

RESPONSIBLE STATECRAFT

Nine reasons why NATO should close the door to Sweden and Finland

The allies did not invite Ukraine into NATO because they didn't want to risk war. The same rationale applies to these two countries.

Written by Doug Bandow

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Almost eight decades have passed since the end of World War II and Europe remains helplessly dependent on America. Yet U.S. officials are celebrating the expected application by Finland and Sweden to join NATO.

The Washington Blob doesn't seem likely to be satisfied until every country on earth relies on the U.S. for its defense.

The accession of these two nations — which would be rapidly granted as war rages between Ukraine and Russia — is being presented as strengthening the alliance. However, the U.S., alone or in conjunction with its 29 NATO allies, many of which appear to field militaries mostly for show, would handily defeat Moscow in any continental contest.

That was evident even before Russia's botched invasion of Ukraine. Now, two months into a conflict that was supposed to have overrun the latter in a few days or weeks at most, no one imagines that Moscow retains more than a shadow of the Soviet Union's conventional military capabilities.

In truth, NATO expansion has never been about American security. Rather, it was meant to expand Washington's defense dole in the name of promoting regional stability.

So why should Americans increase their defense load now? The U.S. should stop adding new members to the transatlantic alliance and instead prepare to turn Europe's defense over to Europe. Here are nine reasons to keep the door closed to Finland and Sweden.

1) **Neither Finland nor Sweden is under threat.** Both are well-armed and friendly with the West; neither has major disputes with Moscow. Indeed, Helsinki maintained its independence as a neutral against the Soviet Union. Even the most Russophobic analysts offer no evidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin plans to conquer the two states and add them to an expanded U.S.S.R. And if he attempted to do so, Ukraine's experience suggests that the two would exact a terrible price.

2) **NATO's fabled "open door" is a fiction promoted by those who want to constantly expand the alliance, irrespective of U.S. security interests.** No country has the right to join. No country has the right to be considered for membership. Rather, Article 10 provides: "The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty." NATO *invites* members as it sees appropriate. It has no obligation to consider applications, let alone approve them. The purpose of the alliance is to protect its members, not other states.

3) **Finland and Sweden would add greater defense obligations than assets to NATO.** Neither country would significantly change the balance of forces with Russia. Geographically Finland and Sweden help shield Norway from Russia, but no such attack is in the offing. Finland could host allied forces ready to aid the Baltic states, but then it would make more sense to station them in the latter. Yet adding Finland would expand NATO's border with Russia by more than 830 miles, requiring a larger allied and, in practice, mostly American, commitment.

4) **Obligation would beget obligation.** The Baltic states and Poland are demanding permanent U.S. garrisons. Warsaw undertook a major lobbying campaign during the Trump administration, offering to name the new facility "Camp Trump." Even advocates of an enhanced U.S. military presence in Europe criticized the idea for serving political rather than security ends. Bringing in more states bordering Russia likely would increase calls for more unnecessary U.S. troop deployments.

5) **Since including the two states would address no Russian threat to existing members, doing so would be seen as threatening by Moscow.** Indeed, Finland provides another route to St. Petersburg, with the Finnish border little more than 100 miles away. Warned long-time Putin ally Dmitry Medvedev: "If Sweden and Finland join NATO, the length of the land borders of the alliance with the Russian Federation will more than double. Naturally, these boundaries will have to be strengthened." Meaning that Moscow likely would rely on America's Cold War policy of "massive retaliation," using nuclear weapons to cover conventional weakness.

6) **Although further expanding NATO might appear to be an appropriate riposte to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, doing so would reinforce the security fears which animated Russia's aggressive policy against both Georgia and Ukraine.** Despite the Washington Blob's blithe denial that U.S. policy had anything to do with Russia's actions, the allies recklessly violated their assurances that NATO would not expand, conducted aggressive military operations undermining Russian interests, and promoted regime change against Russo-friendly governments. Had Moscow acted similarly in Latin America the U.S. would have threatened war. Further deepening Europe's division with Finland's and Sweden's inclusion would exacerbate already deepening hostilities.

7) **The U.S. has no substantial security interests in either nation and thus no reason to go to war for them.** Despite NATO's polite fiction that the U.S. and Europeans are cooperating in their collective defense, in practice Washington is defending them. In recent years the alliance has expanded to the helpless, irrelevant, minuscule, and defenseless, including Croatia, Albania,

Montenegro, North Macedonia, Slovenia, and the Baltics, none of which matter to America's security.

8) Both Finland and Sweden have capable militaries that would promote an independent European defense system. However, further expanding America's European defense dole would discourage defense efforts by them and others. Today 19 NATO members (including Canada) devote less than two percent of GDP to their armed forces. Among the largest European countries, Germany, Italy, and Spain most dramatically leave the spending and fighting to others. Even the Baltics and Poland, so vocal about their fears of Russian aggression, spend little more than two percent of GDP on their defense, a pittance if their independence is truly at risk.

Moreover, surveys found that popular majorities in many European states oppose defending each other. Although Berlin and several other European states have begun talking a good game, public enthusiasm for spending more on the military is likely to ebb as Washington deploys more forces to the continent. Europe is likely to treat its security seriously only when the U.S. ends its policy of constantly "reassuring" allies that it will forever do whatever is necessary to protect them no matter how little they contribute.

9) The U.S. no longer can afford to underwrite a gaggle of wastrel, indifferent states. Uncle Sam should shrink, not expand, his defense dole. The annual federal deficit ran roughly \$3 trillion in 2020 and 2021. This year red ink will run about \$1.3 trillion, assuming the Biden administration is unable to further boost election-year spending. Even with the end of the COVID pandemic, the Congressional Budget Office predicted more than \$12 trillion worth of red ink over the next decade, with much more to come as America's population ages. Publicly held federal debt is already over 100 percent, approaching the record of 106 percent set in 1946. CBO warned that the national debt could break 200 percent by 2050. Significant spending cuts will be necessary.

However, domestic discretionary outlays already are a diminishing share of total federal expenditures. Medicare and Social Security will be nearly impossible to cut for political reasons. Medicaid already spends too little to adequately fund the benefits promised. Interest payments will be going up, not down. Which leaves military expenditures, especially those benefiting prosperous, populous allies, like those in Europe, as a target for major reductions.

The Russian attack on Ukraine offers a stark reminder that Washington should stop distributing security guarantees like candy to children. The allies did not bring Kyiv into NATO because they had no reason to defend it, risking war, especially one that could go nuclear. The same rationale applies to Finland and Sweden. Washington should conclude NATO expansion, starting with them.