

Beat: Politics

## Prospect of Finland and Sweden joining NATO

### Discussed at latest NATO meeting

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**USPA NEWS** - NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (center) looks on as Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs Pekka Haavisto (left) and Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde (right) bump fists after a press conference in Brussels, Belgium. The prospect of Finland and Sweden joining NATO was part of the discussion between foreign ministers from the military alliance in Brussels this week, a senior U.S. State Department official said on Thursday.

"Obviously this is going to be those countries' choices to make," said the official, briefing reporters on the condition of anonymity. "The alliance's open door remains open and there was discussion about that potential candidacy," the official said. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which it says aims among other things to degrade Ukraine's military potential and prevent it becoming a bridgehead for a NATO attack, has prompted the two Nordic countries to consider joining the U.S. led alliance.

Since the invasion began on Feb. 24 public opinion polls commissioned by Finnish media outlets have shown a swift U-turn with the majority of Finns now favoring joining NATO. Finnish foreign minister Pekka Haavisto told reporters earlier that Finland will clarify next steps in the coming weeks regarding a possible decision to seek NATO membership. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has said that if Finland and Sweden joined NATO then Russia would have to "rebalance the situation" with its own measures.

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Source: US State Department

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