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#### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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# **Finnish Foreign Policy Objectives Since 2021**

Athraa Muhammad Jaber 1\*, Prof. Dr. Qasim Muhammad Abd 2

<sup>1,2</sup> College of Political Science, Al-Nahrain University, Iraq

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Apr 24, 2024	Through the period (2021-2024), Finland shed the light on many issues, comprising strengthening democracy, human rights, gender equality, encouraging sustainable growth, emphasizing the role of women, providing appropriate job opportunities, and achieving stability and green transformation. Within the framework of its
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Keywords	
Finland's goals	external relations, Finland sought throughout this period to build
Human rights	partnerships in the region and develop its political relations. Trade,
Climate	investment, and also developing relations between institutions and
Addressing the Covid-19 pandemic	academic partnerships.

#### \*Corresponding Author:

Athraam.mip22@ced.nahrainuniv.edu.iq

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Finland has practiced its foreign and security policy in a globe characterized by international interconnectedness. The foreign and security policy was based on the values and rules it earlier stipulated. As part of the European and Nordic societies, Finland has an exercise of a goal-oriented influence within the framework of its work. As an active and practical member state, its goal is to achieve the highest results. Within the framework of the European Union, setting goals in Finland was based on knowledge of the work environment and important external variables in the foreign and security policy environment of Finland, as it participated in protecting peace, security, prosperity and the rule of law in Europe and bore great responsibility under international organizations and was a prominent actor within the framework of the international community. Generally, and since 2021, the orientation of Finnish foreign policy includes number of goals, the most prominent is promoting international standing, securing its independence and territorial integrity, ensuring the security and well-being of Finnish society, and providing efficient job opportunities. The basic aim on which it is based is avoiding to be a party to any military conflict, as Finland, as it sought to achieve its goals, depended on the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**The importance**: This paper works to identify the objectives of Finnish foreign policy since 2021, where it was based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 and regarding them as its basis for achieving these aims, which were at the forefront of the rights of women, children and youth, addressing the migration crisis and confronting the Covid-19 pandemic

**The objective:** The paper objective is represented by focusing the objectives of Finnish foreign policy since 2021, considering that these objectives are regarding the basis for enhancing its stability and developing its participation and activities at the regional and international levels.

**The problem**: The problem of paper focuses on a fundamental question, the answer to which represents the most prominent aspects of the topic: As long as the changes witnessed in the international arena forced Finland to adapt and integrate within its framework, the question that arises here is: What are

the objectives of Finnish foreign policy since the year 2021? What did Finland base its achievement of these goals on?

**The hypothesis**: The paper hypothesis led to the notion that the changes witnessed in the international system have affected Finnish foreign policy. Therefore, if these changes have affected Finland's foreign policy, then a change in the patterns of its foreign policy objectives is considered an absolute necessity, which is what prompted Finland to rely on The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for the year 2030 as a basic reference for them.

**The plan**: We divide this paper into four axes: the first axis, we address the role of (women, peace, and security). In the second axis, we address climate change and the green transition. Meanwhile, we will get knowledge about human rights in the third axis. Finally, and in the fourth axis, we will study about Finland's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

First axis: Women, Security and Peace: United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 1325 of 2000 is binding on all member states of the United Nations. It stipulates to enhance the women role in decision-making and their contribution to prevent the wars and conflicts, resolving conflicts by peaceful means, and peace, but in light of the transformations. Globally, the importance of the role played by women is declining as a result of the increasing number of wars and conflicts. Therefore, Finland worked to implement this decision and applied it in its first national plan for the year 2008, its second national plan for the year 2016, and the third in the year 2021 <sup>(1)</sup>. The Finnish government program for 2021 stipulated the Gender Equality Law and the Non-Discrimination Law. As a member of the European Union, Finland has committed to the European Union Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for 2024 and has also committed to the NATO Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2025. It is also a member of the Human Rights Council. United Nations Human Rights Council during the period (2022-2024) (). Through this role, Finland confirmed its commitment to do the agenda on women, peace and security, as well as implementing the national action plan for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for the year 2030, one of its most prominent goals was to emphasize the role of women. Finland hosted a meeting of the Advisory Council for Syrian Women during the period from September 26 to October 2021, which included a group of Syrian women and presented recommendations to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to Syria for the purpose of reaching a political solution regarding the Syrian issue. The primary goal of this meeting is to empower women and enhance their views in resolving political issues and their contribution to political discussions. Through the implementation of its third plan of action in 2021, Finland played a fundamental role as it became the largest donor of funding to UN Women with a value of 19 million euros for the years 2021 and 2022, and a third of the funding was directed to the topics of women, peace and security <sup>(2)</sup>.

In 2021, Finland joined the Women, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action Charter under the Generation Equality campaign organized by UN Women. Finland was also one of the largest funders of the United Nations Population Fund with a value of 33 million euros for the years (2021 and 2022) (<sup>3</sup>). In the field of crisis management, half of the experts in Finland were women, as Finland led a working group affiliated with the European Union whose mission was to enhance the role of women in civil crisis management as well as military crisis management. The percentage of women working in the field of crisis management in Finland ranged between 4.7% and 7.8%. In recent years, the goal of the Finnish Parliamentary Committee for the year 2021 stipulated doubling the number of women by appointing women to volunteer military service and professional soldiers. The percentage of women reached about 46% of the individuals sent by Finland on a crisis management mission in 2022, which matches the percentage that Determined by the Finnish Parliamentary Committee, which amounts to approximately 50%, Finland also worked to support its partner countries in developing national action plans for women, peace and security until 2021. It worked with Kenya, Afghanistan and Nepal and supported

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several projects in Jordan, Iraq, Libya and Tunisia <sup>(4)</sup>. Finland's development policy for 2021 also emphasized the necessity of gender equality, and Finland's main supporter in this aspect was the United Nations Women, as Finland was its largest donor in recent years <sup>(5)</sup>.

The second axis: Climate change and the green transition: Climate change, biological diversity, and environmental degradation are among the factors leading to the escalation of risks and the reasons leading to the growth of conflicts. This phenomenon has had an impact in particular in fragile states that were suffering from a state of instability. Therefore, most crisis management operations It took place in areas where climate change played a major role and thus generated a state of conflict and social instability <sup>(6)</sup>. Risks connected with the environment and climate have a great impact on countries and ecosystems, and if they are no procedures to treat, they will work to weaken the results of development cooperation the climate (7). With regard to Finland, it has been distinguished by its progress in the field of environmental policy and sustainable development, and it has also ranked advanced in this field, and therefore its primary goal has been to achieve carbon neutrality and make the country a leader in the field of the hydrogen economy and the circular economy, adopting emission-free energy systems, and finding climate and environmental solutions <sup>(8)</sup>. Within the framework of its strategic plan, it stressed the necessity of adopting a green transformation policy and becoming carbon neutral and the first country free of fossil fuels by 2035. Several legislation will be drafted with the aim of gradually eliminating fossil fuel-powered energy generation by 2029. In order to achieve this purpose, Finland specified 50.0 % of its financial plan to achieve green transformation, and during the period (2022-2023), it adopted a recovery and resilience plan, and one of its most prominent goal was to bring the amended climate change law into effect to ensure achieving the aim of carbon neutrality in Finland by 2035 (9). Finland shared in many discussions within the European Union about the nature of the relationship between climate change and security and suggested that the Security Council include the issue of climate change within the framework of its agenda and the requirement to take environmental issues into account and putting them within security and defense issues. It worked in cooperation with Chile in 2021 to establish the Global Alliance of Ministers Finance for climate action aims to harness financial policy tools such as taxes, budgets, financing, etc. for climate purposes (10). In 2021, Finland presented its first proposal for a strategic plan for the Consolidated Appeal Process after conducting consultations with stakeholders. In 2022, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published the plan for implementing international climate finance and in the same year launched the Development Policy Committee. Finland also increased its efforts in the field of Climate change and its financing. In 2021, the total value of climate financing in Finland directed to developing countries amounted to about 175 million euros, of which about 53% was allocated to mitigation and 47% to adaptation  $(^{11})$ .

The Finnish climate law has set the rate of reducing emissions at 60% by 2030. This means that total emissions do not exceed 28.5% million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2030. The preparations for a climate adaptation plan have been completed in Finland in 2022, the aim of which is to enhance preparedness. Finland and adaptation to the effects of climate change. Therefore, it can be said that Finland sought to achieve climate goals at the lowest possible cost by adopting advanced climate methods and measures at the national levels and at the European Union level as well <sup>(12)</sup>. This law included several goals, including the carbon neutrality goal for the year 2035 and the emissions reduction goal for the years 2030 and 2040. There is another updated goal for the year 2050. The

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emission reduction goals in 2030 is going to reach about 60%, in 2040 they about 80%, and about 90% by 2050  $^{\rm (13)}$ .

**Third axis: Human rights:** The government's report on human rights policy and the national action plan were issued in 2021, which represents a document defined Finland's policy approach and human rights policy. They comprised the basic changes that appeared on the issue of fundamental human rights, which have directly implicated on human rights at the international, national, and even at the European Union level. In confirmation that, the Human Rights Center was established in Finland in 2021, with the mission of promoting the rights of peoples (with disabilities and the elderly) <sup>(14)</sup>. During the period 2022-2024, Finland became the first country to obtain full membership in the Human Rights Council through 180 votes in the elections held within the framework of the United Nations General Assembly. Membership in the Human Rights Council supported the implementation of Finland's foreign and security policy based on the protection of human rights. Finland emphasized that respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law represented the basis on which its foreign policy was based. Finland also supported democratic development in partner countries and effective governance. It also provided its support to many non-governmental and local organizations and institutions, and worked jointly with multilateral organizations whose goal was to promote human rights. It has also worked to involve civil society in the field of human rights protection and therefore, at the beginning of 2024, it established the Human Rights Advisory Council, which included a group of representatives from parliamentary groups and representatives from various civil society organizations (15). Finland has given a major role to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of assembly to build stable, secure and noble societies. It has joined the Council of Europe, whose mission was to provide funding to member states for the purpose of implementing the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. Finland has assumed the presidency of the Human Rights Fund during the period 2021-2022. Finland has discussed issues Several within the framework of human rights represented the focus of its interest, the most prominent of which are:

**1\_ Poverty:** Poverty is an international challenge and eliminating it is one of the sustainable development goals for the year 2030. Therefore, Finland sought to eliminate it permanently <sup>(16)</sup>. Based on the National Action Plan for Finland, its aim of reducing the number of humans living below the poverty line by 100,000 people by 2030. The plan comprised procedures that should be taken into consideration to combat poverty and many other procedures in the future <sup>(17)</sup>.

**2\_Immigration**: For the aim of putting an end to forced migration and addressing the refugee crisis, Finland sought to address the root causes of migration. It emphasized that there are several ways through which the causes of migration can be eliminated, including: preventing conflicts, managing crises, strengthening development policy, achieving trade and economic cooperation, working To use the necessary European Union tools for the purpose of regulating migration and putting an end to unregulated migration, Finland has therefore sought to implement the United Nations conventions on refugees and migration and stressed the necessity of sharing the burdens of the refugee crisis at the global level and working to provide support to countries hosting refugees and stressing the necessity of inadmissibility Using refugees as a means of destabilization.

In June 2021, Finland established a special project for Finnish immigration policy by setting unified long-term goals based on cooperation and innovation. In the same year, it launched a study on introducing amendments to the Aliens Act and ways to implement it. Accordingly, the National Action Plan for the period 2021-2024 to prevent illegal immigration and residence was completed. This law

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>Ministry Of Justice Government Network For Fundamental And Human Right ,Ibid ,Page15.

<sup>26-70.</sup> 

took into account the migration of students and researchers and according to it they were granted a residence permit during their staying <sup>(18)</sup>. The Finnish government report confirmed the necessity of providing job chances for immigrants, encouraging them to be educated, and providing support to immigrant women. Through this period, it worked to increase its share of refugees by up to 450 people, meaning it rose from 1,050 to 1,500, specifically the Afghan refugees coming from Iran as part of the 2021 strategy. Finland stated It is capable of accommodating 30-40 people. Finland mentioned that It has the ability of accommodating 30-40 people. Finland sought to strengthen cooperation with UN with regard to the case of immigration and asylum, the goal of which is to provide assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and other stateless people, and to provide them with all services, like health, education, housing, job opportunities, etc. Finnish law stipulates that they must obtain the right to legal representation, and in In 2022, the Finnish government received 35,074 applications for temporary protection by Ukrainians, and most of the applicants were children. In the same year, about 37,000 people were registered in the special refugee reception system of the Finnish Immigration Service <sup>(19)</sup>.

**3**\_ Finnish law prohibits forced or compulsory labor in all its forms and protects persons from different crimes. The Finnish Victim Support Organization supported 745 clients, including 231 clients who were victims of human trafficking <sup>(20)</sup>. Finland has 5 independent ombudsmen, each of whom is appointed in accordance with a special law. They are tasked with looking into several cases, including: **an ombudsman specializing in non-discrimination issues, an ombudsman specializing in equality issues, an ombudsman specializing in children's rights, an ombudsman specializing in data protection, and an ombudsman specializing in intelligence. Article 22 of the Finnish Constitution to do all efforts to protect human rights. Several organizations, including the Finnish Institute for Health and Social Welfare, the Finnish Statistics Authority, and the Finnish Institute for Occupational Health, have also worked to issue statements in an organized manner about basic human rights <sup>(21)</sup>. Since 2021, Finland started to give recommendations to all countries in light of cases connected with human rights; it made a recommendation to China to respect the rights of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and also presented to Russia proposals to introduce amendments to the laws related to civil society organizations and to the United States for the purpose of abolishing the death penalty and the need to strengthen Human rights among vulnerable groups. <sup>(22)</sup>** 

**4\_The rights of youth and children:** Finland gave great importance to the participation of youth in peace processes in all fields. It is the first country to announce the participation of youth, youth organizations, the central government, research institutes and civil society in developing its national action plan for the year 2021-2024, as they were encouraged to participate in negotiations and peace agreements. And train them to develop peaceful and fair dialogue and establish a good environment for them that enables them to strengthen the bonds of social cohesion. Based on the Finland Action Plan, Resolution 2250 was implemented by the United Nations, the European Union, and the Council of Europe. Finland also achieved progress in the field of early childhood development, as it has enacted its national law, that stipulates supporting early childhood and providing with all services <sup>(23)</sup>. And working to improve their budget and provide them with well-being, taking into account vulnerable children, and that matters relating to children are the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman in Finland <sup>(24)</sup>.

**Fourth axis:** Addressing the Corona pandemic: Since 2020, humanity has faced a major challenge when Covid-19 swept the world. This crisis affected all countries, including Finland, and since March 28, 2021, the World Health Organization has reported 126 million deaths <sup>(25)</sup>. Finland became widely famous in

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Protection Including Latest Statistics, Funded By The European Union, 2022, Page 1-2.

Europe as the most capable of destroying the pandemic and has been described as "Spartans of the North," because it is one of the Nordic nation most capable of confronting the virus. Regarding the closure measures, the government decided since the spring of 2020 to close the borders of Uusimaa County for the period March 28 to April 15 and the declaration of a state of emergency <sup>(26)</sup>. In Finland, the vaccination started on December 27, 2020, by vaccinating people working in the health and care sector and residents of care units who deal with the epidemic. Through the period (2020-2022), Finnish municipalities make vaccination schedules and indicated the place and time of their provision <sup>(27)</sup>.

The first dose received by the population was 91%, while the second dose was 78%, while about 55% of the population received the third dose, and the fourth dose was given to about 23% of the population <sup>(28)</sup>. The Finnish strategy stipulated the necessity of vaccination to combat the pandemic during the period 2021-2022, and vaccinations were considered a means to preserve Finnish society, secure health care capacity, and prevent the epidemic <sup>(29)</sup>. In March 2020, the government decided to grant the Finnish people the right to social care and health care services and facilitate access to coronavirus services. During the pandemic, access to health services was supported and worked to provide them through medicine, teleconsultation, provision of digital services, and treating the elderly in a special situation <sup>(30)</sup>. The government succeeded in confronting the effects of the pandemic in several ways, including providing support and compensation to companies. The strengths of Finland's strategy to confront the Covid-19 pandemic were represented in the health aspect, which played a relatively good role and focused on providing public care and the comprehensive safety net that Finland provided. Finnish weakness regarding the pandemic was represented by the weakness of its resources, which prevented it from participating in international solidarity to combat the virus, or perhaps it wanted to give priority to its self-interest over international solidarity <sup>(31)</sup>.

### The effects of the epidemic on Finland were as follows:

**1 – From the economic perspective:** The repercussions in this aspect were less in Finland compared to the rest of the countries, despite the contraction of the GDP by 2.4% in 2020, but growth quickly returned again in the same year, and by 2021 the GDP increased with continued growth in 2022 The economic losses in Finland were lower than average compared to the European Union <sup>(32)</sup>. The effect of the epidemic on Finnish economic operations and investments, and thus the government provided economic stimulus packages to treat the deterioration in economic morale and the decline in private income and consumption and to stimulate companies. Consequently, these packages led to a decrease in tax income and an increase in the government deficit from 2.3 billion euros to 13.3 billion euros, and the government debt ratio increased. It also increased to 73% in 2022.

**2- From the political perspective:** Since the outbreak of the epidemic, Finland has made groups include experts, called the "Corona Fist," who they should manage crises. The epidemic has led to an increase in power struggles among all regional authorities, meaning that the implementation of the national strategy for vaccination created conflicting opinions <sup>(33)</sup>. Finland worked to make preventing infectious diseases assigned to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, which established a special coordination group for the epidemic to manage the situation and to cooperate with partner countries abroad. The situation continued to be managed by the Ministry until reaching the escalation stage in March 2020, and at this stage it moved. Introducing the virus onto the political agenda represents a transfer of responsibility from within the health sector to the government. It means that instead of

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UNNI TENGVALL - UNADIKA, Finland Covid-19 Policy Action: Balancing Between Legal Boundaries Human Rights

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UNNI TENGVALL – UNADIKA, Ibid, Page 11.

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regarding the epidemic as a national security issue, it was dealt with as an issue (internal security or a community safety) <sup>(34)</sup>. The epidemic represented a sudden disruption to the Finnish government as long as Finland, in terms of its geographical location, was far from the hotspots of its spread, and a trend emerged in Finland that emphasized that Covid-19 was like "the other's problem" and just monitoring the situation from afar. The epidemic was also a challenge and test of the capabilities of small countries in achieving Success and relative progress in controlling it, such as Finland, Norway, and Estonia, but they realized that confronting such crises requires coordination of regional and international efforts <sup>(35)</sup>.

**3- From a social perspective**: Closures and social distancing have affected all countries, and Finland is one of them, especially the service sectors dominated by women, like tourism and hospitality. The crisis showed up the critical situation for another things such as health care, information and communications technology, education, and emergency services, as well as the transfer of responsibility for education from Schools affected families as the closures that they were subjected to <sup>(36)</sup>. During the entry of the second and third waves, Finland announced a system of providing social assistance in the amount of 75 euros per person, and the subsidies were provided for the purpose of supporting parents who are unable to work as a result of the closure of schools and social care facilities <sup>(37)</sup>.

**CONCLUSION**: The study tried to grasp the objectives of Finnish foreign policy since 2021, when Finland sought throughout the different periods of its history to achieve all the aims that globe guarantee its security and stability and enhance its interests. Therefore, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for the year 2030 represented the basic reference on which it relied in achieving these goals.

# RESULTS

**1-** The United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development for 2030 demonstrated the basic reference on which Finland relied to achieve its proposes since 2021.

**2-** Finland has sought to achieve all the goals which might guarantee its stability and enhance its presence and contribution to whole activities at the different regional and international levels.

**3-** Finland attached big importance to the rights (women and children), in addition to its insistence on the requirement for young people to contribute to international forums and participate in decision-making processes. In addition, it gave importance to the migrant crisis and the eradication of poverty.

**4-** Finland adopted its own strategy that enabled it to confront the Covid-19 pandemic, which placed it at the forefront of the countries least affected by the epidemic at all levels.

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