

Sweden holds largest military exercise in 30 years

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“Sweden is at war,” provocatively states the Swedish Armed Forces in one of their announcements for Aurora 23 – Sweden’s largest military exercise since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Aurora 23 began April 17; however, its operations have steadily intensified over the last week, building up to its close today on May 11.

Twenty-six thousand troops are involved in the operation, the largest show of military force in Sweden since 1989, according to the government.

Fourteen other countries have also joined the exercises. While the largest forces have come from the main NATO countries, the United States, UK, Germany, France, and Poland, it is notable that a delegation of soldiers and officers from Ukraine have also participated.

Finland, which joined the US-led military alliance last month, sent 1,000 troops. Their contingent of American made F-18 fighters played a significant role in the air exercises preparing for war around the Baltic Sea. All the smaller Baltic states located on or near Russia’s border, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, are also participating.

The exercise is being held amid a major escalation in the NATO-Russia war centered in Ukraine.

On Tuesday it was revealed that Britain is preparing to send long-range missiles to Ukraine that would be capable of striking Crimea. The delivery by Britain will likely be followed by other such weapons from the United States and the other NATO powers, potentially including F-16 fighter jets.

The delivery of such offensive weaponry – which US President Biden previously ruled out as impossible, equating it to World War III in March, 2022 – threatens to further escalate the war. It is being given explicitly with the aim of targeting the Crimea – where Russia’s

Black Sea naval base has been located in Sevastopol since 1772.

Meanwhile, the United States is directing the Ukrainian armed forces to begin a new counter-offensive against Russia. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers have died so far from the fighting, according to leaked Pentagon documents from April.

The Aurora war games in Sweden involve a significant focus on operations in and around the Baltic Sea, including various tactical scenarios involving Gotland, the heavily fortified Swedish island in the Baltic. Gotland served as a major Cold War base for the Swedish military, and is located just 300 kilometres from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. British Royal Marine commandos have been deployed as part of the exercise, operating out of the amphibious assault flagship HMS Albion.

The exercises are happening simultaneously with the smaller Formidable Shield 23 – a Scottish and Norwegian-led exercise of air, missile, and naval capabilities in the North Sea and its surrounding coastline. Norway has witnessed a major escalation of American and British troop activities over recent months, especially in its far north where major military exercises were held in March.

Sweden has yet to officially join NATO – being temporarily blocked by the Turkish and Hungarian governments – although it has been officially agreed upon in the Swedish parliament. However, Sweden effectively operates already as a member of NATO, and has long been a close intelligence and military ally of the United States.

The Swedish exercises were meant to demonstrate to Russia this pre-existing military integration with NATO and prepare further for war. As Colonel Anna

Siverstig – commander of the Swedish Air Force – stated, “our air force interoperability with NATO is already well established, and this exercise will improve it further.”

The Aurora 23 military exercises have been protested by hundreds of people around Sweden.

In Stockholm, a demonstration was held in April at the beginning of the exercise – with placards reading “NATO’s war will get our children killed for a dollar.” Several hundred protesters also demonstrated in Gothenburg.

The military exercises come amid a deepening cost of living crisis facing the Swedish working class as well as ongoing efforts by the far-right to scapegoat immigrants for the country’s worsening conditions.

Last year Sweden announced it would increase its military budget by 64 percent over five years. Over the past three decades, governments led by the social Democrats and right-wing Moderates have slashed social spending and implemented sweeping privatisations, going a long way to destroy the country’s once much-vaunted social welfare system.

In fact, this year it was revealed that Sweden now has the highest rate of inequality since records began in the 1970s. While Ferraris, Porphes and Teslas are common sights in the country’s up-scale neighborhoods, large sections of the population face a cost-of-living crisis that has placed the working class on edge.

In December 2022, inflation rose to a record high of 12.4 percent year-on-year. High energy and food prices only further exacerbate one of the main problems, high rents.

The Swedish economy is in a recession that is “expected to last until 2025,” according to the Ministry of Finance. It is the only country in Europe in recession.

The news agency *Reuters* explained, “After years of ultra-low borrowing costs, the pandemic and the Ukraine war have served up a toxic cocktail of high inflation and rapidly rising interest rates to many countries... But in Sweden, the structural problems rooted in its housing market are magnifying the effects.”

Sweden has one of the highest debt levels in the entirety of the European Union – about 200 percent of disposable income per person. Meanwhile, almost two-thirds of Swedish mortgagees have floating rates,

meaning they have now increased as central banks internationally have sharply hiked interest rates over the past year.

The right-wing Moderate party-led government, which relies on the support of the fascistic Sweden Democrats for its parliamentary majority, has sought to blame the country’s ills on desperate migrants who fled to Sweden in the 2010’s to escape war and destitution in the Middle East and Africa.

The right-wing ruling coalition just doubled the mandatory income of all job-seeking immigrants coming to Sweden – a move that is expected to bar at least 30 percent of current migrants to Sweden who move with a job in-hand.



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