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*An entanglement analysis of Sweden and Finland's decision to apply
for membership in NATO*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to gain a greater understanding of the meaning-making process behind Finland and Sweden's decision to join NATO in 2022, and by so, deviate from their long-standing tradition of military non-alignment. Instead of solely pointing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine as the official reason for NATO membership this paper suggests that the concept of strategic culture can provide one with a greater understanding of their decision to join NATO. Resulting in the question: *How can the concept of strategic culture help us understand the decision by Sweden and Finland to apply for NATO membership in 2022, despite their longstanding tradition of non-military alignment?* With the concept of strategic culture, the analytical framework argues that the decision-making in Finland and Sweden was shaped by historical experiences that in turn influenced their strategic culture, which worked as a shaping context for their respective strategic behaviour. This is done through an *entanglement analysis*, a close reading and interpretation of the empirical material such as books, peer-reviewed articles, statements, government reports, and speeches, to demonstrate if the decision to join NATO followed Finland and Sweden's typical strategic behaviour. This paper argues that the decision to join NATO did not represent a shift in the two state's respective behaviour, instead the decision was in line with the strategic behaviour the states have followed since the end of the Cold War. Hence, the decision to join NATO demonstrates a sign of continuity rather than a historical shift in their foreign and security policy.

Keywords: Strategic culture, Sweden, Finland, NATO, entanglement analysis, strategic behaviour, security policy, foreign policy.

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1. Introduction

When Finland and Sweden simultaneously handed over their NATO membership application in May 2022, it was perceived to represent a paradigm shift in the nations' foreign and security policies. After decades of adhering to their tradition of military alignment, Finland and Sweden would suddenly become members of a military alliance. The official reason provided was the Russian invasion of Ukraine earlier that year, suggesting that a NATO membership would severely increase Finland and Sweden's safety in the Baltic Sea Region. Scholars have argued that a NATO membership represented a radical shift in the nation's foreign and security policy due to the war in Ukraine (Alberque & Schreer, 2022; Arter 2023; Forsberg, 2023).

On the contrary, using the concept of strategic culture, this paper argues that Sweden and Finland's decision to join NATO did not constitute a paradigm shift, but rather a continuation of the historical strategic behaviours of the respective nations. Through the concept of strategic culture, the analytical framework suggests that the decision-making in Finland and Sweden was influenced by historical events that influenced their strategic culture, in turn working as a shaping context for their respective strategic behaviour. The study is conducted through an *entanglement analysis*, a close reading and interpretation of the empirical material to establish if the decision to join NATO followed Finland and Sweden's typical strategic behaviour. The concept of strategic culture is known for being consistent and continuous, although it has the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Hence, by looking at Finland and Sweden's typical strategic culture and strategic behaviour it becomes evident throughout this paper that their respective strategic culture and behaviour have not changed much in the post-Cold War era. Instead, it has stayed persistent, which is demonstrated by their decision to join NATO as it was a continuation of their typical strategic behaviour. Therefore, this paper argues that the decision to join NATO did not demonstrate an extensive shift in Finland and Sweden's strategic behaviour as initially thought, but the decision was in line with the security and foreign policy the states have driven since the end of the Cold War.

This is relevant for future research in war studies as it implies that Sweden and Finland's strategic behaviour may be resistant towards changes in their strategic behaviour even if met with changes in their security environment. Along with what at the outset might have been perceived as obvious or as common sense does in the end not always represent the whole picture.

1.1. Structure of the paper

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, the research problem will be elaborated on together with a presentation of the research question. Subsequently, a section of previous literature about the subject and a scholarly debate about strategic culture will be presented. Next, the paper's analytical framework and chosen research design are presented. Thereafter follows the analysis of this paper including the empirical findings and a discussion. Finally, a conclusion and discussion regarding the paper's contribution to research is provided.

2. Research problem

On the 18th of May 2022, history was being written as Finland and Sweden jointly applied for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This radical shift from their long-standing tradition of military non-alignment could indicate a paradigm shift in Finnish and Swedish foreign and security policy regarding their alignment strategies. Although for different reasons, both countries opted for a "non-aligned" policy during the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, Sweden took on a more activist foreign policy while Finland opted for a more provincial foreign policy. Both became members of the European Union in 1995, and by doing so, became involved in the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the union, along with being active partners to NATO and co-creators of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO). Still, both Finland and Sweden have been strongly devoted to their tradition of military non-alignment and the reluctance to collective defence.

In light of this, how can we understand the recent shift in their foreign policy, from military non-aligned to becoming members of a military alliance? Some might point to the changing international environment, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. By Håkan Edström and Jacob Westberg, it is argued that small states, such as Finland and Sweden, tend to adapt their alignment strategies in response to events in their external environment. These events are argued to potentially be perceived as strategic shocks, which in turn could trigger a change in a small state's alignment strategies (2020:191-192). To illustrate, Edström and Westberg found that the annexation of Crimea in 2014 was perceived as a strategic shock for both Finland and Sweden, and later that year both signed a Host Nation Support agreement with NATO (2020:200). The agreement indicated that both countries had adopted a multiple courting strategy entailing different measures to guarantee the possibility of external support from allies or means to secure the ability to receive and give military support (2020:197). In similar thought

to this neorealism line of arguing, the decision to join NATO could be argued to be understood as the survival of the state by increasing one's military capabilities and band-wagging with greater allies to enhance one's security as a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. According to realistic assumptions, small states are considered to only have two alternatives in their foreign strategic behaviour; either declaring neutrality and hoping greater powers will accept it or joining an alliance (Beyer & Hofmann 2011:287).

This paper argues that these neorealistic assumptions do not adequately account for the recent shift in Swedish and Finnish foreign policy. While neorealistic assumptions might help us understand a piece of the puzzle they lack the ability to comprehend the interrelated context in which the policy-making is made. As argued by Erik Ringmar, the rationalistic assumption that decision-makers make calculated decisions based on expected gains and losses in relative strengths is not enough to explain nor understand a state's strategic behaviour. As demonstrated by Ringmar, in quoting John Steinbruner, the rational actor cannot deal with such "complex situations" (1996:33).

The concept of strategic culture emerged as a reaction to the rationalistic assumptions which dominated the theories on foreign and security policies in the 1970s. The cultural perspective argues that a state's strategic behaviour is not always based on material or objective factors (Biehl et al., 2013:10; Doeser, 2017:743). Instead, the context in which decisions and behaviour are determined in are multifaceted and complex (Biehl et al., 2013: 9-10). Strategic culture can be recognized as a "shaping context for behaviour" as it influences what options are perceived as appropriate for decision-makers in a specific context (Doeser, 2017:743-744). Hence, strategic culture can be perceived as a lens through which the international strategic landscape is seen by the decision-makers (Rickli, 2008:311). This paper argues that the concept of strategic culture can provide a more comprehensive picture and understanding of Finland and Sweden's decision to join NATO by tracing and analysing their respective strategic culture and strategic behaviour.

2.1. Aim and research question

Rather than objectively comparing Finland and Sweden and drawing generalizable claims, the purpose of this paper is to interpret their cultural, political and social context and, by so, gain a greater understanding of the meaning-making process behind what influences action and

behaviour. This paper aims to investigate the question at hand from within rather than from the outside. For that reason, the aim of this paper is to gain a greater understanding of Finland and Sweden's decision to join NATO through the concept of strategic culture. Hence, the research question this paper aims to answer is the following:

How can the concept of strategic culture help us understand the decision by Sweden and Finland to apply for NATO membership in 2022, despite their longstanding tradition of non-military alignment?

3. Previous literature

3.1. NATO membership

The at times contradictory nature of Finland's and Sweden's neutrality and military non-alignment policies has been scrutinized by researchers ever since the 1990s. Nevertheless, as much of what has been written on the topic has been in a descriptive manner rather than through theory testing or examinations, the following section covering the previous literature may come across as descriptive.

Sweden and Finland have developed extensive cooperation with NATO throughout the years, all while adhering to their policy of military non-alignment. By doing so, the two countries have managed to circumvent a NATO membership, resulting in them being nicknamed *partner number one* (Dahl, 2012:1; Wieslander, 2019:194-195). This contradictory position has been subject to debate (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2001:68-69). As argued by Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira, through a logic of inclusion while simultaneously staying militarily non-aligned, Sweden and Finland have managed to *stay inside the walls but outside the fence* (2006:99). This ambiguous relationship stands out compared to other neutral countries. Andrew Cottey approaches the issue by pointing to the historical institutionalist perspective of path dependency in which neutrality is a core part of one's national identity, implying reluctance towards changes (2013:446-447). Similarly, in explaining why Finland and Sweden are still militarily non-aligned, Ulrika Möller and Ulf Bjereld treat neutrality as an institutionalised idea, i.e., neutrality becomes an institution that serves as a guiding principle within the policy making (2010:363-364).

Due to the proximity in time of Sweden and Finland applying for NATO membership, what has been published about it is limited. Nonetheless, the main assumption within the existing scholarly debate is that the application for NATO membership demonstrated a radical and historical shift in Finnish and Swedish foreign policy as a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 which led to the fear of destabilisation in Northern Europe. Joining NATO would provide the countries with stability and readiness in an unpredictable strategic environment (Alberque & Schreer, 2022; Arter 2023; Forsberg, 2023; Ålander, 2022).

Others are challenging the assumption that this was a U-turn in Swedish and Finnish foreign policy. As argued by Baldur Thorhallsson and Thomas Stude Vidal, Finland's decision to join NATO should rather be perceived as a continued shelter-seeking strategy, something the Finns have resorted to ever since the beginning of the Cold War (2023:195). Arto Nokkala instead claims that Finland's road to a NATO membership should be understood as a protracted process with several dimensions rather than solely a reaction to the Russian aggression. As he argues, Finland has always had to take into consideration the potential threat from her Eastern neighbour in her security planning, signalling continuity rather than a drastic shift in their foreign policy. Still, Nokkala admits that the Russian invasion boosted the process towards a NATO application (2022:39-40).

On the other hand, some scholars, such as Stefan Nisch, highlight the role of public opinion in the decision-making process of joining NATO, stating the vital component of social media in the public debate, suggesting that the public discussion on social media was overall positive when debating the potential benefits and risks with joining NATO (2023:3). Others point towards the Finnish public opinion which has been known to react to external events, implying that Finns are becoming more supportive in times of crisis (Weckman, 2023:14). The public support for a Finnish NATO membership almost tripled between the fall of 2021 and the spring of 2022. In Sweden, the shift in public opinion was not as rapid, but Tuomas Forsberg claims the shift in Finnish public opinion paved the way for Swedes to approve a NATO membership, as it was found that more than 60 per cent of the population was positive to joining NATO as long as Finland joined as well (2023:90). Still, this position is somewhat contested, and as argued by Linus Hagström, the Swedish foreign and security policy were altered way to quickly, not giving the Swedish population a chance to test their point of view in a referendum or in an upcoming election (2022:7).

3.2. The strategic culture debates

The concept of strategic culture has been widely used to analyse states' different strategic behaviour over the years, and has been a subject of debate regarding its use. Arguably, four different generational strands within the literature on strategic culture can be identified.

Strategic culture as a concept was firstly introduced by Jack Snyder in the 1970s as a contrast to the rationalistic notions within foreign policy analysis (FPA) in which state behaviour is fully determined by material factors and states are perceived to behave as rational actors (Biehl et al., 2013:10). As Snyder was analysing the United States and the Soviet Union's nuclear strategies, he discovered that the Soviets had a specific way of thinking, while the US had a different one, which in turn influenced their respective strategic behaviour. Understanding the Soviet's strategic culture, he argued, would provide the Americans with an explanation of the Soviets behaviour which the Americans perceived as incomprehensible (1977:5,38). This is agreed upon by Colin S. Gray, who also emphasises the instrumental tool strategic culture can constitute in analysing states' strategic behaviour, and by so, predicting future state behaviour (1981:22). Gray goes on to emphasise the notion of understanding strategic culture as a context, i.e., "...that which surrounds and that which weaves together" (1999: 68). Hence, we, our behaviour, as well as our institutions are the context, and since we cannot discern ourself from the cultural and social context we are embedded in, our behaviour will be a reflection of that context (ibid; Meyer, 2005:527).

As Gray and Snyder exemplifies the first generation of thinkers within strategic culture, the second strand of research is associated with Bradley S. Klein. Klein interprets strategic culture as a means of political hegemony when it comes to the deployment of force as it informs "*widely available orientations to violence and to ways in which the state can legitimately use violence against putative enemies*" (1988:136; Eidenfalk & Doeser, 2022:3).

The third generation is characterised by the work of Alastair Iain Johnston, who challenge the dominant approach to strategic culture, arguing that the first generation of thinkers failed to isolate for alternative explanations in analysing strategic culture (1995:33). To counter this, he suggested a Popperian understanding to the approach of strategic culture, in which strategic culture is conceptualised as an independent variable. Accordingly, the influence of strategic culture on state behaviour can be falsifiable. Johnston concludes that strategic culture may have

an effect on state behaviour, however, it may not be exclusive for each state, as argued by the first generation (ibid).

Lastly, within the fourth generation of the strategic culture debate, Alan Bloomfield aims at closing the gap between the different generations of thinkers. As he argues, they have conceptualised strategic culture as “too-coherent” and have not taken into consideration deviant strategic behaviour. Therefore, previous approaches to strategic culture fail to sufficiently explain inconsistency, contradiction or even changes in strategic behaviour. Instead, he proposes that each state’s strategic culture consist out of several subcultures, which in turn compete with each other for the hegemonic position of influencing strategic behaviour. The rivalry between these different subcultures is then perceived as a possible cause of change (2012:354, 438-439).

The lack of consensus within the literature on strategic culture is illustrated by the debate between the first and third generation of thinkers, namely Gray and Johnston. When Johnston challenged the dominant approach to strategic culture in his previously mentioned work, he accused Gray’s approach to strategic culture to be over-determined and at the same time being under-determined. Firstly, Johnston suggests that Gray’s approach is too simplified as it assumes that a state’s strategic behaviour can be completely explained by its strategic culture, and hence, not considering other causes of behaviour. Secondly, under-determined referred to its inability to predict if any specific outcome was more likely than the other (Bloomfield, 2012:443; Johnston, 1995:37-38). Instead, Johnston argues for the need of a more rigorous research design for analysing strategic culture, in which culture as a variable can be distinguished from other non-strategic culture variables (Johnston, 1995:44-45). Gray counters this by claiming that culture cannot be separated from behaviour, i.e., it is not something which one can objectively observe as suggested by Johnston, but rather something within us. We are part of the context we are analysing since we are all encultured (Gray, 1999:50-51,55). In the end, their disagreement originates from different epistemological assumptions. As argued by Christoph Meyer, it all comes down to whether the aim of a study is to *understand*, as in the hermeneutics approach suggested by Gray, or if it is to *explain*, as illustrated in the positivist position taken by Johnston (2005:537).

4. Strategic culture as a theoretical framework

According to Gray, strategy can have several different dimensions, of which one is cultural (1999:52). As previously mentioned, Gray suggests that we are all encultured, meaning that everything we do is influenced by our culture. Nonetheless, culture does not entirely dictate our decisions or behaviour but it provides us with the ability to make sense of our world (2007:8). Therefore, this paper will understand strategic culture as, “*comprising the socially transmitted, identity-derived norms, ideas and patterns of behaviour that are shared among a broad majority of actors and social groups within a given security community, which help to shape a ranked set of options for a community’s pursuit of security and defence goals*” (Meyer, 2005: 528).

Strategic culture should thus be understood as a shaping context for behaviour but also as a component of that behaviour (Gray, 1999:50), implying that strategic culture informs the decision-makers in a certain context on what options regarding security and defence are available and appropriate. To illustrate, Finland chose to refrain from participating in Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011, as it is argued it would have been inappropriate for them to participate in such operation since it would have meant a deviation from their tradition of neutrality and non-willingness to use of force. Thus, strategic culture influences behaviour through deep-rooted norms, and norms subsequently limit the number of options available (Ångström & Honig, 2012:671).

Even if one might expect strategic culture to be continuous, Heiko Biehl, Bastian Giegerich and Alexandra Jonas contend that if exposed to a “crisis moment”, strategic culture can change (2013:12). This is agreed upon by Gray who suggest that strategic culture has the ability to shift over time if exposed to a traumatic shock such as a conflict or war (2007:7). For that reason, this paper will assume that strategic culture can change over time even if it is mainly characterised by its continuity and persistence (Howlett & Glenn, 2005:131). Additionally, research on strategic culture has traditionally focused on the elite policy-makers as the holders of strategic culture but has not long ago begun to also include the civil community (Biehl et al., 2013:12). This paper will primarily focus on the decision-makers of Sweden and Finland as the carriers of strategic culture. Furthermore, this paper follows the third generation of thinkers on strategic culture, meaning that a state does not only have one strategic culture, but it has several different sub-cultures that compete with each other of the hegemonic position of having an impact on the state’s strategic behaviour.

Since the aim of this paper is to interpretate this policy shift in a new way, aiming to understand the intersubjective context that shaped Sweden and Finland's strategic behaviour, the concept of strategic culture will be used in an analytical framework as a guide in helping us understand the two nation's respective strategic behaviour. Not only does strategic culture provide us with an instrument in analysing the surrounding context in which strategic decision-making is made, but it also has the ability of connecting the policy-making on the international level with the domestic political environment (Biehl et al., 2013:10). It is assumed that decision-makers do not start with a "blank sheet" but rather has their own pre-existing beliefs, ideas and integrated norms about what strategic behaviour is appropriate at any given situation (Meyer, 2005:527). Ultimately, by understanding how strategic culture shapes decision-makers' behaviour, one can grasp the interrelated context in which strategic decisions are made.

The analytical framework for this study is inspired by the framework presented by Fredrik Doeser in his study on how strategic culture shaped the strategic behaviour of Poland in the decision-making of contributing to the US-led military operation against the Islamic State in 2016. In the study, Doeser suggests that one can empirically demonstrate how a state's strategic culture influences her strategic behaviour by looking into the state's historical experiences from which her culture is formed (2018:455). Just as the theory by Doeser, a common thread within the research on strategic culture is to specifically look at how strategic culture influences a state's strategic behaviour in the participation in international military operations (Doeser, 2017; Doeser, 2018; Ångström & Honing, 2012). Nonetheless, this paper argues that the analytical framework by Doeser could just as well be applied to the study in this paper since its function is still to analyse a state's decision-making behaviour regarding her security and foreign policy. Therefore, the framework is able to provide us with an instrument in understanding Sweden and Finland's decision to join NATO.

The analytical framework is twofold. The first section involves three different steps, starting with identifying certain historical events that arguably have had an influence on the formation of the state's strategic culture. The general understanding within the literature on strategic culture is that culture derives from a state's interpretation of its historical experiences (Gray, 1981, Gray, 2007, Meyer, 2005). Thus, Finland and Sweden have distinct strategic cultures, as they have different historical legacies in which they have interpreted differently (Gray, 2007:5). This is also argued by Doeser, who emphasises the influence of historical experiences on culture,

as it shapes the strategic cultural lens through which the decision-makers view the strategic landscape (2018:457-58).

Still, some authors argue for other sources of strategic culture rather than a state's historical legacy. For instance, Darryl Howlett and John Glenn identify several different sources of strategic culture, such as climate, geography, history and ideas, just to name a few (2005:122). However, when met with that many diverse sources of strategic culture, how to know which one is the most influential? Alan Macmillan and Ken Booth solved this by categorizing the sources that carry the most influence, arriving at the conclusion that *history and experience* are among them (1999:365). These findings are in line with Gray's argument, as he claims that as a result of every community thinking and acting differently when it comes to defence matters, in turn stemming from their unique geographies and histories, no strategic culture is identical to the other (2007:6). Therefore, this paper will exclusively concentrate on certain historical events in which the experiences from these events led to the formation of a specific strategic culture.

The historical events have been carefully chosen by a close reading of the empirical material which has been scrutinized for patterns and themes stretching above several different authors, sources and times. Still, not all aspects of the Finland and Sweden's history will be included as it is too broad of a scope for this paper. Moreover, while the decisive historical events trace far back in history, the general characteristics of the state's strategic culture and behaviour are limited to the time after the end of the Cold War in the 1991. One can arguably claim that this is still a far too broad time period to analyse, nevertheless, this paper argues that only focusing on a couple of years to analyse a state's strategic culture and behaviour is too short, as it evolves slowly over longer periods of time and has the ability to change over time. Hence, giving attention to only a couple of years would enhance the risk of missing the full picture. This paper aims at providing the reader with a general understanding since this type of analysis of Sweden and Finland's decision to join NATO has not been done before, suggesting that more thoroughly, in-depth analysis of the decision is needed in the future. Nonetheless, the ambition is that this analysis can provide the reader with a new general perspective as well as provoking new ideas and thoughts.

So, in the first step of the analytical framework, certain historical events that arguably have had a decisive impact on Finland and Sweden's strategic culture will be identified. The second step

of the analytical framework is to describe what type of strategic culture and strategic behaviour has emerged as a consequence of the experiences learned from the historical events identified in step one. In order to identify each state's strategic culture and strategic behaviour, another framework by Doeser (2017) will be applied. He has chosen certain elements of a state's strategic culture to look at when trying to pinpoint the typical characteristics of that culture. Once again, this framework is related to how elements of strategic culture impacts participation in military operations. However, this paper argues that the framework is applicable to this study as it provides an understanding of the state's respective strategic cultures. The framework provides one with important insights into the Swedish and Finnish strategic cultures that are relevant for the decision to join NATO, such as the preferred organisational framework or partner to cooperate with.

That being said, there are elements of a state's strategic culture that will not be involved in this study, as many different sub-cultures coexist in the two states. However, this paper has chosen to give attention to the sub-cultures that have had the dominate position in influencing the states' strategic behaviours since the end of the Cold War. Also, by limiting oneself to the chosen elements of the framework it will be easier to apply the concept in this paper (Doeser, 2017:744). The reason for considering the states' strategic behaviour in the same section as strategic culture is because they go hand in hand, and since they are so interrelated, at times even hard to distinguish between. The following steps will be based on previous empirical research on Finland and Sweden, i.e., books and peer-reviewed articles. The four elements of strategic culture that will be looked at are the following:

- The core tasks of the armed forces: Involves what tasks are given priority in the armed forces. Are international operations more or less important than territorial defence or are they equally important?
- Operational mandate: Relates to what type of international operations the state prefers to participate in, but also what type is perceived as more effective or appropriate?
- Willingness to use force: Concerns for what purpose the state is willing to use armed force. Should it only be used for self-defence purposes or also for offensive purposes? This element also includes if the state has imposed any moral obligation upon itself to use or not use force in humanitarian interventions.

- Organizational framework and strategic partner: What types of organizations do the states perceive as the most appropriate to participate in military operations with? And also, who are perceived as the preferable strategic partners? (Doeser, 2017:744).

The last section of the framework is to empirically establish that the strategic culture in Finland and Sweden influenced their decision to apply for NATO membership. One therefore has to analyse if the decision reflects the previously identified typical strategic behaviour of Finland and Sweden. This will be done by looking at government reports, statements, articles, and speeches by the decision-makers in Finland and Sweden to analyse if the decision to join NATO followed their typical strategic behaviour.

5. Research design

As with any researcher, one's ontological and epistemological assumptions will have certain implications for the research process. This paper builds upon the interpretivist tradition, meaning that attention is given to understand how human beings, from their perspective, make sense of their world. Subsequently, the focal point will be on the meaning-making processes and the contexts it is embedded in (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:46, 80). In this paper, this entails seeking knowledge about how the Swedish and Finnish decision-makers made sense of their world when making decision about their security and foreign policy. Thus, the goal of any interpretivist research is to make the reader understand the context in which the human being is giving meaning to their world in order to make sense of it (ibid, 49). The logic of such research, including this one, is to follow an abductive manner. Accordingly, I, as the researcher begin with what I know and continue to lay the puzzle in an iterative way, as I will go back and forth throughout the process not always knowing where this paper will end up. It is therefore important for the research design to be flexible, which allows for changes and adaptations along the way (ibid, 55, 73).

As touched upon earlier in the section on the strategic culture debate, researchers' ideas on how to best conduct research on strategic culture go in different directions. Hence, there is no overall consensus on the most appropriate research design. As this paper will follow the third generation of thinkers, strategic culture will not be treated as an objectifiable variable that can be isolated from its context as in a positivistic fashion but rather as entrenched within its context and therefore cannot be separated from the state's behaviour. This in line with the aim of this paper to interpret the intersubjective context in which the decision-makers in Finland and

Sweden make sense of their world, in order to get a greater understanding of their strategic behaviour.

5.1. Entanglement

When looking at more than one entity, the study is often done in a comparative fashion. For instance, within the neo-positivistic tradition one would most likely do a most-similar or least-similar comparison in order to draw generalisable claims to the broader population (Bennett, 2004:30). However, even though this analysis looks at both Finland and Sweden's decision to join NATO, the aim of this paper is not to conduct a comparative analysis, but rather about changing the perspectives.

This analysis will further build on the concept of *entangled history*, which is common within historiography. As suggested by its name, the concept takes on a trans-cultural approach building on the assumption that nation, states, communities or civilisations are interrelated as they are not created independently but rather through a process of interaction and globalisation. Basically, countries as entities cannot be divided into separate objective units, as they are entangled in each other (Bauck & Maier, 2015). One can arguably claim that Finland and Sweden are examples of interconnected societies interacting and influencing each other. Therefore, rather than focusing on the comparability of them, the two countries will be juxtaposed to each other, demonstrating where they are interrelated and if their respective strategic culture influences the other, through an interpretive entanglement perspective. Thus, the stated research question will be answered through an *entanglement analysis*, entailing a close reading and interpretation of the empirical material. Close reading emphasises what is being said, i.e., the content, as well as how it is being said. This act usually involves three steps, of which the first is to read and observe the text preferably several times while taking notes. The second steps concerns interpreting those observations and identifying patterns, whilst the last and third step is to gather the interpretations into coherent arguments and conclusions. Even if this process follows a three-step order, it is generally conducted in a hermeneutic manner (Braun, n.d).

5.2. Analysis of the empirical material

The following section concern how to retrieve and analyse the empirical material for this study. As demonstrated in the theoretical section, the analytical framework follows a two-step order.

The first step is more descriptive, as it aims to pinpoint the typical characteristics of Finland and Sweden's respective strategic culture and strategic behaviour. This is done by diving into their history and looking for unique experiences that arguably have had an impact in shaping their strategic culture, which in turn shaped the context for their strategic behaviour. This step will be based on the close reading of empirical material, such as books, peer-reviewed articles, and government reports. In this process one would want to begin with *mapping the field* by aiming for exposure of as many perspectives of the Finns and Swedes' experiences as possible, for instance, by locating various and even disputed sources of an historical event (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:84-87).

Next, the second step is to empirically establish that the Finns' and Swedes' strategic culture influenced the decision to join NATO. This will be conducted through close reading and analysis of empirical material such as, primary sources, i.e., government reports, statements and speeches by the decision-makers, but also secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed articles and newspapers, to demonstrate if the decision to apply for NATO membership followed their typical strategic behaviour identified in step one. Throughout this process, one would look for intertextuality across the material, for instance, by tracing primary sources and citations from document to document, which can hopefully provide one with *thick* interpretations (ibid). Moreover, when it comes to analysing the retrieved empirical material, one has to be reflective and critical of the origin of the sources, asking questions such as who has written them, where they come from, and if they are characterised by a strong political direction. This paper strives to use as many primary sources as possible. This includes official documents, reports, speeches and statements by decision-makers. Additionally, material will also be retrieved from secondary sources such as books and articles from well-known and established authors within the research field, as well as from reliable and established platforms.

5.3.Limits with this design

No matter the choice of research design, all alternatives will have their shortcomings and challenges. One that is frequently mentioned regarding interpretive research is the lack of generalisability. Within neo-positivist research, the overall purpose of conducting inquiries is to be able to say something about the broader population. This, however, requires the researcher to enable full control over the study, such as isolating oneself from the object under study. This is arguable not applicable in interpretive research as it does not believe that the *researcher* can

separate herself from the *study*, as we are all positioned within the same setting (Yanow, 2014). Still, this does not have to be an issue since the general goal with interpretive research is not to draw generalisable claims, but rather wanting to achieve contextuality, i.e., it is up to the reader to decide for themselves if they are able to understand and relate to the context (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:48-49;).

Another shortcoming is the lack of methodological rigour, as there is no “one size fits all” research design but rather various ways of doing interpretive research (Yanow, 2014). Something that is especially evident when doing research on strategic culture as suggested by Gray, is that we cannot understand strategic behaviour through rigorous methods since strategic culture is not out there but within us, making our institutions and our behaviour the context (1999:53). As interpretivist research follows a hermeneutic logic, lack of rigorous method is not perceived as a hinder. On the contrary, interpretive research welcomes methodological flexibility as it allows the researcher to go back and forth throughout the process.

An additional challenge is if the researcher is selecting material that will confirm the argument of the study and ignore other material that would state the opposite. This, in addition to the challenges above, calls for the researcher to strive for transparency and honesty about the research process, but also be aware and reflective of one’s own position within the context (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:112). This, referred to as reflexivity, concerns the researcher ability to recognise how its own position, characteristics and sense-making may have affected the research process. For example, I as the researcher have certain characteristics that influence how I interpretate and make sense of the world. Such characteristics include being a Swedish woman, born and raised in a democratic welfare state and being positioned in an academic context, to name a few (ibid, 98,100). This is inevitable as I’m positioned within the context and not objectively observing it from the outside. In this paper, this specifically calls for being aware of my position as a Swede, meaning I will inevitably have a better understanding of the Swedish culture and not completely being able to comprehend the Finnish culture and context to the same extent. Just consider the fact that I do not speak the Finnish language, which in turn can prevent me from getting access to certain empirical material, or missing out on specific subtexts that are given in the Finnish culture. However, being self-aware, recognising the fact that I’m interpretating someone else’s interpretations, reflecting over my own sense-making and being transparent about how the knowledge was generated and led to certain conclusions, can instead increase the trustworthiness and quality of the paper (ibid, 103).

6. Empirical analysis

The following section presents the analysis of this paper, wherein the aim is to first identify historical experiences that have influenced the two states' strategic culture. After that, Finland and Sweden's respective strategic culture and behaviours will be analysed through the chosen framework, focusing on the *core tasks of the armed forces, operational mandate, willingness to use force, organizational framework and strategic partner*. Thereafter, the aim is to analyse if the decision to join NATO reflected these previously identified strategic behaviours, by looking at decision-makers speeches, statements, articles and government reports.

6.1. Finland

6.1.1. Historical experiences

There are certain events in Finnish history that has had an extensive influence in the shaping of her strategic culture. Such events are arguably the wars fought against the Soviet Union during the Second World War. As Finland gained its independence in 1917, after years of russification campaigns, the relationship between the parties began to sour. In 1939, in the wake of the Second World War breaking out along with the German advance, Stalin feared the Germans would attack Leningrad via Finland. As such Stalin demanded that Finland agree to an adjustment of the Finnish-Soviet border. As Finland refused to yield, the Soviets close thereafter invaded Finland. This would later become known as the Winter War, in which Finland heroically managed to quickly unite the nation and, despite being constantly under-armed, stand her ground against the Soviet forces. About 100 days later, the Finns agreed to negotiation talks with the Soviets and shortly thereafter a peace agreement was signed (Jakobson, 1998:28-29; Meinander, 2020:188-190).

During 1940 the Finnish-German relationship would grow closer, as it had become evident during the Winter War that the West did not come to the Finnish rescue. In 1941 Finland had no other choice than to join Germany in their war against the Soviets which was perceived by the Finns as a continuation of the Winter War, thereby gaining its name, the Continuation War. When the Finns attacked the Soviets, she was met with strong resistance by the Soviet forces and in 1944 a cease-fire between the two parties was agreed upon, later followed by a peace agreement as it had become clear that the damages were not worth the price. However, despite the Finns' courageous fighting she had to make territory concessions according to the peace

agreement, resulting in Stalin getting what he had requested all along (Heikka, 2005:104; Jakobson, 1998:36-38; Meinander, 2020:197).

Both the Continuation War and the Winter War would go on to have an extensive impact on Finland. The latter would specially have an emotional impact, as the experiences of the wars taught the Finns that they could resist a greater power against all odds. In fact, the West thought Finland were doomed to fail against the greater Soviet, but as it was demonstrated that Finland was capable of standing up against her neighbour in the East, she received the West's admiration (Jakobson, 1998: 29-30). These historical experiences, of a small state successfully standing up against its Goliath evidently fostered a strong sense of nationalism within Finland that would influence its culture for decades to come.

The following years would become turbulent for Finland. Besides paying war reparations and implementing the peace agreement, the domestic politics were characterised by the power battle between the communists and the social democrats. As Europe was divided into two blocs at the onset of the Cold War, the Soviets was afraid that Finland would move towards West and hence the Soviets imposed a friendship agreement with Finland, the *Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Treaty* (FCMA). The treaty entailed Finland to repel any attack towards the Soviets on Finnish territory on their way to the Soviets, implying that Finland had to make concessions regarding her own sovereignty. As the West perceived Finland to have made far too many concessions with this treaty, Finland knew the only way to stabilise the relationship with her eastern neighbour was to ensure the Soviets that Finland were no longer a threat. Furthermore, the Finnish economy after the wars was shattered, and she did not have the capacity to finance a well-equipped army against the Soviets. As such, she had no other choice than to establish friendly relations with them (Forss & Holopainen, 2015:6-7; Meinander, 2020:205; Saloniemi-Pasternak, 2019:113).

During the next 40 years, Finland would have to walk a thin line of careful diplomacy, not only due to their geopolitical position but because the Soviets would take every opportunity to exercise their influence and pressure on Finland. After the wars, Finland had become rather isolated from the world and the fear of getting dragged into great power conflicts remained. Hence, Finland adopted a policy of pragmatic neutrality, as pursuing an active policy would have been too dangerous. The whole society enhanced the tradition of public silence, talking about Finland's security policy was perceived as taboo. Finland did not want to do anything

that could trigger the Soviets. But at the same time, Finland did not want to become completely isolated from the West so the Finns eventually began to become a bit more active internationally, in order to overcome the West's scepticism towards her. Moreover, the fear of getting dragged into other great powers' conflict made Finland keep a low profile while at the same time mobilising her armed forces to send the message that Finland had the capacity to inflict significant cost on anyone trying to attack her (Forss & Holopainen, 2015:7-8; Ries, 2002:73-76; Jakobson, 1998:74).

The historical experiences of the balancing between East and West during the years as part of the FCMA is sometimes referred to as Finlandization, i.e., how the Soviets influenced the Finnish policies in undermining her sovereignty while Finland adapted her policy to the interest of the Soviets to ensure its survival during the Cold War (Forsberg & Pesu 2016:474). While many have argued that the Finlandization era ended with the end of the Cold War, some argue that the culture and experiences from that era still lives on, characterised by a diplomatic culture towards her great power eastern neighbour. For instance, the fear of criticizing Russia publicly still remains in the Finnish society, as exemplified by the Finnish Foreign Policy Institute (FPI) being asked not to portray Russia too negatively in their report on the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Moreover, in the FPI report on the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, the word invasion was perceived as too strong, and as the authors refused to change it, the report was never published (Arter, 2023:173, 179-180).

6.1.2. Strategic culture and strategic behaviour

The historical experiences from the Winter War and the Continuation War taught the Finns many lessons. However, one of the most impactful one is that the Finns could take care of themselves. This lesson further enhanced a strategic culture characterised by a strong belief in the nation's ability to defend itself, and that the most crucial national interest is to ensure its survival. Hence, the **core tasks of the armed forces** concern territorial defence (Locher, 2010:3; Seppo & Forsberg, 2013:113-114). Finland has taken on a comprehensive defence planning resting on the foundation of general conscriptions, a large reserve and total defence. As the neighbouring countries reconsidered their national defence in the post-Cold War era, Finland never abandoned the doctrine of territorial defence. Therefore, it has been possible for Finland to maintain a strong and capable national defence over years. As of 2019 Finland had a wartime strength of approximately 230,000 (Finnish Defence Forces, n.d; Wither, 2020:65,68). Strong

emphasis is made on the armed forces, which can be seen in the light of sharing a 1,300km long border with Russia (Locher, 2010:3).

Consequently, territorial defence has been prioritised over participating in international operations. The prevailing idea in Finnish culture is that participation or contribution to international operations should not be at the expense of the Finnish territorial defence. Also, as national defence is prioritized, the Finns are reluctant to send soldiers on dangerous operations abroad or procure the military equipment needed for demanding international operations (Seppo & Forsberg, 2012:120; Doeser, 2017:747). However, after her entry into the EU in 1995, Finland has adapted its national defence policy to become more internationalised, as a consequence of the changing security environment. Finland has since stated that her national interests can most efficiently be served through multilateral cooperation. But having a credible defence is still the foundation of its defence planning (Locher, 2010:1; Nokkala, 2022:51; Seppo & Forsberg, 2013: 115-116).

When it comes to **operational mandate** Finland prefers to participate in traditional peacekeeping operations, rather than more robust peace enforcement operations. Finland recognises its role as a security provider in the world, not only due to its devotion to peacekeeping missions over the years, but also as Finland has come to view itself as a peace mediator. Not only does mediation provide a small state such as Finland with the opportunity to contribute to the international community but also to brand itself as a “peaceful and peace-loving” state. The self-perception of being a peacekeeping superpower has its roots in the Finnish bridge-building attempts between East and West (Palosaari, 2013:371; Seppo & Forsberg, 2013: 116). Consequently, Finland perceives humanitarian aid, political support or crisis management to be more appropriate ways of showing her support internationally rather than through peace enforcements missions. This can be illustrated in how Finland refused to participate in the peace enforcement operation in Libya in 2011, as it was perceived as inappropriate and inefficient. Instead, Finland chose to show support through humanitarian aid, economic sanctions and political support (Doeser, 2017:741, 747). This aligns with the Finnish tradition of preferring to use political tools over military ones to enhance security (Seppo & Forsberg, 2013:119). Finland’s reluctance to participate in military operations can also be illustrated through the quote by former President Halonen, regarding the decision to refrain from participating in OUP, as she stated it was “*a logical continuation from what we have done previously in international politics. We have our own profile and role*” (quoted in Doeser,

2017:748). Although Finland has moved towards more military crisis management operations during the last decades, the decision whether or not to participate in international operations are seen as controversial (ibid).

Moving on to the **willingness to use force**, in which Finland emphasizes defensive purposes rather than offensive ones, originating from the historical experiences of the wars fought against the Soviets in which defensive fighting paid off (Doeser, 2017:748). The use of force should only be used for self-defence and within the national border. Still, as previously mentioned, the historical experiences also taught Finland to use political tools over military ones to solve disputes. This aligns with the saying by former President Kekkonen, that Finland should be a “physician rather than a judge” (Doeser, 2017:748; Seppo & Forsberg, 2013:119-120).

As the international environment changed in the post-Cold War era, and the need for international interventions became obvious, Finland realized she had to broaden her idea of participating in peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations. This led to an intense debate in Finland as the use of force or having to take sides in a conflict went against the historical principle of being neutral and peaceful (Kerttunen, 2014: 118). Over the decades Finland has integrated further into Europe and contributed to international operations. In some cases, the Finns even contributed with military forces, such as in operation ISAF in Afghanistan. However, the forces were limited to civil-military operations, training and advisory tasks while being stationed in the more stable part of northern Afghanistan (ibid). The reason for Finland’s increased participation in military operations is not only a change in culture but could also be argued to stem from realistic or practical reasons. Participating in military operations abroad is perceived as a tool to serve Finland’s national interest by enhancing the capability of the defence forces, for instance, by providing field experiences in which the defence forces can test and evaluate procedures, weapon systems and interoperability (Palosaari, 2013:366; Kerttunen, 2014:119). Further, by contributing to the international burden-sharing, Finland aims to avoid marginalization while at the same time enhancing her chances of receiving international support in times of crisis (Seppo & Forsberg, 2013:115).

With regard to **organizational framework**, Finland prefers to participate in operations that are led by the EU or UN. Finland has a long history of participating in UN peacekeeping operations and ever since Finland became a member of the EU in 1995, she has perceived the EU to be a key security actor. Hence, it makes sense that Finland thinks EU and UN are the appropriate

organisations to contribute with (Doeser, 2017:749; Locher, 2010:1). Ever since her entry, Finland has been a strong advocate for the EU, for instance, through participating in EU battle groups or developing the European Security and Defence Policy (Palosaari, 2013:369; Seppo & Forsberg, 2013:116).

Closer ties with NATO have also been established throughout the last decades since Finland joined the Partnership for Peace in 1994. For instance, Finland has participated in several NATO-led operations. Due to their close cooperation, it was argued that Finland would have no problem of fulfilling the military, legal and political obligations of joining the alliance, especially as Finland already fulfilled the high standards of interoperability required (Alberque & Schreer, 2022:68; Locher, 2010:2). Although the option of becoming NATO member has been on the table for quite some time, the Finns have generally been sceptical of NATO membership, often originating from the fear of triggering her eastern neighbour, as it is well-known that Russia perceives NATO to be their opponent. Therefore, keeping the door open to NATO without joining was seen as the best of two worlds (Forsberg, 2023:44-46).

When it comes to **strategic partners**, the Nordic neighbours and Germany are the preferred choices, and Finland often follows in their footsteps. Thus, they usually participate in the same operations (Doeser, 2017:749). Further emphasis is on Nordic defence cooperation, especially with Sweden, who is perceived as Finland's closest bilateral partner. Throughout the years the two countries have developed a deep defence cooperation which spans all the way from military procurement to using each other's air and naval bases (Finnish Ministry of Defence, n.d.; Ojanen, 2022:3). The US is also perceived as an appropriate strategic partner and its presence in Northern Europe is believed to have a stabilizing impact on the region. Hence, the transatlantic link is seen as very important to maintain (Seppo & Forsberg, 2013:118).

6.2.Sweden

6.2.1. Historical experiences

Sweden stands out among the Nordic countries as it recently celebrated 200 years of peace. This milestone traces all the way back to the Napoleonic wars in the beginning of the 19th century (Dahl, 2002; Petersson, 2009; Simons et al., 2019; Westberg, 2023). In 1809, Sweden suffered the biggest military loss in her history by losing Finland to Russia and as a consequence,

Sweden lost a fourth of its population and a third of its territory. Sadly, this loss was not a rare occasion but rather the culminating event as Sweden had suffered many territorial losses during the last century (Agius, 2006:62; Westberg, 2023:92-93). The trauma of losing Finland and the Baltic Sea empire to Russia has remained in the Swedes' memory, often referred to as the "Russia scare" (Simons et al., 2019:337). In the upcoming years Sweden would, with the new king Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, i.e., Carl XIV Johan, at the helm, partake in the battle in Leipzig and in the conquest of Norway, in which the latter was perceived as the rightful compensation for the loss of Finland (Talvitie, 2002:26; Westberg, 2023:98-99)

The historical experiences during the Napoleonic wars arguably created a fear within Sweden of getting drawn into conflicts. From a policy of aggressive expansionism, the following decades would instead be characterised by increased cautiousness in order to preserve what was left (Petersson, 2009:21; Simons et al., 2019:335; Westberg, 2023: 92-100). To the extent that Sweden became unwilling to take risks, the king of Sweden enhanced a power-balancing policy aiming to balance between the great powers in the Nordic-Baltic region. The policy allowed Sweden to sustain friendly relations with Russia and Great Britain while at the same time position herself as independent and "neutral" in times of conflict, with the main goal of avoiding getting drawn into the conflicts of the great powers all while enhancing her own freedom (Petersson, 2009:2; Westberg, 2023:100-103). This policy characterized by continuity would later on bear distinct similarities to the neutrality policy adopted during the 20th century, guided by the aspiration to protect the national independence by maintaining a level of autonomy in relation to the great powers (Westberg, 2023: 103).

The fear of getting drawn into other states' conflicts was still present in Sweden as the Second World War broke out in 1939. Just as during the first half of the 19th century, Sweden deemed the policy of neutrality to be the best way of keeping Sweden out of the war. Early on, Sweden declared herself neutral and at first the policy was strictly implemented, both Norway and Germany got the cold hand when requesting aid or support. Nonetheless, this did not block Sweden from assisting Finland when she was attacked by the Soviets in 1939. This was possible due to the fact that the Soviets attack was not followed by a Swedish declaration of neutrality, hence Sweden was free to support the Finns however she wanted to (Agius, 2006:78; Westberg, 2023: 172-73,176-77).

Although, the policy would be altered in 1940 after much debate within the Swedish government, a Transport Act with Germany was signed allowing them to transport material, military equipment and troops on Swedish railways, from Norway to Finland (Pettersson, 2009:22; Simons et al., 2019:337). As the US entered the war the tide changed, and the German pressure on Sweden eased. Subsequently, Sweden denied the Germans any more concessions and switched to helping the allied states instead, for instance through approving British airplanes to fly off the radar over Swedish territory on their way to Germany (Pettersson, 2009:22; Westberg, 2023:180). This policy of being benevolent to the Germans in the war has been a source of much critique, especially concerning the neutrality aspects of the policy. The Swedish government responded to the criticism by claiming they did what they had to do in order to keep Sweden out of the war. During the war, Sweden found itself in a dangerous position as she were geographically surrounded by the Germans and the Soviets. As such, Sweden only had two options; to risk becoming occupied since it became obvious that the Swedish armed forces did not have the capacity to defend itself, or to make concessions to both sides. Hence, the neutrality policy served its purpose of keeping Sweden out of the war and preserving national sovereignty (Agius, 2006:79-81; Westberg, 2023:77,182-3).

6.2.2. Strategic culture and strategic behaviour

As new types of threats such as terrorism and intra-state conflicts emerged in the post-Cold War era, Sweden decided to reorientate the **core tasks of the armed forces** from traditional territorial defence towards prioritising international operations and international crisis management. This had not been possible during the Cold War as Sweden balanced on a knife's edge by carefully not offending the Soviets. With the end of the Cold War, however, Sweden could take on a more active policy. Thus, emphasis on territorial defence was replaced with a focus on expeditionary operations. For instance, in 2009 Sweden's long tradition of conscription service was removed and replaced with voluntary service (Doeser, 2016:287; Wither, 2020:70; Ångström, 2015:245). This could further be illustrated as the main goal of the Swedish foreign policy has been to maintain or improve international peace and security, and therefore Sweden has taken on a very active role internationally (Ruffa, 2013:344). For instance, Sweden played a key role in re-establishing security and stability in the Baltic states, as the Russian troops withdraw in the 1990s, and participated in NATO-led operation in the Balkan region following the Yugoslav Wars (Dalsjö, 2017:12).

Eventually, territorial and national defence would gain renewed priority in Sweden, something that became especially evident in 2012 when the then Chief of Defence, stated that Sweden only had the capacity to defend herself for a week if attacked, implying that Sweden was in dire need of support from other countries in order to ensure her security. This revelation paved the way for a new defence policy in 2015, what later became known as the Hultqvist Doctrine, which symbolized a middle way. The doctrine emphasized the rebuilding of the Swedish armed forces national defence capability, close cooperation with other states, and support for a rule-based security which declared each country's right to self-determination. Basically, the Hultqvist Doctrine constituted a mixture of non-military alignment and close cooperation with NATO and the Western states (Dalsjö 2017:17,23; Westberg, 2023:222,235). The renewed priority of having a credible national defence should also be viewed in the light of the Russian provocation of violating the airspace near Gotland in the Baltic Sea in 2016 (Forsberg, 2023:93). In sum, in spite of renewed attention to territorial defence, Sweden still acknowledges international operations as a fundamental part of her national defence planning, which can be observed in Sweden's participation in the fight against IS in Iraq and Syria, as well as in the former UN operation in Mali (Westberg, 2023:239; Wither, 2020:70).

Moving on to the **operational mandate**, in which Sweden does not usually perceive that any type of international operation is more appropriate to engage in over the other. Rather she emphasises her role in contributing to a change or improvement of a conflict situation. As stated by the former Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt when Sweden decided on participating in OUP in Libya: "now it is time for Sweden to move from words to deeds and do what we can to promote international peace" (quoted in Doeser, 2016:287-288). Contributing to international peace and security does not only serve altruistic purposes but mainly Sweden's national interest as it would increase her credibility as an active player in the international community but also enhancing the prospects of getting support in times of crisis (Ångström, 2015:244, 248). Nevertheless, interventions out of pure self-interest are not deemed as appropriate or legitimate (Ångström & Honig, 2012:680). Further, an evolution can be observed in the post-Cold War era from traditional peacekeeping missions towards more peace enforcement operations, such as Sweden deciding to participate in the NATO-led operations with a coercive character, for example during the Yugoslav Wars (Dalsjö, 2017:12; Ångström, 2015:237).

The historical experiences of the neutrality policy in Sweden have been shaped into the "conscience of the world", which has further contributed to the Swedes' self-image of being "a

force for good in the world” or as being “do-gooders”. (Dalsjö, 2017:10; Ruffa, 2013:343; Ångström 2015:257). This behaviour might seem odd given that Sweden participates in coercive operations, but as mentioned earlier, a state’s strategic culture can entail several sub-cultures which does not necessarily align with each other.

Moreover, when it comes to the **willingness to use force** Sweden can use it as long it is for humanitarian purposes, or for territorial defensive purposes (Ångström & Honig, 2012:679; Ruffa, 2013:350). Sweden has adopted a strong moral posture most evident through stating that she has a moral obligation to act against crimes against humanity, and that she cannot “be allowed to take a passive stance” (quoted in Ruffa, 2013:344). Hence, Sweden perceives it to be appropriate to use force if it is to protect civilians or to stop crimes against humanity, although, the most preferable option would be non-military instruments, most noticeable in Sweden’s commitment to quiet diplomacy (Dahl, 2006:906; Doeser, 2016:288; Ruffa, 2013:353). The act of participating to international operations for altruist purposes has become a core part of the Swedish identity. However, it is not on the utility of the Swedish armed forces in international operations that is of importance, but rather demonstrating the Swedish identity of helping out and being a good force in the world (Ångström, 2015:258).

With regards to **organizational framework**, Sweden does not differentiate between operations led by the EU, the UN or NATO as long as it is sanctioned under international law and is resting on an UN-mandate. The EU is perceived as the most natural arena for cooperation, but over the years a close association with NATO is considered to be important to maintain. By participating in NATO operations, Sweden does not only increase her influence but creates mutual expectations, a form of informal contract, in which Sweden is guaranteed military and political support from the West if anything were to happen (Doeser, 2016:288-89; Ruffa, 2013:349; Ångström, 2015:237,247).

This middle-way of not being a member but still aiming at guaranteeing external support was already evident during the Cold War. While, the official stance by the Swedish government during the Cold War was neutrality and non-alignment, the government simultaneously knew that in case of an attack, Sweden would not be able to defend herself. Covert agreements of war preparations were therefore made with the NATO allies, especially with the US, to guarantee military support in case of the Soviets attacked. Interestingly, this did not have that much impact on the public opinion once the secret agreements became known, as it is suggested that the

general understanding, or expectations, among the public was that either way NATO would come to the rescue if Sweden was attacked (Dahl, 2002:143; Dalsjö, 2017:9).

Moving on to **strategic partners**, bilateral relationships with Finland and the US are perceived as especially important. Defence cooperation with the Nordic and European states are considered vital as well with the former illustrated in The Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) (Wither, 2020:73-74). At last, what stands out among Sweden's defence policies, international cooperation's and multilateral agreements is its lack of binding defence obligations, implying that despite the solidarity declaration, Sweden is not obliged to offer any military support in case a partner country would be attacked (Westberg, 2023:216).

6.3.Sweden and Finland join NATO

On the 13th of April in 2022, Finland's prime minister Sanna Marin together with the prime minister of Sweden, Magdalena Andersson, held a joint press conference in Stockholm about possible memberships in NATO, in which Marin stated that a Finnish decision might be just "a couple of weeks"¹ away. Furthermore, close cooperation between the two countries and the importance of making the same decision regarding the future were emphasised (Killgren, 2022).

That same day, the Finnish government handed over its report on the changes in the Finnish security environment to the parliament. Along with an assessment of the effects of a possible NATO membership, the report was characterised by the eminent threat of Russia and the consequences it could have for Finland. If the war in Ukraine would escalate and spread to the Baltic Sea Region it would be hard for Finland to remain outside the conflict (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022:10). The war in Ukraine demonstrated not only the resolve of Russia but it also pointed out the fact that if Russia could invade Ukraine, she could also invade Finland, who was military non-aligned. Hence, the report emphasised the need for Finland to have a credible defence capacity, strengthening long-term cooperation's with strategic partners and that preparations must be done in order to be able to face a similar situation as the ongoing war in Ukraine (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022:10,14-15; Nokkala, 2022:62). Further, the report recognised the possibility of increased Russian influence on the Finnish way

¹ This author's translation.

of life and that Finland must be prepared for hybrid influence activities (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2022:30-31). The memories of the historical events during the 20th century would become evident in the parliamentary debate on whether Finland should join NATO or not on the 13th of May, as several members of the parliament quoted the words by the infantry general Adolf Ehnroth as he referred to the lessons from the Winter War, i.e., “never again alone” (Arter, 2023:183).

The report further emphasised the importance for Finland to maintain its freedom of choice and national room to manoeuvre, something that was threatened by Russia on several occasions. Most evidently, the repeated warning that a Finnish and Swedish NATO membership would lead to “serious military and political consequences”² (De Vivo, 2022), wherein Finland’s President Sauli Niinistö responded to by stating “you (Putin) caused this, look at the mirror” (TP Kanslia, 2022).

The day before, a finalized government report had been released suggesting that Finland should join NATO. A combination of a robust national defence and NATO membership would be a “credible security solution” (Finnish Government, 2022a:3). Prime Minister Marin and President Niinistö would shortly after in a joint press conference officially state that Finland would apply for a NATO membership (Lehto, 2022). In a speech to the parliament the day after the announcement, Prime Minister Marin said:

At the end of last year, Russia issued a demand to the EU and NATO countries, including Finland, that NATO halt its plans for future expansion. Moreover, had we acquiesced to Russia’s demands, we would have significantly weakened not only our sovereignty but also our security.

She would then go on to say:

Promoting the rules-based world order, human rights and peace are the cornerstones of Finland’s foreign policy. In this changed security environment, membership in NATO would strengthen Finland’s opportunities to advance these objectives as well

² This author’s translation.

as Finland's international position. And above all, by joining NATO, Finland would strengthen its own security (Finnish Government, 2022b).

The speech followed the parliament NATO debate in which no single Finish party opposed NATO membership, except for single MPs (Arter, 2023:184).

About a month before the prime ministers' joint press conference in April, the Swedish government had assigned a task force consisting of representatives from all political parties in parliament with the assignment of assessing Sweden's new security policy situation, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The report emphasised the importance of Sweden to deepen her bilateral and multilateral defence and security cooperation as Sweden's security environment had severely worsened. Despite the many defence agreements with other states, none of them included mutually binding obligations. Consequently, there was no guarantee that Sweden would get any external help in case of a serious threat or attack against her. The report would go on to state that what had become evident during the Ukrainian War was the boundaries of receiving support from NATO, as the principle of collective defence only applies to alliance members, not partners (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2022:41-42). If Sweden remained outside NATO, she would have to increase her military capacity extensively in order to be able to defend her territorial integrity. Having no guarantee of outside support raises vital questions such as how long would it take for other states to decide on international support to Sweden, what type of support would be given and how long would it take before the support arrived to Sweden. A crisis situation in Sweden would thus entail several factors of uncertainty (ibid, 36). Joining NATO on the other hand would not only increase the security of Sweden as she would take part of NATO's collective defence principle, but it would also increase the threshold of using military force in Northern Europe. NATO membership would also mean less dependence on bilateral agreements, particular with the US (ibid, 34, 42). This was agreed upon by all parties except for the Left party and the Swedish Green party. The report considered the EU to be Sweden's most important arena for foreign- and security policy, with its political and economic tools in particular being strongly emphasised. Nevertheless, what had also become obvious was the lack of will among the EU members to develop a collective defence within the union (ibid, 27, 42).

At last, the report would go on to mention Finland's progress towards NATO membership and the possible consequences it would have on Sweden. If Finland were to join NATO but not

Sweden, she would become the only country in the Baltic Sea region not part of the alliance, meaning that Sweden would be in a very exposed position (ibid, 35). This was also emphasised by the then defence minister Peter Hultqvist, who when considering the alternative for Sweden to stay outside of NATO concluded that “the result of my reflection was that the balanced tipped towards Sweden’s disadvantage. Staying alone our exposure to Russia increases. We might have continued as non-aligned with Finland. But all alone? No.”³ (quoted in Dala-Demokraten, 2022).

The report was later handed over to the government on the same day as the Finnish parliamentary debate about NATO. Just two days later on the 15th of May, the ruling party in Sweden, the Social Democrats decided to opt for NATO membership. Thus, a Swedish NATO membership was now supported by a majority of the parliament. Prime Minister Andersson claimed that, “we, the Social Democrats believe it is the best for Sweden, and the Swedish population for us to join NATO”. She would go on to add that “non-alignment has served us well, but our conclusion is that it will not serve us as well in the future”⁴ (Wikén, 2022). The following days would unfold quickly. On the 16th of May the decision to join NATO was officially decided on by the Swedish government following a parliamentary debate (Swedish Government Office, 2023). And on the 18th of May, Finland and Sweden simultaneously handed over their application for NATO membership to NATO’s Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (NATO, 2022).

The official reasons for Finland joining NATO were that it would enhance the security of Finland. In being a member of the alliance, Finland becomes a part of NATO’s collective defence, and by doing so, having guaranteed alliance support in case of an armed attack against her. Also, as a member of NATO, the deterrence effect of the Finnish defence forces will be more credible as it is backed up by the collective capabilities of the alliance. In addition, Finnish and Swedish membership will raise the threshold of using military measures in the Baltic Sea region leading to increased stability in the long run (Ministry for Foreign affairs of Finland, n.d.). The official reason for Sweden joining NATO was that it was perceived as the best way of preserving Swedish security. In light of the worsened security situation in the nearby environment and the potential negative consequences it could have for Sweden, an extensive rearmament of the armed forces and NATO membership was assessed to be the solution. The

³ This author’s translation.

⁴ This author’s translation.

decision was based upon the government report, analysed above (Swedish Government Office, 2023).

7. Discussion

In the eyes of Finland and Sweden, the cost of joining NATO has long been perceived as higher than the benefits of being a formal member of the alliance (Alberque & Schreer, 2022:67). But in May last years, Sweden and Finland reached the decision to apply for NATO membership. However, did the decision to join NATO follow their typical strategic behaviour? And was it really a demonstration of a radical shift in their respective security and defence stance?

By Sweden, NATO membership was perceived as the best way of ensuring Sweden's security. In the last decades, Sweden had become painfully aware that her national defence did not have the full capacity to deter an enemy or protect her territorial integrity. Hence, focus has been on relying on partners or allies in building bilateral and multilateral defence agreements. However, none of these are of mutually binding character wherein the partners are obliged to defend each other's territories. Subsequently, the possibility exists that if Sweden were to be threatened or attacked, she could find herself in a position of no guaranteed military support, particularly as the US has stated that European countries outside of NATO does not entail bilateral defence guarantees from them (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2022:34). Therefore, becoming a part of NATO was assessed to be the best solution.

It could be argued that the NATO membership was a sign of change in Sweden's security and defence stance, as it represents a shift in her tradition of military non-alignment. But on the other hand, to what extent does Sweden really have a tradition of military non-alignment? As mentioned earlier, Sweden had an extensive war preparation cooperation with NATO throughout the Cold War all while the official stance was military non-alignment. Since Sweden joined the Partnership for Peace program in 1994, she has continued to develop close associations with NATO. Taking every opportunity given to move closer to the alliance. Sweden has ever since participated in almost every NATO-led international operation (Dahl, 2012:1-2). Still, the idea lives on in the swedes' minds that its neutrality has kept Sweden out of war all these years, and subsequently the need for Sweden to be able to defend herself or needing outside assistance may not be that obvious to everyone (ibid, 10).

Moreover, one can argue that cooperating closely with NATO in order to gain a voice at the table or enhancing the prospect of getting security guarantees is something Sweden has been doing for decades. As demonstrated by Doeser (2016), by participating in NATO operations Sweden has proven her worth as a civil servant without being a formal member of the alliance, something that would also increase her political influence. As stated by former Deputy Director, Department for Strategy and Security Policy, Ministry of Defence, Åsa Anclair: “The participation increases our credibility, which is useful for us in several different areas within our partnership with NATO” (quoted in Doeser, 2016:289). Also, the former minister of defence, Sten Tolgfors stated that the reason for Sweden to “punch above its weight” in participating in international operations is that it “strengthens Sweden’s voice abroad” (quoted in Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2016:481). The government report that was laid out as a basis for the decision to join NATO also highlighted the increased influence that would come with a membership, as well as the importance of maintaining international law and democratic values. As part of the alliance, Sweden would be able to assert Swedish values and interest internationally, for instance, by pursuing questions regarding human rights, gender equality and environmental changes. As such, NATO membership would open up for a new arena of influence (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2022:39). Something that could also be interpreted as a reflection of Sweden’s tradition of her self-appointed role as the conscience of the world (Ruffa, 2013:344).

Sweden has also for many decades driven a policy characterised by participating internationally and creating bilateral and multilateral defence agreements with other states, especially with neighbours in order to increase the prospects of receiving support in times of crisis and as an instrument of gaining political influence in the international arena. Hence, instead of interpreting the decision to join NATO as a shift in the Swedish security and defence policy this paper argues that it demonstrated a sign of continuation in her policy as she simply followed her typical behaviour. As claimed by Dahl, “a decision to join NATO would represent a continuation of the present activist policy” and “not a break with traditions” (2002:150).

By joining NATO Finland would enhance her own security. The most important aspect of the membership of the alliance is that Finland would be covered by the principle of collective defence. Further, having a strong national defence in combination with NATO membership is perceived as a credible solution to the changes in Finland’s near environment. Also, with Sweden being a member of the alliance, the security in the Baltic Sea region would be increased.

The significance of collective defence has become especially evident in the light of the Russian aggression towards Ukraine, as it reminded Finland of what her unreliable neighbour is capable of. By David Arter, it is argued that the Russian invasion created a “psychosis of fear” among the Finnish people, as it reminded them of the historical experiences during the Winter War and the Finlandization years during the Cold War. It evidently created the fear of renewed Finlandization as the Finns were afraid of history to repeat itself (2023:172). This could also be demonstrated in the drastic shift in public opinion among the Finns. In the beginning of 2022 before the Russian invasion only 28 per cent were in favour of NATO membership. In March however 62 per cent of the Finns supported a membership and in May when Finland officially applied for a membership, 76 per cent of the Finns supported it (Forsberg, 2023:89-90). For many Finns joining NATO was perceived as a statement against Russia and President Putin in his attempt of exerting his influence in Europe. The analogies of the Winter War against Soviet were inherent (ibid, 91). From this perspective, joining NATO is potentially not perceived as a radical shift in the Finnish security and defence policy, since trying to navigate the threat of Russia is nothing new in her strategic behaviour. Finland has always had to take into consideration the potential threat of Russia in her security and defence policy, hence striving for stable relations with the Kremlin. This has pervaded the Finnish strategic culture and strategic behaviour for more than a century, something that further could be demonstrated by the remarkable speed and consensus the decision to join NATO was made in among the Finnish decision-makers. As mentioned before, a NATO membership was unanimously supported in the parliament with only a couple of individuals opposing a membership (Arter, 2023:183-184).

Another dimension of Finland’s decision to join NATO is her continued focus on maintaining a credible national defence, which is of no surprise given her history of having to defend herself with limited external support, resulting in the deep-rooted core tasks of the armed forces. As emphasized in both of the government reports that were released prior to the decision to join NATO, Finland should still focus on maintaining a strong and credible national defence capability even if she becomes a part of NATO. Demonstrating the continued influence of the strategic culture in prioritising territorial defence, for instance, general conscription would still be a core part of the national defence planning. Emphasis was given to the potential effects of the combination of a having strong national defence together with the support from the alliances. Subsequently, this would increase the deterrence effect of Finland drastically, which is in line with her main goal in having a strong defence capability, i.e., “deter the use of force or threats of using military force” (Finnish Government, 2022a:15; Nokkala, 2022:64). NATO

membership should thus be interpreted as a complement in Finland's security and defence planning, rather than being treated as the only component of her defence policy.

Once again this is nothing new in Finnish security and defence policy, as Finland has moved closer and closer to NATO in the post-Cold War era as a way of not becoming marginalised in the international community but also by increasing the chances of receiving assistance in times of crisis. For instance, Finland has participated in several NATO-led operations and are taking part of NATO-led exercises explicitly focused on collective defence on an annually basis (Salonius-Pasternak 2019:121). Moreover, in 2014 Finland together with Sweden became Enhanced Opportunities Partners, meaning that their relations with NATO deepened further. All in all, Finland has despite not being a formal member of NATO been an active contributor and security provider to the alliance and earned the title of NATO's "gold card holders" (Dahl, 2018:132). Thus, one could argue that the decision to join NATO did not demonstrate such a drastic shift in Finland's policy, but rather represented a continuation of her strategic behaviour since the end of the Cold War.

Despite the eagerness to join, the NATO membership will come with obligations that has the potential to become controversial and uncomfortable for Finland, and for Sweden for that matter. Consider their stance on the willingness to the use of force, in which both countries, although Finland to a greater extent than Sweden, prefer to use it only for humanitarian or self-defence purposes. With the NATO membership comes the solidarity commitment to collective defence, which binds the member states to support each other if another member is attacked. However, it is up to each member to decide what type of support is considered appropriate and necessary, i.e., it does not have to entail military support (NATO, 2023). Still, this could be a source of controversy among the Finnish people as the strategic culture of prioritising the defence forces to stay within the national borders together with her self-appointed role as a physician rather than a judge are so deeply enshrined within the Finnish population. For instance, the NATO air strikes during the Kosovo War caused a dilemma for the Finnish decision-makers, as they were reluctant to the use of military force to solve the war while simultaneously wanting to contribute to the upholding of an international order (Forsberg, 2000:41-42). This was also evident among the Finnish population who had a hard time accepting the NATO-bombings (Arter, 2023:181). From this perspective the decision to join NATO could be perceived as a change of policy and a shift in her strategic behaviour. However, the perception in Finland after the Kosovo War was that the bombings were seen as wrong and regrettable but that they were believed to be

something that had to be done to protect the people of Kosovo. Interestingly though, Finland would later on play a key role in the peace negotiations with former President Martti Ahtisaari at the helm, giving Finland another opportunity to reinforce her image as a peace-loving and mediating country (Forsberg, 2000:43). The public support for NATO-membership however would distinctly decline (ibid, 48).

Moreover, what similarities and differences between the countries' respective strategic culture can be recognized, and did they influence each other's decision to join NATO? The bond between the two countries is often referred to as a type of siblinghood. Their strategic cultures share elements of emphasising peace, democracy and standing up for human rights, as well as contributing to the international community. They also share similarities in recognising that they are small states that are dependent on outside assistance if one were to be attacked. Hence, participation in international operations is perceived as an instrument in contributing to the burden-sharing and increasing the prospects of receiving assistance in the future. Further, both nations prefer to use political instrument than military ones to solve disputes. Nevertheless, one should not mistake them for being too similar or one and the same. As argued by former President Tarja Halonen one should describe them as "sister but not twins" (quoted in Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2001:69). Both nations have different historical experiences which have shaped various cultures and behaviours, such as Finland's emphasis on keeping a credible national defence while Sweden downsized her national defence at several occasion in the post-Cold War era. While Finland also downsized her national defence a bit, it never reached the same extent as Sweden.

Another example is Finland's significance on using military force for self-defence or humanitarian purposes only whilst Sweden rather emphasises her role or contribution to the situation instead of the instrument used. Further, Sweden has taken on a more activist role internationally while Finland chose a somewhat more modest position. Although both nations have chosen to contribute to the international community it has been for different reasons. Sweden has participated due to self-imposed moral obligations while Finland has partaken due to realist purposes of serving her national interest. However, Sweden's role as a moral superpower could also be argued to be driven out of realist thinking rather than from altruism, as it has given her the possibility of showcasing herself as a credible partner internationally, and by so, increased the prospects of receiving support in the future.

Regardless of their differences, or similarities for that matter, the question remains if they could have moved into NATO without each other. At the nations' joint press conference in April last year, prime minister Marin stated that Finland and Sweden "are dependent on each other when it comes to security"⁵ and that she would "prefer if we made the same decision for the region, but it is up Sweden to decide for themselves"⁶ (Björkman, 2022). Ever since Sweden shifted in favour for an EU-membership overnight in the 1990s, without consulting Finland first, the two nations have carefully been observing and coordinating their security policies (Dahl, 2018:135). Historically, Finland has been the "little brother" needing the older sibling to pave the way. But in the post-Cold War era Finland has proven itself as an equal (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2001:71), something that became even more evident as Finland was the driving force behind the NATO membership. Suddenly, Sweden found itself in the backseat of the NATO process with Finland at the wheel, as demonstrated by the then Swedish foreign minister Ann Linde when she said "Damn Finland, now we might have to join as well"⁷ (Strömberg & Nilsson, 2022). Finland's eagerness to join NATO could be understood by her geopolitical position, but was it an option for Sweden to let Finland join NATO alone? According to defence minister Hultqvist, Sweden only had one option if Finland were to join NATO, namely to do so as well. Being the only state in Northern Europe outside of NATO would leave Sweden in a very exposed position and without any influence (Westberg, 2023:259). In contrast, only a minor part of the Finnish population responded that Sweden's willingness to join NATO influenced their willingness to join the alliance (Forsberg, 2023:90).

8. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to provide the reader with a greater understanding of Finland and Sweden's decision to join NATO through the concept of strategic culture, by demonstrating that Sweden and Finland's strategic cultures and strategic behaviours are shaped by their unique historical experiences. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that decision to join NATO was in line with the nations' typical strategic behaviour, hence the decisions did not represent a change in policy as this paper initially thought, but rather constituted a continuation of their strategic behaviour in the post-Cold War era.

⁵ This author's translation.

⁶ This author's translation.

⁷ This author's translation.

Finland and Sweden have for decades designed their defence and foreign policies to be dependent on international assistance, for instance, through bilateral and multilateral agreement with the US, the UK and neighbouring countries. In addition, both nations have developed such a close relationship with NATO that they are referred to as *partners number one* or *NATO's gold card holders*, along with including an extensive part of their national defence planning, more so in Sweden than in Finland, to participate in and contribute to the international community. Given that Finland and Sweden have followed their typical strategic behaviour, NATO membership could be perceived to come not as such of a surprise. Moreover, it demonstrates how strategic culture as a concept has the ability to provide a more comprehensive understanding of security and defence matters.

Further, as the decision to join NATO did not demonstrate a shift in their strategic behaviour, the two nations historical strategic behaviour and decisions would still be considered relevant for related future decisions. In contrast, had the NATO membership been concluded to represent a shift in strategic culture, the relevance of historical strategic culture to understand future decisions could be questioned. At last, the ambition of this paper was to analyse the decision to join NATO from a broader perspective by looking at the nation's strategic culture and behaviour, to provide the reader with a general account and to open up for further ideas and thoughts. However, further research is needed to dig deeper into more aspects of Finland and Sweden's history, strategic culture and strategic behaviour in order to gain more insights into their decision to join NATO.

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