

## Sweden: New Member of NATO?

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*For 200 years Sweden has maintained a policy of armed neutrality. Indeed, the country has a good claim to being the second-longest continuously neutral political entity in the world, second only to Switzerland. During the Cold War neutrality allowed Sweden to pursue an independent activist foreign policy. At the same time the country entered into a secret formal and later informal agreement with NATO member countries that provided Sweden with a security guarantee in the event that it was attacked, agreements directed naturally against the Soviet Union. According to Swedish newspaper Local publication on December 9, Sweden was not a neutral state during the [Cold War days](#).*

It signed a top secret intelligence treaty with the US and other countries, forecast the 2008 Georgian war, and now routinely spies on Russia civil targets as revealed by recent Snowden's revelations. The top secret agreement was signed in 1954 by Sweden with the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand regarding collaboration and intelligence sharing, according to SVT's investigative news program Uppdrag Granskning (UG). The secret services cooperation is even stronger today and the trend is on the rise. New revelations, which emerged in early December, indicated that the surveillance included civilian targets within, for example, the Russian energy sector, and that the Baltic countries were also targeted by FRA. This information was subsequently shared with the US, something that puts into doubt the country's neutrality.

Defence policy is currently the object of a heated public debate started a year ago when last December Chief of Swedish Defence General Sverker Göransson stated that if Sweden were attacked, it would only be able to defend itself for one week before requiring foreign assistance. The debate got new impetus when on 22 April the Swedish morning daily *Svenska Dagbladet* reported that Russian nuclear-capable bomber aircraft had launched a night mock attack against assumed targets in Stockholm and Southern Sweden while no Swedish fighter jets were available to respond that night due to overtime restrictions on pilots and lack of funding. NATO, in contrast, scrambled its stand-by air policing unit in Lithuania and trailed the Russian bombers over the Baltic Sea as they returned to base. "It is ordinary training for the Russian side...all was correct", observed MP Peter Rådberg talking to a journalist adding that the "Russian training wasn't special". Rådberg is quoted to confirm that the reaction to the incident reflected the desire of some to promote NATO membership. (2)

The ballyhoo was raised no matter the Swedish government and military said that Russian aircraft never actually entered the country's air space. Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said was no factual basis to the claim that the Russian aircraft were actually conducting a mock attack on Sweden. But the Swedish media did it's best to blow it out of proportions. According to media reports just over a month ago – on November 5, Russian fighter jets have once again simulated an attack on Sweden. The incident has added even more fuel to

the above mentioned debate. The liberal daily Göteborgs-Posten observes: *"The Swedish armed forces suffer from two credibility issues: on the one hand the military non-alignment which is solemnly celebrated each year, and yet increasingly points to integration into NATO. On the other hand its capacity to defend itself is so minimal that it can't even be analyzed without NATO. The [statement](#) by the supreme commander that Sweden could resist an attack no longer than a week is a welcome clarification. A normal political reaction would be to start a debate on ways to solve this predicament. Instead both the government and the opposition are avoiding the decisive question – Sweden's relationship to NATO".* (3)

There are political circles that try to influence public opinion. Sweden's Christian-Democrat opposition party is lobbying for full membership in NATO. The Christian-Democrats say NATO membership offers the only long-term viable defense solution to protect the sovereignty of Sweden and neighboring Nordic states. *"Having a Nordic battalion force is useful in the short-term, but the truth is Sweden needs to be in NATO. We must become a full member,"* said Mikael Oscarsson, the Christian-Democrats' defense policy spokesman, on June 5. (4)

On December 5 NATO foreign ministers discussed the agenda for the upcoming summit in fall 2014, with particular focus on the development of NATO's partnerships with non-allied countries. Members of the Swedish Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee visited NATO headquarters on November 29 to get informed about the new developments in NATO. Chairman of the Defense Committee Peter Hultqvist briefed NATO on security policy developments in Sweden on the basis of the Defense's view concerning the importance of an active and close Swedish partnership with the Alliance. On 26 and 27 November 2013, in Bern with Switzerland as host country, Ireland, Finland, Switzerland, Sweden and Austria, held a dialogue and exchanged experiences regarding NATO Partners Planning and Review Process (PARP). Swedish Defense Minister Karin Enstrom visited NATO HQ on October 18 for a bilateral meeting with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. NATO Secretary General expressed great appreciation for the good cooperation with partner country Sweden and thanked for many years of contributions to NATO-led operations. These are just a few events taking place recently to demonstrate how strong the cooperation with the Alliance is. One can hardly imagine the process of Sweden's rapprochement with NATO could be more intensive.

In May a key defence policy advisory committee has proposed Sweden seek closer cooperation with NATO approving the report by the defence policy advisory committee. The advisory committee went on to propose that Sweden extend its cooperation with NATO. *"The political developments in Russia are worrying, as are the ambitious modernization plans for its armed forces. This increases the level of insecurity compared to levels that existed in 2007,"* DPAC Chairman Cecilia Widegren told Defense News. (5)

#### Military ties real close

Sweden became an early member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program in 1994, and participated in the NATO-led peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Kosovo with the provision of armed units and in the Indian Ocean in EU and NATO anti-pirate policing operations. Furthermore, Sweden is a member of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. It was the only country neither a member of NATO nor of the Arab League to participate in the intervention in the Libyan Civil War in 2011, a mission inarguably going far beyond peacekeeping. Secretary-General Anders Fogh

Rasmussen named Sweden NATO's "most active partner" in early 2013. (6)

In June Sweden registered its interest in contributing units to the NATO Response Force (NRF) after the Social Democrats, the traditional stewards of Sweden's neutrality policy, shifted their position on the issue and underlined the importance of Swedish troops taking part. Alliance government coalition partners the Centre Party, previously doubtful of Swedish participation in the NRF, also backed the move. The NRF was formed in 2006 and consists of 13,000 soldiers as well as aircraft and ships. The Swedish fighter squadron, ship, and roughly 120 service personnel will join the NATO force in 2014. By 2015, Sweden will contribute an additional eight Gripen fighters and an amphibious unit.

Sweden has come out with a proposal to build a joint Nordic Battalion Force (NBF) to make it part of the agenda for Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark. The force advocated by Sweden would operate as a separate force to the European Union's Swedish-led Nordic Battle Group (NBG), made up of troops and equipment from Finland, Norway, Ireland, Estonia and Latvia. Unlike the NBF, which would be Nordic-specific, the larger NBG is assigned to the EU's standby international mission forces. But taking into consideration the fact that the major EU parties are also NATO members, it is easy to guess the both formations will inevitably add to NATO's capabilities too...

In October Sweden joined the NATO Steadfast Jazz training exercise, allowing Swedish soldiers to train with the NRF, a multinational force of up to 25,000 troops that can act as a stand-alone force available for rapid deployment. This December Sweden also participated in a major NATO cyber defence exercise dubbed Cyber Coalition 2013, to test NATO's ability to defend itself against a cyber attack.

Besides, let's not forget that Sweden is home to NEAT, the North European Aerospace Testrange, with some 24,000 kilometers of restricted airspace plus ground room it is a testing playground for NATO and the US.

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At that, the idea remains highly unpopular in the country. Opinion polls remain solidly against NATO membership. According to latest opinion poll conducted by the Swedish daily Svenska Dagbladet this May, 29 percent of Swedish people support Sweden becoming a member of NATO unlike 32 percent who are against. 39 percent, a very large swing vote, are undecided. (7)

Russia cannot see NATO expansion towards its borders as positive, as under certain circumstances the possibility of military confrontation remains, the Russian PM has said at the Euro-Arctic Council's forum in early June. If Sweden and Finland decide to enter NATO, Russia would have to react to such developments, *"We have to consider the fact that for us the NATO bloc is not simply some estranged organization, but a structure with military potential,"* he said adding that under certain unfavorable scenarios this potential could be used against Russia. *"All new members of the North Atlantic alliance that appear in proximity of our state eventually do change the parity of the military force. And we have to react to this,"* the Medvedev noted.

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Is it goodbye to neutrality that served the nation so well for centuries? Joining NATO

Sweden will become a target of potential retaliatory strike and subject to the US influence to even greater extent, though it is strong enough now even without formal membership. Will it serve the interests of grassroots? Hardly so. The obvious trend to enter the Alliance goes against the will of common people, as polls show. Let's hope common sense will prevail over propaganda ruses and self-interests of certain political circles.

Notes:

1. <http://www.thelocal.se/20131209/secret-cold-war-treaty-confirms-sweden-was-never-neutral>
2. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/04/26/sweden-russia-nato-and-extraordinary-political-theatre>
3. [http://www.eurotopics.net/en/home/presseschau/archiv/results/archiv\\_article/ARTICLE116532-Neutral-Sweden-helpless-in-a-war](http://www.eurotopics.net/en/home/presseschau/archiv/results/archiv_article/ARTICLE116532-Neutral-Sweden-helpless-in-a-war)
4. <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130725/DEFREG01/307250013/Sweden-Propose-s-Nordic-Battalion-Force-Plan>
5. <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130911/DEFREG01/309110013>
6. <http://www.thelocal.se/20130114/45608>
7. [http://www.thelocal.se/20130516/47930#disqus\\_thread](http://www.thelocal.se/20130516/47930#disqus_thread)

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