



Finland & Sweden Can Join Alliance In A “Quick Way” Says NATO Chief

Description

NATO Secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg said the Western military bloc would welcome previously neutral Nordic countries amid the Ukraine crisis.

In what appears to be blatant provocation towards Russia, Stoltenberg said Finland and Sweden would be quickly brought into the alliance should they seek membership, as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine stokes security concerns on the bloc’s eastern flank.

In an [interview](#) on Sunday with CNN, the NATO chief said “Of course, it’s for them to decide but, if they apply, I expect that they will be very much welcomed by all 30 allies and that we will find ways to do that in a relatively quick way to take them into the alliance if they so want”

RT [reports](#): Stoltenberg made his comments after meeting last week with Finnish President Sauli Niinistö, noting that NATO’s main message was that it’s for Finland to decide whether to join the alliance. He said the same is true of Sweden.

“We respect the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Finland and their right to decide their own future,” the secretary-general said. “That’s exactly what Russia do not respect, because they actually try to intimidate and to say that if Finland decides to join NATO, there will be consequences.”

Although both countries are EU members, they have stayed out of NATO, maintaining a neutral status militarily. Finnish lawmakers are considering whether to seek NATO membership and, given that polls show increasing public support for the idea, Niinistö said on Wednesday that it’s no longer necessary to hold a public referendum on the issue.

Public opinion has shifted dramatically since Russia began its military offensive in Ukraine in February. A record-high 62% of Finns now favor NATO membership, according to media outlet YLE. Previous polls showed that a majority opposed joining the alliance. Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) land border with Russia.

Stoltenberg has previously spoken of favorable prospects for Finland and Sweden being welcomed into NATO. *“They are enhanced-opportunity partners,”* he said in January. *“We have worked together with them, we have exercised together with them, we have trained together with them. They meet NATO standards in most areas.”*

Moscow has said that NATO undermined Russian national security when it broke promises against expanding eastward after the Cold War ended in 1991. The bloc has added 14 members since 1999, and two former Soviet republics – Ukraine and Georgia – have made formal requests to join.

Chinese leaders have pointed to NATO's *“Cold War mentality”* as a root cause of the Ukraine crisis. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa last month said the war would have been avoided *“if NATO had heeded the warnings from amongst its own leaders and officials over the years that its eastward expansion would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region.”*

by Niamh Harris

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