.

The invasion of Russia into Ukraine has significantly affected the international order, in particular the European security framework and the global security relations among the main great powers, the United States, Russia, and China. The accession of Finland and Sweden to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) introduced new features and scenarios that could pose significant challenges and threats to international and regional stability, potentially creating new conflict zones, escalating tensions, and fuelling military confrontations. However, at the same time, it has opened new opportunities to think about other alternatives towards the strengthening of a rule-based international order, which is based on international principles such as non-intervention, territorial integrity, and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

No recent literature reviews were found on the selected topic; however, numerous recent publications provide relevant information on Finland and Sweden's historical backgrounds regarding relations with Russia, the United States, NATO, and other countries in the region. In all these studies, the focus is on NATO, Russia, and the US as the leading actors shaping European and international security and their impact on the international order, with limited insight into policy decisions within the governments of the Alliance and even less, in particular, on Finland and Sweden.

In Seyaz (2024) and Filipović (2024), we learn that their work focuses on potential conflict zones between NATO and Russia, highlighting that the land border between Finland and Russia, the Baltic Sea, and the Barents Sea in the Arctic will be the main scenarios where confrontation is likely to develop or is already changing. These authors, along with Smirnov (2023), argue that Finland and Sweden strengthen NATO's alliance by maintaining well-equipped armies and a modern defence industry, thereby creating opportunities to enhance operational military capabilities for the Western alliance. They note that these capabilities were already being developed in conjunction with mechanisms such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO). Additionally, they agree that Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO was a crucial step in deterring Russia.

Some articles reviewed agree that Finland and Sweden's NATO membership will increase conflict and uncertainty in European security, with the Baltic Sea seen as a potential battleground. They also concur that Sweden and Finland's loss of neutrality resulted from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and symbolizes a decline in regional security. Most of them conclude that Russia has been and will continue adjusting its security policies to protect its interests (Barrinha & Da Mota, 2019; Filipović, 2024; Kaynak, 2023; Montero Moncada & Velandia García, 2019; Seyaz, 2024; Smirnov, 2023; Sokur et al., 2025; Sperling, 2019; Thies, 2009).

Most of the articles reviewed use realism and neorealism as their theoretical frameworks to address their research questions (Barrinha & Da Mota, 2019; Filipović, 2024; Seyaz, 2024; Smirnov, 2023; Sokur et al., 2025; Sperling, 2019; Thies, 2009). Concepts such as deterrence, strategic competition, and the balance of power underpin explanations of the war in Ukraine and the decisions Sweden and Finland made on this issue, with less focus on norms, values, and the institutions that constitute the international order. Conventional military elements are analysed within a geostrategic framework to examine their implications for the European security architecture and to explore prospects for the near future in the region. Akif Bahadır Kaynak (2025) proposes a distinct approach by applying game theory to his study. The author examines NATO's role in the conflict and considers whether NATO membership was the most effective strategy for previously non-aligned countries, analysing their payoffs, strategies, and potential options to inform decision-making.

Works like Barrinha & Da Mota (2019), Sperling (2019), and Thies (2009) agree that NATO built a security system based on shared geopolitical interests among like-minded states;

however, from 1947 to 1990, NATO was not always a stable structure; it faced several crises of confidence that questioned its ability to ensure the security of its members. Barrinha & Da Mota (2019) and Sperling (2019) explained the reshaping of the Alliance's purpose, expanding the definition of security and moving away from the idea that security was limited to states and rational actors.

In the reviewed articles, the authors do not provide a detailed explanation of variables like the expansion of democracy in the former Soviet space. This variable is mentioned in Smirnov (2023), but it is not the primary focus of his work. Seyaz (2024) discusses the internal context in Sweden and Finland, specifically a “civil robustness against Russia,” which helped promote NATO accession after Russia's invasion of Ukraine violated international law; however, this is not the primary focus of his article. Smirnov (2023) also references Russia's new strategies to pressure borders with new armament and the role of ethnic Russians in those countries, identifies vulnerable areas for Russia, and foresees the involvement of nuclear weapons in the region.

At the same time, Montero Moncada & Velandia García (2019), Raychev (2022), Seyaz, (2024), and Smirnov (2023) mention several variables, including the role of hybrid war, cyberwarfare, and elements of geoeconomics, such as energy supplies, pipelines in the region, and economic sanctions that influence decision-making in security; however, they do not focus their studies or draw any conclusions on the matter. These authors agree that admitting Finland and Sweden to NATO would provide the Allies with broader capabilities, particularly in areas such as technology, innovation, and cybersecurity. It also boosts NATO's presence in northern Europe and enhances control of the Baltic Sea. However, it also introduces more instability, as the Alliance expands its borders with Russia. This raises questions about the credibility of the guarantee to protect all members, given that the enlargement requires significant investments and infrastructure upgrades and that Article V of the Treaty has never been tested.

On the other hand, Stivachtis & Webber (2011) use the English School's perspective to explain the regional international society that emerged in Europe, mainly by explaining the post-enlargement process on the continent within their institutions, such as the European Union and NATO, which led to an institutional adaptation, policy changes, and limits of the political project. Webber (2011) argues that NATO is part of the European international order, and that Finland and Sweden's membership strengthens it. From that perspective, it is worth pursuing in this research

the hypothesis that Sweden and Finland have sought to preserve and strengthen the governing institutions and norms of the regional European international order and the international order.

The English School, according to Buzan (2001) and Stivachtis (2018), assumes that there are multiple international systems. Buzan (2001) provides key concepts, including the international system, international society, balance of power, diplomacy, international law, pluralism, and solidarism. This author defines the international system as the set of relations among two or more states that influence one another's decisions. A state is defined as the unit of power politics operating within an anarchic international structure, in which its decisions are driven by competition, survival, and the balance of power.

Evans & Wilson (1992) and Stivachtis (2018) claim that institutions such as diplomacy, international law, the balance of power, sovereignty, alliances, guarantees, war, and neutrality are essential to preserving the international order because they are among the most enduring practices of states. In contrast, formal institutions, such as international organizations, strengthen and enhance the efficiency of institutions that are products of social and political processes. Also, the authors mention the existence of normative rules in international relations and elements that facilitate their enforcement through solidarity or pressure, such as war, and note a common interest in observing diplomatic rules and treaty obligations.

Flockhart & Korosteleva (2022) and Ikenberry (2024) agree that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has marked a historical moment in the international order, which has developed in a transformation process, leading towards a new global ordering architecture that is still in the process of consolidation or definition. Those authors agree that the liberal international order has lost its hegemony, and it has provoked an emerging uncertainty, power shifts, and crisis, as well as it has created a debate over the fundamental rules and institutions that sustain the liberal international order, led by the US. Flockhart (2016) affirms that the international rules-based order is transforming into a possible multi-order world, while Ikenberry (2024) conceives a three-worlds system, defined by the interactions among the global West, global East, and global South; from his perspective, the outcome will be determined by the "incentives and patterns of conflict and cooperation that could shape and reshape the rules and institutions of global order".

Based on the results of this literature review, it is essential to acknowledge that exploring various theories and approaches to this topic can be valuable. While realism, neorealism, and liberalism provide strong frameworks for analysing power relations, military confrontations, and

the institutional framework, it is also important to consider other perspectives, particularly those focusing on Finland and Sweden as key actors in this context and their influence in the international order. This includes explaining their roles within the military alliance and the mechanisms that will enable them to participate actively in NATO, ensure their own security, and their efforts to influence the international order.

Considering the elements above, it is relevant to examine why Finland and Sweden joined NATO, despite their long-standing commitment to neutrality, and determine whether their decisions were motivated by the preservation of the ruling institutions and norms of the international order, or simply by military alignment, and evaluate how Finland and Sweden's NATO membership has influenced the international order. Answering these questions will enable us to understand the changes that the international order is currently going through. Using the English School as the primary theoretical framework, the hypothesis that Sweden and Finland have pursued to preserve and strengthen the governing institutions and norms of the international order will be tested.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the multiple studies that examine the impact on regional and international security of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO from a realist or neorealist perspective, and considering that most of these studies mainly describe the causes of NATO's enlargement and Russia and the Alliance's military reactions, it is relevant to expand academic research by focusing this time on the actions of Finland and Sweden and their motivations to join the alliance. This research aims to address that gap by analysing whether their decision sought to strengthen a rule-based international order or was merely a military alignment, and by assessing their influence within the international order.

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, requires different approaches to explaining and employing analytical tools that transcend classical theories. In that regard, it is relevant to hypothesize that Sweden and Finland were motivated by a desire to preserve and strengthen the ruling institutions and norms of the international order. The English School helps explain how both states framed their decisions as legitimate responses to systemic threats and how their accession sought to reshape or strengthen norms, values, and practices within the international order. From this perspective, the study will examine the steps taken by both countries to implement their new partnership with NATO, as well as the consequences.

Key concepts from the English School, including the international system, international society, balance of power, diplomacy, international law, pluralism, and solidarism, will provide the study's conceptual foundation (Buzan, 2001). From this perspective, the study will identify the main concepts, as suggested by Berenskoetter (2016), to effectively communicate the arguments and findings in the international order.

The English School

Building on the idea that international relations have a societal nature, the English School (ES) provides a framework for analysing the history and evolution of the global system, its principles, and the norms and institutions that sustain international peace and security. In this context, the ES helps elucidate the elements that enable the coexistence of states, as well as the international legal structure that promotes international justice and the legitimization of state actions within the

system (Aimé González, 2019), as the ES has had a systematic deliberation on the nature of international society and its political relations recognizing ethics about what is possible and desirable (Reus-Smit, 2002).

The English School offers a theoretical framework to analyse “thicker” forms of integration, such as NATO and the EU, and “thin” interactions developed through other organizations, such as the Council of Europe or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Stivachtis & Webber, 2011). In this regard, to explain Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the implications for the international order, it is relevant to recall Hedley Bull's idea of a shared culture that facilitates communication among nations and reinforces perceptions of common interests. From that perspective, the ES sustains that there is an intellectual and ethical foundation supporting an international society, and that this is reflected in the formal institutions that uphold peace and security in the international order (Bull, 1977).

The ES provides International Relations with a holistic approach, based on the idea of social structures of international orders, and relying on three key concepts: international system, international society, and world society. The international system is defined as the result of the relations among two or more states, which influence one another's decisions. In this context, the state is considered a unit in the power politics that plays within an anarchic international structure, where its decisions are driven by competition, survival, and the balance of power. Thus, it is assumed that there are multiple international systems (Bull, 1977; Buzan, 2001; Stivachtis, 2018; Stivachtis & Webber, 2011).

On the other hand, international society is defined as a higher stage of interstate relations, in which states can find common ground and recognize shared interests, norms, rules, and institutions. Similarly, within the international system concept, various regional international societies are considered to have emerged, each with its own rules and institutions, following the end of the Cold War (Bull, 1977; Buzan, 2001; Stivachtis, 2018; Stivachtis & Webber, 2011). Thus, the international society is considered to be based on “certain elementary, primary and universal rules” that protect life, property, and the inviolability of agreements (Evans & Wilson, 1992). However, Bull distinguished between a group of states that held together by economic, political, and strategic interests and those that deliberately create rules and mechanisms to order their interactions based on certain values and principles (Stivachtis & Webber, 2011). The borders

between the international system and international society are not easily identified (Flockhart, 2016). According to Jackson (2000), an international society is an “association of multiple political authorities” that bases its relations on three values: sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention. In this regard, the author prioritizes pluralism and the notion that international politics is guided by certain ethics, as expressed through diplomatic practice, international law, and the ethics of statecraft (Reus-Smit, 2002).

Historically, from the ES point of view, the evolution of the international society was led by the rise of European society that set political and economic requirements in the international system, mainly through liberal ideas, such as the protection of life and property, respect for human rights, the rule of law, liberal economic development, and democracy. According to Buzan (2004), the Western community could be considered as a sub-global international society. Stivachtis & Webber (2018) point out that it is not entirely regional but trans-regional, considering the trans-Atlanticism; nevertheless, it can be identified that there is a “conscious recognition” of shared values and common interests, as well as a tendency to cooperate, pursuing integration and solidarity.

Wight (1966) suggested that an international society is governed by norms and values primarily expressed in international law, as well as other institutions such as customary international law, and specific standards that sustain the international society. Therefore, the ES highlights the importance of concepts such as peace, order, and justice in international relations and fosters a social structure founded on norms and institutions, and norms of behaviours (Aimé González, 2019; Bellamy & McDonald, 2004; Reus-Smit, 2002). Booth & Wheeler (2023) explain that the English School addresses uncertainty in international relations through the creation and consolidation of institutions grounded in international law, the use of diplomacy, and supporting actions based on norms that promote mutual security, thereby constructing a “society” based on cooperation and trust, reducing the risks and promoting a predictable order. In this regard, these authors highlight the importance of policymakers in shaping these societies, promoting shared interests and values that foster secure communities and durable peace.

Based on Hedley Bull’s idea, the international order is understood as the patterns that lead to a certain result, created by the norms and institutions that promote certain goals and values. It is assumed that norms respond to specific objectives or purposes, and that implies the existence of an order. At the same time, the institutions are the “stable patterns of behaviours that produce

order”. Thus, the international order departs from the notion that states behave like social actors that comply with a norm and explicitly justify their behaviour by making reference to a norm (Diez et al., 2011). Questioning about how order is produced and reproduced, Flockhart (2016) mentions that, from the English School point of view, order should be conceived as a *condition* and as an *object*. The first defined as the achievement of fundamental goals “related to life, truth, and property”, and the second formed by actions and practices that are related to “a specific set of values and institutions”. Therefore, order could be found in the international system, international society, and world society; however, it is more likely to be found in the international society.

The concept of international order could be complemented by Ikenberry’s (2001) view, which characterizes the international order as the set of agreements among states that govern their relations, including their fundamental principles, institutions, and rules. Thus, order implies some regularity and predictability; however, there is not just one single international order, but multiple, across areas and specific relations. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that not all orders have formal institutions and codified rules (Lascurettes & Poznansky, 2021).

Flockhart (2016) argues that the understanding of order and the international society is complex and hard to have a clear picture; however, he simplifies it by using international society and the international order as synonyms, defining them as a cluster of nations with the same values, norms, and interests that are articulated through primary and secondary institutions, that could be characterized by a certain degree of constitutionalism, and that have power and identity components that define it.

From the English School perspective, the liberal international order is an example of an international society that has been produced by the existence of shared interests, identity, norms, rules, and institutions. The institutions of sovereignty, international law, balance of power, great power management, and war, in conjunction with the formal institutions, have constituted the liberal international order/society (Flockhart, 2016). Therefore, the liberal international order is based on solidarist liberal values, while a global rules-based order focuses more on “pluralistic state centric principles such as sovereignty and the principle of equality” (Flockhart & Korosteleva, 2022).

Ikenberry (2001) describes the liberal international order as a set of norms and institutions that connect their core principles in a transparent, rule-based, and progressive system. This system includes “open markets, international institutions, cooperative security, democratic community,

progressive change, collective problem solving, shared sovereignty, [and] the rule of law”. This author identifies three types or orders: balance of powers, hegemonic order, and constitutional order. The first two are power-centred, while the third is based on rules, where principles are the main element that characterise it, instead of the position of the actors that integrate it (Lascurettes & Poznansky, 2021). Hence, the liberal international order is considered as the unipolar system following the collapse of the Soviet-led order that, for a while, has been led by the US and has promoted a “Western identity based on free trade, rule of law, capitalism and ‘freedom’”, which it has fostered global cooperation and a wave of democratization in multiple countries, while multilateralism was one of the cornerstones (Flockhart, 2016).

In relation to institutions, the ES has considered that different international societies develop their own institutional order, based on diplomacy and international law. Then, from this perspective, the foundation of international societies is held on the use of those institutions, mutual recognition, and substantive values that facilitate the use of standards and constitute their institutional architecture and membership (Reus-Smit, 2002). For the English School, security is between what is and what ought to be, having the role of power and national interest in the international society. Bellamy and McDonald (2004) refer to authors such as Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight who state that the balance of power is constructed within a specific context, and the use of power is historically contingent. In that regard, the construction of institutions and rules responds to achieve certain goals expressed in the state’s interest and values that structure its identity and conduct (Reus-Smit, 2002).

For the ES, institutions are seen as the most enduring practices of states, such as diplomacy, international law, the balance of power, sovereignty, alliances, guarantees, war, and neutrality, that create and are essential for preserving the international order (Stivachtis, 2018). In this sense, institutions are essential for preserving the international order (Evans & Wilson, 1992; Stivachtis, 2018). On the other hand, organizations, secondary institutions, or formal institutions are the bureaucratic structures. Therefore, formal institutions are elements that play a specific role in strengthening and enhancing the efficiency of institutions, which are products of social and political processes (Diez et al., 2011; Evans & Wilson, 1992; Stivachtis, 2018).

As with most English school intellectuals, there is an assumption that specific normative rules exist in international relations and that elements facilitate their enforcement through solidarity or pressure, such as war. Considering this approach, power and interest are also defined

differently from those in the realist and liberal approaches. Interest is referred to as the common interest, or that states have a common interest in observing diplomatic rules and treaty obligations (Evans & Wilson, 1992), while power is a component of the international society that is derived from material capabilities and non-material factors that support cohesion, identity, and is related to the primary and secondary institutions (Flockhart, 2016). Concepts such as interdependence are considered part of the state system, as interactions among states are integral to international relations and sufficient to influence the behaviour of every state (Evans & Wilson, 1992; Stivachtis, 2018).

Reus-Smit (2002) states that the English School has “merged ontological and normative analyses to reflect on moral actions in a world of sovereign states”, which brings together the idea of evaluating international actions that cannot be unlinked to values. In that regard, he refers to the fact that when a political leader makes a decision, it is not relevant to analyse their particular values, but rather to assess the public value that they have considered in articulating and justifying their decisions. In this case, the ES suggests that there is always a particular set of political values that are maximized depending on the contexts and variables that create opportunities and constraints.

Additionally, the English School brings the concept of world society, which is understood as comprising all individual human beings, non-state actors, and the global population that transcends the state system, creating global societal identities and arrangements (Stivachtis, 2018). Due to the limited use of this concept in this study, we will not refer to it further.

Pluralism vs Solidarism

The analysis of the solidarist and pluralist perspectives of the international society given by Hedley Bull in *The Anarchical Society* and *The Grotian Conception of International Society* represents an element to explain the possible scenarios that the international society could develop, either with a global society cohesive on shared norms, values, and purposes towards peace and international justice, or towards an international society that coexist thanks to a minimum consensus of rules that norms their relations. In this regard, pluralism focuses on the state’s sovereignty; meanwhile, solidarism focuses on the human being (Aimé González, 2019; Reus-Smit, 2002).

According to Stivachtis (2018), the pluralist/solidarist debate is about the limits and potentials of international society that focuses on the inclusion of natural law and positive law in

international law. From that perspective, a pluralist international society has a low degree of shared norms and institutions, while a solidarist international society has high levels of integration and common norms, rules, and institutions.

The new role of the state's sovereignty from the ES perspective after the decolonization process, which led to the emergence of numerous new countries with weak structures, volatile governments, grave internal conflicts, and multiple humanitarian crises, was studied by Robert H. Jackson (1999), who was one of the first to analyse the solidarist and pluralist perspectives *vis-à-vis* the developments in international relations in the 1990s. Jackson is considered part of the second generation of the ES, in which the international system is explained as a transition from positive sovereignty to negative sovereignty (Aimé González, 2019).

In that sense, for the ES of the second generation, the international system post-Cold War was explained from the idea that the legal international structure provides the norms and moral standards of the international society. Still, states' sovereignty is not an absolute political characteristic that guarantees non-intervention and the right to self-determination. From this perspective, an international system that seeks stability, respect for international law, international aid for development, and new standards such as human rights, democracy, and good governance are sources of legitimation of this limitation to sovereignty (Aimé González, 2019).

In relation to security, the English School analyses it through the idea of the political and normative activity of the international society, where the balance of power and the use of power are historically contingent. The main idea of the ES is that security is a normative value, socially constructed, and that the security discourse takes place within a political community, which does not mean it is limited to the state. In this regard, Bellamy & McDonald (2004) comment that, within the solidarist and pluralist debate, notions of human security and security communities play important roles in defining the ES positions on security and the society of states.

In the debate between pluralism and solidarism, as set out by Hedley Bull (1966), pluralism holds that international society, formed by states, has as its main value the sovereignty of states and the norm of non-intervention, allowing the coexistence of the main components (Bellamy & McDonald, 2004). Nardin (1983) highlights that from this perspective, the states have a "practical association" and their relations are only based on restrictions on how they can achieve their own goals, with the possibility that their objectives may be incompatible (Reus-Smit, 2002). On the

other hand, solidarists focus their perspective on the security of individuals and the protection of individuals within a world society (Bellamy & McDonald, 2004).

The pluralist conception of security, as presented by Hedley Bull, postulates that in international society, there should be a framework that allows for plurality and cultural diversity among political communities, enabling them to define and pursue their own conceptions of security and justice. Jackson (2000) refers to the existence of a global covenant, represented by procedural and prudential norms, which lead to foundational principles such as the mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as non-intervention. In this regard, this author states that security is a fundamental value of human relations. Bull and Jackson focus on the state as the agent that provides security; they do not see economic or social inequality as a threat to national and international security (Bellamy & McDonald, 2004).

According to Bellamy & McDonald (2004), the pluralist view centres on the idea that, to grant security, it is necessary not to undermine the basic structure of the international system. From their point of view, state security is more important than individual security; thus, a pluralist international society reduces interstate wars. At the same time, these authors comment that the community does not overlap with state borders and that there is still a long process when states reach an agreement on common values and ideas, such as human security.

The solidarist conception of security, on the other hand, focuses on the idea of the existence of a world society, constituted by moral communities, where individuals are the subject and constitutive members of the international society. As referred by Bellamy & McDonald (2004), authors such as Nicholas Wheeler and Andrew Linklater affirm that the state represents just one stage of the path of self-realization of the individual, and a world society could substitute the international society, as it is more evident that the existence of a moral connection of humanity.

From the English School perspective, the European Union is a process of a regional international system that has grown since the end of the Second World War in 1945, creating a common set of rules and institutions that govern their relations, and with time has resulted in supranational institutions that regulate the interests of the member states and their population, and it has created a set of economic and political requirements to aspire to be members of that international system. The set of rules and institutions of the European Union goes beyond its borders, as its external relations are based on its norms and practices, encouraging other states to adopt its standpoints. A clear example of this is that development assistance must comply with

political and economic conditions, as does the EU's trade policy, which promotes the same principles, such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, and respect for the protection of minorities (Stivachtis, 2018).

The process of EU enlargement represents an example of a thick regional international society within a thin international society that characterizes the current international system. Changes in the international society/order since the end of the Second World War, with new technologies, have increased the idea of the existence of a single global economy and single global environment that encourages the idea of a world society, where individuals play an important role in the definitions of norms and institutions (Stivachtis, 2018). According to Buzan (2001), the European Union is an example of a thick regional international society that has restructured the elements of sovereignty in a context of a postmodern state. Part of the norms and principles of the European international society are structured in different instruments that form international law. Among those, it is relevant to mention the guiding principles of the OSCE at the Helsinki Final Act, where there are stated principles such as territorial integrity, inviolability of frontiers, sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of disputes, equal rights and self-determination of peoples, refraining from the threat and the use of force, and fulfilment in good faith of the obligations under international law.

Although the ES has been criticized for its Eurocentrism (Hobson, 2012), classic international society theory has been adapted over time. Since the end of the Cold War, the ES has sought to explain the international order emerging during globalization, recognizing that the international normative framework derives from the Second World War and a complex process of emerging new states after decolonization. The consolidation of the ES as an analytical framework has evolved with the emergence of new states and international actors, as well as through dialogue with other critical theories. In that regard, the critical theory of international society analyses the agency of states, not only Western countries, to influence and transform the international society, its norms and institutions. Thus, the contradictions of power in the international society make the elements that put together the changes and resistance to domination, characteristics of the European expansion, but at the same time make us consider and pay attention to other elements of the liberal order, such as inequality, hierarchy, and coercion (Aimé González, 2019).

Therefore, the ES and its research areas, such as war, institutions, and balance of power in international society, the debates on order and justice, ethics and principles of international society,

as well as its relation with international law, and the debates on military intervention and human rights (Aimé González, 2019), provide us with the elements to understand, explain, and analyse Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO, as well as the repercussions for the international system. In this research, it is agreed that NATO is an essential component of the international society/order, as contended by Webber (2011). The English school is relevant to the study, as it enables us to analyse the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO at multiple levels. This theory will help explain why Finland and Sweden joined NATO, despite their long-standing commitment to neutrality, but also whether their decisions were motivated by the preservation of the ruling institutions and norms of the international order.

4. METHODOLOGY

Since the English School theory will serve as the primary foundation for the theoretical framework used to analyse how Sweden and Finland approached NATO membership and its actual effects on the international order, the proposed research will adopt an interpretive methodology. This approach will examine the key ideas, discourses, and norms that both countries have developed around their participation in the Euro-Atlantic military alliance. The interpretive methodology (Lamont, 2022) will enable analysis of the security and foreign policies of both countries by using factual information and government decisions, and by considering NATO as a formal institution and part of the international society of states (Ababakr, 2022; Bull, 1977).

The study examines how both nations have adopted specific measures to protect themselves under international law, thereby demonstrating a normative commitment to the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, legitimizing their decisions, and highlighting the importance of their diplomatic efforts. With this in mind, it would be possible to deepen understanding of the circumstances that led Finland and Sweden to join NATO, as well as the changes in the international order. Following an interpretive methodology and drawing on English School theory, it is necessary to determine how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has affected the international order and whether it poses a security threat to Sweden and Finland, and the steps taken to face that threat. The analysis examines the decision-making processes of both countries that led to NATO membership and their accession to the alliance, and describes the invasion as a violation of international law.

Methodologically, the study analyses reliable information and documents supporting the security and foreign policy decisions of both countries, published by NATO, the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence of both countries, the institutions within the European Union, the OSCE, summit declarations, press releases, and publications from the region's leading *think tanks*. This analysis could inform understanding of the new rules and policies within the military alliance framework, including parliamentary debates, legal instruments, treaties, defence agreements, and discourse. These sources provide evidence about the internal and external factors that influenced their policy decisions, as well as how leaders have approached NATO membership in light of international law and collective security. Additionally, this enables us to describe how both countries perceive their role in the international order and their objectives for influencing norms and international practices.

While a descriptive background is necessary for this topic, including the historical context of NATO enlargement and the policy debates within both countries that led to Sweden and Finland joining the alliance, the research maintains a balance between normative and explanatory methods (Lamont, 2022). Inductive reasoning guides the research, beginning with an analysis of specific actions undertaken by the governments of Sweden and Finland, as well as their institutional changes, including legal reforms, treaty ratifications, and new defence policies. The study draws broader conclusions about the influence of both countries on norms in the international order.

The study focused on official documents issued by the government of Finland, such as the Government Defence Report 2024, which updates the Report of 2021, the Government report on changes in the foreign and security policy environment of 2026; and Finland's Arctic Foreign and Security Policy of 2024, which updated Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy (2021) and the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy (2024). In other hand, in the case of Sweden, it is reviewed the Government report "Deterioration of the security environment - implications for Sweden", the Swedish Defence Commission's report on Security Policy (2023), and Sweden's policy of Total Defence, parliamentary resolution for 2025-2030, and other relevant documents that analyse the role of both countries in the international order.

5. SWEDEN AND FINLAND: FROM THE NEUTRALITY POLICY AND NON-ALIGNMENT TO NATO MEMBERSHIP

Historical background: The neutrality policy and non-alignment

Finland and Sweden avoided involvement in international conflicts through a policy of neutrality and military non-alignment. Sweden was considered neutral since 1812, while Finland was neutral from 1955 until recent years. When both countries joined the European Union in 1995, military non-alignment was the new approach to explain their foreign and security policies (Jaber & Al Momani, 2024).

Historically, the borders between Russia and the territories of Sweden and Finland have been modified by the exercise of power. The Great Northern War (1700-1721) and the other two wars in the XVIII Century represented the contest for the territory of today's Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe. During the Russo-Swedish War (1741-1743), the Swedish Empire lost control of Finnish cities to the Russian Empire, while later on in the Russo-Swedish War of 1788-1790, a stalemate did not bring further lost territory to Sweden, but it was agreed that there would not be intervention in Sweden's internal affairs by Russia. In the XIX Century, in 1808, in the context of the Napoleonic wars, the Russian Empire invaded the Kingdom of Sweden, controlling the Gulf of Finland and the Åland Islands. As a result of the Finnish War, Russia and Sweden signed the Treaty of Fredrikshamn, ceding Finland to Russia through the Grand Duchy of Finland (Seyaz, 2024).

In the XX Century, after the October Revolution in Russia, Finland declared its independence in December 1917. With the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in 1918, Russia had to withdraw all its army from Finland and give back the Åland Islands. During the interwar period, Finland sought to be part of neutral Scandinavia, signing a non-aggression pact with the USSR in 1932. However, during the Second World War, the Winter War, from November 1939 to March 1940, altered the borders between the two countries. Finland lost 11% of its territory under the Moscow Peace Treaty. In the Continuation War, Finland fought with Nazi Germany against Russia, aiming to recover its territory. With the Moscow Armistice of 1944 between Finland, the USSR, and the UK, Finland expelled German troops. In 1947, the final peace agreement, the Paris Peace Treaty, led to further territorial losses for Finland. Later on, the USSR and Finland tied their relations with an agreement of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance

in April 1948, which isolated Finland from Western Europe and committed it to non-alignment (Black et al., 2022; Seyaz, 2024; Smirnov, 2023; Wittmann, 2022).

On the other hand, Sweden developed its neutrality policy since the Vienna Conference in 1815, and it reiterated it thereafter. It was not involved in the Second World War and maintained an armed neutrality policy, with a strong military production capacity. Its security policy used to be based on non-alignment and peace. Its foreign policy focused on political neutrality, multilateral dialogue, and nuclear disarmament, based on the fact that it does not share a land border with Russia (Black et al., 2022; Cramér, 2026; Seyaz, 2024; Smirnov, 2023; Wittmann, 2022). However, Sokur et al. (2025) affirm that even if Sweden declared itself free from alliances, it was considered a “secret member of NATO,” bearing in mind the mutual assistance agreement of 1952 with Washington, which allowed the use of airspace and military infrastructure to NATO if necessary, and also its cooperation with NATO member states such as Norway and Denmark.

Cramér (2026) affirms that neutrality policy was useful for Sweden to navigate in the international system and the collective security created within the UN Charter, after the Second World War, but soon it became a “permanent neutrality policy” *de facto* caused by the confrontation of the two superpowers during the Cold War. Nonetheless, it was clear that its identification with liberal democratic values and its integration with Western Europe. Its “globalist approach” has focused on supporting the UN system and international institutions, and was complemented later with its participation in the European institutions. However, with time, Sweden’s non-alignment became “weak or non-existent” or unclear.

According to Sokur et al. (2025), the defence policy in the region during the Cold War was described with the concept of “the Nordic balance”, while the security policies of Finland and Sweden were considered separately, pondering their own historical experiences. The Nordic balance assumed that any change of Sweden towards NATO membership would shift the USSR military position towards Finland, and vice versa. The Soviet Union/Russia’s direct and indirect threats to Sweden and Finland, in particular its presence in the Baltic Sea, the possibility of seizing the island of Gotland, or the Swedish mainland, were, and will always be, part of the assessments of these two countries’ foreign and defence policies. They carefully expanded their military relations with other Nordic and NATO countries at the end of the Cold War. In the case of Finland, it was not until the signing of the Treaty of Foundations of Mutual Relations with the Russian Federation in 1992 that it provided more independence in its foreign policy. At that time, the

Finnish government redefined its policy as independent defence and military non-alignment, which was officially adopted in 1997 by its parliament.

Later on, both countries, once again, adjusted their neutrality policy when they co-joined the Partners for Peace (PfP) program in 1994, an initiative to create trust between NATO and non-member states. Sweden and Finland justified their participation in the PfP as a strategy to support their military transformation and allow interoperability with NATO, without the risks of joining the Alliance. They participated in several NATO-led missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as joint exercises and training. They attended high-level NATO discussions on Nordic-Baltic security (Black et al., 2022; Sokur et al., 2025).

The integration of Sweden and Finland into the European Union in 1995 transformed their foreign policy, becoming politically aligned, as stated in Article 42(7) of the Treaty of the European Union, ending the concept of “Finlandization”, which meant being non-aligned to any dominant bloc during the Cold War. In 1997, Finland and Sweden joined the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), seeking to join the Euro-Atlantic security system with minimal commitments; a situation that eventually evolved in various formats of defence and security cooperation closer to the Transatlantic alliance (Black et al., 2022; Seyaz, 2024; Smirnov, 2023).

The aggression of Russia against Georgia in 2008 evolved into new steps from both countries towards the construction of new institutions, more integration, and cooperation with NATO member states. One of the “palliatives” of that context, according to Sokur et al., (2025), was the creation of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) framework in 2009, with the participation of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, whose objectives were to improve weapons procurement, strategy development, and participation in international operations. With the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, NORDEF was already aiming to provide regional security and cooperation in different scenarios with NATO; nevertheless, Sweden and Finland’s nonalignment position limited their full integration, and they encouraged their presence, improving their participation in military mobility and joint exercises (Black et al., 2022; Filipović, 2024; Friis, 2024; Seyaz, 2024).

The first invasion of Russia into eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 led to discussion on Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO, and to an increase in their cooperation and integration into NATO structures (Filipović, 2024). During the NATO Summit in Wales of that year, both countries became part of the NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partners (EOP),

strengthening their military cooperation, signing Host Nation Agreements with the Alliance, and granting access to their territory to NATO, designating them to play a supplementary role in the NATO Response Force (NRF) (Black et al., 2022; Smirnov, 2023; Sokur et al., 2025). EOP allowed Sweden and Finland to participate in political consultation on security issues, NATO Foreign and Defence ministers' meetings, exchange of intelligence, and participation in the planning of military and operational activities (Filipović, 2024). In 2017, Helsinki was already hosting the Hybrid Centre of Excellence (Hybrid CoE), financed by NATO and the EU, which provides research, advice, training, and exercises to manage hybrid threats, mainly from Russia and its proxies (Black et al., 2022; Smirnov, 2023; Sokur et al., 2025).

Swedish-Finnish cooperation with NATO was already in a “thickening” process, as both were part of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) since 2017, and other groups such as the Northern Group, the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which involved different NATO members. Before joining NATO, both countries already signed a trilateral Statement of Intent (SOI) with the US in 2018 for expanding security cooperation (Black et al., 2022; Smirnov, 2023). Both countries established “multidirectional military and political cooperation with the Alliance” through their participation in training on all the branches of their armed forces, and their full participation in NATO depended on the possibility of changes in the international security environment (Sokur et al., 2025), and the international order. For Smirnov (2023), “their rapprochement with NATO was an irreversible process, the only question being how far it would go and how it would be taken in Moscow”.

Considering that scenario, in December 2021, Russia requested security guarantees from the US and NATO as well as a clear compromise of non-expansion of the Alliance to the East and limiting any further presence in the region; demands that were perceived as unacceptable for Finland and Sweden, considering “their right and freedom to choose” to join any military alliance. Later, the invasion of Russia into Ukraine in February 2022 finally resulted in the decision to request NATO membership. For the first steps in that goal, Finland signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement with the US in 2022, and the same for Sweden in 2023 (Black et al., 2022; Smirnov, 2023; Sokur et al., 2025). The threats that the Russian invasion of Ukraine represented for the international order, as well as the uprising of actions that could interfere with the peace and security of the region, brought the idea that “only the collective security guarantee provided by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty would be sufficient to guarantee their security” (Black et al., 2022).

Being part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU was not seen as sufficient to face the new threats posed by Russia (Seyaz, 2024).

NATO enlargement: towards membership

Historically, Finland and Sweden played the role of neutral actors and avoided any military alliance, in favour of maintaining the international order produced after the Second World War, as well as the balance of power among the great powers. After the dissolution of the USSR, both countries engaged in supporting the liberal international order led by the US. At the same time, they participated in developing the “thickest” regional international society, the transatlantic community, and in the consolidation of the norms and institutions of the liberal international order. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was an inflection point that altered the idea that the European institutions, including NATO, had completed their enlargement process or were in a standstill, so countries, so-called “post-neutrals” (Austria, Finland, Ireland, and Sweden), were unlikely to push forward to join the Alliance (Stivachtis & Webber, 2011). At the same time, it ended any reminiscences of the idea that with the fall of the Soviet Union, Western liberalism would win over other paradigms, as suggested by Francis Fukuyama (Weinberger, 2015).

According to Sperling (2019), the confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union after the Second World War, and the different armed international conflicts, made it evident that the United Nations was not going to be an “effective collective security organization.” Therefore, NATO was the formal institution that enabled the assurance of collective security for the West, the reconstruction of Europe, and sustained the liberal international economic order, led by the US, thereby creating the transatlantic community. NATO and its members have been a key factor in the consolidation of the liberal international order, supporting its primary and secondary institutions, as well as the rules established by them; however, it is important to admit that, in the case of Sweden and Finland, their neutrality aimed to find certain independence from the influences of the great powers, but supporting the multilateralism creating within the UN.

European enlargement brought debates in all formal institutions, including NATO, regarding their internal procedures, decision-making, institutional adaptations, and policy flexibility. It also led to a debate on what the enlargement has meant for the organization (Stivachtis & Webber, 2011; Vachudova, 2005). In 1995, NATO defined that the enlargement was part of a process to build a better security architecture in the Euro-Atlantic area (NATO, 1995);

however, by 2009, the enlargement process was off the agenda, and discussions were focused on obligations of membership, as there was less consensus on enlargement (Biermann, 2009; Goldgeier, 2010; Stivachtis & Webber, 2011).

The end of the Cold War caused a rearrangement of the common interest in Europe and the US to construct a new international order, based on the leadership of the US and the dominance of Western institutions. Within NATO, the alliance was required to adjust the interests of the European countries to obtain more defence autonomy and consider their perspectives in its defence policies, but at the same time to assimilate the former Warsaw Pact states and institutionalize its relations with Russia and their successor states of the USSR, as part of the “Western system of security governance” (Sperling, 2019).

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR brought a new perspective to the security understanding and functions of NATO. Russia was not defined as an enemy and allowed a quick enlargement of the Alliance in the former soviet area of influence, with relevant geostrategic positions such as Poland and the Baltic states, which resulted in threat perceptions from Russia (Åtland, 2016; Seyaz, 2024). However, during the nineties, there was a debate about NATO’s purpose and role. It was balanced between collective defence and crisis management around its periphery, with a tendency to increasing deficiencies in military capabilities and declining defence expenditures by European countries and a disproportionate share of expenditures with the US (Sperling, 2019).

Stivachtis and Webber (2018) affirm that in the first decade of the 2000s, European enlargement, including NATO, was seen with scepticism. For NATO, the failure to grant Membership Action Plans to Georgia and Ukraine at the Bucharest summit in 2008, vetoed by France and Germany, was a sign of “engagement fatigue”. In that context, the enlargement was seen as less than a positive step, and more a challenge that could limit the immediate necessity to restructure NATO’s operations in the war in Afghanistan. These authors also argue that a certain duality was expressed in asserting the obstacles to enlargement, but at the same time, a rhetorical commitment to inclusiveness and cultivating alliances. From their perspective, this duality has been a fixed geopolitical character.

On the other hand, Sperling (2019) affirms that after the terrorist attacks in 2001, the expansion of NATO’s defence perimeters, pushed by the US, brought new challenges to the Alliance, and tensions between European countries and the superpower, bringing debates about

defence spending and risk-sharing within the Alliance. The US wanted to maintain the same institutions and ensure its leadership in granting the stability of the international order. Stivachtis & Webber (2011) consider that Europe arrived at a condition of post-enlargements: limit of membership, organizational consolidation, enlargement fatigue, duality of borders, and liminality (a process of transition, but in a static condition, they are stuck in the threshold). In that sense, from their point of view, there was a pan-European differentiation as certain states remained locked out of NATO and EU membership. Consequently, some authors agree that NATO partnership initiatives could be interpreted as a factor that had the objective to contribute to changing the limits that a formal membership implied, and contribute to new interactions, minimizing the impact of the controversial elements that entail a formal membership (Sperling, 2019; Stivachtis & Webber, 2011).

The Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008, and later the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of eastern Donbas in 2014, led NATO to return to the collective defence strategy and deterrence, abandoning international crisis management and cooperative security. After NATO's Wales Summit in 2014, new actions were taken to reinvigorate Europe's defence plans, with the deployment of troops in the Baltics and Poland, more spending was allocated to the Alliance toward the spending of 2% of GDP on defence by 2024, and the NATO command structure was revised, setting a new path (Åtland, 2016; Seyaz, 2024; Sperling, 2019). Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was the point of inflection in the partnership approach to a new national security and foreign policy for Sweden and Finland, based on NATO membership.

On May 18th, 2022, Sweden and Finland officially changed their foreign and security policies, requesting to join NATO. Military non-alignment was abandoned. They politically coordinated this change, showing their interlinkages. During the NATO Summit in Madrid in June 2022, members formally invited both countries to join the Alliance, signing their Protocols of Accession in July 2022. Finland joined NATO on April 4, 2023, without any impediment after the ratification of its Protocol by all member states, while Sweden faced opposition from Turkey and Hungary. The Turkish parliament ratified Sweden's accession in January 2024 and formally joined the Alliance on 7th March 2024, once signed by the President of Hungary (Black et al., 2022; Seyaz, 2024; Sokur et al., 2025; Wittmann, 2022).

As it was mentioned, Finland and Sweden were constructing and strengthening their links with NATO and its members over time. The different threats that they were perceiving from the

international system alerted them to improve the elements that linked them with NATO, to have a set of norms that could allow them to integrate and be fully part of the Alliance, and, at some point, strengthen their place in the European international society and in the international order (Sokur et al., 2025).

According to Sokur et al. (2025), there are differences between Sweden and Finland in their security policies due to their histories and geopolitics; however, they have sought to align their decisions and not underestimate what Russia represents in terms of security threats. These authors also attest that, for NATO countries, the integration of Sweden and Finland represents a positive development for the integration of their defence systems, geostrategic control over the Gulf of Finland, and strengthened military capabilities on the northern and eastern borders, creating serious challenges and potential threats to Russia. Also, they conclude that documents demonstrate that both governments were waiting for any change in the international order and security environment to request NATO membership officially, so their alignment was already decided before 2022.

Smirnov (2023) notes that the decision to join NATO put aside the fears of uncontrollable tensions with Russia and involvement in international conflicts. Thus, both governments reassured that Russian aggression was a reason to abandon their “neutrality”, and it was necessary to rethink national and regional security through international cooperation with “key partners”. According to Kaynak (2023), the ambiguous relation of both countries with NATO did not represent an element of deterrence toward Russia; to the contrary, it was a signal to intervene to limit NATO’s interference. From his point of view, the only way to face the revisionist policy of Russia and protect their territorial integrity was to “ask for total commitment from NATO”. Jaber & Al Momani (2024) affirm that Finland and Sweden changed their foreign policy from neutrality and military non-alignment to *Realpolitik*, as a result of an “increasingly anarchic international system” to guarantee their security and survival, which will bring more chances of conflict.

In the case of Sweden, the document that explained its application to participate in the military alliance refers to the preservation of mechanisms of security cooperation and its international influence in the international system. The report “Deterioration of the security environment -implications for Sweden”, published in May 2022 by the government of Sweden, states that its membership is a measure of deterrence for Russia, and it identifies potential hostile activities against both countries (Filipović, 2024). On the other hand, in April 2022, the Finnish

government issued the document “Government report on changes in the security environment,” which defined Russia as its main threat. Later on, in the document “Report on Finland’s Accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization” issued in May of that year, the government states that its security guarantees will be based on Article 5 of the NATO treaty. The war in Ukraine made the Russian threat be perceived as imminent and real (Kaynak, 2023).

Security and foreign policies of Finland and Sweden amidst the crisis of the international order.

As it was mentioned, the invasion of Ukraine has forced a change in Sweden and Finland’s foreign and security policies and adapted them to NATO membership. Those changes aimed at and kept aspiring to influence and shape the current international order that is in crisis, and securing their sovereignty, independence, and self-determination. Both countries look to support a rule-based international order over a power-based system. From the realist perspective, their policies have the intention to grant their national security and territorial integrity based on a geostrategic analysis. However, if we make a broader analysis, their actions are defined in a context that responds to the transformation of the current international order and the common interest shared by the Transatlantic community. Thus, it is relevant to review what elements have changed and how both governments have processed this new scenario.

Finland

In the case of Finland, the main documents that contain the defence and foreign policy after the Russian invasion to Ukraine are the Government Defence Report 2024 which updates the Report of 2021, the Government report on changes in the foreign and security policy environment of 2026, and the Finland’s Arctic Foreign and Security Policy of 2024, which updated Finland’s Strategy for Arctic Policy (2021) and the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy (2024), which are relevant to review their main implications.

The Ministry of Defence of Finland (2024) issued the Government Defence Report 2024, which evaluates the policies, necessities, and capabilities of the country as a NATO member until 2030, fully analyses the security threats, and assesses the new elements required in its participation in the military alliance. In this document, the Finnish government recognizes that the unlawful military intervention of Russia in Ukraine has “undermined the international rules-based order and

endangered peace and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area”. In that regard, it is recognized that there is a shift in the global balance of power, where the competition for dominance in the economic, military, political, and technological spheres is between the US and China.

In the same document, Russia is described as an international actor that cooperates with China, with the purpose of consolidating its power, destabilizing the region, and re-establishing divisions in Europe based on spheres of influence. It is stated that the US aims to maintain its hegemony in the international order, and it is willing to defend Europe as part of its long-term strategy. China is portrayed as a power increasing its influence by creating dependencies in the region, including Russia. The European Union is considered an actor that seeks to strengthen its role in that context, address its internal challenges, and respond to security threats. NATO is conceived by its role as a deterrence and defence provider. It is specified that the EU should maintain its unity to address strategic competition and that bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation should be part of its policy (Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2024).

A key element of the Defence Report 2024 is that it recognizes that “Finland bears its share of responsibility as part of the international community by contributing to the peace and stability efforts of the UN, NATO, the EU, the OSCE, and country groups. Finland is committed to NATO’s three core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security”. In that regard, Finland considers bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation and supporting Ukraine for the long term as fundamental; thus, Ukraine is categorized as part of the Euro-Atlantic security system, which supposes EU and NATO membership, and not changes in its territorial integrity, recognized since 1991 (Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2024).

The Defence Report also highlights the relevance of multilateral and bilateral defence cooperation reflected in NORDEFCO, the Joint Expeditionary Force, led by the UK, the Framework National Concept, led by Germany, and the European Intervention Initiative, led by France, as well as with countries such as South Korea, Israel, Japan, Canada, and Australia. In particular, the defence cooperation between Sweden and Finland is described as “extensive and far-reaching”. Regarding crisis management, the government of Finland confirms its interest in keeping promoting human rights, the rule of law, peace, social stability, and equality in conflict areas (Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2024).

Later, on November 25, 2025, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs presented Finland’s Arctic Foreign and Security Policy, which updated Finland’s Strategy for Arctic Policy (2021) and the

Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy (2024). In this policy document, the government recognizes the Arctic's relevance, given its natural resources and new maritime routes, while considering the effects of climate change. In that regard, and bearing in mind the increasing interest of other nations to grow their presence, Finland points out its policy on its responsibility of vigilance and preservation of the region, within the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO membership, and climate change. The main pillars of this policy are based on international law and cooperation, with respect for indigenous peoples' rights (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2025a).

In this document, Finland refers to the necessity to have a stable and secure Arctic, based on international law and sustainable development, so multilateral cooperation plays a key role in procuring stability. Cooperation within NATO, the Arctic Council, the EU, and with allied countries like the US and Canada is part of Finland's strategy to achieve this objective. The current power competition and economic and military tensions in the international system do not leave aside the Arctic. According to this policy report, Finland's expertise in the region gives the leading role in the directions and actions that are taken, considering its technological and industrial capacity. The government of Finland states that its membership in NATO has improved the Euro-Atlantic security, that include Northern Europe and the Arctic region, and its role is to stay vigilant and engaged. That does not let aside the idea that the Arctic region has lost its exceptionalism, and there is a rising potential for conflict in the area, with Russia playing a relevant role due to its Northern Fleet as a strategic asset, and Chinese interest rising for raw materials and new trade routes (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2025a).

According to this document, Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO has allowed deeper defence cooperation without political constraints within Nordic Countries, and explains the US security policy as a global competition, which will increase its presence in the Arctic, in cooperation with Finland through the ICE Pact. Cooperation with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan is part of the security architecture. Meanwhile, NATO's Forward Land Forces (FLF) in Northern Finland is seen as an instrument for deterrence and defence. In relation to the Arctic Council, it is recognized that the war in Ukraine has affected its work, even if there are no security policy matters in its mandate; however, it is Finland's objective to maintain its relevance as an intergovernmental cooperation structure that promotes governance with its decision-making process. With the European Union, Finland has the objective to sustain the Arctic as a region of

peaceful cooperation and slow the impact of climate change, with the idea that it becomes the EU's priority, and supporting comprehensive security (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2025a).

Finland's Arctic Foreign and Security Policy of 2025 states that exploration, new infrastructure, and undersea infrastructure should comply with international law and the environment. For that, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is a pillar for the rights and obligations of the states on the use of the seas and their natural resources. Then, Finland sees the cooperation and dialogue among Arctic Allies as an element that guarantees security, as it strengthens unity, promotes common interest, and raises awareness about the security threats. For Finland, NATO and European security have become complementary to its national security, and the war in Ukraine requires adapting its national legislation and increasing its defence capabilities to integrate into the Alliance (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2025a).

In June 2024, the Government of Finland published the Government report on Finnish foreign and security policy, stating its objectives and priorities; however, due to the significant changes in the international order, particularly in the changes in US foreign policy and the war in Ukraine, it was published in April 2026, the Government Report on changes in the foreign and security policy environment, as a supplement to the Report of 2024. In the Report of 2026, it is recognized that the international order "is being increasingly defined by power and force as well as by great power competition" and that European security remains volatile. It is stated that the US pursues its interests transactionally, but it continues to be an actor of "great importance to Finland". It is relevant to highlight that in this report, the government of Finland affirms that the international order based on shared values is being tested, giving priority to immediate interests; however, it is in its objectives to defend and strengthen the rules-based international order (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2026).

Finland recognizes that unpredictability in the international order is currently part of the international crisis of contemporary institutions, mostly caused by geostrategic competition, unilateralism, and the significant changes in international politics, the international economy, and the multilateral system. In that regard, the government of Finland calculates an increment of dependencies of Finland and the EU in the technological field, as technological competition between China and the US to access critical technologies and raw materials could leave them behind. Therefore, it highlights the importance of reducing "harmful dependencies" caused by the

increasing connection among trade, commerce, technology, and security, and the increasing tendencies of global interdependence (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2026).

As in the other policy documents, Finland's foreign and security policies are defined within the idea of "values-based realism", where independence and territorial integrity are the core goals, but democracy, the rule of law, human rights, equality, and non-discrimination are the values that guide its foreign policy. It is acknowledged that the existence of an unstable and fast-changing international order, where Russia continues to be a long-term threat, and the unity of NATO and the EU represents a key element to face it. Within that scenario, Finland sees Ukraine as a "key security issue for Europe"; then its posture on the solution of the conflict is to recognize Europe's interest in the security order, Ukraine's agency to define the agreeable terms of the peace with Russia, and the European and transatlantic future of Ukraine for a long-lasting peace, which includes Ukraine's adoption of European values. It is stated that Russia's objective is to "change the entire European security order" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2026).

In this Report, it is clear that Finland gives weight to international law and to a rules-based international order, particularly, it refers to the illegal use of force to change the international borders and the dangerous precedent that represent to accept Russia's claims. In that regard, it refers to Finland's participation in the establishment of the Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression and the International Claims Commission within the European Council. In reference to Russia's power, the Government of Finland considers that Russia has been supported by China, and their relationship has become "increasingly imbalanced" (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2026).

Regarding the US, the Government of Finland recognizes it as a key ally, but its relations have become unpredictable, with rapid fluctuations, and transactionalism as the main principle of American diplomacy. However, it is stated that "the United States is not withdrawing from Europe," and it will continue to have a critical role in the Transatlantic security; thus, Finland marks its relevance as an ally in the international order, particularly in reference to commitment to defence spending, the Arctic, and economic, commercial, and technological cooperation. Finland recognizes the importance of Nordic cooperation and supports the idea of being the "World's most integrated region", with Sweden as its closest partner, and the intensification of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation (NB8), considering the security issues in the region. At the same time, Finland acknowledges the importance of promoting Arctic stability together with the EU through

respect for international law. However, it accepts the importance of NATO allies, such as Canada, the US, and the Nordic countries, to enhance deterrence and defence in that region (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2026).

According to this document, Finland gives priority to diplomacy, negotiations, and international law for conflict solutions. At the same time, it gives relevance to its international obligations, such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as other mechanisms, such as the Coalition of the Willing to support Ukraine, and its influence within the European Union, supporting its community of values. In this document, democracy is defined as a cornerstone of security (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2026).

The Report provides a relevant analysis of the international order led by the US after the Second World War. It admits that conflicts have tested the credibility of international institutions, and there is great pressure in the system due to grave violations of international law to obtain short-term goals; however, it is stated that a rules-based international order represents the best alternative for peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community. In that regard, it is recognized that it is necessary to have a functional rules-based international system that allows multilateral cooperation to face the global challenges and enjoy the benefits of stability. It is stated that the formal institutions, such as the United Nations, should be reformed to perform their duties and improve their effectiveness. The fragmentation of multilateral actions throughout formal and informal groups is not seen as negative actions while aiming to defend a rules-based international order, sharing or not the same values (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2026).

To comply with those objectives, Finland has implemented actions in defence and foreign relations along the way, aiming to support a rules-based international order. Those actions are mainly translated into defence programmes within its NATO membership and Ukraine's support. For example, it announced investments from private capital of up to 200 million euros in the military industry for the defence procurement of NATO member countries (Minister of Defence of Finland, 2025). Since the war in Ukraine, the Government of Finland has implemented different plans to support Ukraine. The Ministry of Defence has approved 27 plans with a total assistance of war materiel worth EUR 3.3 billion. In March 2025, Finland signed an MOU with Ukraine on defence cooperation, which includes defence materiel, defence industrial projects in both countries, exchange of information, and research and innovation (Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2025e).

Black et al., (2022) consider that Finland maintains a strong national defence capability with a pragmatic approach after NATO membership, having in consideration the possibility of a Russian invasion. A “comprehensive security” is implemented to ensure preparedness and resilience during a crisis. Thus, training, military exercises, and other elements are the foundations of their national defence. Recently, to align its legal framework with that of NATO members, the Finnish parliament changed the Nuclear Energy Act, which will allow the import, transit, and deployment of nuclear weapons within its territory (Eduskunta Riksdagen, 2026).

Sweden

After the invasion of Russia into Ukraine in 2022, the Swedish government needed to evaluate the new security environment and its role in the international order. Thus, it reconsidered its strategies to face the new scenario that the war brought to the international community, as well as to scrutinize the political situation of international actors that affect Sweden’s interests, such as guaranteeing its independence, self-determination, and sovereignty.

In that regard, in May 2022, the Government issued the report, “Deterioration of the security environment -implications for Sweden”. There, the Government of Sweden documented that there were no security guarantees in the event of an attack, even with its military cooperation with strategic countries. In that context, the government also calculated that there has not been political will among the EU countries to develop a collective defence architecture, and Article 5 of the NATO Treaty applies only to Allies (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022).

Explaining the international order and the war in Ukraine, the government of Sweden clearly stated that the Russian confrontation with the West is a “structural, systematic and enduring” crisis of the European security and the rules-based international order, bringing uncertainty, violations of international law, and a clash between an authoritarian regime and the “free, open and democratic world”, to create spheres of influence. In that context, the factors that make Russia a threat to the international order and Swedish national security are its authoritarian regime, its capabilities for the use of nuclear weapons, the continuous actions against Sweden’s neighbourhood, announcements of retaliatory measures due to its alignment with NATO, and Sweden's position on the war with Ukraine. At the same time, it is stated that Russian-Chinese relations play a fundamental role in determining the global balance of power, and it finds “community of interest and values” with the intention to overrule the US and Western leadership.

The US is seen as a critical actor in European security, NATO, and the international order (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022).

In the above-mentioned document, Sweden defines itself as a country that “contributes to peaceful, stable and sustainable development with respect for the regulatory framework under international law”. It admits that the United Nations is essential to maintain a rules-based international order, but it acknowledges its limitations. Therefore, it is stated that the Swedish foreign and security policy is determined by its relationship with the EU, NATO, and its influence within the OSCE and other forums, to procure a “predictable neighbourhood anchored in European and Euro-Atlantic structures”. According to the government evaluation, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has pushed forward the necessity to prepare in the context of a “serious global security situation”, deepening cooperation with NATO, the US, and other partner countries, scaling up its defence spending, and “taking a historic decision to provide direct support and weapons to another country in an ongoing international armed conflict” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022).

For the Swedish government, the crisis produced by Russia in the international system brought the necessity to reinvigorate and increase cooperation with all the countries that sustain the European security order. That was translated into developing defence capabilities with NATO, activating previous agreements with the military alliance, which intensified coordination activities and sharing information, even if it did not form part of the collective and mutually binding defence obligations. Nonetheless, the Swedish government identified that “NATO members will not allow NATO to rely on a non-Ally in order to resolve issues within the scope of the collective defence obligations”. In that context, NATO membership was planned as the only option to not rely on a “non-formalised relationship with the United States” and other bilateral defence guarantees with European countries, without interfering with other principles of the Swedish foreign policy, such as disarmament and non-proliferation. In the report, it is specified that NATO membership does not interfere with the promotion of liberal ideas in the international system; it means abandoning non-military alignment, but in line with the Swedish “solidarity-based security policy” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022).

Another relevant document to analyse the foreign and security policies is the Swedish Defence Commission’s report on Security Policy (2023), where it was recognized that the war in Ukraine was the reason for the transformation of Sweden’s security policy. There, NATO membership is considered the “most important defence policy” for Sweden, joining the Alliance’s

collective defence system, and putting at the centre of its objectives its territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty. Nevertheless, it is admitted that Sweden's role in fostering a stable and secure international order must be pursued, and political dialogue and diplomacy play an important role alongside other security policy tools, such as military or economic means. In this document, it is stated that from Sweden's point of view, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a "long-term threat" to European and global security, thus its security and foreign policy is "based on the cohesion within the EU and NATO, cooperation in the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions, and within the UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)" (Swedish Defence Commission, 2023).

According to this Report, "Sweden must protect the rules-based world order, the European security order, democracy, freedom, human rights, and equality". To explain that, the government considers that Russia has disrupted European security and violated international law, while China is now claiming its power and challenging the rules-based international order, which could lead to an international conflict or crisis that could affect the balance of power and international security. Consequently, Sweden needs to maintain the European security order based on a partnership of shared values and respect for international law. In that regard, the definition of Sweden's relationships with China, Russia, Europe, and North America plays a critical role in its objective of defending a rules-based world order. Additionally, the Swedish government stated in this report that its objective for foreign and security policies is to respect for the UN Charter and international law, as well as the preservation of the European security order. Hence, the UN is outlined as the organization that grants a rules-based international order, peace, and security; therefore, the organization must be strengthened (Swedish Defence Commission, 2023).

In the same document, Sweden considers that the principles of solidarity and individual and collective self-defence are fundamental; thus, its alignment with the military alliance, based on principles of collective defence and the security guarantees stated in Articles 3 and 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, provides deterrence of aggression and contributes to the collective and national defence. From this perspective, NATO is regarded as a central player in securing peace in the entire Euro-Atlantic region. Bearing in mind that Sweden specified as its objectives to strengthen its alliances with the Nordic and Baltic countries, the US, UK, and other leading NATO countries such as Germany, France, and Poland. In other words, the rights and obligations of NATO membership work for Sweden's security and the Euro-Atlantic region, and it contains a

political and a military dimension that help to reach the interest of peace and security (Swedish Defence Commission, 2023).

The Swedish Defence Commission (2023) noted global trends affecting the international order. It acknowledged that the US's leadership of the rules-based world order after the Second World War is now "challenged by authoritarian states that seek an order based on strength". In that context, the Commission states that there is a geopolitical power competition that is expressed in different actions that "undermine democratic governance in other states", affect international trade and investments, and deteriorate the security situation. Adding to this, the Commission recognized a race to develop new technology due to the increased digitalization and the acceleration of the new information environment. Uncertainty on nuclear weapons, climate change, terrorism, and extremism are facts that are considered under the current security threats in the current geopolitical competition among the main powers.

The Defence Commission describes Russia as an "authoritarian, nationalist and imperialist state", which is in a long-term conflict with the West; hence, the international community's response will have consequences in the international order, global security, and balance of power. In this context, it is of the utmost importance for Sweden to defend European security and a rules-based international order, as well as the principles of independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, that currently expressed in the support to Ukraine against Russia. In the report, the government of Sweden justifies its new military alignment with the necessity to retaliate against Russian actions with political, economic, diplomatic, and military measures. In that context, the Arctic, the Black Sea, and the immediate neighbourhood of Sweden are the areas where the confrontation between Russia and the West has clearly conflicting disputes (Swedish Defence Commission, 2023).

As it was referred to before, China plays another relevant role in the development of the international order; in that regard, the Swedish Defence Commission (2023) does not consider China as a direct military threat, but it described it as a threat to the rules-based international order, as among its objectives are to challenge the international order, and the European and Global security. One important assessment about China is its priority of the state's security and economy over liberal principles, such as human rights and international law. China represents a challenge to Sweden's interests with actions that threaten its security. It is stated that China is against NATO expansion and supports Russia in its security interests. In that regard, the Commission concludes

that the relations among the US, China, and Russia are the main factors to address its foreign, security, and defence policy in the long term, where like-minded countries play a keystone role.

In the Swedish analysis, it is acknowledged that NATO and the EU are actors that complement their roles in collective defence and current geopolitical competition, in an international order that is unstable and unpredictable. Areas such as technology, energy, and cyberspace became strategic to develop a new regional and national security policy. In the assessment, the Commission sees a deterioration of the security environment at the global level and in the Indo-Pacific, challenging the rules-based international order, and requiring the West to pay attention to the interests all around the globe, in regions such as the Middle East and Africa (Swedish Defence Commission, 2023).

About the rules-based international order, the government of Sweden accepts that the current international order is under pressure, mainly by Russia and China, which are looking for a multipolar world order, challenging the international norms, values, and institutions, undermining multilateralism, to weaken the United States' hegemony and its alliance with Western countries. In the government analysis, the liberal values, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, are also challenged by the Russian and Chinese authoritarian regimes. As a key element in the interpretation of the international order, the Swedish government states that the European security order does not offer "protection against the threat from Russia"; therefore, "international law and a rules-based world order are central and long-term Swedish foreign and security policy interests". At the same time, Sweden considers NATO as an actor that upholds the multilateral and rules-based international order, and as a NATO member, it will push for the respect of international law, within the principles of the UN charter (Swedish Defence Commission, 2023).

Referring to the war in Ukraine, the Swedish government states that it is unacceptable to agree to legitimise violations of the principles of international law. It claims accountability for Russia and does not accept the use of military force as a political tool. In that context, the Swedish Defence Commission (2023) affirms that "there is no contradiction between a normative, rule-based order and military deterrence", justifying its change in military alignment, and arguing that Sweden will influence the policy discussions and change the military strategic situation in Northern Europe.

As it has been reviewed, NATO membership required modifications of Sweden's security and foreign policy to effectively participate in collective defence and contribute to NATO's

capabilities and influence the international order. At a national level, it was also required to improve and update its national defence, based on NATO's 360-degree perspective, including both military and civilian defence, and overall national defence and security logistics, which includes multiple areas of action. Considering that, Sweden adjusted its policy of Total Defence, which was adopted by a parliamentary resolution in December 2024. The resolution for 2025-2030 contains the military, civil, economic, and psychological elements of defence, while supporting strong military capabilities. It is pertinent to remember that following the end of the Cold War, Sweden significantly reduced its military capabilities, and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has reinvigorated its defence production. From the government's perspective, Sweden provides a significant industrial defence contribution above its economic relevance to NATO (Black et al., 2022; Swedish Defence Commission, 2023; Szymański & Tarociński, 2024).

In the above-mentioned resolution of 2024, the government of Sweden outlined once again that the international order is unstable and unpredictable. It is affirmed that Russia represents the main long-term threat, as it has shifted towards totalitarianism. Similarly, it is acknowledged that China has played a relevant role in supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine and also represents a threat. The Swedish government identifies a shift in the balance of power from the Euro-Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific, with the dominant actors being the US, China, and Russia, looking to establish spheres of influence. In that scenario, Sweden considers that Europe needs to define its policies depending on the dynamics of its relations with those powers. The US is regarded as the main ally for Europe and Sweden, even if its power has declined; consequently, it is crucial to support Ukraine and increase defence in Europe (Szymański & Tarociński, 2024).

Summarizing the analysis of the foreign and security policies developed by Finland and Sweden as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO membership has evolved in a complex manner. It contains strong military connections to the European security order, with Russia as the main threat to their independence and territorial integrity, and future development, but at the same time, it explains the current crisis of the international order, and their interest in supporting the hegemony of the liberal international order, its norms, institutions, and common values. Both countries agree that strengthening their alliance with the European Union and Western institutions, as well as supporting the multilateral system, will provide the necessary conditions to contribute to the emergence or sustain a rules-based world order that grants stability and peace.

In the military field, according to Wittmann (2022), Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO has changed the characteristics of the North as a region, facilitating the integration of the Nordic and Baltic states, enhancing their collective defence with military cooperation, intelligence, and deterrence, and increasing the political weight of the North in the Alliance. In that sense, this context results in a change of the situation in the Arctic, as Russian military activities are increasing. This author also affirms that there is an Arctic security dilemma, where a politico-military competition between the West and Russia and China is creating more uncertainty and bringing to the Alliance and Russia the idea of confrontation instead of dialogue and cooperation within the formal institution established for this (Wittmann, 2022).

The participation of Finland and Sweden in NATO, particularly in the new Joint Force Command, led by the US, to carry out the Supreme Allied Commander Europe SACEUR's new Regional Plan North-West, is allowing the Alliance to increase their military planning in the north, reinforce their new force model, and it will allow to cover a significant territory that includes the North Atlantic, the UK, and the Nordic countries (Friis, 2024; Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2024). Finland requested that the Alliance establish within its territory a Forward Land Forces (FLF) formation and a Multi Corps Land Component Command under Joint Force Command Norfolk (JFC Norfolk). While Sweden has agreed to lead the Finnish FLF. According to Friis (2024), it is necessary to establish logistic hubs in Sweden to defend the Baltics, NATO member's borders with Russia. Both countries will be part of the North-West plan, along with Denmark, Iceland, and Norway. They will contribute troops in and out of their territory to participate in the Enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia, a strategy that aims to cover the entire border area with Russia and Belarus, from the Baltic countries to the Black Sea.

6. FINLAND AND SWEDEN'S INFLUENCE IN THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER IN CRISIS

The crisis in the international order and the repercussions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

The Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 is considered a direct threat to the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of Ukraine. The impossibility for all countries to stop Russia in this endeavour, it represents the current crisis of the international order. The institutions that sustain the liberal international order, based on international law, diplomacy, political dialogue, multilateralism, and predominance of liberal ideas such as human rights, free market, and democracy, are being questioned due to a shift in the balance of power, most evident in the current strategic competition among China, Russia, and the US. In that scenario, neutrality or non-alignment was no longer an option for Sweden and Finland (Seyaz, 2024). In the opinion of Filipović (2024), the conflict has become a proxy war between the US and Russia, and it indicates the end of European security architecture.

In 2022, NATO defined Russia as the “most significant and direct threat” to the Alliance (NATO, 2022), and all its members decided to increase their investments in defence and cooperation supporting Ukraine through military supply and in research and development of their military industry. That process has not been automatic nor easy; however, it is considered that it could influence the outcome of Russia's war in Ukraine (Ditrych & Laryš, 2025).

Also, it is relevant to note that the collective security in Europe includes bilateral and multilateral security measures that are not always part of the NATO alliance, but it provides a legal framework that facilitates the cooperation and implementation of plans and strategies. The US has signed multiple Defence Cooperation Agreements that allow interoperability. At the same time, the UK, with the Joint Expeditionary Force, has complemented NATO's security strategy, as it is conceived as a mechanism outside of the Alliance. In the case of northern Europe, these changes led to the creation of the Joint Force Command (JFC) headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, US, responsible for the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR)'s defence plan North West, adopted at the NATO Vilnius Summit in 2023. Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO represented the opportunity to integrate them into this structure, including the Nordic Defence Cooperation, leading to developing joint military and civilian activities, including surveillance, logistics, education, training, and exercises, as well as giving enough elements to pursue integration of their military industry and to coordinate procurement among allies (Friis, 2024).

The current crisis of the international order derived from the invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the necessity to support the institutions that granted certain stability and peace in the international system. In that regard, in the case of NATO, the Western countries have agreed on the necessity to increase defence spending and industry's capacity, deepen the Euro-Atlantic cooperation and security cooperation mechanisms, and support Ukraine towards a long-lasting peace in the region. This position was supported in the Vilnius Summit of B9 and Nordic Allies and the NATO summit in The Hague in June 2025 (NATO, 2025b). Also, during the NATO Defence Ministers Meeting, all member countries agreed on increasing defence expenditure up to 5% of the GDP, and recognized that "Nuclear deterrence will continue being the cornerstone of the Alliance" (NATO, 2025c). More recently, in the Bucharest Nine (B9) and Nordic Allies Summit, Russia continues to pose a threat to Euro-Atlantic security and decided to build a "NATO 3.0", improving the participation of Europe and strengthening collective security with the implementation of the Eastern Flank Watch (B9 and the Nordic Countries, 2026).

However, among the disruptions that have accelerated the crisis of the liberal international order are the policies that the US Government has implemented since the return of President Donald Trump to the White House in 2025. The US has demanded that European countries significantly increase the spending on NATO, mainly through military procurement from the US (NATO, 2025d), but at the same time, it has called into question the credibility of the US as an ally, the guarantee of defence of Europe in case of an attack on a NATO member, as well as Europe's capability to contain an attack without the support of the US. According to Ditych & Laryš (2025), the disengagement of the US from the European security system is provoking a deep political crisis in NATO.

According to Sydoruk, Pavliuk et al. (2023), NATO served as a collective defence instrument that helped democratize and stabilize Central and Eastern Europe, legitimize the formal institution as an alternative to European security, and be perceived as a valuable asset for European and American societies. "Only, NATO, rather than the EU or the OSCE, could provide" security guarantees to contain Russian imperialism. According to this author, NATO has provided stability in Europe and facilitated EU expansion. However, the current crisis of the liberal international order raises concerns over the international order that is emerging, and the role of NATO in its consolidation.

Sydoruk et al. (2023) affirm that NATO expansion in the case of Sweden and Finland provided security guarantees immediately upon their membership applications, with the US and the United Kingdom providing safeguards, learning from the 2008 experiences related to Georgia and Ukraine. Thus, Finland and Sweden's membership in NATO is evidence that a new international order is emerging, and the US and European allies play a key role in the redefinition of the balance of power. The result of the Russo-Ukrainian War will determine the reorganization of the international system, but at the same time, it has marked the collapse of the liberal international order.

It is relevant to affirm that the war in Ukraine has strengthened the transatlantic alliance and allowed its expansion. At the same time, the relative withdrawal of the US has led to new measures that seek certain autonomy for Europe. Among the results is the creation in 2022 of the European Political Community (EPC), with 47 members, as an alternative and flexible forum to put together the European International Society, opening an alternative to closed formal institutions such as the EU and NATO. The EPC allowed European countries, such as Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, to create a community based on values, joined against the threat of Russia, and not based on membership in formal organizations, creating a geopolitical block that is between the European Neighbourhood Policy and the admission to the EU. In that regard, the EPC became the alternative to fill the political and institutional space after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the architecture of European security (Ferrero, 2024).

The EPC is not a union of democracies, but it has become a geopolitical and geostrategic forum that is part of the European security architecture, together with NATO, the EU, and the OSCE. EPC is based on cultural and political membership with common interests. It was proposed by France, as president of the European Council, at the European Parliament on May 9th, 2022. The EPC emerged from the necessity to rethink the security and foreign policies of Europe (Ferrero, 2024). In May 2026, the EPC meeting took place, focusing on economic and energy security, democratic resilience, and advanced connectivity (Council of the European Union, 2026) in response to the war between the US and Israel against Iran.

In military terms, NATO expansion has opened the doors for further cooperation and integration among the allies through the adoption of a new legal framework with NATO members, encouraging joint strategies to face threats and generate opportunities; nonetheless, it has generated military integration challenges and risks of entanglement of security policies (Friis, 2024). The

Russian invasion of Ukraine created additional security threats in the region, and in consequence, the Baltic Sea and the Arctic are considered crucial, given the recent incidents that compromised submarine strategic infrastructure, the countries' requests to bolster NATO's presence in the region, and the involvement of the NATO Maritime Critical Undersea Infrastructure Security Centre (CUI Centre). Significant military exercises in these areas have been conducted, and NATO has increased the use of technology to survey the area, creating the Vigilance Activity Baltic Sentry, among other mechanisms (Finnish Defence Forces, 2024; NATO, 2025a; Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2025a; Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe SHAPE, 2025). Regarding Ukraine, the unlawful actions of Russia have injected financial resources for resilience and defence, and procurement of critical defence materiel from the US in all of Europe (Finnish Government Ministry of Defence, 2025).

Finland's military alignment

The current crisis of the international order has led Finland to adopt different actions related to its integration with NATO structures, and at the same time, it has taken certain actions towards supporting a rules-based international order and the liberal institutions that until now there are still in place. Those actions have aimed to strengthen the military alliance and integrate its security and defence policies with the transatlantic community.

In defence matters, multiple examples relate Finland's military alignment and integration to NATO, such as the ICE Pact between Canada, the US, and Finland, which facilitates cooperation on the exchange of knowledge, information, and materials for the construction of icebreakers in the Arctic and Polar regions (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2024); its cooperation with the CUI Centre, which has the objective of safeguarding the energy and gas pipelines and submarine cables; and its participation in the decision-making process of the NATO Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM). With the CUI Centre, Finland shares the critical points that could be targeted in the submarine infrastructure, due to their vulnerability. Finland has also participated in the most significant military exercises in the area to contribute to protecting maritime transport and safeguarding the submarine infrastructure (Finnish Defence Forces, 2024).

After the cutting of the electricity and data submarine cables, particularly the Estlink-2, between Finland and Estonia in December 2024, the Prime Minister of Finland, Petteri Orpo, informed in a press conference that the EU and NATO needed to adopt additional measures to

capture and prevent sabotage to submarine infrastructure, and then define the role of Finland in expanding its presence in strategic points. At the same time, the European Commission announced to strengthen efforts to protect undersea cables, and cooperation with the government of Finland (EEAS, 2024).

In January 2025, the governments of Finland and Estonia co-organized the *Baltic Sea NATO Allies Summit* in Helsinki, where the situation of security in the Baltic Sea was discussed. It counted with the participation of the heads of government of the Nordic and Baltic countries, Germany, Poland, the Secretary General of NATO, and the Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy of the European Commission. All parties agreed on increased vigilance, the use of technology to prevent attacks, and welcomed the creation of the Commander Task Force-Baltic in Rostock, Germany, the CUI Centre, NATO's Critical Undersea Infrastructure Network, and the Vigilance Activity "Baltic Sentry" as well as engaging and improving cooperation with the private sector. The Finnish president informed about the creation of an expert group to review the legal framework related to the law of the sea and freedom of navigation, considering the confiscation of the vessel Eagle S in 2025, as well as the signature of the MOU between Finland and Estonia for the protection of submarine power cables, to implemented with other NATO member countries (NATO, 2025a; Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2025a; Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe SHAPE, 2025)

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2022, Finland's foreign policy has changed towards full integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, as well as to support Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, with the objective of supporting the norms and institutions that sustain the international order. Those steps are seen in the bilateral and regional relations of the country. For example, on January 15th, 2025, the Foreign Minister of Finland, Elina Baltonen, participated in The Hague in the conference on sanctions compliance and enforcement hosted by the Netherlands, where Finland shared its experience on the effectiveness of the implementation of sanctions, with EU members, the European Commission, the UK, Canada, and the US. Finland called to increase the cooperation in sanctions, as it is a key element to help Ukraine (Embassy of Finland in the Netherlands, 2025).

In March 2025, Finland received a State visit from Denmark, intending to strengthen the bilateral cooperation, primarily in defence and crisis management. Both countries shared a position on the situation in Ukraine and the relations with the US and focused their agenda on defence

cooperation with Nordic countries, Baltic Sea security, and assistance to Ukraine. Both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding bilateral defence cooperation, which has as its objective to strengthen the defence and deterrence of NATO in the Baltic Sea, the protection of strategic infrastructure, maritime cooperation, military exercises and training, interoperability of war aircraft, and joint military acquisitions (Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2025c, 2025d). And, at the same time, a letter of intent was signed for civil preparedness and resilience in emergency scenarios, such as war, an attack on strategic infrastructure, and hybrid attacks, among others (Ministry of the Interior of Finland, 2025).

Finland has continued strengthening its cooperation with European countries, mainly in the security field. On August 22, 2025, the Prime Minister of Finland visited Estonia, where the security in the Baltic Sea and the war in Ukraine were the main topics, and they showed their support to increase the EU capabilities of defence, as well as the relevance of strategic areas such as transport and energy (Finnish Government Communications Department, 2025d). Later on, in September, Finland received the President of Poland, where their role in NATO, Baltic Sea security, and contributions to national defence. (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2025b). On the other hand, during a State visit from Iceland, a Memorandum of Understanding on defence and regional security was signed, putting in evidence their cooperation on monitoring the airspace of Iceland as well as the geostrategic role of the Arctic. During this visit, it was highlighted that the shared values of both countries, such as peaceful resolution of conflict and the rule of law in the international order, among others (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2025c).

During the Vilnius Summit of B9 and Nordic Allies, Prime Minister Orpo assured that NATO should send a strong signal of support for Ukraine, acknowledged that a strong defence and deterrence against Russia and its allies will be necessary, and emphasized that long-term assistance will be needed. B9 (Bucharest 9) comprises Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia (Finnish Government Communications Department, 2025c). Later on, during the EU and NATO defence ministers' meetings, the government of Finland agreed on increasing its military spending up to 5% of the GDP, 3.5% in defence, and 1.5% in defence and security-related investments, in contrast with the 3% agreed on in April 2025, starting in 2029, and it stated that Russia will continue being a threat to Finland after the invasion to Ukraine. (Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2025f; NATO, 2025c)

During Finland's presidency of the N5 cooperation framework on foreign policy and security, on 18 and 19 August 2025, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Elina Valtonen, hosted a meeting with her Nordic counterparts and Canada. The main topics discussed were the war in Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East, transatlantic relations, and security in the northern region (Embassy of Finland in Ottawa, 2025). In that context, Canada and Finland signed a joint statement to strengthen the bilateral strategic cooperation in foreign policy and security, and reiterate their alliance, including promoting their Northern and Arctic perspective within NATO (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2025b).

As part of the security dialogue between the EU and Finland, on August 29, 2025, the government of Finland hosts a meeting with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to discuss European security in its role as the external border of the EU. It was announced that one thousand million euros were going to be added to border control with Russia as part of the new EU multiannual financial framework (Finnish Government Communications Department, 2025e).

On 23 October 2025, the Ministry of Defence of Finland announced its support for Ukraine joining the PURL initiative, launched in June of that year. The government announced the acquisition of US armament valued at 100 million euros, as Russia continues to be the principal threat to the security of the region (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2025d). In the same month, Finland joined the Tallinn Mechanism to strengthen the cyber-defence of Ukraine. According to its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Elina Valtonen, Finland joined partners with similar ideas in this field, as well as to promote digital governance and protection of strategic infrastructure, and strengthen international cooperation (Finnish Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2025).

The President of Finland visited Brussels in November 2025 and had meetings with the Secretary General of NATO, the presidents of the European Commission and the European Parliament. With NATO, Finland reiterated the necessity to increase investment in defence, as well as the relevance of supporting Ukraine, defending its territory, and strengthening the defence and deterrence of NATO. On the other hand, with the EU, it was highlighted that it is necessary to strengthen European societies and capacities to face the Russian threat. In that context, Finland supported the initiative of the Council of Europe to use Russian frozen assets to finance Ukraine's reconstruction (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2025d).

As we can deduce, Finland has actively aligned itself in military terms with NATO. It has broad cooperation with all its members. However, from a broader perspective, in the context of the US withdrawal from international organizations that support the liberal international order, Finland has rejected unilateral decisions that it believes will affect the international order negatively. For example, the Government of Finland rejected the US – Russia peace plan for Ukraine, stating that neither Ukraine nor European countries will accept such an initiative that erases the principles of the UN Charter. According to that position, Finland and Europe promote just and long-lasting peace, which should be considered peace for the region and the international order. Consequently, Finland joined the Leader’s Statement on Ukraine signed in Johannesburg on November 22nd, 2025 (European Council, 2025b). During the Group of 20 leaders meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, in November 2025, the president of Finland informed that he had a conversation with Presidents Trump and Zelensky, in relation to the peace conversations in Geneva, and highlighted that NATO and the EU will take separate decisions over this topic. President Stubb reiterated that it is necessary to reach a stable and durable peace in the region, and that diplomacy still remains the main tool to achieve a solution. The role of Canada and Japan as part of the 11 negotiating countries supported the statement that the 28 points drafted by the US require additional work (Bloomberg Television, 2025).

Sweden’s military alignment

As it has been discussed, the crisis of the international order has led to significant changes in the foreign and security policies of Sweden to guarantee a stable and secure international order to protect its independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. Russia represents a long-term threat to European and international security. In that regard, Sweden’s foreign policy focuses on assisting Ukraine, strengthening European and global security, and continuing to support liberal values such as human rights, the rule of law, gender equality, and sustainable development. According to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Maria Malmer Stenergard, in the Statement of Government Policy during the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs in February 2026, Sweden has provided one of the largest forms of military support to Ukraine. The Swedish government’s actions stem from the idea that the confrontation with Russia is a long-term endeavour; thus, NATO and the EU play a relevant role (Government of Sweden, 2026).

Sweden has significantly contributed in military terms to the alliance, mainly on the Eastern flank, participating in Latvia, NATO's Forward Land Forces in Finland, and cooperation towards an Arctic strategy together with NATO (Government of Sweden, 2026). Swedish NATO membership has been evolving, taking certain measures to participate in the military alliance. For example, in 2024, it was announced that a Statement of Intent was signed to enhance cooperation with the US special forces (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024d).

In the same year, the Government also presented a new total defence resolution for Sweden for the period 2025-2030, restructuring spending on defence up to 2.6% of the GDP. In that document, the government of Sweden defined itself as a "security provider" for the region, contributing to NATO's deterrence and defence. Thus, it outlined its military alignment, participating in the North-Eastern Flank, in the Baltic Sea, and the multinational Forward Land Forces (FLF), as well as a logistical and operational hub. For that, Sweden has contemplated improving military cooperation with Finland and Norway, the Baltic states, Germany, and Poland, in particular, in the Northern Europe defence plan, but also includes other countries such as the UK and France. On the other hand, from the Swedish government's perspective, the US "remains a critical military partner", while the European Union supports the role of NATO in security matters. Sweden's contributions to NATO are projected with a military build-up and investment in civil defence, increments in military spending, and modernisation programs in all forces, as well as the civil defence and crisis management system to guarantee strategic services and supplies (Ministry of Defence, Government Offices of Sweden, 2024; Szymański & Tarociński, 2024).

Swedish contributions to NATO defence capabilities include naval, air, and ground units in the service of NATO's forces, as well as other elements to face security threats in cyberspace (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024b). In 2024, Sweden joined together with Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United Kingdom in an initiative for drone cooperation for Ukraine (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024a). It was part of the initiative to provide airspace access in the Nordic countries for NATO operations (Government Office of Sweden, 2024). In 2024, Sweden coordinated the informal foreign and security cooperation formats of the Nordic and Baltic countries (NB8) and the Nordic countries (N5). During this year, several meetings took place to improve security cooperation in the region and support Ukraine (The Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

Within the NATO Defence Ministers Summit in Brussels in 2025, Sweden agreed to invest in new military capabilities and signed alongside Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Germany to increase its cooperation in the Baltic Sea and promote this agenda within the EU and NATO. Also, it joined the Electromagnetic Warfare Capability Coalition within the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, and it looks for increased cooperation on space capabilities and satellite communications (Government Offices of Sweden, 2025a). In November 2025, the Government of Sweden and Canada signed the Strategic Partnership: Northern Allies, Innovators and Trade Partners that aims to strengthen its bilateral relations and cooperation within five pillars, where security, defence, and resilience, Arctic cooperation, and technology are key objectives of both countries, increasing military cooperation within NATO, support to Ukraine, innovation in defence, promoting the acquisition, production and exchange of information of new technologies. Regarding the Arctic Council is recognized as the main forum for governance in the region (Government Offices of Sweden, 2025b).

According to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, supporting Ukraine has been the priority of its Foreign Policy, providing until 2025 up to SEK 70 billion Swedish crowns to that country, including 18 military support packages, as well as contributing to NATO collective deterrence, in particular participating in NATO's Operation Baltic Sentry and prioritizing Hybrid threats. Nonetheless, it highlights the importance that the EU plays in applying the sanctions against Russia, as well as the importance of accelerating EU expansion, mainly with the geostrategic enlargement with Ukraine and Moldova. However, it is recognized that the US is undermining confidence and "runs counter to Europe's values regarding global cooperation and international law." Sweden has increased Nordic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation, as well as strengthened its cooperation with Germany, Canada, France, and the UK. With Poland, Sweden has started a program to develop submarine capabilities. It has promoted increasing sanctions against Russia and extended them to Belarus (Government Office of Sweden, 2025a).

Within the framework of the Coalition of the Willing Summit, on July 13th, 2026, in Paris, the Government of Sweden signed the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the Integrated Anti-Ballistic Missile Coalition, together with Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. The Declaration initiates a defensive coalition to establish the elements that will allow it to develop a roadmap, technical working groups, and identify common operational requirements to develop a missile defence architecture as a

complement to the existing infrastructure, and it will consider Ukraine's experience gained in Russia's war of aggression. This initiative will remain open to other countries (Government Offices of Sweden, 2026a).

Summarizing, both countries have continued their integration into the alliance, but at the same time, the European countries have re-evaluated their relations with the US and the current crisis of the international order. As an example, the documents White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan-Readiness 2030 represent the consolidation of the idea of creating an independent military power within 5 to 10 years, aiming to bring financial resources to increase the military capacities in Europe, within the Stability and Growth Pact, to provide extra budgetary space within the EU fiscal rule. In that regard, the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) Regulation was created to help in financing defence spending, based on national plans (European Commission, 2025c). Finland and Sweden have supported the Plan ReArm Europe, adopted in March 2025. In the case of Finland, it has promoted accelerating the disbursement of financial instruments for Ukraine aid, valued at 50 billion euros, as part of the coalition of 20 countries that aims to send aid to Ukraine (Clapp et al., 2025; Finnish Government Communications Department, 2025a; Finnish Government Prime Minister's Office, 2025).

Contributions towards a new rules-based international order

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Finland and Sweden have agreed on multilateral actions to support a rules-based international order. In that regard, both countries continue supporting formal institutions such as the Council of Europe, the European Union, and the UN system. As both countries are part of the European international order, most of their foreign policy focuses on the European Union and the transatlantic alliance. Then, we cannot put aside all those initiatives that have been adopted there.

For example, both countries supported the Adoption of the Convention Establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine (ICC-Ukraine), which will be a body to administer claims arising from damage caused by Russia in Ukraine (Delegation of the European Union to the Council of Europe, 2025). At the same time, they have agreed on adopting 11 sanctions packages on imports and exports in relevant sectors and products such as hydrocarbons, coal, gold, steel, iron ore, wood, fertilizers, technology, limiting the movement of persons and capital, and creating instruments such as the European Peace Facility to provide humanitarian, macro-financial,

and military assistance and training missions (Council of the European Union, 2024; Ditrych & Laryš, 2025).

Finland and Sweden joined the agreement that created the Special Tribunal for Russian Crimes against Ukraine, which was created in 2025 within the Council of Europe framework to judge Russian military personnel and political leaders responsible for the aggression against Ukraine (Council of Europe, 2023; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, 2026). Through the EU, both countries have supported Ukraine in strengthening its capacity to investigate and prosecute international crimes committed on its territory, mainly through the EU Advisory Mission for the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, as well as to provide additional funding to the International Criminal Court to improve its capacity to analyse, process, and investigate those acts (European Commission, 2017; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, 2025). In this regard, the EU has been developing a legal framework to hold Russia accountable for its violations, including the crime of aggression. According to those initiatives, the principle is that any state that initiates a war should be held responsible for all the calamities of the war.

Finland and Sweden supported the European Commission's declaration based on the result of the meeting on peace for Ukraine called by Germany, that outlines actions to achieve peace while preserving Ukraine's sovereignty and security, in coordination with European countries, the US, and Ukraine, in particular: 1) the preparation of new sanctions for Russia, 2) recognition that the peace require solid and credible security guarantees, implicating the possibility that the US could provide military assistance, and the compromise to strengthening of the Ukrainian armed forces, defend the territory and deter other aggressions, 3) the compromise to support Ukraine in the economic recovery, informing that Europe will finance two thirds of Ukraine requirements for reconstruction (European Commission, 2025a). At the same time, both countries supported the European flagship fund for the reconstruction of Ukraine, which was launched at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in 2025, with up to 500 million euros to support the reconstruction and promote investment in energy, transport, critical raw materials, and dual-use goods production (European Commission, 2025b; Finnish Government, 2021; Government Offices of Sweden, 2025c).

Among other examples of Sweden and Finland, as part of the European community, influencing the international order, we find that in August 2025, the leaders of the European Union signed a joint statement in response to the meeting held between the president of the US and Russia

in Alaska, in relation to Ukraine. The European countries reiterate that the conflict must be resolved by diplomatic means, respecting the principles of international law, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and not changes of international borders by force. At the same time, they state their support for Ukraine to join the EU, as well as to support its right to self-defence (European Council, 2025a).

After the initiative for peace from the US and Russia, Finland, together with the president of the European Council, the president of the European Commission, and leaders of Germany, France, the UK, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, Canada, Japan and Poland, issued a declaration on Ukraine, where it is pointed out that principle of territorial integrity and the prohibition of acquisition of territory by force, and they reiterate the idea to grant guarantees for Ukraine against Russia. In that regard, it is stated that in the peace process, the EU and NATO should be considered and request their consent (European Council, 2025b).

As a follow-up, on 24 November, the President of the European Council, António Costa, called for an informal meeting of the EU leaders about the 28-point Russia-Ukraine peace plan proposed by the US, expressing their concern about: 1) the territorial concessions stipulated in the plan going against the international principle that prohibits border changes by force, 2) the limitation of Ukrainian military capacities to 600, 000 personnel of the arm forces resulting increasing the vulnerability of the country, 3) the references about sanctions and reparations stipulated by the EU and NATO, diverging the purposes of reconstruction of Ukraine after the war, and 4) the ban on NATO membership of Ukraine. A counterproposal was presented by France, Germany, and the UK, which included a ceasefire first before territorial discussions, security guarantees for Ukraine, a change in the language that limits Ukraine's membership to NATO, and an increase in the number of military personnel in peacetime for Ukraine, and the territorial integrity of Ukraine (Worum & Drachenberg, 2025).

In the context of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), created in 1992 and formed by the Foreign Ministers of Finland, Estonia, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Sweden as a forum for cooperation and political dialogue, since 2022, it held its ministerial session, where they have reaffirmed their interest in strengthening security cooperation without duplicating tasks with other organizations. In this forum, Sweden and Finland have reiterated the strong condemnation of the invasion of Russia into Ukraine and the unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. For example, in May

2025, foreign ministers and high representatives met at Vihula, Estonia, where they addressed regional security and hybrid threats, pointing out Russia as responsible for cyberattacks and sabotage, and recognizing the necessity of stronger cooperation among democratic partners to enhance regional security. At the same time, the declaration encourages countries to strengthen the national and international legal framework to protect submarine cables, pipelines, and other underwater infrastructure (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2025).

Other important actions to influence the international order we find them at the Nordic cooperation framework. In May 2025, Finland hosted the summer meeting of Nordic Prime Ministers (Norway, Sweden, Iceland, representatives of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, and the general secretary of the Nordic Council), issuing a joint statement reassuring their compromise for peace, security, and stability. They highlighted their intention to strengthen their plans of cooperation in the Nordic region for resilience and civil preparedness, based on a comprehensive security model that anticipates, prevents, and responds to different kinds of crises and is supported by resilient communities, linked by unique historical, cultural, and geographical bonds. All parts reviewed their cooperation framework on the judicial sector, NORDECO, transport infrastructure, nuclear and radiation safety, energy infrastructure, climate change, space-based services, financial markets, digital services, health and social affairs, education, culture, gender equality, among others (Finnish Government Communications Department, 2025b).

In August 2025, the Nordic countries (N5) and Canada signed a joint statement to support Ukraine, recognizing the role of the US, Europe, and Ukraine to stop the war, as well as supporting the declaration of the US that it is necessary to provide, together with Europe and Canada, security guarantees to Ukraine. In that regard, the participating countries look to play a significant role in supporting such guarantees within the Coalition of the Willing, and reiterate the importance of international law and the principle of territorial integrity (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2025c)

In October of that year, the Nordic Prime Ministers and Heads of Government reiterated their cultural, economic, and historic links, as well as the common values, and set an objective to become the most integrated and sustainable region in the world, coordinating their perspectives. In that context, the Government of Finland recognized that Russia's war in Ukraine has transformed the Baltic Sea region and the Nordic countries into a relevant zone, altering how European countries act in the region. Finland held the presidency of the Nordic Council of

Ministers in 2025, based on the idea of cooperation to promote security and competitiveness (Finnish Government Communications Department, 2025f).

On August 26, 2025, during the Council of Europe session, the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE, the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8, formed by Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) issued a joint statement, where it is recognized that the Nordic-Baltic region is threatened by hybrid threats that seek to diminish democratic institutions. They condemned the invasion of Ukraine. During a meeting in Copenhagen in 2025, the NB8 countries expressed their support for Ukraine and reiterated Russia's obligation to respect its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence, as well as recognized the government of Ukraine's willingness to negotiate peace and a ceasefire. The countries agreed to provide military assistance to Ukraine through the PURL initiative, which allows the financing of the acquisition of high-priority American weapons. They continued to promote Ukraine's membership in NATO and the EU. The NB8 and Ukraine reiterated these agreements a year later in Kyiv (Government Office of Sweden, 2025b; Government Offices of Sweden, 2026b). At the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) Summit in Tallinn, Estonia, 2026, the participating countries linked the Euro-Atlantic security with Ukraine's security, and committed to strengthening "long-term stability, resilience and security across Europe" through cooperation, innovation, and the use of technology (Republic of Estonia Government, 2026).

During its presidency of the NORDEFECO framework, in January 2025, Finland hosted a meeting of the Defence ministers, where they discussed Nordic cooperation, NATO procurement, and assistance to Ukraine. The meeting had the objective of updating the Memorandum of Understanding of 2009 that created this cooperation framework, as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The Joint Declaration of the country members reiterates their commitments toward Vision 2030 (Ministry of Defence of Finland, 2025a, 2025b). The meeting was called in the framework of the threats to critical submarine infrastructure that affected the region, as well as the call from the US to organize the security and defence of the Arctic, and the worries about leaving the European Union and Ukraine out of the negotiations in the peace talks between Russia and the US. In 2023, the Tallinn Mechanism was launched as a tool for providing technical assistance in the cybersecurity field. Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the UK, and Finland are part of this mechanism, where the

EU, NATO, and the World Bank participate as observers (Finnish Government Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2025).

One of the most recent actions, Sweden and Finland joined the statement of the Coalition of the Willing adopted, together with the US and Ukraine, in Paris on 6th January 2026, *Robust Security Guarantees for a Solid and Lasting Peace in Ukraine*, which reaffirms the principles of the UN Charter, but it recognizes the necessity of security guarantees for Ukraine and its relevance for Euro-Atlantic security (European Council, 2026).

7. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine made evident the crisis of the liberal international order which predominated after the fall of the Soviet bloc. Finland and Sweden concluded that the current institutions supporting the international order no longer guarantee their independence, security, and future development. They are aware of the importance of the West defining and transforming the international order in crisis; consequently, both nations abandoned their neutrality and non-military alignment policies to counterbalance and face the security threat that Russia has posed to European and international security.

As part of their assessments, both countries pondered that the uncertainty due to the crisis of the international order, in the context of the strategic competition among Russia, China and the US, do not provide them security guarantees, thus military alignment with NATO was the only option to further face the new scenarios derived from the war in Ukraine, the challenges that Russia and China pose to the international order, and the foreign policy that the US government is implementing to maintain its hegemony. Nonetheless, both countries recognize the importance of strengthening a rules-based international order that could allow them in the long-term to achieve stability and peace for Europe and the international community. With that objective, they concur that international law, multilateralism, political dialogue, and diplomacy are the main institutions that can support a rules-based international order, and formal organizations such as the UN, EU, and NATO represent the instruments that will allow them to strengthen it.

In that regard, both countries refer to the United Nations, the EU, and NATO as formal institutions that have allowed the liberal international order to sustain global peace and security to some extent. After the invasion of Ukraine, liberal ideas of democracy, human rights, free trade, and the rule of law are still substantial elements that define and guide their foreign policy, but their independence and territorial integrity are a priority. Sweden clearly integrates liberal ideas as an integral part of its foreign policy without no exceptions, and there are no elements that show the contrary in the documents reviewed; meanwhile, Finland adopted a “values-based realism” perspective, where human rights and democracy are not necessarily the elements that will determine all its actions.

As it was referred to in the foreign and security policy reports, Finland and Sweden agree that currently there is a power competition to create spheres of influence among the US, Russia,

and China; both countries recognize the role of the US in European security and the definition of the international order, as well as the importance of the European international society in supporting the norms and institutions that derive from the transition of powers and geopolitical importance from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, neither country provides significant information that could infer that the war in Ukraine and the power competition between China and the US express the failure and the contradictions of the international order.

At the same time, in the official documents of Sweden and Finland, there are no elements that could highlight any faults or structural problems in the liberal international order nor what kind of rules-based international order they aspire to. From that perspective, it seems that the changes in their foreign and security policies and their idea of strengthening a rules-based international order lie on the side of supporting the *status quo*, with the US as a superpower. Russia and China are defined as threats due to their authoritarian regimes, imperialist aspirations, and the dependencies created in the economic fields; hence, they do not share the same values as the West and do not represent an alternative for Finland and Sweden's future development.

Both countries aim to support a rules-based international order through international law and multilateralism, but in their assessment, there is not a big role for alliances with countries of the global South. Finland outlines some ideas, referring to the fact that it could make alliances with countries that do not necessarily support liberal ideas, but they align with its objectives; however, it does not provide more public information on what kind of alliances or which countries could play a relevant role in this. Sweden, on the other hand, does not include any reference to the role of countries of the global South in the construction of the international order, but it keeps a strong foreign policy based on liberal values. In short, both countries identify themselves as part of the European international society, and align their security and foreign policies as such. Both countries perceive the European Union as a community of states that have collective interests and objectives in relation to strengthening a rules-based international order, based on liberal ideas and common values that they share, and they do not consider other relevant actors, such as the Global South, to define the norms and institutions of the international order.

Along with the review of the documents of this investigation, it is noted that plenty of actions are being taken towards their military alignment in all the necessary areas to protect NATO members and geostrategic areas in the Arctic and the Baltic Sea. Both states are contributing directly to Ukraine's resilience and defence against Russian aggression. Multiple threats from

Russia are covered in their defence and foreign policy. Military alignment was not only a geostrategic decision but also the only alternative to guarantee their independence and territorial integrity. With that decision, both countries insert themselves in the institutional framework that supports the liberal international order, and from there, they try to influence the norms and institutions in the current context of uncertainty. Both countries still call for respect for international law. Their actions in relation to deterrence and defence against Russia are sustained in the idea on strengthen the rule of law in the international scenario.

Some intellectuals conclude that the geopolitical changes in the international order due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine have changed Finland and Sweden's role in their identity and their long-term foreign policy, as it has weakened the rules-based international order, creating a dilemma as they depend on stability and predictability, which explains their norm-oriented foreign policy, and support for multilateral institutions and the global rule of law. In that regard, both countries are understood as small or medium-sized countries that are in favour of institutionalizing rules and norms, international law, and support for the international organizations that contribute to the stability of the international order (Ahlin, 2026; Michalski et al., 2024).

Michalski et al., (2024) affirm that the liberal international order has been undermined by Russia and China, "rupturing state relations in the liberal order"; however, the UN has continued to be the formal institution that holds together the norms and rules of the international system that balance the power relations. In that regard, it is significant to highlight the irrelevance of the Security Council and the UN General Assembly in relation to the invasion of Russia to Ukraine, as the resolutions adopted have not led to a solution to the war and other international conflicts, nor is the system providing a reasonable path towards peace and security, but on the contrary, it has shown the unrepresentativeness of those formal institutions that do not correlate now with the uprising changes on the balance of power (Corell, 2026; Österdahl, 2026).

The perspectives of foreign policies between the two countries are different. Finland stated a "realist-value-based" foreign policy. On the other hand, Sweden focuses on promoting a solidaristic perspective or globalist foreign policy, with human rights, conflict prevention, and individual accountability for international crimes representing cornerstones of its foreign policy, promoting a broader interpretation of threats to international peace and security, as well as to the principles of non-intervention and states' sovereignty. However, both countries focus on respect for international law, multilateralism within the UN, and maintaining the international order,

understanding that “creates stability and predictability that is *favorable* for a small or medium-size state” (Ahlin, 2026).

NATO and its member countries have shown that the Alliance is working to maintain the liberal international order and that they are willing to maintain the West’s predominance. However, once the current US foreign policy is considered, the scenario is not that positive. Boniface (2026) and other scholars have announced the end of the Western World and the liberal international order. From their point of view, the balance of power has reshuffled. The presidency of Donald Trump has made clear that there is no obligation to protect Europe from Russia and that multilateralism has a small place in the definition of the international order. The US has withdrawn from multiple international bodies, 31 UN agencies, and declared itself to be against fundamental organizations such as the International Criminal Court; therefore, the liberal ideas of democracy, rule of law, and international law are no longer the leading paradigm of the international order.

In that regard, even though NATO documents and declarations as well as Sweden and Finland’s reports on foreign policy and defence state that the US will not retreat from Europe, and considers it as a key ally, the current crisis of the international order does not confirm that the American government will protect its European allies. It has been clear that the US is no longer supporting the post-war global order, as it perceives it as a limitation to its power. Considering that scenario, Boniface (2026) affirms that European states “must reconsider their strategic positioning. Beyond the security dimension, the Western world had asserted itself as an identity bloc founded on shared values. That is no longer the case.” This author affirms that the “Western world is broken and the Europeans are in denial”.

A relevant element for the analysis to consider, defined by Finland and Sweden’s security and foreign policies, is the absence of the role of countries of the Global South. Both countries evaluate the US foreign policy as “transactional” or led by national interest that does not correspond with the principles of the liberal international order; however, they call for the construction or maintenance of a rules-based international order, where NATO, the European Union, and the West keep having the predominant role. In that regard, threats posed by the US government, such as the annexation of Greenland and Canada, and the interventions in Venezuela and Iran, have shown the contradictions in their policies in promoting an international rules-based order, but not strongly condemning violations of international law (Boniface, 2026).

As it was mentioned, the liberal order has lost its hegemony, and currently there is uncertainty due to the power shifts. As stated by Ikenberry (2024), there is a debate over the fundamental rules and institutions of the liberal international order, and Sweden and Finland's NATO membership is a symptom of the crisis of the current international architecture. The insecurity that caused the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the historical changes in US foreign policy put in evidence the necessity to promote a rules-based international order, where Finland and Sweden find a balance between their interest, the European Union, and the West, including the US. Smirnov (2023) concludes that the consequences of the geopolitical changes, resulting from the war in Ukraine and NATO expansion, have made the international actors realize the necessity to replace the current "Western-centric" international order and their institutional mechanisms to resume cooperation. However, there is little evidence that cooperation is leading between the Global South and Western countries; on the contrary, the actions seem to deepen the military alliances and political mechanisms within the Western countries, with limited changes in the multilateral system and participation of the Global South.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Sweden and Finland's membership in NATO has not only been a military alignment, but also a means for the US and Western countries to increase their power *vis-à-vis* Russia and China. Different from other moments when the military alliance expanded its borders, this time the inclusion of these Nordic countries responds to the uncertainty caused by the crisis of the liberal international order. Analysis of both countries concluded that the international institutions and organizations were not enough to grant them their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Russian invasion of Ukraine manifested the power competition to establish spheres of influence, and the loss of the hegemony of the liberal international order led by the US. The possibility of Ukraine losing its independence and part of its territory would symbolize the total collapse of the liberal international order and the emergence of a new order based on power relations and less on international law.

It is important to acknowledge that Finland and Sweden's membership has boosted NATO's capabilities to control certain areas of the Arctic and the Baltic Sea, and it has increased the borders between NATO and Russia. NATO expansion signifies, at the same time, new challenges and the opening of new flanks, with the urgency to improve military capabilities in all fields. In that regard, Finland and Sweden are strengthening their participation in all possible areas. They have formalized multiple legal instruments and commitments with the European Union, the US, and Canada to keep developing their military capabilities and deterrence towards Russia.

At the same time, within the European institutions, both countries have supported Ukraine, adopting sanctions against Russia, and financing Ukraine's requirements to face the Russian aggression. In that regard, both countries, together with the European Union, have supported the liberal international order, used its institutions and called for the respect of international law. They have promoted the creation of an international tribunal for the crime of aggression as well as demanding reparations for the war, while providing significant financial resources to support Ukrainian defence.

On the other hand, it is relevant to highlight that the assessments of the status of the liberal international order led us to conclude that the liberal international order is in crisis, and the hegemony of the US is no longer the only scenario. The rise of China and Russia to dispute the norms and institutions of the current order created the necessity to evaluate Finland and Sweden's

historic position of neutrality and non-alignment. In that regard, the full invasion of Russia into Ukraine represented and continues to represent a vital threat to both countries, and the current institutions are clearly not sufficient to guarantee their security.

Both countries have stated that they are looking for a rules-based international order. In the case of Finland, it has opted for a pragmatic approach or a “values-based realist foreign policy”, while Sweden keeps giving relatively importance to liberal values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Nonetheless, their foreign and security policies will align with the European Union, and most likely towards the *status quo*.

There is little evidence about the role that the Global South could play in supporting the common interests of Sweden and Finland in their objective to support a rules-based international order. The assessments published by both governments start from the idea that the US will continue to support NATO allies, even if President Donald Trump continues to question the current order and its institutions, and no element indicates that middle powers from the Global South could play a relevant role in the construction or transformation of the above-mentioned international order.

The solidarity expressed towards Denmark and Canada regarding the territorial integrity and independence from Sweden and Finland guides us to questioning if all NATO members, including the US, would apply Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty and how it would be interpreted. The idea of the implosion of the liberal international order orchestrated by Russia, China, and the US guides the governments of Finland and Sweden to keep promoting the respect of international law, diplomacy, and multilateralism.

It is clear that Sweden and Finland have engaged in the task of complying with the US's demand to increase defence expenditure from their European partners significantly, and together with the European Union have promoted actions aimed at facing Russian threats to European security, however, there is less evidence that those actions that have strengthened the military and defence capabilities have further impacted the liberal international order positively, nor calmed the rivalry and competition of the main powers. Nevertheless, it is essential for Sweden, Finland, and most of the countries to find the means to promote a rules-based international order, where international law, diplomacy, and multilateralism guide the actions of international actors, towards long-lasting international peace and security.

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