

NATO: Finland and Sweden Seek Membership

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On June 29, 2022, heads of state and government from NATO’s 30 member states (see **Figure 1**) unanimously agreed to [invite](#) Finland and Sweden to join the alliance. Finland and Sweden formally [applied](#) for membership on May 18, prompted by heightened security concerns about Russia after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. [Finland’s](#) and [Sweden’s applications](#) marked a [historic shift](#) for these traditionally militarily nonaligned countries. The [Biden Administration](#) and many [Members of Congress](#) support Finland and Sweden joining NATO, arguing that the addition of these two [mature democracies](#) with [advanced militaries](#) will [enhance security](#) in the Baltic Sea region and the broader Euro-Atlantic area. For Finland and Sweden to join the alliance, all NATO members must ratify requisite amendments to NATO’s founding [North Atlantic Treaty](#); U.S. ratification requires Senate advice and consent.

Finland’s and Sweden’s NATO Aspirations

Russia’s 2022 war against Ukraine has [upended decades](#) of [Finnish](#) and [Swedish](#) security policy that sought to balance political, economic, and cultural ties to the West and relations with Russia. After the Cold War, Finland and Sweden joined the European Union (EU) and established close partnerships with NATO. Both [Finland](#) and [Sweden](#) have participated in numerous NATO operations and have [technologically advanced militaries](#) that are interoperable with NATO. Public support for NATO accession—and the [added security](#) of NATO’s “[Article 5](#)” mutual defense clause—has skyrocketed in both countries since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; recent polls indicate support at [76% in Finland](#) and [59% in Sweden](#).

U.S. officials from the Departments of [State](#) and [Defense](#) concur with [Finnish](#) and [Swedish](#) assertions that the two countries would be “[security providers](#),” [strengthening](#) NATO’s defense posture in the [Baltic region](#) in particular. Finland is expected to [exceed](#) NATO’s 2% GDP defense [spending target](#) in 2022, and Sweden has committed to meet the 2% goal “[as soon as possible](#).”

[Some analysts express concern](#) that Finland’s and Sweden’s accession could provoke Russia and question NATO’s ability to defend [Finland’s 830-mile border with Russia](#) (which would double NATO’s overall borders with Russia). [Finnish officials](#) contend that Finland has long defended its own borders and would continue to do so as a NATO member. [Finland](#) and [Sweden](#) also have strong traditions of societal

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resilience and substantial experience dealing with Russian disinformation efforts, cyberattacks, and hybrid threats.

Russia's Reaction

Russia has [long opposed](#) closer integration between NATO and Finland and Sweden. Over the past decade, [Russia](#) has used aggressive displays of military force (via exercises and territorial air and sea incursions) to signal its displeasure with enhanced cooperation between Finland and Sweden and NATO. Immediately prior to Finland's and Sweden's NATO applications, [Russia's Foreign Ministry stated](#), "Russia will be forced to take retaliatory steps, both of a military-technical and other nature, in order to neutralize the threats to its national security that arise from this." Subsequently, Russia has publicly played down the situation. [Russian President Vladimir Putin stated](#) that Finnish and Swedish accession pose "no direct threat for Russia" but emphasized that "expanding military infrastructure" could be viewed as a threat and could "provoke a response." Analysts [note](#) that Russia's ongoing conflict in Ukraine may limit its conventional military options to oppose Finland's and Sweden's NATO accession.

NATO's Accession Process and Current Status

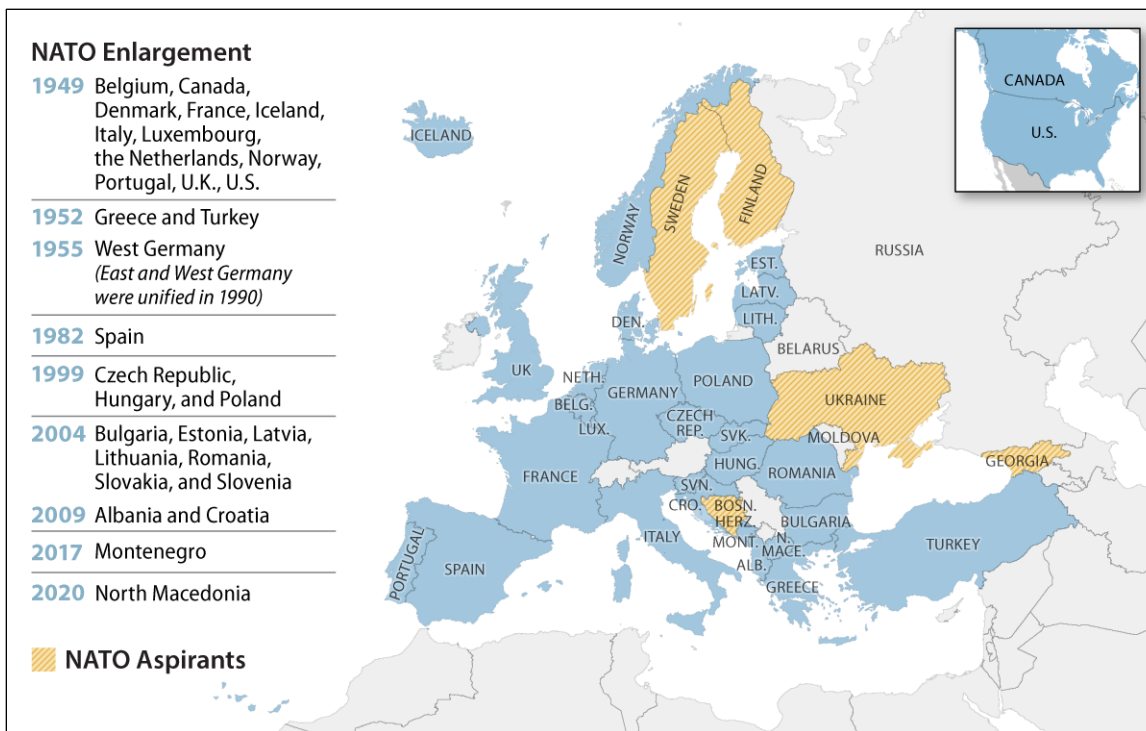
Since NATO's creation in 1949, the alliance has grown from 12 founding members to today's 30 members through eight rounds of enlargement. On July 5, 2022, allied governments [signed](#) protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty to allow the accession of Finland and Sweden. NATO members now must ratify the amended treaty according to national procedures, which vary by country. There is no set timeframe for the ratification process—for [recent enlargements](#) the process has taken about [13 months](#). NATO officials are hopeful that accession could be complete by the end of 2022. Exact timing could depend on a number of factors, including national political and legislative calendars and possible delays in those countries that require parliamentary approval of enlargement.

[Opposition](#) from NATO member Turkey initially delayed the start of the accession process for Finland and Sweden. The Turkish government agreed to support the applications following more than a month of consultations that [culminated](#) in an [agreement](#) to address concerns raised by Turkey about Finland's and Sweden's perceived support for terrorist groups, especially those linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (or PKK, a U.S.- and EU-designated terrorist organization). [Turkey's parliament still must ratify](#) the amended NATO treaty for Finland and Sweden to accede.

Role of Congress and U.S. Policy

In the United States, once accession protocols are signed, the Administration sends them to the Senate for its advice and consent. President Biden [submitted](#) accession protocols for Finland and Sweden to the Senate on July 11, 2022. The amended treaty is referred first to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, which then would report it to the Senate, where it requires a vote of two-thirds of Senators present for passage. If the Senate were to pass a resolution of ratification, the resolution would be transmitted to the President, who would decide whether to enter the treaty on behalf of the United States. (Also see CRS Report 98-384, *Senate Consideration of Treaties*.) In anticipation of the submission of accession protocols, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a [hearing](#) on June 22, 2022, on NATO enlargement to Finland and Sweden.

[President Biden](#) has committed to help "deter and confront any aggression" against Finland and Sweden during the [period before](#) accession. U.S. officials have not provided specifics on U.S. security assurances, which may include an [increased U.S. military presence](#) and [more joint training exercises](#). Resolutions of support for Finland's and Sweden's NATO accession have been introduced in both the House (H.Res. 1130) and the Senate (S.Res. 646).

Figure I. NATO Countries and Aspirants

Source: CRS Graphics. Map updated June 2022.

Notes: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine are also formal aspirants for NATO membership.

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