

Will a Nordic Alliance Prevail in NATO?

Exploring a future Nordic alliance in NATO through the alliance
security dilemma



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Abstract

With an accelerating climate crisis, Russia as an aggressive military force, a changing American presence in the international community, and the move of Sweden and Finland to enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the geopolitics of the Arctic bear increasingly larger implications for global geopolitical trends. The Nordic states have large interests in how the Arctic region develops, and has in the last decade increased cooperation to strengthen common defense capabilities. Building on this, the study explores if the Nordics will build a strong regional entity in NATO on security issues of their neighborhood – a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues – after Sweden and Finland’s entries. To conduct this exploratory research, the Alliance security dilemma (ASD), an intra-alliance theory, is used to execute a mixed-method approach consisting of a theory consuming qualitative case study and descriptive statistics. By answering hypotheses created around ASD’s determinants of choice, this study finds that relative dependence, strategic interest, common interest in the adversary, and behavioral record, are likely to steer the choice to form a Nordic alliance. The one determinant of less importance is explicitness of agreement. The question of whether a Nordic alliance will be established remains unanswered.

Key words: Nordic Alliance, Alliance Security Dilemma, Sweden in NATO, Finland in NATO, Intra-Alliance Management

Words: 9985

List of Abbreviations

ASD: Alliance security dilemma

COW: Correlates of War

CRS: Congressional Research Service

CSDP: Common Security and Defence Policy

EU: European Union

FEK: Royal Danish Defence College

FFI: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment

FOI: Swedish Defence Research Agency

IISS: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NMC: National Material Capabilities

NORDEFECO: Nordic Defence Cooperation

PfP: Partnership for Peace-programme

SÄPO: Swedish Security Service

US: the United States

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1. Introduction

1.1. High North, Low Tensions?

With geopolitical tensions on the rise in the Arctic, the reality of the region as one of peace and low tensions is declining. Today, Russia holds more Arctic military bases than all NATO members combined and has built a forceful naval fleet (Odgaard, 2024). While all Arctic states besides Russia are NATO-members, the organization still lacks an official strategy for the region, thereby opening themselves up for a strategic disadvantage and vulnerability (Ibid.).

In February 2024, the Swedish Security Service (SÄPO) identified security-threatening activities of China and Russia in the Arctic as an emerging threat to national security, with similar calls being heard in the other Nordic countries (SÄPO, 2024; Nyhamar, 2021). The interplay between an increased global geopolitical interest and an accelerating climate crisis, puts the spotlight on tensions in the Arctic and creates security issues for the Nordic states (Granholm, 2019). Moreover, Russia's declaration of war against Ukraine in February of 2022 has rearranged global security structures, and pushed Sweden and Finland to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Edström & Thorburn, 2023).

Since the end of the Cold War, Nordic defence and security policies have increased, most prominently by the establishment 2009 of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) (Dahl, 2014). With Sweden and Finland entering NATO, the Nordics find themselves in a new geopolitical reality in regards to each other, NATO, and the international community (Billström, 2024).

Considering the existing integrated military operations, the question arises on how, and if, the integrated structure will continue in the context of NATO. The Alliance security dilemma (ASD) assumes that states make strategic choices in regards to their allies, based on the most efficient way of balancing long-term alliance relationships and maximizing self-interests (Snyder, 1997: 180). To explore what the outcomes are for previous Nordic security cooperation transferring into a Nordic alliance on Arctic security in NATO, this study will apply the considerations of the ASD to the Nordic states current geopolitical situation.

1.2. Purpose of Research and Research Question

As Finland and Sweden enter NATO, the need to understand how the Nordic states will manage their previous defence cooperation in a new context has been identified. While the two states have been closely partnered with NATO since 1994 through the Partnership for Peace-programme (PfP) (Dahl, 2014: 3), the entries as full-worthy members reshape the conditions on which they act. Based on the presumptions of ASD, the purpose of this study is to explore if strategic and political conditions exist for a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues in NATO, or if such a move would disrupt current power balances in a way that pose too many risks of abandonment for the Nordics. Based on this purpose, the following research question is formed:

What determinants of the Alliance security dilemma could steer the choice to establish a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues in NATO?

1.3. Scientific Relevance

The Arctic is becoming a melting point of international contemporary issues, with powerful states and organizations having an interest in the region's development (Odgaard, 2024). As Arctic states, the Nordics are involved with the tensions and hold security, economic, and societal interests in the region's development (Edström & Thorburn, 2023: 6). Understanding the development of Arctic security and how the Nordic states will manage their existing security and defence cooperation in the context of NATO, is therefore of external relevance to grasp the future landscape of international politics and the military reality of tomorrow.

As for the internal relevance, this area of geopolitics is rapidly changing and there is a need to further explore the matter. With Sweden's application ratified in March 2024 (GOS, 2024), it has not been possible to fully examine the possibility of a Nordic alliance in the organization. While both the Nordics, NATO, and the Arctic have been the subject of previous research (See: Section 3), the theoretical framework of ASD has not been applied to the behaviour of a Nordic alliance in NATO. Additionally, this study will use a mixed-method approach, contributing with a multi-layered understanding of the ASD's role for the establishment of a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues.

1.4. Roadmap

The introduction section describes the purpose of research and research question, scientific relevance, and provides definitions of important concepts. In the background section, the history of Nordic defence cooperation, NATO's relation to the Arctic, and current geopolitics affecting the Arctic, is reviewed. Previous literature on Nordic defence and security integration, and the ASD in relation to NATO is then presented. In the theoretical section, the ASD is further explored and the hypotheses of this study established. Moving into the methodological section, the mixed-method approach is explained, and the selection of material and overall methodological considerations motivated. In the analysis, results and analyses on the hypotheses are presented. Implications of the conclusion and possibility for future research are then discussed in the last section.

1.5. Definitions

1.5.1. The Nordics

The Nordic countries consist of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland. The outlier, due to its location and significantly smaller economy, is Iceland. Additionally, the country lacks a military of its own and is dependent on the military protection of NATO (Bailes & Thorhallsson, 2005: 328). Because of the greater distance to Russia, and the effect the lack of a national military should have, Iceland will not be considered in this study. While this limits the generalizability in an overall Nordic context, it benefits the cohesiveness of the study. Onwards, *Nordics*, *Nordic states* or *Norden* only refers to Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark.

1.5.2. The Arctic

There is no simple definition of what the borders of the Arctic region are, however, in literature many refer to the Arctic circle which is placed on the 66th latitude. Eight states hold territories above the 66th latitude, these are: Canada, Russia, the US, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, and Denmark through Greenland (Leclerc, 2024: 2-3).

1.5.3. A Nordic Alliance

A military alliance is the formation of cooperation by a formal agreement between states on either military or nonmilitary force against states or powers outside the members of the allyship. What sets alliances apart from state alignments is the formal nature of alliances. In addition, alliances are formed to pervade or manage the threat of other states (Snyder, 1997: 4).

Alliance can be distinguished into two categories: hierarchical or egalitarian, the former indicating an internal structure where there are significant imbalances in military capabilities among the members (Masala, 2010: 382). Additionally, the hierarchical structure can be divided in two to subcategories: hegemonic and imperial alliances (Idem., 383).

A Nordic alliance in NATO on Arctic security is therefore conceptualized as the Nordics formally stating their intention to work as a coherent entity on security issues relating to their common neighborhood, with the condition that they will defend each other in the case of foreign military attacks.

2. Background

One of the most crucial obstacles this study has to tackle is to situate itself in its circumstances and context. The situation in the Arctic is highly complex and in many ways reflect global geopolitical tensions and challenges (Leclerc, 2024). The following sections will mitigate the challenges by contextualizing important factors for understanding where the Nordics find themselves in Arctic's geopolitics. While the below description gives an understanding of international actors in the Arctic, the scope of this study does not allow for a thorough review of all relevant geopolitical actors.

2.1. Historic Overview of Nordic Defence Cooperation

Since 1952 and 1972 respectively, the Nordic states have all been members of the Nordic Council (NC) and Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), the two main institutions for Nordic cooperation on societal, cultural and political issues. However, cooperation on military and security between the countries was for long an untouched area. This is mainly ascribed to Denmark and Norway joining NATO in 1949, while Sweden and Finland adapted a strategy of neutrality after the WWII, rejecting allyship with both NATO and USSR (Dahl, 2014).

Nordic defence cooperation was institutionalized by the creation of NORDEFECO in 2009, an organization for economic and strategic military cooperation among the Nordics (Dahl, 2014). In the first five years of its operation, NORDEFECO primarily worked on how to strengthen national defenses through common strategies (Saxi, 2019: 659). However, with the changing international security situation, the cooperation has moved towards joint military operations and the issues of responding to the increasing threat of Russia (Idem.: 671-2). NORDEFECO has an informal structure and an annually rotating chairmanship. In accordance with national specializations and capabilities, the members are given responsibilities over one or multiple cooperation areas (COPAs) (Dahl, 2014).

2.2. Relation Between the Arctic and NATO

NATO was established in 1949 and is a military and political alliance consisting of 32 member states. Article 5 – the common defence clause – constitutes the foundation of the alliance, stating that all NATO-members oblige themselves to assist each other in case of an attack by foreign forces (NATO, 2024). The organization is hegemonic, with the US leading the organization (Biermann, 2023: 24).

The High North is used by NATO to describe the Arctic region, and is generally interpreted as the open sea territory of the region above the Arctic circle (Odgaard, 2024). During the 2000s, NATO has been careful with mentioning the High North in communications and declarations, aware of the risk of Russian reactions to forward rhetoric. But calls for an Arctic strategy from NATO have increased since the strategic concept of 2010 was launched (Buchanan, 2022: 2). While no such strategy has commenced, NATO has made their Arctic commitment present in recent publications and strategies. For example, the High North was explicitly mentioned in the 2022 Strategic Concept:

“In the High North, its (*Editor’s note*: Russia’s) capability to disrupt Allied reinforcements and freedom of navigation across the North Atlantic is a strategic challenge to the Alliance.” (NATO, 2023)

There are still differing views among members on how active NATO should be in the Arctic. While Norway, Denmark, and Iceland are positive towards the development of a strategy, Canada holds a more reserved approach and prefers a contained presence of NATO (Buchanan, 2022: 2-3). The US’ foreign policy for a long held a reserved stance towards NATO involvement in the Arctic (Conley & Melino, 2019). However, recently an increased interest in an Arctic agenda from NATO has been distinguished (Buchanan, 2022: 3). Although, a common Arctic strategy currently seems unlikely. Some suggest that the Nordics could spearhead efforts to rebuild NATO’s Arctic resilience and presence (Idem.: 4), seeing as it would benefit the countries to promote the development of future NATO structures building on established Nordic defence arrangements (Vanhanen, 2023).

2.3. Geopolitical Context

Below, the EU and China's Arctic presences are presented. In their positions as hegemon and adversary, American and Russian stances on the Arctic are of great importance to this study, however, their place in the geopolitical dynamics will be elaborated on in the analysis.

The EU is a powerful actor in the international community, a position enhanced since 2019 and the introduced goal of becoming a geopolitical Commission (Haroche, 2023). The most crucial geopolitical dilemma for the EU today is Russia and its ongoing war against Ukraine (Tocci, 2023). Besides the war, growing competition and global influence of China, and an ambivalent relationship with the US during the Trump presidency, are contemporary geopolitical issues of the EU (Ibid.; Whineray, 2020). For long, the EU held a neutral stance towards the Arctic and chose to not involve itself as an actor in the region. However, with Russia's increase in military strategies for the region, becoming an Arctic actor was deemed necessary. Starting with documents on its Arctic visions in 2008, the first Arctic strategy was published in 2014 (Debanck, 2023).

While China is not an Arctic state, the country has shown a great interest in the region's development and claims entitlement to influence in the region (Pezard, et al., 2022). The Chinese government has invested in an Arctic fleet and launched an official Arctic strategy. Since the Ukraine war began in 2022, the China-Russia relationship on the Arctic has deepened, paving the way for China being given more access to Arctic waters (Lamazhapov et al., 2023). Additionally, Chinese efforts to invest in Greenland's infrastructure has involved them in the Arctic discussion (Peiqing & Huiwen, 2023). However, Chinese involvement has met resistance from European and American camps and partially been prohibited (Ibid.).

3. Literature Review

In the following section, previous literature on Nordic defence and security, intra-alliance management of NATO, and the ASD is reviewed. The findings of previous literature will be taken into consideration when discussing the implications of the conclusion under the Discussion-section.

3.1. Nordic Security and Defence

To understand Nordic defence and security cooperation, many turn the focus towards shared Nordic values and identities (Brøgger, 2023: 57-58; Bailes, 2005). Saxi states that as a result of the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Nordics have increased their integration on military and security policies in the 2010s and onwards (2019). A major change is that military cooperation and integration is now seemingly driven by security considerations and shared strategic interests, rather than defence economics and cost-effectiveness (Brøgger, 2023; Saxi, 2019). It is therefore possible to identify a changed trend in the Nordic defence cooperation, explained by the current identity being shaped by a shifting geopolitical role of Norden and continuous external events that allow, and/or forces, the Nordics to adapt new measures to assert national security (Christensen, 2005; Bailes 2005; Herolf, 2005).

In reviewing the alignments of NORDEFECO after the invasion of Crimea, Saxi (2022) sees the increased threat of Russia as the main force behind deepened NORDEFECO cooperation. In examining if the nature of Nordic cooperation in a pre-NATO reality for Sweden and Finland, the article argues that the Nordics' integrated and shared ambitions for capability and deterrence development, made them deserving of the categorization as a semi-alliance, despite the lack of Swedish and Finnish NATO-membership. In the context of ASD, Saxi sees Nordic cooperation as alignment, arguing that the cooperation needs a more formal basis to be considered an alliance.

3.2. Alliance Management and the Case of NATO

Kiprizli's article (2023), explores the effect of climate change in the development of NATO strategies with the Arctic as an example. It is concluded that climate changes will lead to competition for the extraction of natural resources and new transportation routes, while simultaneously creating strong geopolitical tensions in the region. Moreover, Finland and Sweden's entry into NATO may create a reorientation towards the Northern hemisphere, depending on if the Nordics take on pivotal roles in enhancing their Arctic security concerns, and a bigger focus on the strategic importance of meeting Russia's capabilities in the Arctic.

In his textual analysis, Kupchan (1988) applies the ASD to examine the behaviour of the alliance partners during the Persian Gulf crisis. One important conclusion is that strong American leadership in NATO enhances the US' possibility to make credible threats of abandonment towards allies. Secondly it is concluded that a declining presence of American military power in NATO can foster Alliance cohesion and interdependence, as the European allies are forced to increase engagements (345-6). Van Dijk & Sloan's (2020) article applies ASD on how NATO balances Turkey's move towards authoritarianism and its challenge for NATO's liberal democratic values, with taking precautions to not push the country towards abandoning the alliance. It is concluded that a carrot-and-stick-approach is the most viable for NATO, with the aim to give Turkey's democratic backsliding time to reverse and refrain the country from abandoning the alliance and realigning.

4. Theoretical Framework

In the following section the theoretical framework of ASD will be presented. Additionally, the hypotheses and considerations are established. The hypotheses will be anchored in the theory, which strengthens replicability and validity (Teorell, 2007: 57). However, it should be noted that due to the exploratory nature of this study, the hypotheses are merely formed to navigate the result and implications of the material reviewed and will not be empirically tested.

4.1 Alliance Security Dilemma

The ASD is an intra-alliance theory that breaks down alliances in two stages: the primary and the secondary alliance dilemma. The primary dilemma concerns the formation of alliances, while the secondary concerns intra-alliance behavior (Snyder, 1984: 462). This study is only concerned with the secondary dilemma. ASD assumes that states' behavior are explained by understanding the navigation of abandonment and entrapment. Abandonment costs is the incurred price for states when left by an ally, while the risk is the probability of being abandoned. Entrapment costs occur when a state's ally makes choices against the state's preferences, but due to an alliance agreement, the state is unable to act. The entrapment risk is the probability of an alliance commitment resulting in involuntary involvement in disputes that go against one's policy-preferences. (Snyder, 1997: 183-5). ASD sets up five determinants of choice for navigating abandonment and entrapment: (Snyder, 1984: 471)

1. *Relative dependence*
2. *Strategic interest.*
3. *Explicitness in alliance agreement.*
4. *Level of a common interest in the adversary.*
5. *Behavioral records.*

Relative dependence in an alliance is the degree to which allies depend on each other's aid for defence. The theory predicts that the more dependent one ally is, and/or the more independent the second ally is, the larger are the chances that the cost and risks

of abandonment will outweigh the costs and risks of entrapment. In a security context, the degree of dependence of a state are decided by four factors: 1) a state's need for military assistance as a function of the degree to which its capabilities fall short of its adversary's; 2) the alliance partner's ability and capacity to provide such assistance; 3) the experienced conflict and tension with the adversary of the state, and; 4) the prospects of realignment alternatives (Idem. 471-2).

Strategic interest seeks to measure how dependent a state is on the military powers of the other state not being given to the adversary (Snyder, 1984: 472). Relative dependence and strategic interest are therefore closely related, however, the difference lies in strategic interest being the degree to which one state is dependent on the capabilities of another state not ending under the adversary's control, and relative dependence being the degree to which a state is dependent on reinforcement of other states (Snyder, 1997: 188).

Explicitness of alliance agreement bears implications for the management of abandonment versus entrapment costs. An agreement between allies can be either vague, explicit, or somewhere in between (Snyder, 1984: 472). ASD predicts that fear of abandonment peaks when alliances rely on vague agreements but decreases when founded on explicit agreements, and vice versa for fear of entrapment. Agreement explicitness is, however, considered weaker than the other determinants in affecting entrapment and abandonment risks (Idem.: 473).

The degree of common interest against the adversary is the main determinant to understand the level of risk of abandonment and entrapment risk the state exposes itself to when entering an alliance. If there is a high degree of common interests in the adversary, both states are exposed to low entrapment costs and abandonment risks, as they will make similar assessments on when to fight or restrain themselves. Contrary, when states have widely different interests in their common adversary, complications in terms of abandonment and entrapment costs will likely arise (Snyder, 1984, 474).

Behavioral record argues that states' actions will be affected by the recent behavior of other states when determining entrapment and abandonment costs for their action. In comparison with the other determinants, the behavioral record allows for elaboration on how states may come to act in a more dynamic manner (Snyder, 1984, 474-5). An important aspect for understanding how recent dynamics affect future decisions.

A critique against neorealist theories is the partial insufficiencies in explaining complex relationships between international institutions. Biermann points out that ASD's expectation of states seeking allyship with the hegemon when external threats rise, was not viable to understand EU member states' actions after the annexation of Crimea (Biermann, 2023: 4). The annexation did not prompt alliance-neutral countries like Sweden and Finland to join NATO. Instead EU's defense institutions experienced a growth process (Ibid.). While the annexation pushed Sweden and Finland evidently closer to NATO (Saxi, 2019), the simultaneous growth of EU institutions shows ASD's weaknesses in explaining complex structures between entities (Biermann, 2023: 4-5). This weakness will be considered.

4.2. Hypotheses

H1: The stronger the relative dependence and strategic interest are between the states, the more likely they are to form a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO.

H1 is connected to ASD's two first dependents, assuming that states form alliances when they hold relative dependence with, and strategic interest in, each other (Snyder, 1997: 166-167). The degree of dependence varies depending on the width of security allies can provide each other, i.e. if an alliance not only ensures national security but also entails the peace-keeping of a certain region, the dependence is larger (Idem., 168). Therefore, the Nordics are more likely to form an alliance, the stronger the connections of relative dependence and strategic interest are.

H2: The stronger the expected support of the hegemon is, the more likely the Nordics are to form a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO.

H2 relates to behavioral records and the assumption that recent behavior of states creates a stream of strategic choices that can be yielded into expectations how states will act in the future, expectations that are considered when states make intra-alliance decisions (Snyder, 1984: 475). While this is not limited to the US, the context of NATO as a hegemonic organization implies that the Nordics will be extra cautious on what the US' recent behavior could imply for future reactions. Therefore, a strong relation to the US is assumed to lead to an increased likelihood of participation in

a Nordic alliance, as the states will not have to be as cautious with a negative American reaction.

H3: The stronger the shared interest in Russia is between the states, the more likely they are to form a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO.

H3 is based on the intra-alliance dependent of common interest in the adversary, which predicts that states are more likely to enter into an alliance with each other if an interest in the adversary is shared. This is due to a high common interest implying both small entrapment costs and risks of abandonment (Snyder, 1984: 474). As Russia is the Nordics' Arctic adversary, a high degree of shared interest in Russia will entail a higher likelihood of engaging in a Nordic alliance.

H4: The more confident the states feel in a positive reaction from other allies, the more likely they are to form a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO.

H4 is concerned with the behavioral record and overall calculation of entrapment and abandonment of states. While the US as the hegemon of NATO is the most important source for political saliency in the organization (Biermann, 2023: 24), the disapproval of other NATO-members will entail higher risks of abandonment in choosing to create a Nordic alliance. This can be found in ASD's understanding of the aim of states to maintain long-term alliance relations (Snyder, 1997: 180). Therefore, H4 is formed to measure what importance the approval of other NATO-members have for the Nordics' navigation of ASD.

4.3. Considerations

The one determinant not mentioned in the hypotheses is the explicitness of agreement. The choice to not dedicate a hypothesis to the determinant is based on the Nordics having signed explicit agreements for both NORDEFECO and NATO, tying them to the same military obligations. Hence, it is a factor that can be established prior to the results. However, implications of explicit agreements will still be analyzed and discussed.

5. Methodology and Material

In the following section, the methodological choices of this study are presented. As the purpose of this study is to assess what aspects of ASD that could affect the choice to establish a Nordic alliance, the aim is exploratory (Stebbins, 2001). The chosen approach to answer the research question is mixed-method design with a main focus on a theory consuming case study, and a secondary focus on descriptive data. Following the presentation of the mixed-method, the quantitative indicators will be operationalized. The section thereafter discusses the central question of material and selection for both the qualitative and quantitative part. Lastly, the process leading up to the methodological choice is elaborated on. To repeat, below is the research question reiterated:

What determinants of the Alliance security dilemma could steer the choice to establish a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues in NATO?

5.1. A Mixed-Methodological Approach

As established above, a mixed-method design consisting of a theory consuming case study and descriptive statistics is picked for this study. Case studies are used to dissect complex dynamics and events (Teorell, 2007: 98), which fits this study as it focuses on examining events related to recent Nordic defence and security cooperation, the current situation in NATO, and the Nordic perception of adversary threats in the Arctic. The theory consuming approach is picked based on the single-case focus of this study, the case being the Nordics' navigation of creating an alliance on security issues in NATO (Esaiasson et al., 2012: 41). The theoretical choice does impose limits to the generalizability of the study, therefore conclusion will be treated with precaution to not overinterpret implications for a wider NATO or Nordic context (Idem.: 89).

To strengthen the understanding and results found for the Nordics' navigation of ASD, descriptive statistics are added as the quantitative element (Teorell, 2007: 273-75). The data variables will be presented in two tables, one showing the actual numbers of the result, and one showing the internal-ranking index of the Nordics, with the aim of seeing if systematic patterns are found for the states' results (Idem.: 106-107).

To calculate the internal ranking index, all four states are given a number ranging from 1 to 4 for each variable, where 1 indicates most likely to participate in a Nordic alliance, and vice versa for the value of 4. The index score shows what state that, numerically, has the most favorable outset to create a Nordic alliance in NATO and helps distinguish systematic patterns from the results (Esaiasson et al.,: 386-7).

$$\frac{\text{Rank } V_1 + \text{Rank } V_2 + \text{Rank } V_3 + \text{Rank } V_4 + \text{Rank } V_5}{5} = \text{Internal Ranking Index}$$

Picture 1: How to calculate Internal Ranking Index (V = variabel)

5.2. Operationalization of Quantitative Variables

The statistical variables concern military capabilities, adversaries, and hegemonic relations, and are therefore related to ASD's determinants of intra-alliance behaviour. The military capacity variables relate to the determinants of strategic interest and relative dependence, assuming that alliances are sought when national security is threatened, and states lack capacity to ensure safety by themselves (Snyder, 1997: 5). Comparing index-score on National Military Capabilities (NMC) with Russia, relates to the adversary threat, and common interest in the adversary, playing a role for states' navigation of ASD (Idem.: 194). The NMC-index depicts states military power by combining factors of total population, urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditure of all state members (COW, 2021; Singer, 2021).

Additionally, the choice to include the single variable of military personnel is made compared to the states' relative strength in providing national security and bilateral support during a potential attack. Similarly, defence budgets are picked due to its ability to compare relative strengths between Nordic military capacities, which follows the dependents of relative dependence and strategic interest. The variables related to the US are based on ASD's determinant of behavioral record, predicting that states partially base their intra-alliance on recent behaviors of others (Snyder, 1984: 473-74). As the hegemon of NATO, recent American behavior in regards to bilateral relations should influence the Nordics' choice of forming an alliance or not.

5.3. Material and Selection

The material for this study is gathered from national centers for military research, governmental sources, and independent centers for data collection, making the material mainly secondary, which demands attention towards the independence, bias and centrality of the sources (Esaiasson et al., 2012: 283). Taking this into consideration, this study has applied the strict criteria of search-terms for finding reports to the qualitative section. These search-terms are: *Nordic alliance*, *Nordic defence cooperation*, *Nordic Arctic policy*, *Arctic geopolitics*, *US-Nordic relations*. The search-terms lack evaluative words, an important aspect to avoid skewed results, and have been applied to the websites of Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), Danish Defence Research Portal, Finnish Defence Research Agency. Additionally Lund University's library resource LUB Search WAS USED for Archik's report (2023) and the Finnish government's website for Koivurova et al. (2022) report. All reports used have been published in the last five years.

Using reports from Nordic military research centers, is based on the need to assure centrality even though secondary sources are used (Teorell & Svensson, 2007: 106). Nordic defence research institutes are all connected to their respective Armed Forces, which indicates a good understanding of the states' Arctic assessments (FOI, n.d.; FFI, n.d.; FEK, n.d.; DAF, n.d.). The reports chosen from FOI, FFI, and the Danish Defence Research Portal respectively, are specified in Appendix 1.

In addition to the military research centers' reports, the Finnish government report *Arctic cooperation in a new situation: Analysis on the impacts of the Russian war of aggression*, by Koivurova et al. (2022) is picked, as no suitable reports from the Finnish Defence Research Agency were found, but including a Finnish perspective is necessary to assure centrality. Secondly, *The Nordic Countries and U.S. Relations*, by Archik (2023) provides an American perspective on US-Nordic bilateral ties. The report was originally published by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), a non-party tied US congressional resource (Library of Congress, 2024), which strengthens the report's status as representative of a non-biased American assessment of US-Nordic ties.

For the military capabilities variable, Correlates of War's (COW) dataset on the National Material Capabilities (NMC) will be used (COW, 2021; Singer, 2021). To measure military ties with the US the amount of Defence Cooperation Agreement-bases

(DCA) are used. DCA is a bilateral agreement shared between the US and the Nordics separately, and gives US troops access to national military bases of the counterpart (SAF, 2023; DMD, 2023.b; MFAF, 2024; MDN, 2024). Data for defence budgets and military personnel is found in *Military Balance 2024* by International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), an international research institute that focuses on geopolitics, geo-economics, and conflicts (IISS, n.d.). Data for the size of bilateral trade with the US is gathered from the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), a data visualization tool of economic activities globally (Simoes & Hidalgo, 2011). Data from the most recent year available for all four states is used, and the exact year for each variable is specified in *Table 1*.

5.4. Roads Not Taken

Before deciding on a mixed-method approach, the aim of this study was to use a solely quantitative methodology. In the end, the inability to form a working independent variable hindered that approach, and so a mixed-method approach was adapted. The change in methodology entailed a change from primary to secondary sources. This was not a necessary choice, as national Arctic strategies could have been an alternative way to understand the Nordics' assessment of ASD in relation to creating an alliance in NATO. But while secondary sources do come with objectivity and centrality challenges (Esaiaasson et al., 2012: 283, 287), the material enables a nuanced understanding of dynamics of Arctic security for the Nordics, NATO, and Russia, which fits the purpose of the study.

6. Analysis

In the following sections the material gathered will be reviewed and analyzed, in order to answer the research question. Under the Results title, the quantitative data is presented in two tables and shortly interpreted. Under the sections for answering the hypotheses, the analysis of the theory consuming study will be intertwined with the finding of the data.

6.1. Results

Country	Military Personnel* (2023)	NMC-Score Compared to RUS (2016)	DCA-Bases* (2024)	Bilateral Trade With the US*,** (2022)	Defense budget*,** (2023)
Denmark	15400 (19.4)	0.02606	3 (6.4)	17.71 (26.8)	5.29 (18.6)
Finland	23850 (30)	0.0420	15 (31.9)	12.67 (19.1)	6.64 (23.4)
Norway	25400 (31.9)	0.0404	12 (25.5)	10.92 (16.5)	7.28 (25.6)
Sweden	14850 (18.7)	0.0603	17 (36.2)	24.88 (37.6)	9.22 (32.4)
Total:	79500 (100)	-	47 (100)	66.18 (100)	28.43 (100)

Table 1: Numbers for the variables.

* Percentage of total Nordic sum in parenthesis.

** Both bilateral trade and defence budgets are displayed in billion USD (\$).

*** The total sum of NMC-scores does not serve a purpose.

Country	Military Personnel	NMC-Score Compared to RUS	DCA-Bases	Bilateral Trade with the US	Defense budget	Internal Ranking Index:
Denmark	3	4	4	2	4	3.4
Finland	2	2	2	3	3	2.4
Norway	1	3	3	4	2	2.6
Sweden	4	1	1	1	1	1.6

Table 2: Internal ranking index of the Nordics.

Table 1 displays the results of the five indicators as both the actual value, and as the proportion of the total Nordic sum the value constitutes. In Table 2, the results of the Nordics are internally ranked. The internal rankings are also added up and divided by the number of indicators (5) to create an internal ranking index for the countries.

As seen in both tables, Sweden performs the strongest in four out five variables, but performs the worst on the fifth variable. The strong performance puts Sweden at the lowest, i.e. best, index-score of 1.6. Finland and Norway perform similarly on the index, scoring 2.4 and 2.6 respectively, while Denmark comes in last with a 3.4 index score, after performing the worst on three indicators. Defence budget is the indicator where the results are the most evenly spread out between the countries, with a range in percentage (%) between 18.6-32.4. The largest difference in result can be identified in the indicator for DCA-bases, where the results range from 6.4-36.2. However, it should be noted that Denmark's 6.4% is an outlier. A more evenly spread out indicator is the value of bilateral trade with the US with the results of 16.5%, 19.1%, 26.8%, and 37.6%. For military personnel there is a divide between the countries, where Denmark and Sweden have similar results and Norway and Finland have similar results.

6.2. Hypothesis 1: Relative Dependence and Strategic interest

H1: The stronger the relative dependence and strategic interest are between the states, the more likely they are to form a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO.

The individual military capabilities of the Nordics points towards a large relative dependence on each other in both bi-, tri- and multilateral levels, as there is a commonality between the Nordics of deeming their military capacity as insufficient in the ability to protect themselves in the event of a Russian attack (Snyder, 1984: 471-72; Nyhamer, 2021: 24). Pedersen et al. identifies that the military capability of the Norwegian military forces needs to increase, as both Russia and the climate change poses new challenges for the military. Moreover, the overall increase in interest in the Arctic region over the last couple of years requires military capabilities of the country to both increase in capacity and quality (2023: 37-8). In Jacobsen's article on the Arctic aspect in Danish foreign policy, the militarization of the Arctic is highlighted as becoming more relevant for the state's strategy for the region (2022). To measure up to

the Arctic development, Danish Armed Forces need access to operable ocean-going vessels and well-planned strategic capacities (Nyhamer, 2021: 13-4). Compared to the other Nordics, Finland anticipates the risk of a total Russian invasion as unlikely, but not inconceivable, and therefore focuses on capability and readiness improvement of land forces as new threats emerge (Idem.: 20). Swedish Armed Forces have defined the need to coordinate Sweden's ability to give and receive military support to the fullest extent possible, with regards to the rising security threat in Northern Europe (Idem.: 17).

For all Nordic states, heavy focus in military defence strategies are put into coordinating and cooperating national defenses with Nordic neighbors. Finland has identified a need to deepen the cooperation with Sweden and Norway for the northernmost parts of all three countries, arguing that cooperation should be decided on a Nordic level (Koivurova et al., 2022: 79). Additionally, Norway, Sweden, and Finland's trilateral declaration of joint operational planning, signed in 2020 (Nyhamer, 2021: 17). Sweden's and Finland's armed forces are the most interconnected, due to cooperation between the states pre-NATO applications (Edström & Thorburn, 2023: 5). It is evident that the Nordics rest upon the support of each other for the provision of military assistance, to the effect of domestic defense capabilities falling short, thereby having strong strategic interest in each other (Snyder, 1984: 472).

Nordic defense cooperation is supplemented by a defense guarantee through NATO's Article 5 (Nyhamer, 2021: 7; Edström & Thorburn, 2023: 6). The implications of an external defense guarantee is important, as it both indicates the Nordics having other relations to consider when entering an alliance, and the fear of abandonment being small if choosing to not participate in an alliance and distancing oneself from Nordic cooperation.

By cooperation and joint operative forces, the Nordics can create stronger deterrence capabilities (Nyhamer, 2019: 26). Strategically, it would be beneficial for the Nordics to structure their operative forces in such a way, as an attack on one of them would destabilize the security situation for all (Ibid.). From a Norwegian perspective, it is expressed that defending Norway's territory if Russia had the capacity to operate freely on Swedish and Finnish soil would be almost impossible without international reinforcement (Idem.: 10). Therefore, strengthening common deterrence capabilities is a win-win situation for the Nordics. Once again, the strategic interest the Nordics hold in each other is evident (Snyder, 1984: 472).

Looking at the data relating to military capacity, there are some important implications to be gathered. Firstly, Norway and Finland having larger numbers of military personnel than Denmark and Sweden, gives them a comparative advantage in their abilities to both defend national security and assist others in case of an attack.

The results for NMC-scores compared to Russia mirrors the variable of military personnel in some ways, but differs in others. Norway and Finland rank similarly, which speaks to the fact that they should navigate the need for military assistance necessary to complement national capabilities similarly in the case of an attack. Denmark's compared NMC is considerably lower than the three others, indicating that the country considers abandonment risks higher when navigating the ASD. The vulnerable position may lead Denmark to put more importance of maintaining the support of NATO, as states fearing abandonment will strengthen commitments to allies (Snyder, 1997: 183-84). Sweden has a considerably higher value than the others, indicating relative strength to Russia and a stronger likelihood to form an alliance. It is however important to consider that relative capacity for all Nordics ranges from 4 to 6 %, and so the abandonment costs in regards to the Russian threat, if left by NATO, is significant to all four states.

Regarding defence budgets, Sweden takes the lead and Denmark the bottom placement, while Norway and Finland are situated in the middle. While the differences between Denmark and Sweden may affect their evaluation of entrapment and abandonment costs, the differences between the states are small in an international context, and so it is probable that other factors carry a heavier weight in the countries' calculation of the ASD.

Reconnecting to the hypothesis, the Nordics' interest in participating in a Nordic alliance should be relatively comparable, however, Denmark shows tendencies of being the least likely participant. The military capacities of all four states are weak compared to Russia, a negative factor for the outsets of an alliance, as it indicates large abandonment costs. Contrary, the strong relative dependence and strategic interest between the states indicate positive signs for the alliance. Moreover, established agreements between the Nordics show intentions of investing in their common defense – implying that previous commitments have created low abandonment costs and high loyalty among the Nordics, in accordance with determinant of explicit agreements (Snyder, 1984: 473). Moreover the explicitness of the defense guarantee granted by NATO-agreement provides a security net for the Nordics, as both abandonment risks and costs are mitigated.

6.3. Hypothesis 2: Behavioral Record

H2: The stronger the expected support of the hegemon is, the more likely the Nordics are to form a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO.

The hegemonic nature of NATO has several implications for the intra-alliance ties and behavior of the allies (Masala, 2010: 386). Archik describes the US-Nordics relation as largely strong in *The Nordic Countries and U.S. Relations* (2023). The US has an economic presence in all of the Nordic countries, but the strongest economic ties are with Sweden. The DCA between the US and the Nordics is considered an important point of military cooperation, and additionally, Finland, Norway, and Denmark's choice to purchase US-built F-35 fighter jets have strengthened the bilateral relations (Idem.: 141). The dual-way trade and military ties indicate relative dependence between the entities, as it limits realignment alternatives and speaks to the allies' ability to provide military assistance (Snyder, 1984: 472).

The main friction in the bilateral ties was challenges during the Trump administration, and specifically the former president's pursuit of buying Greenland from Denmark (Archik, 2023: 142). However, the bilateral ties are on good terms as of today, and Jacobsen describes the US as Denmark's "...closest security policy ally. In the Arctic and in general." (2022). Nordic bilateral ties have been smooth with the Biden administration, and have benefited American efforts ratifying Sweden and Finland's NATO-applications (Archik, 2023: 142). From a Nordic perspective, the continued support of the US is important to scare off actions from Russia, as American military reinforcement is a key capability in case of an attack (Nyhamar, 2021: 28).

For entrapment and abandonment navigation, the lack of consistency in recent behavior of American foreign policy poses a challenge for the Nordics (Snyder, 1984: 474). While the current administration shows signs of encouraging a deepened Nordic defence cooperation, a returning Trump administration is likely to have a differing opinion (Archik, 2023; Granholm, 2019: 14), thus increasing the risk of abandonment. Additionally, commitments of the US to defend the Northern flank could change after the upcoming election (Moregård, 2023: 5). The Nordics must act with caution when managing intra-alliance relations in NATO, as American abandonment would be costly.

The US introduced a new Arctic strategy in 2019, but the American approach towards the Arctic was for long been considered as *much talk, little action*, resulting in

the US' capabilities falling behind Russia and China's (Granholm, 2019:14-5). As a consequence of historic sparse American interest in the Arctic, and a decreasing interest of the US in upholding international order, the security guarantee of NATO has become more ambiguous – creating an incentive for the Nordics to work more proactively in securing each others defenses (Nyhamar, 2021: 25). However, the new geopolitical tensions in the Arctic has increased the knowledge on the region among US authorities and institutions. This presents an opportunity for the Nordics to deepen ties with the US on trade and military matters, as American initiatives will follow the increased Arctic attention (Granholm, 2021: 9). Overall for the Arctic, the Nordics must balance their strategic imperatives of both maintaining the peace of the region, with pushing for more attention towards the region from NATO, to be prepared to handle the event of an attack.

Connecting the above dynamics to the data, the two variables of interest are DCA-bases and bilateral trade. Sweden leads the way for both variables, while the other three states quite evenly split the other placements. The strong US relations implies that Sweden's relationship is less asymmetrical than that of the other Nordics, indicating that the country should have more room to make decisions without the necessary approval of the US (Snyder, 1984: 473). On the other hand, the larger asymmetries in the other Nordic's bilateral relations should entail larger abandonment risks. However, as the indicators are small in an American context, the results should not be over-interpreted as the other Nordics having significantly higher abandonment costs to the US compared to Sweden.

Concluding on the hypothesis, the separate bilateral relations between the Nordics and the US are relatively similar, and the US treats the Nordics as one entity in many instances (Archik, 2024: 139; Nyhamer, 2021: 27). The asymmetrical relationship and positions of the US as hegemon imply the Nordics calculating for high abandonment costs in regards to the US. However, the presence of long-standing bilateral ties and the strategic importance of the Nordics for the High North, mitigate the abandonment risks. Denmark scores the lowest on variables relating to strength of American ties, however, this should be interpreted with considerations of findings from the qualitative results, i.e. that the treatment of the Nordics as one, and the similar American outlook on the Nordic countries strategic benefits, implies that the behavioral record of the US should, and the costs of being abandoned, should be equal between the Nordics.

6.4. Hypothesis 3: Common Interest in Adversary

H3: The stronger the shared interest in Russia is between the states, the more likely they are to form a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO.

Granhölm (2019) describes the threat from Russia in the Arctic as increasingly serious. After a period of declining presence and capabilities in the Arctic region, Russia has in the last decade launched ambitious strategies to develop military and civil security, shipping and navigation control, and energy sourcing, in the region. It is still unclear to what extent Russia will be able to fulfill the goals set up in their Arctic strategies, however, there is no doubt that Russia's overarching goal is to possess total control over the Northeast Passage and, as far as is technically and practically doable, the air space in the region (7). Russia's new Arctic ambitions also creates greater risk for Russian power projections further south, e.g.. interrupting seafare transportation in the North Atlantic, that would pose a great risk for Nordic security (Idem. 18).

With the above considerations in mind, the Nordics have all deemed Russia to be a substantial threat to national security, and it is a shared view that a Russian attack would be detrimental to national security (Nyhamer, 2019: 37-8). As a consequence, the Nordics are currently strengthening military capacities. However, the military strategies to combat increased Russian threats differentiates due to different strategic approaches towards adversaries, as well as domestic economical and political variations (Edström & Thorburn, 2023: 2).

The biggest differences in the adversary interest among the states are the level of threat anticipation, and different geographical focus areas. For Norway and Finland, the shared border with Russia has fostered precaution and the countries often emphasize deterrence and trust-building measures (Edström & Thorburn, 2023: 2). Moreover, Finland has in a national government report identified the need for Arctic strategy to have readiness for "action and change, even for a rapid response", due to Russia's behaviour in the region (Koivurova et al., 2022: 80). Sweden and Denmark have displayed more offensive diplomatic approaches, however, still with respect towards Russia being a capable adversary (Edström & Thorburn, 2023: 3).

Due to geographical differences, the states are concerned with somewhat different scenarios of a potential Russian attack (Idem.: 7). The main concern for

Sweden, Denmark and Finland, lies with Russian military aggressions in the Baltic Sea, while Norway focuses on a potential attack in the North Atlantic. Additionally, Denmark is concerned with sea territory close to Greenland (Nyhamer, 2021). However, the attack in one of the sea territories would affect all of the Nordics (Ibid.), and the prospect of an attack in one area would affect all. The almost identical assessment of Russia as a large threat to national security speaks to the likeliness of a Nordic alliance on Arctic security in NATO. This follows ASD's assumption that the allies will cooperate if they have shared interests in the adversary, as it implies low entrapment costs and a low risk of being abandoned (Snyder, 1997: 184).

Two main threats of Russia in the Arctic are identified as the Russian aspiration to control a future transoceanic ocean passage, and submarine-based nuclears. If Russia was to attain control over the Northeast Passage, it would have serious security implications for the Nordics, hence it is identified as a common security challenge (Granholm, 2019: 17-18). Russia's aggressive behavior has been deemed a tactic of political pressure (Nyhamer, 2019: 37). The Nordics share an interest in combating such political pressure together, as Russia's capacity against each one of them separately is considerably greater than its capacity against Norden as one entity (Nyhamer, 2021: 38-9). Therefore, the shared interest in fighting off Russian political pressure with common efforts further establish low entrapment costs and low risk of abandonment for a Nordic alliance in NATO (Snyder, 1997: 187). Additionally, Russia's choice to treat the High North as one entity should make the Nordics consider a stronger cooperation, as it creates a common threat (Granholm, 2019: 20; Snyder, 1997: 180-1).

The compared NMC-scores reflects the common interest in the adversary, and its result shows that Sweden ranks higher than Norway and Finland, who in turn rank higher than Denmark. However, as all Nordics have considerably weaker military capabilities than Russia, with the capacities ranging from 4 to 6 % of Russia's, they share an interest in helping each other's deterrence capabilities. The shared interest in the adversary once again points towards the likeliness of a Nordic alliance in NATO. Although, it should be considered that the relative weaknesses may lead to instabilities in a potential alliance, as the states might feel the pressure to form stronger ties with militarily more powerful NATO-states (Snyder, 1984: 472). Considering that the Nordics all are NATO-members and enjoy the protection of Article 5, this aspect is mitigated, as some military protection, irregardless of a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues, is guaranteed.

6.5. Hypothesis 4: Intra-Alliance Dynamics and Behavioral Record

H4: The more confident the states feel in a positive reaction from other allies, the more likely they are to form a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO.

Edström and Thorburn (2023) identifies Sweden and Finland's NATO-entries as a possibility for operative military coordination to strengthen between the Nordics. Moreover, it has opened up the discussion of Norden as a strong regional entity in NATO (6). However, there are reasons for the Nordics to trade cautiously when pushing for the far-reaching Nordic cooperation in NATO, as it could bring negative implications for alliance members' attitude towards shared defence-responsibilities in the North (Idem.: 8). By creating an alliance, the Nordics could be perceived as only maximizing their benefits over long-term coherence of NATO, resulting in other allies becoming less loyal towards common defence in the Nordic region (Snyder, 1997: 180).

On the other hand, Norden as a single entity could lead to operative military benefits for NATO in the High North, e.g. if a Nordic military with the ability to more efficiently respond to Russian threats than current forces was created (Edström & Thorburn: 8). Under those circumstances, supporting a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues would be in the best interest of NATO-members, as the interest of all allies would be maximized (Snyder, 1984: 180).

When considering NATO-members support of a Nordic alliance, it is important to remember that the aggressive behavior of Russia in the High North also constitutes a threat to the US and NATO's power (Granholt, 2021: 6-7; Moregård, 2024: 4-5). Russia's recent strategical revelations can in many aspects be traced back to the state's wish to hold off American resources from threatening Russian military in the Arctic (Granholt, 2019: 15). From the perspective of NATO, strong interoperability between military forces in separate regions are of importance (Edström & Thorburn: 7), and so the Nordic region is an important piece of the puzzle in fighting off Russian power balancing efforts. Therefore, if a Nordic alliance could assure to bring operative benefits, the positive interests of other allies should outweigh their potential disapproval of enhancement of Nordic interests (Snyder, 1997: 180-1). Additionally, the relative inactiveness of the US and NATO in the Arctic has left organization's Arctic policy

behind Russia and China's, making the Arctic knowledge of the Nordics important for NATO (Moregård, 2023: 3; Granholm, 2021: 1-3). This, in combination with the NATO-members commitment to the extensive military exercise Nordic Response, taking place in March 2024, indicates the importance NATO has started to put in the High North and Nordic region since Finland and Sweden's entrance into NATO (Moregård, 2023: 3-5).

It is difficult to exactly determine how the hegemon and other allies would react to a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues, but what stands clear is that the Nordics, for their own benefit of low abandonment risks, must promote the strategically operative benefits an alliance could bring, if the choice to establish one is taken. A second important part to consider for the Nordics is to assure other allies that a Nordic alliance would not expand to issues beyond the High North. Both of these points relate to the nature of states' behavior in intra-alliance relations, where everyone wishes to maximize their own interest (Snyder, 1997: 180-1). If successful with establishing this narrative, the Nordics should experience lower abandonment risks in choosing to establish an alliance, and gain support from allies on their collaborative effort to strengthen NATO's overall deterrence capabilities towards Russia.

6.6. What Aspects Could Steer the Choice?

The conclusions of the hypotheses have given us indications for how the Nordics are expected to steer the choice of establishing a Nordic alliance based on the dependents of the ASD. Repeating the research question again, it is as follow:

What determinants of the Alliance security dilemma could steer the choice to establish a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues in NATO?

Seeing the analysis, it is evident that the strategic interest and relative dependence will play a big role in the Nordics' navigation of entrapment and abandonment costs in regards to establishing a Nordic alliance. Moreover, the common interest in the adversary, both between the Nordics and among NATO-members, will steer the Nordics' choice in two impactful ways. Firstly, as an alliance would entail small entrapment costs and low abandonment risks among the Nordic states themselves, and create deterrence and operative benefits, the common interest should influence the choice to establish an alliance. Secondly, the general perception among NATO-members

of Russia as the main adversary, implies that the organizations common interest in the adversary for NATO could steer the Nordics' choice in forming an alliance.

The behavioral record plays an important role for understanding the way the US will respond to a Nordic alliance, making it a determinant possible of steering the Nordics' choice. Additionally, behavioral records will be important to navigate the reactions from the other NATO-members. The one determinant of intra-alliance behavior that will hold relatively less significance is the explicitness of agreement in which the Nordic states find themselves. However, it is still concluded that explicit agreements of NATO and NORDEFCO has set the stage for the Nordics' future navigation of ASD, as the explicitness of the agreements have created Nordic loyalties and decreased abandonment risks and costs of potentially establishing an alliance.

7. Discussion

7.1. Implication of Analysis

Moving on to the implication of the analysis, evidence has been found for different aspects of the ASD to steer the potential establishment of a Nordic alliance on Arctic issues in NATO. Expanding on the dynamics found in both the reports and descriptive statistics, a trend of the determinants pointing towards positive indications for a Nordic alliance can be distinguished. This is due to both strong relative dependence and strategic interest found among the Nordics, in addition to the almost equally large and overlapping interest in Russia as the adversary. The results overlap with Saxi's (2022) conclusion on the Nordics' strong defence cooperation leading to dependence, a shared identity and strategic interests. In a further step, this led the author to classify the cooperation as a semi-alliance and alignment. This must be addressed with regards to our findings, as it is concluded that conditions apply for the Nordics to overcome abandonment risks of establishing an alliance, if managed correctly. Saxi's conclusions should be seen in the context of a pre-NATO reality for Sweden and Finland, and so when stating that the Nordic defence cooperation is a mere alignment because it lacks the formality of a common defence clause, it is interpreted that with joining NATO, the cooperation has moved to a formal alliance on some levels. The findings of this study therefore builds on the findings of previous literature and contributes with a new exploratory perspective on what aspects of ASD that should steer the Nordics' choice to establish a Nordic alliance in NATO on Arctic security.

While behavioral record is identified as an important dependent of steering the choice of the Nordics, it is, due to the recent ambivalent behavior of the US and the future of American support of NATO and the Northern flank remaining uncertain, vague how the dependent's implication will steer Nordic navigation of ASD. Although, it is found that the American ambivalence could increase the Nordics' relative dependence, as they might feel the need to establish more certainty in their abilities to defend each other in the case of American non-action. This study therefore shares Kupchan's (1988) conclusion of an American declining military presence fostering alliance cohesion, as the ambiguity of US behavior leading to stronger Nordic cooperation, is a way of increased cohesion. However, due to the exploratory nature of this study, it is not yet known the extent to which American ambiguity will steer alliance cohesion between the

Nordics, or between the Nordics' separate ties to other NATO-allies, which makes this study's result insufficient in fully confirming the conclusion.

Moreover, due to their geopolitical outsets, it is found that the Nordics' navigation of abandonment and entrapment costs when considering an alliance will be influenced by the heightened importance of Russia and the Nordic states' possibilities to influence NATO's future strategic choice in regards to the adversary and the region. Kiprizli (2023) argued that the Nordic states, if taking on pivotal roles within NATO after Sweden and Finland's entries, has the chance to instill their own security interest, which is a conclusion that this study shares. While the influence is in no way guaranteed, the opportunities are presented for the Nordics to create stronger bilateral ties with both NATO-members and the hegemon by creating a Nordic alliance.

As for wider implications of this study, the results can be used to see that the Nordic defence and security cooperation established prior to Sweden and Finland joining NATO will, in some aspects, affect how the states manage ASD and intra-alliance behavior. However, while the discussion reasons around how the Nordics might evaluate the abandonment and entrapment costs for establishing an alliance, it is beyond the scope of this study to certainly answer if we will see a Nordic alliance on Arctic security, and how that choice might affect the Nordics' standing in a wider geopolitical context. Taking into consideration the insufficiencies found in ASD to fully explain complex relations between international institutions, the conclusions found in this study would benefit from the testing of other theoretical frameworks. The implications of four determinants of choice influencing the decisions of the Nordics in regards to establishing an alliance, can however be interpreted as military power and geopolitical tensions currently playing an important role for how small states navigate the international arena.

7.2. Future Research

Expanding on the conclusion of this exploratory study, a main opportunity for future research is to examine how the development of Nordic defence and security cooperation have been conducted in the context of NATO, when sufficient data is available. When examining such a question, one approach could be to examine the feasibility of ASD's determinants in explaining the Nordic states' treatment of their previously established integrated cooperation in a new context. Moreover, questions

regarding how current dynamics will affect the future of a Nordic alliance on Arctic security issues still stand, and so it is worth exploring how the Nordics could promote their potential alliance as one of strategic benefit of NATO. Additionally, diving deeper into what kind of cooperation a Nordic alliance in NATO would entail, for both the Nordics themselves and other NATO-members, deserves more attention.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Reports From National Military Research Centers

The reports chosen from Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) are:

- *Nordic Response 2024 – NATO returns to the North in large scale*, by Moregård (2024),
- *Nordiskt operativt försvarssamarbete — före och efter ett svenskt och finskt NATO-medlemskap*, by Edström and Thorburn (2023),
- *Development in the Arctic - the effect and implications for Sweden*, by Granholm (2019),
- *Too Big Not To Care: the US:s long-term strategies for a new Arctic*, by Granholm (2021).

The reports chosen from Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) are:

- *A Warmer Arctic in a Cold War – The Effects of Climate Change on Arctic Security Policy*, by Pedersen (2023),
- *Military strategic aspects of Nordic security environment changes – identifying common Nordic strategic challenges*, by Nyhamer (2021),
- *A future Nordic alliance? – prerequisites and possible operations*, by Nyhamer (2019).

The report chosen from the Danish Defence Research Portal is:

- *Arctic Aspects in Denmark's New Foreign and Security Policy Strategy*, by Jacobsen (2022).