

The Security Policy Situation in Sweden^I

by Björn von Sydow

Resumé

Sveriges säkerhetspolitiska läge förbättrades rejält när Sovjetunionen föll samman. Det blev utgångspunkten för en omfattande nedskärning och omstrukturering av det svenska totalförsvaret. Men samtidigt fanns det ett behov av en svensk stödjande politik i förhållande till Estland, Lettland och Litauen. Inrättandet av Baltdefcol 1999 blev en bestående insats, under flera år av svenskt ”lead”. Ett ytterligare starkt inslag blev de väldiga krigsmaterialgåvor som skedde 2000–2005 och som möjliggjordes av omstruktureringen. Det inkluderade ett massivt utbildningsstöd. Dagens ånyo försämrade läge genom Rysslands aggression mot bl a Ukraina, motiverar en svensk återrustning av totalförsvaret. EU-medlemskapet, Nato-partnerskapet och raden av mellanstatliga överenskommelser, särskilt med Finland, ger den säkerhetspolitiska ramen idag. Den uttrycker motståndskraft och solidaritet med demokratierna. Den stora totalförsvärsövningen i år visar på de praktiska slutsatserna för svensk del.

I AM VERY glad to be invited, on the 21st anniversary of the Baltic Defense College. Also, to address you on the present challenges to security and democracy, in our part of the world.

First some words on the historic narrative the last 20 years. I assumed my position as minister of Defence in February 1997. One of the first major areas for consideration was Sweden’s voice in the Baltic Sea area, now years after the Soviet’s collapse and the freedom of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the demise of DDR. The geopolitical situation for Sweden was greatly improved. A peace dividend was to be realized in all of Europe—also in Sweden. However, support for the reborn nations was also a huge task—in all parts of the society. We named it “Sovereignty Support”.

Baltdefcol

I was engaged in situations where initiatives were taken and endorsements requested. One

important task fell to my immediate authority—contribution to the Higher Defence Education in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Mr. Johan Reader and Mr. Ulf Hammarström in the Defence Ministry were extremely positive to facilitate my ministerial support to Baltic Defence College.

At my first Nordic-Baltic Ministerial at Saaremaa in June 1997, we decided that Sweden should take “lead” in the frames of a MoU. I must however declare that in these days the Danish support to Baltdefcol and Sweden was extremely valuable. In our position as “lead” we held the role within the ministry. I was briefed and active almost continuously. In the year of 2000, we found the initial phases complete, and our Defence University assumed the Swedish role.

Support deliveries

Among many other important projects, I would like to pay particular attention to the large donations of equipment to all three

countries. I gave a rather detailed narrative on this in Tallinn three months ago—but, under Chatham rules due to my confidential discussions in our government.

However, I can offer a few words.

The background in 2000 were the ongoing reductions of the Swedish Armed Forces, and especially in the Army. We understood that the alternative to downsize complete and working units was not a viable political option domestically.

I pointed out that not least in connection to EU and NATO, it is a “precondition (for Baltic membership) that the Baltic states have a defence with at least some capabilities—and they have not—and they will probably not get so much in any other way than by the support we can give”.

The 28th of September 2000, the government decided on the support deliveries to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. I suggested that the model to use was with complete sets of equipment for infantry battalions, brigade headquarters units, engineer companies and so on, units that we should train and get ready for mobilisation. Supplementary donations were anti-tank mines, anti-tanks weapons, machine guns, large amount of ammunition, explosives and maintenance equipment.

The whole issue was in conjunction with the development in the EU and the prospects of EU membership for the Baltic States. Such a membership, with active Swedish support, must be grounded upon some basic military capabilities. What we now started, would lead to a bigger joint military capability; larger than what all other individual donations had created.

I very much believe this support, together with all support from the 1990s on a total defence concept, the development of Baltbat, education in officers in Sweden and the establishment of Baltdefcol, were all important

parts in the re-creation of the armed forces of free nations.

Now: the present situation

The all-party Swedish Defence Commission worked between February 2017 until May 2019, and delivered two reports. The results are still preliminary; further negotiations are on-going. But I believe the final result will be quite a significant budget increase in our Defence spending, including Civil and Total Defence components. from 1 per cent GDP → 1.5 per cent.

The overall assessment of the Commission is that the situation with regard to global security is characterized by instability and unpredictability. I want to briefly highlight some of the key global trends and tendencies that the Commission describes:

- rapid demographic developments,
- the fact that the majority of people around the globe today live in mid-income countries,
- that globalization has brought benefits but also increased vulnerabilities,
- the increasing importance of digital technology for national security,
- the return of geopolitics. This includes the increased questioning of key norms, cooperative arrangements and institutions; increasing defense spending globally; and the increasingly worrying situation with regard to weapons of mass destruction.
- We also cover the nexus of climate change and security, and the continued threat of terrorism.

Naturally, the report has a strong focus on developments in Sweden’s neighborhood. We define this as not just the Baltic Sea region, but also the North Sea, the Baltic Sea approaches, Kattegat and Skagerrak, the

Arctic parts of Scandinavia, the Barents Sea, the Norwegian Sea and the northern parts of North Atlantic. The Commission underlines that Sweden is an Arctic country.

The deterioration of the security situation in Sweden's neighborhood is a consequence of Russia's actions. Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea violate the prohibition of the use of force that is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; they also violate the norms, cooperative formats and institutions that constitute the foundation of European security.

Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008, in Ukraine since 2014 and in Syria since 2015 demonstrate its willingness to use military means to achieve political objectives, both within Europe and beyond.

Russia already has a significant military capability at its disposal in comparison with its neighbors. Russia's military capability in absolute terms will continue to increase over the coming decade. So far, the development of Russia's military capability has not been matched by a corresponding increase in Western military capability.

The Commission makes clear that the EU is Sweden's most important platform for foreign and security policy. It is in Sweden's national interest to safeguard and strengthen the EU's cohesion, cooperation, solidarity and integration. The Defence commission also states that it is in Sweden's interest to strengthen the EU's capacity as a security policy actor, and welcomes strengthening of EU security and defense cooperation. The Defence commission considers that the transatlantic link plays a crucial role for Europe and for Sweden.

The Defence Commission stresses that developments in and around the Eastern Partnership countries, that is Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and

Ukraine, are of great importance for Europe's and Sweden's security. It is a central interest for the EU and for Sweden that these countries can uphold their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Commission welcomes the progress achieved by the Western Balkans countries and highlights the importance of their continued reform efforts.

As for the Southern neighborhood, developments give little cause for hope regarding peace and stability. Weak states and domestic conflict have serious consequences in the region and also affect Europe. The Defence Commission makes clear that developments in Asia, particularly China's rapid development and its more assertive role, will be of growing importance to Swedish foreign and security policy.

China's military build-up and its growing global power mean that the US increasingly will focus its military and security policy on Asia. The US views China as its major geopolitical challenge. In the assessment of the Defence Commission, this development may affect US interest in and ability to maintain its forces in Europe, and to reinforce them in case of a crisis.

Solidarity

The Defence Commission proposes that the Swedish unilateral declaration of solidarity in concordance with The Lisbon treaty should be maintained. The declaration of solidarity comprises EU members as well as Norway and Iceland. The declaration states that Sweden will not remain passive if another EU Member State or a Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack. We expect these countries to take similar action if Sweden is affected. Sweden must therefore be able to both give and receive civil and military support.

The Commission takes the view that now that the United Kingdom is leaving the EU, Sweden should work toward its continued inclusion in the security policy community of the EU, meaning that the Swedish unilateral declaration of solidarity would comprise the UK.

The Defence Commission underlines that defence cooperation with other states and organizations are an integrated part of Sweden's security policy and should be maintained and strengthened.

Finland

The Commission was specifically tasked to propose ways of deepening cooperation with Finland, which is the most far-reaching of all our defence cooperation engagements.

We also propose that Sweden should make a clear statement that, in the case of a crisis in our region and if both parties find it appropriate, we would be ready to assist Finland. We propose that, as the reinforcement of the Army proceeds, up to a brigade with reinforcements should be prepared for operations in Finland in a crisis, when there is a threat of war, or in war.

The Commission reaffirms the assessment made in its previous report that an armed attack on Sweden cannot be excluded, nor can the use of military measures against Sweden or threats thereof. A security crisis or an armed conflict in our neighborhood would inevitably also have an impact on Sweden. Therefore, the total defence concept will be developed and designed in order to meet an armed attack against Sweden, including acts of war on Swedish territory.

In clarifying that an attack against Sweden would be costly, the total defence, together with diplomatic, political and economic measures and other security policy instruments, serve the purpose of deterring anyone

who might want to attack Sweden or exert pressure by military means.

Exercises

One extremely important feature in order to reinforce is exercising. The Swedish Government has decided to reinforce our national defence capacity. As part of the efforts, the Total Defence Exercise 2020² (TFÖ 2020) will be held under the command of the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB).

The Total Defence Exercise 2020 is held throughout 2020 and will consist of various exercise activities. The TFÖ 2020 marks the first total defence exercise since the Cold War, and is a vital stage in strengthening Sweden's defence capacity. The TFÖ 2020 is likely to be the most comprehensive and complex exercise ever conducted by Sweden.

TFÖ 2020 will emphasize a comprehensive approach, stressing the vital aspects of joint cooperation between the civil society and military defence. Vital capabilities required for successful CIVMIL cooperation will be exercised, with the aim of delivering reliable defence capacity.

The exercise is designed to support the increase of Sweden's resilience in terms of defence capacity. The exercise will be conducted by using a hypothetical scenario in which the Government has decided to respond to a crisis alert situation, where all Swedish resources have been put on alert and Sweden is subject to armed attack.

An attack against Sweden is currently unlikely, but cannot be excluded. The scenario of the exercise has been selected due to the Government's intentions regarding our national defence—that is: to primarily be capable of repealing an armed attack against Sweden. The TFÖ scenario is strictly designed to be in line with our exercise objectives.

Except for military operations of course, civil and military chains of command at all levels will be strained, priority- and allocation functions and strategic communication (Stratcom) will be exercised as well as there will be interaction between different societal stakeholders. The latter feature will be conducted in order for CIVCIV collaboration to ensure that essential services and vital societal functions will be sustained and up and running, that there are sufficient protective measures for civilian population, all with the main objective that Sweden will be able to resist armed attack. The exercise includes both testing and awareness-raising activities.

All societal sectors at all levels will in one way or another be involved in the Total Defence Exercise. In addition to the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), a great number of central, regional and local authorities,

volunteer corps organizations and commercial companies, in total some 400 different stakeholders, will be involved in the exercise.

In conclusion

I have tried to outline rather a long period of Sweden focusing on your countries as we think you are: democracies, “lesson learning” and not least—resilient. Today, we find ourselves with very much the same type of challenges and we believe in Cooperation, rule of Law and Solidarity.

The author is Chairman of the Swedish Defence Research Agency, fellow and vice chairman of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences, a former chairman of the Swedish parliament and former Minister of Defence.

Notes

1. Speech held at the Baltic Defense College 21st Anniversary at 25th of February 2020.
2. Due to the Corona pandemic in 2020, parts of the TFÖ 2020 will be suspended or cancelled.