

# Pentagon's New Global Military Partner: Sweden

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Global Research, August 25, 2010

[Stop NATO](#) 25 August 2010

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The longest war in U.S. history and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's first armed conflict outside Europe, as well as its first ground war, is nearing the beginning of its tenth year.

Over 120,000 troops are serving under NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan in addition to 30,000 under American command, and the Western military bloc recently confirmed that Malaysia has become the 47th official Troop Contributing Nation (TCN) for the war effort.

Never before have forces from so many nations served under a common command in one country, one war theater or one war.

All 28 full NATO member states have supplied soldiers for the campaign, as have over 20 Alliance partners in Europe, the South Caucasus, the South Pacific, Asia, Africa and South America. With the inclusion of contingents deployed and pledged by nations such as Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Colombia and Tonga as well as the 47 official troop contributors, there are military personnel from every populated continent assigned to the West's war in Afghanistan.

European nations that have maintained neutrality since the end of World War Two and in some cases decades and centuries longer have provided NATO with troops for its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Austria, Ireland and Switzerland have sent nominal contingents under Partnership for Peace (PfP) obligations. PfP member Finland has approximately 150 troops attached to NATO's Afghan command and Sweden has 500. The Swedish consignment was until lately the second-largest of all non-NATO member states, only surpassed by Australia until over 750 more U.S. Marine Corps-trained Georgian troops arrived in the South Asian nation in April. (Last month Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili said that the 1,000 total troops he deployed were matriculated in the "school of Afghan warfare" for use in future conflicts like those of the five-day Georgian-Russian war of two years ago.)

The main function of the Partnership for Peace program - whose name is counterintuitive, Orwellian and blasphemous given the fact it has graduated 12 Eastern European nations into full membership in the world's only military bloc and prepared them for deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq - is to integrate nations in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia for NATO operations abroad. The major beneficiary of that process is the Pentagon.

Over twenty nations currently in that category are having their armed forces, military doctrines, weapons arsenals and foreign policy orientation transformed for interoperability with the Western alliance and in particular its leading member, the United States.

The PfP is training the armies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Austria, Bosnia, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Macedonia, Montenegro and Sweden for the war in Afghanistan and, complementarily, is employing the war there to provide the militaries of those states combat experience and to build a globally deployable force for future NATO operations, including ones nearer the respective nations' borders. [1] Other components of the strategy include conducting ever more frequent and large-scale war games and other combat training in partnership nations with Afghanistan the immediate battlefield destination but with general applicability for other locations, and expanding the arsenals of PfP states with – NATO interoperable – unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), armored combat vehicles, artillery, attack helicopters, advanced warplanes and other engines of war.

Al Burke and his dedicated colleagues with the Stop the Furtive Accession to NATO initiative in Sweden are conducting a tireless campaign to sound the alarm over the surreptitious and accelerating drive to integrate the nation into NATO's – and the Pentagon's – global military sphere. [2]

For over a year Swedish troops in charge of ISAF operations in four northern Afghan provinces have been engaged in regular firefights, the first combat operations the nation has conducted in almost two hundred years. Two Swedish officers were killed in February, the first troops killed in an exchange of fire with Afghan rebels.

On July 1 the Swedish government ended 109 years of conscription and made the country's armed force entirely voluntary; that is, Stockholm – to use the approved term – professionalized the military according to NATO standards and demands.

As a result, "All Swedish soldiers will in future be liable to be sent abroad on missions against their will. Any soldiers who refuse could lose their jobs...." [3]

The four unions representing the nation's military personnel are all opposed to the compulsory overseas deployment provision.

As a press agency reported on the day of the announcement, "At the same time, it was decided to loosen the country's traditionally strict neutrality to allow participation in more international military operations, like the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan." [4]

Last year Sweden hosted the ten-day Loyal Arrow 2009 NATO military exercise in its north. The war games consisted in part of "the biggest air force drill ever in the Finnish-Swedish Bothnia Bay" [5] and included the participation of 2,000 troops from ten nations, 50 warplanes and a British aircraft carrier. An account of it stated, "The exercise is based upon a fictitious scenario. Within this scenario, elements of the NATO Response Force (NRF)...will be deployed to a theatre of operations." [6] The allegedly fictitious situation in question was one which could well be applied in the Baltic nations of Estonia and Latvia, the South Caucasus, Transdniestria and other locations where NATO forces and war machinery could come into direct contact with their Russian opposite numbers.

Late this May NATO's top military commander made a tour of inspection to Sweden, commending its government for deploying and maintaining 500 troops in Afghanistan. American Admiral James Stavridis, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, visited the country on the invitation of the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces, Sverker Goranson. He also consulted with the State Secretary to the Prime Minister, Gustav Lind,

and the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Frank Belfrage. [7]

A few days later several special representatives from “NATO Partner Nations Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland,” among them Veronika Wand-Danielsson, ambassador of Sweden to NATO, met with French Air Force General Stephane Abrial, commander of Allied Command Transformation (ACT) at the latter’s headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia.

The European envoys “were also briefed by U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Lawrence Rice of U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) on that command’s mission and on the achievements and future of the ACT-USJFCOM cooperation.” [8]

NATO is and has always been designed to recruit nations into a military bloc so the Pentagon can integrate them into its own network as well. Where NATO advances, U.S. troops and bases follow, as with Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Poland where Washington has acquired air, training, interceptor missile and strategic airlift bases over the past five years.

In June Swedish troops were among 3,000 from 12 countries participating in the annual U.S.-led Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) NATO Partnership for Peace maneuvers, “the largest multinational naval exercise in the Baltic Sea,” [9] which included 500 U.S. Marines, 130 of whom stormed a beach in Estonia, the U.S. Marine Corps’ “first amphibious landing exercise in a territory that was once part of the Soviet Union,” [10] 90 miles from the Russian border.

At the same time United States Air Forces in Europe launched this year’s Unified Engagement “wargame designed to explore future joint warfare concepts and capabilities” [11] in Estonia. Last year’s version was conducted in Sweden.

The American delegation was led by the commander of United States Air Forces in Europe, General Roger Brady, and worked with “counterparts from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden to strengthen relationships, and improve interoperability and future cooperation.” [12]

The United States Air Forces in Europe website described the event as a “transformation war game to explore future combined warfighting concepts and capabilities.”

According to Brady, “Because of training seminars like Unified Engagement, the U.S. Air Force and our partners worldwide are better prepared for future operational challenges.” [13]

In mid-June it was announced that “Swedish armed forces operating in Afghanistan as part of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will be equipped with their first tactical UAV capability since deploying into theatre....”

Shadow 200 unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) systems, “Already operated by the US Army and Marine Corps in Afghanistan and Iraq,” will be deployed by the Swedish air force within months. [14]

During the same week the Finnish government announced it was presenting a proposal to the nation’s parliament to join the NATO Response Force, following up on a decision of three years ago to do so “as part of a joint decision and simultaneous membership with Sweden.” [15]

The U.S. led the annual NATO Partnership for Peace Sea Breeze multinational military exercises in Ukraine in the first half of July – in the Crimea, near the headquarters of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol – with Alliance members and partners Sweden, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Moldova, Poland and Ukraine.

In late July and early August the U.S. 555th Fighter Squadron with 250 airmen spent two weeks in Sweden conducting air-to-air and air-to-ground exercises with the host country’s air force during which “the U.S. Air Force worked side-by-side with their Swedish allies both in the skies and on the ground conducting more than 180 flying missions that tested their air combat capabilities as well as their precision weapons scoring....”

The deputy commander of the participating Swedish unit, Övlt (Lieutenant Colonel) Harri Larsson, stated on the occasion: “We really appreciate working with the U.S. Air Force because it gives us dimension...training with someone else, other equipment, other tactics, working in the English language, which is not our native language....I believe it gives us a lot of good experience which we can use in the future.”

He added that the air combat exercises were important for integrating the warfighting capabilities of his nation’s Gripen pilots with U.S. F-16 Fighting Falcon counterparts. “They can improve their training and we become more interoperable.”

Larsson also revealed the purpose behind the joint maneuvers: “Our government wants us to become more flexible and be able to, on a short notice, go abroad. (Therefore), we need to work with other countries, especially the U.S. (as) the U.S. is the biggest contributor to NATO and the UN. [F]rom our point of view it’s necessary to work with the U.S.”

As the American squadron returned to the Aviano Air Base in Italy, Övlt Larsson said “the F 21 Wing hopes to host its American allies again in the near future.” [16] The F 21 Wing, also known as the Norrbotten Air Force Wing, hosted the fifty NATO warplanes used in last year’s Loyal Arrow war games.

Last week the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead arrived in Sweden to inspect some of the country’s warships and a submarine and meet with his counterpart Rear Admiral Anders Grenstad to “discuss present and future operations between the two navies in the region and around the globe.” [17]

Sweden’s top military commander, General Sverker Goranson, was at the Pentagon on August 5 to meet with Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Goranson had earlier studied at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and served as military attache in the United States.

With eleven years of NATO expansion and the Alliance’s transformation into the world’s first internationally-oriented military bloc, no nation in Europe is permitted to be neutral and none can avoid involvement in military missions, including wars, abroad. Sweden is no exception, having joined scores of other previously non-aligned nations around the world in being pulled into the Pentagon’s orbit in the post-Cold War period.

To illustrate how widely the network has expanded, on July 16 military officers from 63 nations enrolled at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College – Swedish military chief Goranson’s alma mater – visited state officials in Topeka, Kansas.

The officers were from Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh,

Belgium, Bosnia, Botswana, Britain, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda and Ukraine. [18]

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Notes

- 1) Afghan War: NATO Builds History's First Global Army  
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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/01/afghan-war-nato-builds-historys-first-global-army>
- 2) Stop the Furtive Accession to NATO  
<http://www.stoppanato.se/english/proposal.htm>  
<http://www.stoppanato.se/english/guides.htm>
- 3) The Local (Sweden), July 13, 2010
- 4) Agence France-Presse, July 1, 2010
- 5) Barents Observer, June 8, 2009
- 6) Allied Air Component Command HQ Ramstein, April 9, 2009
- 7) North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe  
May 12, 2010
- 8) North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
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- 9) U.S. European Command, June 7, 2010
- 10) Associated Press, June 15, 2010
- 11) Russian Information Agency Novosti, June 7, 2010
- 12) United States Air Forces in Europe, June 8, 2010
- 13) Ibid
- 14) Shephard Group, June 16, 2010
- 15) Defense News, June 16, 2010

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- 17) Navy NewsStand, August 24, 2010
- 18) The Capital-Journal, July 16, 2010

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