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## Reflections on the Finnish Nato Report

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The Finnish election campaign in the spring of 2014 touched with new vigour on Nato, and prompted the new centre-right Government to commission a report by an independent expert group. That group was composed of two Finns, a Frenchman and a Swede. Its task was to explore what might happen if Finland joined Nato. This was not the first Finnish Nato report, but the environment had changed considerably. Our mandate was very general and we had a tight schedule, only three months! We visited several capitals and invited e.g. three representatives from the Baltic States for a dinner to Helsinki: Sven Mikser from Estonia Andris Piebalgs from Latvia and Andrius Kubilius from Lithuania.

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Let me try to look at the crucial issues surrounding Finland's security and its place in the world.

I will first talk about geopolitics, then consider the alleged interdependence of Finland and Sweden. I will end with a look at Finland's evolving relationship with Nato.

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There is a clear context for the work of the Finnish report presented end April 2016. It did not take place in a vacuum. The debate in Finland reflected the heightened tensions in the Baltic Sea area due to the war in Ukraine. Also, a similar debate was taking place in Sweden. Sweden's previous centre-right Government, which was replaced by the social democrats, had commissioned in 2012 a study. A new study of Sweden's security policy was commissioned by the social democrat Government. That report was submitted in September.

The focus of the Finnish report was the concept of a common strategic area shared by Finland and Sweden. In doing so it challenged findings of the first Swedish report, which characterized Finland's position as peripheral in the changing geopolitical setting of the Baltic Sea area.

The first Swedish report emphasized that possible military threats would be focused far from Finnish shores in the southern Baltic Sea. It also implied that Finland, unlike Sweden, could not afford to join Nato because of its physical proximity and relationship with Russia. In the follow-up to the report, the author assured the Finns that even if Sweden joined Nato, Sweden would be ready to continue bilateral military cooperation with a non-Nato Finland.

A closer look at the geopolitics of the Baltic Sea provides a more nuanced view. The most salient fact is that no separate southern Baltic Sea theatre of war exists. Any development in the Baltic Sea area impacts Russia's northern capital St. Petersburg. And the security of St. Petersburg cannot be separated from its crucial assets on the Murmansk coast.

Thus, deployments in the Baltic Sea automatically raise the issue of missile defence, which leads to *THE* crucial issue of strategic balance. Let me quote the Chairman of the Defense Committee of the Russian Federation Council Viktor Ozerov stating this week that in response to deployment of the US missile defense shield in Europe, Russia will deploy the S-400 air-defense missile system and Iskander-M systems to the Kaliningrad region. I can add that S-400 SAMs have also been deployed in the Leningrad oblast "in the direction of Finland". The analysis of the new Swedish report, which drew on the findings of the Finnish report, is therefore more balanced than the first one.

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The differences in the debate climate play a role as political cultures differ. Partisan lines are more marked in Sweden than in Finland – even when it comes to security policy. There is also a difference in the debate culture. Finns tend to de-dramatize as alarmist tones are not alien in the Swedish discussion. To quote the Moscow correspondent of both Hufvudstadsbladet and Dagens Nyheter, a Finn, Anna-Lena Laurén commenting on Swedish and Finnish reactions to developments in Russia: "The Swedes are more worked-up than worried, as the Finns are more worried than worked-up about Russia." I agree with her and this is why we welcome the Nato decision to reassure the Baltic States. It stabilizes the situation in the Baltic Sea area. A look at the map confirms why it is vital for Finland that the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland is and remains free. -- "*Jää vabaks, Eesti meri, jää vabaks, Eesti pind!*"

In any case, homespun theories play a role in all national debates. An illustrative example was the claim that Sweden would be forced to accept American nuclear weapons on its soil following the signing of a memorandum of understanding with Nato on Host Nation Support. This was hotly discussed in Sweden, yet not even mentioned in Finland.

One crucial difference remains that unlike Finland and Norway, Sweden has no bilateral agenda of any significance with Russia. This is partly explained by geography. For Finland, maintaining a dialogue with the Kremlin is vital and reflects Finland's post-war experience.

The claim of interdependence meaning that all decisions by Finland or Sweden impact the other country is crucial. Though recognized as such, automatism is denied in both countries. Finland and Sweden are not twins. While claiming that Finland at the end of the day would not be able to join, proponents of Swedish Nato membership worry and hasten to deny any Finnish veto power over Sweden's right to join the Alliance.

This is whistling in the wind. Security policy decisions *are* based on national interest, but the claim that security policy decisions by Finland or Sweden do not affect the other's security is absurd.

At the same time, the relationships of Sweden and Finland with Nato have changed fundamentally. Joining Nato's Partnership for Peace and making full use of the tool kits it has offered to develop interoperability and participating in operations both in Kosovo and Afghanistan have *peu à peu* resulted in the full compatibility of Finnish and Swedish armed forces with Nato. But again, the claim that joining Nato would be a mere technicality is just silly.

Parallel with deepened Nato cooperation Finland and Sweden have engaged in military cooperation aiming at, in words of Swedish PM Stefan Löfven, "operative cooperation beyond peacetime." This is historic and unprecedented. There is no denying that an increase in strategic depth would greatly benefit Finland. On the other hand, Sweden's interest in pursuing cooperation reveals a deep interest in rebuilding the Swedish armed forces after having abolished territorial defence and suspended conscription.

This remains the forte of Finnish defence and the basis of its strategy of denial of access. Territorial defence based on a mobilization system of trained reserves creates an ability to receive aid and increases the value of Finland as a partner.

Sweden can still rely on its diverse defence industry, powerful air force, a navy equipped with top submarines and its world-class intelligence capabilities. The Finnish weaknesses remain materiel and the lead time in raising readiness.

Both countries have intensified their cooperation with the United States. This relationship is long standing in Sweden's case. During the Cold War, for example, Sweden secretly enjoyed American security guarantees. For Finland, these ties are more recent. Opting for F-18 Hornet fighter jets in the early 1990s was an important step.

Both Sweden and Finland have recently signed statements of intent concerning military-technical cooperation with Washington.

The most important argument in the Nato debate in both countries centres on the issue of whether Nato membership solves the security dilemma posed by Russia. Leaving aside for a moment the outcome of the American presidential election, and the possible repercussions for Nato, the straightforward answer would be affirmative.

Of course, Article 5 guarantees would make a difference. The counter-argument remains that membership would create more problems than it would solve. In the present circumstances it might precipitate a severe crisis in relations with Russia.

The very simple conclusion therefore remains that Finland *cannot* solve the security dilemma posed by its unpredictable neighbour. It can only work to *manage* it. This conclusion is reflected in the Government position that Finland reserves the right to consider applying for Nato membership.

Unsolicited advice to hurry up before it's too late misses the point that a dilemma is a problem that cannot be solved. To quote Bismarck, one should not commit suicide because being afraid to die. +++