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How Sweden and Finland contribute to the development of NATO's arctic capabilities

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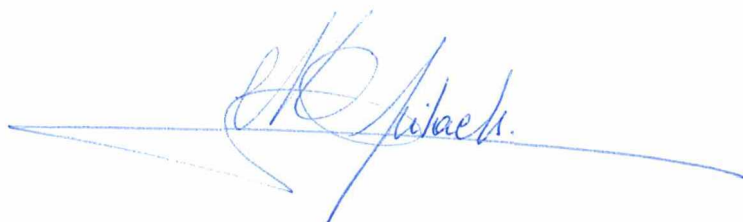


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1. Introduction

“We live in uncertain times. Armed conflicts are currently being waged in our corner of the world. Terrorism, cyber-attacks, and disinformation campaigns are being used to undermine and influence us. To resist these threats, we must stand united.”¹ These words open *In Case of Crisis or War*, an illustrated guide published by the Swedish government and distributed to all households in Sweden in November 2024. That same month, the Finnish Ministry of the Interior updated its guide on preparedness for incidents and crises². Both publications offer a wide range of recommendations to citizens on civil defence shelters, digital security, radiation hazards, and disruptions to payment systems — issued against a backdrop of heightened security tensions across Europe. Sweden and Finland are thus counting on the resilience and preparedness of their populations as a first line of defence against the threats the continent faces.

Yet civil preparedness alone does not capture the full scope of both countries' strategic response. In a more decisive break with the past, Sweden and Finland have abandoned their long-standing traditions of neutrality by joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 proved to be the decisive catalyst: on 18 May 2022 — fewer than four months after the outbreak of the war — both countries simultaneously submitted their membership applications. Following a lengthy and diplomatically sensitive accession process, Finland formally joined the Alliance on 4 April 2023, while Sweden completed its accession on 7 March 2024³. Both Nordic nations now benefit from enhanced deterrence capabilities and are covered by the collective defence principle enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Their membership, however, is not merely advantageous for them: it also injects renewed momentum into the Alliance itself, fundamentally reshaping NATO's strategic posture in the Arctic.

The Arctic has become an arena of great-power competition, coveted for the vast resources of its ocean floor and for the new maritime routes made increasingly accessible by climate change. NATO's strategic priorities in the region centre primarily on the Arctic Ocean — where deterrence, maritime security, and nuclear stability converge — but the effective implementation of this strategy depends on access to, and cooperation with, the broader Arctic region, particularly through infrastructure, airpower, and societal resilience. It is precisely in this regard that Sweden

¹ The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), *In Case of Crisis or War* (Karlstad: 2024), <https://rib.msb.se/filer/pdf/30874.pdf>

² “Preparing for incidents and crisis,” Suomi, accessed December 27, 2026, <https://www.suomi.fi/guides/preparedness>

³ Relations with Finland,” NATO, last modified March 28, 2024, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/relations-with-finland>

and Finland's membership proves so strategically significant, providing critical access, bases, and regional stability.

The timeliness and geopolitical importance of this subject make it a compelling object of study. This thesis aims to synthesize the process of Sweden's and Finland's integration into NATO and to assess its impact on the Alliance's capabilities and strategy in the Arctic. The central research question is the following: *to what extent does this dual accession strengthen NATO's capabilities in the Arctic?* The working hypothesis is that the integration of these two countries significantly enhances NATO's strategic and operational credibility in the region, through their military capabilities, their geographical position, and their expertise in northern environments.

Given the recent nature of the topic, this study covers the period from January 2022 to November 2025. It is structured in three parts. The first traces Sweden's and Finland's strategic reorientation and analyses the mutual implications of their NATO membership. The second examines the importance of the Arctic and NATO's evolving strategy in the region. The third and final part addresses the two countries' evolving postures across cyber, space, and conventional military domains — land, sea, and air — and their concrete impact on NATO's operational capabilities.

2. Sweden and Finland's Strategic Reorientation

a. The War in Ukraine as a Strategic Catalyst

Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sent shockwaves across Europe unlike anything seen since the end of the Second World War. In response, many countries — particularly through European institutions — moved swiftly to adopt new sanctions or reinforce those already in place since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, encompassing economic and diplomatic measures as well as targeted restrictions against individuals.⁴ As members of the European Union, Finland and Sweden have therefore actively participated in the development of these sanctions and are also applying them. Beyond sanctions, the particularly sensitive security context has also encouraged most countries to review their defence policies and defence budgets have also increased substantially. Within the European Union, total defence spending rose from €234 billions in 2020 to €381 billions in 2025, representing an increase of 62.8% over five years.⁵ This trend is also evident in Northern Europe. This increase in defence spending in both countries responds not only to the security requirements arising from the current international context, but also to NATO's objective for its member states to allocate 2% of their GDP to defence annually by 2025.⁶ Indeed, in 2022, Sweden and Finland ended their long-standing tradition of non-alignment by officially applying for NATO membership.

Sweden's principle of neutrality, established in 1810 under the impetus of Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, was grounded in pragmatic reasoning.⁷ As former Swedish ambassador to Paris Ragnar Kumlin explained, *"the Swedish government, all democratic parties in Parliament, and undoubtedly the vast majority of voters believed that a country like Sweden lacked the resources to exert any real influence on the military situation beyond*

⁴ "EU sanctions against Russia," European Council, last modified December 18, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/policies/sanctions-against-russia/>

⁵ "EU defence in numbers," European Council, last modified December 4, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/policies/defence-numbers/>

⁶ "Defence expenditures and NATO's 5% commitment," NATO, last modified December 18, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment>

⁷ Franck Favier, "Le parcours extraordinaire de Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, soldat français devenu roi de Suède et de Norvège," *Revue d'histoire nordique* 2, no. 21 (2015): p.205, <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-d-histoire-nordique-2015-2-page-205?lang=fr>

its own territory. It could not assume responsibilities outside its borders. [...] They also believed that world peace would not benefit from an increase in points of friction between the two great blocs, East and West. Instead, it was considered more advantageous for these blocs to be separated in Northern Europe by a neutral zone. (Translated from French)⁸

Finland's policy of neutrality dates to the end of World War II. As the leader of a country sharing a 1,340-kilometer border with the Soviet Union, President Juho Paasikivi declined the Marshall Plan proposed by the Americans to preserve his relations with Moscow. To avoid being drawn into the Eastern Bloc, Finland also signed an Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with Russia in 1948. A few years later, in 1961, the country joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), thereby increasing trade with Western Europe, until it joined the European Union in 1995. This active neutrality, known as “Finlandization,” contributed greatly to the country's prosperity.⁹

Given this tradition, membership of an alliance such as NATO was long considered out of the question for both countries. Yet institutional cooperation with the Alliance was not without precedent. Both Sweden and Finland joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994, which enabled them to define their own bilateral engagement priorities with the Alliance.¹⁰ In 1997, both countries further deepened their ties by joining the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, a multilateral forum bringing together all NATO Allies and partner countries in the Euro-Atlantic area.¹¹ The two countries have also supported the Alliance in operations and missions conducted under its auspices in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq, to the point of becoming “Enhanced Opportunity Partners,” i.e., partner countries that contribute significantly to the Alliance's missions and objectives.¹²

However, the events of February 2022 and subsequent developments reshuffled the cards. Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and since the beginning

⁸ Ragnar Kumlin, “La politique de non-alliance, fondement de la diplomatie suédoise,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (1961): 4,

<https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1961/03/KUMLIN/24129>

⁹ Émilie Aubry, host, *Le Dessous des Cartes*, “Finlande-Russie : la fin de la neutralité,” ARTE, April 1, 2023, 13 min., <https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/108458-023-A/le-dessous-des-cartes/>

¹⁰ “Relations with Sweden,” NATO, last modified March 28, 2024, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/relations-with-sweden>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

of August 2023, more than 1,300 third-country nationals have arrived in Finland from Russia without visas. According to the Finnish authorities, it was clear that foreign authorities or other actors were facilitating instrumentalized migration, thereby profoundly altering the regional security context.¹³ In a statement published by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish government declared that “Russia’s actions have caused the security situation in Sweden’s immediate neighbourhood and the rest of Europe to deteriorate fundamentally compared with the assessment contained in Total Defence 2021–2025. This requires Sweden to strengthen its defence capabilities and to deepen existing defence and security cooperation. Sweden needs to review how the country’s security can be strengthened, including by taking a position on a Swedish NATO membership.¹⁴” On 12 May 2022, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö and Prime Minister Sanna Marin jointly declared that « NATO membership would strengthen Finland’s security. As a member of NATO, Finland would strengthen the entire defence alliance. Finland must apply for NATO membership without delay.¹⁵”

So, in 2022, following Russia's attack on Ukraine, Sweden and Finland took the next step by applying for official membership of the Alliance. The two governments were also bolstered by a striking shift in domestic public opinion. A survey conducted by the University of Gothenburg revealed a significant shift in Swedish public opinion between 2021 and 2022 regarding the country's membership in NATO. The proportion of Swedes in favour of this option increased from less than 40% to 64% within the space of a single year.¹⁶ The perception of Finns has also evolved positively in recent years, from 19% in favour of their country's integration to 53% in 2022.¹⁷ On 18 May 2022, Sweden and Finland consequently submitted their applications for membership in NATO. Following

¹³ “Situation at Finland’s eastern border,” Finnish Government, accessed on March 24, 2026, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/situation-at-finlands-eastern-border>

¹⁴ “Deterioration of the Security Environment – Implications for Sweden,” Government Office of Sweden - Ministry for Foreign Affairs, published in August 2022, <https://www.government.se/contentassets/05ffb51ba6404a459d7ee45c98e87a83/deterioration-of-the-security-environment---implications-for-sweden-ds-20228/>

¹⁵ “Joint statement by the President of the Republic and Prime Minister of Finland on Finland’s NATO membership,” President of the Republic of Finland, press release 30/2022, published May 12, 2022, <https://www.presidentti.fi/niinisto/en/press-release/joint-statement-by-the-president-of-the-republic-and-prime-minister-of-finland-on-finlands-nato-membership/index.html>

¹⁶ Daniel Jansson and Ulrika Lundin, “Opinion on NATO: Record shift between 2021 and 2022,” University of Gothenburg, last modified June 14, 2024, <https://www.gu.se/en/news/opinion-on-nato-record-shift-between-2021-and-2022>

¹⁷ “Should Finland join NATO?,” Statista, published November 28, 2025, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293557/opinion-development-on-joining-nato-finland/>

the Madrid Summit, on 4 July 2022, NATO Allies signed the Accession Protocols, granting both countries invitee status. Less than a year later, on 4 April 2023, Finland became a full member of the Alliance.¹⁸ Sweden had to wait until March 7, 2024, due to reservations expressed by Hungary and Turkey, which finally gave the green light for its accession.¹⁹

By joining NATO, Sweden and Finland ensure their protection in the face of an increasingly unstable strategic environment, following a logic of securitization and vulnerability reduction. This integration echoes the *shelter theory* developed by Professor Baldur Thorhallsson, according to which « small states/entities seek political, economic, and societal shelter. These forms of shelter are provided by large states and international organizations to reduce the risk that crises occur at all, ensure that they will receive assistance during crisis events, and to guarantee that powerful states and international organizations provide assistance to them during their recovery from a crisis situation.²⁰»

b. Institutional Adjustments and Strategic Implications

The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO has triggered profound transformations in both countries across multiple dimensions. This section examines the scope and nature of these changes by analysing their implications at four levels: political/doctrinal, budgetary and strategic/military.

- **Political/Doctrinal Adaptations**

As mentioned above, this accession marks a historic break with the policy of non-alignment pursued by these countries for several decades and long considered central to their national identity. Sweden's security posture has undergone a profound transformation over the past two decades. The first seeds of change were sown in 2009, when Parliament quietly adopted a unilateral declaration of solidarity, stipulating that Sweden *"will not remain passive if another EU Member State or Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack,"* and that it should *"be in a position to both give and receive military*

¹⁸ NATO, "Relations with Finland."

¹⁹ Stuart Lau and Leyla Aksu, "Turkey approves Sweden's NATO bid, leaving Orbán as final holdout," *Politico*, published January 23, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-approves-swedens-nato-bid/>

²⁰ Baldur Thorhallsson and Sverrir Steinsson, "The Theory of Shelter," Samell States and the Security Environment, Policy brief no. 1, published June 26, 2018, <https://uni.hi.is/baldurt/files/2018/07/The-Theory-of-Shelter3909.pdf>

support.”²¹ Though largely unnoticed at the time, this declaration laid the normative groundwork for what would later be called the Hultqvist doctrine — described by former Defence Minister Hultqvist himself as *“the natural evolution of non-alignment,”* with military non-alignment serving as the *“self-evident foundation for international defence cooperation.”*²²

Yet the doctrine remained largely dormant until 2014, when Russia's annexation of Crimea fundamentally altered Nordic threat perceptions, shifting Russia's status from *“difficult partner”* to genuine security threat.²³ From that point on, Sweden began actively deepening bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation, while formally maintaining its non-aligned status. This trajectory is clearly reflected in the Government Bill on Total Defence 2021–2025, which frames Sweden's security as built collectively with partners, affirming that Sweden must have the military capability to ensure stability and security, while stopping short of any formal alliance commitment.²⁴

This careful balance was shattered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Swedish Defence Commission's security policy report of 2023 marked a decisive turning point, explicitly identifying the deteriorating security environment, and concluding that the existing framework was no longer adequate to guarantee Sweden's security.²⁵ Crucially, the report argued that NATO membership had become not merely an option but a strategic necessity, stating that *“through Sweden's membership, NATO becomes Sweden's most important defence policy arena”* — a formulation that would have been unthinkable under any previous Swedish government.²⁶ Sweden formally acceded to the Alliance in March 2024, representing a historic rupture with two centuries of non-alignment and opening a new doctrinal chapter, fully reflected in the Defence

²¹ Anna Wieslander, “The Hultqvist doctrine” – Swedish security and defence policy after the Russian annexation of Crimea,” *Defence Studies*, 11, no. 1 (2022), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14702436.2021.1955619#d1e135>

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Main elements of the Government bill Total defence 2021–2025,” Embassy of Sweden, published December 2020, <https://www.swedenabroad.se/globalassets/ambassador/nederlanderna-haag/documents/government-bill-totalforsvaret-20212025.pdf>

²⁵ The Defence Commission Secretariat, “The Swedish Defence Commission’s report on security policy, 2023,” Regeringen, published June 19, 2023, <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/de808e940116476d8252160c58b78bb7/sammandrag-pa-engelska-av-allvarstid-ds-202319.pdf>

²⁶ Ibid.

Resolution 2025–2030, which for the first time defines Sweden's defence priorities entirely within the framework of NATO collective defence.²⁷

Finland's doctrinal evolution toward NATO membership can be traced through three successive documents that mark a clear strategic trajectory from partnership to full integration. First, the Government's Defence Report of 2021 represents the last major policy document in which Finland formally positions NATO as a partner rather than an ally. The relationship is framed in purely instrumental terms: Finland "*develops its partnership with NATO from its own premises and interests, and effectively employs the partnership tools and cooperation programmes provided by NATO, to strengthen its national defence capabilities.*"²⁸ Crucially, the report explicitly acknowledges the limits of this arrangement, noting that "*partnership cooperation neither includes any Article 5 based security guarantees nor obligations.*"²⁹ Finland was, in effect, maximizing the benefits of NATO proximity while deliberately stopping short of the commitment that membership entails.

This calculus was fundamentally overturned by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The Report on Finland's Accession to NATO of 15 May 2022 marks the doctrinal break. It argues that membership would substantially strengthen Finland's deterrent posture — were Finland to become the target of military force as a NATO member, it would defend itself with Alliance support "*based on arrangements planned and rehearsed in advance.*"³⁰ The report also acknowledges the reciprocal obligations this entails, including participation in collective exercises and compliance with Alliance budgetary standards, signalling a shift from selective partnership to binding collective defence.³¹

Finland formally acceded to NATO in April 2023 and as a full member, Finland now subscribes to the Allied Joint Publication (AJP-01) — NATO's capstone doctrine, which

²⁷ "Total Defense 2025-2030," Government Offices of Sweden, accessed May 04, 2026, <https://www.government.se/government-policy/total-defence/defence-resolution-2025-20302/>

²⁸ "Government's Defence Report," Finnish Government, published 2021, p.42, <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/a09bd153-e661-45f6-8be7-5f3724253e14/content>

²⁹ Finnish Government, "Government's Defence Report."

³⁰ "Report on Finland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," Finnish Government, published May 15, 2022, p.3,

<https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/0100dd0c-7611-4451-9c80-9e08144f5750/content>

³¹ Finnish Government, "Report on Finland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization."

*“explains the strategic context for operations and focuses on the fundamentals of joint operations and activities.”*³² The AJP-01 also *“provides commanders and their staff with a common framework for understanding the approach to employing the military instrument of power.”*³³ Finland also now participates in shaping the very security policy decisions that govern the Alliance.

Yet, the AJP-01 FI with Finnish National Elements from 2025 is notable for what it preserves as much as for what it adopts. Rather than passively absorbing NATO's conceptual framework, Finland has introduced national elements that reflect its own strategic culture. A telling example is the treatment of hybrid warfare: where NATO uses the term "hybrid influencing," the Finnish Defence Forces employ the concept of *laaja-alainen vaikuttaminen* — "broad-spectrum influencing" — a broader notion in which the use of military force is an inseparable component, unlike in the NATO formulation. This distinction is not merely terminological; it reflects Finland's longstanding doctrine of comprehensive national defence, in which military and civilian instruments of power are conceived as deeply intertwined. The AJP-01 FI thus embodies the central tension of Finland's NATO integration: full doctrinal alignment with the Alliance, achieved without erasing the national strategic identity that makes Finland a distinctive and valuable member of it.³⁴

Moreover, their integration into the Organization enables them to play an active role within its decision-making bodies, notably the North Atlantic Council (NAC), the Alliance's principal political authority, where *“decisions are agreed upon on the basis of unanimity and common accord”*³⁵. As full members, Sweden and Finland enjoy voting rights equal to those of all other Allies, thereby gaining the ability to participate directly in the formulation and adoption of NATO's decisions.

³² NATO, *AJP-01 – Allied Joint Doctrine*, (NATO Standardization Office (NSO), 2022), p. xiii, [https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01_AJP/AJP-01_EDF_V1_E_\(1\)_2437.pdf](https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01_AJP/AJP-01_EDF_V1_E_(1)_2437.pdf)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ The Finnish Defence Forces, *Allied Joint Doctrine with Finnish National elements (AJP 01-FI)*, NATO Standardization Office (NSO), 2025), p. 39, <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/documents/1948673/0/Allied%20Joint%20Doctrine%20AJP-01%20FI.pdf/368e07b7-2615-ed12-8424-d80b6538dfe8/Allied%20Joint%20Doctrine%20AJP-01%20FI.pdf?t=1762439645558>

³⁵ “North Atlantic Council (NAC),” NATO, last modified October 21, 2024, <https://www.nato.int/fr/about-us/organization/nato-structure/north-atlantic-council-nac>

- **Budgetary Adaptations**

Accession to the Alliance does not come without conditions. To meet NATO's requirements, both countries were expected to significantly increase their defence expenditure. At the North Atlantic Council meeting of 5 September 2014, member states agreed to allocate a minimum of 2% of their GDP to defence, with at least 20% of that budget directed towards major equipment and related research and development.³⁶ Sweden and Finland met this objective in 2025 and even stand out as exemplary cases: between 2020 and 2024, Sweden's military spending rose from 1.2% of GDP to 2.4%³⁷ (over €13.5 billion³⁸), while Finland's increased from 1.4% to 2.4%³⁹ (over €6.5 billion⁴⁰). On 25 June 2025, at the Hague Summit, the objective was revised upwards, with the aim of increasing defence spending from 2% to 5% of GDP by 2035.⁴¹

From this perspective, the accession of both countries is also beneficial for the Alliance. Not only do member states strengthen their own national capabilities, but part of this increased budget also contributes to strengthening NATO by *“fostering interoperability across the Alliance. It also funds the operating of selected common-funded capabilities, the integrated command structure, Alliance operations and missions, and to some extent, training and exercises.”*

- **Strategic/Military Adaptations**

By becoming full members of the Organisation, both countries agreed to anchor their security policies within a collective institutional and normative framework governed by the legally binding North Atlantic Treaty. Article 5, which enshrines the core principle of the Alliance, commits each member to consider an armed attack against one Ally as an attack against all, and to take the necessary measures in response. As a result, Sweden's

³⁶ “Wales Summit Declaration,” NATO, published September 5, 2014,

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2014/09/05/wales-summit-declaration>

³⁷ “Military expenditure (% of GDP) - Sweden,” World Bank Group, accessed January 5, 2026,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=SE>

³⁸ “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025),” NATO, 2025,

<https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/finance/def-exp-2025-en.pdf>

³⁹ “Military expenditure (% of GDP) - Finland,” World Bank Group, accessed January 5, 2026,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=FI>

⁴⁰ NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025).”

⁴¹ “The Hague Summit Declaration,” NATO, published June 25, 2025,

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/06/25/the-hague-summit-declaration>

and Finland's national security policies are thus now embedded in a multilateral approach based on strategic solidarity and collective deterrence.⁴²

On the military front, Sweden and Finland, as full members, contribute to Alliance mechanisms such as the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP). This process *“provide a framework within which national and Alliance defence planning activities can be harmonised to enable Allies to provide the required forces and capabilities in the most effective way. It should facilitate the timely identification, development and delivery of the necessary range of forces that are interoperable and adequately prepared, equipped, trained and supported, as well as the associated military and non-military capabilities, to undertake the Alliance’s full spectrum of missions.”*⁴³ This process, which aims to avoid duplication and ensure a coherent strategy, covers 14 areas such as armaments, nuclear deterrence, standardisation and interoperability, civil preparedness consultation and intelligence.⁴⁴

Long before joining NATO, Sweden and Finland already had participated in the Planning and Review Process (PARP), a mechanism designed to assess the progress made by partner countries within the framework of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), particularly in the fields of security and defence. This mechanism also supports partner countries in achieving interoperability with NATO standards and in preparing for potential international operations. The PARP is a voluntary process, but it constitutes a prerequisite for membership in the Alliance.⁴⁵

Both Sweden and Finland are now integrated into the Scandinavian Joint Operations Area, which falls under the responsibility of the Joint Force Command Norfolk (JFC Norfolk), whose primary tasks include securing the strategic sea lines of communication across the Atlantic.⁴⁶ In 2024, both countries participated for the first time as full NATO members in a large-scale exercise, Steadfast Defender 2024. The exercise was designed

⁴² “The North Atlantic Treaty,” NATO, published April 4, 1949, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1949/04/04/the-north-atlantic-treaty>

⁴³ “NATO Defence Planning Process,” NATO, updated April 16, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/nato-defence-planning-process>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Planning and Review Process,” NATO, last modified May 6, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/planning-and-review-process>

⁴⁶ “About us,” JFC Norfolk, accessed April 15, 2025, <https://jfcnorfolk.nato.int/about-us>

to demonstrate NATO's ability to rapidly deploy forces from across the Alliance to reinforce European defence and conduct operations in complex environments, including the High North. As part of this major exercise, Sweden and Finland took part directly in Nordic Response.⁴⁷ Nordic Reponse was an exercise hosted by Norway, Sweden and Finland and focused on collective defence in the Nordic region. Conducted between 3 and 14 March 2024 across northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland — including the surrounding airspace and maritime areas — the exercise involved more than 20,000 soldiers, over 50 naval vessels, and more than 100 aircraft. It featured significant multinational activity across all operational domains, with the overarching aim of strengthening the defence of Nordic territory through joint and integrated operations.⁴⁸

As full NATO members, Finland and Sweden now also participate in BALTOPS, the annual maritime exercise in the Baltic region. Designed to enhance interoperability among Allies and demonstrate collective readiness to defend the Alliance and safeguard freedom of navigation in the Baltic Sea, BALTOPS covers a wide range of capabilities, including amphibious operations, air defence, anti-submarine warfare, mine countermeasures, and medical support. Having previously taken part as partner nations in BALTOPS 22, both countries have since participated as full members, reflecting their continued and deepening integration into NATO's operational framework.⁴⁹

As the Alliance's overall force strength grows with the integration of Finland and Sweden, it also benefits from the expertise of senior officers joining NATO's command structures. On the Finnish side, General Jarkko Karsikas was appointed in July 2024 as Chief of Staff of NATO's Communications & Information Systems Group at SHAPE in Mons, Belgium — becoming the first Finnish general officer to be appointed to the NATO Command Structure.⁵⁰ Sweden has similarly embedded senior leadership within the Alliance. Brigadier General Anders Svensson, formerly Deputy Chief of the Swedish Army,

⁴⁷ Emelie Moregard, "Steadfast Defender 24: Exercising NATO's evolving strategy for deterrence and defence," FOI, April 2025,

<https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI%20Memo%208860>

⁴⁸ "Allies prepare for collective defence exercise in Nordic environment," NATO, published February 27, 2024, https://ac.nato.int/archive/2024/NordicResponse24_announcement

⁴⁹ "Baltops 25 begins in the Baltic Sea region," Strikfornato, published June 3, 2025,

<https://sfn.nato.int/newsroom/news-archive/2025/baltops-25-begins-in-the-baltic-sea-region>

⁵⁰ Merivoimat – Navy, "Jarkko Karsikas to be appointed as General to the NATO Command Structure," published July 7, 2024,

<https://merivoimat.fi/en/-/1948673/jarkko-karsikas-to-be-appointed-as-general-to-the-nato-command-structure>

assumed the position of National Military Representative at SHAPE in August 2024.⁵¹ At the International Military Staff level, Lieutenant Colonel Karin Malmsten currently serves as NATO's Gender Advisor, where she leads efforts to integrate gender perspectives into military planning, operations and policy — bringing over three decades of operational, strategic and diplomatic experience as a Logistics Officer in the Swedish Army to this role.⁵² Beyond individual appointments, Sweden has taken on a broader institutional responsibility within the Alliance: in late 2025, NATO began planning for Forward Land Forces in Finland, with Sweden serving as the framework nation⁵³ — a concrete illustration of Stockholm's emerging leadership role on NATO's northern flank, and of the depth of the two countries' operational integration within the Alliance's collective defence architecture.

⁵¹ “Brigadier General Anders Svensson to NATO's Headquarters SHAPE,” *Nordic Defence Sector*, published June 17, 2024,

<https://nordicdefencesector.com/en/article/brigadier-general-anders-svensson-to-natos-headquarters-shape>

⁵² “Lieutenant Colonel Karin Malmsten,” NATO, accessed May 7, 2026,

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/organization/who-we-are/international-military-staff/gender-advisor>

⁵³ Science and Technology Committee (STC), “Renavigating the Unfrozen Arctic”, (12 October 2025), p.11,

https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2025-10/022%20STC%2025%20E%20rev.3%20fin%20-%20ARCTIC%20-%20FRIDBERTSSON%20REPORT_0.pdf

3. Arctic stakes and NATO's strategy in the region

a. Arctic Stakes

In the final years of the Cold War, the Arctic was primarily a space of cooperation and research. In 1984, the United States adopted the Arctic Research and Policy Act, which set out the country's national Arctic policy with an emphasis on scientific research and environmental protection.⁵⁴ Three years later, in his landmark Murmansk speech of 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev expressed that *“the Soviet Union (was) in favour of a radical lowering of the level of military confrontation in the region.”* His vision for the Arctic was to turn it into *“a nuclear-free zone in Northern Europe,”* along with *“restricting naval activity.”* The former leader of the USSR called on the great powers to make the North a zone of peace through the establishment of *“peaceful cooperation in developing the resources of the North, the Arctic.”*⁵⁵

In recent years, the Arctic region has become the focus of renewed geostrategic and geopolitical interests, with climate change arguably acting as the primary driving factor. The Arctic is warming faster than any other region in the world due to the phenomenon known as Arctic amplification: sea ice reflects up to 80% of incoming solar radiation yet continues to decline. The darker surface of the ocean expands and absorbs significantly more heat. This warming of ocean waters further accelerates ice melt, creating a self-reinforcing vicious circle.⁵⁶

Yet beyond its ecological dimension, the melting of Arctic ice carries far-reaching geopolitical implications. The region now sits at the intersection of major-power rivalries, driven by two interrelated consequences of ice retreat: the gradual emergence of new maritime shipping routes and the increasing accessibility of vast natural resources that were previously beyond reach.

⁵⁴ “Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984,” Congress, published June 21, 1984, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/98th-congress/senate-bill/373>

⁵⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, “Mikhail Gorbachev: An excerpt from the speech in Murmansk”, in *The North: A Zone of Peace* (Press Office of the USSR Embassy, Ottawa, Canada: 1988); pages. 3-10 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/gorbachev/1987/00001.htm>

⁵⁶ Rebecca Lindsey and Michon Scott, “Climate Change: Arctic Sea Ice Summer Minimum,” Climate, published October 18, 2022, <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-arctic-sea-ice-summer-minimum>

- **New Maritime Shipping Routes**

There are two main routes: the Northwest Passage, along the coasts of Canada, Alaska, and Greenland, and the Northeast Passage, which runs along Russia.⁵⁷ The latter is currently the most widely used of the two for several reasons. Firstly, Russia, keenly aware of the commercial potential of the Northern Sea Route, has made substantial investments in the infrastructure and technologies needed to assert its dominance over the corridor. The port of Murmansk on the Barents Sea serves as a central hub for this strategy.⁵⁸ Of particular significance is Russia's fleet of nuclear-powered icebreakers — a capability it alone possesses among Arctic nations. While considerably more costly to build than their diesel-powered counterparts, nuclear icebreakers offer decisive operational advantages: they are far more powerful and can operate for several years without refuelling, enabling sustained deep-Arctic voyages that conventional vessels cannot undertake.⁵⁹



*Northwest Passage*⁶⁰



*Northeast Passage*⁶¹

⁵⁷ “Northeast Passage / Northern Sea Route (NSR),” Arctic Portal, accessed February 2, 2026, <https://arcticportal.org/shipping-portlet/shipping-routes/northeast-passage>

⁵⁸ “Russie – Mourmansk : capitale arctique et port militaire stratégique,” Centre National d’Études Spatiales, accessed February 2, 2026.

<https://cnes.fr/geoimage/russie-mourmansk-capitale-arctique-port-militaire-strategique>

⁵⁹ Georgy Zerkalov, “The Nuclear-Powered Icebreakers,” Stanford University, published March 12, 2016, <http://large.stanford.edu/courses/2016/ph241/zerkalov2/>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Arctic Portal, “Northeast Passage / Northern Sea Route (NSR).”

The Northwest Passage, which runs through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, presents its own set of navigational and legal complexities. Parts of the Canadian coastline remain difficult to navigate due to the fragmented and shallow nature of the archipelago's waterways, limiting their viability as a reliable commercial route even as ice cover recedes. Beyond these physical constraints, the passage is also the subject of a longstanding legal dispute between Canada and the United States of America.⁶²

- **Natural Resources**

Minerals

Even before turning to marine resources, it is essential to highlight the exceptional richness of the Arctic subsoil. It contains rare-earth elements, such as neodymium and praseodymium, which are crucial for the energy transition. These strategic resources are complemented by reserves of minerals.⁶³

On the American continent, Canada stands out as the world's third-largest producer of rough diamonds, accounting for 13.5% of global output in 2020. Alaska alone holds 12% of the world's coal reserves. In Russia, production is particularly marked by platinum-group metals: the Russian Arctic accounts for 40% of global palladium production and 15% of global platinum extraction. In addition to rare-earth elements, Russia also produces significant quantities of copper, tungsten, and gold. In the European part of the Arctic region, Sweden plays a central role, producing 93% of the European Union's iron ore and approximately one third of its lead and zinc output. Finland, for its part, is the European Union's largest producer of cobalt and its only producer of this strategic metal. Finally, Greenland also possesses a particularly resource-rich subsoil, containing reserves of gold, uranium, and zinc, as well as rare-earth elements such as neodymium and dysprosium. According to some estimates, these reserves alone could account for up to one quarter of future global demand.⁶⁴

⁶² "Northwest Passage," Arctic Portal, accessed February 2, 2026, <https://arcticportal.org/shipping-portlet/shipping-routes/northwest-passage>

⁶³ "Minerals and Mining," Arctic Review, accessed March 2, 2026, <https://arctic.review/economy/minerals-and-mining/>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Fishing

Fishing constitutes one of the main resources of the Arctic region and remains directly accessible to local populations. However, this activity is increasingly affected by climate change. While climate change represents a threat to many species in the region, it also forces others to migrate, particularly certain fishes and crustaceans. To remain within their thermal tolerance range, these species are progressively compelled to move toward the poles.⁶⁵ These migratory movements are likely to affect national catch rates and may generate, or even intensify, tensions among Arctic coastal states. The mackerel dispute — which has periodically set the EU, Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland against one another since 2010 — illustrates how climate-induced shifts in fish distribution can destabilise established quota agreements and fuel tensions among Arctic coastal states.⁶⁶ Beyond this single case, these migratory dynamics more broadly affect the halieutic balance of the Arctic region. Fish stocks are also increasing in the Bering Strait, an area that constitutes a zone of potential tension between Russia and the United States.⁶⁷

Gas and Oil

According to probabilistic models developed in 2008 by the US Geological Survey, the Arctic contains 22% of the world's undiscovered but technically recoverable hydrocarbon reserves (about 30% of natural gas reserves, 20% of liquid gas reserves, and 13% of oil reserves). Although a significant portion of these reserves is located in undisputed areas, some lie offshore and/or in contested zones, leaving open the possibility of interstate tensions.⁶⁸ This is the case for the Lomonosov Ridge, an 1,800 km-long underwater mountain range whose two ends are near Greenland and Siberia.⁶⁹ In this context,

⁶⁵ “Une étude suggère que le homard pourrait s’adapter au réchauffement des océans,” Radio-Canada, published March 23, 2023, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1965495/effet-changements-climatiques-homards-est-pays-capacite-adaptation>

⁶⁶ Jen Evans and Andreas Osthagen, “Fisheries Disputes: The Real Potential for Arctic Conflict,” The Arctic Institute, June 3, 2021, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/fisheries-disputes-real-potential-arctic-conflict/>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ana Penha, “Arctic Oceans’ Petroleum Resources” EBSCO, published in 2024, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/environmental-sciences/arctic-oceans-petroleum-resources>

⁶⁹ Y. Kristoffersen, J.K. Hall and Harris Nilsen, “The Lomonosov Ridge,” GeoScience World, <https://pubs.geoscienceworld.org/gsl/jgs/article/182/2/jgs2024-095/649821/The-Lomonosov-Ridge-central-Arctic-Ocean-the-world>

Russia, as well as Norway and Denmark, have in recent years claimed recognition of this ridge as an extension of their continental shelf.⁷⁰

b. NATO's Strategy in the Arctic and the Impact of Double Integration

The region's resources, together with the emergence of new maritime routes, have turned the Arctic into a new geopolitical stake. Moreover, since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the increasing Russian military presence in the region, the *High North* has become a growing focus of attention for the Alliance, a trend that is increasingly reflected in strategic documents and policy statements. In its 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO referred to the *High North* for the first time in a document of this kind. In its strategy, the Alliance recognizes Russia as *"the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area"* and notes that *"in the High North, its capability to disrupt Allied reinforcements and freedom of navigation across the North Atlantic is a strategic challenge to the Alliance"*.⁷¹

In line with these declarations, Alliance representatives approved a new regional defence plan at the Vilnius Summit in 2023, particularly for the north-western region. This area encompasses the North Atlantic, the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries, and therefore includes the *High North*, under the supervision of the Joint Force Command Norfolk (JFC Norfolk). The regional defence plan includes the creation of a Multi Corps Land Component Command (MCLCC) based in Mikkeli, Finland, as well as the deployment of Swedish-led Forward Land Forces (FLF) in Finland under JFC Norfolk.⁷² Moreover, in September 2025, Russian drones and aircraft violated the airspace of several NATO member states, including Poland and Estonia. In response to these incidents, NATO launched Eastern Sentry, a multi-domain operation involving fighter jets, helicopters, transport aircraft, air defence systems, surveillance aircraft and frigates.⁷³

⁷⁰ Penha, "Arctic Oceans' Petroleum Resources."

⁷¹ Science and Technology Committee (STC), "Renavigating the Unfrozen Arctic", p.10.

⁷² Science and Technology Committee (STC), "Renavigating the Unfrozen Arctic", p.11.

⁷³ "Eastern Sentry," SHAPE, accessed April 14, 2026, <https://shape.nato.int/operations/operations-and-missions/eastern-sentry>

This military activity aims to enhance NATO's vigilance along the entire eastern flank, stretching from the *High North* to the Black Sea.⁷⁴

Regarding the air component, NATO has increased its patrol activities in the *High North* since 2023. Sweden and Finland now participate alongside Iceland in missions aimed at securing the region's airspace.⁷⁵ As for the maritime component, NATO has reinforced its presence in the Arctic region, notably through the deployment of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) during the summer of 2025.⁷⁶ Through the activities of SNMG1, the Alliance has also strengthened its presence in the GIUK Gap, the maritime corridor linking Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom.⁷⁷ Neglected for many years, the GIUK Gap nonetheless represents a critical maritime choke point, as it connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Arctic and links the northern part of the North American continent to Europe. For this reason, it is now regarded as one of NATO's major strategic maritime concerns.⁷⁸ While Sweden's and Finland's direct naval presence in the GIUK Gap remains limited, their geographic position and operational support capabilities, combined with the fact that both countries fall under the command of Joint Force Command Norfolk (JFC Norfolk), significantly enhance NATO's situational awareness and defence posture in the North Atlantic.

Space is increasingly a key domain for both civilian and military activities, supporting essential functions such as communications, navigation, and defence operations. At the same time, it is becoming more congested and contested, with satellites increasingly exposed to interference and counter-space capabilities developed by states such as Russia and China. In this context, NATO serves as a central platform for Allied coordination and information sharing on space-related issues.⁷⁹ Among NATO's flagship space-related initiatives are Starlift and Northlink. The former *“aims to develop a more resilient, responsive and cost-effective network of launch capabilities that will help Allies*

⁷⁴ Science and Technology Committee (STC), “Renavigating the Unfrozen Arctic”, p.11.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “The GIUK Gap's Strategic significance,” International Institute for Strategic Studies, published October 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2019/the-giuk-gaps-strategic-significance/>

⁷⁹ “NATO's approach to space,” NATO, updated July 30, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/natos-approach-to-space>

*launch assets at short notice from space ports across the Alliance.*⁸⁰ The latter focuses specifically on the Arctic region. Launched in October 2024, Northlink involves the participation of 13 NATO member states, including Finland and Sweden. This project seeks to establish “a secure, resilient and reliable Arctic satellite communications capability, leveraging both commercial and government-owned systems to enhance communications in this strategically important region.”⁸¹

⁸⁰NATO, “NATO’s approach to space,”

⁸¹ Ibid.

4. Sweden and Finland's Strategic Contributions to NATO's Arctic Posture

a. Nuclear

Finland and Sweden ratified the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1970, showing their longstanding commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. However, NATO's dual-track approach to nuclear weapons combines nuclear deterrence policy and capabilities on the one hand, with nuclear arms control, disarmament, and efforts to prevent proliferation efforts on the other. The development and implementation of NATO's nuclear policy fall under the responsibility of the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), which acts as a key forum for nuclear consultation involving all Allies except France.⁸² As NATO members, Finland and Sweden now participate in this consultation framework.

Allies may also contribute to conventional capabilities in support of NATO's nuclear mission through the Conventional Support for Nuclear Operations (CSNO) mechanism (formerly known as SNOWCAT). As explained in the section Strategic/military adaptations of this paper, these exercises aim both to improve the effectiveness of NATO's nuclear forces and to send a strong deterrence signal by demonstrating political unity.⁸³ In 2025, Finland and Sweden took part in such war-gaming activities for the first time as NATO members.⁸⁴

Another important component of NATO's nuclear policy is nuclear sharing, under which certain Allies host forward-deployed United States nuclear weapons and provide dual-

⁸² Matti Pesu and Tapio Juntunen, "Finland in a nuclear alliance: Recalibrating the dual-track mindset on deterrence and arms control," Finnish Institute of International Affairs, November 2023, <https://fiia.fi/en/publication/finland-in-a-nuclear-alliance>

⁸³ William Alberque and Artur Kacprzyk, "More Pillars Needed: Ten Options for Europe to Improve NATO's Nuclear Deterrence," Stimson, October 2, 2024, <https://www.stimson.org/2024/more-pillars-needed-nato-nuclear-deterrence/>

⁸⁴ Ian Davis, "Sweden joins NATO's annual nuclear exercise, Steadfast Noon: another body blow to arms control and restraint," NatoWatch, October 15, 2025, https://natowatch.org/default/2025/sweden-joins-natos-annual-nuclear-exercise-steadfast-noon-another-body-blow-arms#:~:text=Sweden%20is%20participating%20in%20the%20exercise%20for,and%20intelligence%20systems%20*%20Roughly%202%2C000%20personnel

capable aircraft (DCA) capable of delivering non-strategic nuclear weapons.⁸⁵ Finland is currently replacing its American-made F/A-18 Hornet aircraft with F-35 fighter jets.⁸⁶ These aircrafts are officially certified to carry nuclear weapons, thereby increasing Finland's potential contribution to NATO's deterrence posture.⁸⁷

Sweden, for its part, adopted the Defence Cooperation Agreement with the United States in 2024, constituting a major step for a country that had ended more than two centuries of military non-alignment upon joining NATO. Signed in December 2023, the agreement grants the United States access to 17 military bases and training areas in Sweden and allows for the storage of weapons, military equipment, and ammunition. Critics have argued that the government chose to sign an agreement that does not explicitly exclude the possible presence of nuclear weapons on Swedish territory.⁸⁸

b. Cyber

The increasing strategic relevance of the Arctic entails significant implications for regional communications infrastructure. Maritime transport in the Arctic, along with the corresponding demand for telecommunications services, has risen in recent years and is expected to continue growing as the shipping season extends due to the ongoing reduction in sea ice. In parallel, the Cross Polar Trans-East Air Traffic Management Providers' Working Group (CPWG) estimates that Arctic overflights will increase by approximately 3.5% annually, further intensifying the need for reliable communication systems.⁸⁹ In this context, telecommunications capacity is essential for conducting search and rescue (SAR) operations in the Arctic. The growth of human activity—both maritime and aeronautical—places additional pressure on SAR capabilities, which in turn increases the demand for strong and resilient communication networks.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Pesu and Juntunen, "Finland in a nuclear alliance: Recalibrating the dual-track mindset on deterrence and arms control."

⁸⁶ "Finland to send jets and officers to NATO nuclear exercise," *Helsinki Times*, October 12, 2025, <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/28089-finland-to-send-jets-and-officers-to-nato-nuclear-exercise.html>

⁸⁷ Michael Marrow, "F-35A officially certified to carry nuclear bomb," *Breaking Defense*, March 8, 2024, <https://breakingdefense.com/2024/03/exclusive-f-35a-officially-certified-to-carry-nuclear-bomb/>

⁸⁸ "Swedish MPs green-light controversial US Defence deal," *Le Monde*, June 19, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/19/swedish-mps-green-light-to-controversial-us-defense-deal_6675128_4.html

⁸⁹ "Telecommunication infrastructure in the Arctic – A circumpolar assessment", The Arctic Council, p.11, <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/08f2791c-5157-48f2-a340-917d1ec3cfd6/content>

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Moreover, improved connectivity in the Arctic enhances conditions for data collection, preservation, and transmission both within the region and between the Arctic and external actors. These developments are likely to stimulate further scientific and research activity, as access to real-time and reliable data becomes easier. As a result, cybersecurity has become a major concern for Arctic states.⁹¹ Moreover, Finland and Sweden are geographically close to Russia. This proximity, combined with the expansion of digital connectivity in the Arctic, simultaneously increases their exposure to cyber risks targeting essential communication and data infrastructures.

Finland has built a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy combining government coordination, national resilience, and international cooperation. Responsibilities are shared across ministries such as Defence, Interior, and Foreign Affairs, as well as specialized agencies like the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency and its National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-FI).⁹² Finland also holds a strong focus on building cybersecurity skills and strengthening societal resilience through academic research, professional training, and public awareness initiatives that prepare both citizens and businesses for cyber threats.⁹³ JYVSECTEC contributes to improving national cyber resilience, alongside four annual cyber exercises involving municipalities, critical infrastructure operators, government agencies, security authorities, and healthcare organizations. These measures intend to improve rapid response capacity and reduce sole dependence on state authorities during cyber incidents.⁹⁴ In addition, Finland actively participates in international frameworks such as the EU, NATO, and the OECD to enhance shared standards and collective security. Overall, its integrated approach strengthens national resilience and matches closely NATO's emphasis on cooperative security and public-private collaboration in cyber defence.⁹⁵

⁹¹ "Telecommunication infrastructure in the Arctic – A circumpolar assessment", The Arctic Council, p.10, <https://oarchive.arctic-council.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/08f2791c-5157-48f2-a340-917d1ec3cfd6/content>

⁹² Sophie Himka, "Analysing Finland and NATO's cybersecurity strategies," *The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies*, published October 20, 2023, <https://jsis.washington.edu/news/analyzing-finlands-and-natos-cybersecurity-strategies/>

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "Committed to improving Finland's cyber resiliency," JYVSECTEC, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://jyvsectec.fi/en/national-cyber-exercises/>

⁹⁵ Sophie Himka, "Analysing Finland and NATO's cybersecurity strategies."

Since 2019, cyberattacks targeting Swedish companies and public institutions have significantly increased. The statistics show that the number of incidents has tripled since 2019–2020. Many of these attacks have been attributed to actors linked to the Russian Federation. In response, Sweden established the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) in 2020, bringing together key stakeholders such as the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Security Service.⁹⁶ Similarly to Finland, Sweden has structured its cybersecurity strategy around three main pillars: strengthening cybersecurity across public and private sectors, developing advanced skills and knowledge, and improving the capacity to prevent and manage cyber incidents. To build a resilient and well-prepared digital society, the strategy also focuses on the protection of critical infrastructure, support for businesses, and stronger cooperation between public and private stakeholders.⁹⁷ In June 2024, Sweden established the Sweden Cyber Command, responsible for conducting both defensive and offensive cyber operations to ensure national security. The command has strengthened cooperation with the United States and NATO through participation in major cyber defence exercises such as Austere Challenge and Cyber Coalition, NATO’s largest cyber exercise. Overall, growing cooperation between Sweden, the United States, and NATO enhances collective cyber defence capabilities and improves responses to emerging threats, particularly in areas such as interoperability and Arctic (“High North”) cyber operations.⁹⁸ Beyond cyber prevention and crisis management, the Swedish company Ericsson deserves special mention as a mainstay of the country's defence-relevant industrial base. In 2025, the company topped the Frost Rada 5G Network Infrastructure ranking for the fifth consecutive year, cementing its position as the global

⁹⁶ Dr. Aleksander Olech and Dr. Damjan Strucl, “The evolution of cyber forces in NATO countries,” CCDCOE, 2025, p. 49,

https://ccdcoe.org/uploads/2025/07/The_evolution_of_cyber_forces_in_NATO_countries.pdf

⁹⁷ “A new era of cybersecurity – National strategy for cybersecurity 2025-2029,” Ministry of Defence, published February 5, 2026,

<https://www.government.se/contentassets/e15d576467c3450896bb1c0cea8f811f/a-new-era-of-cybersecurity--national-strategy-for-cybersecurity-2025-2029.pdf>

⁹⁸ Capt. Dorothy Sherwood, “Sweden cyber command and air forces cyber align cyber compatibility,” 16th Air Force, published March 7, 2025,

<https://www.16af.af.mil/Newsroom/Article-Display/Article/4112360/sweden-cyber-command-and-air-forces-cyber-align-cyber-compatibility/>

leader in 5G infrastructure. Ericsson also applies this expertise to defence applications.⁹⁹

Finland and Sweden have developed advanced cybersecurity systems based on strong institutional coordination, societal resilience, and international cooperation. Their regional expertise, particularly in Arctic and High North environments, combined with regular cooperation with NATO, significantly strengthens collective cyber defence.

c. Space

Over the past few years, space has become an arena of unprecedented importance for modern communication systems. Today, it stands as a strategic domain where global rivalries are increasingly unfold. The increasing militarization of space is defined as “the development and use of military technology and weapons in Earth’s orbit and outer space.”¹⁰⁰ One example is the growing number of military and dual-use satellites, including the heavy reliance on Starlink during the Russo-Ukrainian war.¹⁰¹ Sweden and Finland have also recognized the significance of this development.

On July 4, 2024, Sweden released its first space defence and security strategy, formally recognizing space as a key domain for national security. The Arctic occupies a central place in this strategy, as protecting critical infrastructure and assuring reliable access to space-based navigation, communication, and surveillance capabilities are essential for safe and effective operations in the region.¹⁰² The strategy also seeks to position Sweden as an active contributor to collective security by leveraging its geostrategic assets, particularly the Esrange Space Centre in northern Sweden, which provides important satellite launch capabilities.¹⁰³ Integrating Esrange into NATO’s space framework would

⁹⁹ “Ericsson ranks highest in Frost Radar™ 5G Network Infrastructure Market Report for fifth consecutive year,” Ericsson, published June 13, 2025, <https://www.ericsson.com/en/news/2025/6/ericsson-tops-frost-radar-5g-network-infrastructure-market-report-for-the-fifth-year>

¹⁰⁰ Richard Sheposh, “Militarization of Space”, EBSCO, published in 2025, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/military-history-and-science/militarization-space>

¹⁰¹ Johan Eriksson, “Sweden’s first defence and security space strategy: Aligning with allies,” *Space Policy*, vol. 73, published August 2025, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0265964625000153>

¹⁰² “The role of space in a new security situation – Sweden’s defence and security strategy for space,” Ministry of Defence, published July 4, 2025, <https://www.government.se/contentassets/f336052c285a464cb8741da433ac703b/swedens-defence-and-security-strategy-for-space.pdf>

¹⁰³ Eriksson, “Sweden’s first defence and security space strategy: Aligning with allies.”

consequently improve the coordination of satellite communications and navigation systems across the Alliance. This, in turn, would strengthen NATO's situational awareness, command and control, and overall resilience as space becomes an increasingly important operational domain.¹⁰⁴ In addition, in January 2025, the Swedish government announced that its first military satellite, the GNA-3 test satellite, had successfully entered orbit after being launched on August 16, 2024, aboard a Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California, United States. Operated by the Swedish Armed Forces, this satellite marks the beginning of Sweden's military space capabilities.¹⁰⁵ This strategy reflects not only the growing militarization of space but also Sweden's commitment to acting as a reliable partner within NATO and the EU.¹⁰⁶

Regarding Finland, as explained by Major General Timo Herranen, Commander of the Finnish Air Force, in June 2025, the development of Finland's defence capabilities in the space domain relies heavily on international cooperation, as well as on close collaboration between the public and private sectors.¹⁰⁷ For example, ICEYE is a key stakeholder in Finland's space and defence sector, specializing in Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellites. As a European leader in advanced defence technologies, ICEYE has signed a Letter of Intent with the Finnish Ministry of Defence to enable the acquisition of SAR satellites by the Finnish Defence Forces. This cooperation aims to strengthen national intelligence and surveillance capabilities through enhanced space-based monitoring.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) supports researchers, entrepreneurs, and innovators across the Alliance in developing technologies that enhance defence and security by bringing together universities, industry, and governments through a wide network of accelerator sites and test centres. Finland recently joined this network by establishing one accelerator and

¹⁰⁴ Nima Khorrami, "Bridging NATO and the EU: Sweden's strategic role in space," The Arctic Institute, published August 13, 2025,

<https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/bridging-nato-eu-swedens-strategic-role-space/>

¹⁰⁵ "Sweden successfully launched military satellite in August," Reuters, published January 31, 2025,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-successfully-launched-military-satellite-august-2025-01-31/>

¹⁰⁶ Eriksson, "Sweden's first defence and security space strategy: Aligning with allies."

¹⁰⁷ Finnish Government, "Review on the development of space capabilities by the Commander of the Finnish Air Force," published July 3, 2025,

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1951206/review-on-the-development-of-space-capabilities-by-the-commander-of-the-finnish-air-force>

¹⁰⁸ "Iceye will provide SAR satellites to the Finnish Defence Forces," Iceye, published June 27, 2025,

<https://www.iceye.com/newsroom/press-releases/finland-ministry-of-defense-selects-iceye-for-space-based-intelligence-and-surveillance-capabilities>

two test centres in the country.¹⁰⁹ The accelerator, located in Otaniemi (Espoo) and developed in cooperation with Aalto University and the University of Helsinki, will focus on advanced communication systems and quantum technologies. Led by the Ministry of Defence and the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, this programme will provide specialized training and technical support to help companies develop deep technologies and expand opportunities in the defence sector.¹¹⁰

Overall, Sweden and Finland are increasingly positioning the space domain as a central component of their defence strategies within NATO, particularly in the High North. Both countries recognize that secure access to space-based capabilities—such as navigation, communication, surveillance, and intelligence—is essential for effective operations in the Arctic’s harsh and strategically sensitive environment.

d. Maritime

Although Sweden does not have a coastline on the Arctic Ocean, it provides significant maritime capabilities that are highly valuable to NATO, particularly in the Baltic Sea region, which is strategically linked to the High North and especially sensitive due to the presence of critical infrastructure and installations.

Sweden, thanks in particular to its strong expertise in anti-submarine warfare and mine countermeasures, provides the Alliance with a better understanding of maritime activities and potential threats in the region. Furthermore, its advanced surveillance systems contribute substantially to NATO's situational awareness.¹¹¹ In addition, Sweden’s expertise in archipelago warfare is a key asset for NATO, as illustrated by the Archipelago Endeavor 2024 (AE 24) exercise conducted with U.S. Marines in Sweden’s rugged coastal waters. This annual exercise focuses on improving littoral combat skills

¹⁰⁹ “Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA),” NATO, updated June 26, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/organization/nato-structure/defence-innovation-accelerator-for-the-north-atlantic-diana>

¹¹⁰ “NATO accelerator and two test centers to be established in Finland,” VTT Research, published March 14, 2025, [https://www.vttresearch.com/en/news-and-ideas/nato-accelerator-and-two-test-centres-be-established-finland#:~:text=NATO's%20DIANA%20\(Defence%20Innovation%20Accelerator,accelerator%20and%20test%20centre%20activities](https://www.vttresearch.com/en/news-and-ideas/nato-accelerator-and-two-test-centres-be-established-finland#:~:text=NATO's%20DIANA%20(Defence%20Innovation%20Accelerator,accelerator%20and%20test%20centre%20activities)

¹¹¹ “Sweden vital maritime contribution to NATO,” NATO, published April 12, 2024, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2024/sweden-vital-maritime-contribution-to-nato>

and interoperability in complex environments “where the sea meets the land.”¹¹² Sweden’s defence industry, particularly Saab AB, also represents a key national strategic asset and a major contributor to its maritime security capabilities. A clear example is the A-26 (Blekinge-class) submarine, specifically designed for operations in the Baltic Sea. As Sweden’s largest conventional submarine, the A-26 is non-nuclear-powered and can remain submerged for extended periods using three Stirling engines that do not require external air intake, making it exceptionally quiet and difficult to detect.¹¹³ These assets, combined with its operational experience and integration with Allied forces, considerably enhance NATO’s collective maritime defence posture.

Like Sweden, Finland is not bordered by the Arctic Ocean. However, the country also faces extreme climatic conditions and has consequently developed expertise in icebreakers. The country has developed around 80% of the world’s icebreakers and is therefore widely recognized as the global leader in icebreaker design and construction. This expertise stems from domestic necessity: Finland is the only country in the world where all the harbours may freeze during wintertime and 97% of all goods to the country are imported by sea. Icebreakers are therefore crucial to maintain maritime access and ensure the continuity of trade.¹¹⁴ This unique know-how has gained increasing strategic importance as the Arctic becomes more accessible due to climate change, opening new shipping routes and resource opportunities. Icebreakers are indispensable for trade in this region, but they are also a power projection tool for states. They also enable access to the region and support military activity there. This is why Finland represents a considerable asset for the Alliance in the High North.

e. Air

Saab AB is considered a flagship of Swedish industry. The company is better known to the general public for its cars, but it is also a defence giant. Indeed, it produces advanced submarine systems as well as combat aircraft. Its best-known model is the JAS 39

¹¹² Edward Lundquist, “Exercise Archipelago Endeavor 2024,” *Maritime Magazines*, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.maritimemagazines.com/marine-technology/202412/exercise-archipelago-endeavor-2024/>

¹¹³ “Exploring Sweden’s new Saab-built A-26 submarine fleet,” *Modern Diplomacy*, published November 26, 2025, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/11/26/exploring-swedens-new-saab-built-a-26-submarine-fleet/>

¹¹⁴ Adrienne Murray, “The finest in the world: Why the US is buying icebreakers from Finland,” BBC, published January 19, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0q48d71ke8o>

Gripen. The latest version, the Gripen E-series, has been specifically designed for customers facing more complex security environments and requiring the protection of larger territories. Notably, the aircraft can operate in extreme climatic conditions, including cold and austere environments.¹¹⁵

This technological capability is reinforced by Sweden's geographic proximity to the Arctic. The Norrbotten Air Wing F 21 is Sweden's northernmost air wing and is based in Luleå. Its mission is to provide air operational capability through its fighter divisions, while benefiting from access to one of the largest air exercise areas in the world. Together, Sweden's advanced defence industry and its northern operational infrastructure provide a significant advantage for NATO, strengthening air capabilities and ensuring effective military operations in the challenging environment of the High North.¹¹⁶

Finland possesses several air bases, including one in Rovaniemi, located in Lapland, which plays a key role in covering the northern part of the country. This northern air infrastructure enhances Finland's ability to operate in Arctic conditions and contributes to NATO's overall air posture in the High North.¹¹⁷ In addition, Finland placed an order in 2021 for 64 F-35 Lightning II aircraft to replace its F/A-18 Hornet fleet by 2030¹¹⁸, making it one of the largest defence procurement programmes in Europe after the United Kingdom. This acquisition significantly strengthens Finland's air capabilities and interoperability within NATO.¹¹⁹

Both Finland and Sweden are also members of NORDEFCO, alongside Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. NORDEFCO functions as a cooperation framework facilitating coordination.¹²⁰ Through initiatives such as *Vision 2030*, this framework seeks to improve

¹¹⁵ "Gripen E-series," Saab, accessed May 3, 2026, <https://www.saab.com/products/gripen-e-series>

¹¹⁶ "Norrbotten Wing", Försvarsmakten (Swedish Armed Forces), accessed May 3 2026, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/about-the-swedish-armed-forces/organisation/defence-branches-and-units/air-force/where-we-are/norrbotten-wing/>

¹¹⁷ "Protecting airspace over northern Finland and entire nation," Ilmavoimat (Finnish Air Force), accessed May 3, 2026, <https://ilmavoimat.fi/en/lapland-air-command/about-us>

¹¹⁸ "The F-35 programme to yield capability to the entire defense system," Puolustusvoimat (The Finnish Defense Forces), accessed May 3, 2026, <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/en/hx-fighter-program>

¹¹⁹ Paul Cormarie and John Hoehn, "Sweden, Finland and NATO's first-class airpower upgrade," Modern War Institute, published April 19, 2024, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/sweden-finland-and-natos-first-class-airpower-upgrade/>

¹²⁰ "About NORDEFCO," Nordic Defence Cooperation, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://www.nordefco.org/the-basics-about-nordefco>

the ability of Nordic countries to prepare, and conduct combined joint military operations. In doing so, it contributes to strengthening deterrence and defence not only in the Nordic region but also across the broader Euro-Atlantic area, consequently reinforcing NATO's overall security architecture.¹²¹

f. Land

Regarding the land component, an important priority of Swedish defence investment concerns the northern part of the country. By 2028, Sweden plans to make two subarctic mechanized brigades operational, one based in Boden and the other in Skövde. These units are intended to strengthen Sweden's ability to operate in harsh Arctic and subarctic environments by improving both endurance and operational capabilities.¹²²

Another Swedish giant in the defence industry is BAE Systems, which produces the CV90 infantry fighting vehicle. In 2025, six Nordic countries announced a joint procurement initiative for this vehicle, in order to reduce acquisition costs, improve cross-border interoperability and simplify shared maintenance. Built for subarctic environments, the CV90 is well-suited to snow and wetland terrain and can carry up to eight fully equipped soldiers.¹²³

In October 2025, NATO's strategic depth in Northern Europe has also been strengthened through the inauguration of the Alliance's Multi-Corps Land Component Command Northwest (MCLCC-NW) in Mikkeli, Finland. The command is responsible for coordinating Allied land forces and synchronising national military operations in the northern region, including the planning and direction of combined training exercises.¹²⁴

In parallel, NATO is establishing a military presence in Finland as part of its Forward Land Forces (FLF) along the Alliance's eastern flank. Sweden has agreed to lead this forward

¹²¹ "New vision for Nordic Defense Cooperation 2030," Nordic Defence Cooperation, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://www.nordefco.org/New-Vision-for-Nordic-Defence-Cooperation-2030>

¹²² Atle Staatesen, "Sweden beefs up defence forces in the North," *The Barents Observer*, published October 29, 2024, <https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/security/sweden-beefs-up-defence-forces-in-the-north/419631>

¹²³ Atle Staatesen, "Nordic-Baltic region joins forces around Sweden's CV90," *The Barents Observer*, published June 5, 2025,

<https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/security/nordicbaltic-region-joins-forces-around-swedens-cv90/431106>

¹²⁴ "The official inauguration of NATO's multi-corps land component command northwest is held in Mikkeli," Puolustusvoimat (The Finnish Defense Forces), published October 10, 2025, <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/en/-/1950813/nato-s-multi-corps-land-component-command-northwest-official-inauguration-holds-in-mikkeli>

presence, which aims to reinforce NATO's deterrence and defence posture across both the eastern and northern flanks. Although the precise location of the headquarters has not yet been officially confirmed, Lapland is expected to host the structure. Rather than permanently stationing large numbers of NATO troops in northern Finland, the initiative focuses primarily on command and planning capabilities designed to facilitate rapid troop deployment in the event of a crisis or conflict.¹²⁵

g. Additional Strategic Assets

Among the many contributions that Sweden and Finland's NATO integration has brought to the alliance, particularly in the Arctic region, Sweden's expanding ammunition production stands out. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, Sweden has significantly scaled up its output. In Karlskoga, Nammo now runs round-the-clock production of 155mm artillery shells, the standard NATO caliber widely used on the Ukrainian battlefield.¹²⁶ Beyond its industrial capabilities, Sweden also holds an important advantage in raw materials. The country is home to one of Europe's largest lithium battery manufacturers — a resource that has a dual purpose. While lithium batteries are central to the green energy transition, they are equally critical to the defence industry. A single F-35 fighter jet, for instance, requires over 400 kilograms of such materials, underscoring the growing strategic value of Sweden's natural resource base for NATO's broader defence ecosystem.¹²⁷

With 1,340 kilometres of shared border, Finland holds the longest land frontier with Russia of any European country.¹²⁸ In response to Moscow's deliberate orchestration of irregular migration flows following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine — used as a tool to destabilise its neighbour — Helsinki began constructing a 200km fence to halt illegal

¹²⁵ Thomas Nilsen, "Sweden will lead NATO troops in northern Finland," *The Barents Observer*, published September 17, 2024,

<https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/security/sweden-will-lead-nato-troops-in-northern-finland/290270>

¹²⁶ Linda Koponen, "Sweden's accession will make NATO bigger – but what will the Scandinavian country contribute?" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, published March 8, 2024,

<https://www.nzz.ch/english/swedens-accession-will-make-nato-bigger-but-what-contribution-is-the-scandinavian-country-making-ld.1820980>

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ "Classement des frontières terrestres les plus longues d'Europe entre deux États," Atlasocio, updated January 27, 2025,

https://atlasocio.com/classements/geographie/frontieres/classement-frontieres-terrestres-par-longueur-europe.php#google_vignette

crossings.¹²⁹ This experience has forged Finland into a recognised expert in border management. The Finnish Border Guard now operates as a key pillar of both national and collective security, capable of immediately safeguarding Finland's territorial integrity while actively participating in NATO's collective defence and contributing to all border security operations vital to European stability.¹³⁰

One of the most concrete benefits of Sweden and Finland's NATO membership is the expertise both countries bring in operating under extreme cold-weather conditions. The Finnish Defence Forces often runs winter warfare courses for Allied personnel in Lapland, where temperatures regularly plunge below -20°C. These exercises include everything from basic Arctic survival to advanced combat scenarios in frozen forests.¹³¹ These skills are critical for defending Alliance territory in all climate conditions. This Nordic cold-weather expertise was already being shared before formal membership. As early as 2019, the NORTHERN WIND exercise held in northeastern Sweden brought together some 10,000 personnel from Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States for a high-intensity warfighting exercise in arctic conditions.¹³²

¹²⁹ Bence K. Racz, "La Finlande poursuit la construction de sa clôture à la frontière avec la Russie," Euro News, published November 26, 2025, <https://fr.euronews.com/2025/11/26/la-finlande-poursuit-la-construction-de-sa-cloture-a-la-frontiere-avec-la-russie>

¹³⁰ "The strategy of the Finnish Border Guard until 2023," RAJA – Finnish Border Guard, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://raja.fi/en/strategy-planning-and-monitoring>

¹³¹ "Finnish soldiers train NATO allies in winter survival skills," NATO, published January 7, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/multimedia/multimedia/videos/2025/01/07/finnish-soldiers-train-nato-allies-in-winter-survival-skills>

¹³² "NATO allies participate in Swedish exercise Northern Wind," SHAPE, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2019/nato-allies-participate-in-swedish-exercise-northern-wind>

5. Conclusion

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine fundamentally reshaped European security, prompting Sweden and Finland to abandon their long-standing tradition of non-alignment and join NATO. Their accession not only places them under Article 5 collective defence, but also injects renewed strategic momentum into the Alliance, particularly in the Arctic — a region now counting four of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states and seven of the eight Arctic Council members among NATO Allies.¹³³

In addition to offering new strategic depth to the Alliance, the two countries also bring operational contributions. As regards nuclear deterrence, although neither Finland nor Sweden deploys nuclear weapons on their soil, their integration into NATO's mechanisms — including participation in the Conventional Support for Nuclear Operations (CSNO) — concretely reinforces the Alliance's deterrence posture in the Arctic region.

As regards the cyber component, both countries have each developed their own strategies, based on public-private sector cooperation, international cooperation and societal resilience. The establishment of the Swedish Cyber Command in 2024 and Ericsson's global leadership in 5G infrastructure significantly strengthen the Alliance's collective cyber posture in the High North.

As regards the maritime component, both Scandinavian countries stand out through their industrial flagships: the Swedish Saab's A-26 submarine and Finland's world-renowned icebreaker expertise enhance the Alliance's collective posture and are an increasingly strategic asset as Arctic shipping routes expand.

In the air domain, Sweden strengthens NATO's posture in the High North through Saab's Gripen E, designed for extreme conditions, and the Norrbotten Air Wing, with access to one of the world's largest air exercise areas. Finland complements this with its Lapland air bases and the procurement of 64 F-35 Lightning II aircraft — one of Europe's largest

¹³³ Camille Escudé, “Les régions de l’Arctique entre Etats et sociétés,” published September 19, 2019, <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informations-scientifiques/dossiers-regionaux/arctique/articles-scientifiques/regions-arctiques-entre-etats-et-societes>

defence programs — considerably enhancing both countries' interoperability within the Alliance.

On land component, Sweden is working towards fielding two subarctic mechanised brigades, which should be operational by 2028. Furthermore, the country expressed in 2025 its intention to lead NATO's forward presence in Finnish Lapland. Finland, for its part, inaugurated NATO's MCLCC-NW in Mikkeli in October 2025.

In addition to these contributions, Sweden and Finland offer other advantages to the Alliance, namely a sustained rate of ammunition production, lithium reserves, as well as experience in border management and extreme cold-weather environment operations. All these elements therefore lead to the conclusion that the integration of the two countries has given the Alliance a new lease of life. They now enable it to operate and deter in the Arctic and to enhance its capabilities there.

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Abstract

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered a historic shift in Nordic security policy, prompting Sweden and Finland to abandon their long-standing traditions of neutrality and submit simultaneous NATO membership applications within months of the war's outbreak. Finland joined the Alliance in April 2023, followed by Sweden in March 2024, constituting a fundamental transformation of NATO's strategic posture in Northern Europe. This thesis examines the extent to which this double accession strengthens NATO's capabilities in the Arctic — a region of growing geostrategic importance, coveted for its vast natural resources and gradually accessible maritime routes. Drawing on opensource material covering the period from January 2022 to November 2025, the study analyses Sweden's and Finland's strategic reorientation, the evolving importance of the Arctic within NATO's strategic framework, and the concrete operational contributions of both countries across cyber, space, and conventional military domains. The findings suggest that their integration considerably strengthens NATO's strategic and operational credibility in the High North, through advanced military capabilities, a strengthened territorial footprint, and unequalled expertise in northern and Arctic environments.

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