

Of Eagles and Griffins: A View from Washington

The Future of the US-Swedish Defense and Security Relationship

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Résumé

Det svensk-amerikanska förhållandet har utökats och fördjupats markant sedan kalla krigets slut, med särskild tonvikt på försvars- och säkerhetspolitiskt samarbete. Idag samarbetar Sverige och USA, bilateralt och som del av Washingtons samarbete med den nordiska regionen, kring bland annat förmågeutveckling, samövningar, policy, samt försvarsindustriprojekt. Det svensk-amerikanska förhållandet på försvarsområdet står dock inför nya utmaningar, i och med ISAF-uppdragets slut (som utgjort en viktig del av samarbetet), det förändrade läget i Östersjöområdet efter Ukrainakrisen, USAs omorientering mot Asien och Stilla Havet, samt budgetnedskärningar på båda sidor av Atlanten. Det finns dock ett antal områden som USA och Sverige skulle kunna samarbeta kring även i framtiden, såsom maritim säkerhet, arktisk säkerhet, specialförband, gemensam teknikutveckling, samt A2/AD förmågor. Ett fortsatt starkt försvarssamarbete skulle vara värdefullt för båda parter, då det skulle innebära att Sverige även i fortsättningen kan spela en viktig roll inom den transatlantiska säkerhetssfären, medan det också skulle vara en stark signal för Washingtons intresse för och av säkerhet och stabilitet kring Östersjön.

SINCE THE END of the Cold War the US-Swedish defense and security relationship has changed dramatically, and is now very deep, multi-dimensional, and highly advanced. However, while far from secret, the extent of the relationship is not much known beyond a small circle of experts and policy makers in both Stockholm and Washington. Much of the recent development of the US-Swedish defense and security relationship was driven by both American global activism after the 9/11 attacks, and the gradual change of Swedish foreign policy towards deeper European integration and transatlantic engagement since the end of the Cold War. While Stockholm's relationship with Washington today is stronger than perhaps

ever before, it will be challenged by the end of the Afghanistan mission, the US pivot to Asia, and continued European defense austerity.

The relationship also finds itself in a new context due to the changing security environment in and around the Baltic Sea. If the relationship is to be maintained to the benefit of both Sweden and the United States it needs to be tended and expanded further as the opportunities for operational cooperation declines and the Asia-Pacific region emerges as the new global security focus. The need for a sustained and expanded US-Swedish defense relationship has only become more urgent in the wake of the Ukraine crisis.

US-Swedish Relations – The Strategic Context

Sweden's international orientation has dramatically changed since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War Sweden was primarily seen as a neutral middle power with a high profile within the United Nations system, but since then Stockholm has clearly and consistently pursued a policy of deeper European integration and the strengthening of its transatlantic link. In this context, Sweden's membership in the European Union in 1995 is truly historic.¹ In defense and security terms, this broad shift in Swedish policy meant that Sweden largely departed from its territorial defense construct in favor of an expeditionary focus and a security approach in concert with other like-minded nations.

Furthermore, Sweden has all but stopped contributing forces to UN "blue helmet" peacekeeping operations (since the mid-2000s Sweden has never contributed more than a handful of its personnel to UN flagged peacekeeping operations), and instead thrown its lot in with operations under a NATO or EU flag (but a UN mandate for any operation Sweden participates in remains very important to Stockholm). More recently, Sweden has also taken up a larger role in providing for regional Nordic-Baltic security with its Solidarity Declaration, and by being one of the driving nations behind Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO).

This transformation of Swedish foreign, defense, and security policy has been both noted and welcomed in Washington, and has indeed enabled large parts of the current US-Swedish defense relationship. In Washington today Sweden is seen as a small, but serious and competent, transatlantic security actor, which brings real ca-

pabilities and wants to play a constructive role as a partner of both NATO and the United States.² Some in Washington will even quip that Sweden brings more to the table and is a better ally than some formal NATO members. In many ways, Sweden is an example of the kind of security transformation that the United States seeks to encourage across Europe and globally, with nations transitioning from being consumers of security to serving as regional, and to some degree global, producers of security.³

Furthermore, the Swedish defense reforms of recent years have been met with much praise in Washington, and have been discussed within the wider Washington policy community as an example of successful military transformation.⁴ Indeed, the transition to an all-volunteer force that is more deployable, just as Sweden recently did, is something that Washington has encouraged its European friends and allies to do for years (albeit with mixed results). Sweden's domestic debate on its defense transformation and associated challenges (such as manning the force, capabilities gaps, etc) has not, perhaps quite understandably, really registered with the Washington policy community.

Finally, Sweden, along with its Nordic neighbors, provides a bit of cheer for those in Washington that lament the current state of Europe. With the continent wracked by poisoned politics, bickering between northern and southern Europe, and an economically sluggish Eurozone, Sweden stands out as one of the few nations with a relatively healthy economy, the public finances in order, and a domestic political climate that enables effective decision-making (although Sweden was not immune to at least temporary domestic political paralysis following the most recent election). Of course, Sweden's high international stan-

ding and reputation in various international organizations and forums remain, and that is also of value to Washington as it seeks to gain legitimacy and credibility for its efforts by building coalitions and partnerships around and with like-minded nations.⁵

Thus, it is not surprising that Sweden has received a remarkable level of attention from senior US policy makers in recent years. In 2012 Hillary Clinton visited Sweden in her capacity as US Secretary of State, the first time ever a serving Secretary of State has visited Sweden. Her replacement, John Kerry, visited Sweden in 2013 to attend a meeting of the Arctic Council. Most importantly, President Barack Obama visited Sweden in late summer of 2013. Visits by US presidents are no happenstance, and they are carefully weighed by the White House for both domestic and international impact before a decision is ever made to visit a given country at a specific time. In Washington, the visit to Stockholm by Obama was seen as a confirmation of the closeness of the US-Swedish relationship and of Sweden's leadership role within the transatlantic community.⁶

The US-Swedish relationship is broad, deep, and multifaceted, and includes initiatives and collaborative efforts on a range of issues, including green technology, human rights, and embedding Europe's east in the transatlantic community. Currently, the United States and Sweden are also partners as advocates of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. However, the US-Swedish defense and security relationship stands out as unique among the other areas of cooperation, and is of special note and importance to Swedish, regional, and transatlantic security.

The US-Swedish Defense Relationship(s)

The defense and security links between the United States and Sweden are far from secret. However, the depth and many facets of the relationship and how it has evolved over the last decade may not be well understood by a general audience. While almost entirely limited to sharing of technology during the Cold War (with some preparations made for cooperation in case of an all-out war in Europe), the US-Swedish defense relationship today is mature and multi-dimensional. Seen broadly, the relationship is made up of three key dimensions; policy, operations and exercises, and industrial linkages.

The policy relationship

Sweden is currently embedded in two policy initiatives that provide a bridge between the Nordic-Baltic region and the United States. The Enhanced Partnership for Northern Europe (e-PINE) is the oldest, and is the heir of the collaboration between the United States and the Nordic and Baltic states to assist the Baltic states in the transition to the Euro-Atlantic community after the fall of communism. Begun in 2003, e-PINE continues to this day and provides a Nordic-Baltic forum for policy discussions with Washington on a number of issue sets, including security.⁷

More recently, a new US-Nordic security dialogue was announced during Obama's visit to Stockholm in 2013. While still under development, this dialogue appears to focus on softer and broader security issues (such as enhancing UN peacekeeping) and will form a part of the Nordic region's discussion with Washington on the future of the United Nations system and how to im-

prove its components and efforts.⁸ While this is a welcome development, it is unclear whether the proposed dialogue will be able to respond to the interests of a Nordic region increasingly concerned with hard security matters; concerns that have gained additional urgency with the Ukraine crisis.

Sweden is also one of a handful of countries that have a government-to-government Memorandum of Understanding with the United States to simplify the procurement of defense equipment and industrial cooperation between industry and procurement actors in Sweden and the United States. Dating back to 1987, this MoU was most recently updated in 2003.⁹ Remarkably, most of the other nations that have a similar MoU with the United States are either treaty allies or enjoy special relationships with the United States, such as the United Kingdom, Israel, and Australia.

Finally, Sweden is also part of the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR), an initiative by US European Command. Created in early 2013, ASFR brings together senior representatives from Arctic nations to discuss common security challenges, and how to enhance collaboration in the high north.¹⁰

The military relationship: operations, exercises, and visits

Sweden has worked closely with the United States in operations from the Balkans to Afghanistan, and most recently over Libya. Sweden has also been an eager participant in various NATO exercises in the Nordic region and beyond. However, these operations and exercises have occurred in a multilateral context of NATO efforts and Sweden's role as a NATO partner. There are, however, a number of bilateral US-Swedish efforts that have served

to enhance interoperability and to bring US and Swedish forces and the senior military leadership of the two countries closer together over the last decade or so.

The Swedish Air Force has participated in several US Air Force (USAF) hosted exercises, including the prestigious Red Flag exercise series at Nellis Air Force Base.¹¹ In 2010 Sweden hosted an F-16 unit from USAF for the first ever bilateral aviation exercise between the US and Sweden on Swedish soil.¹² More recently, an aviation exercise under the umbrella of NORDEFCO, hosted by Sweden, also saw the participation of F-15 and F-16 fighter jets from USAF Europe.¹³ Also, elements of a Marine aviation unit recently spent time in Sweden to help enhance the Swedish Air Force's ability to conduct forward air control tasks while airborne.¹⁴

US-Swedish collaboration on Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) stand out as perhaps one of the most unique approaches to enhancing interoperability and using international partners for developing and strengthening capabilities. In 2005 the Royal Swedish Navy submarine HMS *Gotland* deployed to San Diego for a two-year stint with the US Navy (USN) as an opposing force during ASW exercises and certifications for US naval assets preparing to deploy into the Pacific theater.¹⁵ Today, the US and Swedish navies collaborate on research and war gaming under the recently formed Littoral Operations Center at the Naval Postgraduate School in California.¹⁶

The relationship also extends to training, education, and staff duty. Annually, some 60 members of the Swedish armed forces are trained at US centers or participate in professional military education in the United States. Sweden also maintains liaison officers at various US combatant commands, including European Command, Cen-

tral Command, and previously at the now defunct Joint Forces Command.¹⁷

Senior US military leaders have also visited Sweden in recent years, including Admiral Jim Stavridis, dual-hatted as the Commander of US European Command and as NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and Admiral Gary Roughhead, then-Chief of Naval Operations. These visits send strong signals about US interest in maintaining and expanding the military-to-military relationship with Swedish forces.

The industrial relationship

The defense industrial relationship between the United States and Sweden also stands out as especially strong, considering Sweden's size and the fact that it is not formally an ally of the United States. It is also arguably the longest standing of the pillars in the relationship. Perhaps most famously, Sweden's frontline fighter jet, the JAS-39 Gripen, contains close to 50 % US manufactured or licensed components, including key systems, such as the engine.¹⁸ This suggests the enormous trust that the US government has in Sweden's ability to control sensitive technologies and to follow made agreements to the letter. But this example is merely one of many.

The Gripen manufacturer Saab is doing quite well in the US defense market, and sells defense products (including the Carl Gustaf recoilless rifle and the Giraffe radar for the USN's new littoral combat ships) worth close to \$500 million each year.¹⁹ The US defense market has high barriers to entry, and US defense procurement is inherently political (as in most other places). Thus, Saab's success in the United States is clearly underpinned by the health of the broader US-Swedish defense and securi-

ty relationship, while also reinforcing it at the same time.

There are also examples of direct collaboration between US and Swedish defense industry, with efforts such as the Excalibur guided artillery round, which was co-developed by Raytheon and the Swedish company Bofors (under BAE ownership).²⁰ Recently, Saab and Boeing announced that they are teaming to offer a new jet trainer aircraft for USAF, based on the JAS-39 Gripen.²¹

Another telling example of the close US-Swedish relationship is the recent Swedish procurement of 16 Blackhawk helicopters manufactured by Sikorsky. The procurement process set a speed record of sorts, with only 18 months between the signing of the contract and the delivery to Sweden of the first Blackhawk helicopter.²² The requirement for rotary lift emerged quickly due to Swedish operations in Afghanistan and the need for a medical evacuation capability, and the US government enabled the speed of the process by using the Department of Defense's Foreign Military Sales program.

Emerging Challenges

The current US-Swedish defense and security relationship is indeed strong, and has been built across several complimentary dimensions and with hard work and painstaking patience in both Washington and Stockholm. The strength of this relationship certainly informed the White House's thinking when considering Obama's visit to Stockholm in the summer of 2013. However, the relationship is about to be challenged in ways that it has not been before.

The key driver of the relationship has been operations, ranging from Bosnia to Li-

bya, but most importantly by collaboration in Afghanistan under ISAF. The Afghanistan mission is currently winding down, and the scale of the transatlantic commitment to Afghanistan beyond 2014 remains unclear. Furthermore, war weariness and the age of austerity brought on by the financial crisis of 2008 means that there is little appetite for further large-scale expeditionary undertakings by NATO or any other conceivable transatlantic coalition of the willing (except if a contingency arose that directly threatens Alliance security) that Sweden could play a part in. Furthermore, it is now clear that the Ukraine crisis represents a real challenge to the current European security order, and that the Baltic Sea region looks likely to be a new friction point between NATO and a newly assertive Russia. In this new context, Sweden's partnership with NATO means less than it did during NATO's expeditionary era.

In addition, the announced US pivot to Asia, and the associated draw down of US military assets in Europe, will mean that there will be fewer easy opportunities for direct collaboration between US and European forces while on European soil. The United States is in the process of removing from Europe, among other assets, an Air Force A-10 squadron and two Army regimental combat teams.²³ It is possible that additional reductions in US forces will happen in the coming years in spite of the manning security environment. As a replacement, the United States intends to rotate units in and out of Europe to exercise and train with European forces, but it is doubtful that this approach will prove as effective in building collaborative relationships as when done with permanently stationed forces. These rotations may be thre-

atened too in the future as the fiscal pressure continues to build in the United States.

There are indeed more US forces in northeastern Europe as of this writing, part of an effort to reassure US allies. However, these forces are rotating through, and there is no guarantee that they will remain there for the long haul.

Finally, many in Washington now argue that the current wave of defense cuts across Europe will leave European militaries less capable and therefore less relevant to the United States as partners on the global security stage. If this perception takes firm hold and spreads in Washington, it could reduce US interest in going out of its way to train and collaborate with European forces. Indeed, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned of exactly this in his farewell speech in Brussels in 2011.²⁴

This presents a problem for Sweden, which does not seem poised to join NATO anytime soon (in spite of a recent vigorous public defense and security debate), and where the direct relationship with Washington, in combination with its active partnership with NATO, is a key pillar of Swedish security and plays a vital role in Sweden's part of the transatlantic relationship. It also presents a challenge for Washington which, if the relationship was allowed to erode, would stand to lose a partner with sought after niche capabilities and a high degree of credibility, soft influence, and legitimacy on the international stage. There are, however, efforts that both Sweden and the United States could undertake in order to keep the relationship alive and vibrant even in a post-Afghanistan world where the security focus seems to lie in the Pacific.

The US-Swedish Defense Relationship Beyond Afghanistan

For Sweden, a natural approach to maintaining the transatlantic link in a post-Afghanistan environment would be to continue its close partnership with NATO, and thereby also gain opportunities to work with the United States through the alliance construct. However, the alliance's partnership agenda is less certain as the Afghanistan mission draws to a close. Furthermore, some of NATO's European members are beginning to question whether Sweden's relationship with the alliance can go much further without full Swedish membership. Some of these hesitations were on display during the alliance discussion on under which circumstances Sweden (and Finland) would be able to participate in Icelandic air policing. Indeed, this debate has become even more complex in the wake of the Ukraine crisis.

Thus, there is a real need to maintain the strong US-Swedish defense and security relationship, and build it out where possible. Policy vehicles such as e-PINE and the Nordic Security Dialogue are worthwhile efforts, but they are not sufficient to maintain the link moving forward and do not address hard and key security issues of central importance to both Sweden and the United States. The United States and Sweden should therefore consider follow-on efforts in all of the dimensions of the current relationship.

Operations, Exercises, and Training

The NORDEFCO construct has opened up vast cross-border areas for training and exercises in northern Sweden, Norway, and

Finland. Sweden should explore how to make these areas available for US forces to use for training on a consistent basis. Furthermore, these training areas could also be considered for use for a "Red Flag Europe" exercise, which would put Sweden in the integration and hosting role for a major transatlantic aviation exercise.²⁵ Hosting exercises in Sweden would allow Sweden to maintain and enhance force interoperability, and it would allow for exercises of a size and scope that are just not physically possible elsewhere on the European continent.²⁶ Given recent events in the Stockholm archipelago, Washington and Stockholm should consider bilateral and multilateral ASW training and exercises in the Baltic Sea.

Also, just as Sweden should continue to invite US forces to train and exercise in Sweden, Stockholm should consider sending ground units to train in the United States, at ranges such as the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. To further facilitate on-going exchanges and exercises, the US could also embed staff officers in Swedish units or higher headquarters, just as Sweden has installed liaison officers in various US military organizations and commands.²⁷

The United States should also remain engaged in regional Nordic-Baltic security through participation in NATO exercises in the broader region and to look for opportunities for joint training and exercises such as the aforementioned combat aviation exercise in 2010 and the training of Swedish personnel in Forward Air Control, FAC(A). Furthermore, US stated and public support for NORDEFCO, bilateral Finnish-Swedish cooperation, and deeper regional Nordic and Nordic-Baltic defense collaboration would do much to energize that concept. Finally, the Ukraine crisis may have a

silver lining for the US-Swedish defense relationship and Washington's interest in the broader Nordic-Baltic region. There is now in Washington a real discussion on how to reassure US allies in the region, and how to further enhance regional security over the long-term. Sweden could very well play a real role in bolstering regional security in concert with the United States and the neighbors, even though Sweden's status as a non-NATO member would require deft political handling of concerns regarding Sweden's role in Alliance efforts.

Besides the rising importance of the Asia-Pacific region and continued turmoil in the Middle East, the US will remain interested in defending the global commons (the cyber, maritime, air, and space domain) and bolstering the capacity of others to contribute to the security of the commons.²⁸ Here, Sweden could play a real role as a contributor to global security, while at the same time raise the relevance of Sweden as a US security partner. In particular, Swedish naval capabilities could be brought to bear to conduct maritime security operations and capacity building efforts around, say, the coast of Africa in concert with others, along the same lines as Sweden's recent participation in Operation ATALANTA.

US naval forces, under US Africa Command, have a ready made program of this type called Africa Partnership Station that Sweden could seek to join. Other European nations are already involved in Africa Partnership Station with their naval and marine forces, including Denmark, so having Sweden join could hardly be called controversial. Security of the global commons is also an area where US and Swedish interests are closely aligned. As a highly globalized, technologically sophisticated, and exporting country, Sweden is just as

reliant on the unfettered access and use of the global commons as the United States.

US interest in the Arctic and high north security is likely to increase in the coming years, especially as the Arctic becomes a viable global transportation route to and from the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, the US Department of Defense released its Arctic strategy, which stresses cooperative security, in November 2013.²⁹ Here, Sweden should remain engaged in the ASFR and seek out leadership roles in defense collaboration, with a particular eye towards efforts that could serve to strengthen military-to-military linkages and increase confidence with the Russian military. Other Nordic nations, such as Norway and Denmark, will quite understandably also seek to play a leading role in Arctic security in concert with the United States, but the agenda is broad enough for Sweden to play a role as well.

Capabilities Development

Both Stockholm and Washington should consider how US-Swedish joint exercises and sharing of expertise and technology can enhance the development of capabilities needed in a broader global security context. For example, the US military, as part of the announced US pivot to Asia, is increasingly interested in understanding and defeating anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities and strategies. Here, Sweden could draw on its heritage as a military force (which is essentially one of anti-access and area-denial against the Soviet Union) and provide valuable knowledge and exercise opportunities for US forces. Indeed, the previously discussed HMS *Gotland* deployment to the US west coast to exercise with US naval forces is an example of exactly this approach. Unfortunately, the

submarine exchange tour was not extended past its first two years.

The US and Swedish militaries should look for opportunities for similar exchanges in the future. Littoral warfare is another area, related to the A2/AD challenge, that should be explored for US-Swedish collaboration.³⁰ For example, the US and Swedish navies operate ships with similar roles (the Visby class corvette and the Littoral Combat Ship). Joint development of operational concepts for these two platforms may be one approach to collaboration on littoral warfare. The aforementioned Littoral Operations Center at the Naval Postgraduate School is a good start, but more practical collaboration, involving real life exercises and training, would be a good next step. These types of efforts would allow Sweden to continue to deepen its military-to-military relationship with the United States, while also indirectly supporting US defense and security efforts around the world.

Special Operations Forces (SOF) have emerged as key assets over the last decade, and their standing is unlikely to diminish, even after the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The United States is clearly seeking to further expand their numbers, capabilities, and roles to meet future challenges. The US Special Operations Command is currently developing a “Global SOF Network” which will provide the foundations for sustainable special operations in concert with friends and allies. This is also an area to explore for US-Swedish collaboration. Sweden has developed its own SOF over the last decade as well as deployed them in operations with both NATO and the European Union, and its Special Operations Group could be a valuable contribution once USSOCOM unveils its Global SOF Network. Special forces

also have direct relevance in meeting the challenge of “little green men” that played such a pivotal role in the Ukraine crisis and Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

Sweden could also play a role as a partner in building defense cyber capabilities together with the United States. In a recent report, Sweden was ranked as better prepared to absorb cyber attacks than the United States.³¹ Sweden is already a participant in the US exercise series Cyber Storm, run by the Department of Homeland Security, and this avenue of collaboration could be expanded further in coming years.³²

Industrial Cooperation

Stockholm and Washington should also take a look at re-energizing the defense industrial relationship through collaboration on the development of various technologies and future platforms. Indeed, the policy groundwork for such cooperation has already been laid with the MoU signed by Sweden and the United States in 1987. The United States may be more open to such collaboration at the present time, since defense budget reductions put a premium on acquiring capabilities at the best price, as well as reduce research and development costs by sharing the load with partners and allies.

Potential areas of industrial cooperation include unmanned systems, long-range strike weapons, air defense, subsurface technology and weapons, and radars. Just as technology sharing and industrial cooperation is the oldest pillar of the US-Swedish defense relationship, it could also serve as perhaps the most important in the coming decades, since industrial collaboration are long-term commitments that include a broad spectrum of actors from government, the military, and industry.

The above suggestions could serve as a range of options for Stockholm and Washington to advance the US-Swedish defense and security relationship. Some of the suggested approaches are quite ambitious, while others may not be appropriate at this time for political reasons. Furthermore, there should be no illusions that they could all be carried off, due to resource constraints and differing priority sets, among other things. However, they all have in common that they could serve as vehicles to sustain and expand a key relationship for a considerable period, at a time when the regional, transatlantic, and global security context is changing very quickly,

Conclusion

Built on the back of operations and shared interests, and energized by common values, the US-Swedish defense and security relationship is stronger than ever before and at a level that is remarkable for a country that is not formally a US ally. This is the result of patient work and long-term thinking within government, the military, and industry in both Sweden and the United States. However, the global security environment is changing, with the west departing Afghanistan and the United States pivoting to the Pacific. The Ukraine crisis that exploded on the scene in late March of 2014 have also cast serious doubt over the current European security posture and framework, as well as brought the broader

Nordic-Baltic region back as a potential friction point between Russia and the transatlantic community.

This emerging strategic context will call for new thinking on how to preserve the US-Swedish defense and security relationship. If maintained, or even expanded, it would enable Sweden to be a small but important contributor to transatlantic and global security in partnership with the United States. It would also enhance Swedish security, and allow for Sweden to work in close concert with the United States on issues of interests to both nations. On the US side extending and further deepening the US-Swedish defense and security relationship would lend Washington a tangible example of US commitment to Swedish as well as Nordic and Baltic security. It would also prove that capable and willing European nations, such as Sweden, remain the go-to partner for the United States in a challenging and changing global security environment.

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