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**Sweden's NATO Workaround**  
**Swedish security and defense policy**  
**against the backdrop of Russian revisionism**

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**Barbara Kunz**

*November 2015*

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# Table of Contents

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<b>Abstract</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction: The New Baltic Litmus Test</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Swedish Security and Defense Policy: Historical Background</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Post-Cold War Era: Strategic Timeout and Paradigm Shifts</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Swedish Military Reform: From Anti-invasion Defense     to Expeditionary Forces (with Partial Reversal)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Economically Driven Processes,     Severe Problems with Outcomes</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>An Evolving Security Environment</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Russia Is Back</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>The Official Take on Sweden's Security Environment</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The Military Status Quo: The Swedish Armed Forces in 2015</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Increased Spending After Decades of Cuts</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Capabilities (On Paper)</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>And in Reality?</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Sweden's Position within the European Security Architecture</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>An Active Partner in International Defense Cooperation</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>NATO's Return to Article 5 Scenarios</b>	<b>29</b>

<b>The Hultqvist Doctrine's Second Pillar:</b>	
<b>Anything Short of Collective Defense</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>NATO Membership Ahead?</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Deep Popular Attachment to Non-alignment</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>NATO Membership Is Not on the Agenda</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Two Main Strands of Opposition</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>41</b>

# Abstract

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Russia's revisionist foreign policy and military build-up has considerable security implications for the Baltic Sea region, including for Sweden. This is also the official perception in Stockholm. Abandoning military non-alignment is yet not on the agenda. Rather, the current Swedish government is addressing the issue through what has come to be labeled the "Hultqvist doctrine" after Swedish minister of defense Peter Hultqvist: on the one hand, boosting national defense capabilities while seeking broader and deeper international defense cooperation short of collective defense on the other. In light of current developments in the Baltic Sea region and beyond, the debate on Sweden's strategic posture and its position within the European security architecture is also relevant beyond the country's border. After decades of important financial cuts and reforms aimed at exclusively orienting the Swedish Armed Forces toward expeditionary operations, the task yet proves difficult. Likewise, the NATO issue remains extremely sensitive in the political debate – in particular for the social democrats in power.

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La politique étrangère révisionniste de la Russie et l'accroissement de ses capacités militaires ont d'importantes conséquences pour la sécurité dans la région de la mer Baltique, y compris pour la Suède. Cependant, l'abandon du non-alignement militaire n'est pas à l'ordre du jour pour Stockholm. L'actuel gouvernement suédois tente de faire face aux défis à l'aide de la « doctrine Hultqvist », du nom du ministre de la Défense Peter Hultqvist : d'un côté, la Suède augmente ses capacités de défense nationale, de l'autre côté, elle tente d'intensifier sa coopération internationale de défense tout en évitant de sauter le pas de la défense collective. Au vu des développements sécuritaires dans la région Baltique, la posture stratégique suédoise et la position de la Suède dans l'architecture de sécurité européenne ont un intérêt bien au-delà des frontières du pays. Après des décennies de réductions considérables du budget de la défense et des réformes qui visaient à orienter exclusivement les forces armées suédoises vers les missions expéditionnaires, la tâche s'avère cependant difficile. De même, la question de l'OTAN reste très délicate dans le débat politique, en particulier pour le parti social-démocrate au pouvoir.





# Introduction:

## The New Baltic Litmus Test

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In 1994, the then Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt wrote a widely read article in *Foreign Affairs* in which he argued that Russia's relations with the Baltic states would be the true litmus test for Russian foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have since become both EU and NATO members, without decisive interference from Moscow. Yet, two decades on, a new "Baltic litmus test" has emerged: NATO's credibility and thus future are very much dependent on its willingness and ability to defend its Baltic allies. Much more than during Cold War times, NATO access to the Baltic Sea area has therefore become of crucial relevance. Sweden, due to its geographical location and the strategic advantages it represents, is a potential key factor in defending the Baltic "peninsula", which, as some claim, has become "the new West Berlin". However, NATO access to Swedish territory, quite apart from Stockholm's support in defending Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, is not self-evident. Sweden, officially non-aligned, stands outside the Alliance.

Russia's repeated violation of various countries' airspace and territorial waters, as well as increased Russian military exercise activity in the Arctic and Baltic Sea, have naturally also set off alarm bells in Stockholm. Although Sweden – unlike its Nordic neighbors Finland and Norway – has no direct borders with Russia, Vladimir Putin's revisionist foreign policy has considerable implications for the country's security environment. Rather unsurprisingly, therefore, the debate on Sweden's strategic posture, and also on its role within Europe's security architecture, has gained momentum in recent months. Against the backdrop of the new Baltic litmus test, this debate is obviously relevant even beyond Sweden's borders. After some hesitation, NATO has come to focus on security in the Baltic Sea since the fall of 2014, not least at incoming Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's initiative.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, so far, the North Atlantic Council discussed the security situation in the region in a 28+2 format, i.e. including Finland and Sweden, in April 2015.<sup>3</sup>

The debate is also of extreme urgency from a domestic point of view. After years of gradual decline, the Swedish Armed Forces have reached a point that made the Swedish National Audit Office conclude in

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Bildt, "The Baltic Litmus Test: Revealing Russia's True Colors", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1994.

<sup>2</sup> See Anna Wieslander, "A new normal for NATO and Baltic Sea security", *UI Brief* No. 2, 2015, available at: [www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/120560.pdf](http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/120560.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

2014 that they were unable to fulfill their tasks. Critics of the various governments' policies have argued in the same vein for quite some time. The ongoing conflict over Ukraine has led a much broader public to pay closer attention to defense matters. Capabilities and defense spending are thus one aspect of current debate. There is now an even stronger focus on the question of Swedish NATO membership. This is also to be seen against the backdrop of the Host Nation Support Agreement that Sweden and the Alliance signed at NATO's 2014 Wales summit, as well as a number of exercises involving Swedish territory that received considerable and largely critical attention in the Swedish media.<sup>4</sup> The 2015 defense bill clearly indicated that the Swedish government is aware of the challenge posed by a more assertive Russia. Boosting national capabilities and seeking closer international cooperation short of collective defense have become the two pillars of the current policy, the so-called "Hultqvist doctrine" named after Sweden's defense minister Peter Hultqvist.

This paper aims to provide an overview of current developments in Swedish security and defense policy. After a short look back at Sweden's approach to the matter during the Cold War, which is indispensable to understanding today's debates, it discusses the country's current strategic posture and choices. It then examines Stockholm's reading of its security environment, followed by Sweden's position within the European security architecture. The paper's last part, before some concluding remarks, is a brief analysis of the ongoing Swedish debate on defense and NATO membership.

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<sup>4</sup> The 2015 edition of Baltops in June, but especially the Arctic Challenge Exercise (ACE) in May 2015, mobilized almost 115 airplanes and 3,600 personnel. "Russia warns Sweden and Finland against NATO membership", *Defense News*, June 12, 2014, available at: <http://archive.defensenews.com/article/2014-0612/DEFREG01/306120040/Russia-Warns-Sweden-Finland-Against-NATO-Membership>, and Norwegian Armed Forces, *Arctic Challenge Exercise*, Lillehammer, June 13, 2015, available at: <http://forsvaret.no/en/exercise-and-operations/exercises/ace>.

# Swedish Security and Defense Policy: Historical Background

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After centuries as a belligerent great power, Sweden looks back on a tradition of more or less strict political neutrality since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with degrees of cooperation with other states varying over time.<sup>5</sup> Unlike with its equally neutral Scandinavian neighbors who were occupied by Nazi Germany, Sweden's neutrality remained intact during the two World Wars, although German soldiers crossed the country during World War II. After the war, talks on a Nordic defense union were held with Norway and Denmark, but failed in 1949. The two latter countries joined the newly created North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Sweden, in turn, was to become "non-aligned during peacetime and aiming to be neutral during wartime" (*alliansfrihet i fred syftande till neutralitet i krig*), backed up with an autonomous defense apparatus, building on a relatively strong draft army (compared to the country's size), a significant defense industry, and, until the late 1960s, the ambition to develop a Swedish nuclear bomb.<sup>6</sup>

Non-alignment notwithstanding, defense planning was grounded in the assumption that the enemy was located to the East and that Sweden's defense efforts needed to be directed at the Warsaw Pact. All Cold War actors – NATO/the United States, the Warsaw Pact/the Soviet Union as well as Sweden itself – implicitly assumed that, although Sweden intended to be neutral in the event of war, it would be so "on NATO's side". The presumption was also that Sweden would hardly be the single target of a Soviet attack, but rather be drawn into war "on the margins" of a large-scale conflict in Europe, hence implying NATO's interest in supporting the Swedes.

After the end of the Cold War, a debate on the country's "real" security policy slowly emerged, notably concerning its relationship with NATO and certain member states. Post-Cold War governments began working on two official reports in order to elucidate the issue: the first one (1994) dealt with the years 1949-69 and was the result of the so-called Neutrality Commission's work.<sup>7</sup> A second study, on the years 1969-89, was

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<sup>5</sup> See Jacob Westberg, *Svenska säkerhetsstrategier 1814 2014*, Stockholm, Studentlitteratur, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Molin, *Omstridd neutralitet: experternas kritik av svensk utrikespolitik 1948-1950*, Stockholm, Tiden, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Statens Offentliga Utredningar (SOU), *Om kriget kommit... Förberedningar för mottagande av militärt bistånd 1949-1969*, Stockholm, 1994, p.11

written by former ambassador Rolf Ekéus and published in 2002.<sup>8</sup> This latter report in particular has been strongly criticized, as it posits that, although there clearly was strong (material) support from the West, and notably the United States, proof of operational cooperation between Sweden and the US, as well as of preparations for such cooperation, could not be found: “The overall conclusion [of this study] was that no significant preparations for operative cooperation with foreign powers took place [in 1969-1989].”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a number of more recent publications and testimonials cast severe doubt on these conclusions. Most prominently, defense journalist Mikael Holmström argued in his 2011 *Den dolda alliansen* (The hidden alliance)<sup>10</sup> – based on 140 interviews with military officers, diplomats, politicians and others, and an analysis of until then unknown documents – that cooperation and, notably, preparations for cooperation between Sweden and NATO (via Denmark and especially Norway) in the case of war with the Soviet Union went much farther than officially acknowledged. Holmström and others, including (former) high-ranking military officers, indeed continue to claim that Sweden’s actual Cold War security policy was far from being identical with the picture painted in political discourse, both during the Cold War and today. For at least parts of Swedish society, non-alignment and neutrality have become cherished elements of national identity.

That non-alignment “has served the country well” is the widely quoted set phrase that many still adhere to – much more so on the left of the political spectrum than on the right; the Social Democrats, in particular, have contributed to elevating military non-alignment into an intrinsic element of “Swedishness”. This has in large part to do with nostalgia for Tage Erlander’s Sweden, as well as with the moral superiority conferred by Olof Palme’s criticism of the United States’ war in Vietnam and the world-famous international pro-disarmament policies in the 1970s and 1980s. However, Sweden’s strategic importance in today’s context gives relevance to the issue that transcends national folklore or nostalgia for the 1970s – all the more so since, as recent research results clearly indicate, such nostalgia is based on erroneous assumptions.

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<sup>8</sup> SOU, *Fred och säkerhet: Svensk säkerhetspolitik 1969-1989*, Stockholm, 2002, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 755.

<sup>10</sup> Mikael Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen: Sveriges hemliga Nato-förbindelser*, Stockholm, Atlantis, 2011.

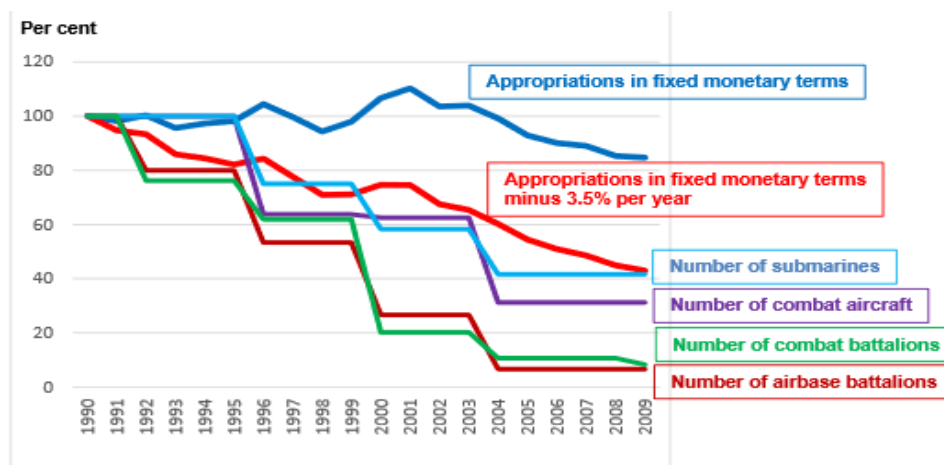
# Post-Cold War Era: Strategic Timeout and Paradigm Shifts

As for the rest of Europe, the end of the Cold War represented a major turning-point for Sweden and its armed forces: Sweden found itself with armed forces that were intended to prevent and fight a foreign invasion that had now become very unlikely. The slogan *smalare, men vassare* – leaner, but sharper – was soon to become the order of the day. The official reading of the situation at the regional level was downright optimistic, notably thanks to both EU and NATO enlargement, while Russia was considered to be too weak to represent a threat for at least the decade to come. From the mid-1990s onward, therefore, the general assumption was that there was no imminent threat to Swedish national territory. Sweden decided to make use of that “strategic timeout” in order to rethink its Armed Forces’ structure and tasks. The economic crisis that severely hit the country during the same period obviously also played a role in this sharp decline in capabilities. From 2.6 % of GDP in 1990, defense spending fell to 1.2 % in 2012.

From the mid-1990s until 2009, numerous units were suppressed and budgets cut:

**Figure 1: Economy and capabilities**  
**Relative development 1990-2009, (1990=100)**

Organizational changes in selected units 1990-2009 compared with defense appropriations in fixed monetary terms and adjusted for annual depreciation of 3.5 %.



Source: Swedish Government, *International Defence Cooperation: Efficiency, Solidarity, Sovereignty, Report Fö2013*, Stockholm, October 2014, p. 21.

These reforms also resulted in the abandonment of the concept of an anti-invasion force (later on half-heartedly reintroduced) and the suspension of compulsory military service, and led to fundamental changes in organizational structures.

Today, the Swedish reform process has many critics. Changes initially intended to modernize Sweden's defense and cut costs resulted in the Armed Forces' complete reorganization, a change of purpose and, as critics argue, their quasi-abolishment and "collapse".<sup>11</sup> No single political party is to blame: Sweden was governed by a Social Democratic minority government from the end of the Cold War until 2006, when a conservative alliance won the elections. In October 2014, the Social Democrats returned to power, forming a minority government with the Green Party as junior partner.

### **Swedish Military Reform: From Anti-invasion Defense to Expeditionary Forces (with Partial Reversal)**

Sweden's approach to defense is officially built around the notion of *totalförsvaret*, "total defense", which implies that both military and civilian organizations and authorities are tasked to ensure Sweden's national defense. These organizations and authorities include the Armed Forces, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (*Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap*), the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), the Swedish Defence Materiel Administration (*Försvarets materielverk*), and the Swedish National Defence College, renamed the Swedish Defence University in early 2015, as well as the rescue services, the police and the healthcare services. The Armed Forces include the Home Guard (*Hemvärnet*), composed of contracted volunteers who train a couple of days per year.<sup>12</sup> Although conscription was suspended in 2010, since 1995 all Swedish nationals aged 16 to 70 are obliged to serve in the event of the alert being raised, under the Total Defense Service Act.<sup>13</sup>

The general guidelines for defense are set forth by the Swedish parliament (*Riksdag*), based on the proposals the government makes in a bill outlining the national defense system's structure and development for the 10 to 15 years to come. These bills are adopted about every four years (1996, 2000, 2004, 2009 and 2015), and thus mark the occasions for a general review of Swedish defense policy. They are based on reports by the Armed Forces and all other authorities involved in the country's "total defense", as well as the Defence Commission (*Försvarsberedningen* in

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<sup>11</sup> To cite just two examples: for an academic study of the matter, see Wilhem Agrell's *Fredens illusioner: det svenska nationella försvarets nedgång och fall*, Stockholm, Atlantis, 2011 ("The illusions of peace: the Swedish national defense's decline and fall"); for criticism from within the Armed Forces, see the renowned blogger "Wiseman's" (aka JAS-pilot Carl Berqvist, whose identity was uncovered in December 2013) blog "Wiseman's Wisdoms", available at: <http://wisemans-wisdoms.blogspot.se/>.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the Home Guard, see [www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/our-organisation/our-forces/the-home-guard-with-the-national-security-forces/](http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/our-organisation/our-forces/the-home-guard-with-the-national-security-forces/).

<sup>13</sup> "Lag (1994:1809) om totalförsvarsplikt", available at: [www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Lagar/Svenskforfattningssamling/Lag-19941809-om-totalforsva\\_sfs-1994-1809/](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Lagar/Svenskforfattningssamling/Lag-19941809-om-totalforsva_sfs-1994-1809/).

Swedish, not to be confounded with the parliament's Committee on Defence). The latter is tasked to analyze the strategic environment and put forward detailed proposals for the Armed Forces' development. Its members represent all the parties in parliament; its findings are more of a political compromise than the equivalent of a national security strategy.<sup>14</sup> After "dialog among all relevant actors", the government then submits its bill to the *Riksdag*.

The 1996 defense bill marked the first step toward abandoning the anti-invasion defense posture, and then reorienting the Armed Forces toward expeditionary use. Compulsory military service still existed, and the "problem" of too many personnel was in part "solved" by reducing preparedness. It is its follow-up, the 2000 defense bill, that truly inaugurated Sweden's strategic timeout. The security environment analysis was based on the postulate that the risk of invasion was "unrealistic" for the ten years to come.<sup>15</sup> "Asserting territorial integrity" was now considered sufficient.<sup>16</sup> Sweden was said to need armed forces able to deal with smaller incidents, and especially crisis management abroad. Mobilization time was increased; it would now take up to twelve months to mobilize certain units. With its focus on "adaptation", the 2000 defense bill hence represents the true beginnings of the reform process, which also implied considerable dismantling of existing infrastructure and capabilities.

With the 2004 bill,<sup>17</sup> the paradigm shift was almost completed. Reform – now labeled *ominriktning* or "reorientation" – continued. One of the underlying Defence Commission reports postulated that "[t]he concrete objective for the Armed Forces' activities in the short and medium term is to create usable and available expeditionary forces".<sup>18</sup> Territorial defense was in essence abolished, and operations such as SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be the benchmark. They would be carried out by professional staff units specifically dedicated to the task. Conscription was maintained, but it increasingly required professional personnel. As far as more conventional threats – i.e. an armed attack on the nation – were concerned, the 2004 bill foresaw that, if the general situation were to deteriorate, the *Riksdag* and the government would take decisions to allow the Armed Forces to develop capabilities in order to respond to larger-scale military operations that threatened Sweden's peace and independence.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sweden is currently also drafting a national security strategy. It is still unclear what its content will be, or how it will relate to the Defence Commission's work.

<sup>15</sup> See Swedish Defence Commission, *Europas säkerhet – Sveriges försvar, Report Ds*, 1999:55, Stockholm, September 1999, p. 59, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/da710886af2749179621a0bfc4bd28bf/europas-sakerhet---sveriges-forsvar](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/da710886af2749179621a0bfc4bd28bf/europas-sakerhet---sveriges-forsvar).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> Swedish government, *Vårt framtida försvar – försvarspolitisk inriktning 2005-2007*, Prop. 2004/05:5, Stockholm, September 2004, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/6a2fe3ec956f4f65983e507614adec32/propositio-n-2004055---vart-framtida-forsvar](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/6a2fe3ec956f4f65983e507614adec32/propositio-n-2004055---vart-framtida-forsvar).

<sup>18</sup> See Swedish Defence Commission, *Försvar för en ny tid, Report*, 2004:30, Stockholm, June 2004, p. 17, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/1c736224da554f5097586993a3b4fa00/forsvar-for-en-ny-tid](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/1c736224da554f5097586993a3b4fa00/forsvar-for-en-ny-tid).

<sup>19</sup> Swedish Government, *Vårt framtida försvar, op. cit.*, p. 34. As critics would argue, the Persson government hence deliberately took the decision to leave the

This bill resulted in considerable cuts in terms of both funding and units, while territorial organization in military districts (reintroduced in 2013) and defense planning for scenarios in which the country is attacked were abolished. Operational territorial defense considerations no longer mattered in military basing policy. One of the results was that the island of Gotland was left with 14 tanks in a depot but no permanent military personnel beyond the Home Guard.

International operations, and in particular those carried out under the EU flag, therefore provided the remaining units with a *raison d'être*. As a high-ranking officer explained in hindsight, “[T]hat’s when, I think, most unit commanders and even the defense inspectors felt the need to demonstrate that they were part of the expeditionary forces. That meant that all units needed to demonstrate that they could be deployed abroad. One indicator for how strange this became was when they sent down an amphibious company to Chad, after they were retrained as tank gunners so that it would fit. But it is explicable, since that was a way to survive. This meant that national defense was put aside.”<sup>20</sup>

The 2008 defense bill was delayed due to the Georgian War, when Sweden – and its Western partners – first needed to process the events in the Caucasus and the possibility of Russia re-emerging as a revisionist power in its neighborhood. It eventually materialized as the 2009 defense bill, with the headline “A deployable defense”.<sup>21</sup> Last-minute changes were introduced in response to the war. Initially planned shutdowns of certain units were retracted, and territorial defense was suddenly brought back in – yet without any changes in the Armed Forces’ organizational structures, then tailored for crisis-management operations abroad. With the bill, Sweden gave up on the idea of specific expeditionary units; all Swedish Armed Forces were now supposed to be prepared for both crisis-management operations abroad and territorial defense at home by 2019. They were to be deployable within one week as well as able to sustain longer missions, with, as was subsequently specified, about four missions ongoing simultaneously, with 2,000 personnel actively serving in operations abroad and at home (while, periodically, contributing to the Nordic Battlegroup). In spite of looming new threats, equipment cuts were to continue: air defense, heavy tanks and the number of jet fighters were to be drastically reduced. It is also with this bill that Sweden finally abandoned conscription. The new organizational framework was meant to be implemented by 2014. However, because of too many shortcomings, it is still not in place.

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Swedish Armed Forces unable to defend the country in the here and now, given that acquiring the capabilities to do so would first require decisions to be taken.

<sup>20</sup> Johan Kihl, quoted in Fredrik Eriksson (ed.), *Förnyelse eller förfall? Svenska försvaret efter kalla krigets slut*, Huddinge, Samtidshistoriska institutet, 2013, transcript of a seminar held at Södertörn University College on January 16, 2012, p. 78, available at: <http://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:621002/-FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Mikael Holmström, “Turbulens försenar försvarsproposition”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, March 17, 2009, available at: [www.svd.se/turbulens-forsenar-forsvarsproposition](http://www.svd.se/turbulens-forsenar-forsvarsproposition).



### ***Economically Driven Processes, Severe Problems with Outcomes***

As many observers agree, the above developments were primarily economically driven, relegating security considerations to secondary relevance. As one of the politicians involved describes it in hindsight, the whole process was a matter of adjusting reality to budgetary frameworks rather than *vice versa*: “I’d claim that any discussion about the level of ambition, risk-taking in terms of security policy and defense policy requirements – that did not take place, instead, this was entirely pursued with economic concerns as its basis.”<sup>22</sup>

Budgetary pressure on military spending was not new in Sweden. A lack of funding had posed severe problems since the 1970s; not only the large conscript army but also the national defense industry became ever harder to sustain. The general tendency to take advantage of the so-called peace dividend from the mid-1990s onward was even strengthened in Sweden by the economic crisis of the 1990s. The 1996 bill thus already implied several billions of crowns simply missing in the budget as compared to the levels of ambition defined. The 1999 bill led to the disappearance of 14 billion SEK already allocated from the defense budget. The then Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces, General Owe Wiktorin, protested in drastic words.<sup>23</sup> Already in the 2000 planning, there was not enough money for training and exercise. As cuts continued with the 2004 act, the Armed Forces became more vocal in their warnings that this would make it impossible for them to defend the country. They were ignored.

Despite initial hopes to the contrary, things hardly changed after the conservatives won the 2006 elections. The defense department was again outmaneuvered by a minister of finance who announced in mid-2007 that he intended to reduce defense spending by 10% until 2010 – new cuts that came on top of previously agreed ones. When still further cuts were requested, Defense Minister Mikael Odenberg resigned in protest and accused the government of reducing defense spending without having defined the Armed Forces’ mission.<sup>24</sup>

Needless to say, this string of decisions and their consequences have been widely criticized, at first only within defense circles, but later on also among the general public. Not only was the budget shrinking, but the fact that suppressing units also had its own cost had been widely underestimated. In fact, simply cutting units is not enough as all the costs related to personnel and real estate will not disappear overnight. The Armed Forces’ structural lack of funding thus not only prevented new acquisitions, it even hampered the preservation of existing capabilities. In early 2013, then Supreme Commander Sverker Göranson made the

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<sup>22</sup> Anders Svärd is cited in Fredrik Eriksson, “Svenska försvaret efter kalla krigets slut”, *Samtidshistoriska frågor* 25, Huddinge, Södertörns högskola, 2012, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Leif-Åke Josefsson, “ÖB tigger om att få sparken”, *Aftonbladet*, January 25, 1999, available at: [www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/9901/25/ob.html](http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/9901/25/ob.html).

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Simon Andrén, “Försvarsministern avgår”, *Expressen*, September 5, 2007, available at: [www.expressen.se/nyheter/forsvarsministern-avgar/](http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/forsvarsministern-avgar/).

headlines when he explained that Sweden would only be able to defend itself for one week and in only one area<sup>25</sup> – that is, once the reform is fully implemented. That the situation is not sustainable overall became more or less official later in 2013 and again in 2014. In a report on “The Swedish Armed Forces’ capability for sustained missions”, the Swedish National Audit Office concluded that the latter were unable to fulfill defined requirements. The report’s findings were indeed rather devastating, as they emphasized the Armed Forces’ shortage of funding, personnel and equipment.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mikael Holmström, “Försvar med tidsgräns”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, December 30, 2012, available at: [www.svd.se/forsvar-med-tidsgrans\\_7789308](http://www.svd.se/forsvar-med-tidsgrans_7789308); Mikael Holmström, “Bara ett område kan försvaras”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, January 26, 2013, available at: [www.svd.se/bara-ett-omrade-kan-forsvaras](http://www.svd.se/bara-ett-omrade-kan-forsvaras).

<sup>26</sup> See Riksrevisionen, *Försvarsmaktens omställning*, RiR 2014:4, Stockholm, March 3, 2014, available at: [http://www.riksrevisionen.se/PageFiles/18998/RiR\\_2014\\_4\\_F%C3%B6rsvarets%20omst%C3%A4llning\\_Anpassade.pdf](http://www.riksrevisionen.se/PageFiles/18998/RiR_2014_4_F%C3%B6rsvarets%20omst%C3%A4llning_Anpassade.pdf); Riksrevisionen, *Försvarsmaktens förmåga till uthålliga insatser*, RiR 2013:22, Stockholm, December 9, 2013, available at: [www.riksrevisionen.se/PageFiles/18617/RiR\\_22\\_F%C3%B6rsvaret\\_Anpassad.pdf](http://www.riksrevisionen.se/PageFiles/18617/RiR_22_F%C3%B6rsvaret_Anpassad.pdf), and Riksrevisionen, *Ekonomiska förutsättningar för en fortsatt omställning av försvaret*, RiR 2014:7, Stockholm, March 18, 2014, available at: [www.riksrevisionen.se/PageFiles/19478/RiR\\_2014-7\\_F%C3%B6rsvarets\\_ekonomi\\_Anpassad.pdf](http://www.riksrevisionen.se/PageFiles/19478/RiR_2014-7_F%C3%B6rsvarets_ekonomi_Anpassad.pdf). The same message is unequivocally expressed in Peter Nordlund, Peter Bäckström, Karsten Bergdahl, Janne Åkerström, “Försvarsmaktens ekonomiska förutsättningar: Anslagstilldelning, kostnadsutveckling och priskompensation”, *FOI report*, FOI-R--3901—SE, Stockholm, March 2014, available at: [www.foi.se/Report-Files/foir\\_3901.pdf](http://www.foi.se/Report-Files/foir_3901.pdf).

# An Evolving Security Environment

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For more than two decades, Swedish defense planning rested on the premise that no direct threat was imminent. The Swedish security analysis consequently tended to focus on threats such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, or environmental risks, explicitly based on a wider notion of security as became popular in the 1990s in both academia and beyond. The Defense Commission nevertheless underlined several times that Russia's behavior was to be watched very carefully. In fact, it even defined a "litmus test" for Russia's foreign policy choices in May 2007: "As far as foreign policy is concerned, Russia's acts toward countries that are former members of the Soviet Union will be a litmus test for the path Russia chooses. Russia's relation with and acts toward these countries during the years to come will define our view of Russia."<sup>27</sup>

When the Georgian War broke out in August 2008, this litmus test proved to be highly relevant. However, conclusions drawn from it were minimal. Territorial defense was, admittedly, reintroduced as a task for Sweden's Armed Forces in 2009, and planning for national defense resumed in 2010 when the so-called timeout was considered to be over. To describe the phenomenon, defense analyst Johan Wiktorin coined the term "snooze policy"; after some commotion, Swedish defense policy went back to sleep. To be fair, Sweden is no exception in that respect; the Georgian War had little effect on general Western approaches to Russia. It thus took the events unfolding in Ukraine from the *Maidan* demonstrations onward for Sweden to reassess the Russian threat.

## **Russia Is Back**

Russia's impact on Sweden's security environment is undeniable. Russian incursions into Swedish territory are numerous (as for other countries around the Baltic Sea), and not only since the annexation of Crimea. Repeated smaller and bigger incidents such as the "Russian Easter" in March 2013 indeed give rise to doubts about Moscow's intentions: two Tu-22M3 *Backfire* bombers accompanied by four SU-27 *Flanker* fighter jets entered Swedish airspace to simulate attacks on two targets in southern Sweden and close to Stockholm. Having no planes and pilots ready, the Swedes could only watch the incident on their radar screens while two

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<sup>27</sup> Swedish Defence Commission, *Säkerhet i samverkan: Försvarsberedningens omvärldsanalys*, Report Ds2007:46, Stockholm, December 2007, p. 36, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/a4f990ca682b4badb1781124cef5240b/sakerhet-i-samverkan-ds-200746](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/a4f990ca682b4badb1781124cef5240b/sakerhet-i-samverkan-ds-200746).

Danish F-16s scrambled from Lithuania.<sup>28</sup> In October 2014, many Swedes had a Cold War *déjà-vu* when (as Defense Minister Hultqvist since confirmed) a foreign submarine was sighted in the archipelago off Stockholm's coast, which resulted in an unsuccessful submarine hunt with live media coverage. Other indicators of a deteriorating security environment include a Russian political scientist suggesting on Swedish television to "neutralize" Gotland in order to "ease tensions" around the Baltic Sea<sup>29</sup> – or simply outright Russian warnings against Sweden's joining NATO. Ambassador Viktor Tatarintsev declared in an interview with *Dagens Nyheter* in June 2015 that there was "no way to guarantee that Russia has no plans to attack Sweden" and said about Swedish NATO membership:

[...] if [Swedish membership] happens, there will be countermeasures. Putin said that in this case, this will have consequences; Russia will be forced to adopt countermeasures at the military level and reorient our forces and missiles. Any country joining NATO must be aware of the risks it is exposing itself to.<sup>30</sup>

### ***The Official Take on Sweden's Security Environment***

Occurrences like these and, of course, the situation in Ukraine led the Defense Commission and the Swedish government to reassess their analyses of a deteriorating security environment.<sup>31</sup> The shift in perception came fast: in 2013, the Defense Commission stated that Europeans were living through the most secure and peaceful times ever. In its 2014 defense policy report, however, it concluded that "the security environment in Europe has [...] changed as a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine", which it qualified as the biggest threat against the European security order since its establishment.<sup>32</sup> It assumed that the Russian leadership was seeking great-power status, including by trying to exploit the presence of ethnically Russian populations in its "near abroad" for its own interests. This would, the Defense Commission noted, be the "central guiding star" for Russian foreign policy under the present leadership.<sup>33</sup> The

<sup>28</sup> Mikael Holmström, "Ryskt flyg övade anfall mot Sverige", *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 22, 2013, available at: [www.svd.se/ryskt-flyg-ovade-anfall-mot-sverige-8108894](http://www.svd.se/ryskt-flyg-ovade-anfall-mot-sverige-8108894).

<sup>29</sup> See the video at: [www.tv4.se/nyheterna/klipp/rysk-expert-h%C3%A5ll-gotland-neutralt-3181567](http://www.tv4.se/nyheterna/klipp/rysk-expert-h%C3%A5ll-gotland-neutralt-3181567). It is worth noting that political scientist Victor Kremenyuk is deputy director of the Russian FSB's think tank.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Winiarski, "Rysslands ambassador: Vi har gjort allt för att starta en dialog", *Dagens Nyheter*, June 18, 2015, available at: [www.dn.se/nyheter/-sverige/rysslands-ambassador-vi-har-gjort-allt-for-att-starta-en-dialog/](http://www.dn.se/nyheter/-sverige/rysslands-ambassador-vi-har-gjort-allt-for-att-starta-en-dialog/).

<sup>31</sup> See Swedish Defence Commission, *Vägval i en globaliserad värld*, Report Ds2013:33, Stockholm, May 31, 2013, p. 17, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/0783c292579948ec8d9fb1ba70eb056b/vagval-i-en-globaliserad-varld---ds-201333](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/0783c292579948ec8d9fb1ba70eb056b/vagval-i-en-globaliserad-varld---ds-201333), and Swedish Defence Commission, *Försvaret av Sverige: Starkare försvar för en osäker tid*, Report Ds2014:20, Stockholm, May 15, 2014, p. 14, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/-7f2ab5930a3c49c38f4ade73eca07475/forsvaret-av-sverige---starkare-forsvar-for-en-osaker-tid](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/-7f2ab5930a3c49c38f4ade73eca07475/forsvaret-av-sverige---starkare-forsvar-for-en-osaker-tid).

<sup>32</sup> Swedish Defense Commission, *Försvaret av Sverige*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

commission also concluded that “a country with great-power ambitions in Sweden’s neighborhood is a fact that we must consider even more. It has implications for our security environment”.<sup>34</sup> These implications included an erosion of trust in international norms, a weakened European security order, and the risk of destabilizing the Baltic Sea area.

In December 2014, the government decided to activate the Total Defense Service Act, which obliges all Swedish citizens between 16 and 70 to defend the country. In May 2015, first calls for mobilization exercises and training for reserve forces were sent out for fall of the same year.<sup>35</sup> Defense Minister Hultqvist also said in August 2015 that he could “imagine” the reintroduction of compulsory military service.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> See Swedish Government, *Försvarmakten har börjat kalla till repetition sutbildningarna*, Stockholm, May 29, 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/artiklar/-2015/05/forsvarsmakten-kallar-in/](http://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/-2015/05/forsvarsmakten-kallar-in/).

<sup>36</sup> See Olof Svensson, “Försvarsministern öppnar för att återinföra värnplikten”, *Aftonbladet*, August 6, 2015, available at: [www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article21219822.ab](http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article21219822.ab).



# The Military Status Quo: The Swedish Armed Forces Today

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The most recent defense bill was adopted in June 2015,<sup>37</sup> prepared under the pressure of events unfolding in Ukraine and in Sweden's neighborhood. After bumpy negotiations, the incoming red-green minority government led by Social Democrat Stefan Löfvén managed to secure consensus with three of the four conservative opposition parties. Swedish defense policy is to be refocused on the Baltic Sea area, and the Armed Forces' capabilities to counter an attack on Swedish territory are to be strengthened by increasing operative capabilities. At least on paper, the new decisions mark the return of territorial defense "for real" in Swedish policies. Indeed, this latest guidance document for Swedish security and defense policy determines that increasing battle units' operational war fighting capabilities as well as guaranteeing the overall total defense system's capabilities is the single most important task in 2016-2020.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, one commission is to look into the equipment challenge, while another is to work on personnel and recruiting issues. Finally, an expert was tasked to evaluate cooperation with other countries and organizations – meaning that the conservative opposition parties failed to impose an explicit examination of potential Swedish NATO membership.

## ***Increased Spending After Decades of Cuts***

The decisions taken during the spring of 2015 seem to reverse a trend. Already in June 2014, i.e. still under the former government, it was decided to increase defense spending by 7 billion SEK (about 750 million euros). The five parties then agreed on additional 10.2 billion SEK over the following five years, which in total equals an 11% increase:

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<sup>37</sup> Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitisk inriktning – Sveriges försvar 2016-2020*, Prop. 2014/15:109, Stockholm, June 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/forsvar/forsvarspolitisk-inriktning-2016-2020/](http://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/forsvar/forsvarspolitisk-inriktning-2016-2020/).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

**Table 1:**  
**Defense budget according to 2015 defense bill, in millions SEK<sup>39</sup>**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
<b>BASIC PLANNING</b>	42,031	43,087	43,881	46,026	47,576	222,601
<b>IN ADDITION</b>	1,324	1,900	2,200	2,320	2,500	10,244
<b>TOTAL</b>	43,355	44,987	44,081	48,346	50,076	232,845

Source: Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitisk inriktning – Sveriges försvar 2016-2020*, Prop. 2014/15:109, op. cit. available at:

[www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/forsvar/forsvarspolitisk-inriktning-2016-2020/](http://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/forsvar/forsvarspolitisk-inriktning-2016-2020/).

The additional financial resources are intended for a number of measures, such as improving the individual soldier's equipment, a battlegroup to be based on Gotland by 2018 (with a military presence there now becoming "a Swedish strategic interest"), and upgraded corvettes and air defense capabilities.<sup>40</sup>

### **Capabilities (On Paper)**

As of 2015, the Swedish armed forces have roughly 52,000 full-time employees, of whom about 20,000 are permanent military personnel, 21,200 are contracted Home Guard personnel, 5,200 civilian personnel, 9,900 contracted military personnel, and 550 "other categories" personnel.<sup>41</sup>

Swedish defense capabilities (along with civilian means) are intended to represent a "threshold" against armed attack by raising the calculated costs of an attack by potential opponents.<sup>42</sup> In the wake of the 2015 defense bill, the government adopted guidelines for the Armed Forces' structure and organization for the years 2016-2020.<sup>43</sup> Sweden's order-of-battle is to be composed of standing units with high readiness and permanent personnel deployable at home and abroad, as well as reserve units composed of contracted personnel essentially destined for operations in case of alert and Home Guard units for national defense that can be called in on the basis of the Total Defense Service Act. More precisely, the 2016-2020 defense planning foresees that

[t]he bulk of the land forces will be organized in two Brigades able to fight a high-intensity conflict against a qualified

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Swedish Armed Forces, *Försvarsmakten i siffror: Personalsiffror*, Stockholm, December 31, 2014, available at: [www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/information-och-fakta/forsvarsmakten-i-siffror/](http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/information-och-fakta/forsvarsmakten-i-siffror/). The fact that these various personnel categories add up to more than 52,000 may be explained by the presence of part-time personnel.

<sup>42</sup> Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitisk inriktning – Sveriges försvar 2016-2020*, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Swedish Ministry of Defence, *Inriktning för Försvarsmaktens verksamhet för åren 2016 till och med 2020*, Regeringsbeslut 7, Fö2015/00953/MFI, Stockholm, June 25, 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/3ece8-de584794a488899d32355229921/regeringsbeslut-inriktning-for-forsvarsmaktens-verksamhet-2016-2020.pdf](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/3ece8-de584794a488899d32355229921/regeringsbeslut-inriktning-for-forsvarsmaktens-verksamhet-2016-2020.pdf).



opponent. The land forces will be expanded with one Motorised Battalion, two Brigade Reconnaissance Companies and the Mechanised Battlegroup Gotland. The Light Infantry Battalion will be reorganized in order to be transportable by air. The land forces will primarily be manned by reserves complemented by personnel serving under the law of national service. To ensure sufficient availability in peace-time, two Mechanised Battalions and one Motorised Infantry Battalion will be standing units with a high number of professional personnel. The land forces will consist of two Brigade Headquarters, two Brigade Reconnaissance Companies, five Mechanised Battalions, two Motorised Battalions, one Light Infantry Battalion, one Mechanised Battlegroup Gotland, two Artillery Battalions, two Air Defence Battalions, two Engineer Battalions, One Ranger Battalion, one ISR Battalion, one Security Battalion, one MP Battalion, one Life Guards Battalion, one CBRN Company, one Heavy Transport Company and 40 Home Guard Battalions.<sup>44</sup>

As far as the Navy is concerned,

[t]he core of the naval units consists of seven corvettes, four submarines and seven mine-clearance vessels. [...] The naval forces will consist of two Surface Warfare Flotilla Staffs, two Corvette Squadrons, two Mine-clearance Squadrons, two Support Squadrons, one Mine-clearance Diver Squadron, and one Submarine Flotilla staff, one Submarine Squadron, one Amphibious Battalion, one Patrol Boat Company and one Naval Base.<sup>45</sup>

The Air Force, in turn, will

consist of four Air Wings with six Fighter Squadrons (JAS 39C/D), one Air Transport Squadron, one Air Combat Control and Air Surveillance Battalion and one Helicopter Wing. The peacetime fighter training establishment will be reorganised to be able to serve alongside the other fighter squadrons in case of war, bringing the number of fighter squadrons to six.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the Joint Forces will consist of

one Armed Forces Headquarters, four Regional Headquarters, one Communications Battalion, one Command and Control Battalion, one Electronic Warfare Battalion, one Armed Forces Logistics (FMLOG), two Logistics Battalions, one Technical Battalion, one Movement Control Company, two Medical

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<sup>44</sup> Swedish Government, *Sweden's Defence Policy 2016 to 2020*, Stockholm, June 2015, p. 9, available at: [www.government.se/globalassets/government/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/sweden\\_defence\\_policy\\_2016\\_to\\_2020](http://www.government.se/globalassets/government/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/sweden_defence_policy_2016_to_2020), equivalent to Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitik inriktning – Sveriges försvar 2016-2020*, *op. cit.*, section 6.3, pp. 71-85.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Hospital Companies, two Medical Support Companies, one Special Operations Group and 19 Depot Units.<sup>47</sup>

### ***And in Reality?***

As anywhere else, the realities of Sweden's Armed Forces are not necessarily on a par with the picture painted on paper. Decisions made in the past cause problems today, sometimes even severe problems. The 2015 increase in spending is thus certainly welcome at the Armed Forces' headquarters. Nevertheless, given the fact that earlier defense acts were structurally underfunded, the added billions will hardly help to truly increase capabilities. In fact, the Armed Forces argued that, to merely reach the objectives defined previously (in 2004 and 2009), additional 4 billion SEK were required per year.<sup>48</sup> As Supreme Commander Göranson therefore stated in front of the Riksdag's Committee on Defense in April 2015 (i.e. before the bill was formally adopted), the decisions taken cannot be considered more than a first step:

[...] the decisions as such do not solve all our problems. Both short-term and long-term challenges remain. It is certainly proper extra funding that is now proposed. But it is also true that we come from, in a Swedish context, a historically low starting point – 1.1 percent of GDP. That even places us after the other Nordic countries. Things should not be this way. The worrying starting point is the accumulated effect of a series of defense bills since the end of the Cold War. In a couple of years, we will face considerable and costly need for modernization as far as materiel is concerned.<sup>49</sup>

Structural problems with day-to-day business are evident and have now come to a broader public's attention, notably thanks to a TV documentary asking "What happened to the Armed Forces?" Sweden, for instance, currently owns 120 tanks, but has only the personnel to operate 42 at a time.<sup>50</sup> The country's air-defense equipment is gathered in Boden – over a day's driving (1,000 km) away from the key areas such as Stockholm or Gothenburg, and even farther from Gotland. As far as Archer artillery systems are concerned, official sources are quoted saying that "four is as correct or wrong as 24"<sup>51</sup> when asked how many Sweden had at its disposal. While the Army undeniably has the biggest problems, other branches have issues, too: the Navy formerly had helicopters that could be used in hunting submarines, but these were scrapped. The materiel

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> See Olle Nygårds, "Försvaret vill ha fyra miljarder extra", *Svenska Dagbladet*, January 23, 2015, available at: [www.svd.se/forsvaret-vill-ha-4-miljarder-extra](http://www.svd.se/forsvaret-vill-ha-4-miljarder-extra).

<sup>49</sup> Sverker Göranson, *Överbefälhavarens anförande i försvarsutskottet*, Stockholm, April 28, 2015, available at: [www.forsvarsmakten.se/siteassets/6-aktuellt/nyheter/2015/150428-ob-anforande-fou-28-april-2015.pdf](http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/siteassets/6-aktuellt/nyheter/2015/150428-ob-anforande-fou-28-april-2015.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Swedish public television (SVT) documentary, "Vad händer med försvaret?", broadcast April 16, 2015. In line with the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *The Military Balance*, vol. 115, 2015, p. 140, it seems fair to assume that the information refers to 120 *Leopard 2A5* main battle tanks.

<sup>51</sup> See Mikael Holmström, "Hur många kanoner har egentligen Sverige?", *Dagens Nyheter*, March 4, 2015, available at: [www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/mikael-holmstrom-hur-manga-kanoner-har-egentligen-sverige/](http://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/mikael-holmstrom-hur-manga-kanoner-har-egentligen-sverige/).

intended to replace them has been suffering from delays of at least ten years. Likewise, the Navy owns five state-of-the-art corvettes, yet could not afford to equip them with air-defense systems.<sup>52</sup> The only Swedish mini-submarine, *HMS Spiggen*, an essential asset in training for Russian incursion scenarios, was given away in 2011. On the Air Force's side, a recurring problem has been that countries buying *Gripen* planes could rent jets from the Swedish Air Force while waiting for their orders to be delivered. Incoming Supreme Commander Micael Bydén, previously chief of staff of the Air Force, has declared that he wants to end that practice.<sup>53</sup>

Although the Armed Forces have been rather successful at recruiting permanent personnel, they have done less well with respect to contracted personnel. Consequently, almost half of squad leaders, soldiers and sailors in order-of-battle units are called in under the law on compulsory military service that the government decided to activate in December 2014. The persons involved under this law are not permanently placed with their units at the current level of alert, but obliged to take part in exercises intended to increase readiness. This sort of personnel structure has obviously hampered the possibilities for training and exercise of entire units within the order of battle. As the 2015 defense bill concludes, problems with fulfilling the requirement of mobilization within one week persist.<sup>54</sup> The government has recently ordered a special report looking into military recruiting, intended to offer suggestions for future solutions by fall 2016.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> All these examples except the statement on the Archer Artillery Systems, are cited in "Vad hände med försvaret?", *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> "Nya ÖB vill inte låna ut fler Jas", *Svenska Dagbladet*, September 16, 2015, available at: [www.svd.se/nya-ob-vill-inte-lana-ut-fler-jas](http://www.svd.se/nya-ob-vill-inte-lana-ut-fler-jas).

<sup>54</sup> Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitisk inriktning – Sveriges försvar 2016-2020*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>55</sup> Swedish Government, *Annika Nordgren Christensen utredare för personalförsörjningen*, Stockholm, October 1, 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2015/10/annika-nordgren-christensen-utredare-for-personalforsorjningen/](http://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2015/10/annika-nordgren-christensen-utredare-for-personalforsorjningen/).



# Sweden's Position within the European Security Architecture

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Although officially non-aligned, Sweden has in the past decades sought to cooperate with a number of other nations and organizations. The Swedish Armed Forces have thus participated in all EU crisis-management operations so far, as well as in many NATO-led operations. Swedish engagement always had the clear objective of achieving the highest degree of interoperability possible. In political terms, this is justified by the need to build security and stability with other countries and organizations. Arguments for closer cooperation with NATO thus also include the claim that it will be beneficial for any sort of cooperation, including bilateral.

## ***An Active Partner in International Defense Cooperation***

Sweden has participated in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program since its launch in 1994 as one of the most active partner countries, as its contributions to, for example, KFOR in Kosovo, ISAF in Afghanistan and Operation Unified Protector in Libya illustrate.<sup>56</sup> More recently, participation in these missions has also become an alternative to taking part in EU operations as the Union's presence as a military actor is diminishing on the global scene. Sweden is today a member of over 150 NATO committees. Cooperation with the Alliance is highly valued in Sweden; the Defense Commission considers it "vital" for the development of the Armed Forces.<sup>57</sup> For years now, Sweden has been more interoperable with NATO than some member-states. It has participated in PfP's Planning and Review Process (PARP) since 1995, as well as in numerous trainings and exercises, including on Swedish territory. In 1996, Sweden signed the PfP Status Of Forces Agreement. At the Alliance's Wales 2014 summit, the former conservative government signed an Enhanced Opportunities Partnership agreement (alongside Finland, Australia, Jordan and Georgia), in addition to measures adopted within the PfP framework. Under this new "special relationship" status that was created at the initiative of the United States, Sweden will be able to continue close à la carte cooperation with NATO on matters such as intelligence-sharing and participation in exercise

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<sup>56</sup> The latest official Swedish report on cooperation between Sweden and NATO dates from 2009: Swedish Government, *Sveriges samarbete med Nato inom Euroatlantiska partnerskapsrådet (EAPC), Partnerskap för fred (PFF) och krishanteringsinsatser*, Skr. 2008/09:137, Stockholm, May 2009, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/3474415070f748dfa7d5e4153a9ee02a/sveriges-samarbete-med-nato-inom-euroatlantiska-partnerskapsradet-eapr-partnerskap-for-fred-pff-och-krishanteringsinsatser](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/3474415070f748dfa7d5e4153a9ee02a/sveriges-samarbete-med-nato-inom-euroatlantiska-partnerskapsradet-eapr-partnerskap-for-fred-pff-och-krishanteringsinsatser).

<sup>57</sup> Swedish Defense Commission, *Vägval i en globaliserad värld*, op. cit., pp. 218-9.

planning or exercises with high-readiness forces.<sup>58</sup> In 2015, Sweden took part in several major NATO exercises (Arctic Challenge Exercise and Baltops) as well as in Trident Juncture 2015, NATO's biggest exercise since 2002.

At the Wales Summit, the then Swedish Supreme Commander (once again alongside his Finnish counterpart) also signed the Memorandum of Understanding for a Host Nation Support Agreement, which had been prepared since 2010 and is due to enter into force in 2016 after ratification by parliament. This framework agreement will serve as a basis for planning for future operations, covering the full range of peacetime exercises, crisis management and wartime military operations in Sweden or its neighborhood. However, the agreement does not confer on NATO any right to operate on or from Swedish territory without Stockholm's formal invitation.

NATO's increased interest in Sweden and the Nordic countries also translates into concrete measures beyond the above-mentioned agreement. The Alliance thus is currently about to build a "northern family", which held its inaugural Northern Headquarters' Conference at Joint Force Command Brunssum (Netherlands) in March 2015.<sup>59</sup> In June, Brunssum's Commander General Hans-Lothar Domröse also visited Sweden and met with then Supreme Commander Sverker Göranson.

As noted above, Sweden has participated in all EU operations since the Union became engaged in crisis management. Even more important for Sweden was, however, the EU's 2004 decision to set up a rapid reaction force, inter alia based on EU battlegroups. Sweden became the framework nation of the first Nordic Battlegroup (NBG) in 2008, with Finland, Norway, Estonia and Ireland as contributors. A second NBG was set up in 2011, and a third in the spring of 2015, then including all three Baltic countries. Swedish General Håkon Syrén chaired the EU Military Committee from 2009 to 2011.

Sweden has also worked with Norway, Denmark and Finland within the NORDEFECO (NORdic DEFense COoperation) framework since its inception in 2009, and which it currently chairs. In 2013, the Swedish Armed Forces were involved in more than 130 projects in different areas, including training, the exchange of information and the development of crisis management capabilities. While cooperation on defense equipment has so far "not been one of the most successful parts of Nordic cooperation", exercises and training have been of special relevance; for example, "[a]lmost every week, the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish air forces engage in joint exercises in the North, operating out of the airbases

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<sup>58</sup> See Mikael Holmström, "Nato ger Sverige "guldkort", *Svenska Dagbladet*, September 2, 2014, available at: [www.svd.se/annu-ett-beslut-om-fordjupat-samarbete-mellan-nato-och-sverige](http://www.svd.se/annu-ett-beslut-om-fordjupat-samarbete-mellan-nato-och-sverige).

<sup>59</sup> See NATO, *First Northern Headquarters' Conference held at JFC Brunssum on March 18-19, 2015*, available at: [www.jfcbnato.int/page7715057/first-northern-headquarters-conference-held-at-jfc-brunssum.aspx](http://www.jfcbnato.int/page7715057/first-northern-headquarters-conference-held-at-jfc-brunssum.aspx).

in Bodø, Luleå and Rovaniemi”.<sup>60</sup> Although NORDEFECO follows the new trend for unilateralism, it must be noted that “[m]utual cooperation among the Nordic countries is felt by all participants to be a complement to relations outside the Nordic region. No matter what the political rhetoric may be, such non-Nordic relations come first.” This also applies for Sweden, although “it probably requires a special effort, not least for Swedes, to understand that the historic closeness and cultural likeness that unite the Nordic countries in so many ways do not apply in the area of security policy, because of the issue of alliance membership”.<sup>61</sup>

### **NATO's Return to Article 5 Scenarios**

Two trends currently converge within NATO. The re-emergence of a Russian threat has again brought territorial defense to the fore. At the same time, the end of ISAF in Afghanistan marks the end of large-scale out-of-area crisis-management operations for the foreseeable future. Exercises will increasingly focus on Article 5 scenarios, and partner countries' role is no longer self-evident. Earlier close cooperation or the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership program are unlikely to change this, not least given pressure from within the Alliance not to blur the lines between members and non-members. Both developments already imply a return to a sharper distinction between members and non-members: “In important respects, the dividing line between allies and non-allies has become clearer.”<sup>62</sup> Also, within NORDEFECO, Sweden's (and Finland's) military non-alignment already turned out to be problematic: for example, Sweden and Finland declared their willingness to participate in Iceland's air policing in 2014, but this was only open to Allies (resulting in Sweden and Finland merely participating in the NATO-led Iceland Air Meet 2014 exercise).<sup>63</sup> Such problems were already noted in the 2014 Defense Commission report, which also referred to the inherent potential:

It remains to be seen what the consequences will be for the continued development of NATO's partnerships with countries like Sweden. It can, on the one hand, limit Sweden's possibilities for insight and influence. On the other hand, NATO's focus on Sweden's neighborhood can increase, which is likely to make cooperation with Sweden interesting for NATO.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Hultqvist Doctrine's Second Pillar: Anything Short of Collective Defense**

Against that backdrop, the Swedish strategy is currently what came to be labeled the “Hultqvist doctrine” in the Swedish media: boosting capabilities and seeking international cooperation. Collective defense not being on the

<sup>60</sup> Swedish Government, *International Defence Cooperation: Efficiency, Solidarity, Sovereignty*, Report Fö2013:B, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>63</sup> See Annex 3 of the above-quoted report, available in Swedish only: Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitiskt samarbete. Effektivitet, solidaritet, suveränitet*, Bilaga 3, pp. 99 and 101.

<sup>64</sup> Swedish Defense Commission, *Försvaret av Sverige*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

agenda, Stockholm is seeking to deepen bilateral cooperation. Besides NATO and the measures described above, this especially concerns Finland as the other non-aligned state in the region, but also the United States. Moreover, cooperation with other partners is also to be deepened. Most recently, Sweden signed a memorandum of understanding with Poland.<sup>65</sup>

As official sources state on many occasions, Swedish-Finnish defense cooperation is of primary importance for Stockholm. The two defense state secretaries signed a joint declaration to that effect in May 2015,<sup>66</sup> pledging to implement recommendations and proposals made in a report on the same matter published earlier that year.<sup>67</sup> “National guidance from the respective Ministries and Governments” is not to be “substituted”, meaning that cooperation will remain exclusively intergovernmental. Identified areas include secure communications with “immediate priority”, alternative landing bases and mutual use of naval base infrastructure, air surveillance cooperation, and further development of combined units and continued exercise cooperation. Moreover, in April 2015, the two countries announced that they were looking into the potential for cooperation beyond peacetime in the event of conflict. In October 2015, Sweden and Finland announced the creation of a joint Naval Task Force.<sup>68</sup> Swedish Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist justified such measures by the increasing tensions in the Baltic Sea region, stating that “[t]his is a step to take for two militarily non-aligned countries. This implies that the two armed forces will start looking into this type of scenarios. There are no a priori obligations. But should it happen, then the respective government will have to decide upon this when the situation arises.”<sup>69</sup> In that sense, cooperation with Helsinki thus goes farthest, given that it includes the option of working together “beyond peacetime”.

The United States, in turn, continues to be the main guarantor of security in the region, not least from a Baltic perspective. A number of Swedish-American meetings took place during the summer of 2015, including talks between Defense Minister Hultqvist and US Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert O. Work in Washington in May to discuss

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<sup>65</sup> Swedish Ministry of Defence, *Sverige och Polen undertecknade ett ramavtal om samarbete på försvarsområdet*, Stockholm, September 14, 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2015/09/sverige-och-polen-undertecknade-ramavtal-om-samarbete-pa-forsvarsområdet/](http://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2015/09/sverige-och-polen-undertecknade-ramavtal-om-samarbete-pa-forsvarsområdet/).

<sup>66</sup> Finnish Ministry of Defence, Swedish Ministry of Defense, *Joint Statement Regarding Deepened Defence Cooperation between Sweden and Finland*, Helsinki, May 22, 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/globalassets/regeringen/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/2015-05-22-joint-statement---signed.pdf](http://www.regeringen.se/globalassets/regeringen/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/2015-05-22-joint-statement---signed.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Swedish Government, Finnish Government, *Final reports on deepened defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden*, Stockholm, January 30, 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/globalassets/regeringen/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/final-reports-on-deepened-defence-cooperation-between-finland-och-sweden.pdf](http://www.regeringen.se/globalassets/regeringen/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/final-reports-on-deepened-defence-cooperation-between-finland-och-sweden.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> Swedish Ministry of Defence, *Sverige och Finland ska utveckla gemensam marin stridsgrupp*, Stockholm, October 29, 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2015/10/sverige-och-finland-ska-utveckla-gemensam-marin-stridsgrupp/](http://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2015/10/sverige-och-finland-ska-utveckla-gemensam-marin-stridsgrupp/).

<sup>69</sup> Hasse Svens, Örjan Magnusson, “Sverige fördjupar militära samarbetet med Finland”, SVT, April 6, 2015, available at: [www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/svenskt-finskt-militarsamarbete-inte-bara-i-fred](http://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/svenskt-finskt-militarsamarbete-inte-bara-i-fred).



security matters in the Nordic Baltic Region. In late August, Hultqvist made unequivocally clear in a newspaper op-ed that Washington is the power to bet on – in light of Russia's foreign policy: “the government believes that the transatlantic link is decisive for Europe's security and ought to be strengthened. Sweden's bilateral cooperation with the US is important and ought to be deepened. This is about interoperability, exercises and training, materiel, research and development as well as international operations.”<sup>70</sup>

Overall, Hultqvist's approach may be described as a workaround for the option currently not at hand: full-fledged NATO membership. None of these international cooperation formats has anything to do with collective defense. Despite close cooperation with NATO, this is indeed the red line that Sweden has so far not been willing to cross, even though the price of this is having no protection under Article 5, (at least officially), no insight into NATO's contingency planning for the Baltics, and no participation in the Alliance's defense planning.

Stockholm nevertheless sees itself as bound by the EU solidarity clause included in the Lisbon Treaty, as well as by a unilateral “declaration of solidarity” issued in 2009 to EU member states as well as Norway and Iceland:

Sweden does not participate in any military alliances. However, Sweden will not remain passive if another EU member state or Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack. The government expects that these countries act in the same way if Sweden were to be affected. Sweden must therefore have the capability to offer and receive military support.<sup>71</sup>

Paradoxically, while this unilateral declaration is widely seen as a big step in Sweden, it seems very little known abroad. And where it is known, it is not necessarily taken seriously. The declaration, however, has a domestic role to play. It opens up increased cooperation and serves to politically justify, for example, the Host Nation Support Agreement with NATO in 2014, since Sweden needs to be able to “offer and receive military help”.

Unsurprisingly, the Swedish approach has given rise to more or less severe criticism. It is noteworthy that, in return, no other country has issued a declaration of solidarity similar to the Swedish one. Comments can occasionally be somewhat wry. As, for instance, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves noted, Sweden never specified the actual meaning of the notion of solidarity, adding: “You could send 10,000 bottles of olive oil and meet the demands of solidarity”.<sup>72</sup> Ilves had gone further earlier, when

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<sup>70</sup> Peter Hultqvist, “Sveriges militära samarbete med USA måste fördjupas”, *Dagens Nyheter*, August 31, 2015, available at: [www.dn.se/debatt/sveriges-militara-samarbete-med-usa-maste-fordjupas/](http://www.dn.se/debatt/sveriges-militara-samarbete-med-usa-maste-fordjupas/).

<sup>71</sup> This “declaration” is in fact included in the 2009 defense bill: Swedish Government, *Ett användbart försvar*, Prop. 2008/09:140, Stockholm, March 19, 2009, p. 29, available at: [www.regeringen.se/contentassets/1236f9bd880b495f8a9dd94ce1cb71de/ett-anvandbart-forsvar-prop-200809140](http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/1236f9bd880b495f8a9dd94ce1cb71de/ett-anvandbart-forsvar-prop-200809140).

<sup>72</sup> For Ilves' statement, see SVT, “Vad hände med försvaret?”, *op. cit.*

he claimed that Sweden was a “security hole”,<sup>73</sup> while in the 2014 Bertelman report, a “centrally placed Baltic politician” was attributed with the assessment that “[y]our solidarity is a threat to our security”.<sup>74</sup> It almost goes without saying that, regardless of how openly the various governments express themselves, all of Sweden’s Baltic neighbors as well as Poland would like to see the country join the Alliance.

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<sup>73</sup> See Mikael Holmström, “Sverige pekas ut som säkerhetshål”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, May 10, 2014, available at: [www.svd.se/sverige-pekas-ut-som-sakerhetshal](http://www.svd.se/sverige-pekas-ut-som-sakerhetshal).

<sup>74</sup> Swedish Government, *International Defence Cooperation*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

# NATO Membership Ahead?

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Whether Sweden should join the Atlantic Alliance or remain “neutral” is an issue that is anything but new to the Swedish debate. It has in fact been discreetly lingering around for decades, albeit increasing in urgency since Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Against that background, where does the Swedish debate on non-alignment stand? Politically, the conservative Moderaterna (and Carl Bildt in particular) and especially the Liberal Party have been in favor of Sweden joining the Alliance, while the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Greens have been against. The two smaller conservative opposition parties – the Christian Democrats and the (formerly) agrarian Centerpartiet – recently also adopted a pro-NATO stance, the latter breaking with an almost centennial tradition of support for neutrality. That said, the coalition of conservative parties took no steps toward that objective while they were in power from 2006 to 2014. The Reinfeldt government, however, did dilute the notion of non-alignment by introducing the above-quoted declaration of solidarity.

Contrary to beliefs sometimes held elsewhere, Swedish NATO membership is by no means imminent. The reasons are manifold, although developments in Sweden’s security environment would suggest that a country more or less officially unable to defend itself for more than a week would seek allies. But the ongoing debate is not determined by external factors only. At the domestic level, security policy is an intricate matter. Decades of pro-neutrality rhetoric have left the general public deeply attached to non-alignment.<sup>75</sup>

## ***Deep Popular Attachment to Non-alignment***

Before the Ukraine crisis, NATO membership was a non-issue beyond the very confined circles interested in security affairs. Overall, Swedes always rejected their country’s joining the Alliance. In 2000, for instance, only 24% of respondents in an opinion poll thought that Sweden should apply for membership, while 62% preferred to remain non-aligned. Another poll from the same year resulted in 29% for NATO-membership and 48% against.<sup>76</sup> During the following years, figures remained around the same level. A slight increase can be observed within the context of the Ukraine crisis in various opinion polls. Yet, an overwhelming pro-NATO majority is not in sight. Newspaper headlines such as “Yes to NATO membership” and claims that

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<sup>75</sup> See Barbara Kunz, “Le dilemme de la politique de sécurité suédoise: l’ambiguïté entre les niveaux interne et externe”, *Nordiques*, Paris, 2005, pp. 9-26.

<sup>76</sup> Ulf Bjereld, “Ny opinionsundersökning: Nato-medlemskap lockar inte svenskarna”, *DN Opinion*, March 2, 2001, available at: [www.dn.se/arkiv/debatt/dn-debatt-ny-opinionsundersokning-natomedlemskap-lockar-inte-svenskarna](http://www.dn.se/arkiv/debatt/dn-debatt-ny-opinionsundersokning-natomedlemskap-lockar-inte-svenskarna).

“more people want to join the Alliance than want to stay outside” are based on the omission of a significantly large portion of respondents who “do not know” or hold no opinion.<sup>77</sup> None of the reliable surveys carried out so far has showed an absolute majority for Sweden in NATO. A poll published in December 2014 did show a “significant increase” in respondents in favor of NATO membership, from 28% to 33% (with opponents decreasing from 56% to 47%).<sup>78</sup> Support continued to grow: a September 2015 poll yielded 41% in favor of membership, with 39% opposed and 20% undecided.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, it is essentially among the voters of the four conservative opposition parties that the tendency veers toward a yes, with 61% pro-NATO – a considerable development since the 2014 parliamentary elections. Across the leftist spectrum (the ruling Social Democrats and Greens as well as the Left Party), “no” is the majority opinion, totaling 52% among Social Democratic voters.

### ***NATO Membership Is Not on the Agenda***

Growing popular support notwithstanding, NATO membership is not on the agenda for the Social Democratic/Green Swedish government. In fact, not even an evaluation of this option’s advantages and disadvantages is to take place. Before the government and the major opposition parties came to agreement on the 2016-2020 defense bill, the conservative opposition party Moderaterna’s leader made such an evaluation a precondition for her party’s consent. However, this failed at the end of the day: although a new report on Sweden’s international cooperation in the field of security and defense policy was ordered, it will not look into Sweden’s membership in the Alliance due to the Social Democrats’ veto. Likewise, the country’s military non-alignment is not to be evaluated.<sup>80</sup>

Before the government changed in the fall of 2014, things briefly seemed to evolve, when Tomas Bertelman, inter alia former Swedish ambassador to Moscow, was tasked by the Defense Commission to analyze Sweden’s international security cooperation. By the time his report was ready, the government had changed, with the Social Democrats coming back to power. The Bertelman report’s recommendation to look into NATO membership, if possible together with Finland, was ignored. Prime

<sup>77</sup> As far as the example quoted here is concerned, 42,4 % in favor, 33,3 % and 24,2 % do not know.

See Pär Karlsson, Staffan Dickson, “Sverige Tycker: Ja till Nato-medlemskap”, *Aftonbladet*, May 27, 2014, available at: [www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article20861928.ab](http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article20861928.ab).

<sup>78</sup> For detailed results, see Ipsos Public Affairs, “Allmänheten om Nato och Sveriges försvar”, *DN/Ipsos*, Stockholm, December 22, 2014, available at: [www.ipsos.se/sites/default/files/pdf/DN\\_Ipsos\\_Allmanheten\\_om\\_Nato\\_och\\_Sveriges\\_forsvar\\_141222.pdf](http://www.ipsos.se/sites/default/files/pdf/DN_Ipsos_Allmanheten_om_Nato_och_Sveriges_forsvar_141222.pdf).

<sup>79</sup> Jonas Gummesson, “Stärkt opinion för natomedlemskap”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, September 13, 2015, available at: [www.svd.se/starkt-opinion-for-nato-medlemsskap](http://www.svd.se/starkt-opinion-for-nato-medlemsskap).

<sup>80</sup> See Jonas Gummesson, “Försvarsuppgörelsen i mål”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 17, 2015, available at: [www.svd.se/forsvarsuppgorelsen-i-mal\\_4495102](http://www.svd.se/forsvarsuppgorelsen-i-mal_4495102); Swedish Government, *Extrarapport om Sveriges internationella samarbeten inom försvars- och säkerhetspolitik*, Stockholm, August 20, 2015, available at: [www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2015/08/Expertrapport-om-sveriges-internationella-samarbeten-inom-forsvars--och-sakerhetspolitik/](http://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2015/08/Expertrapport-om-sveriges-internationella-samarbeten-inom-forsvars--och-sakerhetspolitik/).

Minister Löfvén, as well as his Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist, immediately insisted that such a move was not on the agenda.<sup>81</sup> Sweden is instead to continue cooperating with its Nordic and Baltic partners, within the EU as well as within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace. The new Finnish government, in power since May 2015, has in turn announced its intention to investigate Finland's potential membership.<sup>82</sup>

Things may, however, change in the years to come. The next elections are to take place in 2018, and they are very likely to become "NATO elections". By the fall of 2015, all four conservative opposition parties had adopted a pro-Alliance stance. This considerably changes the situation for the red-green minority government, faced with staunch "anti-militarism" on the left side of the political spectrum and the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats to the right. As of late 2015, the debate is only about to start, and it is currently more interesting to note what the government is not saying than what its members actually say. Prime Minister Stefan Löfvén – generally keeping a low profile in foreign and security policy – did not mention non-alignment in his opening address for the 2015/16 Riksdag session. Likewise, the government's guidance document for the Armed Forces, adopted after the 2015 defense bill had been accepted by parliament, does not contain any mention of non-alignment.<sup>83</sup>

### **Two Main Strands of Opposition**

While former and active representatives of the Armed Forces and some politicians made statements in favor of at least considering membership, the debate has now come to be dominated by the opponents. Besides those rejecting anything "militarist" out of principle, current discussions involve more than the usual suspects. Among the general public, issues rightly or wrongly associated with NATO membership raise concerns. Anti-Americanism certainly matters, especially to the left of the political spectrum. Among them are also nuclear deterrence as such and fears of nuclear warheads stationed on Swedish soil, and the perceived risk of being dragged into unwanted wars, such as Turkey's attacks on the Kurdish PKK. Overall knowledge of the Alliance, of what it does and how it works, remains rather superficial in the debate that takes place in the media. Unsurprisingly, therefore, fears of being "run over by great powers" are also high on the agenda in a nation made up of nine million people.

Beyond these rather concrete issues, two main strands of deeper-running argument can be identified as far as NATO opponents are concerned.

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<sup>81</sup> "Inte aktuellt med Nato-utredning", *Svenska Dagbladet*, October 29, 2014, available at: [www.svd.se/inte-aktuellt-med-natoutredning\\_4053133](http://www.svd.se/inte-aktuellt-med-natoutredning_4053133).

<sup>82</sup> See Karoliina Romanoff, Anna Starckman, "Finlands nya regering gör en Nato-utredning", *SVT*, June 5, 2015, available at: [www.svt.se/nyheter/utiset/svenska/finlands-regering-gor-en-nato-utredning](http://www.svt.se/nyheter/utiset/svenska/finlands-regering-gor-en-nato-utredning).

<sup>83</sup> Swedish Government, *Inriktning för Försvarsmaktens verksamhet för åren 2016 till och med 2020*, Regeringsbeslut 7, Fö2015/00953/MFI, *op.cit.*

A first strand, in essence, refuses to take NATO membership seriously. Assuming that the Alliance will come to Sweden's help no matter what in case of an attack, joining it seems like an unnecessary step. Unsurprisingly, therefore, 66% of the respondents in the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency's yearly opinion poll said in 2014 that they were either "very sure" or "quite sure" that Sweden would receive help from other countries in the event of an armed attack against it.<sup>84</sup> Even former Supreme Commander Göranson seemed to reason along these lines, as the following statement may illustrate:

After a week into the hostilities, the Supreme Commander expects Sweden to receive military help – but not from the EU, in which we are members, as "it is no military alliance." He instead mentions that Sweden, in a 2011 NATO-led staff exercise, deployed the better part of its *Gripen* jets in order to rescue Norway, which had been attacked by the exercise enemy. He expects the same solidarity if Sweden is attacked. – "I see Nordic cooperation in that perspective. We do not have any agreements with them of any kind, we are still militarily non-aligned."<sup>85</sup>

Among Swedish peculiarities is thus a belief that, although the country is not formally a NATO member, the Alliance would nevertheless help it if it were to come under attack. However, former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, SACEUR Phil Breedlove and US ambassador to Sweden Mark Brzezinski on various occasions have unequivocally insisted that Article 5 was for members only – the latter recurring to the insurance analogy and explaining that getting insurance when the house is already burning is too late.<sup>86</sup> The fact that military support for NATO partner country Ukraine has never been on the agenda in Brussels has not gone unnoticed in Sweden. Yet, Ukraine's situation is also considered to be different – and most probably rightfully so.

A second strand is essentially about convictions regarding causality: for its proponents, it is *because* Sweden was neutral that it has managed to avoid war. By extrapolation, remaining non-aligned guarantees peace in the future, further pursuing the path of 200 years of peace. Instead of assuming that Sweden managed to remain non-aligned because the Cold War remained cold, it is assumed that Sweden did not have to fight during Cold War times because of its non-alignment.<sup>87</sup> Representatives of that train of thought thus somehow reverse causality, as the former arguably seems more likely than the latter. Moreover, its empirical starting point – Sweden's non-alignment/neutrality in 1914-18 and 1939-45 as well as during the Cold

<sup>84</sup> See Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och beredskap, *Opinioner 2014: Allmänhetens syn på samhällsskydd, beredskap, säkerhetspolitik och försvar*, Karlstad, January 2015, p. 34, available at: [www.msb.se/RibData/Filer/pdf/27502.pdf](http://www.msb.se/RibData/Filer/pdf/27502.pdf). Only 26% of respondents answered "no, probably not" and 5% "no."

<sup>85</sup> Mikael Holmström, "Försvar med tidsgräns", *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> Mikael Holmström, "Sverige bör gå med i Nato", *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 27, 2014, available at: [www.svd.se/sverige-bor-ga-med-i-nato](http://www.svd.se/sverige-bor-ga-med-i-nato).

<sup>87</sup> For an archetypical example, see former defense minister, Thage G. Peterson, "Säg nej till Nato", *Aftonbladet*, June 17, 2015, available at: [www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/article20984299.ab](http://www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/article20984299.ab).

War – rests on very shaky grounds (see the brief historical introduction to this paper). And while it may be tempting to smile at that kind of argument for its parochialism, it is not unproblematic, as it opens up more apologetic attitudes toward Russia. Turned around, this strand of argumentation indeed serves Russian interests rather well. For instance, some would argue that joining NATO would make Sweden “less safe”, implicitly buying into the argument that the West at least partly pushed Russia to its current behavior by expanding the Atlantic alliance.





# Conclusion

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In light of the deteriorating security situation in the Baltic Sea region, Sweden stands confronted with considerable challenges. Indeed, these challenges are too big for Sweden to address single-handedly. In addition to boosting its military capabilities, therefore, Stockholm is betting on cooperation with partners, in its immediate vicinity and beyond. Yet, in so doing, Sweden faces obstacles that are self-made. Although the meaning of military non-alignment is stretched to its limits in the country's actual partnership with NATO and others, popular nostalgia for a past that in fact never existed limits Swedish governments' room for maneuver. This first and foremost applies to the ruling Social Democratic party. Stating that non-alignment is merely a hollow formula would be an exaggeration, but Sweden's declared need to be able to provide and receive military support if necessary has concrete implications, such as even closer cooperation with the Atlantic alliance. However, at least under the current government, and unless the security environment harshens considerably, Swedish NATO membership is not to be expected.

Other problems are home-made, too. Shrinking budgets and capabilities lost are the result of decades of Swedish defense policy. Both political camps are to blame, as both succumbed to the belief that history was "over" and that security policy formulation could be subordinated to financial considerations. The latest decisions are a first step to reverse the trend, yet they are exactly just that: first steps. Like that of so many other countries, Sweden's security and defense policymaking suffers from a number of inherent problems. When threat analyses are the result of political consensus, the conclusions drawn from them are not necessarily guided by strategic considerations. Likewise – as, for instance, the 2007 "post-Soviet litmus test" and the 2008 Georgian war illustrate – the link between analysis and practice is often lacking.

Whether Sweden eventually joins the Alliance – which, in fact, means: whether the Social Democrats manage to make a U-turn without losing face – remains to be seen. Observers point to the fact that such a move already worked with respect to EU membership, for decades excluded because of military non-alignment. Beyond doubt, Swedish NATO membership would bolster security in the Nordic-Baltic region – provided that Finland is not left out in the cold on its own.



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