

<https://www.projectcensored.org/how-swedish-love-for-the-us-turned-deadly/>

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Generally speaking, Swedes really love the US.

And I don't just mean, *oh we love the Brad Pitt movies and the whimsical images of Sunset Blvd* (which by the way is way less whimsical in real life). No, I mean that Swedes really love the whole propagandized packaged-with-a-bloody-bow-on-top United States. There are more than a few cowboy-themed bars and restaurants in Stockholm. Hell, there's even a TGI Friday's. Some stores aim to peddle only American goods, which ultimately means they sell pop-tarts and peanut butter. Younger Swedes will adopt US slang, folding it into their Swedish sentences as awkwardly as one might try to fit a TGI Friday's into a cobblestone and tree-lined promenade. They love Obama and hate Trump. And they will look on in disbelief as I slide out my soapbox and pull at their lofty misconceptions through a depressively realistic listing of all the American ills: no free healthcare, no free daycare, no vacation time (even unpaid), no free college, income [inequality](#) worse than imperial Rome, starvation wage jobs, absurd rent and housing prices, and the largest and most violent imperialist military the world has ever seen.

Now, it used to be that the last point was met with some nodding and even vocal agreement. Particularly in the Bush years, Swedes would often be eager to point out what a waste of space good ole "Dubya" was, but that, of course, Democrats were cool. Lately, though, there's some pushback. They typically shift uncomfortably and offer up a "But Russia!" before returning to their delicious Swedish pastry. They're not happy about the facts I've just thrown into their afternoon break but feel that the harsh realities of life in the US are just a little less important and less horrific than Russia's evil aims of world domination. It's almost laughably absurd, but what curbs my chuckle reflex more than anything is the realization that these Swedes really are afraid—that they think it's more likely that Russia will invade these red cottage-rimmed shores than that the US is engaging in a sadistically violent imperialist swan song, taking anyone and everyone down with it.

To be fair, Swedes grow up with more than a healthy dose of fearmongering around Russia. Indeed, Sweden and Russia (in the various iterations of those nation-states) have been side-eyeing each other and coming to blows since about the year 1200. When I was growing up in the 1980s and 90s it was a common quip to hear about Russian U-boats darting around little islands in the Stockholm archipelago. They could invade at any time! But they didn't. And they won't. At this point, the war crystal ball more likely shows the US dragging Sweden into its vortex of endless wars, throwing up military bases on formerly pristine islands, and sending Swedish bodies boxed in birch back to the mainland. Ironically then, what this Swedish fear is barreling towards is the precise outcome it hopes to avoid: death and destruction. Death and destruction at the hands of the one we'd hoped would be our protector: the cowboy, the Brad Pitt-style brooding but sexy loner, the peanut-butter-eating Uncle Sam.

What drove Sweden to get this far into such a twisted abusive relationship with the US empire is a longer discussion and indeed research project. But it's clear that what started as a cultural fascination devolved into a dangerous political partnership. Although officially neutral in US forays into the Middle East, Sweden did [send](#) troops to Afghanistan as a part of the NATO-led military campaign. What's that you say? Sweden wasn't part of [NATO](#) (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) then? You're correct. But why let something as small as NATO membership get in the way of helping out a friend?! Indeed, long before officially joining

NATO, Sweden had been a very active partner: allowing NATO military exercises in Sweden, attending NATO meetings, sending troops, and, of course, sending weaponry. In a 2005 [report](#), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) listed Sweden as one of the top ten global arms exporters, further noting that Sweden does not report on various weapons exports, such as missiles and missile launchers making it difficult to accurately assess how much weaponry they really export. This ranking is even more impressive (in a gross way) when you consider the fact that Sweden has a population of 10.5 million. The New York City Metro area's population is 18.8 million. Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're too small for your big violent dreams!

And despite legislation aiming to stop weapons exports to nations rife with human rights violations like Saudi Arabia, as of 2021 Sweden was still [supplying](#) the Saudis with weaponry for their ongoing genocide in Yemen. The war there is of course largely made possible thanks to US support, and between 2015-2019 US arms exports [grew](#) by 23 percent with half of those arms exports going to the Middle East and half of those going to Saudi Arabia alone. At the same time, "Major arms exports by Russia decreased by 18 per cent between 2010-14 and 2015-19." And while Russia remained second in global arms exports, they were a full 76 percent behind Uncle Sam. Damn, this whole Russia's trying to take over the world narrative does start to lose traction when you look at facts. But what are mere facts in the face of the overpowering emotion of fear? What difference does it make that the US empire hosts some 800+ military bases around the world while Russia hosts roughly twenty? Why bother with the important history around NATO, e.g., that Russia actually wanted to join but was boxed out or that NATO promised [not](#) to expand east of Germany and now encompasses larger parts of the globe far beyond the North Atlantic? Why reckon with the duh-inducing bottom line that if Russia were to invade Sweden, the whole world would step in regardless of NATO—if for no other reason, to save IKEA? Why consider the US-backed [coup](#) in Ukraine that uplifted neo-Nazis and the puppet Zelensky to power? Why let a detail like the West [purposefully](#) killing a potential Ukraine-Russia peace deal get in the way of you flying that Ukrainian flag with the Nazi Azov insignia? Or how the US may have had a hand in [blowing up](#) the Nord Stream pipeline (a direct act of war), or *oooh*, I know, how about Zelensky showing up via Zoom at the New York Stock Exchange to announce that Ukraine is open for business (you know, the kind of [business](#) that hollows out a country and makes, like, ten people very, very rich)!

Put simply, Sweden chose not just to ally itself with the US but to enter into a death cult run by US imperialist interests rather than confront its own fears about Russia and people's misgivings about American imperialism. And to be sure, there are misgivings—or at least there were. A 2013 international Gallup [poll](#) found that people in sixty-five countries overwhelmingly felt that the US is the greatest threat to peace in the world. Around the same time, in 2014, Swedes were also overwhelmingly against [joining](#) NATO. Fast forward to 2023 and the numbers have essentially flipped: 56 percent against joining NATO in 2014 vs. 62 percent for joining NATO in May 2023. This is the power of propaganda. This is the game that Swedish politicians have been playing for more than a decade, and indeed even after the war in Ukraine began, Swedish politicians campaigned in the 2022 election *against* joining NATO. Even then, the establishment didn't trust the people to vote for an eager US imperialist sycophant. But alas, we'll never know if the people would ultimately have voted to be a nation of sycophants because NATO membership was never put up for a vote, an issue that Swedish journalist Kajsa Ekis Ekman rightfully [highlighted](#) as undemocratic and deeply disturbing. Ekman points out that there was a referendum for joining the EU, arguably a vote of lesser importance as it didn't involve the potential for global war and carnage. She writes that the EU referendum prompted people to get educated about the issue. People held study groups and meetings and passed out pamphlets. It was discussed in schools, workplaces, bars, and at home. People wanted to be knowledgeable when they took to the polls. And perhaps there lies the primary reason why there was never a NATO referendum. If people really knew the history of NATO, and the present and future aims, they'd be horrified at the prospect of joining.

Among the future aims of NATO with regards to Sweden, there are many reasons why Swedes would want to run as fast as they could from a NATO membership. As of 2022, Sweden [spends](#) roughly 1.3 percent of its GDP on military expenditure, some \$7.7 billion. NATO demands that member states spend 2 percent of GDP on so-called defense. That's a massive boost to military spending for our little country. And as peace

activist and former US Army Colonel Ann Wright [pointed](#) out in a recent interview on the Project Censored Show: "Every penny that goes towards NATO and the military is a penny that is taken away from education, health, infrastructure development. The fact that there aren't riots in the streets baffles me. Because it's a direct correlation: the more you put into the military...the less the people of the country are going to have for their basic human needs."

Sweden is in no place to be pulling from basic human needs. Despite a lovely global image as a socialist wonderland, Sweden is far from it. I've gotten up on my soapbox about this before (see, I'm an equal opportunist in bashing the policies of both my home nations) both on [Dr. Richard Wolff's](#) show and in writing for [MintPress News](#). In short, Sweden is as eager to engage in cutthroat capitalism as it is in US imperialism. People are struggling, and what they really need is a boost to everything from the healthcare sector to public transportation to schools. By joining NATO, these needs will likely go unmet.

And on the subject of a lovely global image, despite being a major arms exporter, Sweden has long been known as a neutral nation—proudly boasting more than two hundred years of "neutrality" in global conflicts (I put neutrality in quotes because, as the historian Howard Zinn once reminded us, there is no being neutral on a moving train). Sweden also has a stellar reputation for protecting human rights. But in joining a death cult via backdoor dealings with the likes of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Sweden has kicked itself off any moral high ground it ever felt the right to stand upon. Kurdish refugees in Sweden have already felt the whiplash with many reporting harassment, closed bank accounts, arrests, and deportation. Swedish Kurdish representative Hakan Cifci [said](#) that Sweden's dealings with Turkey amounted to an open endorsement of the Turkish government's "human rights violations, war crimes, cross-border operations, extrajudicial killings, the jailing of thousands of politicians, journalists, academics, activists, and the closure of hundreds of institutions and media networks." While the reputation of human rights leader and neutral paradise was inflated at best, any remaining efforts to support human rights and legitimate peace worldwide will be greatly hamstrung by Sweden's NATO membership.

More concretely, Sweden will suffer from the NATO alliance in ways we cannot yet measure. Firstly, NATO members are expected to have military exercises, storage, and even bases in their countries. Sweden has already held military exercises, most notably in the far north, closest to Russia, and on the land of the Indigenous Sámi people, whom Sweden cares almost as little about as Yemeni children. There has been some outcry on the destruction of these Arctic lands, but to be honest, far less than there would be if we were talking about say, Gotland. A beautiful island off the eastern coast of Sweden, Gotland is a jewel in both Swedish culture and tourism. How'd you like a massive NATO base amid your sandy beaches and meandering forest paths? Or how about a nuclear storage facility?

And then finally, there's the human cost. Known as värnplikt, Sweden has mandatory military service meaning that if Sweden (or in this case NATO) needs soldiers, any and every eligible Swede can be called to serve. In a pointed illustration of this, a cartoon by the Swedish organization Tecknaruppropet [shows](#) a person being grabbed by the hand of NATO and forced to fight, with the text: "Whose siblings, children and friends will be sent to foreign frontlines?" On the next slide, the NATO hand holds a soldier in position pointing a rifle at frightened people: "Whose siblings, children and friends will kill or be killed?"

As a child of the US empire in my mid-30s, I know I'm not alone in having more than a handful of friends who got sucked into the military, and in many ways, never got out. As one veteran friend told me once, "I have survivor's guilt, but also, I'm jealous. Sometimes it seems like it would've just been easier to die over there." He died by suicide two years later. An entire generation of people who were killed, killed themselves, or will live with unbearable scars both physical and emotional—just to bolster US hegemony in endless wars. I wouldn't wish that upon any other nation's population. Moreover, I would not wish for any other nation to be on the receiving end of that terroristic violence.

If Swedes could and had been able to consider these facts ahead of a referendum, there isn't a snowball's chance in hell that we'd be reading about Sweden's NATO membership. There might even be a chance that

Swedes would look upon the US without the glimmer of Hollywood's *Top Gun* aviators and see this empire for what it really is. While I rag on my fellow Swedes, I believe that, on the whole, we are good people, and I believe likewise about my fellow US-ians, and indeed, all people around the world caught under the boot of an oppressive system which they're propagandized into respecting and idolizing. I want to also point out that there are those in Sweden who are out on the streets, who have been out in the streets (hats off for instance to [Nej till NATO](#)). But it's not enough. It's way less than enough, and if the horrible things I mentioned above are to be avoided, my fellow Swedes really need to step it up.

They say that in the information age, ignorance is a choice. There's some nuance there, but when it comes to most Swedes who have access to time, alternative forms of news, and the tools with which to research, ignorance is not simply a banal choice, it's a deadly one. It may be too late to take back much of the stupidity that Sweden has engaged in in the interest of impressing Uncle Sam. But it's not too late to push back. It's not too late to realize that we are all steeped and marinated in the propaganda of Western imperialism, and the longer we swim in it, the closer we get to drowning the world in this toxic sludge of fear and violence. It's not too late to confront those fears of a Russian invasion and realize that they're stupid. It's not too late to stand in opposition to the US empire. It's not too late to recognize that a stance against NATO and war is *not* a stance for Putin.

Come on folks, we can do two things at once. One can dislike Putin while simultaneously recognizing that he has no interest in invading Sweden to get at our caviar in tubes, reindeer sausage, and fermented herring (the first two of those are actually really good). It's not too late to spread the word, get educated, and as Colonel Wright noted, get out into the streets. See you there.
