Sweden to increase military budget 64 percent by 2028

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Sweden plans on increasing its defense and security budget by 64 percent between 2022 and 2028. The increase, proposed in a draft budget released last month, will see the small country spend about $12 billion a year on defense by 2028.

The proposed increase follows Finland and Sweden's application to join NATO in May. While Turkey retracted its veto against the two Scandinavian countries joining the military alliance in June, both Turkey and Hungary have yet to sign off on their membership.

The war in Ukraine has rapidly developed into a direct conflict between the US and its NATO allies on the one hand, and Russia on the other. The Swedish ruling elite was able to exploit Putin's reactionary invasion of Ukraine to overcome long-standing popular hostility to joining the imperialist powers in NATO and significantly expanding its armed forces.

Sweden's proposed enlargement of its military budget comes weeks after a new right-wing coalition government took power. The right-wing coalition government rules with the support of the far-right Sweden Democrats, a party which originated in Sweden's neo-Nazi movement and has now become the second-largest party in parliament.

A few days after Sweden announced its massive defense budget increase, Sweden signed a military aid package for Ukraine worth $287 million—more than all its past aid.

Pål Jonson, Sweden's defense minister and member of the right-wing Moderates, stated that the aid package contained "air defense and winter equipment—because that's what the Ukrainians need." He said the "first priority" of his office was to "[step] up economic, military, political and humanitarian support for Ukraine, including the transfer of more advanced weapons systems."

The NATO-aligned international arms industry has greeted Sweden's massive military spending increase with enthusiasm.

Defense News exclaimed, "Days after Sweden announced its largest military aid package yet for Ukraine, its lead defense officials are positioning the Nordic country's contributions as an example of what to expect from Stockholm as a NATO member."

They continued, "Ramping up aid from portable anti-tank weapons to heavy-duty anti-aircraft systems was just the latest in a whiplash-inducing array of changes for Sweden after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. After 200 years of nonalignment, Sweden is now a NATO aspirant, prompting a fast-tracked rewrite of its defense strategy and—from its new center-right government—a major defense budget boost."

Sweden has long played an important role in the global arms industry.

The Nobel family, which obtained its wealth primarily from owning Russian oil fields and mines, was also a prolific manufacturer of explosives and ammunition. Alfred Nobel oversaw the invention of dynamite. When he died, his company owned 90 factories that manufactured explosives and ammunition across the world.

Sweden played a major role in the development of anti-tank weapons in the 20th century. The Carl Gustaf M series rocket launcher, now produced by Saab, is one of the most widely used portable anti-tank weapons.

In his press conference for the military budget, Jonson noted Sweden's important role in the global arms industry, "There's no other country of 10 million that can produce submarines, surface combatants, advanced artillery systems, combat vehicles and fighter aircraft… For being a quite small country, we have quite

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a vibrant defense industrial base."

Saab, Sweden's major defense company, recently posted a 13.6 percent rise in quarterly earnings. Its CEO Micael Johansson told a press conference, "It's a multiple-year growth opportunity that we see in Europe and elsewhere, at least until 2030."

Sweden has effectively been a close collaborator and participant in NATO for years. A staunch ally of the US since World War II, Stockholm's "neutrality" is belied by its decades-long collaboration with the US military and intelligence agencies during the Cold War and War on Terror. Sweden has been involved in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya.

Sweden has also participated in NATO military exercises for years prior to its formal application to join. It plays a major role in BALTOPS—NATO's annual Baltic Operation exercise dating back to 1985—which Sweden hosted this year.

Sweden's integration into the US-led military alliance and massive increase in military spending have been supported by the entire political establishment. While the latest budget is being implemented by a right-wing government, the previous Social Democrat government initiated another major defence budget increase in 2014 and reintroduced compulsory military service in 2017. Social Democrat Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson seized on the US/NATO-instigated Russian invasion of Ukraine to rush through Stockholm's application to join NATO. The ex-Stalinist Left Party backed the sending of military equipment to Ukraine and promoted nationalism and militarism during the debate on Swedish NATO membership.

Sweden's major increase in military spending comes as the major imperialist powers are increasing their war budgets to unprecedented levels. Over the past week alone, the United States, Germany and Japan unveiled massive new military spending proposals, underscoring the advanced preparations for World War III. Sweden could emerge as a frontline state in such a war, since it forms together with Finland a northern front that NATO could open up against Russia.

In the Swedish government's budget draft, military spending will grow by $800 million in 2023 alone. The money will include a significant amount for increasing military personnel. This fall, Stockholm's major subway stations were filled with advertisements to join the Swedish Defense Force. The budget also includes new money for cyber-defense, intelligence and new armaments.

A few weeks after the new budget was announced, Sweden's special security and intelligence police (SAPO) conducted a raid with Black Hawk helicopters loaned by the military in Stockholm. According to AP, "The authorities gave few details about the case, but Swedish media cited witnesses who described elite police rappelling from two Black Hawk helicopters to arrest a couple that had allegedly spied for Russia."

Two Iranian-born men were arrested earlier in November on charges of spying for the Russian military. One of them was previously a member of Sweden's intelligence service SAPO.

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