



PHOTO: SCANPIX, THE US ARMY

THE BALTICS

A SEA TOO TRANQUIL?

There was a time, only a few decades ago, when Northern Europe was the object of intensified strategic attention. Soviet submarines were seen, or believed to be seen, in Swedish waters. The North Atlantic Sea, according to John Lehman, Ronald Reagan's Naval Secretary, could become the target of "horizontal escalation". A superpower clash in the Middle East would immediately escalate into a military confrontation, eventually drawing in the Soviet submarine bases on the Kola Peninsula, "the most valuable piece of real estate on earth", according to Secretary Lehman.

Were the submarines in fact Russian? Or had British and possibly US vessels entered the Baltic Sea to test Swedish defense efforts, and had a couple of those submarines in fact been damaged by Swedish mines or depth charges close to the Naval Base of Muskö on the eastern coast of Sweden? According to US Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, these underwater tests were carried out "regularly" and "frequently" in Swedish waters, after US—Swedish Navy-to-Navy consultations. Senior Norwegian and US officials revealed to Ola Tunander, a Swedish scholar based at PRIO in Oslo, that a Western submarine during such a test had been damaged in the Stockholm archipelago in October 1982.

British and Danish naval officers also revealed to Tunander that British submarines had actually passed submerged through the Danish straits of Stora Bält for covert operations in the Baltic Sea, with the consent of the Danish navy high command. When some of these findings were published by the Danish Institute for International Studies, the top brass of the Swedish Navy caused a minor diplomatic incident, as they barged into the Danish Embassy in Stockholm and demanded an explanation from the Danish Foreign Ministry. The admirals even demanded that measures should be taken to "correct" the Danish inquiry.

Those were the days and the aftermath of the Cold War. Today, by comparison, the Baltic area seems a fairly tranquil place. Is it in fact too tranquil? That is worrisome for the once-again independent three republics on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. Since 2004, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are members, not only of the European Union but also of the North At-

lantic Treaty Organization, which after the end of the Cold War did not follow its eastern counterpart, the Warsaw Pact, into oblivion. Instead, NATO expanded and now includes most of the former communist nations that had been the Western line of defense for the Soviet Union. NATO is seen as life insurance for the three Baltic states. But even with that insurance, the Baltic nations do not feel entirely safe.

During the Cold War, the iron curtain cut the Baltic in half. After 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Sweden, Norway and Denmark sought to compensate for decades of neglect. Sweden, recalling its own history as a Baltic great power, felt a particular responsibility toward Estonia, which during the Cold War had seemed more distant than, say, Tanzania.

Thomas Käbin of the Swedish Export Council said in a 1991 interview: "In the same way as former West Germany assumed responsibility for what was formerly named the GDR, it has become natural for Sweden to assume responsibility for Estonia." In that case, Swedish prewar ties to Estonia and Sweden's special intelligence responsibility during the Cold War would be arguments for a post-Cold War "responsibility"; one should, however, also remember the large number of Estonian former "boat refugees" in Sweden, who arrived at the end of World War II.

Several of the new politicians in independent Estonia turned out to be Swedish nationals, raised in a country to which their parents once had escaped. A Swedish financier and Estonian exile, Jan Manitski, became Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, a Swedish banker, Madis Üürke, became Estonia's Minister of Finance, and a Swedish historian, Hein Rebas, became Estonia's Minister of Defense. In Latvia, Swedish banks took over the entire financial sector, lending liberally to practically everybody. All went very well until the world economic crisis erupted and many Latvians realized they owned very little, except their bad debts. In 2009, Latvia's GNP fell by 18 percent.

Outside interest was appreciated, but did their nearest Western neighbors really commiserate and understand the touchy issue of the Baltic States' relations to its big neighbor further to the east? In Riga and Tallinn, Russian street signs, recalling the painful Soviet years, were torn down. But, as Norwegian dip-

lomat Sverre Jervell points out, in the extreme north of Norway, the good burghers of Kirkenes decided to make their own street signs bi-lingual, in order to accommodate Russian guests from across the border. Norway has been eager to open the border and deal face-to-face with its Russian neighbor in the Barents Sea. But that seems too friendly an attitude to ex-Soviet Balticum, where the long period of annexation is not simply history but rather a living presence in the form of half of Latvia's population and a sizeable portion of the population of Estonia who are native Russians.

Early talks in the 1990s, involving the Baltic nations' desire to join the Nordic Council (Nordiska rådet), became slightly frightening when Latvian representatives clearly expressed their wish to get rid of the Russians, even by using psychological pressure to make it extremely unpleasant for them to remain in the Baltic area. The Nordic Council quickly decided to admit the Balts only as observers rather than full-fledged members. Very early on, the Balts turned to NATO, seen as a more important ally than the Nordic Council or even the European Union, which they later did join as full members.

To what extent can one rely on NATO? The new nations on the eastern coast of the Baltic are still jittery. Is NATO in fact de-escalating, seeking a modus vivendi with its former enemy, one transubstantiated from an evil communist empire into a cuddly Russian bear? Is the current US president too much of a peace lover? After all, the Norwegian Nobel committee in 2009 gave Barack Obama the peace prize as a reward for promising a radical change in US relations to the world and — yes! — attempts at peace building, including a "re-set" of the relationship to Russia. (It was, says Norwegian journalist Erling Borgen, like a young writer getting the prize in literature for promising to write a very good book some time in the future.)

Facing a new and extremely uncertain world after the collapse of its communist adversary, NATO is redefining its purpose. NATO will, according to its Danish Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, build muscles by burning fat, i.e. reducing bureaucracy and getting rid of redundant bases and command centers in Europe.

The Balts need a strong neighbor. Another one they fear.



PHOTO: SCANPIX, THE US ARMY

There was considerable tension when the newly elected Secretary General attended his first NATO get-together in Istanbul. Muslim Turkey, a member of NATO but still waiting for acceptance by the European Union, did not like the cartoons in the Danish daily *Jyllandsposten* depicting the Prophet Mohammed as a terrorist. In his former capacity as Danish prime minister, Fogh Rasmussen had found it impossible to curtail freedom of speech and apologize. By a fluke, Fogh, before the meeting, tripped and fell, hurting his arm in the bathroom of his hotel in Istanbul. Initially, he was planning to fly back home to Copenhagen to receive professional care, but was well taken care of by Istanbul medics, and emerged, arm in a sling, to greet NATO members and praise Turkish health services. Tensions subsided.

Who, then, is NATO's enemy?

Europe as a whole seems a lot less important these days, both to the American president and to NATO. When redefining its purpose, NATO reiterates its guarantee to protect all the 28 member states in case of external attack, deterring outside threats — but from whom? Could it possibly be NATO's guest at the Lisbon meeting in November 2010, Russia's president Dmitry Medvedev? Medvedev on his part wants to re-open talks between NATO and OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. This is the so-called Corfu Initiative, the main topic when OSCE's 58 members assembled in Astana in early December 2010, capital of OSCE's current chair, Kazakhstan.

A sizeable proportion of Russia's own, relatively rusty military machine is being overhauled. At least in the near future, the Baltic area is not a primary target for a re-habilitated Russian army. Russia's current frontline is in the Caucasus, fighting al-Qaeda type jihadists.

Scandinavians should show more empathy with the Baltic States, says Rolf Ekéus, a veteran Swedish diplomat. "We haven't been living under Soviet rule. We haven't had tens of thousands of our countrymen and women deported to Siberia." On the other hand, he feels that Sweden should avoid participating in big military exercises in the Baltic, with Russia as the presumed enemy.

During the Cold War, Norway and West Germany were entrusted by NATO to keep an eye on north-western Russia, in particular Murmansk on the Kola Peninsula, home port of Soviet nuclear submarines. Even though Sweden was not a member of NATO, the Swedish air force and the FRA, Sweden's National Defense Radio Establishment, were given the task of monitoring Soviet signals. As a tragic consequence, on Friday, June 13, 1952, Soviet planes shot down a Swedish DC-3, flying on its regular run along the eastern Baltic coast to map Soviet defenses. It took several decades before the Swedish government owned up to being part of this spying operation, which entailed the loss of eight FRA operators.

Sweden is still listening in, nowadays on Internet traffic. When the Internet was born, one of its nodes was located in Sweden, an asset that opened the

door for Swedish participation in the US exercise *CyberStorm III* — particularly pertinent after the cyber attack on Estonia in 2009, which followed a political controversy involving the removal of a Soviet-era statue of a hero from the center of Tallinn, the Estonian capital.

One thing that looked like a genuine effort to defuse conflict was president Obama's announcement in the fall of 2009 that the US would cancel the Bush administration's plans to station ten ground-based interceptor Patriot missiles in Poland. That project was a remnant of Ronald Reagan's Star Wars program, aiming at shooting down missiles in mid-space, presumably launched not by Russia but by "terrorist" nations such as Iran and North Korea.

But the Patriots are not off the agenda. President Obama and his Republican Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, have plans to replace the abandoned project in favor of what is called a "stronger, smarter, and swifter alternative", deploying Aegis class warships with SM 3 missiles that will have a range of at least 500 kilometers, making it possible to reach at least Saint Petersburg. In the future, missiles will travel on ships in the Baltic.

In other words, there will be further joint military exercises in the Baltic Sea, supervised by NATO. The annual BALTOPS (Baltic Operations) involves naval forces from twelve nations, led by US Carrier Strike Group 12: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the US. In June 2010, that operation involved a full amphibious landing in Estonia. Jackal Stone in Poland in September 2010 involved special forces from nine countries in the Baltic area.

Saber Strike in late October 2010 is of particular interest. It was in essence a land exercise, preparing troops for Afghanistan, with participation from the three Baltic States and the US. It was, in military language, "designed to tune together interoperability procedures with prospects of participation in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan and other multinational operations in the future". And the Latvians are already there. One hundred Latvian soldiers are fighting in Afghanistan as part of Norway's ISAF troops.

Small and relatively poor members of NATO, the Baltic republics are not living up to NATO's requirement that two percent of their GNP should be spent on defense. Lacking their own air force, they are presently being assisted by NATO and its members on a rotating schedule, from an air base in Lithuania. Recently the Czech air force spent four months protecting Baltic air space with its Swedish JAS Gripen planes, rented out by the Swedish air force.

To make certain they will be defended, the three Baltic republics, without much defense of their own, are in effect clinging to NATO, hoping to show themselves as reliable partners, even in distant Afghanistan. Paradoxically, this is also one of the reasons why neutral Sweden is sending troops to Afghanistan.

"I am against disarming Sweden," says Sven Hirdman, a former ambassador to Moscow and before that undersecretary of state in Sweden's Ministry of Defense. Hirdman is opposed to what he sees as a rapid dismantling of his country's traditional territorial defense. He finds it strange that Sweden has been left with a defense system that can do nothing to stop a foreign invasion, while a large portion of its military resources is being committed to international operations, with more than 500 men and women in Afghanistan.

Sweden, says Hirdman, should not prioritize military activities in foreign lands. Like Finland, Sweden ought to maintain its territorial defense. A small international force, brigade-size, could be offered to the United Nations in case of need.

"Sweden shouldn't", says Hirdman, "be having half of its defense forces ready to go abroad to fight."

Hirdman also questions what he sees as misguided talk about international solidarity. Do Swedish parliamentarians seriously envisage sending Swedish troops to assist the Baltic republics in the event of a Russian attack? That is a promise that would never be kept. Hirdman suspects that those promising that kind of unrealistic solidarity are actually in favor of Sweden's joining NATO. Such a move, Hirdman thinks, would disturb the traditional pattern of security in Northern Europe. He is convinced that Sweden is creating more stability in the area by staying outside.

Rolf Ekéus, former UN arms inspector in Iraq and 2001–2007 OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, thinks it is about time to remember Henry Kissinger's instructions in 1975 to the newly appointed US ambassador to Sweden, Robert Strausz-Hupé, after there had been a long interruption in US—Swedish relations, caused by Olof Palme's bitter critique of US policy in Vietnam. There ought to be a Northern balance, Kissinger pointed out to his ambassador. Swedish neutrality was of great importance. ≈

björn kumm

ACCORDING TO DOCUMENTS released by WikiLeaks, NATO in January 2010 decided to include the Baltic states in its war plans. NATO is prepared to engage nine army divisions from the US, Great Britain, Germany, and Poland if a serious conflict erupts in the area.

Initially, the US was hesitant, because Washington did not want to risk relations with Russia, which had been improving, albeit slowly. Germany vigorously opposed the plan.

A temporary solution was found, according to which there would be no specific plan involving the Baltic states. Instead they would be included in NATO's general defense plan for Poland. This was accepted by all involved, but Poland expressed concern that the defense of the Baltic states would be too spread out.

The short war in August 2008 between Russia and Georgia made the Baltic states extremely worried. They exerted strong pressure on NATO and wished to be expressly included in the war plan. This was finally accepted at the NATO meeting in January 2010.

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