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Washington Is Pushing NATO toward Expansion in All Directions

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The coup in Ukraine and the subsequent crisis in that country have whetted NATO's appetite; they have started talking about a new expansion of the alliance. The main candidates being named for inclusion in NATO are Sweden and Finland, as well as Moldova, with respect to which an accelerated plan has been enacted. Work on bringing the Balkan countries - Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina (these countries have already been included in a Membership Action Plan), as well as Serbia, which was bombed by NATO in 1999 - into the alliance continues. NATO's interest in the Caucasus has not cooled either; Georgia and Azerbaijan are members of the Partnership for Peace...

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen is already comparing Ukraine, on the one

hand, with Finland and Sweden, on the other, emphasizing that these countries, although they are partners of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, cannot count on support if they are attacked, as such guarantees are only given to NATO member states. Who Fogh Rasmussen expects to attack Sweden or Finland, he does not say. However, in certain Finnish circles, calls for the country to join NATO are gaining resonance. Finnish Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen has already promised to conduct broad national discussion on this issue.

There are also supporters for Finland joining NATO among the Finnish military. As Finnish human rights activist Johan Backman points out, the most active among them is the head of the department of strategic planning of Finland's General Staff of the Armed Forces, Lieutenant Colonel Torsti Siren, who called Russia a «deranged neighbor» and also suggested the idea of tearing Karelia away from Russia. He is echoed by Captain Jere Laine, who recently published the book *The War of 2016*, in which he examines the model of a Russian-Finnish war in the near future.

In Sweden, until recently the topic of joining NATO did not meet with support. Only Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sverker Göranson caused a moment of panic in Swedish society when he stated last year that if Russia were to attack their country the Swedes wouldn't last a week. In January 2014 Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt dismissed all speculation on this topic, stating at the national Society and Defense conference, «NATO membership is not timely for Sweden. It simply does not enjoy broad support in the Swedish Parliament.» However, now fear of «Russian aggression» is once again being instilled in Swedish society.

The American journal *Foreign Affairs* is campaigning for Sweden to join NATO; an article by Jan Andersson recently appeared in the journal, saying: «Sweden and Finland's formal inclusion in the alliance would finally allow NATO to treat the entire Arctic-Nordic-Baltic region as one integrated military-strategic area for defense planning and logistical purposes, which would make the alliance much more able to defend Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania against Russia. For Russia, the loss of Sweden and Finland to NATO would represent a serious geostrategic blow, one that would outweigh any gains made from the annexation of the Crimea. It would place NATO forces within arm's length of Russia's strategic nuclear submarine bases located on the Kola Peninsula. It would also turn the Baltic Sea into a NATO lake...»

Moldova and Ukraine are two other interrelated links in the advancement of NATO's interests from the point of view of expanding the alliance. High-ranking American officials are constantly visiting Chisinau, and talk about unifying Moldova with Romania never ceases. Of course, unlike Sweden and Finland, Moldova has a large number of supporters for rapprochement with Moscow. The issue of the status of Transnistria remains unresolved as well.

During a trip to Poland, Belgium, and France in early June, U.S. President Barack Obama was lavish with words on America's «sacred duty» to «protect» Europe and about the fact that Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and other U.S. allies in Eastern Europe will never be alone. Meanwhile, NATO is considering Kiev's request for military aid to Ukraine; the aid package Ukraine has requested includes lethal weapons.

The main impetus for all this feverish military and propaganda activity, for which the most

fantastic justifications are being found, comes from Washington. There they have not lost hope that by advancing the zone of responsibility of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization deep into Eurasia and acting on a broad front from the Arctic to the Caucasus, they can achieve a decisive geostrategic win on the «Grand Chessboard».