Sweden to join NATO with Finland as US-led war on Russia escalates

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A day after Finland pledged to join NATO "without delay," Sweden's ruling social democrats accepted a parliamentary report also calling to join the US-led alliance. NATO is threatening to turn Scandinavia and the entire Baltic Sea into a second front in the war on Russia it has waged since Russia invaded Ukraine in February.

Finnish and Swedish troops are joining US and Ukrainian forces in NATO "Hedgehog" war games next week in Estonia, whose border with Russia is just 150 kilometers from Saint Petersburg. The exercise, involving 15,000 troops, will simulate war between NATO and Russia in Estonia. This underscores that Finland's vast,1,300-km border with Russia is becoming a potential war zone.

Asked on Thursday about Finland joining NATO, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov said: "Russia will be forced to take retaliatory steps, both of a military-technical and other nature, in order to stop the threats to its national security that arise in this regard." Russian officials have said that if Sweden and Finland join NATO, they will try to maintain a regional balance of power by stationing nuclear missiles in Russia's Baltic port enclave at Kaliningrad.

This week, former Russian President Dmitri Medvedev admitted that Europe is rapidly moving towards all-out war. "NATO countries pumping weapons into Ukraine, training troops to use Western equipment, sending in mercenaries and the exercises of Alliance countries near our borders increase the likelihood of a direct and open conflict between NATO and Russia," he said. "Such a conflict always has the risk of turning into a full-fledged nuclear war."

Nonetheless, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson is to schedule a debate on joining NATO tomorrow. With staggering recklessness, the Swedish social democrats are scrapping a two-century policy of non-alignment in foreign wars that Sweden has observed since the Napoleonic wars ended in 1814, as the Finns scrapped the neutrality they observed since World War II.

At a press conference last night, Swedish Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist admitted that Sweden's announcement could provoke war with Russia, but dismissed the danger: "If Sweden chooses to seek NATO membership, there is a risk of a reaction from Russia. … Let me state that, in such a case, we are prepared to deal with any counter-response."

At yesterday's press conference, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde said: "Swedish NATO membership would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a conflict-preventing effect in northern Europe."

The Swedish government's case for joining NATO is a mixture of political lies and self-delusion. By joining NATO, Sweden is not, as Linde argues, deterring Russia from attacking it by making clear Moscow would potentially run the risk of a military clash with NATO. Rather, Sweden is signing up to a NATO war drive against Russia already being led by Washington, London and Berlin.

Hultqvist's statement that the Swedish government is prepared for "any counter-response" from Russia is astonishing. It appears Sweden's defense minister has forgotten that Russia has over 6,000 nuclear warheads: In case of a major escalation of the NATO-Russia war, Russia's "counter-response" could obliterate Sweden.

The escalation now underway puts paid to NATO propaganda that it is simply defending innocent Ukraine from Russian aggression. The Kremlin did invade Ukraine in February 2022. But the NATO imperialist powers, exploiting the consequences of the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, are seizing on a conflict that they played the main role in provoking to try to drastically reshape world politics.

Since backing a far-right putsch in Kiev that brought a Ukrainian nationalist regime to power in 2014, NATO has

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poured billions of dollars in arms and military advisers into Ukraine. Last year, Kiev adopted a so-called Crimean Platform pledging to reconquer Crimea, a Russian-speaking area which had responded to the putsch by voting to secede and join Russia. Washington's backing for the Crimean Platform signaled that NATO policy accepts the forcible territorial break-up of Russia.

The Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine was a desperate and reactionary attempt to prevent it from being consolidated as a NATO base targeting Russia. Now, attracted by the prospect of crumbs from the table at which the major imperialist powers would divide up and plunder Russia, Sweden and Finland are signing up to join NATO to wage imperialist war abroad and class war at home.

Criticism of the plans for Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO came not only from Russia, but also from Turkey and China. As Turkey is in NATO, which formally gives its member states the right to veto applications by other states the join the alliance, this could potentially derail Swedish-Finnish membership in NATO.

"We are following the developments regarding Sweden and Finland, but we don't hold positive views," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an said yesterday. He accused Sweden of ties with Kurdish nationalist groups, like the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) that the Turkish state bans as terrorist, saying: "the Scandinavian countries, unfortunately, are almost like guesthouses for terrorist organizations. PKK, DHKP-C are nested in the Netherlands and Sweden. I go further, they also take part in the parliaments there."

US diplomatic sources said last night that they were trying to clarify Erdo?an's remarks to see whether he could be made to change his position.

China's state-run *Global Times* newspaper criticized Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO as a threat to world peace. Referring to US plans to also invite Japan and South Korea to NATO's June summit in Madrid, it wrote: "[This] will not only complicate the ongoing Ukraine crisis but also erode the basis for sustainable security in Europe, even endangering the world given NATO's continuous expansion—in eastward, northward directions and even 'Asianization.'"

The reinforcing of NATO is inseparable from attempts of the ruling classes, amid mounting anger among workers over social inequality and the official mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, to shift political life as far as possible to the right.

The Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine no doubt seems to many in the Baltics an echo of the Soviet bureaucracy's reactionary 1939 invasion of Finland. That invasion came after the Stalinist regime had carried out a political genocide of the Marxist movement inside the Soviet Union in the Great Purges and lost any ability to make a revolutionary appeal internationally to workers. It aimed to forestall by brute military force a potential invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany and its ally, Finland.

But many of NATO's most enthusiastic supporters in the Baltics today do little to hide their historical and political sympathies for the Nazi-Finnish alliance. Finland joined the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, which claimed 27 million lives and led to the Holocaust of European Jewry; Finland in particular helped the Nazis besiege Leningrad (today Saint Petersburg). As for the Swedish bourgeoisie, it provided the Nazi regime with iron ore and other key materials throughout World War II.

Yesterday, protests broke out in the Latvian capital, Riga, over the authorities' plans to tear down a monument to the Soviet liberation of Latvia from Nazi rule. The Riga City Council took this decision after bulldozing flowers that Russian speakers left in front of the monument on May 9, the anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazism.

Yesterday, Latvian police carried out arrests of Russian-speaking protesters. Citing false and unsubstantiated claims that Russia is carrying out genocide in Ukraine, they claimed that waving flags or symbols to support the Soviet Union or Russia amounts to "justification of genocide," "crimes against humanity" and "crimes against peace and war crimes."

The Swedish and Finnish governments' decision to join NATO must be taken by workers as a warning: The imperialist powers' promotion of militarism, anti-Russian hatred and far-right forces threatens the world with war and a nuclear conflagration. The critical question is the international unification of the working class across northern Europe and the former Soviet Union and beyond, in a struggle against imperialist war and for socialism, based on the traditions of the Bolshevik revolution continued today by the Trotskyist movement.

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