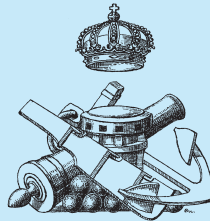


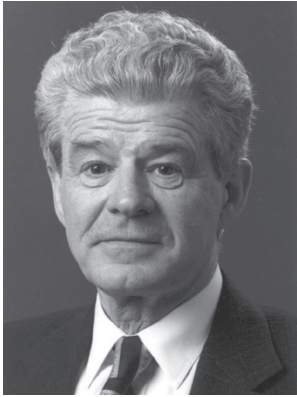
Changed naval strategy with Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO

Av Claes Tornberg



KUNGL. ÖRLOGSMANNASÄLLSKAPET
SVERIGES MARINA AKADEMI

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Changed naval strategy with Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO

The Baltic - an adjacent sea to the Atlantic

Although the Baltic often has been seen as a faraway outpost by the major world powers it has nevertheless been an historically important trade and strategic area for Russia as well as the western maritime powers and remains so today.

In fact, one can see many similarities between the Baltic and the Mediterranean seas. For example, both can be looked upon as adjacent seas to the Atlantic. In my view the Baltic has had the same type of influence on the economic and cultural development in Northern Europe as the Mediterranean has created for its region.

Consequently, it has always been difficult for me to understand why the Baltic area often has been looked upon as a lake within the European landmass. The historical struggle between two opposite positions to seeing the Baltic as a *mare clausum* or a *mare liberum* is stating the importance the Baltic has for Northern Europe. The English expression the “*Baltic approaches*” versus the Swedish and German “*Baltic outlets*” gives a linguistic example of how different maritime and continental powers have looked upon the Baltic. The Baltic does consist of water! Thus, the maritime issues will continue to be as important for stability in northern Europe as it has been in the past.

Shipping and trading

The Baltic has played a vital importance for the Baltic coastal states’ ability to trade. The Hanseatic league established a strong position in the Baltic region in the Middle Ages by controlling the trading centres on the Baltic shores and thereby also being able to control trade within the Baltic. The Hanse’s dominance was broken by Dutch merchants by the end of the fifteenth century, and was further eroded with the rise of Great Power Sweden in the seventeenth century. The necessity for Sweden, of which

Finland was a part, was to control and support the possessions in northern Germany and the eastern Baltic area in a continuous struggle with Denmark. Great Britain and the Netherlands tried to keep the balance of power and supported whoever was the weaker part in the struggle at any one time.

In the beginning of the 18th century Russia threw itself into the Baltic power struggle. In 1703 Russia started to build a fleet on instructions from Tsar Peter the Great, who had studied ship building in the Netherlands. Since the Great Nordic war Russia has been the main opponent to Sweden.

During the following centuries, Sweden was often supported by the Royal Navy to counter Russian power in the Baltic, which could sometimes establish command of the sea. During Sweden's disastrous wars with Russia 1788 – 1809, Britain secured its own maritime needs against Napoleon's continental blockade. A severely wounded Sweden with a very weak navy was saved by Britain from falling under Russian control. The war with Russia came at an extreme cost as Sweden lost a third of its territory and a quarter of its population when Finland became an autonomous part of the Russian Empire. During the Crimean War Sweden allowed the British and French navies to have a temporary base in Fårösund on northern Gotland despite Swedish neutrality, an exception made partly in hope of getting the island of Åland back under Swedish sovereignty. The fortress in Bomarsund was destroyed and fortress Sveaborg bombarded. A British frigate sailed along the Finnish coast in the Gulf of Bothnia burning ships and harbours. On a personal note, my great-grandfather was a rich businessman and the Russian consul in the city of Haparanda at the very northern end of the bay of Botnia. He owned a shipyard in Torneå that was destroyed in the British raid.

After the cold war shipping in the Baltic grew tremendously, including Russian shipping. In 2017 Russia moved one third of its seaborne cargo and half of its container traffic from Baltic ports. With the western sanctions adopted as a response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine this traffic is now closed. Moreover, supply to the landlocked Kaliningrad region is either dependent on overland transport through Lithuania and Belarus or by sea transport from St Petersburg.

The first Nord Stream gas pipeline is just now working with a limited capacity and the second is ready for operation but closed by Germany. The Baltic states and Poland saw the first Nord Stream gas pipeline as a reminder of the Molotov - Ribbentrop pact in 1939. The naïve Swedish government saw it then from an environmental perspective and did not recognize the security implications it raised. This even though the Russian commander of the Baltic Fleet declared that it was his task to protect the pipeline, including the large part of the pipeline being laid in the Swedish economic zone.

With the Russian aggression on Ukraine – which I might note did not really start this February but in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea – Sweden and not least the Social Democrats have now reevaluated their long-standing objection to joining NATO.

One can of course find other situations after the second world war where there was similar aggression from Russia, which forced Sweden to reconsider its longstanding "Neutrality Policy". The submarine incursions during the 1980s are just one example. Moreover, it seems that the Swedish government, rather than evaluating the strategic changes the war has led to, are just following the decision made by Finland, and thereby

“indirectly” being “forced” into NATO as a *fait accompli*. The government needs to assess quickly the new strategic situation and I suspect it will lead to some dramatic changes in our foreign policy as well as security and defence policy.

The Suwalki corridor

The Suwalki corridor (also known as the Suwalki Gap) separates the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad from Belarus. The only way to get by road or rail from Poland and Central Europe to the Baltic states goes through the corridor.

To seize control of the corridor by the Russians may seem far-fetched, as it would explicitly involve an attack on NATO territory, thus likely triggering a NATO response. Nonetheless, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has a central lesson to offer. The West must prepare for worst-case scenarios by focusing on actual Russian military capabilities in the region, rather than the Kremlin’s announced intent or considered estimates of Russia’s strategic logic, or intelligence assessments.

Some forty miles wide, the Suwalki corridor isn’t much of a corridor and has no natural boundaries. It is a wide-open rural region, predominantly characterized by rolling farmland interspersed with forests and small villages. Much of it is ideal terrain for tracked vehicles like tanks, given the very limited roadways and the gentle hills.

The Russian Baltic Fleet

The disintegration of the Soviet Union had an extreme impact on the geopolitical situation in the Baltic. The Baltic fleet went from dominating the eastern part of the Baltic Sea – as well as launching underwater intrusions in the western part in the 1980s – to finding its naval base and headquarters in an isolated Russian exclave. Of course, the Baltic fleet is not the sole but the dominant actor in the extremely well protected area. It is surprisingly not the naval component that has been reinforced, but instead it is predominantly its shore-based assets, such as a strong air defence capacity, coastal missiles (some of them armed with nuclear warheads) and ground forces that have been strengthened since 2014.

A large portion of the combat fleet inventory is composed of smaller vessels. Four modern corvettes and a frigate form the bulk of major vessels plus just one old Kilo-class submarine. The average age of the fleet vessels is around 30 years. The amphibious assault capacity can lift around 3000 soldiers or less than a thousand combined with heavy or medium tanks or trucks. The mining capacity is good though covert minelaying capacity is low with the lack of submarines. The ASW and mine counter measure capacity is limited to coastal defence. The city of Kaliningrad is also host to thousands of Russian troops and home to permanently stationed Russian forces, including advanced fighter jets and nuclear weapons.

The Spetsnaz training facility 10 miles northeast of Baltijsk has been expanded. The organization is closely linked with GRU. I do not know how much of the underwater systems have survived and been developed after the Soviet Union, but probably they have been given priority and the Spetsnaz brigade should now be deployed to the Black Sea.

Tactical nuclear weapons have been improved through the Iskander missiles.

In short, the offensive capacity is to my thinking very low and will be so for the coming decade.

Future alternative development of the Russian Ukrainian war

The war has drastically changed the strategic landscape. Despite that Russia wages the war and that the war seems to be prolonged for a long time some conclusions can already be drawn:

- The end of the optimistic post-cold war area and a new darker and more dangerous future chapter in Europe is now at hand.
- As the cold war was shaped by the Korean War, the Berlin blockade, Cuba crises et cetera this war will shape a new strategic pattern.
- The West is once again united, and a common sense of purpose can be seen. Germany has shaken off its pacifistic Ostpolitik, although Germany has yet to confirm and start to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.
- The US have again returned to secure the European defence despite its new focus on the Pacific and China region.
- Whatever the outcome of the war – a victorious Russia, a defeated Russia or a frozen conflict - we will enter a new cold war.
- China will have to carry out a tricky balancing act. Russia will be very dependent on China which China will use to secure its own interests with a long-term strategy.
- The brutality, with no respect for the law of war and destruction of infrastructure, make it abundantly clear that the Russians must be fought off at sea, in the air and space as well as in the cyber domain and information environment. Russian atrocities on Swedish soil must be prevented.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine has altered traditional thinking about the effectiveness of conventional military strategies.
- It has also revealed the advantages of mobile, precise weapons on the battlefield. Events have proven that asymmetric warfare, in which a combatant attempts to thwart the strengths of a more powerful opponent, can defend against invasion.

The NATO northern region

The Arctic zone will become an even more important area. Of the permanent members in the Arctic council: Russia (now chairman) will be the only permanent member that is not a member of NATO when Sweden and Finland have joined. All permanent members have declared that they will boycott further meetings because of the war. Climate change has made polar routes more open to navigation and consequently northern frontiers increasingly vulnerable. China's growing influence in the region is shifting the balance of power there.

The Kola Peninsula military importance is mainly based on Russian naval and airbases for strategic nuclear second-strike capacity with submarines and aircraft. In

addition, it is a hub for countering NATO sea lanes of communication across the Atlantic Ocean. Russian ambition in a crisis will probably be to expand its security zone westward to Norwegian and Swedish territory to deploy long-distance air defence systems. So, the northern parts of Sweden will be of central strategic importance.

The Baltic will form a NATO lake with limited access for Russia.

From a Swedish perspective the strategy in the Baltic Sea will dramatically change. During the Cold War, the Baltic Sea was seen as a moat and now it must be seen as an important connecting link to the eastern and south side of the Baltic.

The Baltic states will never by themselves have the capacity to counter a full-scale Russian invasion. Sweden will have a mutual interest within the alliance as well as self-interest to create a capacity to support the Baltic states. This means a need to secure the sea lines of communication as well as naval ports and air bases. Shipping protection and air control must be established in order to maintain command of the sea.

The island Gotland as well as the south-eastern part of mainland Sweden will be strategically important areas to secure and to deploy naval and air forces at an early stage in a conflict. It will be important to establish air control over the Baltic states.

The west coast of Sweden: Import of goods and commodities to the port of Gothenburg must be protected. We need to recall that Gothenburg is not only the largest Swedish port but also the largest Norwegian port. The port is also of great importance for Finland and the Baltic states as great volumes of goods are transhipped through Gothenburg. Therefore, the port of Gothenburg is of strategic importance for the alliance.

Command of the sea in Kattegat and Skagerrak should be established by Germany and Great Britain, as Denmark's capacity on its own is too limited.

The Baltic Straits must be defended and made impassable to Russian forces aiming to strengthen the Baltic Fleet.

Command structure: Of the three Joint Forces Commands the JFC in Brunssum in the Netherlands will probably be given the responsibility for the northern area. The principle to point out a command with responsibility for a certain area was abandoned when Russia no longer were assumed as a threat. Regional commands will have to be re-established. To my thinking a Baltic regional command structure should be established. A Baltic Command, that include the earlier BALTAP (Baltic Approaches) Command, should be organized. Why not in Sweden (Stockholm)?

Geostrategic change and technical revolution,

- China will in the long perspective be the main threat for the western world. This challenge must have priority despite the present Russian hostilities.
- The western world must define a long-term strategy and mobilize to counter the Chinese threat.
- Russia will continue to represent a threat for the European order but in the foreseeable future their military capacity is not as advanced as expected. Not only is it less advanced than expected, it is being seriously degraded by the conflict in Ukraine and will take some time to recover, regardless of the outcome.

- The main Russian threat will be from their nuclear arsenal, including both intercontinental and tactical weapons.
- NATO shore owners will overwhelmingly dominate the Baltic.
- Russia controls only 1 % of the shoreline.
- Russia can easily be “bottled up” in their naval bases.
- NATO will without problem establish surveillance and sea control over the Baltic.
- NATO has the resources to establish a no-fly zone over the Baltic and the Baltic states.
- Total sea control should be possible to achieve by NATO.
- The NATO nuclear deterrence/umbrella will be of core importance.
- The Russian threshold to use tactical nuclear weapons is probably low. Hence, NATO will have to take that in account. Solutions not to overstep core Russian security must be found. This means that a naval blockade could be preferred before eliminating the defence of Kaliningrad.
- The dramatic change in internet technology makes the battlefield transparent in the air and on surface. The underwater domain is still not yet transparent but perhaps this does not include the southern part of the Baltic with its shallow depth and flat bottom.
- The development of flexible cheap drones is rapidly changing the need to adopt to new strategies and force compositions.

Naval strategy

The Baltic Sea will be effectively dominated by NATO members when Sweden and Finland have joined the alliance.

Kronstadt and St Petersburg in the inner part of the Gulf of Finland could easily be closed by a naval blockade by mines and submarines. Kaliningrad could as well be blockaded without problems. The destruction of the two Russian bases with access to the Baltic Sea could be achieved, although it will not be wise to provoke Russia to that extent, due to the Russian nuclear capacity.

The capacity for an enforceable no-fly zone over the Baltic states must be achieved.

NATO must implement sea control and air cover over the Baltic Sea to secure defence of the Sea Lanes of Communication. The Baltic Straits must be secured.

The Sea Lanes of Communication must be defended in Kattegat and Skagerrak.

The major change is that the traditional Swedish strategic war planning to stand and fight alone is now history. Being a NATO member will totally change the Swedish position.

Changed need for new structure in Swedish naval forces

The old Cold War thinking to fight a Soviet invasion (the “red arrow”) over the sea against Sweden should now be inverted to “a blue arrow” from Sweden across the sea to the Baltic states carrying NATO forces and logistics.

Historically these naval challenges are similar to the situation during the centuries when Sweden was the major power in northern Europe. This means that the task for the Swedish Navy now needs to be focused on sea control, air defence, shipping protection, ASW, mine countermeasure, harbour protection etc. The Swedish navy is balanced but small in numbers and with a high average age.

The navy must focus on submarines and an increased number of surface combatants using modern technology. Defence of ports must be safeguarded

In the previous defence decision, the navy was put “within brackets”. The now working defence committee must decide how the increased defence budget should be allocated. It seems that a focus on ground forces and territorial defence is still the prevailing thinking. Sea blindness has apparently not yet been overcome.



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