

Sweden, NATO (and Turkey) – and the New War on Terror

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Resumé

Utgångspunkten vid tiden för denna texts tillkomst i slutet av augusti 2023 är att Sveriges regering och myndigheter uttalat att Sverige inte sedan slutet av den andra världskriget befunnit sig i en lika allvarlig och utsatt säkerhets- och säkerhetspolitisk situation. För drygt ett år sedan uttalades liknande larmsignaler, även då med referens till det andra världskriget. Men då handlade det om det direkta ryska hotet och den ryska aggressionen; nu, 2023, har fokus ändrats radikalt och larmsignalerna gäller det terroristiska, jihadistiska hot, mot Sverige som nation och stat, som blommat upp under sommaren till följd av främst koranbränningarna och reaktioner från den islamska världen som reaktion på dessa. Men det tillkomna främst jihadistiska terrorhotet ersätter förstås inte det direkta ryska hotet utan lagras ovanpå allt annat i en komplicerad världsutveckling. För svensk del handlar säkerhetsläget i viss mån om en paradoxal koppling till vår problematiskt utdragna Natoprocess där den blivande allianspartnern Turkiets officiella vrede bidragit till att väcka och i den islamska världen sprida en sakligt märklig bild av Sverige som ”anti-muslimskt” med ett allvarligt och utdraget terrorhot som bieffekt. Vilnius-dokumentet indikerar att Nato ser ”terrorism” som ett allvarligt, växande hot. För Sverige har ansökan om Natomedlemskap varit svaret på rysk aggression, men den utdragna vägen till Nato har i denna dimension tillfört ett säkerhetshot. Sverige bilden internationellt har påverkats negativt.

NOT SINCE WW2 has Sweden been so exposed to security threats as now, August 2023, according to repeated, gravely serious statements by the Swedish government, including the Prime and Foreign ministers.

Similar wordings, in broad parliamentary consensus, were issued in springtime last year, the year of the launch of the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine. The brutal and shocking fact of Russia launching, in violation of the legal and political achievements leading to the conclusion of the Cold War, and well before, a naked, “old-fashioned”, war of aggression against its

neighbor, had led the then Social Democratic minority government – with massive opposition support and in parallel with similar action by Finland – to draw an profoundly important conclusion: The basis for continued formal non-alignment had become permanently disrupted by Russia’s action and that in this situation of acute crisis the solution had to be the earlier unthinkable (at least for the Swedish left), abandonment of military non-alignment and a national decision to seek full membership in NATO.

At the time, last summer, Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine had been the dominant

reality for only a few months (since February 24, 2022), so there were many “unknown unknowns”, including what might happen in the interval between the application and the entering into force of the NATO’s security guarantee after a full membership had been ratified. Hence all eyes, Swedish and Finnish and those of others, on the forthcoming NATO Madrid summit and its relevance as the first possible entry point for Sweden and Finland to attain invitee status and pave the way for concrete adaptation to Alliance requirements and waiting for member states’ ratification process.

Challenge-Response: Russia’s aggression, Sweden’s and Finland’s NATO bid, Turkey’s veto

The challenge, then, was Russia’s aggression, and the Swedish and Finnish – and NATO – response, the “solution”, was to contribute to NATO enlargement to encompass the territories, military capacities, and peoples of all the Nordic countries. From the point of view of Sweden and Finland the “solution”, or response, was abandoning traditional non-alignment and seeking the protection (and challenges) through Alliance membership. Their security calculus had shifted drastically, although mentally and practically prepared in a sequence of steps and events since at least 2014.

In Madrid, followed by a NATO Council decision, the invitee status was indeed achieved, opening up for the processes of security adaptation and member state ratification, but at a price: Turkey’s unexpected (?) objections, followed by those of like-minded Hungary, to the Swedish membership bid, could be overcome only conditionally, pending a trilateral process of implemen-

tation (and indeed interpretation) negotiations on the basis of a trilateral agreement, in Madrid, which in itself manifested far-reaching Swedish-Finnish concessions to Turkey’s regime narrative on terrorism, terrorism definitions *a la Turca*.

The degree of normative concessions, including the “first ever” mention in a formal Western document on security and terrorism of not only the PKK but also its Syrian offshoot YPG (stamped as a terror organization only by Turkey), and “FETÖ”, the Gulen movement, the earlier AKP ally now regarded and treated by official Turkey (and Turkey only) as a terror organization, was explained and defended – and herein strongly encouraged by NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg – in terms not only of the formal veto power of any NATO member state but also the need for an aspiring NATO member to show understanding and support for a fellow member state’s security concerns, with the addition, repeatedly stressed by Stoltenberg, that Turkey’s security concerns are genuine, deserving attention and respect, in view of Turkey’s particular exposure to (and understandably harsh responses to) terrorism in its tense region.

The post-Madrid process of interpretation and implementation 2022–2023

We may remind here that the post-Madrid process of interpretation-cum-implementation of the (rather vague) trilateral agreement, which clearly was relatively more controversial in a Swedish context of high-profile presence and activities of various migrant groups, many – like the PKK and “FETÖ” – with an antagonistic opposition relationship with their home countries and incumbent regimes – was immediately colored by

the Madrid statement by president Erdogan that implementation of the agreement in the case of Sweden meant, i.a. , an obligation to extradite “73” (Erdogan even specified the number in rare English language statement) terror suspects from Sweden. This gave an early indication of a problematic negotiation process to follow, especially for Sweden. But incidentally, it so happened that Sweden could here show-case pre-existing plans to sharpen legislation against terrorism, although at the time focus was, for well-known reasons, on the IS/Da’esh threat. This was a platform adaptable for extended use in talks with Turkey, now on PKK, recognized also by Sweden as a terror organization, although less so as regards the entities not stamped as terror organizations, not by Sweden nor anyone else in the Alliance and the EU, i.e., YPG/PYD in north Syria, and “FETÖ”, Erdogan’s competitor and adversary within Turkey’s Sunni Islam culture.

Before returning to the August 2023 point of departure, we may still remind ourselves on some features of the interim period between then, summer 2022, and now, at the point of writing.

First, there were the elections in Sweden, leading to the establishment of a new, majority, government, one that immediately declared as its clear first priority to manage the NATO accession adaptation process, in parallel with determined efforts to continue strengthening the nation’s civil and military defense capacity, to militarily and otherwise support Ukraine and to handle the challenges following the upcoming EU 6-months Presidency, and accordingly declared its readiness to make every effort (allowed by the Swedish liberal constitution) to convince Ankara that in the area of combatting terrorism the new Swedish government meant serious business, stretching hitherto known and respected constitutional limits. During

the autumn, these efforts included constitutional change in order to allow for strengthened anti-terrorism legislation, a dialogue process with Turkish (and Finnish, it was then still a trilateral format) counterparts, involving various competent authorities, reassuring statements (“we are not going to deal with or even relate to the YPG”, although we are still members of the US-led anti-Da’esh coalition) and a process of confidence-seeking high level visits to Ankara, not all conspicuously successful.

Sharpened Swedish attitude, quran burnings, earthquake diplomacy

As from the security conference in Sälen in early January this year, the official Swedish position shifted into one of saying “enough is enough”, that there are constitutional (and political) limits to what Sweden can do, or concede, once the new legislation has passed Parliament and become law, effective as from June 1, this being a reaction to repeated Turkish statements to the effect that whereas legal changes and a generally sharpened Swedish attitude towards the PKK in Sweden may be useful, more “concrete steps” (i.e., extraditions as consistently demanded by Turkey) were still needed for Turkey to drop its veto. The Swedish side claimed that what had been decided by Sweden, and nothing more than this, is what is required of us in a reasonable interpretation/implementation of the trilateral Madrid agreement. 29 other NATO member state governments, and NATO chief Stoltenberg, strongly endorsed this view, but Turkey disagreed.

And then came the first, first this year, quran burning incident, causing furious Turkish highest-level reactions, with uni-

lateral Turkish cancellation of the Madrid agreement talks and with President Erdogan once famously stating that as long as Sweden allows quran burnings, and this time provocatively close to the Turkish Stockholm embassy, Sweden can forget about Turkey allowing its entry into NATO.

And then arrived the catastrophic earthquake in southern Turkey, with some 50 000 deaths and enormous destruction. The disaster gave, like in the similar event in the crucial year of 1999, rise to “earthquake diplomacy”, meaning politically useful and exploitable manifestations of sympathy for Turkey in its hour of need. The efforts undertaken by Sweden, now as EU presidency, as if to “appease” Turkey by means of administering a massive EU earthquake victim support package, may have been objectively useful but it remained, and remains, unclear to what extent the Turkish regime saw or accepted this as at all relevant to the NATO process.

A resumption of the trilateral format was in any case agreed, but only as a result of intense persuasive efforts on the part of Jens Stoltenberg in the earthquake context, a new meeting in that format in Brussels proved unproductive (or less), positions remained unchanged as regards Sweden, however Turkey now proved ready to speedily accept Finland in NATO, which paved the way for Finland, in its national security interest in view of 1340 km joint border with Russia, to abandon the joint process with Sweden and set in motion an own route into NATO, leaving Sweden behind. In Stockholm this new divergency may have hurt, but the official line was of course that Finland entering NATO before Sweden was indeed in the security interest also of Sweden, in view of the overall momentum gained. One in was better than two out.

More bumps on the road; Turkish elections, the road to Vilnius, Erdogan says “Yes, but”

At that time the landmark Turkish presidential and parliamentary election process was in full swing, and it was clear to everyone that in this situation the now bilateral process with Sweden was de facto brought to a halt, pending the seemingly very, very uncertain prospects as regards the election results; would it be five more years with the Erdogan regime, five more of the same, or would the elections bring about fundamental changes? Which outcome would be more favorable to a speedy Swedish catching up with Finland into NATO, in time for the next crucial NATO summit in Vilnius some five weeks after the Turkish elections, in case of a second presidential round? Speculations were many and varied. However, such speculations were silenced when, after a second round in late May, it became clear that Erdogan and his regime had indeed prevailed, both in the parliamentary and the presidential elections, and, notably, in a strengthened power position.

Last year it was all eyes on Madrid, now it was all eyes on the approaching summit in Vilnius, equally crucial in view of all the accumulated decision-making needs following developments in and around Ukraine. Could a victorious, strengthened Erdogan regime, with a fresh cabinet team, be expected to concede on the Sweden-NATO issue under the enhanced pressure from the US and 28 other NATO governments, Finland now included, and quickly have the newly elected Turkish parliament ratify the Swedish membership, so that Sweden could participate in Vilnius as a full Alliance member? Could parallel Turkey-US negotiations on F16s and other

items on their bilateral agenda turn out to be useful? These were the questions on the road to Lithuania's capital.

A last-ditch effort in Vilnius itself, too late for Swedish full participation there and then, trilaterally this time at head of state/government level between Turkey, Sweden and NATO represented by Stoltenberg, led to the adoption of a new agreement, in which Turkey pledges to bring the issue to its parliament for ratification "as soon as possible" (later however defined to "probably" mean early October after the MPs return from their summer recess), and in which Sweden, with Stoltenberg's blessing, reiterates its determination to fulfil its Madrid obligations (still apparently defined differently) and to accept, or propose – in addition to the remaining trilateral format with Finland as the third party, also after ratification – a new, this time bilateral, Swedish-Turkish minister level "compact" for further talks, or negotiations (or dialogue).

In Sweden this new agreement was met with a mixed bag of relief – finally a yes from Erdogan's Turkey to Sweden in NATO, what a relief! – and some guarded skepticism: what did the October definition of "as soon as possible" and the establishment of a bilateral format and the mention in the agreement on a Swedish "road map" on anti-terror combat and Madrid implementation really signify as regards whether there were still, in spite of everything, a Turkish conditionality approach ("concrete steps") to be struggled with?

At the time of writing the jury is still on this. Perhaps expected intense multilateral and bilateral developments and interaction, especially in the US-Turkey-Russia/Ukraine triangle, will as from September indicate where things are headed.

The new quran burning crisis

But in the midst of this, so far focusing on the very important Turkish parameter/variable, a new, or renewed, quran burning crisis erupted. The attention to – and singling out of – Sweden (later joined in this predicament by Denmark) as an "anti-Islamic" country throughout the Islamic world, initially largely a result of the NATO enlargement process and the angry Turkish reactions to the quran burning incident at the Turkish embassy, had evolved into one Islamic government after the other, from Teheran to Beirut and beyond, and the OIC collectively, harshly criticizing Sweden and the Swedish government for outrageously allowing such assaults on basic Islamic values and more or less openly threatening – or encouraging – retaliation, should Sweden (and Denmark) fail to credibly apologize and concretely prevent further burnings and similar acts of active disrespect. Significantly, this time, compared to earlier episodes, official and popular Islamic anger targeted not individual persons but Sweden, and Denmark, as states. No doubt, this vicious circle also included a temptation of the part of potential quran burning provocateurs to seek impact and attract attention.

Official Swedish attempts at reaching out, domestically and abroad, with a view to seeking understanding for the principles of constitutionality and freedom of speech and assembly were rejected with contempt and were apparently of little use – and relevance – for cooling down the immediate crisis. Meanwhile, competent authorities in Sweden, declared that the sequence of events had led to Sweden now being not only a general Western target in the eyes of jihadist circles everywhere (also inside Sweden) but a prioritized, specific target.

Accordingly, towards the end of August, the Swedish security police had found reason to announce an upgraded threat level, upgraded in its 5-level alert list from level 3 (general, raised) to level 4 (clear and present risk, but still rather general than specific), a mixed official message of alert and at the same time an appeal for calm.

Thus, it was now the jihadist terrorist threat that made the Swedish government – again – speak about the greatest security threat since WW2. Focus had clearly shifted from last summer’s preoccupation with the Russian threat – and from the previously prioritized concern with the NATO veto power nation Turkey’s concern with *its* terrorism problem. The rather sudden shift – all other things being equal – implied moving from a dictated, NATO related, concern with the security concerns of a (future) fellow alliance member to acute concern with Sweden’s own security.

Paradoxically, the irony was that as Sweden was seeking NATO membership as a solution, or response, to the perceived Russian threat, this same step meant having to negotiate with Turkey (while defending basic Swedish – and NATO – constituting values), which in turn, given Turkish reactions to Swedish rule-of-law principles, led other Islamic countries to single out Sweden (and Denmark) as particularly anti-Islamic entities, which in turn was seen by competent security authorities in Sweden and Denmark as dramatically increasing the security threat of the terrorism variety. And meanwhile, in spite of this, even after Vilnius, the Swedish Alliance membership bid remained uncertain, paradoxically due to lingering Turkish (and Hungarian) objections. The difference between Sweden and Denmark in this new threat context being that whereas Denmark was facing the challenge backed by its full

NATO security guarantees, whatever this means in the anti-terror struggle, Sweden suffered a problematic vulnerability link between the unfinished NATO process and the exposure to jihadist threats.

So had the quran burnings alone, whether spontaneous or somehow externally orchestrated, put Sweden in a situation which according to repeated government warnings was, indeed *is*, the most serious security-wise since the second world war? Were jihadist terror threats now to be seen, in a rather drastic shift of emphasis, as the *main* security challenge? To the extent that the quran burnings are seen as the main cause of this dangerous situation, is that all or is there more to it? Is the (again) arisen jihadist threat a temporary problem linked to the specifics of the current context of action-reaction – and a problem that could perhaps be solved by democratically controversial concessions to the Islamic world, e.g., through delegalizing quran burnings and similar acts of offensive religious disrespect – or is the arisen problem of a more permanent or at least long-term nature? Questions are many and varied, and relevant.

And then there is the perhaps unwelcome further question: to what extent is NATO, i.e., the Swedish membership bid process, part of the problem or part of the solution? If part of the problem, then – perhaps – because Sweden through its negotiations with Turkey has become singled out in the wider Islamic world, inspiring jihadist terror at home and/or abroad to terrorist violence, without much protection (or meaningful solidarity) against this particular threat to be expected from the Alliance. If part of the solution, on the other hand, then because Alliance members are able and ready to offer concrete support, somehow.

The Vilnius declaration on facing rising terrorism threat

The Vilnius declaration did devote some strong paragraphs to the issue of terrorism, two out of 90 entries. Albeit drafted well before the current Quran burning and the ensuing terrorist threats crisis, the NATO declaration uses very strong, but not entirely specific, language on today's terrorism threat, leaving behind the question of whether (or not) this represents a new "war on terror", compared with what the Bush administration unleashed as a result of 9/11, with its focus on Afghanistan, Iraq and some other problematic countries in Asia and Africa, with a questionable net end result.

Here is what NATO now has to say, in its consensus document:

20. We categorically reject and condemn terrorism in the strongest possible terms. Countering terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is essential to our collective defence. NATO's role in the fight against terrorism contributes to all three core tasks of the Alliance and is integral to the Alliance's 360-degree approach to deterrence and defence. Allies will continue to fight this threat with determination, resolve, and in solidarity.... NATO will also continue to engage, as appropriate, with other international actors to ensure added value and complementarity.

21. Terrorist organisations threaten the security of our populations, forces and territory. They have expanded their networks, enhanced their capabilities and invested in new technologies to improve their reach and lethality. We will continue to deter, defend and respond to threats and challenges posed by terrorist groups, based on a combination of prevention, protection and denial measures. We have today tasked the Council in permanent session to update NATO's Policy Guidelines and Action Plan

on Counter-Terrorism, and reassess, in consultation with our regional partners, the areas where NATO can provide civil-military assistance to partners in this field. Our approach to terrorism, and its causes, is in accordance with international law and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and upholds all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions on the fight against terrorism.

This fascinating reading manifests verbal high ambitions when it comes to the joint struggle against terrorism, "in all its manifestations". Although ISIS/Da'esh is mentioned as apparently key example (deleted here), the text generally talks sweepingly about *all* terror groups, avoiding to bother any and all readers with a reminder that defining terrorism and terrorists is historically proven to be rather difficult – and that in today's world claims to terrorist threats are put to notorious use by most if not all authoritarians as an excuse for democratic shortcomings and for "temporary" deviations from rule-of-law normalcy under the UN Charter and related document, including the NATO Charter.

Five points of reflection

The blend in this NATO statement between strong language generally and shortness on specificity (other than the mention of Da'esh) probably reflects a hard-bargain compromise between member states, including the lone voice of Turkey, as regards how to describe the nature and dangers of the terrorism threat and the commitment to combat this threat. The general background to this adds dimensions also to the current, extraordinary, Swedish security predicament.

Firstly, in spite of all these more than 20 years of the US defined and US-led "war on terror" after 9/11, the jihadist threat to the

Western world is far from over. Hence, in a sense, this launch of a new, or re-energized, war on terror, this time under the 360-degree umbrella of combined, multi-faceted threats in a global security environment of enhanced complexity and competitiveness. With the bitter experiences from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria – and elsewhere –, combined with mounting new challenges in the Sahel area – and beyond, a new war on terror apparently has had to shift emphasis and methodology, in uncharted waters. The earlier policy of large military deployment to threatened and threatening areas overseas apparently leading nowhere, at enormous cost – cf Trumps “forever wars” – has had to be replaced by something new.

Secondly, in this context of enhanced complexity and competitiveness, several factors have become blurred as regards defining the terrorist actors, be they states, organizations, groups, or individual lone wolves. Who are the actors, and how do they interact? Is terrorism and are terrorists a separate threat category, alongside states and state sponsored actors and organized crime, or have we ended up in a situation of complete blur, making it ever so difficult to meaningfully and operationally target “terrorism”? Is jihadism in this respect the exception to a general rule, acting independently under their religious agenda rather than under the malign agendas of rogue states or international crime consortia?? Whereas extreme right (or left) terrorism may be typically closer linked to and serves as instruments of other actors? As in the current Swedish case, to what extent can it be judged, with reliable certainty, that a specific jihadist terror threat, linked to quran burnings, can be hijacked or exploited by a state (notably Russia) for the purposes of weakening Sweden’s will and resolve to resist? Or by rightist extreme groups taking advantage of the focus on and vulnerability

to jihadist threats? Official Swedish comments on the current crisis indicate that these are seriously considered options, based not least on the current discourse among US/UK counterparts and a recognition that jihadist groups by no means have monopoly in the market of terrorism, even if they seem to dominate globally at present.

Thirdly, developments and issues along these lines seem to indicate that in today’s world of exponential digital development (followed presumably by AI), antagonistic inter- and intra-state relations and problematic aspects of globalization, the distinction in doctrines and security strategy documents between external and internal security can no longer be meaningfully upheld. A more mixed and holistic approach for overall defense (and perhaps deterrence) against the old and new forms of terrorism and other threats is clearly needed. In practical action terms, this may be easier said than done, however. We are in uncharted territory, assuming these reflections are valid, also as interpretation of the Vilnius declaration. But analytically, for deeper understanding, this is imperative. As we have seen, incidentally, digital developments now represent a sort of capacity duel between defenders and offenders of the law. This makes security even much more than before a joint EU and NATO agenda.

Fourthly, terrorism is normally understood to imply – almost by definition – use of violent measures and notorious disregard for civilian suffering and casualties as a result of terrorist activities in pursuance of their objectives, if they indeed have any (classical nihilism is probably not completely buried in the cemetery of history). The very demanding challenge posed by the various varieties of terrorists, leaving definition controversies aside, is that they represent a diffuse threat and typically choose methods

rendering defense (and of course deterrence, detection and prevention) very difficult, the lone-wolf suicide bomber representing the extreme version. Periods of epidemic spread of terror activities in a country or even a region, generally aiming at achieving destabilization, tend or risk to lead on to a vicious circle in which the needed countermeasures add further, profoundly unwanted destabilization. This involves very delicate balancing acts, regardless of the degree of emergency perceived. In sum, defense against terrorism is difficult, and that applies equally to prevention and deterrence.

And then there is the remaining risk and threat – a genuine cause of fear some decades ago – that terror groups one way or another gain access to weapons of mass destruction. Interestingly, for all the strong wordings in the NATO Vilnius declaration as regards increasing capacities and lethality of terror groups, this particular threat is left unmentioned, for some reason.

Fifthly, finally, there is an analytical need to add here the issue of sequencing vs accumulation. It can be argued that in past eras of terrorism, with examples from Germany, Italy and Palestine, and elsewhere in the 70 to 90s, outbursts of terrorism in different countries, whether leftist, rightist or religious, occurred sequentially, reflecting various stages of state-building in the countries affected. Clearly, recent years have seen a sequence of crises necessitating shifting foci. But what characterizes our time, over and above earlier periods, is the accumulation of simultaneous crises. Hence, in the case of the Swedish example in August 2023, the jihadist terror threat happens on top of all the other accumulated crises and challenges. And we have seen that NATO in its Vilnius communiqué depicts “terrorism” as a growing threat with increased “lethality”.

Sweden particularly exposed, in spite of and because of NATO

But, as we have seen, in late August 2023 the Swedish government finds itself faced with a particularly exposed security situation, “the worst since WW2”, over and above the general threat image portrayed by the NATO summit declaration.

At the time of publication of this text many things will have happened, focus may have again shifted, things unknown at the time of writing. For instance, it is quite possible that at that time a strategic package deal between the US and Turkey will have been struck, allowing for, or paving the way for, Sweden’s formal entry into NATO after approvals by a majority in the Turkish – and Hungarian – parliaments, if so a great relief for Sweden and (most) Swedes, and others.

But the reality facing the Swedish government in August 2023 was extraordinarily grim and complex. The NATO accession process remained unsolved, the war in our vicinity raged on without a visible end, shaking the foundations of security in Europe and beyond, some odd features of Sweden’s NATO membership bid have contributed to shaping a situation where Sweden has become exposed to and vulnerable to Islamic world targeted anger which in turn has exposed us to grave danger in the shape and form of concrete terror threats, of a lasting nature, according to SÄPO estimates.

And then there is also the continuing, shocking gang violence in Swedish cities and suburbs, genuinely astonishing a European and global audience, i.e., a prime example of the contemporary emerging blur between external and internal security, as discussed earlier.

The shattered image of Sweden

Unfortunately, all these have affected negatively the “image of Sweden” abroad. Even though negative perceptions will of course vary in kind and degree, depending on where geo-politically the observer stands. It will, most likely, be an uphill and protracted battle for Swedish representatives and authorities to reconquer lost terrain and to steer the country into calmer waters. As already indicated by government and competent agencies in Sweden, this battle – a battle against the external and internal security harm inflicted mainly but of course not only by a few quran burning provocateurs, working alone or as proxies – will have to be both short-term and long-term; protective measures against the acute terror threat at home and against Swedish people and interests abroad, strengthening resilience against the rising tide of information warfare, active diplomacy in Islamic and other countries with a view to explaining the nature and purpose of Swedish (and European) understanding of and devotion to constitutionality and liberal democratic freedoms, deepened dialogue with Islamic circles in Sweden, and (controversially, as we have seen) a new look at what might be legally (and constitutionally) done to push back quran burnings. Success in this battle will no doubt depend on many factors and persuasive efforts on our part, while maintaining a united parliamentary front based on strong national consensus.

Still, it remains peculiarly amazing, and troubling, that a country, Sweden, which used to be, and was used to being, respected internationally for religious and political tolerance and for having opened its borders for decades to a mixture of religions and cultures, also in material work-force

self-interest, and to being a safe haven for the oppressed in lands of conflict, should now, rather suddenly, have to face the current terror threat crisis, due to the malign spread of perceptions that Sweden is an “anti-Islamic” country that allows quran burnings and similar acts of sacrilege, and a country whose authorities “kidnap” children of immigrant families – as the malign saying went some years back.

By way of conclusion

To conclude, seeking speedy membership in NATO was the response, the solution, to the outburst of naked Russian aggression against Ukraine last year – and continuing throughout this year and perhaps onwards. But the protracted process of negotiation with Turkey (and Hungary) over issues mainly pertaining to terrorism – Turkey’s demands on Sweden (and Finland) to accept, help legitimize and act on Turkey’s special (or separate) terror definitions and concerns as a *or the* condition for lifting the veto – led to Sweden becoming exposed and singled out internationally in the Islamic world and hence to a serious security crisis, once the Islamic world had been made aware of the utility in targeting Sweden (and Denmark) over quran burnings (et al), thus potentially inspiring and legitimizing terrorist actors of various shapes and forms to punish any and all Swedish assets or persons, inside Sweden or abroad. Hence also resulting potential temptations for other malign actors, including quran burning candidates, to exploit and provoke. A vicious circle of sorts.

Interestingly, the main Swedish concern last year was to assess and act on the country’s threat exposure to Russia during the interval period between the national decision to apply for full membership and the entering into force of NATO’s security guar-

antee under Article 5. Now, one year later, in late August 2023, we can instead, or in addition, observe that the duration of, and intricacies in, Turkey's reluctance to lift its veto and to allow for final parliamentary ratification – even if finally overcome in early autumn, with US help (the harm is already done) – has significantly contributed to the emergence of the current, very different and very serious security crisis.

In this sense, NATO has proved to be both (and mainly) a security solution, i.e., to the threat of Russian aggression (and the Madrid invitee status did open up for a determined process of Alliance adaptation), and a security risk enhancement factor, an unexpected cost and a significantly increased vulnerability, for as long as prevailing uncertainties endure under an unexpectedly protracted process.

On the other hand, impressions and developments are mixed: Turkey's resistance to accepting Sweden, while contributing to our terrorism exposure as discussed here, has made the other 29 Alliance members (except Turkey and, so far, Hungary) commit totally

to making the case, before Vilnius and after, that Sweden's entry into the NATO ranks is absolutely essential and indispensable for the Alliance. This should, also, help to compensate for the costs on the other side of the coin.

Nonetheless, there remains the problem and the policy challenge that the image of Sweden abroad has, on balance, shifted into something more mixed, and problematic; hostility from the Islamic world combined with probably widespread perceptions in other countries of a formerly stable, tolerant and prosperous country now struggling with external and internal security crises.

In the uphill battle now needed for Sweden to be fought, NATO membership is a necessary but not sufficient condition; re-energized Swedish foreign policy is needed on all classical multilateral platforms, particularly the EU, but also the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe and others. As a means to avoid being trapped in "the worst of worlds".

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