

Scandinavian governments support Bush's war against terrorism

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Scandinavian governments have all registered their support for Washington's international war against terrorism. Their public statements, however, also reflect a degree of nervousness, along with a desire not to be excluded from influence in any new carve-up of Central Asia.

NATO members Norway and Denmark have been most forthright in their support. Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, still in office pending the outcome of negotiations about forming a new right wing coalition government, announced full support for whatever actions the US government decided to take. He said, "It is also in our interests to hit back against such attacks," but added the proviso, "We assume that the USA is not interested in retaliating in any way which could pose a threat to world peace."

Norway supported the unprecedented NATO decision to invoke Article 5 of the military alliance's constitution, pledging all members to "collective security". Responding to media claims that this was merely verbal support, Defence Minister Bjørn Tore Godal issued a press release insisting, "the United States is Norway's most important ally. Norway is already providing intelligence assistance to the United States. If we receive a request for further support, including military support, we will of course respond positively, and in accordance with the obligations of article 5 of the NATO treaty."

The Norwegian government is in the midst of a reorganisation of the country's military, placing greater emphasis on participation in NATO-led international operations. During the Cold War, Norway's armed forces were geared towards coastal defence as part of NATO's strategy against the former Soviet Union.

On September 28, as part of the international efforts to pull the Pakistan government into line with the US-led coalition, Norway also lifted restrictions on aid to Pakistan, imposed after it had carried out nuclear tests in 1998.

The Danish Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen immediately offered troops for any NATO operations and conceded that the "central decision must come from the US." The crisis has exploded at a time when Copenhagen is trying to deepen Danish integration into the European Union, in the face of broad popular opposition. Although Denmark is an EU

member, and conducts most of its trade with Europe, a recent referendum rejected adoption of the single currency, the euro. Denmark also has "opt-outs" from any participation in EU military operations, but the Danish government is seeking to push forward the "European Security and Defence Policy" (ESDP), which outlines EU intentions of being able to dispatch 100,000 troops anywhere on the planet if NATO is not involved. The ESDP also calls for a trans-European response to "asymmetric threats" along with greater integration of military operations with civil immigration, police and asylum policy.

A recent speech by Social Democratic Defence Minister Jan Trøjborg indicated that the military opt-out is in danger of reducing Danish influence inside NATO. In the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attacks, Foreign Minister Mogens Lykketoft called for Denmark's opt-outs from EU military structures to be renegotiated to "show we are ready to take our share of the responsibility and fully participate in European cooperation."

In Sweden, Prime Minister Goran Persson stated, "We must view the situation with utmost seriousness, but with much restraint. Once again, we have been reminded of how vulnerable the open world is, how vulnerable our democracies are."

Despite the restrained tone of Persson's response, speculation is rife that the terror bombings will become the pretext for Sweden to end its policy of neutrality, even to the extent of seeking to join NATO. Olof Petersson, a political science professor at the Swedish Centre for Business and Policy Studies, told *Reuters*, "Any remnants of neutrality thinking, of our traditional balancing act, have gone out of the window now..." Leading newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* editorialised, "For the first time in years a Swedish politician was able to talk about our spirit of community with the United States and the American people as a natural thing."

Over centuries, essentially since it was displaced by Britain as the leading maritime power in northern Europe, Sweden mastered the art of maintaining relations with all its more powerful Russian, German and British neighbours, while avoiding becoming embroiled in their wars. In World War Two, for example, the Swedish bourgeoisie maintained neutrality while allowing German troops to cross Swedish soil

during the occupation of Norway. During the Cold War, with the Soviet Union looming across the Baltic Sea, Sweden hosted numerous international institutions, presenting itself as peace loving and non-aligned with either bloc, while developing a considerable arms industry. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, Sweden rapidly reoriented itself towards the EU and the Baltic States, and has developed a closer relationship with Britain. One of its largest arms company, Saab, is now part owned by British-based BAE Systems.

Nevertheless there are serious concerns within the Swedish bourgeoisie over the domestic reaction to a radical policy shift away from neutrality. Following last month's EU summit, which announced European support for actions against terrorism, Persson stated, "Sweden's main contribution to the fight against terrorism will be in the form of intelligence and humanitarian assistance. Sweden has no plans to take part in military action."

Pressed further on this, however, Foreign Secretary Anna Lindh stated, "The UN Security Council has called upon all states to join forces and see to it that those responsible are brought to justice without delay. Like practically all the countries in the world, Sweden is prepared to participate in joint efforts to protect democracy and safeguard the openness of our societies."

Finland was for a long time under Soviet influence, to the extent that "Finlandisation" became a term describing a capitalist government which was nevertheless a close political ally of the Stalinist regime in Moscow. It has been considering NATO membership, but its military policy presently calls for increased cooperation with, and participation in NATO and EU-led operations, while remaining outside formal alliances. Finland is also supportive of efforts by the former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to join NATO, but is still anxious to maintain friendly relations with Russia.

While universally condemning the September 11 attacks, Finnish politicians, by contrast with their Norwegian and Danish counterparts, were distinctly reserved on the question of a military response. Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja noted, "We must act according to our values [of democracy and humanity]. Warlike talk and the incitement of a mentality of revenge are not among these." Harri Holkeri, the outgoing Finnish ex President of the UN General Assembly, warned, "My view is that it is not possible to fire the last shot in the world, someone will certainly always shoot back. This is why the use of force... and its consequences must be considered beforehand."

Finnish President Tarja Halonen stressed that the EU was not a military alliance, and suggested the most viable way to end terrorism would be through "helping Palestinians and Israelis to a negotiating table."

Though their responses to calls for military measures may have been nuanced, all four Scandinavian governments have leapt at the chance to attack democratic rights at home, under

the guise of targeting alleged supporters of bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network. Kurt Malmstrom, deputy director of the Swedish National Security Police announced, "Terrorists that belong to Osama bin Laden's network, as well as those from Pakistan, are operating in Sweden," but complained that he was powerless to arrest people because, "Nothing that they do in Sweden is illegal."

Malmstrom's Norwegian counterpart Stein Vale, deputy director of the Norwegian National Security Police, made similar statements. Norway has subsequently announced it intends to mobilise National Guard members to monitor military bases, as well as power and water utilities. Finnish Chief of Defence, Admiral Juhani Kaskeala, said that measures were already being implemented to share security and surveillance intelligence between Finland and Sweden.

In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, the Swedish government announced that up to 700 indictments could be handed out against demonstrators involved in protests outside June's G8 summit in Gothenburg. One 20-year-old protestor from Germany, who was shot in the leg during the demonstration, has already had a six-month sentence increased to 16 months' imprisonment, followed by a 10-year ban from Sweden. Another protestor has been jailed for two-and-a-half years.

In Denmark, the government is preparing new legislation to bug phones, snoop on Internet traffic, and refuse entry to Denmark to individuals deemed to be a threat to national security. It is also preparing to allow easier extradition of Danish citizens.

Conservative Party leader Bendt Bendtsen called for the Danish Police Intelligence Service to be given new powers to register and investigate all individuals with links to fundamentalist Islamic organisations. With a general election due soon, the Conservative Party, along with the right wing Liberals and the Danish People's Party, have all used the terror attacks to push for cuts or a complete cessation in Danish foreign aid to the world's poorest countries. Conservative Party spokesperson Lene Espersen told *Berlingske Tidende*: "In my opinion, these events do not mean that the world should pour billion after billion into development aid. Terrorism does not just occur because people are poor."



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