

Minister for Foreign Affairs Maria Malmer Stenergard

Statement of Government Policy

In the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs
Wednesday 18 February 2026



Mr/Madam Speaker,

Lana Chornohorska was a journalist, LGBTIQ-activist, artist – and drone pilot.

She wouldn't have needed to fight, but like so many other Ukrainians, she was unable to just stand by and watch as her loved ones were afflicted by Russia's war of aggression.

On New Year's Day this year, she shared a tangerine with her friend Ignatius. He joked that he would tell the world about the lovely girl he shared a tangerine with.

Ten minutes later, Lana died in his arms, after being hit by a Russian drone.

Now, Ignatius is doing what he said he would: telling the world about Lana.

When I met him, he asked me to remember Lana when I think of Ukraine and of all the people who, like Lana, have given their lives for Ukraine and for a free, democratic Europe.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

We are living in times of upheaval.

The security policy frameworks, international rules and free trade that have made countries like Sweden secure and prosperous are being challenged. We're seeing serious violations of international law.

The Government is addressing these developments with clarity of vision and decisive action.

In his first Statement of Government Policy, the Prime Minister spoke about the need to re-orientate foreign and security policy in order to address the threats facing Sweden and Europe.

Sweden was in the process of becoming a NATO member, increasing its support to Ukraine, reforming development assistance and deepening cooperation in its neighbourhood.

The Government has delivered on all these points, because we have prioritised them.

Foreign and security policy is about will, but equally, it is about choice.

We have chosen to protect the security of Sweden and the Swedish people.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has been ongoing for almost as long as the First World War.

How the war ends will affect security in Europe for at least a generation going forward.

For this reason, support to Ukraine continues to be the Government's foremost foreign policy priority.

We support Ukraine's efforts in the current negotiations, together with European and US partners.

We are ready to take responsibility if an agreement can be reached. In addition to extensive support, Sweden will at that point be ready to contribute to a multinational reassurance force.

However, as long as Russia's aggression continues, Sweden will remain committed to our two-point plan: more support to Ukraine and increased pressure on Russia.

Support to Ukraine is a moral obligation and an investment in Europe's security, independence and future.

Last year, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Sweden, Denmark and Norway were the countries that provided the largest military support to Ukraine in relation to GDP.

Sweden's overall support – military support and development assistance – saves lives and strengthens Ukraine's resilience.

I would like to thank the Chamber for its broad support of Ukraine's cause. It is a demonstration of Swedish strength, sending a clear signal to the world that Sweden will support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

We know that Russia's objectives extend far beyond Ukraine.

Sweden and Europe need to be prepared for a long-term, far-reaching confrontation with Russia.

Together with our Allies and partners, we will constrain Russia from a position of strength.

NATO's deterrence and collective defence are fundamental pillars of this policy of constraint.

Sweden's NATO membership makes our country more secure. We do not stand alone in troubled times.

Our overriding interest as an Ally is to maintain the political and military credibility of NATO's Article 5.

NATO is currently facing a shift that will require Europe to assume far greater responsibility for its own security.

Sweden is prepared to take its responsibility as part of this shift.

We have demonstrated this since becoming an Ally – through extensive contributions on land, at sea and in the air. Around the Baltic Sea, in the High North and along NATO's eastern flank.

In May, Sweden will host the meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Helsingborg, where the shadow fleet can be seen on an almost daily basis, on its way to less scrupulous buyers who are filling Russia's war chest.

Sweden's military presence in Latvia is of palpable significance. Now we have also taken on responsibility as a framework nation for NATO's Forward Land Forces in Finland, which demonstrates the increased significance of security in the Arctic region and the High North. Sweden will also contribute fighter aircraft to the NATO operation Arctic Sentry. Efforts to develop a new Swedish Arctic strategy are ongoing.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden and the US are united by family ties that go back generations. The US and Europe are also linked together by two of the world's most integrated economies and by the world's foremost defence Alliance.

The US is crucial to Swedish and European security and prosperity, but Europe's relations with the US are now entering a new era.

It is evident that the US is increasingly acting in a way that undermines confidence and runs counter to Europe's values regarding global cooperation and international law.

Let me therefore emphasise what is self-evident: Sweden will not compromise on the territorial integrity of our neighbours. Only Denmark and Greenland decide on matters concerning Denmark and Greenland.

Sweden's bilateral cooperation with the US continues to be strong. We have developed cooperation in areas such as defence and space and have opened consulates-general in San Francisco and Houston.

Now that the transatlantic link is being redefined, we must bolster Europe. The Government is therefore developing closer relations with Allies and partners in Sweden's neighbourhood.

We are a driving force in Nordic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation, which has never been deeper.

We are strengthening security cooperation between the countries around the Baltic Sea.

Poland's choice of Sweden as a partner to build up its submarine capability creates new opportunities for and between our countries. This shows that the Swedish defence industry is also a valuable asset for Allies and partners.

We have also strengthened our strategic partnerships with Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Canada.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

In these times of upheaval, there are certain constants. One is the EU – a community of values and Sweden's most important foreign policy platform.

Time and again, the EU has demonstrated its collective strength during crises.

The EU is our best means by which to defend democracy, freedom and international law.

Sweden wants to see a more geopolitical and resolute EU. The foreign and security policy dimension needs to be strengthened, and it must be possible for a qualified majority to take more decisions.

Sweden welcomes the emerging defence dimension in the EU. The EU is playing an increasingly important role in strengthening the defence industry, military mobility and civil preparedness in Europe.

The EU is crucial for robust and long-term support to Ukraine, and for a policy of constraint against Russia.

In the EU, Sweden has been a driving force in advocating sanctions against Russia's shadow fleet in order to reduce Russia's energy-related income and to use Russia's frozen assets to support Ukraine.

Sweden wants to expand sanctions against Belarus, because of its domestic repression and its support for Russia's aggression. The Government supports the Belarusian people on their path to a free and democratic Belarus.

Many countries are now knocking on the EU's door. They want to be part of a free Europe and the world's largest single market. It is in our interest to help the candidate countries make progress towards joining the Union.

The Government is pushing for additional steps towards EU membership for Ukraine and Moldova, both of which have done impressive work on reforms. In the Western Balkans, Albania and Montenegro are making great progress.

Sweden deeply laments the current developments in Georgia – at the same time, we are determined to continue supporting the democratic and European-minded forces that are present there. The Swedish Government continues to support democratic development in Armenia and welcomes Armenia's efforts towards closer cooperation with the EU.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The developments in the Middle East give cause for both hope and concern.

The UN Security Council resolution that approved the US peace plan for Gaza is confirmation of the widespread international support for peace in the region.

It is essential to protect civilians, allow unhindered access to humanitarian assistance and ensure meaningful Palestinian participation in the reconstruction of Gaza. Hamas must be disarmed and has no place in the future governance of Gaza.

The alarming expansion of settlements and increase in settler violence against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank must stop.

Sweden continues to push for additional EU sanctions against extremist settlers and extremist Israeli ministers who are pursuing illegal settlement policy.

Ultimately, a negotiated two-state solution based on international law is needed. This is the only sustainable solution in which Israelis and Palestinians can live side-by-side in peace, freedom and democracy.

Iran and its proxies have been weakened, but the country still bears a large part of the responsibility for the negative developments in the region and for security risks in the West.

The situation in Iran is horrific. This Government condemns the extensive deadly violence against peaceful demonstrators and the widespread, arbitrary arrests that have been made

following the recent protests in the country. We fully support the brave Iranian women and men who are exercising their freedom of expression and assembly.

Sweden welcomes the EU's political agreement to list the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps as a terrorist organisation. This is an issue that Sweden has long pursued, supported by consensus in the Riksdag.

In Syria, the fall of the Assad regime has meant an opportunity for the Syrian people to finally shape their future.

Sweden has been clear in its expectations of the transitional government to include all Syrians in the construction of the new Syria. The participation of women and ethnic and religious groups must be ensured.

We expect the rights of ethnic and religious groups – including Kurds, Christians, Alawites and the Druze – to be respected. Sweden will continue to underscore the importance of accountability for the crimes committed in Syria, both recently and in the past.

Sweden and the EU are increasing their support now that, despite the fragile situation, there are better prospects for a brighter future for the Syrian people, including the possibility of eventually returning home.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The Asia-Pacific region is where the greatest economic growth is expected. The security of Asia and Europe is also becoming increasingly interlinked.

We are strengthening our cooperation with Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand – all important NATO partners.

We are intensifying our dialogue with the ASEAN countries.

And we are developing our partnership with India. The trade agreement and partnership in security and defence between the EU and India brings on a new era of cooperation.

China is the world's second-largest economy and a leading nation in research and technological development; at the same time, it is under authoritarian rule and has growing geopolitical ambitions.

Where possible and in line with our interests and values, we welcome dialogue and cooperation with China, for aims such as promoting trade on equal terms and tackling climate change.

We continue to call attention to human rights violations, together with the rest of the EU. Sweden's relations with China are, and will continue to be, anchored in a European strategy.

China's conduct towards Taiwan is worrying, and threats of military action are unacceptable. China's enabling of Russia's war in Ukraine has a direct, negative impact on the security of Sweden and Europe.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Global challenges cannot be resolved solely with our Allies or closest like-minded partners.

Together with like-minded countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America that care about and uphold common institutions and rules, we can create a force that does not compete, but unites.

Reform of the UN Security Council is urgently needed. Sweden supports fairer representation of all continents in the Security Council and will push for the addition of more permanent and non-permanent members. Veto power should be limited.

Nearly 65 years have passed since the death of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. Sweden continues to support the UN investigation that aims to clarify the circumstances surrounding his death.

In trade policy, Sweden is working to defend the rules-based order and maintain EU unity.

The free trade agreements between the EU and India, and between the EU and MERCOSUR, are progress for free trade globally.

Swift entry into force of the MERCOSUR Agreement is in Sweden's interest and is backed by all the parties that support our Government. I can only regret that large parts of the opposition are working against the Agreement at a time when we need to forge more ties with the rest of the world, not fewer.

We have substantially raised the bar for our trade and investment promotion efforts, which has yielded significant results, particularly with regard to exports of defence equipment.

We see an increased need for international cooperation at the nexus of technology, innovation, trade and security. It is important to reduce the vulnerabilities that result from unilateral economic dependencies.

Only a growing economy will allow us to equip our defence and ensure preparedness in tougher times. A strong Swedish economy builds security in uncertain times.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The development assistance strategy for Ukraine is Sweden's largest bilateral strategy ever. This year, the Swedish Government is increasing its development assistance to Ukraine to at least SEK 10 billion.

At the same time, Sweden continues to be a generous donor to the world's most vulnerable people. This is particularly demonstrated by its humanitarian assistance and support for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

From Gaza to Sudan to Ukraine, Sweden continues to make a difference where humanitarian needs are greatest.

Sweden is one of the world's most generous donors of climate aid. By chairing the board of the Green Climate Fund in 2026, we are continuing to support international climate action. Climate change can only be tackled through global cooperation.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Gender equality is a core value of Sweden's foreign policy. It is a human rights issue and a priority area for Sweden in the UN and for our development assistance. Under Sweden's 2025 Presidency of the UN Women Executive Board, the organisation's strategic direction was enhanced.

Sweden's work is essential to advance women's and girls' rights and empowerment. Swedish development assistance must help increase access to pre-natal and maternity care, comprehensive sexuality education and measures to combat all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. This is an important part of our broad commitment to global health.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

During this electoral period, Johan Floderus, Saeed Azizi, Joakim Medin and Galina Krasnianskaya have been released and have been able to return to Sweden.

Dawit Isaak, Gui Minhai and Ahmadreza Djalali must also be reunited with their families.

I am the first Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs to have travelled to Eritrea, which should be seen as a new attempt to establish dialogue on Dawit Isaak's case and other important issues for and between our countries.

As the first Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs to have visited China in 11 years, I raised Gui Minhai's case.

We also have a direct dialogue with Iran concerning the detained Swedes who are still waiting to see their families again.

For us, not speaking with others is not an option when it involves Swedish interests and the safety and security of Swedish citizens. We will not cease in our efforts.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

International law, including the UN Charter, is a cornerstone of Sweden's foreign and security policy.

A world in which the rule of might outweighs international law, and superpowers do as they please, is not the world order we want to see.

Sweden fully supports the independence and integrity of international courts. We welcome the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.

Human rights and freedoms must be defended. The equal value of every individual, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation or religion, is a matter of freedom. Violations of religious freedom are an increasing problem globally. Freedom of religion and belief is therefore an integral component of Sweden's efforts for human rights around the world.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

We don't know what awaits us on the other side of these times of upheaval, but we do know that we need to be prepared for a more brutal world.

We need to remain steadfast in our values but also navigate pragmatically, based on what is best for Sweden.

Security and law and order internationally – especially in our neighbourhood – are essential in order for Swedes to feel safe and have belief in the future.

The threat from the East and the signals from the West differ greatly in nature.

And yet the answer is the same: we must harness the strength of the Swedish economy, arm our defence and work even more closely together with our Allies and partners.

We must build global partnerships that make us more secure and economically stronger.

We must continue supporting Ukraine, and never forget Lana and all the others fighting for their own future, and for ours.

Ultimately, it is a matter of safeguarding Sweden's peace, freedom and security. There is no more important task.