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Afghanistan: Training Ground for War on Russia NATO Trains Finland, Sweden For Conflict With Russia

by Rick Rozoff

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A Swedish newspaper reported on July 24 that approximately 50 troops from the country serving under NATO in the so-called International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) had engaged in a fierce firefight in Northern Afghanistan and had killed three and wounded two attackers.

The report detailed that the Swedish troops were traveling in armored vehicles and "later received reinforcements from several soldiers in a Combat Vehicle 90." [1]

The world has become so inured to war around the world and seemingly without end that Swedish soldiers engaging in deadly combat as part of a belligerent force for the first time since the early 1800s - and that in another continent thousands of kilometers from their homeland - has passed virtually without notice.

A Finnish news story of the preceding day, possibly about the same incident but not necessarily, reported that "A Finnish-Swedish patrol, part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), came under fire in northern Afghanistan" on July 23rd. [2]

Three days before that a Swedish commander in the north of Afghanistan, where Finnish and Swedish troops are in charge of ISAF operations in four provinces, acknowledged that "During the last three months, six serious incidents have occurred in our area." [3]

The same source revealed that in the upcoming weeks Swedish troop numbers are to be increased from 390 to 500.

The Svenska Dagbladet reported that over a twelve week period attacks on Swedish-Finnish forces in the area have doubled and that seven attacks preceded the deadly firefight described earlier. "In April, a Norwegian officer was killed by a suicide bomber in a province under Swedish-Finnish control, and several vehicles have been attacked along Mazar-i-Sharif's main road since." [4]

Like Sweden, Finland has also increased troop deployments to Afghanistan lately, ostensibly to provide security for next month's elections but, given the escalation of fighting in the nation's north, certainly to remain there for the duration of NATO's South Asian deployment, one which a German official recently stated would last eighteen years from 2001 onward. In early July Finland dispatched 70 more troops to join the 100 already stationed in Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Balkh Province bordering Kunduz where German troops are waging an almost two week long military offensive.

Last month Finnish forces in the area were attacked twice and a rocket attack struck close to Finnish barracks in the capital of Kabul.

Troops from the other Scandinavian nations have fared even worse. Three Danish soldiers were killed in a bomb attack in Helmand on June 17, bringing the country's death toll to 26. Norway has lost four soldiers.

To illustrate the integration of Finland and Sweden military forces in Afghanistan and under NATO control in general, in late June it was announced that Sweden was purchasing 113 armored vehicles from Finland. Approximately 1,200 of the Finnish-made vehicles "have been ordered by other customers and [they are] currently used operationally in Finland, Poland, Slovenia and Croatia, for example in operations in Afghanistan." [5]

NATO Deployment In Afghanistan "Improves Readiness For Defense Of Finland"

Last month a major Finnish daily newspaper in a feature called "Afghanistan: Now it's Finland's war, too" contained this striking revelation:

"[F]rom the point of view of the Finnish Defence Forces, there is still another important reason for the Afghanistan operation: it improves readiness for the defence of Finland."

The Finnish source quoted the former commander of the nation's troops in Afghanistan, Ari Mattola, as saying, "This is a unique situation for us, in that we will get to train part of our wartime forces. That part will get to operate as close to wartime conditions as is possible." [6]

Comparable claims about the Afghan war being the training ground for military action on their borders - and that can only mean in relation to Russia - have been made by defense and military officials in the Baltic states, Poland and Georgia.

Early this month Finnish Defense Minister Jyri Hakamies divulged that he would further drag his nation into NATO's plans for a drive east aimed against Russia and is paraphrased as asserting that "NATO had approached Finland with an opportunity to take part in cyber warfare training and the country should accept NATO's offer." [7]

NATO's Article 5: Cyber Warfare And Nuclear Weapons

On June 15 US President Barack Obama and Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met at the White House with American National Security Adviser James Jones, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, and discussed cyber security - which is to say, as the Finnish Defense Minister more honestly called it, cyber warfare. The Estonian president, raised in the United States and a former Radio Free Europe employee, "thanked the United States for its

assistance in establishing the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center in the Estonian capital of Tallinn...." [8]

The head of the U.S. Strategic Command, Gen. Kevin Chilton, indicated this May what US and NATO cyber warfare plans might include when he said that "the White House retains the option to respond with physical force - potentially even using nuclear weapons - if a foreign entity conducts a disabling cyber attack against U.S. computer networks...." [9]

The NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania authorized the establishment of the Alliance's cyber warfare center in Estonia in 2008 and last month the Pentagon complemented that initiative by approving a unified U.S. Cyber Command.

For two years American and NATO officials have spoken bluntly about invoking NATO's Article 5 war clause, used for the invasion of Afghanistan and the buildup to that of Iraq, in response to alleged Russian cyber attacks.

Encirclement Of Russia: Finland Offers NATO 237,000 Troops, 1,300 Kilometer Border

This January Finland released a Security and Defense Policy Report which stated that "Finland regards NATO as the most important military security cooperation organisation", and that "there will continue to be a strong case for considering Finland's membership of NATO in the future". [10]

Mandatory weapons interoperability is a key component of full NATO membership and in April the Finnish Defense Ministry announced "the team of Norwegian Kongsberg and US Raytheon has been selected to fulfill Finland's future Medium Range Air Defense Missile System (MRADMS) requirements....The new NATO-compliant anti-aircraft missile system will replace the Russian-made BUK systems purchased in 1996 that will be taken out of service. The key reason for giving up the Russian systems is their lack of compatibility and interoperability with NATO systems...." [11]

The Helsinki Times of July 23 quoted Finnish Russian experts Esa Seppanen and Ilmari Susiluoto on Russian responses to what is now an all but certain development: Finland's joining NATO and providing the Alliance a new 1,300-kilometer border with the nation that has always been NATO's main target.

The two scholars are quoted as saying that "Russia is concerned about Finland's NATO option. It will not remain passive if Finland becomes a member."

The article also says that "NATO is marketed in Finland as a global peacekeeper. However, the Russians see it as a territorial threat specifically aimed at them" and "Russia fears that NATO membership would bring NATO's military structures to Finnish soil.

"NATO's expansion in the Nordic countries would finish off the military-political stability of the entire region. The Baltic Sea would become 'NATO's sea,' with the exception of Kaliningrad and the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland." [12]

In addition to securing NATO's encirclement of Russia from the Barents to the Baltic to the Black Seas, an article titled "Finland Rearms," in reference to the Finnish government

recently agreeing to boost military spending to 2% of its budget - a standard NATO demand - says "By raising their spending, Finland pulls more of its weight in the alliance and thus is more likely to get a favorable response to any future requests for defense aid. Finland is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program, and, with their new emphasis on added security, are likely to grow a closer relationship in the future.

With Finland in NATO the bloc would gain an additional "237,000 troops, beefed up with the latest infantry weapons and heavy armor...." [13]

Finland, Sweden Forced Into NATO And Overseas Wars Against Will Of The People

In a recent newspaper interview the Finnish Speaker of the Parliament Sauli Niinisto spoke of the surreptitious campaign underway - indeed almost completed - to pull his nation into an expanding worldwide military alliance despite its citizens not only being opposed to but not even aware of it.

He characterized the process in this manner: "The logic of silent agreements has been brought very far in thinking in which closer Finnish participation in NATO is seen to bring us security points from the United States and NATO." [14]

Niinisto listed several instances of how NATO is transitioning Finland into full membership without public debate or cognizance. Referring to the purchase of NATO interoperable fighter jets, he said that "It was a silent preliminary contract involving confidence that more supplies would come later."

He also cited Finland's participation in NATO's international Rapid Response Force as well as in the European Union's Nordic Battlegroups. More will be said later about the integration of the EU and NATO in global deployments and strike forces but this (not so) hypothetical observation by the Finnish Speaker offers an initial insight:

"All European defence activities are always under the NATO umbrella. What if the EU could be collectively a NATO member? What would Finland do then? Would Finland secede? The EU now seeks to act as a collective in all organisations. Why would security policy be a big exception?" [15]

An identical campaign, covert and concerted, is being conducted in Sweden, where as in Finland polls regularly register a majority of citizens opposed to NATO accession, and is being addressed and combated by the Sptoppa smyganslutningen till NATO/Stop surreptitious accession to NATO, whose web address is: <http://www.stoppanato.se>

European Union, NATO Symbiosis: Global Battlegroups And War In The Caucasus

Mention has already been made of the European Union Battlegroups and on July 21 Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt visited NATO Headquarters in Brussels - to "address the North Atlantic Council on the priorities of the Swedish EU Presidency" [16] - further endorsed the project and "expressed his support here [Brussels] for the EU's battlegroup concept, under which about 1,500 troops from three or more countries are on standby on a six-month rotation."

The article the preceding is taken from added "Bildt, whose country holds the six-month

rotating EU presidency...said there was 'huge demand' for Europe in the world and that the best way for the EU to improve its crisis management capability, of which battlegroups are a part, is by implementing the EU's Lisbon Treaty.

"He said they must remain ready to be deployed within 10 days."

As to where such deployments may occur in the future, "Bildt also hopes to secure backing from fellow EU foreign ministers early next week for a one-year extension to the EU's peace monitoring mission in Georgia" and "says he will insist on the mission's right to monitor the situation in the two regions [Abkhazia and South Ossetia]...." [17]

He was referring to re-deploying European Union monitors - including troops - to the borders of Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where in the latter case a war erupted last August after a Georgian assault and a Russian response. Bildt and the EU in fact don't consider that there are national borders connecting the three states but that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are part of Georgia. Russia, which has recognized the independence of both, disagrees and as such opposes EU troops returning to the area, where Abkhazia has accused them of collaborating with the Georgian government of Mikhail Saakashvili in launching attacks on its territory.

What Bildt is actually advocating is something substantially more serious and fraught with the danger of a conflict far worse than the war of last August.

The Chairman of the Georgian Parliamentary Commission on Defense and Security, Givi Targamadze, said on July 21 "The deoccupation [regarding Russian troops] of this territory [Abkhazia and South Ossetia], but not the presence of the observation mission in an expanded format, is important for us. However, U.S troops' participation in the mission will be a step forward." [18]

That is, the EU will insinuate itself into South Caucasus conflict zones and US troops will be inside the Trojan Horse. If that scenario evolves, troops from the world's two major nuclear powers can face off against each other in the next war.

Three days after visiting NATO Headquarters Bildt was in Afghanistan, during the exact moment the battle described at the beginning of this article occurred, to meet with US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke and to visit an ISAF European Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).

Regarding the effective merger of EU and NATO international security and military missions and how the EU is being employed to hasten NATO's absorption of nations like Sweden and Finland, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who will turn his post over to former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen this week, in early July "expressed frustration...over the lack of progress in NATO's relationship with the European Union" and said:

"I will leave my office in three weeks' time frankly disappointed that a true strategic partnership that makes such eminent sense for both organisations (NATO and the EU) has still not come about.

"I am convinced that if ... North America and Europe are to defend their values and interests

and solve [common] challenges, then we will need to do a much better job of combining the complementary assets of NATO and the EU. We should work together where necessary, not just where we can.

"Our missions, our geographical areas of interest, our capabilities...are increasingly overlapping, not to speak of our memberships. Our definition of the security challenges and the means to tackle them is also increasingly a shared one." [19]

Scheffer added "NATO-EU relations will be an important part of the alliance's new Strategic Concept, which serves as guidelines for all actions," a subject doubtlessly addressed with Bildt, whose country currently holds the EU presidency, two weeks later. [20]

Applying NATO's War Clause Globally

At the same press conference the NATO chief said "I hope the new Strategic Concept will finally lay to rest the notion that there is any distinction between security at home and security abroad. Globalization has abolished the protection that borders or geographical isolation from crisis areas used to provide." [21]

Significantly, Scheffer affirmed that NATO's Article 5 mutual military assistance provision can "apply outside NATO territory as much as inside." [22]

To the South Caucasus, for example.

Four previous articles in this series have addressed NATO's plans to absorb Finland and Sweden as full members [23] and US and NATO plans to confront Russia in what the Alliance calls the High North, the Arctic Ocean and by extension the Baltic Sea. [24]

Scandinavian Nations Move Military Into Arctic Circle

Sweden's and Finland's Scandinavian neighbors Denmark and Norway, both NATO members, have recently joined the battle for the Arctic.

Last month Norway revealed that it was moving its Operational Command Headquarters from the south of the nation at Stavanger north to Reitan outside Bodo, "thus making Norway the first country to move its military command leadership to the Arctic." [25]

Last year "Norway's government decided to buy 48 Lockheed Martin F-35 jets at a cost of 18 billion crowns (\$2.81 billion), rating them better than rival Swedish Saab's Gripen at tasks such as surveillance of the vast Arctic north." [26]

A few days after the Norway's announcement that it was shifting its military command headquarters to the Arctic the Danish government said that increasing competition for resources and more importantly military advantage in the Arctic "will change the region's geostrategic significance and thus entail more tasks for the Danish Armed Forces".

Because "The risk of confrontation in the Arctic seems to be growing," Denmark plans to "set up a joint-service Arctic Command and is considering expanding the military base at Thule in northern Greenland, which was a vital link in US defences during the Cold War" and "create

an Arctic Response Force, using existing Danish military capabilities that are adapted for Arctic operations." [27]

Copenhagen itself has no direct claim to the Arctic but is using Greenland and the Faroe Islands, both effectively colonies, for a military buildup that can only be aimed against Russian claims in the region.

An article titled "Danish militarization of Arctic" adds these details:

"The higher focus on the Arctic is part of the Danish defence plan for the period 2010-2014 approved by Parliament, the Folketinget, on 24 June.

"Denmark [is also considering applying] fighter jets in monitoring operations and sovereignty protection at and around Greenland. The country might also consider to give the Thule Base a more central role in cooperation with partner countries." [28]

The partners in question are fellow NATO members and Arctic claimants the United States, Canada and Norway.

From August 6 to 28 Canada will conduct its major annual Arctic military exercise, Operation NANOOK, with "land, sea and air forces operating in the Baffin Island region." [29] This year Canadian special forces will join the war games. "Col. Michael Day, commanding officer of Canada's Special Operations Forces Command, said units such as the Special Operations Regiment and Joint Task Force 2 have rarely been involved in northern military exercises." [30]

Arctic: Russia's Last Stand Against Missile Shield First Strike Threat

Two previous articles [31] have examined the fact that the Arctic Circle is the only spot on the planet where Russian nuclear deterrent and retaliation capacities can be based in order to evade potential US and NATO missile shield-linked first strikes.

Earlier this month former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev appeared on Russian television and warned that "missile defense installations in Europe are a threat to Russia" and "are aimed at creating a situation that makes it possible for NATO to be first to launch a nuclear strike while staying under the shield." [32]

On June 30th the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen was in Poland where Washington intends to install interceptor missiles and "said he was hopeful Washington and Warsaw could wrap up talks on a deal tied to a anti-missile plan opposed by Russia....[33]

On July 13-14 Russia carried out test launches of two Sineva intercontinental ballistic missiles and "The United States was reportedly unable to detect the presence of Russian strategic submarines in the area before they launched the missiles."

As a government official said of the tests, "Russian submarines not only fired ballistic missiles while submerged, they also did it from under ice floe near the North Pole, which proves that the Russian Navy has retained the capability of moving under Arctic ice and striking targets while undetected." [34]

At the beginning of this month NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer officiated over a change of command for the Alliance's top military commander, swearing in Admiral James Stavridis. The latter's comments at the event included:

"With me are over seventy thousand shipmates - military and civilian - in three continents from the populated plains and coasts of Europe to the bright blue of the Mediterranean Sea; from the high mountain passes of Afghanistan to the distant Arctic Circle." [35]

The simultaneous and coordinated US and NATO military buildup in the Arctic Ocean, the Baltic Sea and the Barents Sea are moving the line of confrontation with Russia ever closer. With Finland's and Sweden's integration into NATO the armed forces of both nations will have something far more formidable and dangerous to contend with than firefights in Northern Afghanistan.

Notes

- 1) The Local, July 24, 2009
- 2) NewsRoom Finland, July 23, 2009
- 3) Stockholm News, July 20, 2009
- 4) Radio Sweden, July 20, 2008
- 5) Swedish Wire, June 26, 2009
- 6) Helsingin Sanomat, June 19, 2009
- 7) Xinhua News Agency, July 3, 2009
- 8) Government Security Information, June 17, 2009
- 9) Global Security, May 12, 2009
- 10) Defense Professionals, June 25, 2009
- 11) Ibid
- 12) Helsinki Times, July 23, 2009
- 13) Strategy Page, June 29, 2009
- 14) Helsingin Sanomat, June 16, 2009
- 15) Ibid
- 16) Trend News Agency, July 21, 2009
- 17) Defense News, July 22, 2009
- 18) Trend News Agency, July 22, 2009
- 19) Trend News Agency, July 7, 2009
- 20) Ibid
- 21) Xinhua News Agency, July 7, 2009
- 22) Ibid
- 23) End of Scandinavian Neutrality: NATO's Militarization Of Europe
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/message/38611>
- 24) Scandinavia And The Baltic Sea: NATO's War Plans For The High North
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/message/40045>