Finland, Sweden offer NATO an edge as rivalry warms up north

By EILEEN KNICKMEYER

WASHINGTON — The first surprise, for the Finnish and Swedish officers taking part in a NATO-hosted military exercise in the Arctic this week, was the sudden roar of an U.S. Marine helicopter-another sign of the changing nature of the world.

The United States and Britain, major NATO allies, are among the nations participating in the exercise. It is the first time that the United States has joined NATO’s military exercises in the Arctic since the 1970s.

The exercise, which involves about 200 personnel from the United States, Britain, Canada, the Netherlands and Norway, is designed to test the ability of NATO forces to operate in the Arctic, a region that is becoming increasingly important as climate change melts the ice and opens up new shipping routes.

The exercise also aims to improve coordination between NATO and non-NATO countries, such as Finland and Sweden, which are not members of the alliance.

For the Finnish and Swedish officers, the exercise is an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the U.S. military and its operations in the Arctic.

The exercise takes place as tensions rise between Russia and the West over the war in Ukraine. The United States and its allies have also been increasing their military presence in the Arctic as a way to challenge Russia’s claims to the region.

The exercise is expected to last until the end of the month.