



BULLETIN

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Finland Gets a Foot in NATO's Door

Wojciech Lorenz

Finland's new prime minister Alexander Stubb wants his country to join NATO. Such a prospect still seems distant due to negative Finnish public opinion and blatant threats from Russia. Nevertheless, Finland can move cooperation with NATO to a new level, which will allow it to join the alliance quickly and have in place the technical abilities to receive substantial military support, when threatened with the aggression.

Jyrki Katainen, who quit as Finland's prime minister, was replaced by Alexander Stubb, a former foreign minister and minister of European affairs and foreign trade, who is known as a staunch supporter of Finland's accession to NATO. Since the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, Stubb has advocated for a national debate on NATO membership, and after Russia annexed Crimea he stressed that joining NATO should be possible in the next parliamentary term (2015–2020). Finland has already achieved one of the highest levels of interoperability among NATO partners. In April 2014 it decided to further deepen the cooperation with NATO by signing the agreement, which will better prepare Finland for receiving military assistance. However, recent opinion polls indicate that 59% of Finns are against joining NATO, while only 22% would support it. The very suggestion of Finnish membership also triggers a furious reaction from Russia. In June, Nikolai Makarov, the commander of the Russian armed forces, warned that Finland's cooperation with NATO would be a threat to Russia. Siergiej Markov, personal envoy to Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, followed this with the suggestion that Finland's accession could provoke a third world war.

The Finnish Security Environment. Finland, with a population of 5.5 million, and one of the lowest population densities in Europe, shares a 1,340-kilometre border with Russia. It gained independence from Russia in 1917, and, during the Cold War, was neutral, which gave Russia *de facto* influence on Finnish foreign policy (Finlandisation). After the collapse of the Soviet Union Finland joined EU, but decided to keep out of military alliances.

Nevertheless, Russia does not exclude that, in a broader confrontation with the West, Finland would also constitute a threat. In 2009, Russia and Belarus conducted military exercises Ladoga, which apparently included the scenario of a pre-emptive attack against Finland to block it from rendering help to Estonia in the event of a conflict between Russia and NATO. In 2010, Russia formed the Western Military District by consolidating the Leningrad and Moscow Districts, which resulted in the shift of major forces and commands from Central Europe to the north-west, in the vicinity of the Finnish border. Consequently, new military units have been deployed in Kaliningrad Oblast, the St. Petersburg area and on the Kola peninsula, which hosts the headquarters of the Russian Baltic Fleet. The presence of Iskander-M tactical ballistic missiles close to St. Petersburg is potentially dangerous for Finland, as the missiles can carry a payload of nuclear warheads of five to 50 kilotons and can reach the greater part of Finnish territory. Deployment of S400 anti-aircraft systems in Kaliningrad, which can block aerial operations in the Baltic Sea region, also have a negative influence on Finland's security.

Finland Closer to NATO. Finnish Security and Defence Policy, published in 2012, states that Finland does not belong to any military alliance, but cooperates closely with NATO and reserves itself right to join the alliance. However, it is not going to seek membership during this term of the parliament, which ends in 2015. Being outside NATO and its Article 5 guarantees, Finland tries to strengthen its security through its membership of the EU, and by promoting the credibility of European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Additionally, it develops cooperation with Nordic partners (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) in the NORDEF framework, which focuses operationally on air force, navy and artillery exercises, and the exchange of information, in order to better control airspace and sea routes. On 5 April 2011, the Nordic States signed the Nordic Declaration of

Solidarity, which is a political declaration that countries will help each other during peacetime when faced with serious crisis.

Finnish defence policy is primarily based on the credibility of its territorial defence, which is supported by 500 tanks (including 400 in storage), 750 pieces of artillery (including 100 self-propelled guns) and 600 mortars. Sixty-three F18 Hornet multipurpose combat aircraft help control airspace, while eight missile boats, three minelayers and 13 minesweepers watch over sea routes. During peacetime, the Finnish military has 30,000 personnel at its disposal, whereas during war it is able to mobilise an additional 200,000 reservists. For the last 10 years, defence expenditures amounted on average to 1.4% GDP. In 2014 it fell to 1.36% (\$2.7 billion, which was \$120 million less than a year earlier). Finnish politicians gave assurances that cuts in defence spending would not affect the credibility of territorial defence, which will be maintained by better training, arms and equipment for the armed forces, as well as investments limiting the ability of a surprise attack and the possibility of a potential aggressor dominating Finnish air space.

Finland has already made some decisions to improve its defence and deterrence capabilities. Domestically made and Russian air defence systems and radars were replaced with new equipment, which offers interoperability with Western partners. Finland is the first country in Europe to have been granted permission by the U.S. to buy stand-off cruise missiles (AGM 158 JASSM) for its F18 aircraft fleet. Plans also include modernising 22 M270 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS) and equipping them with the longer range missiles.

During the last decade, Finland used the membership Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme to achieve one of the highest levels of interoperability among NATO partners. Finnish troops joined the NATO Response Force (NRF), a 13,000-strong, quickly deployable unit. F18 combat planes were certified to perform the most demanding coalition operations, which enabled Finland to join the air patrol mission over Iceland, a Nordic NATO country without its own armed forces. In 2013, Finland participated in NATO's Steadfast Jazz exercise, which included territorial defence scenarios. It also develops cyber defence capabilities, in cooperation with NATO.

However, the biggest shift in Finnish cooperation with NATO was triggered by the Russian annexation of Crimea. On 22 April, Finland decided to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with NATO, which opens way for the country to receive military assistance from western partners. According to the agreement, Finland will develop infrastructure necessary to host aircraft and ships. It will also enable deepening interoperability beyond the current PfP programme. The majority of major Finnish political parties have also declared an increase in defence spending after the next parliamentary elections, which will take place in April 2015. Additionally, Finland decided to strengthen defence cooperation with Sweden, and even suggested that both countries could sign a defence treaty.

Credible Ability for Accession. It is unlikely that Finland will seek full NATO membership unless directly threatened by Russia. Finnish accession would make the NATO–Russian border twice as long as it is today, and would probably trigger the accession of Sweden, which would be perceived by Russia as a shift in the balance of power and a direct threat to Russian interests. In such situation, Russia could resort to the use of force to try to undermine the territorial integrity of NATO countries and the credibility of the alliance.

At the same time, Russia's increasing readiness to use force, its growing military potential, ability to conduct a surprise-attack, and blatant threats toward Finland, will encourage Finnish authorities to look for some credible security guarantees. To this end, Finland should develop full political and technical ability for quick accession to NATO in the event of a direct threat. Although formally joining NATO can be approved by parliament, with a two-thirds majority, Finnish leaders should initiate a national debate on membership in an attempt to change the negative attitude of Finnish society towards accession. An information campaign would be also helpful if politicians decide to seek membership in an emergency situation, without a referendum. It will be equally important to gain the political support of NATO's members, which will have to approve Finland's membership in their parliaments. This is especially true in the case of those nations that demonstrate a growing tendency to block decisions that might provoke a negative response from Russia. To demonstrate that such unified support is possible, NATO should, at the September summit in Wales, restate that the door for Finland (and Sweden) remains open.