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Sweden's Security Policy: Operationalising Its Role in NATO

Upon joining NATO in March 2024, Sweden embarked on the process of integrating into the Alliance's missions (including deterrence and defence) and embedding within NATO's political and military structures. The centre-right coalition government led by Ulf Kristersson has significantly raised defence spending, reaching 2.14% of GDP in 2024. Over the next few years, priorities will include further modernising the armed forces, developing new military technologies, and strengthening defensive readiness against potential threats from Russia.

Experiences from the first half year in NATO. Sweden's accession to NATO in March 2024 ("[IEŚ Commentaries](#)", No. 1075) marked the achievement of one of the four main goals of Prime Minister Kristersson's centre-right cabinet, formed in October 2022 ("[IEŚ Commentaries](#)", No. 723). In the first months following NATO accession, Sweden intensified its military cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and the European Arctic. The Swedish Armed Forces took part in NATO's main manoeuvres, organised under the umbrella exercise Steadfast Defender 24 ("[IEŚ Commentaries](#)", No. 1048). Immediate Response 24, conducted in April and May in the northern part of the country (Norrbotten), tested the host nation's preparedness to support U.S. forces moving from Norway to Finland (including protecting and escorting troops and route traffic control). The exercises aimed to confirm Sweden's role in ensuring transit route security to defend Finland and the Baltic states. Swedish forces also participated in the 53rd edition of the NATO military exercise BALTOPS 24 (Baltic Operations 2024) in June 2024 to enhance interoperability among the armed forces of twenty NATO countries across various maritime, air, and land operations. These exercises included submarine search and destruction, mine warfare capability development, and amphibious operations.

Sweden's Contribution to NATO in 2025. According to a draft bill dated October 3, 2024 (subject to parliamentary approval by the Riksdag), Sweden's land, air, and naval forces may be deployed within the Alliance's deterrence and defence framework¹. Following the January 2024 announcements, Sweden will contribute a mechanised battalion in 2025 to NATO's Multinational Brigade in Latvia (MNBG Latvia). This battalion will be part of a semi-annual rotation with Danish forces within a brigade framework led by Canada. Sweden's contribution will comprise around 600 soldiers and officers, potentially increasing to 1,000 if needed. This unit will also be operational in other Baltic states and Poland.

Sweden will also contribute to NATO's air surveillance and incident response system (NATO Air Policing), which involves participation in NATO's integrated air and missile defence. The Swedish Air Force, primarily Blekinge Wing F17 stationed in Ronneby, will operate from Swedish and allied territories, including rotational deployments in the Baltic states as part of the Baltic Air Policing mission. Sweden's air surveillance contribution will involve eight fighter jets, which can scale up to one squadron (16 fighters) if required.

Sweden will also participate in NATO's naval forces – Standing NATO Maritime Group One (SNMG1) and Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group One (SNMCMG1) – primarily operating in the northern part of the SACEUR's geographic area of responsibility, including the Baltic Sea. Sweden's baseline contribution will consist of one warship with demining and maritime surveillance capabilities, which can be increased to three ships if necessary. Swedish personnel will also participate in the newly established NATO Commander Task Force Baltic (CTF Baltic), headquartered in Rostock, Germany, operationally subordinate to NATO's Joint Force

¹ Regeringens proposition 2024/25:22, Svenskt bidrag till Natos avskräckning och försvar under 2025, <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/2da70083785446d580ff54f01c8c6d8c/svenskt-bidrag-till-natos-avskrackning-och-forsvar-2025-prop.20242522>

Command in Northwood, U.K. CTF Baltic comprises up to 180 personnel during peacetime, but this can increase to 240 personnel in times of crisis. The staff comes from 13 countries (all NATO members from the BSR, along with France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom). Its tasks include fostering cooperation among allied fleets in the BSR, planning maritime exercises and operations, and commanding NATO-assigned naval forces during peace, crisis, and war.

Additionally, Sweden actively engages in crisis response activities (including cyber defence and counter-disinformation) and strengthening partnerships to enhance Arctic defence capabilities. These initiatives include the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF), the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), and collaborations with other allies (such as air operations with the U.S. as part of the Bomber Task Force). Sweden's peacetime contributions to these operations and activities encompass up to 200 soldiers and officers, up to three warships, and up to eight fighter aircraft. During a joint session of the Finnish and Swedish governments held in Stockholm on 16 September 2024, Swedish Defence Minister Pål Johnson announced the intention to assume the role of framework nation for the establishment of NATO's Forward Land Forces (FLF) in Finland from 2026, thereby deepening existing bilateral cooperation (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 464](#)).

New Total Defence Bill 2025-2030. The increasing military expenditure is a crucial factor enabling Sweden's swift integration into NATO structures. Between 2020 and 2024, Sweden's annual defence budget doubled, exceeding the targets outlined in the security strategy for 2021-2025 set in December 2020 (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 300](#)). Current spending, at SEK 125.5 billion (2.14% of GDP), was achieved in the spring of 2024, despite initially being planned for 2028. According to the draft Total Defence Bill for the period 2025-2030 presented mid-October, this spending is projected to reach 2.6% of GDP by 2028². This signifies a substantial enhancement of total defence, with an additional SEK 170 billion allocated for military defence and SEK 37.5 billion for strengthening civil defence by 2030.

These resources will allow Sweden's armed forces to align gradually with its international obligations arising from NATO membership. The number of conscripts will increase from 8,000 to 10,000 annually by 2030, reaching approximately 12,000 between 2032 and 2035. Further efforts will focus on restoring divisional-level capabilities (in line with NATO operational planning). In addition to the already initiated process of rebuilding command capacities at this level, this includes establishing two artillery battalions, an additional rocket artillery unit, an electronic warfare battalion, an intelligence battalion, an engineering battalion, and an armoured transport battalion.

Between 2025 and 2027, additional infantry fighting vehicles (CV9035 MkIIIC), ordered from BAE Systems in May 2024, will be delivered. Modernisation of Stridsvagn 122 (Leopard 2) tanks by KMV will continue, with deliveries as Stridsvagn123A starting in 2026. The acquisition will include loitering munition systems (LMS, armed drones), reconnaissance drones, anti-aircraft artillery, and Archer artillery systems. Investments in the Navy encompass the modification of Visby-class corvettes (program initiated in 2021, with the first modernised ships to be delivered in 2026) and the construction of four new Luleå-class surface combat ships, significantly enhancing air defence capabilities. Additionally, construction of two A26-class submarines ordered for the Swedish Royal Navy in 2015 is underway at Saab Kockums in Karlskrona. HMS Blekinge will enter service in 2027, with the second submarine, HMS Skane, expected in 2028. Sweden's air force is also being reinforced – the introduction of JAS Gripen 39E fighters will begin at the end of 2024 and continue from 2025 to 2030. An additional 12 Black Hawk HK16 utility helicopters (Sikorsky UH-60M Black Hawk) will also be purchased.

Conclusions

- Sweden's accession to NATO has necessitated an acceleration of armaments, requiring substantial financial resources and raising concerns about pressures on the state budget. It remains unclear where the additional funds will originate, given that other areas such as the justice system, migration policy,

² Sveriges Riksdag, *Totalförsvaret 2025–2030*, Proposition 2024/25:34, 14 October 2024, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/proposition/totalforsvaret-2025-2030_hc0334/

and healthcare also require investment (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1220](#)). Furthermore, Sweden continues its financial support for Ukraine; in June and September 2024, two new aid packages amounting to SEK 13.3 billion and SEK 4.6 billion, respectively, were approved, including providing ammunition and armoured and transport vehicles. This brings Sweden's total support for Ukraine to approximately SEK 57.4 billion since February 2022. Part of the latest package will be used to acquire spare parts for modernising JAS 39 C/D Gripen aircraft, which, if decided, could later be transferred to Ukraine. Additionally, to ensure long-term stability, Sweden has established a three-year military support framework for Ukraine, totalling SEK 75 billion for 2024–2026, amounting to SEK 25 billion annually.

- Meeting the demands of the current geopolitical situation requires addressing defence deficiencies from previous years (primarily pre-2014), especially concerning land forces. Declarations by Swedish government officials regarding the country's role as a reliable and credible ally must be backed by a rapid restoration of military capabilities. With Sweden's membership in NATO and the EU, its geographical proximity (operating in the Baltic Sea basin), and a shared view on Russian revisionism and the threats posed by the Russian Federation, a strengthening partnership between Poland and Sweden could become a stabilising factor in the Baltic Sea region.
- Cooperation with Sweden (and other NATO countries in Northern Europe) is increasingly vital due to the growing significance of maritime transport for the Polish economy and existing and planned energy investments. These initiatives align with the Polish naval command (POLMARFOR) establishment, set to assume command of CTF Baltic in 2028, and the ongoing debate surrounding Poland's northern policy and the Baltic's role in Poland's new National Security Strategy.