

FINLAND AND ITS  
RELATIONS WITH THE USSR:  
A STATE TO BE EMULATED OR DENOUNCED?

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Finland occupies a unique place within the Soviet's foreign policy. A tiny northern country that share some eight hundred miles of common border with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it is highly vulnerable to invasion from its gigantic neighbor. Yet no invasion has taken place since the time of World War Two. And Finland and her citizens live a life remarkably free of Soviet influence, considering her location. But these freedoms do come with a price- what many scholars have termed "Finlandization." This paper will discuss this 'price' that Finland must pay, as well as explore possible reasons that the USSR uses in their decision not to invade and control Finland. And finally, whether Finland represents a dangerous precedent or rather a state to be admired and even emulated, being a nation of relative freedom in the face of possible domination, and as one that brings the East and West together and therefore lessening the chance of global conflict.

But first we must examine some history of the relation-

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ship between Finland and the USSR. The relationship has been a very rocky one to say the least, and one filled with conflicts and hatred. In 1917, Finland gained her independence from Russian control. Interesting enough, the Soviets were the first to recognize Finland's independence. Up until its war with Soviet Union in late 1939, Finland was basically western oriented in its domestic and political contacts. The Russians were regarded with "fear and hatred" and as a "hereditary enemy."<sup>1</sup> In the war of '39 the Finn's fought bravely against the Russians, but were heavily outnumbered and outgunned. The signing of the Moscow Treaty signified the end of the conflict, and in it Finland ceded land and transit rights. Attempts were made to stabilize relations between the two countries, but the mood of the Finnish population was very definitely anti-Soviet. This mood lead the Finn's to seek a strong ally, and which they thought they found with Nazi Germany. But it was

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<sup>1</sup>Fred Singleton, "The Myth of "Finlandization". International Affairs- London, spring '81, p. 270.

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soon obvious that Germany was not the solution to their problems, and Finland began to look for a way of of the alliance. Peace negotiations were started with the Russians, and an armistice was signed in the fall of '44. Part of the treaty called for size restrictions to be placed on the Finnish armed forces. These restrictions still apply today. There was a call throughout Finland for a new policy of "good neighborliness" in dealing with the USSR. In '48 the "YYA" treaty was signed, linking the Soviet Union and Finland to "...friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance."<sup>2</sup> Since then, with only minor problems, Russian/Finnish relations have been fairly good.

But why hasn't the Soviet Union incorporated Finland, as it has done to so many other countries that lie on or near to its border? We will examine several possible reasons, and while some may be more important than other, it is probable that all have played some part in the decision.

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Janssen, "Finland, Looking East, Wonders If a Neighbor Is Changing Its Policy." The Wall Street Journal, September 30, '76, p. 1.

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To start, it is possible that Finland is simply not worth the price the Soviets would pay by annexation. It is a small country, and has but five million inhabitants. Annexation would surely cause Western denouncement and possible economic hardships. And Finland would be particularly hard to digest; the Finns are brave, patriotic, and not too fond of Russians. Finland would surely be more difficult to digest than either Latvia or Estonia were. What's more, the Russians have a "healthy respect"<sup>3</sup> for the Finns, admiring them as people who have suffered much in their long fight for freedom.

And it is very probable that Stalin (and those who followed him) wanted to use Finland as a model and a showcase to show the West that the USSR wasn't really the land hungry expansionist power that they were made out to be. As Richard Janssen puts it, "...it's reasoned Finland's main protection now is her role as Russia's "showcase" for peaceful coexistence, or proof that Soviet Russia doesn't gobble up every little country along its borders."<sup>4</sup> But

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<sup>3</sup>Walter Laquer, The Political Psychology of Appeasement, p.8

<sup>4</sup>Janssen, The Wall Street Journal, Sept. 30, '76, p. 1

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it is most likely a combination of these factors that is responsible: the USSR realizes that Finland is not a large price to pay considering its use as a propaganda tool, and thus the USSR avoids the bloody and bitter conflict that would surely take place if Finland was annexed. The West remains happy; the Russians lose little; and the Finns get to live their normal lives.

But what price must Finland pay to remain an "independent" state? Walter Laqueur, in his book, A Continent Astray<sup>5</sup> lists five reasons:

1) Finland is a neutral country, but must show the Soviet Union special "obligations". It cannot be against Soviet foreign policy, and neither may Finland enter any "commitments" without first consulting and getting Soviet approval. It is also "expected" to show support for major aspects of Soviet policy.

2) The Finns are allowed to have an army, but within the limits set by the treaty signed in '44.

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<sup>5</sup>Walter Laqueur, A Continent Astray, p. 223.

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3) The USSR pledges non-interference when it comes to Finland's domestic affairs. The Russians impose no censorship, but with the understanding that the Finn's are to use self-censorship. Finnish officials are "expected" to often state their "beneficent" relations with the Soviets. And the USSR controls political parties; only those "approved" can participate in government.

4) Close commercial ties are expected between Finland and Communist countries, but there are no set limits or rules.

5) Finland must deny the existence of "Finlandization."

Regarding Laqueur's fifth point-- this paper's purpose is not to prove that "Finlandization" exists, as I believe it does, but rather to explore the hows and whys of it, and examine whether Finland is to be emulated or denounced.

There can be no argument that Finland occupies a unique place in world politics; it has retained its basic

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freedom in the face of a mighty adversary. And it provides a 'bridge' between East and West, as both sides have respect for it. And can one really fault its concessions it has made to the Soviets compared to the price it would pay if it did not? There is heated discussion on both sides. Leading the critics is Walter Laqueur. Laqueur believes that Finland and its concessions to the USSR are setting dangerous precedents. By not disputing (and actually giving support) to the Soviets and their policies, the Finns are actually encouraging the Soviets, Laqueur says. It is a way for them to expand their sphere of influence without resorting to military domination. It is a slow transformation, to be sure, but a peaceful one. Just the threat of their military might is enough. Laqueur believes there are signs that Western Europe is already beginning to be "Finlandized." Lack of denouncement of the Soviets and their actions, the increased trade with Russians, and the growing weakness of the NATO alliance are all signs, he points out. There is no hope of the Finns defeating



the Russians, Laqueur acknowledges. Rather he feels that the Finns have become too strict in their complience; that they carry self-censorship much farther than the Soviets pressure them to do. The Finns, of course, harshly deny Laqueur's claims, and even go so far as to say, "There is no evidence to support the claim that Finland is a puppet dangling on Soviet held strings."<sup>6</sup> But perhaps Laqueur is wrong. Even with the acknowledgment that "Finlandization" does exist, perhaps Finland is a state to be emulated and even followed. By retaining their "neutrality", Finland gets the best of both worlds; its people to do what they please, to an extent, and yet they maintain close ties with the USSR. And maybe Laqueur is correct when he states that Western Europe is leaning to a state of "Finlandization." Perhaps it is an intentional movement. They envy Finland, and its ability to stay out of a crisis. And its ability to maintain excellent relations with all of its neighbors-- not just a few.

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<sup>6</sup>Krosby, Peter. "Finlandization." Scandinavian Review  
June '75, p. 17

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So perhaps Finland does present us with an example of what the future will hold. Finland is, quoting Stevenhan Rosefelt, "A country which has found a way to avoid the harshest burdens and risks of the cold war, to preserve its Western style political liberties and cultural traditions. And, almost alone now among European states, to face changing circumstances with relative equanimity."<sup>7</sup> No wonder Europe is impressed by Finland's results. So Rosefelt is probably correct when he states that that Finland is "what Europe wants to be."

So let us then assume that the future does indeed hold the Finlandization of other European counties. But in all probability it will help create a safer world, strengthening East-West relations by promoting better communication. And by reducing the chance of a thermo-nuclear conflict. As Max Jakobson, former UN ambassador from Finland says about his homeland, "the cold war passed

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<sup>7</sup>Rosefeld, Stevenhan. "Finlandization." The Washington Post, Dec 1, '72. p. A26

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her by."

The price of course, is self-censorship and maintaining good relations with the Soviet Union. But perhaps this is better than the alternative- increasing East-West tensions and the increasing chance of global conflict.

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