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End of Scandinavian Neutrality: NATO's Militarization Of Europe

by Rick Rozoff

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There was a noble if naive expectation that with the effective dissolution of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact in 1989 and even more so with its formal dismantling and the breakup of the Soviet Union itself into fifteen new countries two years later that an era of peace in the world and demilitarization of the European continent was dawning.

The peace might not be a just one, leaving the major Western military and economic powers in charge of the planet, but peace of a sort - any sort - seemed preferable to a continued state of

armed, which meant nuclear, confrontation, some thought.

Hopes and talk abounded of a global peace dividend, with hundreds of billions of dollars and pounds, marks and francs and rubles hitherto expended on the production of weapons, the maintenance of armies and the prosecution of wars to be allotted to civilian production and to basic human needs in Europe, North America and throughout the world, especially its most underdeveloped and desperately needy nations.

The past twenty years, even the very first year of that double decade, 1989, proved that perspective wrong, tragically wrong, wrong in every particular.

With a diminished and all-but-dead Warsaw Pact and an internally weakened and infinitely compliant Soviet Union in 1989, the US felt free to invade Panama in late December of that year; the German Democratic Republic was incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany - and NATO - the following year; and in January of 1991 the United States, acting on the so-called Carter Doctrine, launched Operation Desert Storm, a series of devastating and deadly attacks on Iraqi forces in Kuwait and on Iraq itself, with the assistance of local client states and NATO allies Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Turkey, Portugal, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands and Norway. The only NATO nations not participating were diminutive Iceland and Luxembourg.

In March of 1991, six days after the war ended, then US President Bush H.W. Bush described the results of Operation Desert Storm and of the soon-to-be post-Cold War period: "Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order."

The new global order had no room for either peace or disarmament. It never intended that either should ever prevail.

Had the unified Germany of 1990 announced its withdrawal from both NATO and the by then largely fictitious Warsaw Pact, disbanded its redundant armed forces and thereby provided a precedent and model for a genuine new international order, matters may have proceeded otherwise.

After all, the Warsaw Pact was formed six years after NATO was and then only in response to West Germany being taken into the bloc earlier in 1955 with most of the military-industrial potential inherited from a Nazi Third Reich defeated only ten years before.

But the Europe Whole And Free (1), the title of a speech delivered by Bush in the West German city of Mainz on May 31, 1989 - the catchphrase still routinely used to this day by major American officials, most recently by current president Obama in first trip to NATO headquarters last week - envisioned in Washington and Western European capitals didn't include a demilitarized Germany and Europe or a peaceful world.

Neither would it brook neutrality or non-alignment.

Over the past twenty years not only the former East Germany but all Warsaw Pact members outside of the Soviet Union have been taken into NATO: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999 and Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia five years later. (Albania, which left the Warsaw Pact in 1961, was brought into NATO less than a week ago.) In addition, in 2004 three former Soviet Republics - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - were incorporated and in the same year the beginning of the full integration of ex-Yugoslav republics was marked by Slovenia's accession.

Far from the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union leading to either the abolition or shrinking of NATO, the end of both, the alleged opposition to which was for decades NATO's raison d'être, rather unleashed the Alliance to become an expansionist and now international military power.

One which has expanded from an original twelve members to sixteen at the end of the Cold War to twenty eight as of last Saturday; one which has through collective or individual partnerships formal military arrangements with and commitments from over sixty nations, a third of the those in the world; members and partners in five of the world's seven continents, only uninhabited Antarctica and South American so far not ensnared in the bloc's worldwide nexus; and one which in 2005 conducted "eight simultaneous operations on four continents with the help of 20 partners in Eurasia, seven in the Mediterranean, four in the Persian Gulf, and a handful of capable contributors on our periphery." (2)

That historically unmatched and until recently unimaginable expansion of the world's only extant military bloc into all parts of the globe is dismissed by most commentators, both NATO supporters and detractors, who either bemoan or ridicule the bloc as a paper organization. Family members of killed and maimed Serbians, Afghans and of late Pakistanis as well as those of young men and women from scores of nations serving under NATO command in war and post-war occupation zones in three continents would disagree.

Sceptics of all stripes may view NATO's star as dimming; Alliance policy planners see it as beginning its ascendancy to an intended zenith.

After its recent sixtieth anniversary summit, NATO is crafting an updated Strategic Concept which will elaborate on and expand a list of self-selected missions - and potential casus belli - mentioned over the past several years by its secretary general and others. The list includes enough issues to allow the bloc to intervene anywhere on the Earth for any number of often unrelated and even mutually exclusive purposes. It includes but is by no means limited to: Protecting national sovereignty if it suits NATO's objectives in a given region and overriding and trampling upon the same at its whim in the name of human rights or other subterfuges; guaranteeing energy security as it chooses to define it, again ad hoc and in service to broader geopolitical designs; cyber security and protecting against computer system sabotage, which as it pertains to the World Wide Web is correspondingly global and even ethereal in nature, sufficiently nebulous and elastic to be invoked wherever and whenever convenient; natural disasters, crisis management and relief efforts, which can provide valuable reconnaissance opportunities as with Pakistan in 2005-2006; guarding the world's sea and shipping lanes and escorting, intercepting, boarding and seizing

vessels and their cargoes at will as has been done throughout the Mediterranean Sea since 2001 and off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden since last autumn, with the west coast of Africa the next likely area of operations; addressing the effects of climate change, especially in the Arctic Circle as an oil and gas bonanza presents itself and Russia must be kept out of the scramble; the eternal war against terrorism, contraband uranium (so-called loose nukes) and nuclear espionage, piracy, poaching, illegal immigration and human trafficking, drug cultivation and running, the smuggling of goods and weapons, resource conflicts and urban unrest occasioned by the world economic crisis; most anything can and will provide NATO with grist for its expansionist and interventionist mill.

....

During the forty five years of the Cold War few European states were not members of either of Europe's two blocs. The small handful of exceptions were Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland and Yugoslavia on the continent, Malta and Cyprus in the Mediterranean.

On April 4th Croatia followed Slovenia in gaining full NATO membership and the other four former Yugoslav federal republics - Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia - are members of the Partnership for Peace apprenticeship program and the first two have troops serving under NATO in Afghanistan. Kosovo, which ex-Serbian prime minister Vojislav Kostunica last year referred to as "the first NATO state," has since June of 1999 been the Alliance's prototype consummate colony.

Regarding Malta, "NATO is an inescapable military locked vault; a nation never exits once it's entered. Since NATO was formed 60 years ago no member has ever left. Of the 23 members of NATO's transition Partnership for Peace program (ten former members of the latter have joined NATO and two more have been invited), only Malta left, in 1996, but was brought back in several months ago." [Boris Yeltsin's Russia was a member until 1999, when it pulled out in protest against NATO's attack on Yugoslavia.] (3)

Cyprus is the only European nation [smaller states like Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino are excluded for present purposes] never to have been in NATO or its Partnership for Peace program and is currently, along with Russia (more in Asia than Europe), not affiliated with either. Last week pro-Western members of the Cypriot parliament secured a majority vote to demand inclusion in the Partnership for Peace (PfP).

Austria and Switzerland are members of the Partnership for Peace, are included in the NATO air surveillance system and have sent small deployments of security personnel to serve with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

Europe's most-celebrated neutrals, however, are Finland and Sweden, particularly the latter. Over the past fifteen or so months pressure has been exerted both inside and outside the two nations to fully integrate them into NATO, the campaign advancing at a breathtaking pace.

Of the eight European countries that have borders with Russia, both its main body and the Kaliningrad exclave, five are now in NATO - Norway, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, with Poland joining ten years ago and the three Baltic states five years later.

Of the remaining three, Ukraine is on a fast track to full integration, having received a specially crafted Annual National Program substitute for the traditional Membership Action Plan, the penultimate phase of full NATO membership.

Belarus, Russia's closest ally in most every respect - geographically, culturally, historically - is being weaned from the long-standing project of a Union State with Russia through the mechanism of the European Union's Eastern partnership program. The Eastern Partnership was launched by Sweden and Poland. Likely to follow will be an upgrading of its Partnership for Peace status and the threat of abrogating joint air surveillance and defense systems, leaving the entire western flank of Russia vulnerable to the buildup of NATO military infrastructure and with no buffer against air and missile strikes.

The full integration of Finland and Sweden poses an analogous and in some ways even greater threat to a Russia that is being increasingly surrounded by a Western military cordon sanitaire, with US and NATO air, naval, surveillance, missile and infantry deployments increasing from the Barents to the Baltic to the Black seas.

Russia and Finland share a 1,200 kilometer border and Finland is located on or near three northern seas - the Baltic, Barents and Norwegian - which currently host permanent NATO air patrols, the European Union (NATO-linked) Nordic Battlegroups and other new and expanding military formations that face Russia to the east and the new global battleground at the top of the world, the Arctic, to the north.

For background information see:

NATO's, Pentagon's New Strategic Battleground: The Arctic (4)
Baltic Sea: Flash Point For NATO-Russia Conflict (5)

In the autumn of 2007 Finnish Defense Minister Jyri Hakamies was in Washington where he stated that Finland's biggest security challenge was threefold, "Russia, Russia, and Russia! And not only for Finland, but for all of us." (6)

A year before, the chief of the Russian armed forces general staff at the time, General Yuri Baluyevsky, was in the Finnish capital and warned his hosts of the perils of NATO membership as regards relations with their eastern neighbor and also in two other respects: That, like Poland, Finland ran the risk of losing several prerogatives of national sovereignty like the determination of its foreign policy and military commitments and like the three Baltic states could be transformed into a "gray area" outside of the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty where Western armaments, conventional and perhaps otherwise, could be deployed without notification provided and inspection rights granted to Russia.

Finland and Sweden, both PfP members with troops in Afghanistan, are being herded into NATO directly and through such mechanisms as the Nordic Council, a proposed Nordic Defence Alliance, European Union Nordic Battlegroups and through the increased merging of NATO and EU military roles.

To illustrate the degree to which European bodies have become - generally surreptitiously - integrated with and effectively subservient to NATO two reports, one from earlier this year and one a year before, provide stark testimony:

In January of this year the European Parliament Foreign Relations Committee recommended strengthening cooperation with NATO and issued a document the conclusion of which was that "the European Parliament considers that future collective defense of the European Union can be realized within cooperation with NATO" and "Despite the fact that some of the EU countries like Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden are not involved in NATO, the European parliament considers that all EU countries should attend the EU-NATO meetings." (7)

In January of the preceding year the general secretary of the Nordic Council - a post-World War II cooperation group comprised of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden - Jan-Erik Enestam, wrote an opinion piece in a Finnish newspaper which included his view that "NATO is the only important international organisation of which Finland is not a member. It would seem as if the time is now ripe for membership. Meanwhile it would be sensible to enter into closer defence co-operation with Sweden and Norway. Norway is after all a NATO country." (8)

From that time, a year ago January, an unbroken succession of statements - and actions to match them - has issued from the mouths and pens of major Finnish and Swedish government and party officials and has been supported by NATO functionaries and American government officials.

Proceeding chronologically, the following is an examination based on press accounts of how rapidly and inexorably NATO is completing its domination of European military and foreign policy, leaving no former neutral outside its grasp.

The catalogue is lengthy and should prove edifying to persons who can still with a straight face place the acronym NATO and the word defense in the same sentence - in any context past, present or to come.

The end of military neutrality on the Scandinavian peninsula is of major world political and historical significance in its own regard, but is even more important by what it illustrates. The NATO integration of Finland and Sweden is a final detail in a grand landscape whose composite view is of every European nation - large and small, west and east, continental and insular - incorporated into and subordinated to a globally expanding military bloc controlled by a power in another hemisphere. A project exceeding by orders of magnitude the efforts of Napoleon and Hitler to achieve a comparable objective in the last two centuries.

In March of 2008, related to Finland supplying troops for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, the Pentagon's Central Command acknowledged supplying regular military intelligence to its Finnish allies and a weekly "summary on the military situation within the areas of responsibility of the United States Central Command" which included "data regarding the war in Iraq, the Iran crisis, the situation in Sudan, and the piracy off the Somali

coast." (9)

The same report added "While Finland has been fine-tuning its degree of closeness to the NATO Response Force (NRF), cooperation between the Finnish and the United States armed forces has continued closely already for quite some time."

Days later the Finnish parliament voted to contribute troops to the NATO Response Force.

In the same month Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt announced at a European Union meeting in Brussels that he "expected Swedish troops to join the rapid reaction force as another step in increasing cooperation with NATO" after "neighboring Finland definitely decided to participate." (10)

Bildt's colleague, Swedish Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors, the month before claimed that "Membership in NATO is a 'natural' step for Sweden...." (11)

In January of 2008 Finnish Defense Chief Admiral Juhani Kaskeala expressed intent to join NATO's Early Warning Air Surveillance System (EWASS), reminding his listeners that "non-NATO members Austria and Switzerland are included in the NATO air surveillance system." (12)

And as "Finland, Sweden and Norway are at present looking at the establishment of joint air surveillance...if these three Nordic countries decide to team up in this field, Sweden and Finland would have to take part in the NATO air surveillance system...." (13)

In February US First Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Kurt Volker, now US ambassador to NATO, was in Scandinavia securing Finnish and Swedish troop commitments for Afghanistan and for NATO's Response Force, an unorthodox task for a representative of the American diplomatic corps.

A local news source reported that "The tense situations in both Afghanistan and Kosovo were on the agenda during the half-hour discussion." (14)

At the same time NATO was conducting an ordnance exercise off the coast of Northern Norway with the participation of forces from personnel from ten countries: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Lithuania, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Estonia and Turkey.

Not to be left out, in the same month Finland hosted a staff officer course for NATO personnel organized by the international center of the Finnish Defence Forces. "The course involves planning and management of peacekeeping operations. Taking part will be officers from NATO countries as well as non-members who are part of the Partnership for Peace."

The training was "the first time that a course of the NATO School in the German city of Oberammergau is held in a different location" and "there has also been talk of holding more NATO training courses in Finland." (15)

Public opposition to NATO membership remained high in both Finland and Sweden and a major propaganda blitz was launched in the "free press" of both nations which has intensified in the interim, enough to have some effect in recent polls.

In April Finnish troops joined a NATO CMX08 exercise "designed to practice crisis management procedures, including planning and consultations between NATO and its partner nations as well as cooperation on a national level...." (16)

The following month Finnish Defense Minister Jyri Hakamies, speaking at the Atlantic Council of Finland, said "With Denmark, Norway and Iceland already serving as NATO members...the joining of Finland and Sweden would make the Nordic bloc an influential force within the military alliance" and to make the plan more transparent added "NATO membership would further the Nordics' position in the face of Russia's growing power." (17)

Hakamies was also quoted in a news dispatch called "Finland's defence minister calls for Finland, Sweden to join NATO", as saying that "a group of skilled and active Nordic countries would be seen as a positive thing in NATO. With a combined population of 24 million, the bloc of Nordic countries would not be a complete lightweight in decision making either." (18)

May was a busy month for Hakamies, but not so busy that he couldn't find the time to co-author with Swedish Defense Minister Sten Tolgfors an article for the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter endorsing joining NATO air surveillance operations. "The defence ministers added that the Barents Region [shared by northern Scandinavia and Russia] has become an increasingly influential location, due to the discovery of oil." (19)

In June Finland, which had "recently increased cooperation with the alliance and now also has soldiers in military operations under NATO command in Kosovo and Afghanistan," hosted 1,000 troops from 25 NATO and partnership countries in a disaster exercise that was "largest international exercise held in Finland." (20)

At the beginning of the month the US Carrier Strike Group 12 led the annual BALTOPS (Baltic Operations), the largest international exercise organized in the Baltic region "including ships, submarines, aircraft, and ground force elements from NATO and PFP nations, including Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Latvia; Lithuania; Norway; Poland; Russia; Sweden; the United Kingdom and the United States." (21)

Before June had ended the new Finnish foreign minister, Alexander Stubb, met with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in Brussels on Friday - "the first such meeting in six years" - where the two "discussed NATO's operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Finland will take the lead in NATO's combat division of the Kosovo Force, the KFOR, in August. By then the number of Finnish peacekeepers in the force will rise to 500."

Stubb "emerged from [the] meeting...calling for more regular contact with the alliance" and said that "biannual meetings between Finland and NATO would be pencilled in from now on." (22)

In July Swedish defense chief Sten Tolgfors repeated the message in his jointly written article of two months earlier and "suggested sharing airbases with Norway" and argued "that NATO is a natural source of Swedish security."

"The Nordic countries cannot by themselves generate sufficient political and military weight." (23)

Early in the following month the Pentagon announced that it had established its first-ever defense cooperation office in Finland, "part of a defense equipment cooperation deal between the defense ministries of the two nations." (24)

Weeks later Sweden's Liberal Party called for the country to join NATO and to boost its troop contingent in Afghanistan from 350 to 500 soldiers, its defense policy spokesperson Allan Widman saying "Sweden ought to send more soldiers to Afghanistan, participate in NATO's rapid reaction force, as well as join the military alliance's air patrols over the Baltic region" and that the recently concluded war in the Caucasus "makes Swedish NATO membership all the more important." (25)

Sweden, of course is nowhere near the Caucasus and has no border with Russia.

In September Ex-President Martti Ahtisaari asseverated, "There aren't very many of these oddities - countries that say that they belong to the Western democracies, but which are not part of all of the organisations. I think that this also applies to Sweden. I see no reason why we could not join NATO: Norway is already there, and so are Denmark and Iceland". (26)

He would take up the refrain again in stating "Finland should join NATO because it is the optimal channel through which to streamline peacekeeping efforts....I don't want Finland to be the odd one out when most other states are already members." (27)

Ahtisaari had the day before been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which says far more about the Norwegian Nobel Committee than about him, prompting outrage from those who had suffered directly at his hands. "The news sparked intense debate on the website of Serbia's national broadcaster RTS. Some of the readers wondered why the prize should be given to a man who had 'helped destroy the great state of Yugoslavia.'" (28)

Though no longer a government official, Ahtisaari's assertions reflected more than his personal conviction. The pace of his nation's drive toward full NATO integration was accelerating daily to the extent that it was noticed in Brussels: "Finland [which] has a 1,200 km long border with Russia...inched closer to NATO in March when it announced its intention to join future operations of the alliance's rapid reaction force. It has developed technical capacities alongside NATO for several years and would be ready to join quickly if the decision was made." (29)

With more international NATO and joint NATO-EU missions in mind, in September of 2008 Finland announced that it "would contribute half a million euros this year to a fund established under the auspices of NATO to help train helicopter aircrew and maintain and modernise aircraft

in EU countries." (30)

Weeks later an article appeared reporting that Sweden was testing its Gripen jet fighters in NATO exercises where they gathered "valuable experience from training alongside a variety of NATO types, and proving the domestic design's potential as an expeditionary asset" and that "the Swedish air force has...embarked on international training deployments over the past few years, including with Lockheed Martin F-16-equipped neighbour Norway, and two major exercises in the USA." (31)

In late October the Finnish government drew up "a draft security policy that for the first time presents NATO membership in a positive light. This is a departure from the strictly neutral view usually espoused by official government documents." (32)

In the middle of the same month a German-run NATO multinational naval exercise, Northern Coast, was held off the shores of Denmark with the participation of vessels from Finland, Sweden, Poland, Germany, The **Netherlands and the Baltics.**

To demonstrate the purpose of the expansion of NATO naval presence and operations in the arc that takes in the North, Norwegian, Barents and Baltic seas and the Arctic Ocean, an article in The Economist titled "The Arctic contest heats up" reported "Norway is quietly boosting defence co-operation with Sweden and Finland. And it hopes to 'NATO-ise' a big land, sea and air military exercise next spring, named Response. Just what that is responding to is left tactfully unclear." (33)

The pro-NATO Atlantic Community website at the time shared with the Euro-Atlantic initiated that "A Rand Corporation study of 2002 concluded that 'for the United States and its allies, the greatest anti-access in-theater vulnerability is concentrated in the area of the Baltic Sea....'

"In order for any NATO contingency to succeed, the Baltic Sea must be controlled by strong NATO navies and air forces. Otherwise, the collective defense clause may be impossible to implement." (34)

In the same month Finland and Sweden became the only non-NATO states to enter a joint arrangement with ten Alliance members to jointly purchase and operate three Boeing C-17 Globemaster III strategic airlift carriers.

NATO opened a base in Hungary in October of last year, staffed by US military personnel, to support airlift operations for war zone and other deployments outside of Europe under the rubric of the Strategic Airlift Capability Partnership designed to "increase NATO's ability to transport large numbers of troops and supplies to far-flung places, such as Afghanistan."

The project includes twelve partners: "The U.S., Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and two non-NATO countries — Sweden and Finland." (35)

Last November, Pekka Visuri, a political scientist at the Finnish National Defence College, warned that Finland's joining NATO might unsettle the security of northern Europe and that "an increase in military power through an alliance with a distant superpower might undermine the region's stability." (36)

In a report commissioned by the Finnish foreign ministry itself, Legal Implications of NATO Membership, reservations were voiced that "Finland would commit itself to receiving and sending forces as well as to the advance planning for such situations" and "Accepting such a mechanism of mutual defence cannot be considered irrelevant for sovereignty." (37)

Around the same time 44 prominent Swedish political and cultural figures signed their names to an appeal in the daily Svenska Dagbladet warning against the concerted and essentially covert drive to drag Sweden into NATO with the admonition that "Behind the people's back, there has been a hidden adaptation to NATO. The process has now gone so far so NATO that supporters can say that Sweden is already a member ninety percent....so we can as well take the last step to full membership." (38)

The above remonstrations were of no avail though, as the foreign and defense ministries of both countries had been so thoroughly infiltrated and subverted by NATO that in the period between the last two reports Swedish "Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors says that Sweden is ready to defend its Nordic neighbours and fellow EU members against any attack.

"Last week the Nordic and Scandinavian countries - Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland signed a treaty on increased defence cooperation.

"Pointing to Russian patrols in the North the minister says that the Arctic region has a new strategic significance." (39)

The news report from which the above is extracted added that "Sweden is now effectively linked to NATO, through military cooperation with Norway, as well as participating in the European Union's military" and "This is in stark contrast to Sweden's defence policy during the last 200 years, and especially during the Cold War, which was to avoid committing to any military alliances."

Also in November the annual Viking multinational military exercise was held in Latvia, one described in the local press as "a Swedish-U.S. initiative with the purpose to bring together NATO and Partnership for Peace member countries." (40)

Further consolidating the Scandinavia-Baltic NATO bond, in December it was reported that "The Baltic states are interested in entering into talks with Nordic nations about the basis for a regional defense strategy under the so-called Nordic-Baltic 8 format" and that "Baltic governments are working on a common air-defense solution with NATO. (41)

Last year ended with Sweden abandoning two centuries of military neutrality and both that nation and its neighbor Finland heading toward complete and irrevocable integration into NATO's transcontinental and global military structure.

The new year has only intensified the process.

In early January Finland pledged to double its troop commitment to NATO for the Afghan war. It also announced that it was scrapping Russian air defense missiles, although only purchased a decade earlier, in favor of American counterparts to insure NATO interoperability. According to one report "Russian iron needs to be replaced by NATO iron." (42)

A later account of the same decision said "Finland's Ministry of Defence is looking at ways to upgrade its existing missile defence system, from the present arsenal of Russian Gadflies (now about halfway into its expected life cycle) to something more compatible with NATO systems.

"Whether the move is designed to appease NATO allies or to distance Russian hardware from Finland's defences can only be speculated." (43)

Finnish Under Secretary of State Markus Lyra met with NATO Assistant Secretary General Martin Erdmann in Helsinki in early February and detailed the steady advance of his once non-aligned nation into NATO's ranks: "Finland is developing and deepening its partnership with NATO. "For instance, we have regularly increased our contribution to voluntary trust funds and Finland has five experts in the NATO Secretariat." (44)

Lyra in speaking as he did confirmed the results of Finland's latest annual Security and Defense Policy Report which were summarized by Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen:

"NATO's objectives, tasks and obligations correspond with the foreign and security policy goals of Finland and the European Union. There is and will continue to be a strong case to consider Finland's membership of NATO in the future. Finland regards NATO as the most important military security cooperation organization." (45)

Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, who earlier played a role as perfidious as his compatriot Ahtisaari in regards to Serbia and Kosovo, viewed the report as offering "strong arguments" in favor of NATO membership and actually provided a timeline for NATO membership: 2011, two years from now.

As with the Eastern European nations absorbed into NATO over the past ten years and the remaining Partnership for Peace states not yet elevated to full membership status, the testing ground for new subordination to NATO is the battlefield of Afghanistan. On February US State Department Official Patrick Moon was in Helsinki to both applaud Finland for its vow to double its troops in Afghanistan and presumably to pressure it for more. "Finland is making a very significant contribution to our efforts in Afghanistan. We certainly welcome a decision by Finland to deploy additional troops...." (46)

A little earlier Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt paid an unannounced visit to Afghanistan. An Associated Press report on the trip stated: "The Swedish contingent serves

under NATO command as part of the International Security Assistance Force. Sweden decided in November to boost its size from 390 to 500 troops...." (47)

Though the US's and NATO's expanding war in South Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, is not the only touchstone for aspirants to NATO membership. In the middle of March NATO conducted a 7,000-troop war game, Cold Response, off northern Norway, one which simulated a military intervention by Alliance forces to confront an invasion by a fictitious Northland against Midland in a scenario whose description suggests that Midland may be either Estonia or Latvia and Northland is of course Russia. The NATO nations participating in the exercises included the US, France, Germany and Spain and two non-NATO members joined them: Finland and Sweden.

In early February Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg advocated that "The Nordic governments should issue a mutual declaration of solidarity in which they commit themselves to clarifying how they would respond if a Nordic country were subject to external attack or undue pressure."

More than the temperature is heating up at the top of the world and NATO is recruiting Scandinavia's former neutrals Finland and Sweden to be at the very center of it.