“The Future of Sweden’s Partnership with NATO”

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SUMMARY:
This is a preparatory policy memo for Jens Stoltenberg. It is meant to prepare him to effectively manage the relationship between NATO and Sweden as he takes office as Secretary General of NATO later this year. The memo discusses the evolution of NATO-Sweden relations and analyzes technical and symbolic values of the partnership. In particular, it discusses lessons learned in Afghanistan and Libya. In its second section, it discusses the prospects for a future Swedish NATO membership in light of the ongoing events in Ukraine. Finally, it gives policy recommendations with regard to membership and in three areas where the partnership shows particular promise: Afghanistan, pooling and sharing, and interoperability.
I. THE EVOLUTION OF NATO-SWEDEN RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION: SWEDISH NEUTRALITY AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Swedish neutrality originates in its losses during the Napoleonic wars, notably the painful loss of Finland to Russia in 1809. Neutrality and non-alignment have been two central aspects of Swedish foreign policy ever since. In effect, Sweden remained neutral in the major European conflicts of the 20th century and throughout the Cold War. Non-alignment remains a central tenet of Swedish foreign relations to this day. However, it arguably manifests itself quite differently today than it did only two decades ago. While Sweden formally remains non-aligned, it should not be described as a neutral state. Since the early 2000s, when Foreign Minister Anna Lindh declared that neutrality “had served Sweden well” (note the past tense), Sweden tends to officially describe its security policy as non-aligned rather than neutral. In practice, Swedish neutrality started to fade after the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. One of the most significant security policy challenges facing the Nordic nation in the early 1990s was how to adapt to geopolitical transformations in Europe. One of the most notable events in this regard was the accession of Sweden to the European Union (EU) in 1994. Granted, the EU that Sweden joined was not a military alliance. However, the character of the economic and political cooperation within the union made it difficult to think that Sweden would remain passive if another EU member state was attacked. This meant that Sweden increased its involvement in international security cooperation on several levels. As Sweden’s security cooperation with other EU member states deepened through the emerging concepts of EU Crisis Management and the European Common Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), Sweden also gradually opened its door to NATO. Sweden became an initial member of NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) program when it was launched in 1994. Sweden then joined the NATO Planning and Review Process (PARP) when it was established in 1995 and thereby showed its commitment to deeper cooperation. Since then, the Swedish military has contributed to NATO operations in a number of ways. Swedish troops participated in a NATO-led operation for the first time in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, when mechanized battalions joined the IFOR (later SFOR) peacekeeping force there. Soon thereafter, Swedish troops joined the NATO-led KFOR operation in Kosovo. In total, 9,000 Swedish military personnel participated in the operation. Established in 1999, 850 Swedish troops were deployed to the mission at its peak and the last Swedish contingents left the country in December 2013. In reviewing military cooperation between NATO and Sweden, this policy memo will focus on two NATO operations. First, examples will be drawn from Operation Unified Protector in Libya, which is the most recent example of operational partnership cooperation. Second, the Swedish contribution to the NATO-led ISAF operation in Afghanistan will be analyzed in order to assess the future of the partnership.
SWEDEN: FREE RIDER OR VALUABLE CONTRIBUTOR?

Swedish contributions to NATO missions and training in the last decade have shown that it has the will and capability to provide security for the alliance. As a first example, Sweden has made substantial contributions to the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan since 2003. On average, a contingent of around 500 Swedish troops has been stationed in Afghanistan. The majority of troops have been based at Camp Northern Lights (where Finnish troops are stationed as well) in Mazar-e-Sharif in Northern Afghanistan, and in surrounding regions, as a part of the ISAF mission. Sweden assumed a leadership role by taking responsibility for a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Mazar-e-Sharif in 2006. Originally providing intelligence capabilities to ISAF, the Swedes expanded their contributions relatively quickly to include logistical support and various specialized units for the PRTs. In 2012, under the leadership of Sweden’s senior civilian representative in Mazar-e-Sharif, Ambassador Krister Bringéus, the PRT was transformed into a Transition Support Team. Swedish efforts in Afghanistan have not only demonstrated a commitment to multilateral security cooperation but also added instrumental value to NATO’s efforts in terms of capabilities and innovation. For example, one area where Sweden has demonstrated leadership and added value is through the establishment of all-female Military Observation Teams (MOT Juliette) to promote the principles of UN Resolution 1325 and the emerging NATO priority to implement gender perspectives in its operations. To this end, a Nordic Center for Gender in Military Operations has also been established as a part of the Swedish Armed Forces International Center (SWEDINT) based outside of Stockholm, adding substantial value to NATO training capabilities. Finally, Sweden has a seat at the table as the post-2014 NATO mission in Afghanistan is taking shape and has made significant training and advisory commitments to the Afghan military as they take over responsibility for their own security after the end of this year.

The capability of the Swedish military and its interoperability with NATO was further demonstrated during Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011. Sweden arguably provided the largest contribution to the operation among NATO partnership countries. The Swedish parliament reacted quickly after the UN Security Council authorized the operation, and NATO had requested Swedish assistance. With an overwhelming majority, the parliament voted to contribute militarily to the NATO mission in Libya (240 yes, 18 no, 5 abstentions). Within 48 hours, eight Swedish JAS 39 Gripen single-engine fighter aircraft were in place in Sicily to partake in the operation. In total, Sweden contributed 8 JAS 39 Gripen aircraft, 1 C-130 Hercules aircraft, 1 Gulfstream IV surveillance aircraft, and 130 military personnel to the NATO-led mission in Libya. It should be noted that the parliament did not authorize the Swedish military to use force against ground targets. However, the Swedish Air
Force flew a total of 570 operations, carried out 30% of all NATO reconnaissance sorties, and supplied NATO with over 2,700 reconnaissance reports. These numbers are important to take note of.

Both the Libyan operation and the Swedish contributions in Afghanistan are viewed as successes in the NATO community. They demonstrate how the Swedish military has kept even steps with NATO members through training and technical interoperability. The successful operations carried out by Swedish JAS 39 Gripen aircraft in Libya are a prime example of how Sweden can provide technical military capability to the alliance. The JAS 39 Gripen has been modified for NATO interoperability standards and is used by the Hungarian Air Force since 2003 and the Czech Air Force since 2004 for its fighter, attack and reconnaissance capabilities.

Finally, Sweden’s pooling and sharing of military resources makes it a valuable contributor to NATO. This is true in terms of absolute technical contributions to NATO allies but also in showing the way ahead. The new NATO mindset developed to maintain military capabilities in times of economic austerity is called Smart Defense. By sharing capabilities it is believed that partners will gain communal abilities that would not be possible to achieve independently. As an example of this, Sweden and Finland operate three C17 aircraft based in Hungary together with ten other NATO allies. This is a case in point of how the Nordic nations contribute to the development of the Smart Defense concept. Furthermore, Sweden cooperates with its neighbors on defense issues through the Nordic Defense Cooperation Forum (NORDEFCO) in a positive way. Finally, Sweden is working to develop the ability for fighter jets to share munitions from several sources and has shown interest in a number of other Smart Defense projects.

INSTRUMENTAL AND SYMBOLIC VALUES OF THE PfP PROGRAM

The PfP program, the relationship with NATO, and its contributions to NATO-led missions carry both instrumental and symbolic value for Sweden. In instrumental terms, both operational missions and training programs led by NATO provide opportunities for the Swedish military to advance its operational capabilities. This is done by regular participation in PfP exercises and contributions to multilateral NATO-led operations, on a case-by-case basis. This has had significance for the Swedish military, especially since it began a substantial transformation after the end of the Cold War. For the greater part of the 20th century, the Swedish Armed Forces were built to counter an invasion from the east. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the military was reorganized to focus on international deployment and international multilateral interventions. This radical change brought about heavy downsizing, the end of mandatory military service, and the need for new capabilities and knowledge. The Swedish government then introduced a goal of having up to 2000 military personnel deployed in
international military operations on a continuous basis. A result of this policy was the establishment of
the rapid-reaction force Nordic Battlegroup, headquartered in Sweden. This force is a part of the EU
Battle Group concept and includes troops from Finland, the Baltic states, Ireland and Norway.

NATO operations, notably in the cases of Libya and Afghanistan described above, have provided
Sweden with substantial opportunities to follow through with the transformation of its military. For
example, when the Swedish Air Force participated in Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011, it
was the first time it had been deployed since it participated in the UN peacekeeping force in Congo,
ONUC (Opération des Nations unies au Congo), in the early 1960s. Operation Unified Protector thus
provided an opportunity to gain operational experience and prove the credibility of the Swedish Air
Force. For the military, the operation was a major success since it acknowledged its well-functioning
training and technical systems. Similarly, it could be argued that the Swedish engagement in
Afghanistan since the early 2000s has provided a way to keep its military operational, and has
provided valuable operational experience. While the mission is still ongoing, and it is difficult to find
any military evaluation of the operation itself, it is clear that the mission has brought home several
lessons for the Swedish military in order to put into effect its aspirations as a “deployment force” in
the future. These points include the need for specific military equipment, specialized skills, and
interoperability.

Furthermore, Sweden’s partnership with NATO serves as a channel and tool for exercises, training,
and other forms of cooperation. One area of major cooperation is civil emergency planning and crisis
management. Bilateral exchanges and exercises in this area aim to prepare Sweden to cooperate with
NATO countries in the event of a major incident involving CBRN and the need for disaster relief. An
example of Swedish efforts in this area is the Viking exercise, which is the largest reoccurring civil-
military relations exercise in the world. This exercise has taken place seven times since 1999 with
Sweden as a lead nation and the United States as a strategic partner.

The Swedish strategy for participation in international peacekeeping and security building operations
of 2008 acknowledges that Swedish contributions to NATO-led, as well as other, multilateral military
operations are to some extent motivated by national security and strategic interests. However, security
is not highlighted as a central goal of the strategy. Rather, it is seen as a requirement to achieve the
more overarching goals of development, justice, and solidarity. Sweden views itself as a contributor to
a world order based on international law to serve peace, freedom and reconciliation. This narrative is
reflected in the Swedish government’s latest bill for the continuation of military contributions to ISAF
(2010/11:35). In the bill, there are no mentions whatsoever of threats to Swedish security in relation to
Afghanistan. Rather, the bill stresses how Swedish military contributions will promote development
and human rights. The government bill on troop contributions to Operation Unified Protector similarly
refers to long-term benefits to Libyan democracy, human rights and development rather than security issues. Importantly, it also highlights the importance of international solidarity and cooperation and that “the United Nations is a cornerstone of Swedish foreign policy”. In this regard, the PfP program serves as an instrument for Sweden to partake in multilateral military operations and thereby strengthen its role in the international system. Sweden seeks engagement in order to get a seat at the table. There are constant references to international solidarity in Swedish official documents on its international military deployments. Moreover, there is a strong focus on its international reputation with regard to security issues. Sweden constantly frames itself as a trustful country that the international community can rely on. It is clear that its partnership with NATO facilitates its pursuit to put these words into action. Effectively, the partnership has become an instrument for Sweden to gain international political capital. Influence in the international community requires not only a presence, but a voice, and trust from other actors.

THE DISCURSIVE GAP: SOCIAL HUMANITARIAN LIBERALISM VS. REALISM

The Swedish foreign policy narrative described in the preceding section can perhaps best be described as a form of liberal international idealism. This fact is important to take note of, not only because it reveals symbolic and instrumental values for Sweden, but also because it shows the width of the gap between Swedish ideals and the realist discourse used by NATO. For example, the Swedish government’s appeal to idealism is in stark contrast to NATO’s narrative about the ISAF mission. This is not to say that reconstruction and protecting Afghans has not been a longstanding part of the NATO mission. NATO is, and has been, committed to democracy, human rights and development in Afghanistan. The point here, however, is that the ISAF mission was established because NATO member states were concerned about their own security, and because Afghanistan had been a safe haven for international terrorism. This was the main concern for NATO, its secretary general, and its member states, even after Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011. In contrast, it can be noted that “terrorism” is only mentioned once in the 27-page bill from the Swedish government (2010/11:35) motivating its renewed military contribution to ISAF.

It could be argued that the gap between the idealism of Swedish social-humanitarian liberalism and NATO’s realism is narrowing. In this regard, it is perhaps necessary to nuance the dichotomy illustrated above. Most notably, realism has – at least superficially – gradually decreased in the NATO discourse in recent years. This is especially notable in speeches and official documents from the last five years. More and more, official NATO speeches and documents state that military means is not enough to meet the security challenges the alliance faces in the world today, both on NATO’s home turf and in other regions. In this regard, reference is often made to political, civilian and military
cooperation for crisis management as well as the linkages between security and development. This trend is particularly clear in the discourse around the ISAF mission. For example, NATO adopted a framework for reconstruction and sustainable development at the Bucharest Summit in 2008. Reference has also been made to UNSC Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in several documents in recent years, which is a break with previous centrally communicated priorities. Moreover, it should be duly noted here that NATO played a new role in its recent operation in Libya. In Operation Unified Protector, NATO played a more humanitarian role than ever before as it “answered the call” to intervene under the banner of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. This rhetoric contrasts with the traditional collective security principles and the realist roots that the military alliance is traditionally associated with.

II. FUTURE PROSPECTS: AN OPEN DOOR TO THE NORTH?

POLITICAL BARRIERS TO NATO MEMBERSHIP

The evolution of the Sweden-NATO partnership has made observers speculate whether full membership will be the next natural step for the Nordic nation. This section will analyze the prospects for such a development within the near future. The three main barriers to a Swedish NATO membership are found in domestic public opinion, party politics, and in Helsinki.

Swedish public opinion on NATO membership was more or less stable in the 15 years following its EU accession in 1994. While 15% of the Swedish population were positive to the idea of joining the military alliance in 1994, the number increased to 20% in the following years and remained stable around 20-23% throughout the first decade of the 2000s. Meanwhile, around a third of the population have consistently claimed to be “neutral”, and between 40-50% oppose the idea of joining NATO. Public opinion also varies with age, gender and political sympathies. To summarize in broad terms, young men who lean to the right on the Swedish political scale are the most positive about joining NATO. Older age groups, and especially females, who sympathize with the political opposition (the Green Party, the Social Democrats and the Left Party), are in general the most negative about NATO membership. The stability of the negative Swedish opinion is evidently not encouraging for NATO proponents. However, the results from the latest comprehensive opinion poll (SOM 2013, conducted in October – December 2013) were published in April 2014 and show that public opinion is shifting. The NATO proponents have increased their base to an all-time high of 29% of the population while the negative side seems to be converging at 34% (10-15 pp below the stable level of the 1990s – early 2000s). This trend seems to indicate that the Swedes are becoming more NATO-friendly. However, the interpretation of these figures should not be overly optimistic. Support is still relatively low. It is
extremely unlikely that a Swedish government, of any political shape or form, would even consider joining a military alliance if less than a third of its population supports it.

The second obstacle to a Swedish NATO membership is rooted in the lack of broad political support. Among the eight largest political parties, the center-right liberal conservative Moderate Party (Moderata samlingspartiet) is the most vocal proponent of joining NATO with the caveat of “the need for broad political support”. Its leader, Fredrik Reinfeldt, is also the Prime Minister and leads the current four-party coalition government. In his cabinet, Mr. Reinfeldt finds a partner in the NATO-friendly Liberal People’s Party (Folkpartiet), also officially in favor of joining NATO with the requirement of “broad popular support”. The two other parties in government, the Center Party (Centerpartiet) and the Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna), both officially want a parliamentary committee to investigate whether or not Sweden should join NATO. It should be noted that the political opposition is somewhat fragmented in terms of its composition. However, it is clear that all opposition parties clearly adhere to non-membership policies. The largest party, the Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterna), does not object to participation in NATO-led operations that have been authorized by the UN Security Council, but explicitly objects to the idea of participating in any form of military operation that is based in the collective security guarantees outlined in Article V of the NATO Charter. As long as the coalition of center-left parties (currently in opposition) maintains its non-membership line, it is very difficult to imagine that the center-right would actively pursue membership status. It is not feasible for any state to join NATO if it is not able to commit political support beyond the next parliamentary election. Moreover, Swedish foreign policy has been deeply rooted in broad cross-party agreement for decades. Politically, it is highly unlikely that this issue will move without the support of the Social Democrats, or at the very least a shift in the security policy principles within the party. Such an event could possibly instigate a broader political coalition between the center-right and the popular left over time. It should also be noted that these political factors are highly contingent on the dynamics of public opinion outlined in the previous paragraph.

Thirdly, the prospects of Sweden joining NATO must be nuanced by developments in the security climate and domestic politics in its immediate neighborhood. More specifically, the future of Sweden’s relations with NATO will be highly influenced by the political situation in neighboring Finland. If Sweden would seek membership it would almost certainly do so jointly together with Finland. Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt of Sweden was recently quoted saying that his country would not pursue NATO membership without consulting Finland, and would not “act out of step” on this issue vis-à-vis its eastern neighbor. Finnish politicians are increasingly speaking about the necessity to have an open debate about NATO membership. However, only a fifth of Finns favor joining the alliance and the official position of the Finnish government is that membership is off their
agenda. Finally, it is worth noting that a joint Sweden-Finland accession would be welcomed by neighboring NATO members Denmark and Norway.

OUTLOOK FOR 2014-2015: A CHANGE IN THE STATUS QUO?

Considering the barriers outlined in the previous section, the following pages will assess how Sweden-NATO relations are likely to develop during the first year of Mr. Stoltenberg’s tenure as Secretary-General of NATO. Particular focus will be given to political developments in Russia, Ukraine and the domestic political debate about the Swedish military and defense spending.

A year ago almost to the day – on Good Friday, March 29, 2013 – the Russian Air Force caught their Swedish counterpart completely off guard in an incident that would become known as the “Russian Easter” within the Swedish military. Six Russian military planes, out of which four were heavy bombers, were able to conduct an exercise over Gotska Sandön against military targets in Stockholm and southern Sweden. Incidents of Russian military planes flying in toward Swedish airspace through the Gulf of Finland are not uncommon. Normally they are met by responding Swedish JAS 39 Gripen fighter planes. However, this incident was out of the ordinary in several aspects. First of all, it was the first time the Russian Air Force attempted this type of exercise in the middle of the night. Second, the Swedish Air Force failed to respond to the Russian military presence. Instead, two Danish NATO F-16 Fighting Falcon planes stationed at Šiauliai Air Force Base in Lithuania scrambled toward the Swedish island Gotland in the middle of the Baltic Sea (250 KM NW). The Russian planes then returned east before the F-16s had a chance to catch up. This incident drew enormous attention in Sweden as it exposed the vulnerability and weakness of Sweden’s territorial defense. In addition, two months prior to the incident, the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces Sverker Göranson had declared that the Swedish military would only be able to defend its national territory for a period of seven days if it was attacked. These events sparked a debate in Sweden about defense spending and whether or not the shift in defense doctrine had resulted in a military incapable of defending its country. While Swedish defense spending was 2% of GDP in 2000, it had shrunk to 1.2% of GDP in 2012.

As tensions have mounted in Ukraine in recent months, the Swedish defense debate has been invigorated even further. Sweden has a long history of conflict with Russia. The loss of Finland to Russia in 1809 triggered Swedish non-alignment in the first place, and Russia was perceived as a looming threat to Sweden throughout the Cold War. As recently as last year, Dmitry Medvedev stated that a Swedish NATO membership would force Moscow to “respond”. The Russian annexation of

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1 See Map A (Annex).
2 Ibid
Crimea and the ongoing public debate has certainly triggered a Swedish response. The Swedish military has moved fighter jets to the island Gotland in the Baltic Sea (see above) and the political leadership is increasingly calling for defense reforms. Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt recently told his parliament that “[Sweden has] a powerful and unpredictable neighbor which is not behaving according to international structures developed after the Cold War. This unpredictability creates uncertainty in our neighborhood, and this must be a starting point for revising defense spending needs.” The Deputy Prime Minister has called for a revision of the military doctrine and Anders Borg, the Minister of Finance, has publicly announced the need for a substantial increase in defense spending. In addition, the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt (who was Prime Minister in the 1990s) is one of the most vocal critics of Moscow in the EU and was a noted anti-Soviet activist during the Cold War. Earlier this month, the Swedish Security Service (Säkerhetspolisen) announced that the Russian Easter incident in March 2013, as well as a similar incident in October 2013, where Russian bombers simulated bombings of targets in the Blekinge region of Sweden (where the largest naval base of the Swedish Navy is located) are part of a larger pattern. This pattern includes a substantial increase in intelligence activities on Swedish territory by the largest Russian foreign intelligence agency, the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU). More specifically, there has been an increase in Russian attempts to recruit subjects for espionage, electronic attacks against Swedish IT-systems, and signals intelligence on Swedish territory.

With the renaissance of the Russian threat, political commitments to prioritize the military, and a public debate about defense capabilities, one might be tempted to assume that Sweden will shift gears on NATO and pursue full membership status. However, it is unlikely that these factors will bring Stockholm that much closer to Brussels.

An opinion poll conducted on March 10-13 2014, in the midst of the Crimea crisis, shows a significant spike in negative Swedish attitudes toward NATO. According to the poll, 50% of Swedes do not think that their country should join the military alliance. This figure is 16 percentage points higher than it was before the crisis started (see page 6). Meanwhile, the yea-sayers have remained stable at a share of 31%. In other words, it is quite clear that a large number of previously undecided respondents have taken a negative stance on NATO membership after the Russian aggression in Ukraine. These figures might seem surprising but can be explained. One likely interpretation is that a large group of Swedes find reassurance in stabilizing the status quo in times of unpredictability. Moreover, the crisis in Ukraine is reminiscent of the Cold War for many Swedes. This fact could trigger some to take a negative stance toward NATO, since non-alignment in the face of a Russian threat has been proven to work before. The crisis in Ukraine possibly exposes a Swedish fear of being dragged into conflict by

See Map A (Annex).
joining an alliance. In any case, these figures indicate that the political developments discussed above are unlikely to have a drastic positive effect on public opinion vis-à-vis NATO in Sweden. The public opinion barrier is therefore likely to remain an obstacle to membership in the near future.

On the other hand, it could be argued that Swedish public opinion on this issue is not cast in stone and that it could be changed by political advocacy. The issue then becomes whether any of the political parties that are positive about a Swedish NATO membership would be willing to prioritize the issue. There is an ongoing electoral campaign in Sweden that will culminate in parliamentary elections in mid-September later this year. Most factors indicate that NATO membership will not be a prioritized issue of any party in the election campaign. In fact, it would be surprising if defense policy were given any significant space at all in the upcoming electoral period. Swedish voters very rarely attribute any particular importance to foreign policy and defense issues when they cast their votes. In fact, it is one of the lowest-prioritized issues. This has been shown in a wide range of studies and is incorporated in the electoral agendas of the political parties. The only irregular precedent that could be used to build a counter argument would be the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, a month before parliamentary elections that year, which benefited the incumbent Social Democrats. Unless the crisis in Ukraine evolves into a larger international conflict, it will not affect the Swedish election process. In fact, the ongoing defense policy debate is likely to quiet down until after the election to make way for domestic political issues of higher priority. This also means that the status quo within the political parties is highly unlikely to shift.4

Finally, a major shift in Swedish NATO policy is unlikely without parallel measures being put in place by Finland. Earlier this month, the Finnish minister for European Affairs, Mr. Alexander Stubb, who is one of the most NATO-friendly politicians in Finland, was quoted saying that “one should not enter when the weather is bad, but when the sun is shining.” […] “And that is not the case now.”. Mr. Stubb’s comments reflect the view of many Finns that now is not the time to further challenge an unpredictable Russia. While this makes it politically difficult for Finland to approach NATO, economic factors also play an important role. While Finland has joined the rest of the EU in implementing sanctions against Moscow, it has been cautious in doing so. Helsinki is clearly wary of how further economic sanctions might have negative effects on its own economy. Trade between Russia and Finland has more than doubled in the past decade and Finnish investments in Russia have increased by 800% over the same time period. The country is dependent on these close economic ties with its great neighbor to the east and wants to do little to upset that situation, especially with the current economic situation in Europe in mind. Furthermore, public opinion remains discouraging for

4 However, unrelated to the political factors at hand here, it should be noted that the political background of Mr. Stoltenberg might ease tensions regarding NATO within the Swedish Social Democrats as he takes office as Secretary General of NATO in October this year. This remains to be seen over the longer term.
NATO-supporters in Finland. A perceived increased Russian threat will not change that situation significantly. 60% of the population opposes their country joining NATO. While many Finns take great pride in having fought the Red Army, a large part of the population do not think that belonging to an alliance would help in a conflict, because they believe that their country would be left on its own anyway. In any case, it can be concluded that a major shift in Finnish NATO policy is not underway in the near future. The Finnish barrier thus remains in place, complicating a potential Swedish NATO membership.

III. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Sweden is a highly valued NATO partner. It has shown great commitment to the alliance through its recent contributions to the operations in Afghanistan and Libya. NATO gains from this partnership through technical value and expertise in a range of fields, and not least through the Smart Defense mindset. Sweden benefits from the partnership on a technical level but also attaches symbolic importance to its close ties with NATO, and having a seat at the table. The once wide discursive gap between Sweden and NATO is narrowing. This is a positive development that will open new doors for deepening mutual cooperation. However, Sweden is unlikely to pursue full NATO membership status in the near future. The main barriers to membership are found in domestic public opinion, party politics, and in the relationship between Sweden and Finland. The recent events in Ukraine are not likely to significantly change any of these factors in favor of membership. Rather than joining NATO, it is likely that Sweden and Finland will increase their bilateral military cooperation, as well as with the other Nordic countries. It is likely that Sweden and Finland will seek deeper cooperation through the Nordic Defense Cooperation Forum (NORDEFCO). The viability of this option will depend on how much Norway, Iceland and Denmark are willing to invest in regional military cooperation outside of NATO.

In summary, this report proposes the following policy recommendations to Secretary General Stoltenberg with regard to membership, and three areas where the partnership between NATO and Sweden shows particular promise:

1. MEMBERSHIP

Sweden is unlikely to pursue full NATO membership status in the foreseeable future due to public opinion, party politics, and the situation in Finland. NATO should therefore not expect that Sweden will seek membership nor should it actively pursue such a development. Instead, NATO should aim to develop the partnership with Sweden through the PfP program. The deepening of relations should be focused on three areas, which are outlined below.
2. AFGHANISTAN

Aim to develop cooperation between NATO and Sweden in Afghanistan post-2014. Sweden has shown great commitment to the ISAF mission. More specifically, it has the technical and political capacity to contribute significantly to the training efforts to build up the Afghan security forces. This will be of great importance to NATO in the coming years as the operation in Afghanistan shifts gears.

3. POOLING AND SHARING

Pooling and sharing military capabilities is the way ahead and should be a central tenet of the future Sweden-NATO partnership. In these times of economic austerity, this makes Sweden a valuable partner. It has made technical contributions by sharing capabilities with NATO allies. The C17 aircraft operated in Hungary demonstrate Sweden’s leadership and NORDEFCO shows further commitment to the Smart Defense concept.

4. INTEROPERABILITY

The operations in Afghanistan and Libya showed that the Swedish Armed Forces and NATO allies were able to operate effectively together. As the ISAF mission in Afghanistan draws to an end, it will be of utmost importance to maintain interoperability. To this end, Sweden should be included to the greatest extent possible in upcoming military training and NATO exercises. If possible, synergies with Nordic military cooperation (NORDEFCO) interoperability should be identified and drawn upon to achieve this goal.