

Finland closes border with Russia indefinitely to block asylum seekers, prepare for war

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Finland's right-wing government announced last week the indefinite closure of its 1,300-kilometre border with Russia. An initial decision had been taken last November by the conservative National Coalition Party (NCP)-led government to temporarily close border crossings after a small number of asylum seekers crossed into Finland from Russia.

The four-party coalition government, which includes the far-right Finns Party, is seeking with the move to provoke Russia and demonstrate its determination to clamp down on refugees. After Finland joined NATO last April, becoming the military alliance's 31st member, its long land border with Russia and close proximity to St. Petersburg transformed Finland into a frontline state in the US-NATO imperialist war on Russia.

Finland's entry into NATO, following the US-provoked Russian invasion of Ukraine, was overseen by a Social Democrat-led government. Prime Minister Sanna Marin's coalition lost support due to sweeping attacks on the working class and embrace of pro-war policies, and was defeated in parliamentary elections also held in April 2023. When the NCP unveiled what is widely described as Finland's most right-wing government since World War II, a central plank of the program was a clampdown on asylum seekers and refugees.

The Finns Party, which has ties to outright fascist forces, has long scapegoated foreigners for the country's problems.

NCP Prime Minister Petteri Orpo placed the Interior Ministry under the control of the Finns Party. Finns leader Riikka Purra enthused, "I am delighted that together with our negotiating partners we have agreed on an immigration package that can rightly be called a paradigm shift." Among the measures proposed was a halving of the refugees accepted by Finland from the UN refugee agency from 1,050 to 500 per year, and the creation of lower rates of social welfare for refugees and immigrants.

Purra boasted that temporary residency permits for refugees would be "withdrawn if the person is on holiday in their country of origin."

In the months following the coming to power of the new coalition, from August to December 2023, approximately 1,300 asylum seekers crossed the border from Russia, an increase from an average of one per day before then. Interviews conducted with asylum seekers who successfully made the trek after paying hefty fees to smugglers underscore that they chose the route because it was the easiest way into "fortress Europe," which, thanks to the European Union's inhuman refugee policies, has led to the drowning of thousands in the Mediterranean in recent years.

The EU has not only made it virtually impossible to cross safely via the short sea route from north Africa or Turkey, but also funds criminal gangs in Libya and dictatorships like Egypt's el-Sisi's to prevent refugees from even attempting to reach the continent.

This did not stop lurid stories in the media, hyped by the international press, about an alleged campaign of "hybrid warfare" directed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. The fact that a fascistic party's programme was being implemented was of no concern to top EU officials like EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

During a meeting in Stockholm with Orpo and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson in January, von der Leyen declared, "Most recently, Finland suffered from instrumentalisation of migrants orchestrated by Russia. This is yet another form of hybrid warfare. This requires a clear and determined response. Finland has acted decisively. And you can rely on the European Union to support your efforts."

The Finnish government's vicious anti-immigrant programme is combined with savage austerity measures to pay for Finland's massive military build-up. Orpo is committed to imposing €6 billion in austerity measures

during his first term. “We cannot put our heads in the sand. There is no more money,” he claimed last June.

In fact, there is plenty of money for Finland’s military, which completed in 2023 the largest single purchase in its history to acquire 64 F-35 fighter jets from US-based Lockheed Martin, at a cost of €8.4 billion. The purchase drove the 2023 defence budget up by 36 percent year-on-year, the highest single-year increase in over six decades.

Finland’s 2024 defence budget rose by 5 percent from the previous year to about €6.2 billion, or 2.3 percent of its GDP. Given its small size, with a population of 5.5 million, Finland has backed the far-right Ukrainian regime since the US-provoked Russian invasion in February 2022 with a substantial €2.9 billion in support. On April 3, newly elected President Alexander Stubb, who has significant powers over Finland’s foreign policy, signed a long-term bilateral defence agreement with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky in Kiev. Stubb was elected president in February following a campaign dominated by pro-war, anti-Russia hysteria.

In December 2023, Finland finalised a defence cooperation agreement (DCA) with the United States, which gives Washington unimpeded access to several military bases in Finland and the ability to pre-position military supplies for major operations. This is part of a huge military build-up throughout the Nordic region, all of whose countries are now NATO members. After Sweden formally joined NATO last month, Russia is now confronted with hostile adversaries on all sides in the strategic Baltic Sea.

Much like their cultivation of the far right in Ukraine and the Baltic states, Washington and the major European powers are reviving the counterrevolutionary traditions of the Finnish bourgeoisie to facilitate opening a new war front against Russia.

Finland has already emerged as an important base of operations for NATO soldiers to obtain training in Arctic warfare and how to operate along a border with Russia. The military unit overseeing these training operations is the Jaeger Brigade—whose name has its origins in a unit created by the German Empire during World War I to crush revolutionary workers in Finland inspired by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in October 1917.

The taking of power by the working class in Russia prompted a general strike in Finland in support, which was prevented from transferring power to the working class by the bankrupt Social Democratic Party leadership. When the Finnish Socialist Workers Republic was ultimately proclaimed in Helsinki in January 1918, it was

clear that the counterrevolutionary Whites were ready to launch a civil war with the backing of the imperialist powers.

After the Soviet Union was forced under threat of invasion to sign the peace of Brest Litovsk in early 1918, Germany intervened decisively in the Finnish civil war to support the Whites. The Jaeger Brigade spearheaded the ruling-class massacre of tens of thousands of workers who backed the short-lived Finnish Socialist Republic, which was drowned in blood in May 1918 as Germany invaded Finland. Thereafter, Finland was a key base for the imperialist-backed Whites, who sought to topple the Bolshevik government in the Russian Civil War.

The sharp rightward turn of Finnish politics and the revival of the country’s role as a slavish servant of imperialist war aims have been facilitated by Finland’s nominally “left” parties. The Social Democrats have played an important role since the 1990s in paving Finland’s route into NATO, including joining the alliance’s misnamed Partnership for Peace program in 1994.

The ex-Stalinist Left Alliance, the successor of the once-powerful Finnish Communist Party, ditched its supposed opposition to NATO membership after the outbreak of the US-NATO war on Russia. Although the party only entered Marin’s Social Democrat-led coalition government in 2019 on the condition that Finland not join NATO during the government’s term in office, Left Alliance leaders threw this pledge overboard and remained in the government as it championed the move. The party collapsed in last year’s election as a result.



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