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**THE ROYAL SWEDISH
ACADEMY OF WAR
SCIENCES**

An Academy of its Time

by Björn von Sydow

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Translated to english by Bruce Acker.

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Resumé

The Swedish Royal Academy of War Sciences was founded in 1796 in the shadow of the Napoleonic Wars. I shall present the Academy in its modern form, and in light of a part of its history. Today we are 393 fellows, half of which are military and the remainder civilians. 160 are 70 years of age or younger. 91% are men and 9% women. There is an ambition that the academy's membership will be representative of the entirety of the modern Total Defense community. Today's Academy emphasizes qualified studies and research-like projects, which lead to publications, discussions, and debates in and outside of the Academy. The Academy's latest project – SES – which was adapted and formulated its conclusions after the 2022 Russian attack on the entirety of Ukraine, addresses essentially all aspects of the world situation we experience today—War in Europe. Is it possible for an Academy within a democratic society to simultaneously satisfy the military defenses need for secrecy and a meaningful openness and transparency? The answer today must be accepted as yes, at least in time of peace. Whether it will remain so in a modern war remains to be seen. We have just started a new project “Deterrence and resilience with Sweden in NATO—a reformed Swedish security policy.” The project will, in a structured approach, develop, discuss, and publish contributions to inform Parliament's coming multi-year Defense Decision 2025.

THE ACADEMY OF today has 393 fellows, of which 39 are invited members from foreign nations with the remaining majority being elected ordinary Swedish native members. Of the Swedish members, 160 were born after 1953, thereby being younger than 70 years old. Of these, many are still professionally active well after the customary early retirement age for military. The dramatically worsening situation after the Russian aggression against Ukraine has resulted in many of the Academy's fellows being engaged both within and in addition to their Academy activities. Roughly half of today's members are military serving in the grade of Major/Lt Commander or above, and of the remaining civilians many are former

military members. The gender distribution is approximately 91% male and 9% female.

Here and Now

The Academy seeks membership demographics that reflect of the modern Swedish Total Defense's breadth. The Academy's annual report for 2022 clearly captures the breadth of the Academy's activities, and in my opinion, it's *raison d'être*. The Academy has in recent decades been active in variety of study projects. One such project concluded in 2022, in dramatic fashion. The project commenced under the name Security in Tomorrow's Europe, a Swedish Perspective (SES), but the final report was entitled, A Serious Situation, Swedish Security Policy in

Perilous Times. During the final phase of the project, the events of February 2022 called for continued analysis to clarify among other things the implications to Sweden of war in Europe. Sweden's security policy had to be seen in a broad perspective considering both the EU and the coming membership in NATO. The Military component must be strengthened both in quantity and quality, as well as coordinated within the North Atlantic defense community. The civil defense component, which for all practical purposes had been dismantled, needed resuscitation in all haste. The conclusions were based on a comprehensive study effort that had been underway since 2018.

The Academy is divided into six sections, of which four are military, one for the civil elements of total defense and one for security policy and international relations. All sections are represented in a Presidium that in addition to the sections Chairpersons has four Academy members comprising the Academy's executive function. These additional four are the Academy's Chairperson, the Vice Chairperson, the Permanent Secretary, and the Treasurer. The Academy's activities are coordinated between the Presidium and the sections, which includes offering commentary on government proposals as well as initiatives originating in the Academy. The Academy's statutes and administrative processes are rooted in history but are adaptable as needed. The current charter has only recently been reviewed and updated, with the largest changes resulting from increased member longevity as well as welcoming more women and foreign members into the Academy. Additionally, in our quest for more youthful membership, we must adapt to schedule challenges of members engaged in balancing parental, professional and free time activities.

The Academy's gatherings, symposiums and seminars throughout the year are relatively comprehensive. For the most part, they are arranged at the National Defense University, across the street from the Royal Institute of Technology. As with society in general, the global pandemic ushered in an era of digital meetings, often as hybrid meetings with some in physical attendance. Newly inducted fellows can therefore opt to present their inaugural address to the Academy either in person or online. Often, invited guests contribute to the discussions. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is a frequent focal point of the seminars, though other salient topics including China and climate have also been of interest.

The annual Academy commemoration, this year on 13 November, presents opportunities for a variety of presentations. Swedish and Finnish NATO membership took centerstage in 2022 with all of the Nordic Chiefs of Armed Forces contributing their views. The year before, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö presented the keynote speech, immediately before the Russian aggressive intentions in Ukraine became indisputable. The Commemoration is also an opportunity for celebration and recognition in the form of medals and monetary awards for deserving contributors to the Academy's mission. Despite a modest budget dedicated primarily towards publication activities, thanks to the members' generous volunteer spirit the Academy boasts a relatively comprehensive portfolio of activities.

Our quarterly publication, *Kungl Krigsvetenskapsakademiens Handlingar och Tidskrift* has been published since 1797! While the formal name is not so terribly "catchy", we affectionately refer to it as "Gulan", perhaps best translated to "Old Yella" after its traditional yellow cover design. The Journal is published in four editions per year with

articles covering the entire spectrum of the Academy's area of interest. The Articles include recognized peer-reviewed submissions as well as analytical, discussion, and debate pieces as well as literature reviews and overviews.

The Academy has a webpage updated daily with new articles and commentary via our blog. For both the home page and the Journal, discussions are underway to address the scope of the activities appropriate for translation to English. The Academy's Journal is the broadest such publication in the Nordics and with NATO membership we have an incentive to communicate more with an author corps and reading public from among others Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Germany in addition to our Nordic neighbors, United Kingdom, and the United States. Within NATO and the EU, English is in practice the lingua franca, even if French is formally recognized on an equal footing in both alliances, in which many other languages are common.

Today's Academy is characterized by qualified studies and research projects that lead to publications, discussions, and debate, both within and external to the Royal Academy of War Sciences. These activities trace back to the 1970's when the Academy's statutes were revised to open the way for more structure in the sections work, as well as for female membership. The Academy also received enhanced economic possibilities through the formation of its own foundation, the Alberger Fund, and through possibilities for project financing from other foundations, primarily the Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg Foundation. The interest in new activities originated in the notion that the European security order could be changed, hopefully for the better. Further, the previous authoritarian social psychology of the military was giving way to the

more anti-authoritarian elements growing in society. Additionally, the Swedish defense began developing uncertainty on strategic questions of ends and means.

In 1980, the Royal Academy of War Sciences, and the Engineers Academy initiated cooperation in a study of the interaction between technology, industry and defense, entitled TIF-90. This enabled further symposiums and academic writings. As a consequence, the scientific credibility in the Academy of War Sciences Journal was enhanced. Those officers who had served in mobilization readiness roles during World War II began retiring, yielding a motivated, knowledgeable, and volunteer workforce for the Academy.

These encouraging trends were reinforced by the simultaneous trends toward dissolution of the Soviet Union resulting from their misadventure in Afghanistan and the intensifying Cold War. Similar tendencies and ambitions have continued to be an energizing mainstream within the Academy. In the period after the European democratic security order again came under threat by the retrograde Russian imperialistic nostalgia, the Academy's projects have been at the leading edge compared to the government and Parliament.

Prior to the Academy's study, the 2007 situation led to the conclusion that Sweden must retain the ability to operate together with forces from other nations, which inspired the Small States Project. This study promoted an academic (apolitical) perspective and touched all of the Academy's sections. EU membership implied a solidarity in crisis and war. The Russian war in Georgia 2008 led to a Swedish parliamentary unilateral solidarity declaration (toward EU and Nordic nations) but without any reinforcement of the Total Defense.

A new project commenced 2011 under the title National Security after 2014, which found additional motivation following the Russian invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine. This finally paved the way for the government and Parliament to increase defense investment. I remember from my time as the Chairman of the Defense Commission 2017 how important the Academy's contribution was, not the least for the civil defense deliberations. The Academy additionally opined further that the Alliance question could not be neglected. A new project was initiated, under the banner *The Future Battlefield – War Science in the 21st Century – (KV21)*.

It can be concluded that the Academy with its latest project, *Security in Tomorrow's Europe – Swedish Perspective (SES)* that after the Russian attack on Ukraine 2022 was further developed, not the least in its conclusions, covers for all intents and purposes all known aspects of the security situation we live in today. This includes pandemics, climate change, refugee flows, and the current war in Europe.

Now and in the future

Future historians will certainly note that the foregoing descriptions of the Academy's recent activities have no parallel in the roll of the Academy during the conflicts of the 1900's. We of course do not know what was said between Academy members external to the Academy's meetings or what was decided with regard to content in the Journal. Qualified descriptions of the course of the wars were included in the journal, but there remained a dearth of writings addressing the political and labor union challenges and alternatives like for example uniform service rivalries that the leadership wrestled with

under the two world wars 1914–1918 and 1939–1945.

Jan Glete opined in *The Academy of War Sciences, Defense and the Industrial Society Transformation 1870–1920* that when Armed Force in only a few decades is reformed from and agrarian class society to an industrial society with general conscription, the Academy roll was reduced to quite marginal. The Journal addressed various transformations within the Army and Navy; transition to general conscription and steam powered armored warships. But a debate weighing these issues against one another was basically non-existent if not suppressed. It could be coincident with a centralization of command and control in the General staff, Navy staff and National Defense College that the Academy's role diminished. The world wars were well documented with the Journals articles, but absent any significant new thinking with the exception of ideas associated with the establishment of an independent Air Force beginning 1926.

Academy member Arvid Cronenberg reviewed the Academy from the WWI until 1996, sharing the same basic picture as Jan Glete. With the arrival of central and regional leadership structures and higher learning institutions, the Academy lost its relevance. The Journal retained its character, but the gatherings became fast in their form as the rising median age and hierarchical class divisions made for poor soil to nourish change and renewal. "Like a red thread...it runs through the Academy's difficulties to orient itself in the grey zone that differentiates politics and science".

In domestic policy, the defense questions were highly contentious between the left, right and monarchy. This applied to the increasing mobilization in the beginning of the 1900s as well as the disarmament in 1925. The Academy and its Journal were further

constrained by opinion differences between the different branches of service. Within the Academy, these thought processes were expressed in *The New Military Journal* in the 1920's which prioritized the Army and the Air Force.

"The outbreak of war in September 1939 and the following years of readiness didn't significantly disrupt the Academy's work plan", writes Cronenberg after noting that the Academy's external contact was modest and influence exceedingly small.¹

As strange as it may seem today, neither the first nor second world war were significant sources of inspiration for the Academy of War Sciences.

Even further back in time

What if we set our gaze even further back? What were really the founding principles of the Academy?

First it must be pointed out that the original name was the Swedish Military Society, established 1796. It was a subsequent parallel to the Naval Officer Society, established 1771. This occurred in the context of the Napoleonic wars as well as the 1700's enlightenment. I favor focusing on the person of *Gustaf Wilhelm af Tibell, General and Academic*; also the title of a recently published biography. The author is Erik Norberg, a longtime member of the Academy and a former Chairman.²

The Swedish army of the time fielded approximately 48000 soldiers, divided between 31000 in Sweden, 15000 in Finland, and 2000 in Swedish Pomerania. In addition, there was a reserve consisting of 13000 soldiers in Sweden and 4000 in Finland. The respective numbers for the Navy are unknown. In the time after the Great Northern War, 1697-1719 and under time of peace, the cost of defense varied between 60-65%

of the States total budget. The Officer corps was still dominated by the aristocracy, except in the lower ranks of the Navy and the technical elements of the Army. The training level was inconsistent.

A new school of warfare, called the Academy, was established in 1792 at Karlberg, but it was not a pre-requisite to obtain an officer's commission until much later. The leadership organization had the King personally at the top, but at the same time a so-called General Adjutant was established for both the Army and the Navy as rapporteur to the King, or subject matter expert perhaps in modern language.

It was from the Karlberg School of Warfare that the initial threads were spun for a Military Society. Perhaps the most important of these forces was barely 20-year-old Captain that served as an instructor at Karlberg. It is there we find Tibell with several others of a same mind. There idea was to encourage cadets to improve themselves in military science while inspiring serving officers to engage in military science questions; not the least in the regiments in the countryside. The ambition was to create an academic society to analyze seldom-pursued questions of the art of war and to communicate them to a wider audience.

The Society commissioned itself and appointed several experienced older Generals as leaders. In addition, they received a Royal sanction from the King. Tibell became the First Secretary, which became a central position, which Tibell immediately began to fill with contributions within the framework of diverse sections and themes. Soon, the Journal could commence. But already in 1798 Tibell requested release from duty to report for duty in the service of France under Napoleon in the Italian theater. He became an army engineer, advanced to the rank of Brigadier General, and initiated an

Academy of War Sciences in Milan, with himself as Secretary and a War Archives for the Cisalpine Republic.

Back home, the Swedish Military Society had nearly collapsed and Tibell was summoned home to restore the operation. Moreover, it was then renamed in 1805 with a new Royal Charter under the current title, the Royal Academy of War Sciences.³

Sweden was drawn into a new war. Swedish Pomerania was attacked by French forces. Napoleon and the defeated Russian Tsar Alexander met in Tilsit and struck an agreement 7 July 1807 meant to force Sweden in to the French trade blockade against England. Swedish King Gustav IV Adolf refused this, resulting in an increased threat of war from Russia against Finland. Even the French-friendly Denmark-Norway were possible enemy belligerents. The Academy's activities again lost momentum. af Tibell, having newly entering the nobility, as hostilities commenced in 1808 was called by the King as General Adjutant for the Army, and later for the Navy as well. This was a position that Erik Norberg called Chief of the General Staff and Supreme Commander. I won't go deeper in to that, but refer you to Norberg's book as very interesting reading. This was no trivial task for the now 36 year old af Tibell, nor for the even younger, almost autocratic King. Af Tibell was not at all lacking independence in his recommendations and judgements, even though he often conceded in the end to a King that could have dismissed him at will, but never did.

af Tibell had more harmonious relations with the Kings uncle Karl, later King Karl XIII. When the revolution against Gustav IV Adolf occurred 13 March 1809, af Tibell was alerted by the perpetrators of the coup, but his position was completely untenable. He was considered lieutenant of the deposed Kings autocracy and an associate of

Napoleon. This eventually led to af Tibells dismissal from all positions, including from the Academy of War Sciences, and lived in a sort of exile in Rönninge in Södertörn.⁴

af Tibell was eventually rehabilitated by the new Crown Prince Carl Johan Bernadotte and was finally named as President of the Krigskolligiet, a management oversight organization for the Armed Forces. He became a Baron and Chairman of the Academy, and initiated large almost research level publications of the Army's historical writings. He was inducted in several other of the Royal academies. The Academy of War Sciences initiated election of new members, and Finnish (now a Grand Duchy under Russia) members were partially replaced by Norwegian (now in union with Sweden) members. The organization of the sections are highly reminiscent of the current structure. Censorship was permitted by law until 1810, but with the subsequent freedom of press meant possibilities for the Royal Academy of War Sciences.

After af Tibells death 1831, the Academy's proceedings were complemented in a Journal. It evolved in to the Academy's outward face with an open and modernized approach, with the exception of that which became the political main theme with Bernadotte, cooperation with Russia, nor with Carl Johans prioritizing Karlborg fortress as a central area for defense and a reserve capitol in the event of war.

Academy member Lars Ericson Wolke contends that the Society that became the Academy landed in crisis in the beginning of the 1800's. The war deeply affected the Academy, but it gradually improved and Ericson Wolke emphasizes the weight the articles in the Journal had in Sweden at that time. There were texts that ambitiously addressed tactical and technical questions that were relevant in the 1820's and 30's. "However, there are few subjects of more

strategic and security policy nature that appear in the columns, with the exception of discussions around the allotment recruiting system's existence or abolishment".⁵

Summary and Future

I have searched for threads that inform the present in light of the past for the Royal Academy of War Sciences. It is challenging to believe that an abstract creation of man, like an Academy, should be the same after more than 200 years even if the creators had envisioned it to be so. We have looked back and seen the highlighted the course of development. For the Academy we might say that the form of the organization has persisted somewhat in tact, with the obvious exception of the welcoming of our first female fellow in 1979.

Is it possible for an Academy in a democracy unite the military defense's need for secrecy with a meaningful openness and transparency? The answer must be yes, at least in peacetime. However, the patterns of the Second World War don't fit today. How will it be in a modern war? This remains to be seen. Shall Sweden manage better or worse than other nations in modern Europe?

Our Academy's transparency can be suppressed by internal tensions and power structures. It is difficult for the Academy to carry forward criticism of the current security and defense policies driven by the National leadership—today the government whose mandate originates in Parliament, compared to the past with an active monarch. To initiate debates to change the security and defense policy, "it can happen" to quote the honorable Carl Jonas Love Almqvist. But from an historical perspective the forces to preserve have been quite strong.

Today the Royal Academy of War Sciences is an independent, competent think tank. The focus is total defense, the entire Swedish society.

To "translate" military thinking and language for common understanding is a challenge. At it is not simplified by the fact that so many of our new citizens don't have Swedish as an active adult language. The Covid pandemic was a serious warning signal. How do we manage this in time of crisis and war? We should see progress with the development of AI. All text published by the Academy should immediately be translated to English and made available for our website and pods. This, so that the peoples in the free countries in our part of the world, including ourselves, can actively engage in our ways of thinking and discussions. And the converse, all of the articles we publish in English should immediately be available in Swedish. This is truly important as the Academy commences a new study phase in which our security and defense policy is integrated into NATO and continues in the EU.

Today the Academy has initiated a new research project, named "Deterrence and resilience with Sweden in NATO—a reformed Swedish Security Policy" In other words, how should military and civil fighting and resilience capacity be built to contribute to NATO's deterrence—with its various components and in cooperation with the EU. Further, how can Swedish resilience (resistance) be strengthened to contribute to an enhanced deterrence and fortitude within the entire society? As a member of NATO, Sweden becomes a part of the common strategy do deter aggression against the entire NATO area of operation. This influences both Sweden's own actions and Swedish proposals on how the Alliance and EU strategies should be developed. Sweden should therefore be an active part of negotiations

in these central questions with a departure point being Swedish national interests.

We hope that the analysis in scenario form can bring forth the consequences of the worlds security policy development within a number of areas, including the USA.

It is with great pleasure that we acknowledge that the Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnsons Foundation for Public Good has announced a donation of 2,7 million Swedish Crowns to the Royal Academy of War Sciences, which thereby means we have the means to execute the planned ambitions for the project.

We hope that some of the groundwork for the project will be ready prior to the January 2024 People and Defense Conference in

Sälen and as a foundation for the Defense Commissions final report 26 April 2024. Further these will lead into the revised Swedish National Security Strategy, planned for Spring 202 and in final form for the Parliaments Defense decision 2025. Our ambition is that these reports will be made available also in English so that counterparts in our neighboring nations and allies in EU and NATO will find them in the common interest.

The Author is Docent, former Defense Minister, and Speaker of Parliament. He is a fellow of the Royal Academy of War Sciences and the Academy's Chairman.

Notes

1. Cronenberg, Arvid: "Från första världskriget till nutid", i *Fäderneslandets försvar*. Kungl Krigsvetenskapsakademien 1796-1996, s 312-322.
2. Norberg, Erik: *Gustaf Wilhelm af Tibell. General och Akademiker*, Kungl Krigsvetenskapsakademien, Stockholm 2022
3. Ericson Wolke, Lars: "Från sällskap till akademi", i *Fäderneslandets försvar*. Kungl Krigsvetenskapsakademien 1796-1996, s 19-36. Norberg a.a. s 18-25, 37-38, 167-174
4. Norberg a a, s 50-108, 140-149. Ericson Wolke a a, s 36-37, 40-42
5. Ericson Wolke a a, s 44-58, 67, 75, 82-90, 98-99, 107-109, 119-123. Norberg a a, s 156-163, 174-199.

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