

*Scandinavian Views on Nato  
membership:*

**Eight Weeks That Shook  
Swedish Social Democracy**

---

Mikael Sandberg

Halmstad University

Sweden

[mikael.sandberg@hh.se](mailto:mikael.sandberg@hh.se)

# Scandinavia and NATO

---

- Historical experiences of Sweden and Finland in relation to Russia
- The Role, Position and Response of Social Democracy to the invasion
- Explaining NATO application as retreat from historic Social Democratic neutrality policy
- Background: Social Democratic Workers' Party, SAP, Marxist reformists, has been largest Swedish party for a century.



# What are Swedes and Finns reminded of when Russia invaded Ukraine?

## The Great Nordic War 1700-1721 (Peter I):

Sweden forced to cede Estonia, Livonia, Ingermanland and South Karelia in 1721, and

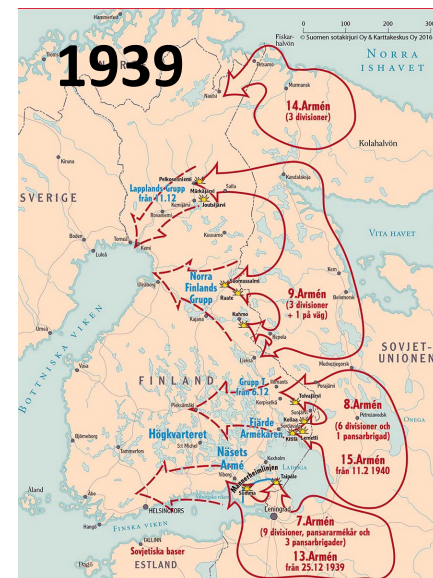
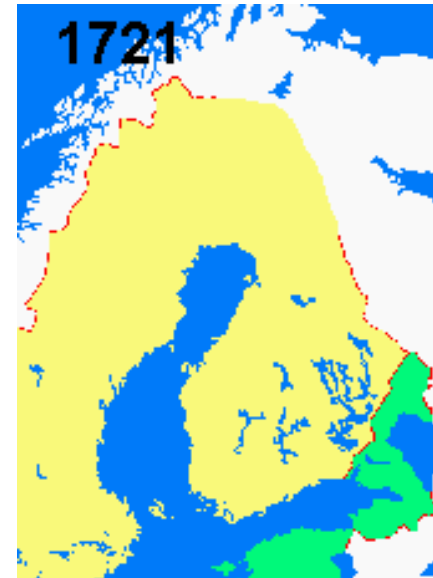
## The Finnish War in 1809-1810 (Alexander I):

Grand Duchy of Finland to the Russian Empire in 1809 (had been part of Sweden since 1249)

## The Winter War in 1939-1940 (Stalin):

The USSR under Stalin invaded.

Finland forced to cede Karelia, Salla and the Arctic Ocean coast to the Soviet Union.



# A Social Democratic Scandinavia, Germany and NATO leadership in 1922 (until Swedish Sept elections)

- Historical perspectives and party strategies
- NATO:s Jens Stoltenberg, Kanzler Olaf Scholz
- All are Social Democratic Leaders



Mikael Sandberg, ASN 2023: Scandinavian Views on Nato membership



Magdalena Andersson, Sanna Marin,  
Jonas Gahr Støre, and Mette Frederiksen



# Eight Weeks That Shook Swedish Social Democracy:

---

- **First to second week: not much reaction.** Magdalena Andersson and her new government (SAP) unprepared as Russia invades. Finland's "Nato option" not understood by SAP. SAP stuck in old concepts: "*NATO expansion would destabilize Northern Europe*" (Andersson), SAP Congress was against NATO membership, as was Ann Linde, the secretary of state.
- **Third week: Now realize that Finnish social democrats under Marin are really pro NATO:** four SAP VU ("politburo") meetings about Swedish-Finnish defense union. However, March 11: *European Council in Brussels: Finland (Social Democrat Sanna Marin) were openly pro-Nato.*
- **Fourth week: now taking the NATO option seriously:** (March 14-16) SAP VU discusses NATO membership seriously as Sweden cannot be neutral alone in Scandinavia. March 14: a new security commission in parliament appointed and *SAMAK (Social Democrats in Nordic countries): Finns again pro Nato.* After this meeting, Andersson open-minded to Nato. March 15: Andersson meets Boris Johnson in London on "security guarantees". March 16: Finnish green party leader Suomela: pro-Nato statement. March 17-18: new council to Andersson, ambassador Stenström, declared himself pro-Nato, organizes new security council with Andersson, Linde, Hultquist, and Johansson. **March 18: "Damned Finland, we might have to join", says Secretary of State Ann Linde.** March 20: president Sauli Niinistö interviewed in *Financial Times*: only alternative to Nato membership is defence collaboration with the USA and Sweden.

# The New Security Council: Peter Hultquist, Ann Linde, Morgan Johansson and Magdalena Andersson



Mikael Sandberg, ASN 2023: Scandinavian Views on Nato membership

# March 2022: Magdalena Andersson (1967-) and Sanna Marin (1985-), prime ministers



Mikael Sandberg, ASN 2023: Scandinavian Views on Nato membership

# Eight Weeks That Shook Swedish Social Democracy (cont'd):

---

- **Fifth week: the Rightists Attack:** *Rightist party leader Kristoffersson in major article states that if they win the elections in September they will apply to Nato*
- **Sixth week: SAP convinced but not yet prepared to admit publically:** *victory for Marin's Nato policy in her party. March 30: Andersson in Swedish TV: "cannot exclude Nato membership"*
- **Seventh week: pro-Nato position, but how to convince members and voters?:** VU meeting April 4 and 8. April 6: Finns decided. April 7 Damberg, minister of Finance on trip to Finland. April 8: Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces in the Security Council. *VU quarrel about "discussions" in the party as SAP Congress was against Nato.*
- **Eighth week: SAP yes to NATO, all set:** Hultquist, defence minister: **"I decided on April 11, 8.15."** Party secretary: SAP will have "a security policy dialogue". Parliamentarian Security Analysis, initiated March 16, presented on May 13: pro Nato. Decision in SAP VU on May 15.

# Lenin about shaking hands with Svinhufvud who asked for recognition of Finland's declared independence in 1917:

---

“Look at Finland; she is a democratic country, more developed, more cultured than we are. (...)

I very well recall the scene when, at Smolny, I handed the act to Svinhufvud which in Russian means "pighead" — the representative of the Finnish bourgeoisie, who played the part of a hangman. He amiably shook my hand, we exchanged compliments.

***How unpleasant that was! But it had to be done, because at that time the bourgeoisie were deceiving the people, were deceiving the working people by alleging that the Muscovites, the chauvinists, the Great Russians, wanted to crush the Finns. It had to be done.”***

V. I. Lenin

# Marxists give in when losses threaten fundamental power of their parties...

Lenin: “How unpleasant that was! But it had to be done...”

**Linde: “Damned Finland, now we might have to join Nato...”**



# Conclusion

---

- The short answer to why the Social Democrats in Sweden and Finland changed policies toward a NATO membership: they had to, otherwise they would have historically lost political power.
- Which by the way is also the reason Lenin accepted Svinhufvud's declaration of independence for Finland just after the Bolshevik coup: or else Bolsheviks would be threatened to lose power for good.
- Putin's war in Ukraine forced Scandinavian Social democracy to show its hands of cards (and Norway and Denmark are already members)...
- Marin and Andersson the "Gorbachevs" of Finnish & Swedish Social Democracy... Discussion *in the party* more critical than in parliament.



Thanks for listening!  
[mikael.sandberg@hh.se](mailto:mikael.sandberg@hh.se)

PS. special thanks to Maggie Strömberg och Torbjörn Nilsson, “Så gick det till när S vände om Nato”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2022-07-02



# Grand Duchy of Finland, the Bolshevik Coup, and Finland's independence in 1917. Compare Ukraine...

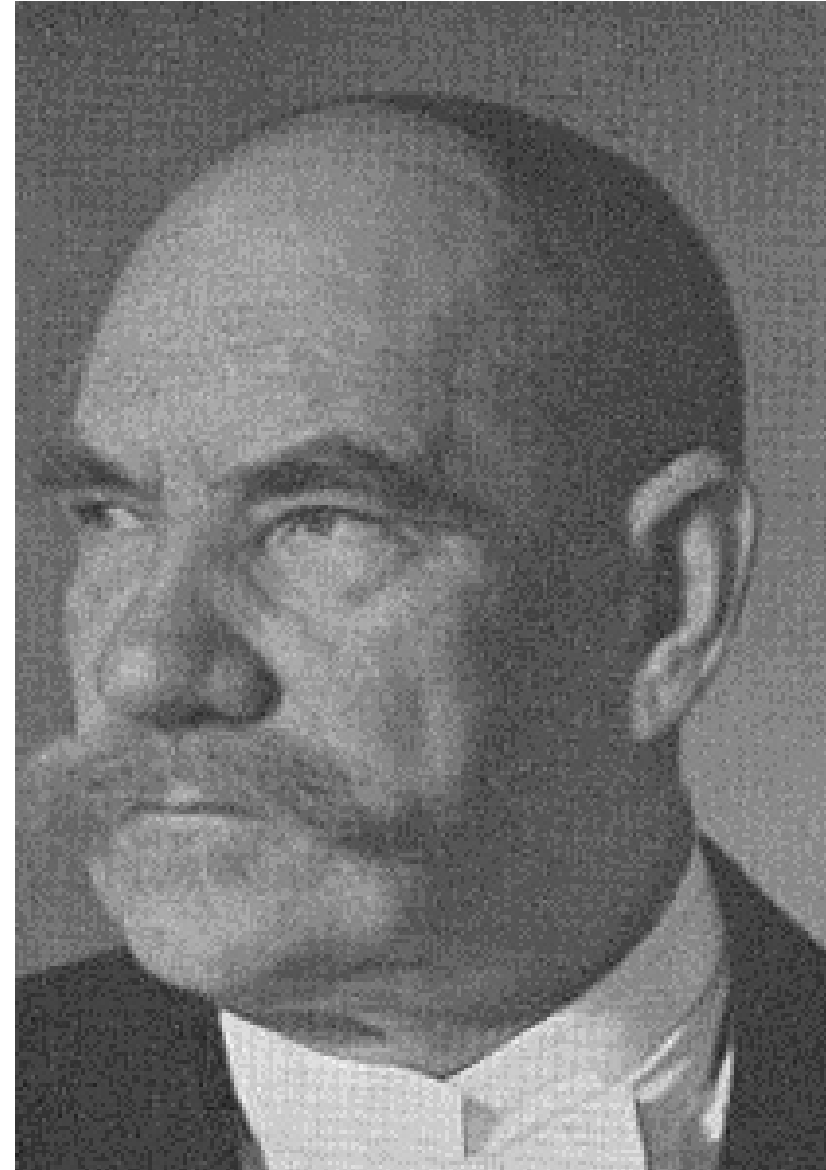
---

Pehr Evind Svinhufvud, president of the Senate in Finland, personally went to Petrograd, where he met Lenin. Surprisingly, this was successful.

On December 27, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party recognized Finland's independence.

Similar situation to when Ukraine gained independence from the USSR.

Ukraine officially declared itself an independent country on 24 August 1991, when the communist Supreme Soviet (parliament) of Ukraine proclaimed that Ukraine would no longer follow the laws of USSR and only the laws of the Ukrainian SSR, de facto declaring Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union.



“Do you think Sweden should be a member of NATO?” (Novus) (If Finland joins: 63-64 percent)



# New Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and President of Finland Sauli Niinistö (both rightists)



Mikael Sandberg, ASN 2023: Scandinavian Views on Nato membership

What  
Russia (or  
Putin)  
seems to  
be thinking  
...

