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BRIEFING NOTE

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 precipitated a seismic shift in Swedish defence. After 200 years of neutrality, Sweden, alongside Finland, made the historic decision to apply and join the NATO alliance, a decision that increases not only Sweden's own security, but also of the Euro-Atlantic area. Now, seven Arctic nations are NATO allies, and all the democratic nations surrounding the Baltic Sea are members of both the EU and NATO.

As the newest NATO member, having acceded to NATO in March 2024, Sweden has wasted no time in actively and constructively contributing to NATO's defence and deterrence in all three main domains. This includes air policing, contributions to the NATO Standing Maritime Group, and, most visibly, the contribution of a mechanized infantry battalion to the Canadian-led Multinational Brigade in Latvia as part of the NATO Forward Land Forces concept on the Eastern Flank. Swedish troops arrived in Latvia in January of this year, and on February 6th were formally put under Canadian command, taking over from the Danish battalion with whom they will be rotating every 6 months.

Working closely with likeminded countries in Latvia has provided Sweden an opportunity to deepen its bilateral ties and military to military cooperation with NATO allies, particularly, Denmark, with whom they are now rotating in the contribution of the mechanized infantry battalion, the host nation, Latvia, and the framework nation, Canada. Canada was the first nation to ratify Sweden's accession to NATO, and Sweden's contributions to the deterrence efforts in Latvia have provided the two nations an opportunity to develop closer ties both politically and militarily.

There are many reasons why the Multinational Brigade in Latvia was a good match for Sweden. Geographically, the increased contribution and security of the Baltic region is valuable both to Sweden and to NATO as a whole, where Sweden has naturally strong security interests in constraining the potential scope of Russian action. It has also provided an opportunity work alongside Baltic and Nordic allies such as Latvia and Denmark, with whom Sweden has longstanding military, strategic, and historic ties. From a planning perspective, as Sweden is currently developing its Land Forces, working with the Multinational Brigade has also offered the chance for these forces to become directly interoperable with NATO. At present, the Multinational Brigade in Latvia has the most different NATO nations represented (14) of all the deterrence forces along the Eastern Flank.

Having a Swedish mechanized infantry battalion in Latvia is the result of several years of planning and consultations – having begun during the application phase prior to

Sweden's official membership into the Alliance –with involvement from many different actors. As to be expected, there are many agreements, planning and logistical considerations, and perspectives to take into account when working in a multinational environment.

From the national perspective, the Swedish Armed Forces are in the midst of a period of reorganization and growth, an important process which needs to be balanced with the demands of readiness. These considerations were part of the overall picture in determining which units were most fit to take part in the brigade, as well as other troop contributions that Sweden is heavily considering in the future, as they indicated they have a desire to contribute to the future Forward Land Forces in Finland, which may have Sweden as a logistical hub. Now, there is a brigade within the Swedish Armed Forces responsible for the rotation of the battalion in Latvia. This is similar to how Sweden organized its deployment to Afghanistan, however the demands and capabilities needed of a counterinsurgency operation and deterrence activities are very different.

Canada, as the framework nation, is responsible for force generation, and Sweden had to work with Canada to determine what capabilities would be most relevant to the brigade as a whole. The mechanized infantry battalion fulfills the need for an infantry fight force and includes capabilities such as main battle tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and indirect fire capabilities. These strategic goals have been kept front of mind in order to ensure the troop contribution in Latvia, and all other Swedish contributions for that matter, are well balanced, well-trained, and well equipped to constitute the needs and requirements of the unit as requested from a NATO planning perspective.

While in comparison to the geographic distance from Canada to Latvia, the distance from Latvia to Sweden may seem trivial, however there are still many complications to consider in deploying a land force to another theatre. This is a challenge and a benefit from the Swedish perspective, as the need to sustain a battalion on the other side of the Baltics has driven development within their forces. This is not just from a land forces perspective either, as to sustain a force across the water, even in peacetime, sea lines of communication must be maintained over the Baltics, which see 4,500 ships at any time, including Russian military vessels.

Though Sweden has been a longstanding partner of NATO, the difference between training for interoperability as a partner nation and sustaining a deployed, interoperable battalion within a multinational deterrence force has proven to be a valuable learning experience and force development opportunity. These developments have also led to conversations about the potential for increased military to military cooperation between Canada and Sweden, within Latvia, within NATO, and bilaterally. Arctic security, air

defence systems, officer training, and the future Forward Land Force in Finland were all noted as potential opportunities to strengthen ties.

Sweden's accession to NATO and its rapid integration into key alliance operations have precipitated a profound transformation in its force development and the strength of the deterrence posture on the Eastern Flank. This contribution has allowed them an opportunity to not only sustain an interoperable battalion but also deepen bilateral ties, particularly with Canada, at a time when the 'transatlantic' part of the NATO alliance is top of mind.

About the Author

Hannah Christensen *is a Master of International Affairs student in Security and Defence Policy at Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs. She serves as Senior Advisor for the NATO Field School and Simulation Program at Simon Fraser University. She has the honour to have been recognized by Women in Defence and Security (WiDS) as recipient of the 2025 'Twenty in their 20s' award and a winner of the 2024 WiDS scholarship. Hannah is a member of the Advisory Council on Diversity for the Commander, Maritime Forces Pacific, and co-Host of the Field Report Podcast, hosted by the Canadian Defence and Security Network (CDSN).*

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