

# Finland's decision to join NATO marks major escalation of US-led drive to war with Russia

Jordan Shilton  
13 May 2022

Finland's President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin announced in a joint statement Thursday that the country should join the US-led NATO military alliance "without delay." The decision, which brings to an end more than seven decades of formal Finnish neutrality, marks a massive escalation in the drive by American and European imperialism towards all-out war with Russia.

Finnish membership will more than double NATO's border with Russia. The country shares a 1,300-kilometre border with Russia, and its capital city, Helsinki, is just three-and-a-half hours by train from St. Petersburg. The vote in parliament required to formally submit a membership application, expected next week, is considered a formality. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg commented Thursday that the process of Finland joining the alliance would be "smooth and swift." It is expected to be rapidly followed by the accession of neighbouring Sweden, whose governing Social Democrats are preparing to overturn their decades-long opposition to NATO membership on Sunday. Reports suggest the government will then make a formal announcement on Monday.

Unsurprisingly, Russia responded to the prospect of NATO soldiers, tanks, and other weaponry being stationed within a few hours' striking distance of its second city by warning of a major escalation of the war danger. Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov described the decision as "definitely" a threat and warned that Russia would respond with symmetrical measures. Former President Dmitri Medvedev, a close ally of Vladimir Putin, warned in a Telegram post that NATO expansion near Russia's borders would "increase the likelihood of a direct and open conflict between NATO and Russia instead of their 'proxy war.'...Such a conflict always has the risk of turning into a full-fledged nuclear war, this will be a catastrophic scenario for everyone."

In a separate statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated Moscow would be "forced to take retaliatory steps, both of a military-technical and other nature to stop the threats to its national security."

The Finnish and Swedish ruling elites, their imperialist masters, and corporate-controlled media outlets around the world fraudulently claim that the Scandinavian countries' decision to join NATO is a "defensive" reaction to "Russian aggression" in Ukraine. Former Finnish Prime Minister Alexander Stubb asserted

that NATO membership was a "done deal" the moment Russia invaded Ukraine. Swedish Defence Minister Peter Holtqvist, who publicly declared last November that Stockholm would not join NATO, stated that the invasion proved Putin was "unpredictable and unreliable," forcing Sweden to rethink its position.

According to the BBC, "Vladimir Putin's actions have shattered a long-standing sense of stability in northern Europe, leaving Sweden and Finland feeling vulnerable."

This is nothing but self-serving propaganda. The reality is that Swedish and Finnish NATO membership is a massive provocation that was decided upon in Washington, Berlin, and London far more than in Helsinki and Stockholm. Having goaded Russia into launching an invasion of Ukraine by expanding NATO eastwards over the past three decades and dismissing efforts by the Kremlin to negotiate security guarantees, American, German, and British imperialism are eager to open up a new front in their war drive to subjugate Russia to the status of a semi-colony and overthrow the Putin government.

The ruling elites in Helsinki and Stockholm have systematically deepened their military-strategic ties with the imperialist powers over recent decades. After becoming members of NATO's "Partnership for Peace" program in the mid-1990s, which was a key mechanism that facilitated the US-led military alliance's expansion into Eastern Europe, Finnish and Swedish troops participated in a series of exercises and NATO missions. Swedish and Finnish troops joined the neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan, while Swedish Saab-Gripen jets flew bombing raids during the destruction of Libya by the imperialist powers in 2011.

If they delayed applying for full NATO membership, this was above all due to the widespread popular hostility to the aggressive military alliance in both countries. The hysterical anti-Russia campaign and war fever whipped up by governments and the media in the US and Europe following Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine prompted a sharp shift in opinion polls, which was seized on by the Finnish and Swedish governments to implement plans for NATO membership that were prepared long ago and were only awaiting a pretext.

Recognising the opposition to military aggression that remains strong among working people, Niinisto and Marin sought to portray their decision in Thursday's statement in terms of "national defence." They declared, "NATO membership would

strengthen Finland's security. As a member of NATO, Finland would strengthen the entire defence alliance."

This is a lie. The integration of Finland and Sweden into NATO will in fact transform the entire Nordic region into yet another staging ground for military conflict with Russia. Just as the imperialist powers are pumping tens of billions of dollars in lethal weaponry into Ukraine with the aim of "breaking the back of Russia" irrespective of the devastation inflicted on the country, Finland and Sweden would become frontline garrison states and potential war zones. As Trotsky wrote in "War and the Fourth International" on the eve of World War II, "(W)e see how naturally formal neutrality is replaced by a system of imperialist pacts and how inevitably war for 'national defence' leads to an annexationist peace." In the case of Helsinki, such "annexations" would undoubtedly include the 10 percent of its pre-World War II territory it lost to the Soviet Union after 1945.

The imperialist powers' view of Finnish and Swedish membership in NATO opening up another front in the drive to war with Russia was underscored by the visit Wednesday to both countries by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who concluded mutual security pacts with Helsinki and Stockholm. During a press conference at the Swedish prime minister's country residence, Johnson refused to rule out deploying nuclear weapons to protect Sweden and Finland's sovereignty. Johnson said he would consider "very seriously" that request if either country made it. "What we are saying emphatically is in the event of a disaster or in the event of an attack upon Sweden, then the U.K. would come to the assistance of Sweden with whatever Sweden requested."

Given Russia's position that it will not accept Finland and Sweden joining NATO, Johnson effectively committed Britain to war with Russia with incalculable consequences. Expressing the putrefaction of democratic rule in Britain, as among all the imperialist powers, there has been no discussion organised in Parliament on these grave events, let alone among the population.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz invited Marin and Swedish Prime minister Magdalena Andersson to a government retreat at Schloss Meseberg last week to finalise plans for both countries' NATO membership. Scholz commented after the meeting, stating, "If both these countries should decide they want to belong to the NATO alliance, they can depend on our support."

For its part, the US military has expanded bilateral training and cooperation with the Finnish military over recent years, and Washington enjoys a decades-long intelligence-sharing relationship with Sweden.

While Finland's long border with Russia offers NATO the opportunity to launch provocations against Russia and quickly threaten St. Petersburg, Sweden occupies a strategically crucial position on the northern coast of the Baltic Sea. The island of Gotland, where the Swedish military maintained for decades a significant Cold War presence, lies just 300 kilometres northwest of the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, home to Moscow's Baltic fleet.

With their push to join NATO, the Finnish and Swedish bourgeoisies are reprising their servile devotion to the most reactionary imperialist forces during the wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Immediately after being granted

independence for the first time in the modern era by the Soviet government, the Finnish ruling elite responded by massacring tens of thousands of workers with the help of German troops during the country's civil war. They proceeded to open up Finnish territory for the military operations of counter-revolutionary white forces during the Russian civil war, which were backed by an imperialist intervention aimed at overthrowing the Soviet government and turning Russia into a colony.

After Stalin's reactionary invasion of Finland in the Winter War of 1939-40, which reflected the bureaucracy's deep hostility to the socialist and internationalist program that brought the Bolsheviks to power in 1917, the Finnish ruling elite aligned the country with Nazi Germany. Finnish forces joined "Operation Barbarossa," the Nazis' war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, which claimed 27 million lives and led to the Holocaust. For their part, the Swedish ruling class served as one of Nazi Germany's most important sources of raw materials, above all iron ore, throughout the war.

With the defeat of Nazi Germany and the beginning of the Cold War, the records of the Finnish and Swedish ruling elites forced them to adopt a nonaligned policy of neutrality. Finland was specifically obliged to remain neutral under its peace treaty with the Soviet Union in 1948.

The Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism fundamentally changed the political and geostrategic environment, giving the Finnish and Swedish ruling elites the chance to develop more direct military and security ties with the imperialist powers. Their decision to join NATO marks an acceleration of this process, and intensifies the looming danger of the US-NATO war with Russia spreading beyond Ukraine's borders and spinning out of control.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**