

Finland and Sweden formally announce application for NATO membership

Jordan Shilton
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Swedish Social Democratic Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson formally announced Monday that Stockholm will submit an application to join NATO. The move followed a parliamentary debate in which almost all parties voted in favour of the move. The Greens and ex-Stalinist Left Party, which have helped keep the Social Democratic minority government in power for the past eight years, voted against.

Sweden's decision came one day after Finnish President Sauli Niinistö and Prime Minister Sanna Marin confirmed Sunday that Helsinki will apply for NATO membership. Although a parliamentary vote is necessary to finalise the process, this is seen as a formality since Niinistö and Marin represent the two largest parties, the conservative National Coalition Party and the Social Democrats.

Helsinki and Stockholm's formal applications to join the aggressive Western military alliance were prepared in close consultation with the major imperialist powers. Washington, Berlin and London see in NATO's expansion the opportunity to open up a second front in their drive to bring about regime change in Moscow and reduce Russia to the status of a semi-colony of Western imperialism.

Representatives of NATO and the imperialist powers sought to cover up this reality over recent days with Orwellian propaganda about "democracies" coming together in a "defensive" alliance to ensure "security" in Europe.

Speaking after a three-day G7 foreign ministers meeting on Saturday, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock claimed, "Every democratic country should be happy that democracies with strong defence capabilities will make the joint alliance stronger." She added that NATO is not pushing both countries to join. Instead, these two "strong democracies" are joining in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Baerbock then hosted a NATO summit in Berlin, where foreign ministers from NATO's 30 member states joined their colleagues from Finland and Sweden to consult on a "very, very fast" approval of the membership applications, as Baerbock put it. "Their membership in NATO would increase our shared security," added NATO Secretary

General Jens Stoltenberg.

In reality, there is nothing "democratic" about Sweden and Finland's decision to join the world's most aggressive military alliance, which has been responsible for spreading death and destruction from the Balkans to Afghanistan and Libya over the past three decades. The move has much more the character of a conspiracy engineered by the most powerful imperialist states, above all, Britain, Germany and the United States. Together with their accomplices in the Finnish and Swedish ruling elites, they are rushing to present the population of the region with a *fait accompli*: that they now live on a new frontline in a rapidly escalating military conflict with Russia.

As late as March, Andersson stated that Sweden would not join NATO, declaring that it would destabilize security in the region. Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist remarked the same month, "Sweden's membership in NATO means fundamentally changing the security line. This affects the safety of our immediate region."

According to an analysis by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, which is aligned with Germany's Free Democratic Party, "Finnish diplomats in Brussels started informal discussions with the defence alliance on 25 February, the day after the war started, and government officials have been on a diplomatic whirlwind tour ever since."

At a NATO meeting attended by Finnish and Swedish officials on February 26, participants discussed special intelligence-sharing arrangements for both countries with NATO. "They need to be fully informed because of their strategic position for Russia," a diplomatic source told EURACTIV.

Politico likewise described the "intense schedule of meetings at home and abroad" over recent weeks. Marin and Andersson travelled to a German cabinet retreat near Berlin in early May to obtain pledges of military support from Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who heads a government engaged in the largest rearmament programme since Hitler's Third Reich. Meanwhile, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde

traveled to the US and Canada to make arrangements with the Biden administration and Trudeau government.

The imperialist powers are eager to bring Sweden and Finland into NATO not only due to their relatively well-equipped militaries but, above all, due to the countries' geostrategic location. Finland shares a 1,300-kilometre border with Russia that is within striking distance of St. Petersburg. Swedish membership in NATO would leave Russia totally encircled by NATO members in the Baltic Sea and make it easier for the alliance to supply its battlegroups in the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the event of an attack on Russia.

The two membership applications must be approved by all 30 NATO members before Finland and Sweden can join. This could prove to be a stumbling block in the imperialist powers' drive to conclude the membership process as soon as possible. On Friday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed his opposition to Helsinki and Stockholm joining the alliance, saying they were "guest houses for terrorist organisations." Erdogan accused Sweden and Finland of supporting the banned Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) against which Ankara has waged a bloody military conflict for decades. Finland and Sweden have dispatched delegations to Ankara for talks aimed at resolving the dispute.

The political establishments in Helsinki and Stockholm have been striving to become NATO members for well over two decades. In the mid-1990s, Finland and Sweden joined NATO's "Partnership for Peace" programme, which was a key instrument in the US-led military alliance's aggressive expansion up to the borders of Russia in the Baltic region and in Eastern Europe. Finland and Sweden went on to send troops to support the neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan, while Swedish fighter jets participated in NATO's savage bombardment of Libya.

In 2017, Finland and Sweden then joined the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), a British-led military alliance of Baltic and Nordic countries aimed explicitly at Russia. The goals of the alliance were to enable NATO members to launch military attacks without the delays required for consultation within the military alliance and engage non-NATO members in joint military exercises with NATO equipment.

Russia's reactionary invasion of Ukraine—which was intentionally provoked by the transformation of Ukraine into a NATO member in all but name after the US- and German-backed Maidan coup in 2014—was seized upon by the imperialists, and the plan for NATO expansion involving the Swedish and Finnish governments has long been in the works. The main obstacle was always strong opposition to the military alliance among the Swedish and Finnish

populations, but this was overcome through a sustained barrage of pro-war propaganda and a vicious anti-Russia campaign portraying the nationalist Putin regime as the main aggressor.

As Petteri Orpo, head of the conservative National Coalition Party in Finland, put it during a recent trip to Washington for consultations with Biden administration officials, "For 16 years, we have supported NATO membership, and now it's possible. Thanks, Putin."

A striking feature of the pro-war consensus that has emerged within Finnish and Swedish ruling circles as they prepared to join NATO is that it was led primarily by the Social Democratic parties, who owed their considerable popularity for much of the 20th century to their professed opposition to war and military violence.

Marin's Social Democrats, who currently head the government in Helsinki, voted at a national executive meeting on Saturday by a 53-5 vote with 2 abstentions for NATO membership. At a similar meeting held a day later by Sweden's Social Democrats, who currently govern in a minority tolerated by the Greens and Left Party, Andersson obtained agreement from the party executive. Reflecting the significant skepticism towards NATO that still exists, the Social Democrats felt compelled to pledge that if Sweden's application is accepted, the party will "work to ensure that Sweden expresses unilateral reservations against the deployment of nuclear weapons and permanent bases on Swedish territory."

Just four days earlier, Andersson hosted British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who confirmed London's readiness to provide Sweden with military assistance as part of a mutual security pact. Asked if this would include nuclear weapons, Johnson told the media, "When it comes to our nuclear deterrent, that's something we don't generally comment upon, but what I've made clear is that it's up to either party to make a request, and we take it very seriously."

Tacit approval from the ex-Stalinist and pseudo-left parties has played a no less important role in suppressing opposition in the population. Li Andersson, leader of the Left Alliance and Education Minister in Marin's government, declared last week that while she personally opposed joining NATO, she saw no reason to resign from the government if Finland filed an application to join.



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