

Small-state realism and the geopolitics of raw materials. An outsider's approach

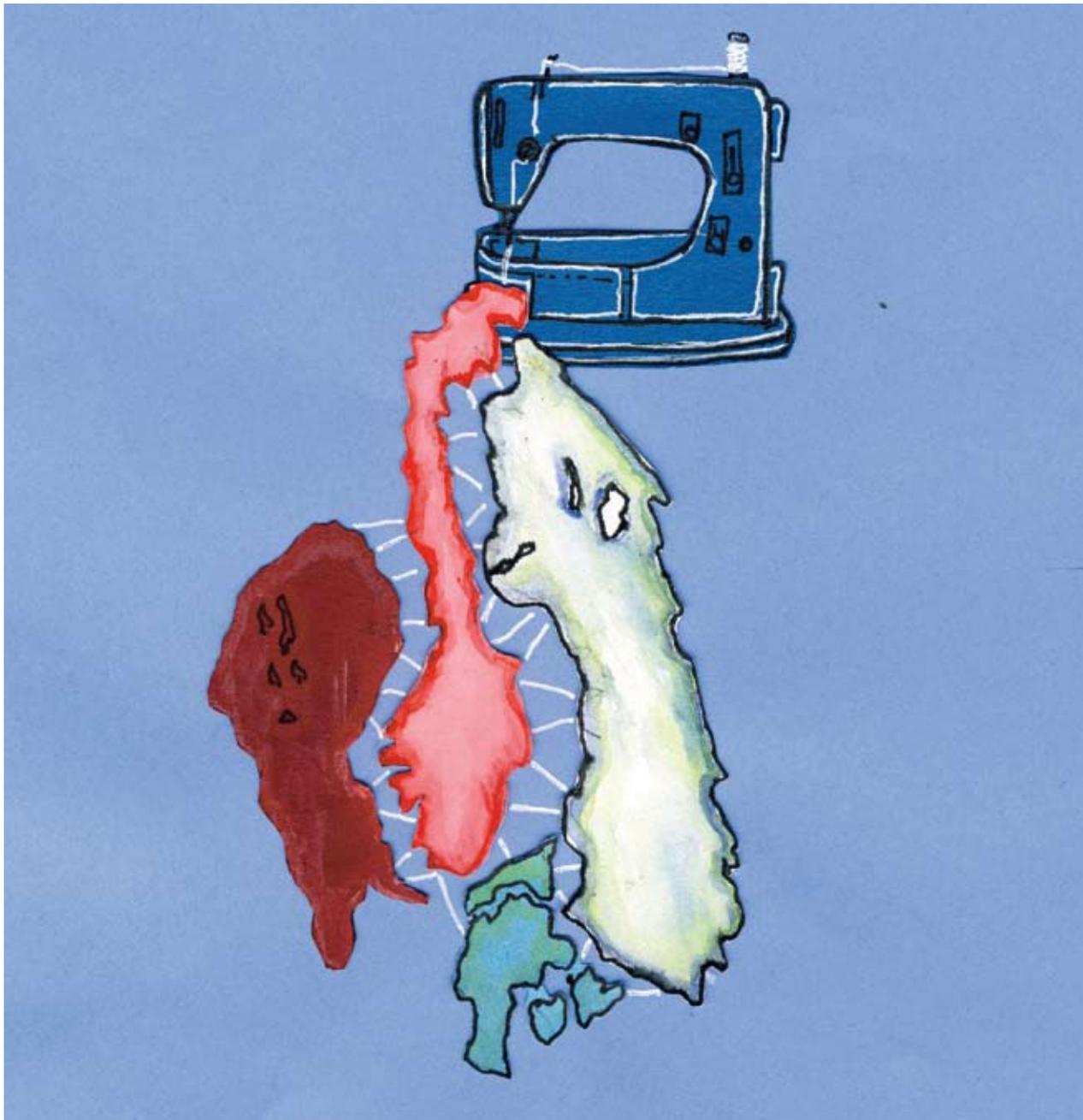


ILLUSTRATION: RAGNI SVENSSON

Einar Maseng Utsikt over de nord- europæiske staters utenrikspolitikk i de siste århundrer

[An overview of the Northern European States' foreign policy during the last centuries].

I–III

Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 2005
323, 291, 353 pages

SEVERAL “LANGUAGE GAMES” can be used by those seeking to describe World War II. The war can be interpreted as a battle between Left and Right Hegelians, or between Fascists and Bolsheviks. Alternatively, one can view it as a battle between democracies and national dictatorships. Occasionally, and especially by American historians, it is perceived as a war of extermination, as Hitler’s battle against the Jews. It may also be described as a continuation of the European Civil War that broke out either in 1914 or 1917 (the latter is the date provided by German historian Ernst Nolte). This conception is consist-

ent with the Soviet view that, just as the World War I had led to the birth of Soviet Russia, so would the Second lead to the birth of Soviet Europe. This perspective need not be interpreted as imperialist; it can, rather, be seen as resulting from a deterministic view of history.¹ One could also view World War II as a duel between Hitler and Churchill, as John Lukacs does – a view that was probably shared by Christian Günther, Sweden’s foreign minister during the war. Einar Maseng sees the war primarily as a battle between one nation with a great naval force and another nation possessed of a strong ground force. A complete edition of Maseng’s great three-volume work on Nordic security and foreign politics has now appeared, published under the direction of Lars Mjøset.

Maseng was a Norwegian diplomat who lived from 1880 to 1972. He was forced to leave the diplomatic

service after the war, when Tryggve Lie, foreign minister to the Norwegian government in exile in London (and later first Secretary-General of the United Nations), had accused him of either having been disloyal or of having shown poor judgment. The grounds for Lie’s accusations were strikingly flimsy. Among other things, Maseng was supposed to have hung a portrait of Vidkun Quisling on the wall of the Norwegian embassy in Moscow. This portrait, however, seems to have been a relic from the 1920s, when Quisling’s work for the Nansen Aid Program had made him a great hero in Russian eyes. Maseng’s habit of giving philosophical lectures had also provided space for misunderstandings. He was, for example, perceived as pro-German in his discussions on military strategy, a subject matter that sometimes makes it natural to “disregard the ideological factor” – to quote Swedish law professor Karl Olivecrona’s explanation for his pro-German stance during World War II.

MASENG DID IN FACT obtain redress – that is, he was placed on the unattached list but avoided a dishonorable dismissal. Nonetheless, he chose to remain in Sweden, whither he had come in 1941 after the German attack on Russia, as a representative of the Norwegian government in exile. Even Lie acknowledged that there was no doubt Maseng was a good Norwegian patriot; but he had made himself – or the circumstances had made him – politically impossible.

Maseng spent the last decades of his life in Vallentuna, close to Knivsta, between the cities of Stockholm and Uppsala. His large three-volume work is now, for the first time, available in its entirety, with a detailed introduction and postscript written by the publisher. The two first volumes had been published in the 1960s.

LITTLE IS KNOWN OF MASENG’S private life. He was married four times and had four daughters and one son. He was a military officer when he entered diplomatic service. Moreover, he was a founding father of the Norwegian division of *Föreningen Norden* (known in English as The Norden Association, or sometimes The Nordic Association). His analysis of the European state system has gained new relevance after *die Wende*, when “the Second World” (that is, the Russian Empire; the concept may

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Defended his doctoral thesis on Max Weber, in 1982 in Uppsala. An associate professor of political science at Stockholm University (1996) and a recurring visiting professor of sociology at the Centre for Social Studies and Graduate School for Social Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw (CSS/GSSR at IFIS PAN). In addition, research professor at Uppsala University's Department of Sociology, engaged in a research project entitled "Gunnar Myrdal as a Weberian and European Public Intellectual". His principal monograph is *Max Weber's Methodologies* (2002). Among anthologies he has edited are *Building Democracy and Civil Society East of the Elbe* (2006) and, with Nadezhda Georgieva, *New Europe: Growth to Limits?* (forthcoming). Has been a visiting scholar at German and American universities and research centers.

alternatively refer to the so-called BRIC countries) imploded and new, as yet unknown, constellations began to emerge. Maseng can be seen as a natural successor to Stein Rokkan and Immanuel Wallerstein, as Mjøset himself points out. It was the legendary sociologist and resistance fighter Arvid Brodersen (1904-1996) who inspired Mjøset to re-issue Maseng's work.

MASENG BASES HIS WORK on the assumption that had the Nordic countries been united, they would have been powerful enough to maintain credible neutrality vis-à-vis the great powers – something of which Norway, in 1940, was obviously incapable. Germany had no real rational interest in tying up several hundred thousand men in Norway, Maseng argued, as long as the iron ore deliveries from Kiruna via Narvik ran according to agreement.

Maseng dedicated the last 27 years of his life to the analysis of the prerequisites of Nordic unity and of the shared neutrality of the Nordic countries, both made impossible by Norway's "Atlantic turn", a turn that also cost Maseng his job. During the 1948-1949 discussions concerning a Scandinavian defensive alliance, the Norwegian stance was that all of Scandinavia should enter NATO jointly.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, the Dutch, the British, the Russians, and the Hanseatic League had all managed successfully to block Nordic steps towards unity. There is, for example, the Sound naval battle of October 29, 1658, when the Dutch fleet saved Denmark from total collapse. Nor do we know how history might have been changed had the Union of Kalmar (1397-1523) endured. A united Nordic region would have exercised a virtual monopoly on some of the raw materials that were essential to naval powers. If, after the 1807 Russian-French agreement in Tilsit, Swedish King Gustav IV Adolf had not made the mistake of confirming the British-Swedish alliance, the British terror attack on Copenhagen would scarcely have been either possible or likely. As is well known, the policies pursued by Sweden's royal "crackpot", which ran contrary to the recommendations of his own advisers, initiated a domino effect which ended in what became known as the "small-Sweden solution" of 1809; that is, the Finnish part of the

Swedish Kingdom was separated from the realm, and an unhappy "shotgun marriage" took place between Sweden and Norway (1814-1905).

One might object that Finland's special predicament is, perhaps, less than central to Maseng's reasoning. Nevertheless, his analysis of the Nordic state system does shake the otherwise standard acceptance of the diversified solution to Nordic security issues, reached after the breakdown of the 1948-1949 defense alliance negotiations, as necessarily beneficial. In this context, it is important to remember the "presence through absence" of Finland, which had a well-trained corps of officers and plenty of conquered Russian weaponry. As late as 1940, there had been quasi-official discussions of a possible Swedish-Finnish union. For instance, a commission had been given Östen Undén, specialist on international law, to investigate whether it was consistent with Sweden's constitution that Stockholm's joint foreign minister be a Finnish citizen.² In general, one can say that Sweden and Finland – for better or worse – have a historical *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* that is out of harmony with Norway's weak defense and pro-British orientation, both of which make Norway dependent on British military assistance.³ Marshall Mannerheim's unexpectedly successful defense on the Karelian Isthmus in the summer of 1944 affected the entire Nordic state system; had events played themselves out differently, the security predicament of both Sweden and the Nordic region in general would have been far more troubling.

IT IS GENERALLY recognized that, in order to attain a realistic perspective on the course of a war, one needs a map and one needs information concerning strategic raw materials. One can term this the return of geopolitics – in Maseng's case, with emphasis on the geo-strategy of raw materials.

Maseng's small-state realism is used in a long perspective – half a millennium – and his primary question is why the Nordic region is permanently split, something that can be seen as a historical anomaly. Kristian "Tyrant", the last Danish king to rule a united "North", takes on the guise of an unsuccessful hero in his fight against Sweden's secession in the early 1500s.

One cannot do Maseng justice in a few short pages. But I will mention some of the points where his work has changed long-accepted conceptions, providing great "extra value". There are several areas where Maseng has made me, at least, revise or reconsider cherished and ingrained conceptions.

This is especially true when it comes to the Nordic defense policy. Consider the "Nordic Bridge", which includes Norway as full NATO member, Denmark as NATO member but without NATO troops on its territory, Sweden as a non-aligned country with its own strong defense, and, finally, Finland's geographically conditioned "special relation" to its large eastern neighbor, a neighbor that could unilaterally demand consultations when it felt threatened by West German revanchism. The dominant doctrine is that this "Nordic Bridge" was entirely in line with Sweden's individual security-political rationality, as well as with collec-

tive European rationality, all directed towards decreasing Cold War tension in North Europe. In this perspective, the collapse of negotiations concerning a common Scandinavian defense alliance constitutes a blessing. However, this conclusion does not affect Maseng's claim that had a Scandinavian defense alliance been in existence *before* World War II, the Nordic region might have been spared the great catastrophe. (Though, as is in the nature of things, this type of counterfactual historical assertion hardly lives up to Karl Popper's falsification criteria.)

MASENG'S WORK IS, moreover, the first to offer an account that allows me fully to grasp the important role played by the Sound and the Danish Belts as a sort of buffer between Germany, Europe's leading continental power, and the efforts made by Great Britain to prevent any one power from gaining continental hegemony – a principle that has guided Great Britain's foreign policy at least since the "recasting of alliances" of the 1740s. It is also worth noting that Nazi Germany's occupation of Norway in fact was a successful pre-emptive strike, as the British were "lurking among the reeds" – having, only a few days previously, and in violation of international law, mined Norwegian waters. Their unexpected and bold maneuver simply enabled the Germans to get there before the British. That the English would doubtlessly have been far more welcome as unbidden guests is another matter. Presumably, if the Danes had had the army necessary to engage the Germans for just a few days, *Weserübung* would scarcely have succeeded, for the *Wehrmacht* would not, in that case, have controlled the Danish airfields.

MASENG LIKEWISE POINTS out that the Finnish Winter War (December 1939-March 1940) actually broke out because Finnish politicians, motivated by domestic political concerns, refused to aid Russia in its efforts to secure Leningrad against attack. Mannerheim had recommended Finnish concessions, arguing that the bridgeheads in question were of far less strategic importance to Finland than to Russia, and were, moreover, almost impossible to defend should armed conflict break out. Finland certainly did the right thing in fighting for independence once the

country had been attacked. One may compare its fate to that of the Baltic States, which lost a large proportion of their populations and had to deal, in the end, with a large, irredentist Russian minority. War does sometimes pay off, even if it entails great sacrifices. But the Winter War could have been avoided by granting the Soviet Union fairly cheap concessions. To try to give the Soviet Union a leasehold on Hogland, Hanko, or Porkala in the Gulf of Finland would not have involved any great alternative outlay. But young nations tend to be particularly cocky. It is a controversial issue, and Finnish diplomat Max Jakobson points out that there are few examples of a sovereign state relinquishing territory without subsequent, long-term harmful consequences. Nor was granting a Russian leasehold even to some distant islets in the Gulf of Finland a good election-winning tactic. The Finns had missed their opportunity in the spring of 1939, when Litvinov, the Soviet foreign minister, made a modest proposal for border adjustments on the Karelian Isthmus.

Since Russia has ice-free access to the North Atlantic via the Kola Peninsula, Maseng gives no credence to Cold War scenarios according to which Russian troops would rush to control the strategic Norwegian coastline as a step towards gaining control of the so-called GIUK-gap. (This denotes the gap bounded by Greenland, Iceland and Great Britain of which, presumably, both the US and the USSR would attempt to gain control of at the initial stage of a Third World War, in order to facilitate transfers of troops and supplies.) The envisioned maneuver would, it was thought, lead to confrontations between Russian armed forces and NATO paratroopers in the area around Jämtland and Trøndelag, in Sweden and Norway respectively. It is historically more reasonable, Maseng argues, to assume that Russian imperialist thrusts would be directed against Afghanistan, the Dardanelles, and the Sea of Japan – scenarios that have been confirmed by postwar events.

MASENG REFERS TO the fact that Norway and Denmark managed to maintain armed neutrality during World War I as an argument that the same would have been possible during World War II – if the Nordic people had united in a credible, that is, well-armed, neutral

TABLE. MASENG'S PERIODIZATION OF SEA POWER DOMINANCE

Sea power (hegemon)	Land power (challenger)	Secondary land power (assists hegemon)	Global war	Ends	Restructuring treaty
Britain/Netherlands	France	German States/Russia	War of Spanish Succession	1713	Utrecht
Britain	France	German States/Russia	Napoleonic Wars	1814	Vienna
Britain	Germany	France	World War I	1918	Versailles
Britain /US	Germany	France/Russia	World War II	1945	Yalta
US	USSR	(EU/Japan)	Cold War	1989	(none)

Note. – Global wars and restructuring treaties, as well as information on the periods after 1918, have been added.

bloc. Maseng advocates something that Mjøset terms small-state realism, a position resembling the one taken by Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal in two articles published in the social-democratic journal *Tiden* in the spring of 1945.⁴ Advocates of small-state realism may reach different conclusions, however. It is consistent both with the concept of a Scandinavian defense alliance and with the notion of a sort of Nordic Ark, able to function as a Cold War bridge and a buffer zone. This distinction depends on how those watching the elephants dance judge Scandinavia's chances of remaining in the audience's seats, not least by juggling the great powers' demands when it comes to trade in strategic raw materials such as iron ore – or, today, oil.

MASENG MENTIONS ship-mast timber as of particular strategic importance in the past; tar is another material whose importance is often forgotten today. The guiding principle is that great nations are cynical in their dealings with the small. Small nations must look, first and foremost, to their own interests. In Munich 1938, British Prime Minister Chamberlain gave a practical demonstration of this principle, with well-known consequences for (among others) Czechoslovakia and Finland. Small-state realism is, however, fundamentally paradoxical. Its principles are based on a hard-boiled Hobbesian understanding of the relationship between states – while, at the same time, acknowledging that any advances in an international legal system is to all small states' advantage. The fostering of such a legal system is a very slow process, with its roots in Grotius's times and, thereafter, the initiative taken by the Russian tsar to establish the International Court of Justice at The Hague; the UN, IMF, and the World Bank have constituted additional way stations.

Maseng also teaches us that the Norwegian-Swedish Union might have survived had not, at the time of its dissolution, Sweden been dominated by the interests of the nobility and upper classes. Norway was, at that time, a more advanced political society than Sweden, whose democratic breakthrough came relatively late.

One detail in Maseng's book that is likely to irritate patriotic Swedes is his odd habit of using the term "Sweden-Finland", a country that has never existed. The Finns were, until the small-Sweden solution of 1808-1809, good Swedes. Two ethnicities, Finns and Swedes, have contributed to the creation of both Finland and Sweden, as Swedish historian Erik Lönnroth made clear.

If one wishes to increase one's insights into security

politics, it pays to listen to cultural geographers, military men, and diplomats. Sociologists, political scientists, and public pundits are of marginal utility – indeed, they are often outright destructive of knowledge. One makes certain reservations, here, for modern game theory, which is of significant use when it comes to explaining courses of events that are otherwise difficult to grasp, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis (a subject on which Maseng, however, does not dwell). Natural resources and the information infrastructure, the character of the landscape, and the country's production capacity are decisive factors. The political level, however, is probably important as well; good citizen morale is essential if a country is to assert itself in what is, basically, a Hobbesian battle among nations, a battle that is gradually diminishing in ferocity, as a system of international norms emerges. Ancient concepts such as *Standort*, *Sitten*, and *Verfassung* are still relevant.

IT IS NO COINCIDENCE that Switzerland and Sweden were the only countries capable of upholding their neutrality during World War II – that is, apart from Spain, Portugal and Ireland, countries at the outskirts. Armed people in hilly terrain hold certain good cards, even when they are up against aggressors with greater resources. Germany could, obviously, have occupied Sweden, but this would have been at a high alternative cost. Troops urgently needed elsewhere – such as in securing access to oil resources in Baku – would have been tied down in Sweden.⁵ And had the Carpathians stretched in a north-south rather than an east-west direction, the Poles could have slept more easily. Had Lapland's iron ore resources been located in Lekebergslagen in Närke, in central Sweden, the Germans would not have had to risk the bold *Weserübung* – they could have taken the train or at least gone over land. With the USA's in-

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volvement in the war, which, in reality, was begun in the summer of 1941, and when the American productive resources were placed, through lend-lease, at the disposal of the British, no crystal ball was needed to predict the Allies' victory. Maseng's approach bears many resemblances to what we today call resource analysis: the stronger economy eventually wins out, a lesson taken from the American Civil War. The need to secure energy supplies, without which the war and the economy would grind to a halt, sheds light on the rationale behind many strategic decisions. Seen from this perspective, indeed, it can hardly be rational to start a war as long as it is cheaper to buy much-needed raw materials on the world market – something Gunnar Myrdal has pointed out in a number of interviews.⁶

I HAVE NOT EVEN come close to doing Maseng full justice. Historical demography is a theme omitted here, but it should not be ignored when planning long-term security policies. Maseng's guiding principle is his loyalty to the botched Norwegian policy of armed neutrality. In his opinion, the Germans made a mistake when they accepted Major Quisling's self-appointment as leader of the Norwegian Government (this was done without consulting Berlin). It is, seen superficially, somewhat of a paradox in a geo-strategic perspective that Norway's exile government chose to ally with precisely the government whose war planning – during the so-called Phony War and the Winter War – had openly included plans to infringe on Norwegian territorial integrity, and who, by early April, had actually begun to act on these plans. Had not Sweden denied France and Great Britain the right to transport troops to Finland, the sweeping domino effects would have included war between the Western Powers and the USSR, which at this time was allied with Germany. Maseng attributes a decisive role to British influence on Norwegian intellectual life, as well, of course, to the fact that after the German invasion, there was no alternative.

One might argue that Norway's misfortune was self-inflicted, which is not to excuse Germany's attack – in defiance of international law – on April 9, 1940, nor the Germans' brutal occupation policy, which included the use of collective punishment. Reichskommis-

sar Terboven was no bundle of charm. On the other hand, faults in Norway's pre-war diplomacy combined with the Western Allies' plans to stop the export of Swedish iron ore through northern Norway *explains* what in German phrasing and English vernacular became the German decision to "assume guardianship over Norway's neutrality", a neutrality which Norway, given its weak military, could not guard itself. Maseng's version of small-state realism has had little influence on Norway's foreign policy, but in Sweden it became a guiding principle. Mjøset does not offer a detailed account of disagreements among Maseng, Nygaardsvold, and Halvdan Koht (prime and foreign ministers in Norway immediately before the German invasion). Instead, he lets Maseng summarize the situation:

Had the Norwegian defense been at its post and, together with Sweden, let England clearly understand that it would defend its neutrality against every aggressor – as everyone knew it would have done during World War I – then the Western Powers, with their limited ground forces, would not have been capable of initiating a landing enterprise. Further, England's general politics would not have allowed it to fight and defeat a smaller nation that it knew was bent on upholding its independence. – Germany would then in 1940 – in its own interest – have left the Nordic people in peace. And later the war developed in a manner that made it ever more difficult for Germany to reserve forces for secondary theaters of operations.⁷

ONE MAY ADD THAT security-policy doctrines have short lives, and never constitute universal recipes. When it comes to relations between states, nothing is permanent.⁸ Small states are, in times of unrest, like ships on stormy seas, little bark-boats in a spring brook; it takes *virtu* combined with *fortuna* and with lucky timing to stay afloat, to avoid being pulled into conflicts raging in one's immediate environment. It is often calm in the center of the tornado, but a tornado moves. Sweden was in a very exposed position during the winter of 1940, at least up until June 1941.⁹

As Gunnar Hägglöf writes:

Is it not a habit that we Swedes have gotten into, and it is actually not found in any other nation, namely discussing foreign politics as if they were a matter of juridical concepts. It is seen as not entirely correct to speak of the balance-of-power, the number of army corps, the distance by plane across the Baltic Sea, or the question of Sweden's ability to defend itself if the Russians had taken Finland. This is, of course, the sort of thing that ought to be studied and discussed within the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs, rather than all those Geneva Conventions, which have never been anything but "scraps of paper".¹⁰

A WEAKNESS OF ALL security politics is that one can only prepare oneself for probable scenarios – while unlikely scenarios are far from uncommon. Tsarist Russia's defeat by the Japanese at Tshushima 1905 facilitated Norway's secession from Sweden, to mention just one example. Another case is Schabowski's interpretation of "kurzfristig" on November 9, 1989, an interpretation whose domino effects remain difficult to fully understand today.¹¹

I claimed, above, that cultural geographers, diplomats (who stand for the "first defense")¹², and military men have more to offer than do, for instance, political scientists as far as the cognitive *mapping* of an outside threat, and how to avoid it, are concerned. Maseng is, however, a historian, albeit a historian with macro-theoretical aspirations. Long time-lines and historical relativism are probably a great help in the formulation of theoretically grounded predictions. Historians are, however, doomed to hindsight.¹³ The course of events leading up to an incident is turned into an object of idiographic accounts; a juridical pattern is used in order to assign responsibility. It is far easier to predict that an incident will take place than it is to predict when it will happen. In 1957, during a journey in Central Asia, Gunnar Myrdal wrote a long unpublished double-letter to his wife, in which he identified the tensions that more than thirty years later would lead to the Russian empire's implosion.¹⁴ Actually American sociologist Randall Collins predicted this in a book written in 1986 (*Weberian Sociological Theory*), but does not give any definite date (which Myrdal does not attempt to determine). Some political scientists were still predicting, in the late 1980s, that the USSR facing the new millennium was stronger than ever.

sven eliaeson

1 The scenario in 1918–1922 was not unlike that of the early Cold War years. Had not Marshall Pilsudski defeated a much larger Russian army outside of Warsaw ("The Miracle at Vistula") in August 1920, a Bolshevik Europe extending all the way to the Rhine would have been a likely outcome, given the revolutionary currents in, for example, Saxony and the Ruhr. – See Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War 1919–20*, London 2003.

2 It appears that the initiative to discuss this union was taken by Major Svante Pålsson of Rottneros, where the source material would also be kept. See Wilhelm M. Carlgren, *Svensk utrikespolitik 1939–1945* [Swedish foreign poli-

Keeping an eye on a neighbor. A German look on Denmark

Bernd Henningsen
Dänemark

C H Beck. 2009
229 pages
(From the series: Die
Deutschen und ihre
Nachbarn)

- cy 1939–1945], Stockholm 1973, pp. 220 ff.
- 3 In the German debate, the term *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* has conservative connotations, but it can also be used purely cognitively. In the case of Finland/Sweden, we may just as well speak in terms of “communicating vessels”. – See also Torkel Jansson, *Riksprängningen som kom av sig* [The realm break-up that drifted off course], Stockholm 2009.
 - 4 By a fortunate coincidence I discovered that the article by Professor Bruce Hopper in *Foreign Affairs* to which Myrdal refers was ghost-written by Swedish senior diplomat Gunnar Hägglöf. See Gunnar Hägglöf, *Diplomat: Memoirs of a Swedish Envoy in London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow & Washington*, London, Sydney & Toronto 1971, p. 203. Graham Green wrote the book’s preface.
 - 5 According to information conveyed to the Swedish banker Jacob Wallenberg by his good friend Carl Goerdeler, Germany did in fact have plans for an assault on Sweden as late as in February 1942 – plans that were given up because it involved a force of 600,000, which could hardly be spared from Russia, where problems were mounting. – See Gunnar Hägglöf, *Var försiktig i Berlin: Möten med Hitlermotståndare under krigsåren* [Be careful in Berlin: Meetings with Hitler opponents during the war years], Stockholm 1986, p. 124.
 - 6 This is a recurring theme in a majority of the interviews preserved in the Labour Movement Archive and Library (ARAB) in Stockholm, for example in James Angresano’s interviews, which have also been published.
 - 7 Einar Maseng, “Hvem var det som dro Norge inn i krigsulykken?” [Who drew Norway into the misery of war?] (*Nationen*, April 26, 1955.) Quoted, here, from Mjøset’s “Introduksjon: Einar Masengs politiske biografi” [Introduction: Einar Maseng’s political biography], pp. xlviii–xlix, Maseng 2005, vol. I.
 - 8 Here, the relationship between Denmark and Sweden is made into somewhat of a feel-good story, with an account of how the two former mortal enemies became, during the 1800s, good neighbors and put aside old conflicts. – In 1809, Denmark and Russia could have eliminated Sweden and forced through a Polish solution. Such plans did in fact exist.
 - 9 According to Hägglöf, Foreign Minister Günther, on hearing about Germany’s assault on the USSR, is to have exclaimed: “One has to have luck at least once.”
 - 10 Gunnar Hägglöf (under the pseudonym Frank Burns), *Paradis för oss* [Paradise for us], Stockholm 1952, p. 247.
 - 11 Journalists once asked Harold Macmillan what was most difficult to handle in politics, to which he answered: “Events, boys, events.” History contains a long series of fateful coincidences.
 - 12 “First defense” is also the title of Swedish diplomat Håkan Berggren’s authoritative work *Första försvar: Diplomati från ursprung till UD* [First defense: diplomacy from its origin to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Stockholm 2008.
 - 13 Like the fictional characters Backlund and Stoltz, two members of the “leisured classes” who in Birger Sjöberg’s novel *Kvartetten som sprängdes* [The quartet that broke up] stand on the beach, commenting on what the lifesavers ought to have done, with shouts and “good” advice.
 - 14 Available in Myrdal’s *Nachlaf* at ARAB.

NOWHERE ELSE CAN ONE find the kind of thankfulness that exists in Denmark, writes Bernd Henningsen in his book about the Danes, their culture, and their mentality. People are thanked for a recent dinner or party, and are expected to be thanked for the food. “Say hello to grandma.” – “Yes, thanks.” “Thank you for noticing.” “What will it be this time?” – “A Pilsner, thank you.” Denmark is, in sum, a thanking society, where, indeed, thanking occurs not infrequently as an intensifier to itself: “Thanks thanks.” This, like so many other external characteristics, is something Danes share with other Scandinavians. That it becomes especially clear in Danish society may depend on the fact that in Denmark, there is a lot to be thankful for; for the Danes are, according to all available survey data, the happiest people in the world. They feel at peace with themselves and their social and economic system. They are satisfied with their material abundance, their functioning labor market, their healthy public finances – and their high taxes. Self-satisfied, a foreigner would say. Bernd Henningsen, born in the historic border area between Denmark and Germany, has no problem with that word.¹

HENNINGSSEN, A CULTURAL historian working in Berlin, with a research focus on Northern Europe, has published a book in a new series of short texts on Germany’s neighbors. Helmut Schmidt and Richard von Weizsäcker, former Chancellor, and, respectively, former President of the Federal Republic of Germany, are the patrons of the series. The contemporary historical context, of course, is that Germany – surrounded, or as it is sometimes said, “encircled”, by many neighboring peoples – has a great need to understand and learn about the social climate and political culture in its immediate vicinity. But it is also without a doubt true that the surrounding peoples are interested in how they are perceived and assessed by the state which again may take itself to be able to set the general direction that Europe shall take, if not also, in a formal sense, to be the leader of Europe. Henningsen’s outlook is German, and it is normative. The European project to which Germany has committed itself after its defeat in the war bears fruit for everyone. Those who do not want

to bite into the apple need to explain themselves. In Henningsen’s view, the Danes have much to explain.

IN DANES, THERE IS A mildness of disposition that has been driven too far, says Henningsen. They translate *sophrosyne*, moderation, with mediocrity. The truth lies in the middle, extreme accomplishments do not impress, the competitive spirit is not particularly prominent in social life. Restraint in a Dane can be the same as laziness, yet still not be regarded as a vice. “When a Tuborg tastes best?” the down-and-out man asks his friend. “Every time.” This collective declaration of satisfaction, or even love of pleasure, prevents the Danish people from dealing with serious matters, the Union for example. Denmark is the most reluctant of all EU countries. In several referendums a majority have rapped politicians on the knuckles, forced exemptions and concessions from Union commitments. The Faroe Islands, a remaining possession in the North Sea, chose at the time of Danish entry in 1972 to remain outside; Greenland, with overwhelming voter support, decided at the time of the achievement of autonomy to withdraw.

What annoys Bernd Henningsen in Danes’ view of the EU is that they simply expect economic benefits from it. They joined because they had to – because the United Kingdom, their main trading partner, won entrance. They cannot leave the Union, even if they wanted to, because of concern for their business relations with the Continent, particularly Germany. This is simply to cherry pick, or to use the more expansive Swedish expression, “to pick the raisins out of the cake”. No responsibility is taken for anyone other than oneself. It is a “lovely country”, as we hear in one of the country’s two (!) national anthems, the language spoken is considered to be beautiful, although not even the closest, neighboring kindred peoples can understand it fully, people do not focus on realizing great works, since the greatness of the country lies in the past, where it rests, quite comfortable and uncomplicated. The “de-imperialization” of the Danish kingdom – which once controlled the Baltic Sea and large parts of the British Isles, where the “Danelaw” was in force – has created among the Danes of later years a kind of pathos of defeat, a patriotism of loss, which is not the same as listless-