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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Holmila, A., & Ahonen, P. (2022). The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Many Faces of Finlandization and Some Potential Lessons for Ukraine. *Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History*, *19*(3), 560-577. https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok-2473

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Leibniz-Institut
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Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

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THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

The Many Faces of Finlandization and Some Potential Lessons for Ukraine

How will Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine end? What kinds of political scenarios could stop the suffering and bring stability to the region? Of all the different future scenarios none is particularly encouraging. In particular, the prospect of a ›Finlandized‹ Ukraine has met with near universal rejection. Yet, ever since Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimea, ›Finlandization‹ of Ukraine has been discussed as a potential solution.

In February 2014, in the context of Russia's annexation of the Crimea, Zbigniew Brzezinski called for a ›Finland option‹ to stabilize the Russo-Ukrainian situation.[1] Henry Kissinger followed on Brzezinski's heels, arguing that Ukraine should seek a posture similar to that of Finland: fiercely independent and firmly tied to the West, while avoiding ›institutional hostility toward Russia‹.[2] At the time, the words of these elder Cold War statesmen elicited mainly criticism. Ukraine was not Finland, ran the counter-argument; Russian interest in the ›Ukrainian question‹ and the two countries' historically conditioned Slavic ties rendered the Finnish model inapplicable at best and anachronistic at worst.[3] During the run-up to the current war, the Finnish model emerged once again, only to be quickly shot down by Ukrainians and Finns alike. It is evident that the notion of Finlandization keeps producing negative sentiments, especially in Ukraine and Finland. Still, it stubbornly persists – cropping up most re-

1 Zbigniew Brzezinki, Russia Needs to Be Offered a ›Finland Option‹ for Ukraine, in: *Financial Times*, 22 February 2014.
2 Henry Kissinger, To Settle the Ukraine Crisis, Start at the End, in: *Washington Post*, 5 March 2014.
3 For a particularly strong rejection, see James Kirchik, Finlandization Is Not a Solution for Ukraine, in: *American Interest*, 27 July 2014. See also Mark P. Lagon/Will Moreland, ›Finlandization‹ Abandons Ukraine, in: *Foreign Policy*, 3 November 2014; Clifford G. Gaddy, Finlandization for Ukraine? Realistic or Utopian?, in: *Brookings*, 6 March 2014.

Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History 19 (2022), S. 560-577
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cently, if indirectly, at the Davos World Economic Forum of 2022 when Kissinger called for a return to the status quo ante bellum in Ukraine.[4] President Joe Biden has been more direct in his wording. Echoing Franz Josef Strauss, first in May 2022 and then again in February 2023, he accused Putin of trying to Finlandize NATO. Ironically, of course, with the ongoing foreign policy reorientation of Finland and Sweden, Putin is highly likely to end up facing a NATO-ized Finland instead, as Biden also observed.[5]

As a Cold War concept, Finlandization or the ›Finnish model‹ carries a sense of ignominy, submission and subservience. The generally accepted interpretation is that Finland was caught in the relentless embrace of the proverbial Russian bear and functioned as a quasi-sovereign nation, unable to conduct its foreign or even domestic policies independently of Moscow's approval.[6] Who would want to pursue something like that as a national strategy? To understand the multifaceted nature of Finlandization and to weigh its potential risks and benefits in today's context, we need to turn to history.

The term itself first emerged in the debates regarding Austria's neutral status in the 1950s, but it gained traction and was operationalized by the West German conservative elites in their campaign against Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In its West German permutation, Finlandization had not yet become the model of superpower-small power dynamics to which it later evolved. Instead, it was conceived at a particular time and place during the Cold War to satisfy the political needs of its creators, especially in domestic party politics. Further, it illuminated the anxieties of those who first applied it, rather than signifying the real nature of the USSR's policy toward Finland or Finland's policy toward the Soviet Union, let alone constituting a general model of major power-small power interaction. In short, Finlandization was a politically loaded term from its inception.[7]

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4 Kissinger's entire speech of 17 January 2022 is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfzK_bPPax4>.

5 Peter Beaumont/Isobel Koshiw, Biden Says Putin Trying to ›Wipe out‹ Ukrainian Culture, as Prospect of Retreat Looms in East, in: *Guardian*, 28 May 2022; the transcript of Biden's 21 February 2023 speech in Warsaw is available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/02/21/remarks-by-president-biden-ahead-of-the-one-year-anniversary-of-russias-brutal-and-unprovoked-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

6 See in particular Walter Laqueur's influential *The Political Psychology of Appeasement. Finlandization and Other Unpopular Essays*, Piscataway 1980, pp. 3-22.

7 A good account of the origins of the term can be found in Harto Hakovirta, *Suomettuminen [Finlandization]*, Jyväskylä 1975, and Pekka Lähteenkorva/Jussi Pekkarinen, *Idän etuvartio? Suomi-kuva 1945–1981 [The East's Outpost? Finland's Image 1945–1981]*, Helsinki 2008, pp. 207-286. See also Johanna Rainio-Niemi, Puolueettomuus ja suomettuminen: suomalaista viiteryhmä- ja muistinpolitiikkaa kylmästä sodasta nykypäivään [Neutrality and Finlandization: Finnish Politics of Reference Groups and Memory from the Cold War to Today], in: Louis Clerc/Tiina Lintunen/Markku Jokisipilä (eds), *Demokratian, politiikan ja urheilun rajamailla. Ajankohta. Poliittisen historian vuosikirja [Intersections between Democracy, Politics and Sport. Ajankohta. Yearbook of Political History]* 18 (2023), pp. 230-267. The most recent English-language academic study of Finlandization is Tuomas Forsberg/Matti Pesu, The »Finlandisation« of Finland: The Ideal Type, the Historical Model, and the Lessons Learnt, in: *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27 (2016), pp. 473-495. See also Burkhard Auffermann, Finnlandisierung – das abschreckende Beispiel? Zur Problematik eines politischen Kampfbegriffes in der Ära des Kalten Krieges, in: *zeitgeschichte* 26 (1999), pp. 347-371.

Because Finlandization today remains a pejorative descriptor of fearful appeasement, rooted in Finland's supposed conduct during the latter half of the Cold War and detached from its original moorings, it is important to break from the monochromatic understanding of the term and to examine how the whole concept was born and how it developed into the controversial model it is today.

1. A Short History of Finnish-Soviet Relations

During World War II, Stalin made two failed attempts to destroy the Finnish state and to put an end to the ›Finnish question‹ that had troubled the Bolshevik leadership since the early 1920s.[8] The fact that Finnish society as a whole contributed to the thwarting of key Soviet objectives between 1939 and 1945 gave the nation not only a strong inoculation against Soviet ideology but also a quiet sense of pride that has existed ever since. Once a nation has successfully defended its very existence on the battlefield, it is nearly impossible to break. The Ukrainians have shown that the Russians today face a situation similar to that of the Soviet Union vis-à-vis Finland in WWII.

Even in the heyday of Cold War Finlandization in the 1970s, national pride was embedded in the deep structures of Finnish society, much of whose everyday life was managed by the tens of thousands of war veterans. This underlying societal dynamic was never recognized in the West. At the same time, official Finnish rhetoric kept regurgitating all the pomp about ›eternal friendship with the Soviets‹ that truly bored ordinary Finns.[9] In short, Finland played with two sets of cards. For many, this seemed a necessary evil; for some, a national shame. But above all, the Finns knew that the Soviet Union was, among many things, also a linguistic regime in which words and surface symbolism often mattered as much as deeds.[10]

Postwar Finnish-Soviet relations developed from these circumstances. Both sides were forced to recognize that a form of coexistence was the only viable solution. The Finns knew that in the case of a major East-West conflict, Finland would be among its first victims and there would be no Western assistance. The Russo-Finnish Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) of 1948 established the foundations of post-1945 Finnish-Soviet relations. It stipulated that Finland was obliged to resist any armed attack from the West against Finland or through Finland against the USSR, thus turning Finland into a Soviet buffer zone. However, unlike the FCMA

8 Kimmo Rentola, *Stalin ja Suomen kohtalo [Stalin and Finland's Fate]*, Helsinki 2016. For a good general assessment of Finland and WWII, see Tiina Kinnunen/Ville Kivimäki (eds), *Finland in WWII. History, Memory, Interpretation*, Leiden 2012.

9 Antero Holmila, *Suomalaisten kylmä sota [People's Cold War in Finland]*, Jyväskylä 2023.

10 For the role of language, see Helena Rytövuori-Apunen, Luottamuksen kieli idänsuhteissa – tyhjää ›liturgiaa‹ vai merkityksellistä toimintaa? [The Language of Trust in Relations with Russia – Empty ›Liturgy‹ or Significant Action?], in: *Idäntutkimus [Eastern Studies]* 2 (2008), pp. 60-66.

treaties that Stalin forced upon the countries of the socialist bloc between 1947 and 1948, the Finnish version was a negotiated one, into which the Finns managed to insert an important provision that recognized Finland's neutrality and its desire to remain outside the superpower blocs and their conflicts. Militarily, the Finns interpreted the treaty to mean that Finland would defend its territory against any attack – also from the East. The only time that the Soviets tried to invoke bilateral consultations through the FCMA treaty was in the context of the smoldering Berlin crisis of 1961. According to the Kremlin, the threat of a wider war was so great that the USSR wanted to initiate negotiations for activating the treaty's clauses. The Finns rejected the offer, based on the leverage that the FCMA treaty provided.[11]

Overall, the FCMA treaty set the baseline for Finland's foreign policy and in effect functioned as a stabilizing mechanism in Finnish-Soviet relations. For Finland, the treaty laid out its status of neutrality. Critics may say that a stubborn adherence to neutrality was a desperate measure in a world that could have been destroyed in an instant, but it was arguably the best possible strategy that Finland could have pursued in the Cold War geopolitical landscape.

In exchange, the Soviets acquired a neighbor that was relatively trouble-free and did not require intensive attention, apart from the relentless Cold War disinformation campaigns that Moscow waged on all fronts in any case. The FCMA treaty was a compromise, but a compromise that President Paasikivi pushed for, and Stalin accepted. The Finnish model of neutrality was born in this kind of a negotiated fashion, but the leverage that the Finns managed to exert was only possible because of the successful wartime fight against the USSR.

Although the historical record shows that the Soviets never truly regarded Finland as neutral (at least not until the late 1970s) and worked hard to undermine their neighbor's stance, the Finns fought back and utilized their agency from the premise of neutrality. By the 1960s, the West recognized Finland's neutrality as a genuine and legitimate foreign policy orientation, and, irrespective of their innermost dreams of control, the Soviets too had no choice but to allow Finland to develop its policy. In Cold War Europe, which was predominantly about taking sides and belonging to one bloc or the other, the Finnish model remained an anomaly, even if several other countries

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11 There is ongoing debate over whether the Soviets really intended to invoke the negotiations in 1961 or whether the Soviet note that called for bilateral consultations due to the heightened insecurity caused by the Berlin crisis was staged at the request of President Kekkonen to solidify his grip on power in Finland. According to revisionists critical of Kekkonen, he orchestrated the note and the ›successful‹ negotiations to demonstrate to the worried Finns that only he could be trusted as the guarantor of Finland's peaceful future. According to the same argument, the Soviets were happy to give Kekkonen the platform he desired since the Kremlin, too, wanted Kekkonen as Finland's undisputed leader. For the revisionist view, see especially the work of Hannu Rautkallio, including *Novosibirskin lavastus. Noottikriisi 1961 [Pretence in Novosibirsk. The Diplomatic Note Crisis of 1961]*, Helsinki 1992. The pro-Kekkonen position has been stated most consistently by Juhani Suomi in his series of biographical studies of the former president. See especially Juhani Suomi, *Kriisien aika. Urho Kekkonen 1956–1962 [Time of Crises. Urho Kekkonen 1956–1962]*, Helsinki 1992.

also pursued different variants of neutrality, and Finland's situation had certain parallels with Austria in particular.[12] In addition to portraying themselves as members of the wider group of neutral states, the Finns also tried to explain their policies to the West in terms of George Washington's Farewell Address. Finland was trying to avoid entangling alliances, ›observing good faith and justice toward all nations‹ and cultivating ›peace and harmony with all‹, as President Kekkonen proclaimed during his state visit to the United States in 1961.[13] But what was the good in Finlandization?

2. The Good

The Finnish diplomat, statesman and historian Max Jakobson observed many times that the ordinary people of Finland remained rather immune to Finlandization. The majority, ›the ordinary Finns‹, did not support the type of politicking that was characteristic of Finlandization.[14] Also, because the pro-Soviet faction in the country was the loudest and felt confident in knowing that it had the Soviets' support, it appeared larger than it actually was. Thus it was chiefly the nation's elite that became Finlandized, and, even then, the term often served as a kind of shorthand for a *realpolitik*-based pragmatism. What is more, Finlandization was by no means the only force that shaped Cold War Finland. The nation was simultaneously reaching out to the West. Over the postwar decades, Finland developed economically in tandem with the Western capitalist system and, together with its Scandinavian neighbors, built a Nordic welfare state that offered its citizens safety, freedom, relatively equal opportunities and a vision for the future.[15]

Historically, Finnish Cold War politics highlight the difficulties of moving westward while remaining neutral. For example, in 1973 Finland finally signed a free trade agreement with the EEC after complicated maneuvering that included the signing of a similar agreement with the Soviet bloc's economic union (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, CMEA) as the price for this step toward Western integration. Because the West examined all such moves through ideological Cold War lenses, it saw the CMEA agreement as an indication of Finland's quasi-sovereign status – Finland was allegedly unable to run its own foreign and economic policies without placating Soviet sensitivities. From the Finnish perspective, the move was a matter of pragmatism: as a part of the capitalist free market system, the Finns knew that their country's

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12 Johanna Rainio-Niemi, *The Ideological Cold War. The Politics of Neutrality in Austria and Finland*, New York 2014.

13 Max Jakobson, *Finnish Neutrality. A Study of Finnish Foreign Policy Since the Second World War*, London 1968, pp. 50-51.

14 See, for instance, Max Jakobson, *Tilinpäätös. 20. vuosisadan tilinpäätös 3, 1973–1995 [Balance Sheet. A Balance Sheet of the 20th Century, vol. 3: 1973–1995]*, Helsinki 2003.

15 Pauli Kettunen, The Nordic Welfare State in Finland, in: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 26 (2001), pp. 225-247.

economy could not thrive without the EEC. The bow to the East was not an ideological capitulation; it was merely a pragmatic token gesture to the USSR even as both parties knew that it was the EEC that really mattered.[16]

A similar type of balancing act took place in Finland's energy policy, particularly vis-à-vis nuclear energy. Finland's first nuclear reactor for atomic research was purchased from the USA, with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) acting as a middleman, but the first nuclear reactor for commercial use was ordered from the USSR in 1969. Initially, the company in charge of the project (IVO) wanted to opt for either West Germany's AEG or the American Westinghouse, but the government overruled the decision and coupled the purchase of two nuclear reactors with a wider trade deal with the Soviets.[17] The Soviet reactors were modified with Finnish safety and automation technology before being put into use. The next two reactors that Finland ordered soon thereafter were built by the Swedish company ASEA (which, following a 1988 merger, became the Swiss-owned ABB).

In the short term, the Finnish pragmatism, evident in the complicated balancing act between East and West, reaped scorn and pitying headshaking from the West. From the perspective of long-term national interests, however, the scorn was a minor issue – Finland secured permanent and institutionalized trade links to the EEC, which paved the way for its subsequent EU membership (since 1995) and without which its economic development would have been severely hampered. Along the way, Finland also gained a measure of visibility and recognition for its neutrality when it hosted the broadly successful summit meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975, at which the Helsinki Accords were signed as a landmark East-West compromise.[18]

If Finlandization was as utterly bad as present-day Finnish debates often suggest, why was it so popular for such a long time, at least within Finland?[19] Shame and guilt about the excesses of kowtowing to the Soviets played a role, and for a good while domestic public criticism of Finlandization was effectively stifled. In the process, critical voices were often made to appear as part of the lunatic fringe and portrayed as unpatriotic, although the opposite was frequently the case. Also, as critics have correctly

16 Juhana Aunesluoma, *Vapaakaupan tiellä. Suomen kauppa-ja integraatiopolitiikka maailmansodista EU-aikaan [On the Road to Free Trade. Finland's Trade and Integration Policies from the World Wars to the EU]*, Helsinki 2011.

17 Matti Roitto/Pasi Nevalainen/Miina Kaarkoski, Fuel for Commercial Politics: The Nucleus of Early Commercial Proliferation of Atomic Energy in Three Acts, in: *Business History* 64 (2022), pp. 1510-1553; Tuomo Särkikoski, *Rauhan atomi, sodan koodi. Suomalaisen atomivoimaratkaisun teknopolitiikka 1955–1970 [Atom for Peace, Code for War. The Technopolitics of Finland's Atomic Energy Policies, 1955–1970]*, Helsinki 2011.

18 See, for example, Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act. The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War*, Princeton 2018.

19 For strong critiques of the excesses of Finlandization, see Timo Vihavainen, *Kansakunta rähmällään. Suomettumisen lyhyt historia [A Nation on Its Knees. A Short History of Finlandization]*, Helsinki 1991; Tauno Tiusanen, *Narutettu sukupolvi. Suomettumisen ilot ja murheet [A Misled Generation. The Joys and Sorrows of Finlandization]*, Helsinki 2011.

argued, a key element of the Finlandization syndrome was an inability to recognize its symptoms. Over time, most Finns became blind to the problems within the country and its political culture that were glaringly obvious to the outside world. Yet, despite all these retrospective misgivings, part of the domestic popularity of Finland's policy line during the Cold War derived from the simple fact that not everything about Finlandization was inherently bad and wrong, even if, within Finland, it has now become popular to argue this. Ordinary Finnish citizens and politicians predominantly viewed Finlandization as a pragmatic position at the time. Among bad options, one simply had to choose what appeared to be the least bad. Once the Cold War ended, it even seemed that Finnish policy was ›vindicated‹, as John Lukacs argued in 1992.[20]

Still, the good in Finlandization comes with a significant qualification: essentially, the good relates to stability and predictability in the nation's foreign policy. In considering the positive appraisals by Brzezinski, Kissinger and others, it is important to understand that, to them, Finlandization is a foreign policy matter, not a question of domestic political culture. It is all very well to discuss Finlandization as an abstract model of international relations in which Finland or Ukraine appears as an object with diminished agency of its own. And it is perhaps easy to point to policy successes in the realm of foreign relations. When the focus moves from the international level to domestic politics, Finlandization begins to appear much murkier.

3. The Bad

The typical Western critique of Finlandization since the late 1960s was that Soviet influence over Finland led to a situation in which Finland was only nominally independent. As Walter Laqueur put it in his *The Political Psychology of Appeasement. Finlandization and Other Unpopular Essays* (1980), ›Finland, first of all, is a neutral country, but not vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, toward which it has special obligations.‹[21] Finland could not oppose Soviet foreign policy actions, Laqueur argued, and he was right – at least in part. It is well-known that the Finns remained officially silent when the Soviets invaded Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan. When the Soviet empire was collapsing, the official Finnish line was to play down the Baltic states' desire to re-establish their independence.[22] During the Cold War, Soviet violations of human rights received scant attention in Finnish public discussion, even as Finns frequently criticized American

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20 John Lukacs, Finland Vindicated, in: *Foreign Affairs* 71 (1992) issue 4, pp. 50-63. For earlier, fairly sympathetic views of Finland's situation, see especially George F. Kennan, Europe's Problems, Europe's Choices, in: *Foreign Policy* 14 (1974), pp. 3-16; George Maude, *The Finnish Dilemma. Neutrality in the Shadow of Power*, London 1976.

21 Laqueur, *Political Psychology* (fn 6), p. 8.

22 Juho Ovaska, *Mauno Koiviston idänkortti. Sotamiehestä presidentiksi [The Eastern Card of Mauno Koivisto. From Infantry Man to President]*, Helsinki 2017; Jukka Seppinen, *Koiviston aika. Mauno Koiviston poliittinen ura [The Koivisto Era. Mauno Koivisto's Political Career]*, Helsinki 2015.

foreign policy practices. The case in which a leading Helsinki publishing house opted not to publish a Finnish translation of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in the 1970s is often cited as a prime example of cultural Finlandization. Yet the same publisher had brought out a translation of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* back in 1963 with a cover on which the letter ›S‹ was formed out of barbed wire.[23] The atmosphere in the early 1960s was far less anxious than a decade later. In the 1970s Finnish diplomats tried to defend Finlandization as a practice that was designed to be unprovocative toward any foreign power.[24] The trouble was that the argument did not hold. Finland's model of neutrality was biased toward the Soviet view of the world, and no verbal acrobatics could do away with that fact.

In defense of Finnish practices, one could observe that although pinpricks toward the USSR would have earned applause from the Cold War West, what wider purpose would this have served? The Finns stated bluntly that taking the moral high ground was futile, as it would not do anything to help the victims of Soviet aggression.[25] The West was often furious regarding various Soviet moves, but what did this actually achieve? The outcomes of the Soviet invasions of 1956 and 1968 were obvious since it was clear that the West would not intervene militarily, and indeed the Eisenhower administration's rollback rhetoric had probably helped to inspire the Hungarian Uprising in the first place. In order to satisfy domestic public opinion, a war of words was the only above-ground battle that the West could wage against the USSR in Europe. The Finns watched all this with a cynicism similar to that with which the West observed Finlandized Finland's inability to declare opposition to Soviet aggression on moral grounds. Instead of showing solidarity with small oppressed socialist nations, Finland displayed more solidarity with the Soviets.

In this type of political culture, one aspect was utterly unhealthy: the cynical pragmatism adopted by the Finns contributed to the erosion of a value-based assessment of world affairs, the guiding principle of the postwar West. While values may have seemed like empty vessels in a Cold War climate and in the shadow of a nuclear holocaust, the West was – and still is – a value-based international community. It is hard to see how the West would have remained as coherent as it was in the Cold War, or even in the post-Cold War era, without holding the moral high ground on the freedom of speech, movement, ideas and capital and on ›the liberal international order‹. Finlandization contributed to the Finns' inability to understand the importance of values as a key part of the West's modus operandi. In due course, too, the inability to think through values began to take root in Finnish domestic politics – a point at which the bad in Finlandization started to turn ugly.

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23 On Solzhenitsyn, see Vihavainen, *Kansakunta* (fn 19), esp. pp. 160-168.

24 See, for example, Keijo Korhonen, *Urho Kekkonen. A Statesman for Peace*, London 1974. See also Sakari Jutila, *Finlandization for Finland and the World*, Bloomington 1983; and Hakovirta, *Suomettuminen* (fn 7), pp. 155-210.

25 Holmila, *Suomalaisten kylmä sota* (fn 9).

Even if it is possible to offer a historically nuanced explanation of Finnish behavior that redeems some of the unpleasant aspects of Finlandization, many of its basic tenets are hard, if not impossible, to justify. When commentators in the West argued that the USSR limited Finland's sovereignty, they were paradoxically wrong. In essence – and herein lies the tragedy of Finlandization – it was not primarily the Soviets that limited Finnish sovereignty, but the Finns themselves. For a non-Finn, Finlandization may appear objectionable as a case in which national self-interest and an instinct for self-preservation trumped a value-based approach to foreign relations. For Finns, Finlandization appears pejorative and emotionally taxing because it was the Finns themselves who admitted the Soviets as partners into Finnish domestic political life. Further, the fact that the Finns never really tested the limits of Soviet expectations makes Finlandization even worse. For example, what would have happened if Finland had refused to become a signatory to the economically useless CMEA treaty and simply signed a free trade agreement with the EEC in 1973? Probably not a lot. Yet the Finns themselves, starting with President Kekkonen, led their nation down the twisted road of undue acquiescence. In cases where the Finns put limits to Soviet intrusions, the latter retreated.[26] What was so bad about Finlandization was that those limits were put to the test far too rarely.

In terms of party politics, Laqueur was wrong when he argued that only political parties of which the USSR approved could participate in the Finnish government.[27] Sadly, the real deciding factor was not the opinion of the Soviets but that of the long-serving Finnish president Urho Kekkonen (in office 1956–1982, in a manner more than a little reminiscent of various East bloc potentates). Kekkonen was the leader favored by the Soviets who, with a personal lust for power, exploited his Soviet connections to his personal benefit and to the detriment of Finnish democracy. The president established and legitimized extensive personal contacts with Soviet officials, including KGB agents, as a modus operandi of Finnish politics, business and culture. Once the president had set up the pattern, other national elites followed. Yet, even in this highly dubious scenario, the bottom line remained that however Soviet-leaning and engaged in personal diplomacy with the Soviet leaders the president may have been, in the most serious cases he set limits to how far the Soviets could go with their requests, with a little help from Finnish military leaders.[28] For example, in 1974 and again in 1978, the USSR pushed the Finnish military for an association agreement and joint military exercises. The Finns consistently rejected these initiatives. The Soviet attempts were resisted because the right people stood at the helm, notably the Western-oriented commander-in-chief of the Finnish armed forces, Lauri Sutela,

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26 A classic example is the so-called Ustinov case. In summer 1978 the Soviet Defence Minister Dmitry Ustinov pressed the Finns for joint military exercises, which proposal the Finns steadfastly declined. See Jukka Tarkka, *Karhun kainalossa. Suomen kylmä sota 1947–1990 [Embraced by the Russian Bear. Finland's Cold War, 1947–1990]*, Helsinki 2012, pp. 365-367.

27 Laqueur, *Political Psychology* (fn 6), p. 8.

28 Tarkka, *Karhun kainalossa* (fn 26).

who sometimes even failed to keep the president in the loop for fear that he might go ›soft‹ under Soviet pressure. But under Finlandization, nothing was certain. Sutela's predecessor had requested Soviet support for managing his goal of ›democratizing the military‹ in line with the demands of the extreme left. In exchange, the Finnish general had promised to interpret the FCMA treaty more flexibly than had been customary in the Finnish military. Kekkonen fired the general, at least ostensibly not for what he had said but for the way he approached the Soviets – behind the president's back.[29]

In retrospect, what makes Finlandization so painful for the Finns is the knowledge that it could – and should – have been different. Between 1949 and 1951, President Paasikivi successfully defended the Social Democratic minority government which the USSR disliked and constantly criticized. When a similar occasion arose early on in Kekkonen's presidential tenure, in 1958, he quickly conceded to Moscow's protests, dissolved the government (which he himself disliked) and set up a new, Moscow-approved coalition.[30] These events opened the door for Soviet meddling in Finnish domestic politics. The bad, indeed ugly, feature was that the door was opened by the Finnish president. As the years went on, Finlandization in the Finnish domestic sphere turned from bad to ugly, and the Finns themselves were to blame for that. Most importantly, Finland's elites gradually grew almost blind, incapable of seeing the tragic dimensions of Finlandization and their corrosive effect on democracy.

4. The Ugly

What had started to develop as a Finnish *realpolitik* posture in 1945 under President Paasikivi took a drastic turn under his successor Kekkonen. Paasikivi held that because the Soviet Union had won the war and grown into a global superpower, its core security interests had to be recognized by Finland. Nevertheless, for Paasikivi such recognition was restricted to the realm of foreign relations. Also, Paasikivi accepted the fact that not all Finns supported his logic. He merely expected that they should understand it and refrain from expressing undue hostility toward the USSR, while remaining aware and critical of possible Soviet intrusions.[31]

Kekkonen, by contrast, was not content with Paasikivi's position. Instead of simply expecting that all Finns understood the underlying *realpolitik* context, Kekkonen wanted all Finns to support his logic. In addition, throughout his tenure he pursued a political program that coerced the nation into backing his views. The ugly part was

29 Ibid., p. 368.
30 See, for example, Kimmo Rentola, *Niin kylmää että polttaa. Kommunistit, Kekkonen ja Kreml, 1947–1958 [So Cold That It Begins to Burn. Communists, Kekkonen and the Kremlin, 1947–1958]*, Helsinki 1997, pp. 488-502.
31 Jakobson, *Tilinpäätös* (fn 14).

that support of Kekkonen's logic became a measure of one's loyalty, patriotism, and political and social capital. Careers were made and destroyed at the whim of the president, who instrumentalized Finland's narrow political room for maneuver to his maximum personal benefit. It was utterly ugly that the Soviet Union was Kekkonen's closest partner in this game.

Because Kekkonen had made himself the embodiment of good Finnish-Soviet relations, his own power was secured as long as he enjoyed Moscow's confidence and the Finnish people supported his personalized ›special relationship‹ with the Kremlin. Gradually, Kekkonen came to be viewed as the indispensable guarantor of Finland's survival during the Cold War – a view that suited the USSR perfectly. It was thus ›only‹ Kekkonen personally whom the Soviets trusted and who could steer Finland through the murky waters of neutrality. In the process, open debate about Finland's politics, history, and place in the world was stifled. The dominant wisdom among the country's baby boomer generation holds that Kekkonen was a truly indispensable leader without whom the country would have been doomed.[32] In reality, such views reveal less about Kekkonen's alleged greatness and the actualities of the Cold War era (a number of people would have been fit for the presidency) than about a lack of political imagination and societal pluralism. Under Kekkonen, these hallmarks of Western liberal democracy were seriously curtailed. It is Kekkonen's rather than Moscow's influence that international observers often fail to recognize.

Thus, we can argue that a generation of Finns grew up not only in the shadow of Moscow but, more immediately, in the shadow of Kekkonen – a fact that has continued to shape Finland's post-Cold War foreign policies and views about modern-day Russia. The Finlandized baby boomer generation rose to the nation's leading elite in the 1990s and has remained influential ever since. Today's overwhelming support for NATO membership in Finland is as much a generational shift – a type of catharsis, as some see it – as a simple reaction to recent Russian actions.

Simply put, to understand Finlandization historically, Finland's domestic political landscape is at least as important as Finnish-Soviet diplomatic relations. As Finland's experience under Kekkonen testifies, personality cults can also develop within democratic systems.[33] Indeed, as Kekkonen's personality cult grew, the Soviets – the masters of personality cults – observed the developments with much interest, even glee. After all, the Finns themselves were doing the Kremlin's dirty work. Kekkonen and his intimate relations with the Soviets created perhaps the ugliest part of Finlandization. Politicians, entrepreneurs, journalists and academics alike competed for the president's – and Moscow's – recognition. The Soviet diplomat and post-USSR Russia's first

32 Holmila, *Suomalaisten kylmä sota* (fn 9).

33 For observations about another major personality cult within the democratic Finnish polity, see Tuomas Tepora, The Image of Marshal Mannerheim, Moral Panic, and the Refashioning of the Nation in the 1990s, in: Ville Kivimäki/Sami Suodenjoki/Tanja Vahtikari (eds), *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*, London 2021, pp. 349-371.

Finnish President Urho Kekkonen shaking hands with Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev at the signing of a trade treaty between the two countries on 18 May 1977
(picture-alliance/Associated Press/Hans Paul)

ambassador to Helsinki, Yuri Deryabin, wrote in his 1997 memoir that Finnish elites were aware of how Moscow had divided Finnish politicians into pro- and anti-Soviet camps and that those elites, including Kekkonen, took unscrupulous advantage of such categorizations in their domestic political posturing.[34]

Part of the political culture of Finlandization also related to a generational shift. The Cold War youth in Finland, the postwar generation, distanced itself from the previous generation's ›nationalist and militaristic‹ World War II legacy and flirted with Moscow, Vietnam and Cuba, singing songs about revolution and condemning American

34 Juri Derjabin [transliteration in English: Yuri Deryabin], *Omalla nimellä. Reunamerkintöjä Juri Komissarovin kirjoihin ja omaan elämään [Under my Own Name. Marginalia to the Books of Yuri Komissarov and to My Life]*, Helsinki 1997, pp. 128-129.

weapons as those of war and imperialism while praising the Soviet arsenal as that of peace.[35] In the media and in Parliament, reasoned criticism of the USSR was branded as anti-Soviet propaganda and called ›unpatriotic‹. Worse still, Kekkonen and his acolytes played the ›fascist card‹ in Finnish domestic politics. Arguments that were anti-Kekkonen, critical of the USSR and openly pro-Western were frequently labeled ›fascist‹. For example, in 1973 the Parliament pushed through a constitutionally highly dubious piece of legislation with which Kekkonen was given a new presidential term without scheduled elections. The minority of the MPs who sought to uphold the constitution and the people's right to vote were framed as the extreme right. The charge was led by the Social Democratic Prime Minister, Kalevi Sorsa.[36] In this context, some, including the professor of comparative economics Tauno Tiusanen, felt that leaving Finland was the best option for personal safety and professional integrity. Tiusanen's sin was simply to have revealed the catastrophic condition of the Soviet economic system.[37]

Part of the ugliness also derived from reinterpretations of Finland's own recent past. During the 1970s, the fact that the USSR had invaded Finland in late 1939 gradually became a taboo in public discussions. Instead, as initiated by Kekkonen in 1973, on the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Finnish-Soviet FCMA treaty, the new narrative claimed that the Winter War would have been avoidable had the Finns signed a similar treaty in 1938 when the USSR had first offered it.[38] Like the Winter War, the events leading to Finland's independence in 1917 were also sugar-coated with the official Soviet view. Finns were now taught that Finland's independence had been ›a gift‹ from Lenin.[39] History thus offered a deterministic message: comply with the Soviets and you will be on the right side of history, among its victors. As for Kekkonen, his political spin on history was clear: Kekkonen wanted to demonstrate to the Soviets that the diligent Finns had learned their lesson. Over time, schoolbooks were adapted to conform to such history politics and, more widely, Marxist-Leninist elements began to dominate official interpretations of key political events.[40]

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35 Juho Saksholm, Reform, Revolution, Riot? Transnational Nordic Sixties in the Radical Press, c. 1958–1968, PhD dissertation, University of Jyväskylä 2020, URL: <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-8374-1>.

36 Matti Arjanne, *Uutisvuoto ja poikkeuslaki [The News Leak and the Emergency Legislation]*, Tampere 1973.

37 For Tiusanen's perspective, see Tauno Tiusanen, *Elämä rautaesiripun varjossa. Toisinajattelijan päiväkirja [A Life in the Shadow of the Iron Curtain. Diary of a Dissident]*, Helsinki 2009.

38 Vihavainen, *Kansakunta* (fn 19), p. 194.

39 Ibid., pp. 186-190.

40 A highly controversial example from the 1970s was the attempt to introduce an explicitly Marxist curriculum to primary schools in the Finnish commune of Pirkkala. A thorough but fiercely critical account of this project is Jari Leskinen, *Kohti sosialismia! Pirkkalan peruskoulun marxilainen kokeilu, 1973–1975 [Toward Socialism! The Marxist Experiment in the Primary Schools of Pirkkala]*, Helsinki 2016. A more balanced assessment can be found in Sirkka Ahonen, Finnish History Textbooks in the Cold War, in: Juhana Aunesluoma/Pauli Kettunen (eds), *The Cold War and the Politics of History*, Helsinki 2008, pp. 249-265. See also Holmila, *Suomalaisten kylmä sota* (fn 9).

If these developments had been caused by clear pressure from the USSR, the situation would have been more understandable. However, all this was – once again – primarily driven by the Finns themselves in their own perverted political game. In an ugly way, such ahistorical and contextually devoid thinking was practiced across most of Finland's political spectrum – from the left to the right. In their darkest moments, the practices of Finlandization bordered on treason, as in the run-up to the 1982 presidential election, when the chairman of the Center Party casually conversed with the Soviets about trade deals that would have boosted the chances of the party's candidate. It is hardly surprising that when – years later – the issue came to light, the Finnish Parliament's Constitutional Committee promptly rejected any charges of treason.[41] All major parties from the left to the right had sought to benefit from their Soviet contacts, and a prosecutorial precedent would have opened up a Pandora's box of Finlandized politics. Still, it is remarkable that political parties casually lobbied for Soviet support as an accepted, even desired, part of Finland's political culture. What had terrified President Paasikivi in the early aftermath of WWII had come to pass within a few decades. It is worth quoting his diary entry from late October 1946:

›I am terribly burdened by the atmosphere of lies and amorality in which we must live. I have always taken matters hard and heavy and thus life is so difficult for me at the moment. I am afraid that we who will have to participate in this [scheming] are destroying the soul of our nation, and that means the nation's death. We will have to tolerate lies and deception, and we cannot tell the truth [...]. It is expected that we, as a nation, should throw ourselves to the ground and dirty ourselves by crying and wailing that we alone are the guilty ones and criminals, while all others are innocent and pure as white doves. We cannot sink to that level, because that is how we destroy the soul of our nation.‹[42]

Paasikivi had written his diary entries with an eye toward publication after his death. But when his diaries from the years 1945 to 1956 were finally due to be published in 1985, several top politicians and academics wanted to block the publication, claiming that it would damage the Finnish-Soviet friendship.[43] Kekkonen himself had seen snippets of the archived manuscript in the late 1950s and been terrified. In his view, the text was too anti-Soviet and thus not suitable for the country's Finlandized political culture. After all, Paasikivi had been the architect of post-War Finnish-Soviet relations, eager to remind the nation that the USSR was the key foreign policy factor with certain security interests that had to be recognized. So how could it be that such

41 Tarkka, *Karhun kainalossa* (fn 26), pp. 446-448.

42 Yrjö Blomstedt/Matti Klinge (eds), *Paasikiven päiväkirjat [Paasikivi Diaries]*, Vol. 1, entry of 25 October 1946, Helsinki 1985, pp. 378-379.

43 Toward the end of his life, Paasikivi rewrote his original diary entries, which he had scribbled on separate pieces of paper. Two years after his death in 1956, the 3,000 pages of entries were copy-edited. His wife, who had become the copyright holder, agreed with President Kekkonen that the time was not ripe for publication in the late 1950s. In her will, she barred publication for 25 years after her death. She died in 1960, and thus the diary became available for publication in 1985.

a man was also deeply and often bitterly opposed to the Soviet Union, displaying anti-Russian traits? What would the public airing of his private views do to current Finnish-Soviet relations? The hefty two volumes were finally published in 1985–86 after the Soviet ambassador and the Finnish president (Kekkonen's Social Democratic successor, Mauno Koivisto) had tried and failed to stop the process. Following the publication, the then Finnish Prime Minister Kalevi Sorsa asked in the Social Democratic press why Finland was sawing off the very branch on which it was sitting. The Soviets also protested, but nothing further happened. However, for ordinary Finns this was an important moment since these diaries, written by a highly influential public figure, gave voice to a foundational everyday Finnish patriotism that was bereft of pro-Soviet mantras.[44]

Overall, it must be concluded that in domestic politics the practices of Finlandization were a disaster that put a straightjacket on Finland's political culture. Moreover, apart from a brief moment following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the dynamics of Finlandization have not been subjected to deep scrutiny, as the whole political, economic and cultural elite had a stake in the system.[45] The legacy of Finlandization has thus outlived the Cold War, and major soul-searching of the ugly sides of Finlandization and its effects on post-Cold War Finland has started to emerge only recently, driven by Russia's war in Ukraine, which for many Finns has functioned as an eye-opener about their neighbor's true nature.

5. Potential Lessons for Present-day Ukraine

How, then, could Finland's historical experience in dealing with the Soviet Union during the Cold War perhaps be relevant for contemporary Ukraine and its future relations with Russia? One obviously needs to be careful in drawing parallels between two distinct cases, and an attempt to offer specific policy lessons to the Ukrainian leadership from the safety and comfort of a historian's desk would be highly presumptuous. However, three sets of general historical observations might nevertheless help to contextualize abstract contemporary discussions of Finlandization and what it can teach Ukrainians when they are planning their future policy options.

The first concerns the origins of the concept. As argued above, the term Finlandization emerged very much as a postwar notion, rooted in the outcome of a bloody and prolonged armed conflict. The leverage that the Finns ultimately managed to carve out vis-à-vis Moscow from the late 1940s onwards was only possible because of previous relative success on the battlefield (Finland managed to thwart all of Stalin's main

44 Tarkka, *Karhun kainalossa* (fn 26), pp. 395-399.

45 The most interesting and far-ranging study, particularly of the domestic aspects of Finlandization, is still Vihavainen, *Kansakunta*, first published in 1991 (fn 19).

objectives in WWII). Today, while the fighting in Ukraine is still ongoing and an improved outcome on the battlefield is within its grasp, Kiev cannot compromise with Russia, since success on the military front may eventually translate into a decent negotiating position for Ukraine. Whatever will ultimately be negotiated in the current conflict, the most important factor to learn from the Finnish case is that the Ukrainians will have to turn their wartime achievements into political leverage that can underpin their future relationship with Russia.

The second point relates to the good in Finlandization, i.e., its functions in the sphere of international relations. In the Cold War setting, as we have argued, Finland sought to anchor itself between East and West and to make the best of a situation in which viable alternatives were lacking. Finlandization served as a basis for the pursuit of Cold War neutrality for a country caught in a difficult geopolitical and historical position between the two power blocs. It is hard to escape from the conclusion that Ukraine's external situation is somewhat similar. The country is also a prisoner of its geography and its past between East and West: mentally tied to European ideals but historically linked to the Russian orbit. An exclusive embrace of one, combined with a total rejection of the other, seems unrealistic in the long run, but at the same time the further development of links to the West is essential for Ukraine's long-term survival as an independent state. Through its Cold War policies, Finland was able to move gradually toward the West through a series of steps. Ukraine will hopefully be able to secure similar arrangements with the West in general and the EU in particular. Current developments are at least modestly encouraging in view of the EU's June 2022 decision to grant Ukraine membership candidate status, even if the road to full membership will probably be long and winding.

However, Finlandization also had its bad and downright ugly sides, particularly in the domestic context, and the third potential lesson for Ukraine would be to avoid these. As we have argued, by the 1960s and 1970s Finnish elites became excessively accommodating toward the Soviets, effectively doing the Soviets' bidding in an anticipatory fashion, enabling Moscow to exercise what one analyst has famously called ›silk glove hegemony‹ and thereby eroding democratic values and corrupting Finland's political culture.[46] In any future scenario, the Ukrainians must avoid these deleterious aspects of Finlandization, which, to be fair, appear unlikely to emerge for the foreseeable future, given the bitterness and hatred that Russia's brutal aggression has generated. The Ukrainians should also be wary of the example set by President Kekkonen during his overly long presidential reign in Cold War Finland, which ultimately led to a personality cult that had a narrowing effect on Finland's political, social and cultural life in which the nation's future seemed like an either/or vision dependent on just one individual.

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46 John P. Vloyantes, *Silk Glove Hegemony. Finnish-Soviet Relations 1944–1974*, Kent 1975.

6. The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

The crucial component of Finlandization in its historical context is that it is a post-conflict concept, born from the ruins of war and denoting a relationship between two former enemies rather than simply one between a small power and a superpower.

Because the future of the international order is looking anything but stable, there is little reason why, from a *realpolitik* perspective, Finlandization should be abandoned outright, especially as, historically, it functioned as a stabilizing mechanism. At the level of the Cold War international system, its positive function is hard to deny. In the past, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski and George F. Kennan all recognized the success of Finlandization from the point of view of hard-nosed realism. At the same time, the Soviet-subjugated nations of Central-Eastern Europe viewed Finlandization as a model for which to strive.[47] If Finlandization can teach us anything positive, it is that, in turbulent times, seeking out at least nominally stable international relations lies within the interest of all parties. If there is a ›good type‹ of Finlandization, it is the form advocated by President Paasikivi before the emergence of ›Finlandization proper‹: Russia will not cease to exist, and it will continue to project its power to its neighbors, a fact that must be recognized and realistically addressed.

But that is as far as it should go. Like the Soviet Union in the past, today's Russia seeks to corrupt the inner core of its neighbors and to reap maximum benefits from the situation. Naturally, this should be resisted at all costs – and Ukrainians have recently been doing a remarkably good job of this. The major issue is that Russia should not be given any say in other countries' domestic politics – not now, and not in twenty years' time. The bad and the ugly sides of Finlandization illustrate the mechanisms of seeking to subvert a country from within.

Throughout Russian and Soviet history, the dirty work has often been done by the locals, ›the useful idiots‹ that the Kremlin has been so good at manipulating. In Cold War Finland, politicians and journalists were the major targets, and the Soviets were highly successful in identifying key people and institutions through which the Finns themselves then came to promote pro-Soviet ideas. On balance, the Soviets were far less successful in making inroads into Finland's everyday culture. The literature read, the movies and TV series watched and admired, the consumer goods and products bought, and the holiday destinations dreamed about were all Western.

It is utterly ugly that, at the peak of Finlandization, the prevailing public norms in Finland – what was allowed to be said in public and what consequences one could expect in case of transgressions – were closer to authoritarianism than to democracy. In extreme cases, this amounted to nothing short of uncurtailed corruption, a social mechanism used for personal gain – whether political or economic.

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47 See, for example, Adam B. Ulam, The Destiny of Eastern Europe, in: *Problems of Communism* 23 (1974) issue 1, pp. 1-12. For similar arguments regarding Afghanistan in the early 1980s, see Selig S. Harrison, Dateline Afghanistan: Exit Through Finland?, in: *Foreign Policy* 41 (1980–81), pp. 163-187.

Finally, Finlandization illustrates the danger inherent in the passage of time. While Finnish society and ordinary people remained resistant to the excesses of Finlandization for decades after WWII, once the immediacy of war and the fear of occupation had faded, the Soviet Union's aggressive actions and violations of international law were given drastically new interpretations by the post-war generation that came into maturity in the early 1970s. What the history of Finlandization suggests is that the danger of a ›Finlandized Ukraine‹ is not an immediate prospect; the real danger may come later, perhaps in the 2040s and 2050s.

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