FINLAND'S COLD WAR NEUTRALITY: A SOVIET PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the Soviet perception of Finnish neutrality during the Cold War, focusing on Finland's foreign policy and its relationship with the USSR. Positioned between the Soviet Union and Western Europe, Finland adopted neutrality to protect its independence amid East-West tensions. Key figures like Juho Kusti Paasikivi and Urho Kekkonen shaped Finland's foreign policy through the 1948 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. The paper examines Soviet security concerns, Finland's geopolitical significance, and its balance between Western integration and Soviet demands. Finnish neutrality was an active strategy, maintaining peaceful relations with the USSR while engaging with the West. It also looks at how Finnish neutrality evolved during crises like the 1961 Soviet request for consultations and the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Finnish neutrality was a pragmatic response to Cold War pressures, preserving sovereignty under Soviet influence.

Key words: Finland, neutrality, sovereignty, Cold War, consultations

INTRODUCTION

The Cold War period presented major challenges for smaller nations caught in the crossfire of competing great powers, and Finland was no different. Geographically and strategically positioned between the Soviet Union and Western Europe, Finland's foreign policy was profoundly shaped by its proximity to the USSR. The nation's commitment to neutrality, especially in the context of Soviet interests, was not only a survival mechanism but also a complex balancing act of diplomacy and realpolitik. This paper explores the Soviet perception of Finnish neutrality during the Cold War, analyzing the evolution of Finland's foreign policy and its delicate relationship with its powerful eastern neighbor. Juho Kusti Paasikivi, one of Finland's most influential

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politicians and later its president, laid the groundwork for the nation's post-war foreign policy. His cautions regarding Finland's geopolitical fragility and the necessity of preserving friendly ties with the Soviet Union influenced Finnish diplomacy for many years. Finland's neutrality was not merely a theoretical stance, but a carefully crafted policy designed to ensure survival in a world polarized by Cold War tensions. Paasikivi's insights, formed during and after World War II, emphasized the necessity of Soviet trust and cooperation as the key to maintaining Finland's independence and avoiding occupation. Finland's position as a neutral state under the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union, signed in 1948, defined much of its Cold War strategy. This treaty, while ostensibly about mutual security, carried significant political implications and served as a symbol of Finland's balancing act between Soviet security concerns and its aspirations for Western economic and political integration. The Soviet perception of Finnish neutrality was shaped by its security interests in the region and by Finland's careful efforts to avoid entanglement in East-West conflicts.

THE POSTWAR ROOTS OF FINNISH NEUTRALITY

On September 2, 1944, the future Finnish president and one of the most influential Finnish politicians of the 20th century, Juho Kusti Paasikivi, wrote the following words in his diary: "Our foreign policy is not led by reason, but by our backside"... "We should never have participated in this war," he added, accusing both the war leaders and the newly appointed president, Mannerheim, of shortsightedness and incompetence in managing Finnish foreign and security policy. The greatest sin, Paasikivi argued in private conversations and public speeches until his retirement from Finnish political life in early 1956, was neglecting Finland's geopolitical position, namely the country's proximity to the Soviet Union. According to Paasikivi, such neglect led to catastrophes such as the Winter War of 1939-1940 and Finland's cooperation with Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1944. He added that this brought Finland to the brink of collapse by the fall of 1944 when Soviet occupation seemed inevitable (Hanhimaki, 1997).

Finland emerged from World War II as a severely weakened nation. Nearly 100,000 individuals, out of a population of about 4 million, lost their lives in military conflicts. Over a tenth of its land was surrendered to the Soviet Union, forcing almost half a million people from those areas to move westward. The nation's industry had to shift its focus to paying war reparations, which required the delivery of goods valued at over half a billion dollars over an eight-year period, based on the prices of that era. German forces, stationed in northern Finland, had to be driven out. The Porkkala Peninsula, located near Helsinki, was handed over to the Soviet Union to set up a naval base, and the Allied Control Commission in the capital monitored adherence to the terms of the armistice. At the time, few outsiders were prepared to invest in Finland's future. However, the core of Finnish independence and democracy remained intact. Although Finland was defeated, it was never fully

subjugated. In reality, Finland was the sole European country involved in World War II that managed to avoid foreign occupation, except for the territories lost during the Winter War and those ceded in the Soviet-Finnish peace treaty. The continuity of its political institutions remained untouched, as did its social structure. On this foundation, it was possible to rebuild (Törngren, 1961:603).

The first major test for post-war Finland came with the parliamentary elections on March 17-18, 1945. Paasikivi and his government framed the issue clearly, with Soviet influence further simplifying the message. *Pravda* declared the elections were not merely a Finnish internal matter, and *Izvestia* stated that the results would show Finland's commitment to eradicating fascism and rejoining peaceful nations. Despite Soviet backing, the Finnish Communist Party ran under the Finnish People's Democratic League (*S.K.D.L.*), a coalition of communists and the Socialist Unity Party. They secured 25.1% of the vote and 49 out of 200 seats, while the Social Democratic Party won fifty seats and the Agrarians forty-nine. Although it appeared that "Marxist" parties might gain power, the Social Democrats' anti-communist stance quickly made them a target of Soviet criticism. Paasikivi's new government, formed on April 17, 1945, included six *S.K.D.L.* members, with the key Interior Ministry position going to communist Yrjo Leino. Paasikivi, who had formed his first government in 1944, included communists for the first time in Finnish history but firmly declared that all parties, including the Communist Party, would operate under the rule of law and Finland's democratic Constitution (Krosby, 1960:230-231). Indeed, in the general atmosphere of 1945, especially since the USSR treated Finland better than expected, it was not surprising that many Finns supported the party that seemed to offer the best chance of improving bilateral relations between Moscow and Helsinki (Spencer, 1953:303). In early 1946, Mannerheim resigned as President of Finland due to health reasons, and on March 9, 1946, Paasikivi was elected President of Finland in the first round of presidential elections, officially becoming the most important political figure. Mauno Pekkala, a member of the *S.K.D.L.*, became the new Prime Minister, giving the Finnish government an additional red hue. However, it should be noted that during these immediate post-war years, Paasikivi was limited in the directions he could take to find support for the policy he considered so important for Finland's future. As a former Finnish government official remarked: "Immediately after the war, Paasikivi faced the difficult task of steering things back to normal. It was like rowing against a strong, stormy wind" (Hodgson, 1959:155). The first two years after the armistice were particularly difficult for Finland. Fear of Soviet military intervention persisted, fueled by tensions over Moscow's demands, such as the trial and imprisonment of war leaders like Väinö Tanner, leader of the Social Democrats, and the closure of certain performances and cultural societies. Finland also faced the heavy burden of reparations, needing to export goods to the West to buy materials like coal and steel for production. Additionally, 460,000 Karelian refugees, displaced by the Soviet annexation, had to be resettled, adding one-eighth to Finland's population. Housing was rationed, with families required to take in tenants, and limited land resources were divided, leading to a temporary decline in agricultural production (Jackson, 1948:507-508).

SOVIET INTRESTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF FINNISH NEUTRALITY

Finland's post-war foreign policy was influenced by the experiences and lessons drawn from the war. While Scandinavian cooperation was important, it had not guaranteed security. The Western Allies could not extend their influence on the Baltic, and at the 1945 Yalta Conference, Finland was placed in the Soviet sphere of influence. It became clear that Finnish territory, as a potential launching pad against the USSR, would be vulnerable in a conflict. Thus, Finland aimed to distance itself from great power conflicts, but a return to pre-war neutrality was impossible. In 1939, Soviet distrust of Finnish neutrality stemmed from fears that Finland, willingly or under pressure, might allow German forces to use its territory. Post-war, Finland's foreign policy focused on building Soviet trust as a peaceful neighbor (Törngren, 1961:603-604).

Paasikivi's line, or the foreign policy doctrine of the time, assumed that the Soviet Union's interest in Finland was primarily a security concern and that occupation and satellization were not necessary to ensure that goal was achieved. The doctrine was based on the assumption that if Finland took friendly and cooperative measures to convince the USSR that hostile actions from or even through its territory would be prevented in the future, the Soviets would, in return, cooperate to the extent that they would accept Finland's independence and its freedom to choose in other respects, including managing its internal affairs and aspects of foreign relations that did not affect the Soviet Union's strategic interests. This case was partly based on historical evidence of a special Russian restraint towards Finland and partly on an analysis of the geopolitical circumstances in northern Europe.

Paasikivi inherited his views from the "Old Finns," who believed the best way to counter Russian influence was through a policy of friendship. Figures like Yrjö-Koskinen and E.G. Palmen argued that Finland's interests were best served by acknowledging the dominance of great powers and avoiding conflict with Russia. They dismissed the idea that internal turmoil in Russia could temporarily save Finland, seeing such developments as far off. Unlike nations like Poland, Finland lacked the resources for sustained nationalist struggle. Forceful action was only justified if cooperation had failed. Paasikivi embraced this thinking, even as Finland eventually gained independence through different means. He applied these ideas to Finland's relations with both the czars and the Bolsheviks, recognizing the Soviet Union as an imperialist power. He believed that small states would be crushed if they stood in the way of great powers, and that Finland's proximity to Russia left it with few allies. Paasikivi supported the idea of a Nordic defense alliance but understood it would only work with Soviet approval. He also rejected hopes for the Soviet regime's collapse, reasoning that any successor would still present the same survival challenge for Finland. By 1930, he saw the Soviet Union as too strong for its collapse to be a realistic consideration (Kuusisto, 1959:37-39).

Political neutrality has many dimensions—it can lean in various directions, be convincing, and apply to multiple or limited areas of foreign relations. Finland's neutrality, however, had a unique feature that set it apart from other European

neutral countries. This was the Finnish-Soviet security treaty[1] of 1948, also known as the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (Törnudd, 2005:44). At the time the treaty was negotiated, it was still unclear what neutrality would mean in the context of the Cold War. Although the treaty had a constitutive impact on Finnish neutrality, these two issues—neutrality and the bilateral security pact—were formally two separate things. In 1948, neutrality was Finland's aspiration, while the idea of a bilateral security pact was the primary goal of the Soviet Union (Rainio-Niemi, 2021:77).

Finland's interpretation of the treaty's role as part of its neutrality policy encompassed the following points:

- The treaty's primary importance was political, though its political significance stemmed from its military provisions. Its main aim was to serve as a preventive measure.
- The Soviet Union had security concerns along its northwestern border, and these concerns did not conflict with Finland's stance.
- The Soviet Union's security concerns were a result of the broader East-West conflict. Once that conflict ended, the treaty would no longer be necessary. However, when tensions escalated, the treaty's importance grew, as did the Soviet Union's need to take countermeasures. Therefore, it was in Finland's interest to work towards reducing global tensions.
- The treaty implied a potential scenario of an attack or threat against Finland. In such a situation, a neutral state has the right to defend itself and seek assistance wherever available. The treaty had already indicated that the Soviet Union could be a potential source of such assistance.
- Abandoning neutrality and accepting Soviet assistance would only be considered during a crisis, following an evaluation of the situation and based on Finland's own decision (Törnudd, 2005:44-45).

Although it was never explicitly stated this way, the treaty also served to protect Finland from Soviet aggression. As long as the Soviet Union was convinced that Finnish territory would not serve as a base for an attack against it, or that Finland would at least make every effort to prevent such an attack, it saw no reason to occupy Finnish land. The term "trust" was often used in official speeches to reflect this belief, and Finland had a vested interest in highlighting the importance and strength of this existing trust. It was clear, however, that this trust was not absolute. Nonetheless, discussing it and stressing the significance of the treaty raised the political barrier the Soviet Union would have to overcome if it ever felt the need to increase its military readiness along its northwestern border. There was also an

[1] The Finnish-Soviet agreement of April 6, 1948, was the last in a series of agreements between the Soviet Union and its neighbors and satellites, starting with the Czechoslovak treaty in 1943, the treaties with Yugoslavia and Poland in 1945, and the pacts with Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria in 1948 (Bellquist 1949:217).

implicit threshold for initiating consultations in the event of a threat or attack, as outlined in Article 2 of the treaty. From Finland's perspective, it was crucial to avoid a repeat of the 1961 situation[2], when the Soviet Union suggested consultations based on the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. Finland sought to avoid such consultations, as they would have been seen as an indication that Finland was closely aligned with Soviet positions and agreed with the Soviet interpretation of the circumstances. Within Finland, there were differing views on how to maintain this consultation threshold as high as possible. Some Finnish officials believed that a strong level of armament would compel the Soviet Union to engage in timely consultations. Others thought that any weakness in Finland's defense capabilities would inevitably lead to early consultations. Neither theory was ever put to the test. The consultations stipulated in Article 2 of the treaty never actually occurred (Korhonen, 1973:185). However, one mentioned event did threaten to trigger consultations, and with it, the viability of Finnish neutrality. On October 30, 1961, a note was delivered to the Finnish ambassador in Moscow by the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, proposing the commencement of military talks between the Soviet and Finnish governments. These talks aimed to prepare for a possible attack by the Federal Republic of Germany on the Soviet Union through the Baltic region and Finland (Holsti, 1964:63). The note raised concerns about a number of military developments involving Germany, Denmark, and Norway, under NATO's umbrella, which the Soviet government believed could turn the Baltic into a possible conflict zone. Specifically, it cited the construction of West German military depots in Denmark and Norway, the relocation of Germany's naval command from the North Sea coast to Flensburg on the Baltic Sea, and the proposed creation of a German-Danish naval command (Wuorinen, 1962a:44). Kekkonen did not hesitate to openly criticize the rearmament of West Germany to appease the Soviets but also expressed concern about the possibility of war in Europe (Brodin et al., 1968:25). The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that these actions represented a direct threat to both Soviet and Finnish security and suggested that the appropriate response from the Finnish government would be to initiate military consultations in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. (Holsti, 1964:63). Through the diplomatic skill of Finnish President Kekkonen, Khrushchev was persuaded to abandon the consultations, successfully resolving the emerging crisis (Grlić Radman, 2009:144).

However, there was a covert debate about the content of any potential consultations. The Finnish side believed that the purpose of consultations would mainly be to evaluate the threat level and decide whether external assistance was required. On the other hand, the most rigid Soviet dogmatists held the view that such consultations would solely focus on the specific nature and extent of military aid provided by the Soviet Union. The concerns and speculations that arose in Finland during the early years following the signing of the treaty largely centered on the security and military matters. However, Finnish President Paasikivi's remarks on April 9, 1948,

[2] The Berlin Crisis.

highlighted that the revisions and concessions accepted by the Soviet Union in those same provisions were key to making this agreement distinct from the treaties concluded between the Soviet Union and other Eastern European nations. Had the treaty followed the initial model proposed by the Soviet Union during the drafting process, it would have resulted in a military alliance, which would have hindered Finland's aim to remain uninvolved in conflicts between major powers. The Soviet Union's recognition of the necessity for amendments and compromise was due to the perseverance of President Paasikivi and the Finnish negotiators. It also reflected the rational approach of Soviet leaders. This is supported by Paasikivi's statement on April 9, 1948: "It can be observed that the models used with other countries[3] were not applied here, and that the treaty reflects our geographical position and unique circumstances" (Korhonen, 1973:185). The Soviets also benefited from the treaty. They gained a security zone in the northwest, firm control over the Gulf of Finland, and a shared border with Norway. Finland, with heavy artillery along the shores of the Gulf of Finland, was ready to resist any incursion from the West. By adding Porkkala, the Soviets gained an important military base in Finland that guaranteed the Finns would not violate the signed agreements. However, the Soviets could not station their troops elsewhere in the country, which undoubtedly limited their security profile in the northwest and reduced their potential influence on Finnish policy.

Despite the limitations for the Soviets, Paasikivi, according to Naimark (2019), did not favor the Finnish-Soviet treaty. "It has become clear to the Finnish people and the whole world," he wrote in his diary on April 14, 1948, "that we would rather be without such a treaty if the circumstances permitted." Indeed, the treaty tied the Finns' hands when it came to independent foreign and security policy. But especially with the onset of the Cold War, circumstances did not allow this, and the mutual defense pact gave Finland a way to avoid Soviet domination, let alone Stalinization, to which other countries in the Soviet Eastern European sphere were subjected (Ibid).

Even though the term neutrality was not explicitly mentioned in the preamble to the treaty, there was an allusion to the nature of neutrality in such a way that Finland's efforts remained outside the conflict of interests of the great powers. Some authors argue that this clause, viewed from an international perspective, was the basis for the policy of neutrality and that no imposed legal framework emerged from it. However, Finnish neutrality had only minimal legal force. The Soviet Union's obligations to respect or recognize neutrality were negligible. Given the bilateral agreement and the various possibilities for its interpretation, this pact with the Soviet Union became a threat to Finland's security, often described in literature as the "Finnish dilemma" (Grlić Radman, 2009:143). Jakobson (1962:199-200), on the other hand, cites several examples that demonstrate Finnish neutrality in practice after the signing of the Finnish-Soviet treaty. Namely, Finland remained detached from any military alliances or international organizations that could be perceived

[3] For example, Hungary or Romania, which had the status of Soviet satellites based on bilateral agreements with Moscow (Singleton, 1985:208).

as tools of great power politics, and that either side might interpret as hostile. Another demonstration of Finnish neutrality can be seen in its approach to the German question. Finland had not officially recognized either of the two German states[4] and maintained trade missions in both, a position that uniquely served its interests by enabling trade with both sides while signaling neutrality on the issue as a whole. Additionally, Finland's neutrality had already been implicitly acknowledged by the Soviet government in the 1948 treaty. Since then, official Moscow had repeatedly affirmed Finland's neutral stance, both in public statements and in joint communiqués with the Finnish government. In fact, the Soviet Union went so far as to declare that it saw the continuation of Finnish neutrality as a key factor in preserving peace in northern Europe. In the West, the British government expressed its understanding of Finnish neutrality during the Finnish president's visit in May 1961, and U.S. President Kennedy similarly stated in October 1961 that the U.S. respected Finland's policy of neutrality and was prepared to honor it under all circumstances.

As early as 1952, a discussion about neutrality followed between Finland and the USSR, whose strategic goal was to pull Norway, Denmark, and Iceland out of NATO's orbit. At that time, Finnish President Kekkonen first mentioned the policy of neutrality, referring to the treaty with the USSR, and introduced a new version of creating a neutral alliance of the Nordic countries (Grlić Radman, 2009:143). In January 1952, Kekkonen informed Soviet ambassador V.Z. Lebedev of his plan to promote Nordic unity and neutrality. Moscow responded positively, seeing it as a way to strengthen peace and national independence. On January 23, 1952, Kekkonen's speech advocating for a neutral Nordic zone was published. Finland believed this would lessen the threat to the Soviet Union from Finnish territory and modify the 1948 Finnish-Soviet treaty. Kekkonen expected Norway to reject the idea, and Swedish Prime Minister Erlander, while agreeing in principle, dismissed it as "unrealistic" (Rentola, 2021:134-135). Although Finland's proposals did not resonate with the official circles of the Nordic NATO countries, it is believed that these positions contributed to creating a favorable climate for neutrality and Finland's distancing from the great powers. Later, in 1965, Kekkonen proposed a Finnish-Norwegian border agreement, as he believed that the real threat to Finland's security, and thus its neutrality, came from the Lapland region, where the Finnish border touched NATO's border area. Similar insights inspired Kekkonen's idea that Norway should withdraw from NATO and conclude a friendship treaty with the United States, modeled on the Finnish-Soviet agreement (Grlić Radman, 2009:143-144). It is also important to mention Kekkonen's May 18, 1963, proposal for the establishment of a nuclear-

[4] The German Democratic Republic (GDR) continuously pressured Finland to recognize and establish diplomatic relations. There were even efforts to make diplomatic recognition a precondition for the ratification of trade agreements, and threats of imposing economic sanctions on Finland if these demands were not met. The issue of the diplomatic recognition of the GDR seems to have first arisen in May 1950, during a discussion between Paasikivi and Foreign Minister Åke Gartz. They agreed that, due to the fear of negative reactions from the West, Finland should sign a trade agreement with the GDR but should not go politically further than that. This, of course, remained Finland's official policy until the early 1970s (Väyrynen 2008:243-244).

free zone in Northern Europe. Although the initiative was based on similar ideas of military separation proposed by Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki in 1957 and 1958 for Central Europe, compared to Rapacki's proposal, Kekkonen's initiative was rather a hasty instrument for setting the agenda. Namely, it had little or no chance of success due to Norway and Denmark's membership in NATO. Although essentially unsuccessful, the Finnish initiative was not completely useless in a political sense. It was used to signal Finland's security policy preferences to a broader international audience and to take the initiative in controlling the discussion on Nordic security away from the Soviet Union. Kekkonen's proposal was also anchored to the 1962 proposal by Swedish Foreign Minister Östen Undén for the establishment of a bloc of states committed not to possess nuclear weapons (including the deployment of foreign nuclear installations on their territory) in exchange for a commitment from nuclear powers to refrain from further nuclear testing. Thus, although it did not have geographic dimensions in the same way as the Finnish initiative, Undén's plan borrowed some elements from Rapacki's plan and the initiative by Irish diplomat Frank Aiken to begin negotiations on nuclear non-cooperation. Similarly, Kekkonen did not propose a formal treaty between the Nordic countries but rather a series of declarations or mutual political commitments for that purpose (Juntunen, 2024:135-136).

As expected, Norway was the most opposed to Finland's proposal. The official Norwegian position was clear: Northern Europe was already a nuclear-free zone, but creating a permanent contractual obligation would deprive Norway, as a NATO member, of the right to call on nuclear forces in an emergency. This would significantly limit Norway's security and foreign policy space in the event of external threats, as the threat of changing its nuclear-free status could be an effective countermeasure to increasing Soviet pressure on any part of Northern Europe, including Finland (Maude, 1975:407). Norway's rejection of Finland's proposal was consistent with then-Western military doctrines. During the Cold War, Western thinking on this matter assumed that, unless NATO deterred the Soviet Union with sufficient armament and political cohesion, the USSR might occupy neutral countries in Europe. The natural consequence of this assumption was the argument that small neutral countries must also be strong enough on their own to help deter such plans (Väyrynen, 1977:98).

It should be noted that Finland's proposal came six months after the Cuban Missile Crisis, which can arguably be said to have brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that Finland saw it as a vital interest to keep any potential nuclear war as far from its borders as possible (Pajunen, 1968:89). Interestingly, Finland was mentioned in NATO's military planning and assessments until the mid-1950s. It was assumed that the Finns would allow Soviet troops, even up to five army divisions, to pass freely through Finnish territory in the north to attack Norway or Sweden. NATO, therefore, planned massive nuclear airstrikes on Finland to halt Soviet troops. Later, during the 1950s, NATO became more optimistic and assessed that the Soviet Union might have more limited use of Finnish territory in the event of war, such as key roads and bases, and that Soviet troops might encounter Finnish guerrilla resistance (Lazic & Petersson, 2021:516).

By 1954, the Soviet government was exerting pressure on Finland to restrict its diplomatic and economic ties with Western and Scandinavian nations. For instance, threatening statements from Moscow led to Finland's exclusion from receiving Marshall Plan assistance. Stalin's regime consistently opposed Scandinavian cooperation, and the Soviet Union also obstructed Finland's attempt to join the United Nations (Holsti, 1964:71). Moreover, concerns that Finland might establish an alliance with the Federal Republic of Germany played a significant role in Soviet reluctance regarding Finland's involvement in international organizations (Aunesluoma & Rainio-Niemi, 2016:55). However, following Stalin's death, Finnish governments gained more autonomy in shaping foreign policy, and Kekkonen managed to successfully integrate Finland into both Scandinavian and international organizations (Holsti, 1964:71). Thus, the period up to 1955 is perceived as a period of passive neutrality (Grlić Radman, 2009:144).

FINNISH NEUTRALITY IN PRACTICE: BALANCING EAST AND WEST

In 1955, Finland became a member of the United Nations[5] because of an agreement between the U.S. and the Soviet Union not to veto each other's candidates for membership. In the General Assembly, Finnish delegations adhered to the main principle of the preamble to the 1948 treaty: the Finnish government has the right not to interfere in the conflicts of the great powers. Therefore, Finnish delegations abstained in most East-West conflicts with an ideological undertone. At the 14th General Assembly of the UN, Finland was unofficially offered a seat as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, but the Finnish foreign minister declined, believing that the responsibilities of Security Council membership were not in line with the Finnish government's policy of non-involvement in Cold War conflicts (Hodgson, 1967:279).

Finland never voted against the Soviet Union, even when Moscow openly violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states (Lukacs, 1992:59). In implementing the principle of neutrality, Finland decided to abstain from voting on non-binding General Assembly resolutions concerning the conflicts in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Afghanistan in 1979, when the Soviet Union was criticized for violating the UN Charter. Although Finnish public opinion expressed sympathy for the victims—in the case of Hungary through humanitarian aid, and in the case of Prague[6] through political protests—the most difficult case for the Finnish government in the realistic application of neutrality was the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Not only did the Western powers have little

[5] In the early post-war years, Finland could not become a member of the UN because, in addition to the Soviet veto, as a former ally of Nazi Germany, it was placed in the same category as former German satellites and was considered an enemy state from 1944 to 1947 (Götz 2008:73).

[6] Legal and political definitions of neutrality do not require the citizens of a neutral country to follow any form of ideological or "moral neutrality (Fischer et al., 2016: 8).

understanding of Finland's passive stance in not condemning Soviet aggression, but a potentially harmful debate arose about any parallel between Soviet action as "assistance" to the Afghan regime under a mutual defense agreement and the potential Soviet option of providing defense assistance to Finland under their treaty (Möttölä, 2021:222).

An exception to this pattern was Finland's participation in UN peacekeeping operations, which began during the Suez Crisis in 1956. Since then, Finland's role in peacekeeping operations has been one of the most notable within the United Nations. It contributed military or financial assistance to every UN peace mission. For instance, Finland had a battalion in Cyprus, observers in Kashmir and the Middle East, and a Finnish general served as chief of staff of UNTSO in the Middle East. Additionally, the UN Secretary-General's adviser on military affairs was a Finnish colonel (Pajunen, 1972:176). Furthermore, in 1955, Finland became a member of the "Nordic Council[7]," which included two NATO members, Denmark and Norway, despite the Soviet Union's sharp opposition to Finnish membership just three years earlier (Hodgson, 1967:279). In 1956, the Soviet Union returned the naval base of Porkkala to Finland. The Soviet initiative began in September 1955, when Khrushchev, seeking to secure the victory of a pro-Soviet candidate in the upcoming Finnish elections, offered Finnish President Juho Paasikivi a package deal. Among other things, this included extending the Finnish-Soviet treaty of 1948 for another twenty years, in exchange for which the Soviet Union would relinquish the naval base at Porkkala (Mueller, 2016:159). The new agreement reaffirmed Finland's earlier commitment to abstain from coalitions directed against the Soviet Union (Törnudd, 1969:350). Finland agreed, and consequently, Finnish neutrality was explicitly recognized by Khrushchev in 1956 at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Mueller, 2016:159). The strategic significance of Porkkala had diminished with the rapid development of missile weaponry and military aviation. Naturally, the Soviet Union used the abandonment of Porkkala for propaganda purposes to demonstrate that (unlike the United States) it was willing to give up one of its military outposts located outside the Soviet Union (Suchoples, 2023:25). Grlić Radman (2009:144) emphasizes that the return of Porkkala to Finland, along with its membership in the UN and the Nordic Council, marked the beginning of an era of active Finnish *de facto* neutrality.

Throughout the 1960s, Soviet policy towards European neutral states focused on two main objectives. The first was to prevent neutral states from aligning with the European Economic Community (EEC), and ultimately to encourage them to promote Soviet ideas, particularly the recognition of East Germany (GDR) and the convening of a pan-European conference that would legitimize the post-war order, promote détente, and weaken NATO cohesion. In 1960, neutral countries Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland joined the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, and Portugal in founding the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (Mueller, 2016:162). Under Soviet pressure, Finland became only an associate, but not a full

[7] The Union of Parliamentary Groups of the Nordic Countries.

member in July 1961 (Wuorninen, 1962b:164). The issue lay with the Finnish-Soviet trade agreement, which contained a most-favored-nation clause. Since the Soviet Union was not a member of GATT[8], it was not bound to accept the restrictions imposed by membership in a free trade association or customs union. In practice, only a small portion of imports from the Soviet Union would have been affected by the tariff reductions granted to EFTA countries, as most goods purchased from the Soviet Union consisted of raw materials and other duty-free items. However, an important question of principle was involved, and the Finnish government, in line with its established policy, sought to reach a solution acceptable to both sides rather than unilaterally terminate a valid agreement. In November 1960, during President Kekkonen's visit to Moscow, an agreement was finally reached, whereby Finland, given the neighboring relations between the two countries, would effectively grant imported goods from the Soviet Union the same customs benefits as those imported from EFTA (Törngren, 1961:608). Simultaneously, Finland agreed to appropriate tariff reductions for the Soviet Union. During its membership in EFTA, the share of EFTA countries in Finland's foreign trade increased by approximately 10%, while trade with members of the European Economic Community declined significantly. Trade with the Soviet Union was less affected. In 1960, it accounted for 14% of Finland's foreign trade, and by 1970, it had fallen to 12%. During the 1960s, the annual volume of trade increased, mostly with Sweden and the Soviet Union (Pajunen, 1972:193). During a visit by a Soviet delegation to Helsinki in September 1960, Prime Minister Khrushchev expressed his understanding of Finland's desire to maintain its position in Western markets. In fact, the Finnish-Soviet tariff agreement had no other purpose than to allow Finland to connect with EFTA. The EFTA member governments, on their part, made significant concessions to enable Finland to achieve the desired solution. For Finland, the success of the negotiations was of vital importance, but it may also have broader significance in the fact that a neutral nation was able to maintain its trade relations across the lines of opposing blocs (Törngren, 1961:609). Since 1969, Finland has been a member of the OECD[9], and in 1972, it concluded a Free Trade Agreement with the EEC. After renewed tensions with Moscow due to the EEC agreement, Finland, in line with its policy of balance, had to conclude similar agreements with Eastern European countries to satisfy the USSR (Grlić Radman, 2009:151).

A new era in Finnish foreign policy emerged through active participation in international organizations, particularly the UN, which offered small states like Finland a platform to influence global change and gain prestige. Finland contributed to peacekeeping missions and, by 1967, Finns chaired UN committees. Between 1968 and 1970, Finland made notable progress in the Security Council, with over half of its resolutions proposed by Finland in 1970. In 1971, Finland nominated Max Jakobson for UN Secretary-General, but his candidacy failed due to Soviet opposition. However, in 1972, Helvi Sipilä became the first woman to serve as Assistant Secretary-General

[8] General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

[9] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

of the UN (Pajunen, 1972:176). Thus, Pajunen (1972:176) concludes: "The real importance of the UN for Finnish security was the strengthening of our country's position, its neutrality, and its reputation in general. In practice, this means that Finland demonstrated its independence from the Soviet Union, which would rarely have been possible without the forum offered by the world organization."

Although Finland pursued a more sovereign foreign policy compared to the previous decade, it still faced limits on its political freedoms. In 1958, tensions arose when the Finnish government considered including Social Democratic politicians unacceptable to the Soviet Union. The USSR suspended negotiations on key economic issues, and Soviet Ambassador Viktor Z. Lebedev was recalled, signaling dissatisfaction. In response, President Urho K. Kekkonen visited Leningrad in early 1959, meeting Soviet leaders to ease tensions. The Finnish government resigned, and a new, Kremlin-approved minority government formed. Khrushchev made it clear that while Finland had the right to choose its government, the USSR retained the right to express its opinion. This highlighted the ongoing Soviet influence on Finland's domestic and foreign policy, a dynamic that persisted until the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991 (Suchoples, 2023:26).

After Khrushchev's removal in 1964, Soviet tolerance for the "Europeanization" of Finnish neutrality quickly diminished. The Soviets criticized Finland's interest in European economic integration and condemned Kekkonen's focus on self-defense, modeled after Switzerland and Austria. In response, Kekkonen regularly consulted Soviet leaders Brezhnev and Kosygin, assuring them that Finnish neutrality was a peace policy and that, in wartime, the Finnish-Soviet treaty would take precedence. This shift undermined Finland's efforts to strengthen neutrality and leaned towards appeasing the USSR. Following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the concept of neutrality was removed from Soviet-Finnish communications and did not reappear until Gorbachev's 1989 speech in Helsinki. The challenges from the mid-1960s onwards and the beginning of a new era in the Cold War after the CSCE marked the end of the earlier "state ideological" phase in the development of Finnish neutrality policy. By the mid-1960s, both Finland and Austria had moved far from the conceptions of neutrality of the mid-1950s. The most difficult phase of post-war "conceptual modernization" and the building of domestic consensus on Cold War neutrality had been completed. If it had not been for this domestic project and its relative success, Finnish neutrality (and democracy) might not have withstood the pressures of the late 1960s and 1970s to the same extent. Despite and because of Soviet criticism of the armed basis of Finnish neutrality and the related ethos of national self-defense, popular support for these elements remained high during the 1970s. The essential conceptual work in building consensus also provided a stronger intellectual foundation for the internationalization and multilateralization of neutrality starting in the late 1960s, especially in relation to the CSCE. In 1973, in line with Austria and Sweden, Finland concluded an association agreement with the EEC despite Soviet (and partially domestic) criticisms. Without these steps, Finland would not have emerged from the Cold War as a country that managed to establish and maintain sovereignty and territorial integrity among the Nordic countries

and other European neutral states (Rainio-Niemi, 2021:93-94). Finnish neutrality, therefore, was a fully instrumental, pragmatic choice, determined by the necessities of national survival in the Cold War world, in close proximity to the Soviet Union. The priority was to keep Finland on the western side of the Iron Curtain and to find opportunities for as much Western European integration as possible. Neutrality, according to this interpretation, was of very secondary importance and, according to some observers, merely a kind of "cover" for Finland's inherently Western national identity—an undesirable but the best available option (Rainio-Niemi, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The Soviet perception of Finnish neutrality during the Cold War was shaped by a complex blend of geopolitical interests, historical relationships, and strategic calculations. Finland's delicate position as a neighbor to the Soviet Union meant that its neutrality had to be carefully managed, balancing the need to maintain its sovereignty and Western affiliations while avoiding antagonizing its powerful eastern neighbor. This study demonstrates that Finnish neutrality, far from being a passive stance, was an active and strategic policy that evolved in response to changing international dynamics and Soviet demands. Finland's foreign policy, particularly under the leadership of Juho Kusti Paasikivi and Urho Kekkonen, was built on the premise that peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union was essential for national survival. The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance of 1948 embodied this necessity, serving as a legal framework for Finland's neutrality while also addressing Soviet security concerns. Although the treaty provided a basis for Soviet trust in Finland, it also imposed significant constraints on Finnish foreign and defense policy, limiting Finland's ability to freely align with Western powers and reinforcing its geopolitical isolation during key moments of Cold War tensions.

The Soviet Union's perception of Finnish neutrality oscillated between cautious acceptance and suspicion, depending on the broader context of East-West relations. During periods of heightened Cold War tensions, such as the rearmament of West Germany or the Cuban Missile Crisis, Soviet pressure on Finland increased, demonstrating the fragility of the trust that underpinned Finnish-Soviet relations. However, Finland's ability to maintain its neutrality and resist Soviet domination, while avoiding full alignment with NATO, was a testament to the skillful diplomacy of Finnish leaders. By positioning itself as a mediator and a peacekeeping nation through its active participation in the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), Finland was able to strengthen its international standing while reinforcing its image as a neutral state.

The evolution of Finnish neutrality during the Cold War also highlights the inherent contradictions in Soviet foreign policy towards neutral states. While the USSR tolerated and even encouraged Finland's neutrality as a buffer against Western influence, it also sought to limit the scope of Finnish sovereignty, particularly in relation to European integration. The Soviet Union's reaction to Finland's association

agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, along with its earlier opposition to Finnish participation in Scandinavian and Western economic organizations, underscored the limits of Soviet tolerance for Finnish independence in foreign policy matters. Despite these challenges, Finland managed to navigate the Cold War without succumbing to Soviet domination, maintaining its democratic institutions and gradually increasing its participation in international organizations. Finnish neutrality, while constrained by the realities of Soviet power, was ultimately a pragmatic and flexible policy that allowed Finland to survive and even thrive during a period of intense global competition. The Finnish experience demonstrates that neutrality, when carefully managed and supported by astute diplomacy, can serve as a viable strategy for small states caught between great power rivalries.

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FINSKA NEUTRALNOST TIJEKOM HLADNOG RATA: SOVJETSKA PERSPEKTIVA

Marin Jašić

SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad istražuje sovjetsku percepciju finske neutralnosti tijekom Hladnog rata, s naglaskom na finsku vanjsku politiku i njezin odnos prema SSSR-u. Smještena između Sovjetskog Saveza i zapadne Europe, Finska je prihvatila neutralnost kako bi zaštitila svoju neovisnost usred tenzija između Istoka i Zapada. Ključne figure, poput Juha Kustija Paasikivija i Urha Kekkonena, oblikovale su finsku vanjsku politiku kroz Ugovor o prijateljstvu, suradnji i uzajamnoj pomoći iz 1948. godine. Rad ispituje sovjetske sigurnosne brige, geopolitičku važnost Finske i njezinu ravnotežu između zapadne integracije i sovjetskih zahtjeva. Finska neutralnost nije bila pasivna politika, već aktivna strategija koja je uključivala održavanje mirnih odnosa sa SSSR-om, istovremeno se povezujući sa Zapadom. Također se analizira kako se finska neutralnost razvijala tijekom kriza poput sovjetskog zahtjeva za konzultacijama 1961. godine i sovjetskih invazija na Mađarsku i Čehoslovačku. Finska neutralnost bila je pragmatičan odgovor na pritiske Hladnog rata, očuvavši suverenitet pod sovjetskim utjecajem.

Ključne riječi: Finska, neutralnost, suverenitet, Hladni rat, konzultacije