

Sweden initiates massive military buildup in preparation for war with Russia

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Sweden's Social Democratic government announced last month a massive, multi-year plan to increase military spending and activities—the largest such expansion in 70 years.

Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist announced that the country's defense budget would be increased by 27 billion Swedish kronor (US\$3.13 billion) between 2021 and 2025, a 40 percent increase.

The military budget hike comes on top of significant increases enacted since 2014. Forbes estimates that the total increase in the defense budget between 2014 and 2025, including the new bill, could be as much as 85 percent.

In addition to increased spending, the massive 181-page defense spending bill calls for the enlisted forces to grow from 60,000 troops to 90,000. It proposes the completion of a new submarine to join Sweden's world-class submarine stealth submarine fleet as well as a new mechanized brigade for its army. Likewise, it proposes the development of a new, more advanced submarine program to replace its famous Gotland-class submarines by 2025.

The bill will also involve a boost to Sweden's "Civil Defense" force. At a press conference on October 15, Hultqvist told reporters, "Sweden's capabilities to handle a state of heightened alert and, ultimately, war need to be strengthened on a broad front." Investment will also be made in a variety of other features of the armed forces—new fighter jets, artillery platforms and cyber warfare programs.

The planned massive build-up of military force in this small but significant country testifies to the immense danger of war as the global economic and political situation deteriorates under conditions of the greatest capitalist crisis since the 1930s.

Throughout Eurasia, the threat of war has never been

as great since World War II. In 2019, global military spending reached \$1.9 trillion, the highest level since the end of the Cold War.

The global cockpit of militarism and war is the United States. Since 2008, first under Obama and now Trump, a massive build-up of military spending has taken place aimed at preparing for "great-power conflicts," above all with Russia and China.

The claim of the American, and, for that matter, Scandinavian, ruling classes that they are engaged in "defense" preparations against the great 'Russian threat' is a lie to justify rearmament and aggression. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US and NATO have engaged in a systematic military build-up against Russia, as they, one-by-one, brought former member states of the Eastern bloc and Soviet Union into NATO as part of a larger plan to break up Russia into smaller states that could be easier for US imperialism and its allies to dominate.

It is impossible to see Sweden's massive plans for rearmament, and, as defense minister Hultqvist says, "war," outside of the broader efforts of the United States and its allies to prepare for war against Russia and the drive of global capitalism toward war and militarism. The Democratic Party's main criticism of the fascistic-minded Donald Trump over the past four years has been that he has been insufficiently aggressive towards Russia.

A Swedish government statement from October 14 clearly placed the increase in defense spending in the context of the drive to war with Russia. Hultqvist told reporters that previous cuts to defense had gone "too far" and that "Russian aggression in Georgia and Ukraine" suggests that "an armed attack on Sweden cannot be ruled out."

However, an armed attack by Russia on Sweden

would be suicide. Sweden, while not a formal member of NATO, is, and has been, a very close ally of the US military and intelligence agency for over 50 years. Notwithstanding its official posture of neutrality during the Cold War, Stockholm served as a key partner of US intelligence operations against the Soviet Union.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy, Sweden has established many mutual-defense treaties with NATO and the US. An attack by Russia on Sweden would therefore lead, almost immediately, to a response of every major European, NATO- and US-aligned power against Russia. The real threat the Baltic region faces is not Russian aggression, but the general descent of global capitalism towards inter-imperialist rivalry and the advanced preparations of US imperialism for war against both Russia and China.

Conflicts in Syria, Iran, Venezuela, Israel, Libya, or the Azerbaijan-Armenian war, could very easily and quickly spiral into a conflict involving major armed powers. In that context, in which one of these flashpoints triggers a major war between the US and Russia, Sweden, allied with the US, would be on the doorstep of Russia, including St. Petersburg. In such a scenario, control over the Baltic would be essential for the US.

It is notable that the historic surge in military spending in Sweden is not being carried out by the traditional “right” parties but rather the Social Democrats and the Greens. The Social Democrats have a long record of militarism. It was under the Social Democrat-led government of Göran Persson in 2002 that Sweden gave up its much-vaunted position of formal neutrality, which had existed for almost 200 years, in order to support the Bush administration’s “war on terror” and participate more fully in joint military exercises with NATO.

This is not merely a Swedish phenomenon. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has documented, Europe’s “left” parties have been at the forefront of calls for rearmament. This can be seen clearly in Germany, where a massive rearmament of German imperialism is underway spearheaded by the Social Democratic Party and met with great support and enthusiasm from both the Left Party and Green Party.

Sweden’s huge rearmament program is all the more significant politically given that outside of the country,

Sweden and its “social democratic” political parties are upheld by pseudo-left organizations like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) as “socialist” models to be aspired to. These nationalist, pro-capitalist organizations combine this with the promotion of politicians and parties that defend militarism in the name of “national defense,” like Bernie Sanders in regards to China.

There is nothing “socialist” about Sweden. In striking contrast to the billions lavished on the military to train troops in killing and to purchase weapons of death, the ruling elite has starved the country’s health care and social services amid a raging pandemic that has claimed the lives of over 6,000 people in a country of just 10 million.

During the pandemic’s first wave, elderly care homes were ravaged by COVID-19 infections and deaths as low-paid, precariously employed care workers were overwhelmed and lacked even the necessary employment protections to shelter safely at home if they showed symptoms. Hospitals were so overstretched after decades of privatization and cost-cutting that they adopted a policy in the Stockholm region of refusing to treat care home residents over the age of 80.



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