

Sweden joins NATO amid escalation of US-led war on Russia

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Sweden joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Thursday, officially becoming its 32nd member. Stockholm's succession to the military alliance completes the encirclement of Russia's Western border with hostile states and effectively turns the Baltic Sea into a NATO-dominated lake.

The accession last year of Finland, which shares a 1,000-kilometre border with Russia, and now Sweden to NATO was aggressively pushed by the imperialist powers, above all the United States, Britain, and Germany. They seized on the US-incited Russian invasion of Ukraine to open a northern front against Moscow, which is seen as critical in the imperialists' war to subordinate Russia to the status of a semi-colony and plunder its natural resources.

Underlining Washington's leading role in NATO's expansion, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson flew not to NATO headquarters in Brussels, but to Washington DC to deposit Sweden's official instrument of accession and participate in a joining ceremony. During the State of the Union Thursday evening, President Joe Biden singled out Kristersson in the audience, asking him to stand as he argued for an intensification of the conflict with Russia. One day earlier, the United States Air Force flew a B-1 and B-52 bomber at low altitude over the downtown of Sweden's capital, Stockholm. The two bombers are capable of dropping a combined payload of 64 nuclear bombs and missiles, enough to destroy every major population center in Western Russia.

Sweden is joining NATO at an inflection point in the war in Ukraine. In late February, French President Emmanuel Macron publicly declared that NATO is considering sending ground troops to Ukraine, a move that would result in a direct war with Russia and risk a catastrophic nuclear conflagration. Four other NATO states—Canada, Lithuania, the Netherlands and most recently Poland—indicated they would be ready to send ground forces. On Friday, March 1, a leaked conversation between top German generals exposed advanced discussion and planning on supplying Ukraine with long-range weapons that could strike several hundred

kilometers into Russian territory. The leak also revealed that Britain already has a “small number” of troops on the ground, which London later admitted.

As Kristersson left for Washington, a massive NATO exercise involving some 20,000 ground troops, more than 100 warplanes, and over 50 frigates and submarines got started in the Arctic regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. “Nordic Response 2024” is an expansion of the long-standing “Cold Response” exercise organised by the Norwegian military into a regional war game made possible by Finland and Sweden's NATO membership. “Nordic Response” is a component of NATO's “Steadfast Defender,” which amounts to a massive mobilisation of 90,000 troops throughout the Nordic and Baltic regions, as well as Germany and Poland in the coming months.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, who has recently declared the necessity for Germany to be ready to fight a war with Russia in five to eight years, was in northern Norway as the maneuvers began. He proposed a stronger German military presence along Norway's 198-kilometre Arctic border with Russia. “It's actually clear that here in the Arctic—the northern sea—the threads come together, so to speak,” he said, pointing to the presence of extensive Russian freight traffic and military submarines.

These developments make clear that American imperialism and its European allies are determined to escalate the war with Russia, a process triggered by a deepening crisis of the Ukrainian armed forces. Ukrainian forces have retreated from Avdiivka. Amid massive casualties endured by Ukraine, with some estimates as high as 500,000 fatalities, the Zelensky government is having difficulty finding more troops to fight off a Russian advance.

More fundamentally, however, the war with Russia arises out of the irreconcilable contradictions of crisis-ridden capitalism, which are driving the major powers to engage in another redivision of the world. The subjugation of Russia is seen as essential by Washington and its European allies to secure dominance over the Eurasian landmass and prepare for military conflict with China.

During the ceremony and short press conference in Washington, Kristersson repeatedly described Sweden joining NATO as “coming home.” Indirectly, Kristersson was alluding to the fact that for the entire post-war period the small, but economically powerful country remained formally neutral, despite being closely integrated into the US-led economic and geopolitical order.

For decades, the Swedish ruling class has desired to join NATO—working closely with US and European military and intelligence services despite not being a member. However, widespread opposition to war, including US imperialism, in the Swedish population, prevented it. In 2014, only 28 percent of the Swedish population was in favor of joining NATO. But at the beginning of 2024, 63 percent of the population approved of joining NATO, according to the polling company Ipsos. This shift was largely due to a hysterical anti-Russia campaign embraced by all major parties that reached its high point in early 2022 when Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine in response to Western provocations.

In an address to the nation from Washington broadcast Thursday evening, Kristersson went out of his way to applaud the consensus across the entire political establishment for Sweden’s NATO membership, ranging from the Social Democrats to the fascistic Sweden Democrats. He praised his predecessor Magdalena Andersson, who headed a Social Democrat-led government when Sweden formally applied for NATO membership in May 2022. Kristersson’s conservative Moderate Party and the Social Democrats had worked together “at every step” along the way, he commented.

Sweden’s accession to NATO came almost a year after Finland joined in April 2023. The delay was primarily due to opposition from Hungary and Turkey, with the latter seeking to extort concessions from Stockholm over the repatriation of Kurdish nationalists, and from Washington on the supply of military equipment. Hungary’s President, Tams Sulyok, signed the bill approving Sweden’s ascension to NATO on Tuesday.

Kristersson’s praise for Andersson and former Social Democrat prime minister of Finland Sanna Marin as key players in both countries’ NATO membership, was entirely justified. While Kristersson’s signature confirmed Sweden’s NATO membership, political responsibility for transforming Sweden into a frontline state in the imperialist powers’ war on Russia rests squarely with the Social Democrats and ex-Stalinist Left Party.

Like their counterparts internationally, Sweden’s nominal left-wing parties have moved sharply to the right over the past four decades. When in power between 2014 and 2022, the Social Democrats, backed by the Greens and Left party,

initiated a sharp increase in military spending, reintroduced military service, enacted budget cuts and privatizations, championed “let it rip” COVID policies, and clamped down on immigration.

In his national address, Kristersson noted that it has been 30 years since Sweden joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme and 15 years since the country obtained permanent representation at NATO’s Brussels headquarters. Social Democrat-led governments backed by the Left Party during this period oversaw the deployment of Swedish troops on NATO interventions, including the neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan, and in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Left Party leader Nooshi Dadgostar, while not openly voting for NATO, for fear of retribution from her membership, essentially stated her agreement in 2022. She said that if Sweden joined NATO, it was important “that we do this together as one people and one nation. I don’t often agree with Carl Bildt [former conservative prime-minister and NATO advocate], but on this question I do. There’s the left-wing and there’s the right-wing, but the Swedish military is all Swedes together.” Such pro-militarist and nationalist perspectives have nothing to do with left, let alone, genuine socialist politics.

Sweden is rapidly increasing its military budget. Kristersson bragged during the ceremony in Washington, that Sweden has doubled its defense budget to spend the NATO requirement of 2 percent of GDP on defence this year. His government has announced an increase in the military budget by 64 percent between 2022 and 2028. Sweden has likewise sent over a billion dollars’ worth of arms to Ukraine and hosted major military exercises.

Kristersson also noted that Sweden was “increasing its numbers of conscripts” and “reintroducing civilian service,” noting, “we have prepared for this task for quite a while.” New advertisements for the military have become a common sight in major Swedish cities, like Stockholm and Gothenburg, over the past two years.



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