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Written Statement - SFRC NATO Accession Hearing for Finland and Sweden

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to express the Department of Defense's support for NATO membership for the Republic of Finland and the Kingdom of Sweden. This historic moment builds on the positive relationship that the Department of Defense enjoys with Ministries of Defense of Finland and Sweden and the interoperability we have worked to develop with each country's Armed Forces. The Department fully supports both countries' sovereign choice to apply for NATO membership.

FINLAND

Finland is a highly capable military partner whose democratic values align closely with those of the United States. General conscription, a well-prepared and trained reserve, and a strong will to defend the country are the foundations of Finland's defense capabilities. At the core of Finland's will to defend itself is the belief that the Finnish way of life is worth protecting. Finland's location on the Baltic Sea, experience with Russia as a frontline state, and advanced capabilities would make it an asset to the Alliance. Finland spends more than two percent of its GDP on defense and possesses unique military capabilities and expertise, particularly its experience operating in the Arctic environment.

In 2016, DoD and the Finnish Defense Ministry signed a Statement of Intent to increase practical cooperation. Our bilateral defense relationship currently focuses on deepening interoperability, enhancing Finland's defense capabilities, building regional air and maritime domain awareness, increasing Finnish contributions to multinational operations, and aligning strategic communications. Finland and the United States have enjoyed strong military-to-military cooperation dating to Finland's acquisition of F/A-18 Hornets in the mid-1990s. In December 2021, Finland announced plans to purchase 64 F-35A fighter jets, which will only deepen our cooperation and ensure another generation of close bilateral defense ties.

Finland also maintains a high degree of interoperability and cooperation with NATO. Finland first participated in a NATO-led operation in 1996 and became a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner in 2014, the closest level of partnership with the Alliance. It has contributed to or otherwise supported NATO missions in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, and Kosovo.

Finnish membership in NATO would further the principles of the North Atlantic Treaty and enhance the security of the North Atlantic area. As a democracy and market economy, Finland's foreign policy is underpinned by a commitment to and the promotion of democracy, individual freedom, and rule of law. Finland is a modern, highly industrialized democratic country with one of the highest standards of living in the world. Finland has a well-educated and media-savvy population, making its citizenry and democratic institutions resilient to misinformation and malign influence while serving as a model to others. As an advanced democracy, Finland's support of values enshrined in NATO's founding Washington Treaty - including democracy, human rights, and respect for territorial integrity - align strongly with those of the United States.

Finland's NATO membership will be an asset to the Alliance as a values-based security organization. Finland is a world leader in advanced telecommunications. As a NATO Ally, Finland would augment NATO's capacity to defend critical infrastructure, operate in the cyber domain, and strengthen individual and collective resilience. A founding member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and a member of the European Union (EU) since 1995, Finland has demonstrated for decades its commitment to individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Finland emphasizes the importance of international cooperation to collectively resolve the world's most pressing global challenges, including climate change, international terrorism, defending human rights, and promoting open and fair trade. Finland has a seat on the UN Human Rights Council from 2022-2024, will serve as OSCE Chair in 2025, and has ambitions to join the UN Security Council in 2029-2030.

The Finnish Defense Forces comprise a total active and reserve force end-strength of 280,000, with an additional 900,000 trained individuals available for military service. Unlike many other European countries, Finland has maintained a general conscription model for defense. This allows Finland to rapidly call up its reserve force when needed, at a lower overall training cost.

In addition to military forces, Finland maintains a comprehensive security model with a whole-of-society approach to security and preparedness. Vital societal functions are handled together by government authorities, businesses, NGOs, and citizens ensuring that every part of society is invested and understands the role they play in defense of the country.

Finland's accession to NATO is likely to decrease the United States' overall cost-share percentage of NATO's common funded budgets. Relative to other accessions, Finland's modern military forces and existing close partnership with NATO will reduce the time, effort, and costs associated with its integration into NATO structures. Finland would provide a net increase in security and military power to the Alliance. Given Finland's capable military forces, high level of readiness, and ability to provide for its self-defense, Finland's NATO membership presents no discernable additional cost requirements to the U.S. defense budget.

The Department of Defense is confident the accession of Finland to NATO will have a positive impact on the Alliance's military effectiveness. This high level of confidence is based on Finland's defense capabilities, its support of U.S. and NATO actions in multiple theaters, and its ability contribute available capabilities to operations.

SWEDEN

Swedish accession to NATO would further the principles of the North Atlantic Treaty as Sweden will combine a first-rate and rapidly growing military that will contribute to the collective defense of the North Atlantic area, with a principled foreign policy that ardently defends democracy and human rights.

Sweden is a modern, highly industrialized democratic country with one of the highest standards of living in the world. A member of the European Union (EU) since 1995, Sweden's commitment to democracy, individual freedom, and rule of law align closely with those of the United States.

Sweden is a highly capable military partner and home to a world-class defense industry. Sweden's military expertise in the Arctic and undersea environments would further the Alliance's capabilities. The Swedish Armed Forces, which has about 60,000 personnel, set a goal in 2020 to reach 90,000 by 2025. Sweden is working to increase military spending to two percent of GDP as soon as practically possible, expecting to meet this benchmark not later than 2028.

Sweden also maintains a high degree of interoperability and cooperation with NATO, having become a member of Partnership for Peace in 1994. Sweden first participated in a NATO-led operation in 1995 and became a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner in 2014, the closest level of partnership with the Alliance. Sweden has contributed to or supported NATO missions in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Kosovo, and Libya.

Sweden is a capable military partner that would be a net contributor to Alliance and transatlantic security should it be approved for NATO membership. Sweden has an acknowledged level of competency in domestic crisis resilience and preparedness that distinguishes it as a leader among European nations. In 2016, the Department of Defense and Swedish Ministry of Defense signed a Statement of Intent (SOI) to increase practical cooperation. Our bilateral defense relationship currently focuses on deepening interoperability, enhancing Sweden's defense capabilities, building regional air and maritime domain awareness, increasing Swedish contributions to multinational operations, and aligning strategic communications.

Sweden would be a net provider of security and military power to the Alliance area, thus enhancing the national security interests of the United States and all NATO Allies. Sweden considers the United States and Finland to be its two most significant strategic partners. Both the governing coalition and the opposition are committed to strong ties with the United States. Sweden's inclusion will not detract from the ability of the United States to meet or fund its military requirements.

Sweden's membership in NATO will strengthen the security of the Baltic Sea region, which remains an active area for Russian military activity. Swedish NATO membership will accelerate regional maritime and air domain awareness.

Sweden's accession to NATO is likely to decrease the United States' overall cost-share percentage of NATO's common funded budgets. Sweden's modern military forces and existing close partnership with NATO will reduce the time, effort, and costs associated with Sweden's integration into NATO structures, relative to other recent accessions. Given Sweden's capable military forces, high level of readiness, and ability to provide for its self-defense, its NATO membership presents no discernable additional cost requirements to the U.S defense budget.

The Department of Defense is confident the accession of Sweden to NATO will have a positive impact on the Alliance's military effectiveness. This high level of confidence is based on Sweden's defense capabilities, Sweden's support of U.S. and Allied actions in multiple theaters, and expectation that Sweden will be able to contribute available capabilities to operations.

In closing, the Department of Defense assesses Finland and Sweden are ready for NATO membership. Finland and Sweden's accession will provide additional security and stability in Europe. They have close bilateral defense relationships with the United States; already enjoy close working relationships and military interoperability with NATO as Enhanced Opportunity Partners; and are thriving democracies that share our values and fit the ideals of the North Atlantic Treaty.