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## 10. SWEDEN: THE ALIGNED NONALIGNED

Craig Kennedy and Gary J. Schmitt

### KEY POINTS

- The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 generated a cross-party consensus to rebuild Sweden's military defensive capabilities and renew the country's civil defense preparations – implementing a concept of total defense.
- Defense plans have included a reintroduction of conscription, a significant increase in military spending, and modernization of the existing force structure.
- Sweden recognizes, however, these improvements would not be adequate in a sustained conflict with Russia; hence, although formally nonaligned, Sweden has increasingly worked with NATO, the United States, and Nordic neighbors, particularly Finland, to bolster military cooperation and planning.

For almost two centuries, Sweden had a policy of neutrality toward regional and global conflicts.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the country had military conscription for all able-bodied men and built significant commerce

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1. When Sweden joined the EU in 1995, the country's formal status as a neutral country ended. See the Swedish parliament's 2008 adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and Article 42.7, which obligates EU members to assist and support any member state under attack, as consonant with Article 51 of the UN Charter. Treaty of Lisbon, A.T.-B.E.-B.G.-C.Y.-C.Z.-D.E.-D.K.-E.E.-E.S.-F.I.-F.R.-G.R.-H.U.-I.E.-I.T.-L.T.-L.U.-L.V.-M.T.-N.L.-P.L.-P.T.-R.O.-S.I.-S.E.-S.K.-U.K., December 13, 2007, Article 42.7 T.E.U.

in the sale of munitions and other military supplies to countries around the world.<sup>2</sup> The result was a foreign policy that purported to stay above the fray of competing great powers and a defense policy seriously committed to protecting Sweden and maintaining a defense industry to support self-sufficiency. The balance between these two poles shifted after the Cold War's end, with Stockholm cutting defense resources and setting peacekeeping missions abroad as its forces' priority. The Russian invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 reset Sweden's commitment to a robust defense at home.

Swedish security priorities are articulated through a collaborative process that involves most of the parties in the *Riksdag*, the Swedish parliament. About every five years, a multiparty defense commission, appointed by the minister of defence and drawn from the *Riksdag*, identifies key threats, develops a long-term strategic plan for the country's security, and makes recommendations on spending levels for implementing these priorities. Though the government's annual statements at the beginning of the parliamentary year modify and amplify these priorities, the Swedish Defence Commission's report establishes the framework for Swedish security policy thereafter. The commission's process and its focus on creating a broad base of agreement among Sweden's leading parties provide an element of stability in defense planning and are often cited by Sweden's politicians with pride.

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2. Inspectorate of Strategic Products, *Annual Report 2018* (Solna, SE: Inspectorate of Strategic Products, 2019).

The commission's 2019 white book focuses on security and defense policy for 2021 through 2025.<sup>3</sup> The white book's overarching theme is the need to revive the concept of total defense in response to the threat now posed by Russia. This concept has three key elements: first, strengthening Sweden's conventional defense capabilities; second, increasing the country's capacity for national resilience in the event of a conventional attack on its territory; and third, strengthening ties with security partners in both the region and further abroad.

Russia's role as the primary threat is not surprising, given the country's military buildup, its willingness to use military force against neighboring countries, and its intervention in Syria to achieve seemingly expansive Kremlin goals. But the report's very blunt and public assessment that Russian military capabilities are far superior to those of Russia's neighbors, alone and together, and that this power imbalance will grow during the next decade is a surprise.<sup>4</sup> Consonant with this view is the commission's judgment that Sweden, by itself, is poorly prepared to defend itself. The white book states:

The Swedish Armed Forces have a limited capability to manage developments if the security situation deteriorates. When it comes to the requirement to be able to meet an armed attack, it is the assessment of the Defence Commission that the operational capability of the Swedish Armed Forces has considerable limitations.

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3. Swedish Defence Commission, *The Swedish Defence Commission's White Book on Sweden's Security Policy and the Development of the Military Defence 2021–2025* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Commission, May 14, 2019).

4. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*, 1.

The limitations are due to deficiencies in the units of the wartime organization regarding personnel and equipment and the fact that there are too few units . . . The Defence Commission notes that the Armed Forces have not fully reached the ambition set out in the Government's Defence Bill of 2015.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the Defence Commission's previous report, *Resilience: The Total Defence Concept and the Development of Civil Defence 2021–2025*, and concerns the Russian military threat has not diminished, the commission's negative assessment of the government's implementation of priorities for the years 2016 through 2020 explains the sense of urgency in the 2019 white book's tone, recommendations, and call for a significant increase in defense spending.

The Swedish government's second major priority is civil defense. Like its neighboring state, Finland, Sweden places considerable emphasis on its ability to mobilize private resources and the civilian population in the case of an attack on its territory. In keeping with Sweden's realistic view of the country's military capabilities, one cannot assume Sweden will be able to repel a foreign invader. Rather, the focus of civil defense and "national resilience" is to "manage serious disruptions to the functionality of society" for at least "three months."<sup>6</sup> As the *Resilience* report notes, "In a severe security crisis . . . it will take a relatively long time before the necessary decisions on international support of Sweden have been made. It will take even longer for the international support to make a practical difference. Meanwhile, Sweden must

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5. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*, 3.

6. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*.

have the capability to defend itself and endure the hardships unaided.”<sup>7</sup>

As it does with Sweden’s military capabilities, the Defence Commission has a critical take on the country’s civil defenses. “Large parts” of the system have been “decommissioned,” and, even after the increased threat from Russia, Swedish civil defense planning has had “limited strategic direction or defined ambitions.”<sup>8</sup> More has to be done for Sweden to buy time and endure in case of a conflict.

Although Sweden has emphasized its policy of neutrality over the decades, the current threat environment and its own weakness have led to a third priority—strengthening ties with other states concerned about Russian ambitions and behavior. Accordingly, in both 2009 and 2015, the Swedish parliament emphasized the need to work more closely with neighboring countries as well as the EU and NATO on defense and security matters.

## CONVENTIONAL DEFENSES

Sweden’s active-duty force totals approximately 30,000 personnel. The army’s numbers are less than 7,000, the navy’s are just over 2,000, and the air force’s total 2,700. The remaining personnel are tied to units tasked with logistics, intelligence, information warfare, electronic warfare, maintenance, and medical services. In addition, the Home Guard—National Security Forces, which can be called on to assist in territorial

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7. Swedish Defence Commission, *Resilience: The Total Defence Concept and the Development of Civil Defence 2021–2025* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Commission, December 20, 2017), 2.

8. Swedish Defence Commission, *Resilience*, 2.

defense efforts, consists of approximately 22,000 volunteers.<sup>9</sup> According to the commission's 2019 white book, currently the "wartime organization," which comprises the Home Guard and civilians, consists of about 60,000 individuals.<sup>10</sup> In spite of the change in the security environment facing Sweden, the size of the country's armed forces and defense organization has not changed appreciably in recent years. Indeed, upon ending conscription in 2010—a fact of life for Sweden's young men for more than a century—the number of volunteers was insufficient to fill the armed forces' ranks, leaving the military short of its authorized numbers.<sup>11</sup>

Starting in 2018, conscription was reintroduced, with the target of drafting 4,000 men and, for the first time in Swedish history, women into the force.<sup>12</sup> The commission, however, has already indicated the addition of 4,000 conscripts is not sufficient for the planned growth in Sweden's defense structure, proposing the number be doubled to 8,000. In total, the commission is recommending a 50-percent increase in the end strength of the wartime defense structure to 90,000.<sup>13</sup>

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9. International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), "Chapter Four: Europe," in *The Military Balance 2019* (London: IISS, February 2019).

10. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*, 7.

11. IISS, *Military Balance 2019*, 79.

12. Adam Chandler, "Why Sweden Brought Back the Draft," *Atlantic*, March 3, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/03/sweden-conscription/518571/>.

13. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*, 7.

Major proposed changes to the Swedish Army include the addition of a mechanized brigade to the two existing brigades, upgrades to the armored vehicles and Leopard 2 main battle tanks, continued acquisition of self-propelled artillery and mortars, man-portable anti-aircraft missiles, and the introduction of a division-level command structure capable of directing and concentrating the country's land forces to meet attacks on Sweden's soil if need be.<sup>14</sup> To fill the existing gap in the country's defense against ballistic missiles and Swedish air defenses, the government agreed in August 2018 to purchase four Patriot Configuration 3+ air and missile defense batteries. Delivery of the Patriots is expected to begin in 2021.<sup>15</sup>

As for the Swedish Air Force, the commission has no intention of growing the basic force structure of six fighter squadrons, three squadrons of helicopter wings, and the transport fleet of six C-130s. The air force's current major program is the acquisition and integration of 60 Saab JAS-39 Gripen E multirole fighter aircraft into the force. The Gripen E program, completed in 2019, follows the procurement of the Gripen C/D models, which was completed in 2015. Moving beyond current programs, Sweden is participating in the development of a next-generation stealthy fighter—the United Kingdom-led BAE

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14. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*, 4–6; and IISS, *Military Balance 2019*, 80–81.

15. David Donald, "Sweden Joins the Patriot Club," AIN Online, August 11, 2018, <https://www.ainonline.com/aviation-news/defense/2018-08-11/sweden-joins-patriot-club>.



Systems Tempest program.<sup>16</sup> As reported, Sweden's participation in the Tempest development is also tied to the possibility of integrating parts of that program into existing platforms as they are developed. In fact, according to the Swedish government, the agreement "does not entail long-term commitments between the countries, but is intended to enable future positions."<sup>17</sup> In any case, the first flight of a new-generation fighter is not expected until the mid-2030s at the earliest. So, instead of changing the current size of the air force, the emphasis is on revitalizing Cold War-era plans for distributing the force in a time of conflict. Dispersal, command and control, and sufficient logistics for carrying out wartime contingencies are the orders of the day.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, the fleet size for Sweden's capital navy vessels (submarines, corvettes, and missile boats) will remain largely the same. According to the commission's white book, the goal is to grow the submarine force slightly from four vessels to five vessels within the 2024 to 2025 time frame by upgrading the existing *Gotland*-class submarines, retiring an older class, and adding two new

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16. Stephen Kuper, "UK Tempest Consortium Grows with Swedish Interest in 6th-Gen Fighter Program," Defence Connect, July 22, 2019, <https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/strike-air-combat/4449-uk-tempest-consortium-grows-with-swedish-interest-in-6th-gen-fighter-program>.

17. Ministry of Defence, "Sweden and United Kingdom Sign Agreement on Development of Future Combat Aircraft Capabilities," July 19, 2019, <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2019/07/sweden-and-united-kingdom-sign-agreement-on-development-of-future-combat-aircraft-capabilities/>.

18. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*, 5.

*Archer*-class submarines. All of Sweden's submarines are equipped with air-independent propulsion systems. The *Visby*-class corvettes will be kept at five vessels, but will be upgraded with air defense missiles and new antiship missiles, and the missile patrol boat fleet will remain at four vessels. The key additional capabilities are tied to developing offensive mine-laying capabilities, outfitting Swedish helicopters for antisubmarine warfare operations, adding forces to protect the western coast of the country, and acquiring 18 new fast patrol boats capable of carrying 20 soldiers to maintain the fleet for quick-reaction coastal defense.<sup>19</sup> Finally, given the relatively small size of the Swedish fleet and Sweden's long coastlines, the commission has recommended maintaining the existing system of land-based antiship systems.

If Sweden's defense plans appear short on major new acquisition programs for the next five years, the commission in its latest report makes clear "the capacity for sustained action" during war—meaning improved logistics, support functions, and command and control systems—is a priority. The phrase also means improving the capability of the Home Guard's 40 battalions to mobilize quickly, defend key installations, and conduct necessary surveillance and demolition operations. This improvement will include new equipment (such as night-vision equipment and antitank weapons) and more extensive training and

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19. Jeff Martin, "Sweden Navy Chief Aims to Grow Sea Power," *Defense News*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/navy-league/2018/04/10/sweden-navy-chief-aims-to-grow-sea-power/>; and "Sweden Orders Additional 18 CB90-Class Fast Assault Craft," *Naval Today*, July 10, 2017, <https://navaltoday.com/2017/07/10/sweden-orders-additional-18-cb90-class-fast-assault-craft/>.

exercise regimes.<sup>20</sup> The government has also dispersed service staffs from Stockholm to enhance Sweden's survivability in case of conflict. The air staff has moved inland to Uppsala, and the navy has moved back to the Muskö Naval Base, a cavernous, underground naval facility on the island of Muskö, just south of Stockholm.<sup>21</sup> And, like other modern states now critically dependent on digital communications and the Internet, Sweden is focused on upgrading its cyber defenses and developing offensive capabilities as well. The country expects to draw on the talent of conscripts to help improve competencies in that area. Finally, Stockholm is increasing its defense posture on the geographically important Baltic Sea island of Gotland.<sup>22</sup> As recently as 2015, the island lacked a military garrison. Going forward, the plan is to harden the existing defense posture on the island with more territorial forces, field a battery of ground-based antiship missiles, create a battalion-sized mechanized

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20. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*, 5.

21. Paolo Valpolini, "The Swedish Air Force Looks to the Future," *European Defence Review*, July 16, 2018, <https://www.edrmagazine.eu/the-swedish-air-force-looks-to-the-future>; and David Crouch, "Swedish Navy Returns to Vast Underground HQ amid Russian Fears," *Guardian*, September 30, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/30/swedish-navy-returns-to-vast-underground-hq-amid-russia-fears>.

22. Simon Johnson, "Sweden to Boost Gotland Air Defense amid Russia Tensions," Reuters, July 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-defence-gotland/sweden-to-boost-gotland-air-defense-amid-russia-tensions-idUSKCN1TW27U>; Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission's White Book*, 4; and Grzegorz Kuczyński, "Sweden Faces the Russian Threat in the Baltic Sea," December 10, 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/sweden-faces-russian-threat-baltic/>.

battle group, and deploy a missile air defense system and artillery units.

## CIVIL DEFENSE

After World War II and the massive threat posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, both Finland and Sweden adopted strategies of total defense, preparing their countries to both wage war against an invader and to maintain a coherent strategy as a nation during the fight. To this day, Finland has attempted to sustain a total defense strategy with a fairly formidable, if small, conventional military force, a population-wide reserve force, and an extensive array of tunnels and shelters designed to complicate an adversary's ability to occupy and pacify the country.<sup>23</sup> This comprehensive security concept was the norm as well for Sweden from the 1940s until the late 1990s. But the idea of total defense lay fallow after the implosion of the Soviet Union because Sweden saw no threat to the homeland from a weak Russia. In the 1990s, Stockholm emphasized dealing with crises outside of Sweden's borders.<sup>24</sup> This emphasis led to the establishment of an expeditionary military capability and a concomitant set of strategies for dealing with crises outside Sweden. But, considering

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23. Teri Schultz, "Finland Wins Admirers with All-Inclusive Approach to Defense," *Deutsche Welle*, October 4, 2017, <https://p.dw.com/p/2IDXv>; and Thomas Grove, "Beneath Helsinki, Finns Prepare for Russian Threat," *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/beneath-helsinki-finns-prepare-for-russian-threat-1500024602>.

24. See Barbara Kunz, *Sweden's NATO Workaround: Sweden's Defense and Security Policy against the Backdrop of Russian Revisionism*, Focus Stratégique no. 64 (Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales, November 2015), 13.

the conflict in South Ossetia, the Ukraine crisis, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's stated ambitions for reordering the security architecture of Europe, the Swedish government turned its thoughts to civil defense and, more broadly, the nation's resilience in case of an invasion. In 2015, total defense planning was begun once again.<sup>25</sup> But, as noted earlier, the Defence Commission's 2017 report *Resilience* clarified, though some planning had resumed, the total defense effort lacked sufficient urgency and direction.

Though it may have seemed radical, the move to revive the total defense posture was not so because the legal structure for the strategy was still in place.<sup>26</sup> Although planning had stopped, the laws governing the government's ability to carry out civil defense policies had remained on the books. The issues facing the government were not small, however. The issues included traditional civil defense goals such as making sure adequate food, water, and drug supplies were available and maintaining access to energy, provisions for handling mass casualties, and sufficient bunkers and shelters for both civilians and government officials.

Complicating these traditional needs were new issues. Sweden, like many Western states, has

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25. Swedish Defence Commission, *Sweden's Defense Policy 2016 to 2020* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Commission, June 1, 2015), 3.

26. Swedish Defence Commission, *Resilience*; Björn von Sydow, "Resilience: Planning for Sweden's 'Total Defence,'" *NATO Review*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/04/04/resilience-planning-for-swedens-total-defence/index.html>; and Fredrik Lindgren and Ann Ödlund, "Total Defence at the Crossroads," in *Strategic Outlook 7*, ed. Cecilia Hull Wiklund et al. (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, October 9, 2017), 37–44.

developed a highly efficient and economical just-in-time supply system for many of these necessities. Also, Sweden has become a highly digitalized society since the late 1990s. Resilience would require plans for dealing with cyberattacks, disruptions in electronic communications, and information warfare waged through social media. Finally, because of reforms made by Swedish governments in the past, many of the public services the government had operated in the past had passed into private hands. Developing the mechanisms for tying the public sector to the private sector, the national government to local governments, and civilians to the military to ensure a whole-of-nation approach to total defense—and then training and exercising those mechanisms—is no small task.

In its report, the commission suggested a single agency be put in charge of coordinating the total defense effort and recommended the Swedish Ministry of Defence be given that role.<sup>27</sup> The focus of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency has been on peacetime disruptions. The commission appears to have concluded, although the Civil Contingencies Agency would have a role to play in the civil defense effort, total defense required greater organizational capacity and a strategic outlook. The commission set 2025 as the date by which to complete the civil defense revitalization. For 2018 through 2020, the commission has allocated some 400 million Swedish krona (SEK) (US\$41 million) per year to civil defense

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27. Swedish Defence Commission, *Resilience*, 3.

efforts.<sup>28</sup> According to the commission, its proposal to strengthen both military and civil defense is expected to cost about 4.2 billion SEK annually for 2021 through 2025.<sup>29</sup>

## SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS

The Swedish government believes that by itself, Sweden would not be able to withstand a Russian invasion for longer than a few months. Indeed, according to the Defence Commission, the expectation is “Russia’s military capability in absolute terms will continue to increase over the coming decade” and, so far, this “development . . . has not been matched by a corresponding increase in Western military capability.”<sup>30</sup> In such a security environment, a priority for Sweden is to enhance its deterrence posture vis-à-vis Russia by working with other states and their militaries.

Repeatedly, in government reports and formal statements of government policy, the EU is described as Sweden’s “most important . . . arena” or “platform” for its foreign and security policy.<sup>31</sup> These statements are followed by a Swedish refusal to “remain passive”

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28. Aaron Mehta, “Fortress Sweden: Inside the Plan to Mobilize Swedish Society against Russia,” *Defense News*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2018/03/14/fortress-sweden-inside-the-plan-to-mobilize-swedish-society-against-russia/>.

29. Swedish Defence Commission, *Resilience*, 6.

30. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission’s White Book*, 1.

31. See, for example, Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission’s White Book*, 1; and Ann Linde, “The Government’s Statement of Foreign Policy, 2020,” (speech, the Riksdag, Stockholm, Sweden, February 12, 2020).

if a fellow EU member, Norway, or Iceland “suffers a disaster or an attack.” In turn, the expectation is “these countries will act in the same way if Sweden” faces “a disaster or an attack.”<sup>32</sup> As an element of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy, since 2008, Sweden has led the Nordic Battlegroup, consisting principally of Swedish troops and elements from neighboring militaries. As with all EU Battlegroups, the Nordic Battlegroup has never been deployed to an actual crisis or sent into conflict, undoubtedly because doing so would require the consent of all EU member states. The primary difficulty with the EU being the centerpiece of Sweden’s security policy is the EU’s defense cooperation is limited to operations outside the territory of the EU. Nor is the EU set up institutionally to act at the level of decisiveness required to meet the kind of large-scale contingencies posed by a potential conflict with Russia. In such a situation, the EU’s NATO members are expected to rely on the alliance to provide for their defenses. Given this reality, Sweden has opted to deepen security ties with its neighboring democracies, the United States, and NATO, even while remaining outside the alliance formally. The Defence Commission has reiterated “the transatlantic link plays a crucial role for Europe and for Sweden,” and “NATO is the clearest manifestation of this link.”<sup>33</sup>

Well before the heightened concern about Russia, Sweden was cooperating with other Nordic states in several security-related forums. In 2009, these

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32. See, for example, Linde, “Government’s Statement of Foreign Policy”; and Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission’s White Book*, 2.

33. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission’s White Book*, 2.



forums were brought together in the Nordic Defence Cooperation, which includes Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Finland.<sup>34</sup> The Nordic Defence Cooperation is an effort to develop collaborative defense programs that allow for cooperative actions, such as sharing costs in specific acquisition programs. In light of the declining defense budgets of each country at the time, getting more from less by working on joint projects seemed reasonable.

As for NATO, Sweden joined the Partnership for Peace program in 1994 and is one of the five Enhanced Opportunities Partners, a designation which reflects their work with NATO operations and strives to deepen interoperability with alliance members.<sup>35</sup> Sweden has also offered rotational forces for the alliance's high-readiness force, the NATO Response Force.<sup>36</sup> In 2014, Sweden signed, and eventually ratified in 2016, a host nation support agreement with NATO that makes providing logistical support for NATO training exercises on Swedish soil and, in a time of conflict or crisis, providing support to or receiving support from NATO forces easier.<sup>37</sup> Sweden also participates in Strategic Airlift Capability, a multinational arrangement managed by NATO. The program provides heavy-lift air transport to its 12 member states, with Sweden having the most

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34. "About NORDEFECO," Nordic Defense Cooperation, n.d., <https://www.nordefco.org/the-basics-about-nordefco>.

35. "Relations with Sweden," NATO, accessed October 4, 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52535.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52535.htm).

36. "Relations with Sweden."

37. Charles Duxbury, "Sweden Ratifies NATO Cooperation Agreement," *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/sweden-ratifies-nato-cooperation-agreement-1464195502>.

access, after the United States, to the program's C-17 Globemaster aircraft.<sup>38</sup>

Since becoming a NATO partner state, Swedish naval, air, and ground forces have hosted or been involved in numerous military exercises with neighbors and NATO members.<sup>39</sup> Sweden has been a participating member of NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence since 2015 and participated in NATO-hosted cyber exercises. Sweden also participated in NATO crisis management exercises in 2016, 2017, and 2019.<sup>40</sup> Three of the more notable military exercises have been Aurora 17, Sweden's biggest exercise in two decades, which multiple alliance members participated in, including the United States; Exercise Trident Juncture 2018, NATO's largest exercise in 20 years; and the Swedish Army exercise Northern Wind—conducted in 2019 in the northeast of Sweden and involving some 7,000 troops from the United States, Norway, Finland, and

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38. "Strategic Airlift," NATO, updated March 31, 2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50107.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50107.htm).

39. Kuczyński, "Sweden Faces the Russian Threat," 13–14.

40. "France Wins Cyber Defence Exercise Locked Shields 2019," NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, n.d., <https://ccdcoe.org/news/2019/france-wins-cyber-defence-exercise-locked-shields-2019/>; and NATO, "Crisis Management Exercise 2019," Press Release 052, May 3, 2019, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_165844.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_165844.htm).

the United Kingdom.<sup>41</sup> In addition, in recent years Sweden has signed defense cooperation agreements with Poland (2015), Denmark (2016), and the United States (2016) and a trilateral accord with Finland and the United States (2018).<sup>42</sup>

Sweden's deepest defense tie is with Finland, who shares a border and seas with both Sweden and Russia. Potentially, Finland's defense provides strategic and operational depth to Sweden. Not long after signing the 2018 defense cooperation agreement with the United States and Finland, Sweden and Finland finalized an accord that called for joint defense exercises and military access to each other's territory. In addition, the agreement has evolved to include joint operational defense planning.<sup>43</sup> Under the umbrella of Northern Wind, a joint Swedish-Finnish brigade was created for the exercise, with the Finnish contingent of approximately 1,500 troops being the largest force Finland has deployed outside its territory since World

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41. Mike Winnerstig, "The Strategic Ramifications of the Aurora 17 Exercise in Sweden," October 2, 2017, <https://icds.ee/the-strategic-ramifications-of-the-aurora-17-exercise-in-sweden/>; Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe Public Affairs Office, "The Swedish Armed Forces Participate in Trident Juncture," 2018, <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2018/the-swedish-armed-forces-participate-in-trident-juncture->; and Defence Today News Desk, "Winter Warfare Capabilities Tested in Swedish Exercise Northern Wind," Defence Today, March 22, 2019, <https://www.defencetoday.com/security/winter-warfare-capabilities-tested-in-swedish-exercise-northern-wind/>.

42. Kuczyński, "Sweden Faces the Russian Threat," 13–14.

43. Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Finland and the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden on Defence Cooperation, F.I.-S.E., July 9, 2018; and Karin Enström and Carl Haglund, *Action Plan for Deepened Defence Cooperation* (Turku, FI: Swedish Ministry of Defence and Finnish Ministry of Defence, May 6, 2014).

War II. Swedish-Finnish defense cooperation is set to increase, as proposed by the Defence Commission.<sup>44</sup> With limited defense funds, coordinating on procurement and operational planning buys both countries more capability. The Swedish Air Force and Swedish submarines provide Finland with more capacity and, in turn, the Finnish Army and surface fleet help fill gaps in Sweden's forces.<sup>45</sup>

Although the rationale for much of Sweden's post-Cold War military deployments abroad has been Stockholm's sense of obligation to assist in maintaining international order through crisis management, such assistance is also understood as easing discussions with security partners over potential Swedish defense needs in turn. Under the various umbrellas of the UN, the EU, NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and ad hoc arrangements, Sweden has deployed small numbers to Afghanistan, Iraq, Ukraine, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Somalia. In 2011, Sweden sent several Gripen jets and an aerial tanker to fly defensive air cover and eventually collect tactical intelligence in support of the UN-sanctioned, NATO-led Libya campaign.<sup>46</sup> As late as 2012, Swedish forces numbered 500 in Afghanistan, with Sweden taking the lead of a Provincial

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44. See Finnish Prime Minister's Office, *Government's Defence Report* (Helsinki: Finnish Prime Minister's Office, July 2017), 18.

45. See Piotr Szymański, *The Northern Tandem: The Swedish-Finnish Defence Cooperation*, OSW Commentary no. 298 (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, March 20, 2019).

46. Ann-Sofie Dahl, *Partner Number One or NATO Ally Twenty-Nine? Sweden and NATO Post-Libya*, NATO Defense College Research Paper no. 82 (Rome: NATO Defense College, September 2012).

Reconstruction Team in the country's fourth-largest city, Mazār-e Sharif.<sup>47</sup> In 2020, Sweden sent an additional 150 troops to accompany some 200 already serving in Mali to assist in training, intelligence, and French-led counterterrorism operations under the UN-sanctioned stabilization mission and the EU training mission. This contingent, now totaling more than 300, is Sweden's largest contingent abroad.<sup>48</sup>

## THE DEFENSE BURDEN

Thirty years ago, just before the end of the Cold War, Sweden fielded a formidable force when compared with today's force. Swedish active-duty soldiers numbered 100,000, and the country's reserves totaled some 350,000. The air force consisted of some 300 combat aircraft, and the navy's fleet consisted of 40 ships, including a dozen submarines.<sup>49</sup>

Sweden's defense spending at that point was approximately 2.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). In 2000, the defense burden as a percentage of the GDP was still 2 percent. A decade later, the GDP stood at 1.3 percent and continued to decline, resting at 1.12 percent in 2018. Guided by the Defence Commission report, the major Swedish parties in fall 2019 agreed to a goal of 1.5 percent of GDP for defense

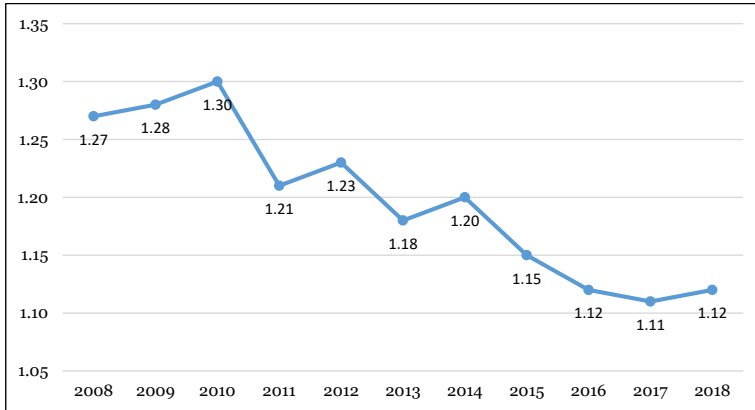
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47. International Security Assistance Force, "International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures," ISAF Placemats Archive, January 6, 2012, [https://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats\\_archive/2012-01-06-ISAF-Placemat.pdf](https://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats_archive/2012-01-06-ISAF-Placemat.pdf).

48. Fergus Kelly, "Sweden's Government Proposes to Send 150 Troops and Helicopters to Mali for Task Force Takuba," *Defense Post*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/03/16/sweden-150-special-forces-helicopters-takuba-mali/>.

49. Kuczyński, "Sweden Faces the Russian Threat."

by 2025.<sup>50</sup> The decline in Swedish defense burden as GDP percentage is expressed in figure 10-1.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 10-1. Swedish defense expenditure as a percentage of GDP**

Since the mid-1990s, when the Swedish government introduced a series of reforms that considerably lightened public intervention in the country's economy and pulled back on deficit spending, the composition of the Swedish government's budget has remained relatively stable in areas such as housing, health, and education. Nevertheless, other than the drop in the percentage of monies spent on public services, the only other cut was associated with national defense. Since the start of the century, defense's percentage of

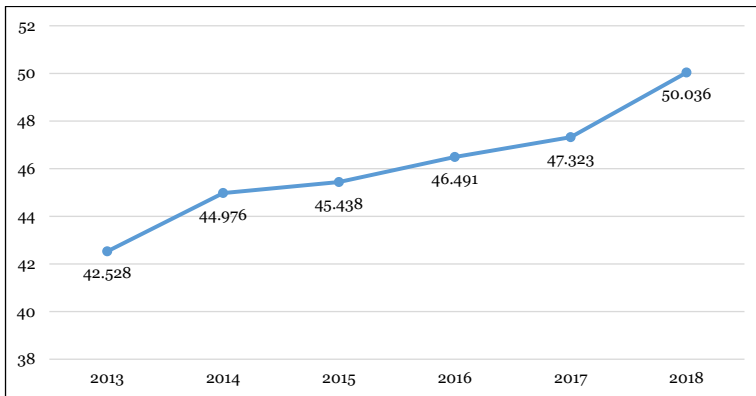
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50. Daniel Darling, "Sweden Plans \$2 Billion in Extra Defense Spending from 2022–2025," *Defense & Security Monitor* (blog), September 5, 2019, <https://dsm.forecastinternational.com/wordpress/2019/09/05/sweden-plans-2-billion-in-extra-defense-spending-over-2022-2025-period/>.

51. "Military Balance+," IISS, n.d., <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance-plus>.

the budget had gone from 4.1 percent to 2.4 percent in 2018 – a decline of 42 percent.<sup>52</sup>

Following the Ukraine crisis, Sweden has gradually increased the amount spent on the military. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the defense budget in 2013 was 42.5 billion SEK and has grown every year, with the latest figure for 2018 at 50 billion SEK – a nominal increase of approximately 17 percent. Sweden’s defense spending numbers are represented in figure 10-2.<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 10-2. Swedish defense spending in billions (SEK)**

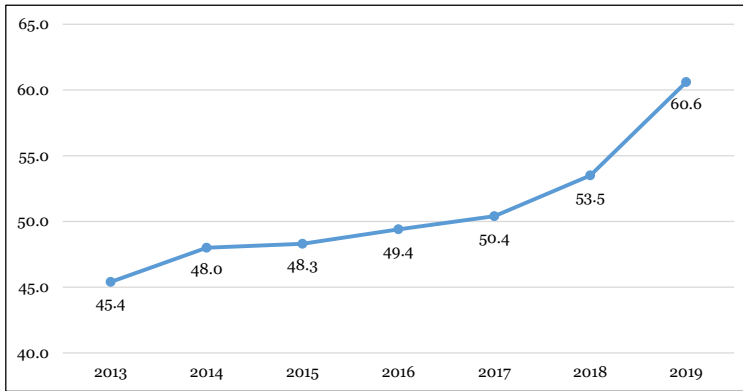
The official Swedish budget numbers shown in figure 10-3 are slightly higher, but they include monies

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52. “General Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG),” EuroStat, accessed March 4, 2020, [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=gov\\_10a\\_exp&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=gov_10a_exp&lang=en).

53. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Military Expenditure by Country, in Local Currency, 1988–2018* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).

for national contingencies—that is, expenditures beyond a base military budget—as part of the total defense effort.<sup>54</sup> Both figure 10-2 and figure 10-3 show growth in defense spending and a more rapid rise in recent years.



**Figure 10-3. Swedish defense and contingency spending in billions (SEK)**

In the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis and with the Russian intervention in the Syrian Civil War ongoing, the Swedish defense bill set out to increase Sweden’s military capability and identified multiple gaps that needed to be filled. Spending would increase by some US\$236 million annually from 2016 to 2020.<sup>55</sup> Soon, Sweden realized it would need more resources. In 2017, the parties agreed to an increase of US\$300 million annually from 2018 to 2020.<sup>56</sup> Even so, in early 2018,

54. Government Offices of Sweden, *Swedish Government Offices Yearbook 2017* (Stockholm: Government Offices of Sweden, June 7, 2018), 40; and Government Offices of Sweden, *Swedish Government Offices Yearbook 2019* (Stockholm: Government Offices of Sweden, June 16, 2020), 38.

55. Darling, “Sweden Plans.”

56. IISS, “Chapter Four: Europe,” 82.



the Swedish Armed Forces reported, under current plans, the budget was at least US\$700 million short for the years 2018 to 2025—a gap implicitly recognized in the Defence Commission’s 2019 white book.<sup>57</sup>

In fall 2019, the parties reached a new agreement to increase defense spending again. In addition to the 12-percent nominal increase from 2018 to 2019, the 2020 defense budget grew 8 percent to a total 64.8 billion SEK.<sup>58</sup> With a commission goal of reaching 84 billion SEK for defense in 2025, the government will budget some 20 billion SEK more between now and 2025.<sup>59</sup> If this goal is accomplished, Sweden will have, in nominal terms, nearly doubled its armed forces’ resources over a period of 12 years—a notable achievement. Nevertheless, though this increase will leave Sweden spending approximately 1.5 percent of its GDP on defense, Sweden remains short of the 2-percent goal NATO members have set as the minimum for each member. Sweden, of course, is not a NATO member and has no formal obligation to reach the 2-percent target. But, even at 1.5 percent, the country will be in lockstep with the plans of Germany, which is Europe’s largest economy and a NATO member.

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57. “Sweden Edges Up Military Spending, Says More to Come,” Reuters, March 13, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-defence/sweden-edges-up-military-spending-says-more-to-come-idUSKBN16K1K6>.

58. Fenella McGerty, “Sweden Proposes 2020 Budget,” *Jane’s Defence Industry*, September 18, 2019, [https://web.archive.org/web/20190922190609/https://www.janes.com/article/91383/sweden-proposes-2020-budget?from\\_rss=1](https://web.archive.org/web/20190922190609/https://www.janes.com/article/91383/sweden-proposes-2020-budget?from_rss=1).

59. Swedish Defence Commission, *Swedish Defence Commission’s White Book*, 10.

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Sweden's strategic outlook has obviously evolved as the security environment both abroad and on its borders has changed. During the Cold War, though it took no side formally between the military blocs led by Moscow and Washington, DC, Sweden was heavily militarized. Bunkers and shelters were dispersed throughout the country; army, air force, and naval bases were spread throughout virtually the whole of Sweden. And, because conscription was nearly universal, generations of Swedish men had served in the military, and many remained in the reserves. After the Cold War, Sweden's military was substantially downsized and became an active participant in blue-helmet UN peacekeeping and crisis management operations. The military, if it was to be deployed, was principally tasked with helping to tamp down simmering disputes or to create conditions for reconciliation. As a small, nonaligned state, Sweden has viewed the preservation of international law and the security order of central importance to the country's security. With the conflict in South Ossetia in 2008 and Putin's rhetoric of reestablishing a Russian sphere of influence, Stockholm began to reconsider the strategic environment. But the Swedish government did not take concrete steps to begin to rebuild the military's capabilities and reinvigorate the country's civil defenses until 2014, following the Ukraine crisis and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

In the midst of the conflict in Ukraine in 2013–14 but before Russia moved militarily against Ukraine, Sweden's then-Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt gave the 2014 statement of the government's

foreign policy before the Swedish parliament.<sup>60</sup> The statement is notable for the centrality of Europe in the Swedish government's strategic vision. Bildt called for "a strong, united and open Europe" – a "global Europe." Although the statement also mentions the need for Sweden to have "strategic links with other global actors," Bildt stresses Sweden is "committed to" the EU. Bildt speaks of the Swedish military twice as having a role in peacekeeping and "crisis management" operations – operations the government may or may not assume. In contrast, toward the end of his remarks, Bildt, in line with the 2009 solidarity clause of the Lisbon Treaty, reiterated the Swedish solidarity declaration from 2009 that Sweden will not stand by if a Nordic country or an EU member state is under attack and emphasized, for Sweden, this declaration has meant strengthening security ties with neighboring Nordic states.

The 2015 government's annual foreign policy statement was made under a new, center-left government, and the statement's tone was considerably different.<sup>61</sup> In the wake of "the Russian aggression against Ukraine" and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's "barbaric offensive" in the Middle East, Sweden now faced "a time of greater insecurity." Although this statement perpetuated the Swedish theme "international collaboration and cooperation" are central to the country's foreign policy, Sweden's security commitment to the defense of Nordic countries and EU member states and the

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60. Carl Bildt, "Statement of Government Policy" (speech, Parliament House, Stockholm, Sweden, February 19, 2014).

61. Margot Wallström, "Statement of Foreign Policy 2015" (speech, Parliament House, Stockholm, Sweden, February 11, 2015).

expectation it would receive the same was moved to near the statement's beginning. The 2015 statement also brought forward Sweden's cooperation with its neighboring states in defense matters and, unlike the 2014 statement, stipulated "close transatlantic collaboration between the EU and the United States is particularly important."

The most recent statement, made in February 2020, begins by noting "the world is becoming increasingly unpredictable."<sup>62</sup> The mention of security partners beyond the Nordic states, with specific mentions of the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, make this statement distinctive. The 2020 statement also flags "enhanced cooperation" with Finland. With NATO skeptic Donald Trump in the White House, the minister's underlying point is "Europe must take greater responsibility for its own security," and this point is accompanied by a gentle reminder that "a strong transatlantic link is important" for both Europe and the United States.

That link, however, has never included Sweden's formal membership in NATO, and, from the viewpoint of the parties of Sweden's center-left, "non-participation in military alliances" has, in the minister's words, served Sweden "well and [contributed] to stability and security in northern Europe." Although all of Sweden's center-right parties now favor NATO membership, public support for membership has consistently fallen short of a majority.<sup>63</sup> In 2015, a

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62. Linde, "Government's Statement of Foreign Policy."

63. See IISS, "Chapter Four: Europe," 79; and Anna Wieslander, "Will Sweden's Elections Lead to NATO Membership?," *New Atlanticist* (blog), September 6, 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/will-sweden-s-elections-lead-to-nato-membership/>.

poll finally indicated more Swedes favored NATO membership than did not. But, even then, those favoring membership topped off at 45 percent.<sup>64</sup>

Whether nonparticipation in a military alliance continues to serve Sweden's security remains an open question. Certainly, the *Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut* (Swedish Defence Research Agency) has not downgraded the military threat posed by Russia. In its forecast for Russian military capabilities for the next decade, the agency concludes, though the Russian economy might prevent the Russian military from exponentially improving, it can be expected to "consolidate" the significant improvements made to its forces since 2008 and retain "the ability to launch a regional war." Putin's goals remain, according to agency analysis, "recognition [of Russia] as a great power and [the establishment of] a sphere of interest in its neighborhood."<sup>65</sup>

As already discussed, Stockholm has tried to square the circle of formal military nonalignment with its threat perception by increasing defense ties with NATO and its members. In some respects, this strategy is not new. Although Sweden publicly adhered to a policy of neutrality during the Cold War, the country engaged in secret military cooperation with multiple NATO countries beginning in the

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64. "More Swedes Want to Join NATO," Radio Sweden, January 11, 2015, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=6064600>.

65. Fredrik Westerlund and Susanne Oxenstierna, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2019* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2, 2019), 3.

earliest days.<sup>66</sup> Democratic and geostrategically important, Sweden was both an inviting target for Soviet forces and an obvious partner of the democratic West should war have broken out. Even though the Cold War was brought to a peaceful conclusion and Russian revanchism had yet to appear, Sweden was the largest single contributor to the creation of armed forces in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania after their independence, and, as previously noted, Sweden was among the first nations to join NATO's newly created Partnership for Peace program in 1994.<sup>67</sup> Sweden also took a supportive view of NATO's expansion into the Baltic states just a few years later. And, indeed, though a majority of Swedes do not seem to favor joining NATO, in recent polling almost two-thirds have a "favorable" view of the alliance.<sup>68</sup>

Even before the Ukraine crisis, Sweden was participating in NATO exercises. In 2011, a command exercise hosted by Norway was designed around a potential military attack against the country by the

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66. See Commission on Neutrality Policy, *Had There Been a War . . . Preparations for Reception of Military Assistance 1949–1969*, SOU 1995:11 (Stockholm: Commission on Neutrality Policy, 1994); and Mikael Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen: Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser* [The hidden alliance: Sweden's secret NATO relations] (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2011).

67. See Johan Raeder, "Thinking of the Future of NATO's Partnerships," in *Advancing US-Nordic-Baltic Security Cooperation: Adapting Partnership to a New Security Environment*, ed. Daniel S. Hamilton, Andras Simonyi, and Debra L. Cagan (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2014), 51.

68. See Moira Fagan and Jacob Poushter, *NATO Seen Favorably across Member States* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 9, 2020), 7.

fictional state of Vineland.<sup>69</sup> As such, the scenario involved discussions of mutual defense guarantees under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.<sup>70</sup> Though not a signatory to the treaty, as the crisis unfolded, Sweden offered political support to Norway; next, Swedish airspace for the alliance to use; and, then, air and maritime forces in support of NATO operations and under alliance command. Admittedly, the scenario hit close to home because Norway was being invaded. Nevertheless, this exercise signaled, when the pressure is on, Sweden would likely not stand aside in a NATO conflict with Russia, especially if it involved a Nordic or Baltic neighbor. And, in turn, the expectation is NATO would not stand aside if Sweden were the target of Russian aggression.

## CONCLUSION

In spring 2018, the Swedish government published a 20-page pamphlet, *Om krisen eller kriget kommer (If Crisis or War Comes)*, providing guidance on civil defense.<sup>71</sup> The pamphlet was distributed to five million households throughout the country, with versions in Swedish, English, and multiple other languages and dialects. The pamphlet was also made available in audio formats. The pamphlet outlines advice on preparing home supplies—food, water, heat, and communications—in the wake of a national emergency. The pamphlet also notes, if

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69. Dahl, *Partner Number One*, 6–8.

70. The North Atlantic Treaty, B.E.-C.A.-D.K.-F.R.-I.S.-I.T.-L.U.-N.L-N.O.-P.T.-U.K.-U.S., April 4, 1949.

71. See Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, *If Crisis or War Comes* (Karlstad, SE: Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, May 2018).

judged necessary for the country's defense, private property can be requisitioned by the government, and individuals between the ages of 16 and 70 may be conscripted to undertake jobs they do not usually have. The pamphlet lists the various types of attacks Sweden might face – from cyber to air and rocket attacks – and asserts strikingly, “If Sweden is attacked by another country, we will never give up. All information to the effect that resistance is to cease is false.”<sup>72</sup>

Three issues appear to complicate Sweden's confidence in its ability to resist. The first is tied to the booklet being published for the first time since 1961. In many ways, Sweden has grown and improved as a country. But Sweden is significantly different in terms of civic culture, popular expectations, and the place the military occupies in Swedes' daily lives. Indeed, one reason the booklet was published in 16 languages is, as of 2019, approximately 20 percent of Sweden's population was born outside of the country.<sup>73</sup> Hence, renewing a whole set of practices and attitudes that, following World War II, were deeply ingrained in the whole of society is no small task. As one critic of the booklet noted, the 2018 pamphlet being addressed

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72. Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, *If Crisis or War Comes*, 12.

73. “Summary of Population Statistics 1960–2019,” Statistiska Centralbyrån [Statistics Sweden], updated March 19, 2020, <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/population-composition/population-statistics/pong/tables-and-graphs/yearly-statistics--the-whole-country/summary-of-population-statistics/>.



to “the population of Sweden,” not “the citizens” of Sweden as the original version was, is perhaps telling.<sup>74</sup>

The second issue concerns resources. Again, as with the pamphlet, the Swedish government had shown itself to be serious about meeting the new security environment by pushing defense budgets up considerably. Yet, the hole Sweden found itself in was deep. Whether the plans for rebuilding Swedish military capabilities are sufficient for the country to dig itself out of the hole and meet the threat the country faces is not obvious. Modernizing a military is expensive, and, looking at Swedish defense procurement plans, the government has seemingly decided to buy new platforms or update older platforms instead of adding substantial new force structure. For a country that spent 2 percent of its GDP on defense as recently as the turn of the century, the government’s goal to have a defense burden of 1.5 percent by mid-decade is not as compelling as it might be.

The third issue concerns Sweden’s ability to rely on its security partners under the present circumstances. Sweden’s defense procurement strategy means the country is more dependent on friends and partners to supply its defense needs; thus, the country’s ties to the EU, Finland, NATO, and the United States are vitally important. But the EU’s ability to act as a coherent whole in security and defense matters has been notably lacking for years, and this problem shows few signs of abating anytime soon. As for the United States and NATO, Sweden has seen two successive

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74. Kristian Gerner, “Why Sweden’s ‘Prepare for War’ Leaflet Is a Waste of Time,” *The Conversation US*, May 25, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/why-swedens-prepare-for-war-leaflet-is-a-waste-of-paper-97194>.

American presidents who have shown less regard for transatlantic relations than any others in memory. Absent actual NATO membership, uncertainty in Stockholm about Swedish security in case of a conflict is not surprising.

In her 2020 statement before the Swedish parliament on the government's foreign policy, Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde said, "Diplomacy is our primary line of defence."<sup>75</sup> Sweden has not, up until now, paid a price for keeping its ties to the alliance short of formal commitments. Also, a majority of Swedes take pride in being free to follow policies not constrained by alliance politics. But alliance commitments are like insurance policies: They are rarely used, but everyone is relieved to have insurance coverage when emergencies do occur.

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75. Linde, "Government's Statement of Foreign Policy."

