

Minister for Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström in the
Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs 20 March 2024

Statement of Government Policy

following Sweden's Accession to NATO



Government Offices of Sweden
Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Since 7 March, Sweden has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO. The defence community of Western democracies.

This is an epoch-making event for our country and entails a profound and immediate change in Sweden's foreign and security policy. It is therefore important that the Government today presents a supplementary Statement of Foreign Policy to the Riksdag.

On 4 April, it will be 75 years since NATO was founded in Washington DC. Ever since, the Alliance has been an indispensable foundation for peace in our part of the world, and in addressing the authoritarian forces that have threatened it.

Sweden has now proudly acceded, as the thirty-second Ally, to this community whose significance for international security has never been greater.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was an irreversible turning point, for Swedish, European and global security.

Sweden's membership of NATO is a direct result of this illegal, unprovoked and indefensible war of aggression.

Russia's objective with this war is to recreate an empire and violently overturn the European security order. Ukraine is thus also defending our security and our freedom.

In December 2021, Russia issued demands amounting to ultimatums for new agreements on Europe's security. These would also have restricted Sweden's self-determination and security in crucial ways.

Russia has used military force to achieve its political objectives. In Georgia in 2008, in Ukraine since 2014, in Syria since 2015 and using the Wagner Group as proxy in a number of countries on several continents.

Russia has further lowered its threshold for the use of massive military force. It is ready to take huge risks – greater than we've seen before – and to accept major losses, not least in terms of human lives – both its own citizens and those of other countries.

Step by step, Russia has evaded the restrictions of arms control. In recent times, it has suspended its participation in the New START Treaty, withdrawn its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and withdrawn from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. Russia's threats to use nuclear weapons are deeply irresponsible.

Russia's international aggression goes hand in hand with intensifying domestic repression. The limited space that previously existed for opposition forces, independent media and civil society has practically been eradicated. The Russian leadership bears responsibility for the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Russia's actions have severely worsened the security situation in Europe and Sweden's neighbourhood for a long time to come. Russia has chosen a confrontational approach towards the EU and NATO. This confrontation needs to be addressed.

Along with its partners and Allies, Sweden must pursue a concerted, long-term and strategic policy to counteract Russia's expansion of power and possibilities to cause harm.

Strong, predictable and sustained support to Ukraine is not only morally right, it is also our primary means to influence Russia's actions. It is clear that Russia will not cease its aggression of its own accord.

How far Russia may go in its actions is not only a question for Moscow. The answer depends to a large extent on whether those of us who share fundamental democratic values stand firm, strong and united.

In these dangerous times, Sweden's and Finland's membership of NATO makes the situation in our part of Europe more predictable. It raises the threshold for an armed conflict in our neighbourhood. It increases security and stability both for us and for our Allies.

That is why Sweden has become a NATO member.

Our application was submitted by one Government, and now the process is being completed under another.

With broad support in the Riksdag, we are thereby exercising the invaluable right that is the core of the European security order: every state's right to independently make its own security policy choices.

Here in the Riksdag, the Government would also like to thank all the countries that have now welcomed Sweden as a full member of NATO and supported us along the way. We look forward to enhanced cooperation with all the members of the Alliance.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Few political decisions have fundamentally characterised Sweden's modern history and identity as much as the policy of neutrality and non-alignment for which King Karl XIV Johan laid the foundations in 1812. Since then, this choice of direction has formed the roots of our foreign and security policy.

The history of our policy of neutrality is not linear. Sweden's stance has often, but not always, been tested in times of upheaval and changing conditions. There has been reason to question the policy pursued at a number of points in history.

After the First World War, Sweden chose to seek collective security in the League of Nations. As the clouds of war gathered again, a joint defence of Åland with Finland was considered. And during the Finnish Winter War, extensive military support was provided to Finland.

In the initial stages of the Second World War, the coalition government made concessions to Germany. In its final stages, Danish and Norwegian units were trained in Sweden. In the former case, Sweden considered itself *forced* to deviate from obligations under the law of neutrality; in the latter case, we *wanted* to do so.

When the Cold War took hold of Europe, the idea of a Scandinavian defence union was mooted, but Norway and Denmark chose – based on *their* geographical positions and *their* past experiences – to join NATO. Sweden chose – based on *our* geographical position and *our* past experiences – non-alignment in peacetime with a view to neutrality in war. Consideration of Finland's situation weighed heavily, both then and later on.

At the same time, preparations were quietly made to enable Sweden to receive military support from Western powers if this policy of neutrality failed. This was based in experiences gained during the Second World War.

The fall of the Soviet Union fundamentally changed Sweden's situation, and the development of Swedish security policy for a new era began.

We were engaged in strengthening the security and sovereignty of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from an early stage. Sweden joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994 and became a member of the European Union in 1995. That same year, Swedish troops served under NATO command for the first time.

Since then, we have continued to progressively deepen our security cooperation with NATO, in the EU and with our Nordic and Baltic neighbours.

When Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the EU and NATO 20 years ago, both their security and ours were strengthened, just like when Finland became a NATO member in April last year.

Step by step, this cooperation and this solidarity have been consolidated as pillars of our security policy.

Sweden's NATO accession is thus the culmination of a long farewell to the policy of neutrality and non-alignment.

Sweden has now joined the Western defence community that has been fundamental to our security and freedom for the last 75 years. We have come home.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

There is strong and broad political consensus on the foundations of Sweden's security policy as a NATO member. This is a great strength for our country.

Sweden's vital national security interest is asserting our independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We are prepared – ultimately by force of arms – to defend our country, our people, our democracy, our freedom and our community of values.

Sweden will continue to build security together with others as a loyal member of NATO and the EU. Sweden will pursue an alliance policy based on solidarity, aiming to enhance security and stability in our neighbourhood and throughout the Euro-Atlantic area.

Sweden has entered into binding collective defence obligations in accordance with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. The collective defence commitment as a NATO member is a key component of Swedish security and defence policy.

As an Ally, Sweden will maintain a strong national defence capability to contribute to both national and collective defence, in accordance with Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Sweden has a responsibility to the EU Member States and is covered by the solidarity that EU membership entails.

Under the Treaty of Lisbon, including Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union and the solidarity clause in Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Member States are obligated to take their share of responsibility for Europe's security.

Sweden's security policy requires proactive, broad and responsible international action. Challenges and threats to our security must, as far as possible, be tackled in cooperation with other countries and organisations. Sweden's foreign and security policy builds on cohesion in the EU and NATO, and on cooperation in the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions, and in the UN and the OSCE.

Cooperation with strategic Allies, such as our Nordic and Baltic neighbours, the United States and the United Kingdom, is especially important for Sweden's security. A strong transatlantic link is indispensable for Europe's security.

Sweden will continue to promote the fundamental values of our foreign and security policy. In NATO, the EU, the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, Sweden will safeguard the

rules-based world order, the European security order, democracy, freedom, human rights and gender equality.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden and Finland joining NATO is one of the biggest geopolitical changes in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Our choice to move in this direction strengthens the European security architecture.

With Sweden as a member, NATO will be stronger, developments in our neighbourhood will be more predictable and our neighbours will be more secure.

NATO is an intergovernmental organisation in which decisions are taken unanimously. NATO is the main forum for transatlantic security policy consultations. Sweden's security benefits from us now having a seat and a vote when NATO takes decisions concerning Europe's security. This is a new opportunity for Swedish diplomacy.

Sweden will work to ensure that the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris are upheld.

The basic premise of the Government's security policy is the assessment that Russia will constitute a serious threat to the security of Sweden and Europe for the foreseeable future.

Sweden will therefore work consistently for a clear-sighted, realistic and long-term Russia policy that constrains Russia's possibilities for aggression, destabilisation and power expansion. In relation to Russia, our security must be safeguarded from a position of strength – political, economic and military.

Our contribution to NATO's deterrence and defence is an important part of constraining Russia's scope for action and is of considerable benefit to the Alliance as a whole.

Sweden's geographical location and our capability to support other Allies is essential to NATO's ability to operate in our part of Europe. Sweden will take on this responsibility. We fully embrace the possibilities to considerably facilitate collective defence of our neighbouring countries.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

NATO is a defensive alliance, and Sweden's solidarity-based alliance policy has a stabilising effect.

We will engage in all of NATO's core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management and cooperative security.

Safeguarding cohesion in NATO means safeguarding the Alliance's strength. This is a core Swedish interest as an Ally.

Sweden will contribute to the security of NATO as a whole in accordance with the Alliance's 360-degree approach and act resolutely and in a spirit of solidarity in the fight against terrorism.

Sweden will stand for fair burden-sharing within NATO. Sweden's defence spending will exceed two per cent of GDP this year, and this should be considered a minimum level. We Europeans should take greater responsibility in transatlantic relations, thus creating a stronger Europe in NATO.

We will actively contribute to NATO's air policing and to its enhanced forward presence, not least in our neighbourhood.

The feasibility of allowing conscripts to serve in the NATO framework is being analysed in the Government Offices and will also be considered by the Defence Commission. The Government will seek broad political consensus on this matter.

Cutting-edge technological expertise is a cornerstone of our security. Swedish innovation and technological know-how will strengthen NATO. Our defence industry is an important asset.

Sweden supports NATO's strategic deterrence and will remain a strong voice for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

Sweden's efforts to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons being deployed must be intensified in a time of high tensions.

With broad support in the Riksdag, Sweden applied to join NATO without reservations. This stance remains firm, but as in the other Nordic countries, there is no reason to have nuclear weapons or permanent bases on Swedish territory in peacetime.

With Sweden as a NATO member, it is important that Riksdag oversight and influence are ensured. The Government has initiated dialogue on this matter with the Speaker and parties of the Riksdag. The Government will provide information to the Riksdag ahead of formal NATO ministerial meetings and summits and present an annual communication on NATO.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

As a NATO member, Sweden will continue to work for close cooperation between the EU and NATO. The support to Ukraine demonstrates how well the two organisations can complement and reinforce one another.

Sweden is determined to contribute to a strong and united EU with the capacity for resolute action that is required in a time of security policy upheaval.

EU enlargement is a geostrategic investment in peace, democracy, security, stability and prosperity. It goes hand in hand with NATO's support to partner countries such as Moldova, Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Our military, political and economic support to Ukraine is Sweden's foremost foreign policy task in the coming years. Ukraine's cause is our cause.

NATO's role in long-term support to Ukraine should be strengthened. Sweden supports the Vilnius Summit communiqué, which declares that Ukraine's future is in NATO.

China's authoritarian rule combined with its growing claims to power and deepened cooperation with Russia challenges both regional security and the international rules-based order.

The Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions are more closely linked than ever before in security terms. Sweden therefore welcomes the deepening of NATO cooperation with partners such as Japan, Australia, South Korea and New Zealand.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership at the same time. With Sweden's accession now also complete, all of the Baltic Sea countries – apart from Russia – are members of both the EU and NATO. And seven out of the eight Arctic states are now NATO members.

This is a historic moment for the Nordic-Baltic region as a whole. As free and democratic Allies, we will defend each other and strengthen our resilience together.

Our Nordic neighbours have experience of war. For our Baltic neighbours, memories of occupation and oppression are still fresh. They know that there is no compromising with authoritarian darkness. Now we are all united in an Alliance whose express purpose is to preserve peace and freedom. We welcome this new chapter in Nordic-Baltic relations.

As the security landscape in our part of the world changes, new opportunities are emerging for enhanced cooperation between like-minded neighbours in the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions. Sweden will be involved in developing this over the next year.

We are doing so in our role coordinating Nordic and Nordic-Baltic foreign policy cooperation. Sweden and Finland have also proposed a security policy dialogue in connection with the next Ministerial Session of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, of which our close partners Germany and Poland are also members.

A strong Baltic Sea region, firmly anchored in NATO and the EU, is in Sweden's security policy interests.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

This summer will mark 80 years since Allied forces landed in Normandy. The NATO of today is the heir to that coalition, and is the primary manifestation of the transatlantic link.

It is indispensable for Sweden's and Europe's security, but must never be taken for granted. It is fundamental that Sweden maintains and intensifies relations with the United States. Canada is an important partner.

The Defense Cooperation Agreement is a lynchpin of our relations with the United States. It enhances the security of both Sweden and the United States. It contributes heavily to stability in our neighbourhood.

It is a strength that our Nordic and Baltic neighbours have similar bilateral cooperation agreements with the United States. This signals our security policy consensus, enhances security in northern Europe and aids NATO's joint planning.

The Joint Expeditionary Force helps strengthen security in our neighbourhood and demonstrates the United Kingdom's importance as a partner. France's clear engagement in northern Europe is also significant for our security.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden has made a historic choice. Our accession to NATO gives Sweden's foreign and security policy a new identity. Sweden's solidarity-based alliance policy enjoys broad political and popular support, and we stand ready to fulfil all of our obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty.

That which belongs together – in security policy terms – can now come together: in the Nordic region, around the Baltic Sea, in Europe and across the Atlantic. This offers a historic opportunity to develop these various dimensions of Sweden's security in unison.

We stand firm together with our Allies – for peace and freedom. One for all, all for one.

Thank you.