

ПРОТИСТОЯННЯ УКРАЇНИ ВІЙСЬКОВІЙ АГРЕСІЇ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ФЕДЕРАЦІЇ

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RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION ON UKRAINE AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE OF SWEDEN'S NEUTRALITY POLICY IN ARMED CONFLICTS AND THE COUNTRY'S ACCESSION TO NATO

Abstract: The policy of neutrality successfully served Sweden for more than two centuries. It was a pragmatic policy with certain degree of flexibility, rather than a dogmatic one, and its usefulness was in principle not questioned, neither by politicians, nor its citizens. After WW2, when concessions regarding the upholding of the neutrality were made to keep the country outside the conflict, Sweden officially continued to pursue the doctrine of “non-alignment in peacetime aiming to neutrality in war”. At the same time, Sweden developed, in concealment and without public knowledge, a wide range of security and military cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance and its member states, including technology and intelligence exchange.

Today's dramatically changed European security situation has clearly proven that a policy of non-alignment is no longer sufficient and that a strong national defence is also not enough. The security cooperation with the Nordic countries and NATO members does not offer necessary guarantees to keep the country safe. Only full NATO membership provides such guarantees. The Russian aggression on Ukraine was the direct catalyst for a radical and surprisingly swift change of Sweden's security policy, demonstrating the essentially pragmatic approach to the policy of neutrality. Only a few weeks after the invasion, a large majority of the parliamentary parties stood behind the government's decision to apply for NATO membership.

The purpose of this article is to briefly portray the historical and geopolitical background, the development, and the reasoning of Sweden's long history of neutrality policy, as well as present the causes that directly influenced the change of this policy and the implications of Sweden's NATO accession for the country's security policy.

Keywords: Sweden, Ukraine, NATO, neutrality policy, security policy, non-alignment, Russia

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АГРЕСІЯ РОСІЇ ПРОТИ УКРАЇНИ ЯК КАТАЛІЗАТОР ЗМІНИ ПОЛІТИКИ НЕЙТРАЛІТЕТУ ШВЕЦІЇ У ЗБРОЙНИХ КОНФЛІКТАХ ТА ВСТУПУ КРАЇНИ ДО НАТО

Політика нейтралітету успішно слугувала Швеції упродовж більше двох століть. Ця політика була прагматичною, з відомим ступенем гнучкості і її значимість загалом не ставилася під сумнів ні політиками, ні громадянами. Після Другої світової війни були зроблені поступки щодо дотримання нейтралітету, щоб утримувати державу поза конфліктом, Швеція офіційно продовжувала дотримуватися доктрини «неприєднання в мирний час з метою нейтралітету під час війни». У той же час, Швеція розвивала, уникаючи публічного розголосу, широкий спектр безпекової та військової співпраці з Північноатлантичним альянсом та його державами-членами, включаючи обмін технологіями та розвідданими.

Кардинальна зміна на сьогоднішній ситуації з безпекою в Європі чітко довела, що політики неприєднання більше недостатньо і що потужної національної оборони також недостатньо. Співпраця у сфері безпеки з країнами Північної Європи та членами НАТО не дає достатніх гарантій безпеки країни. Тільки повноправне членство в НАТО містить такі гарантії. Російська агресія проти України стала суттєвим каталізатором радикальної та напрочуд швидкої зміни безпекової політики Швеції, продемонструвавши принципово прагматичний підхід до політики нейтралітету. Лише через кілька тижнів після вторгнення переважна більшість парламентських партій підтримали рішення уряду подати заявку на членство в НАТО.

Метою цієї статті є коротко описати історичні та геополітичні передумови, розвиток та обґрунтування тривалої історії політики нейтралітету Швеції, а також представити причини, які безпосередньо вплинули на зміну цієї політики та наслідки вступу Швеції в НАТО для політики безпеки країни.

Ключові слова: Швеція, Україна, НАТО, політика нейтралітету, політика безпеки, позаблоковість, росія.

Swedish Security Policy – from a Policy of Neutrality to a Policy of Solidarity. The policy of neutrality (Sweden has never been a permanent neutral state like for example Switzerland but has for many years pursued a so-called policy of neutrality) [1, p. 261], which until recently guided Swedish foreign policy regarding armed conflicts and Swedish participation in military alliances, dates back to the early 19th century. The Treaties of Tilsit in 1807, ending Napoleon’s wars with Russia and Prussia, led to political changes in northern Europe. On the one hand, Great Britain turned against Denmark by seizing its fleet for fear of a possible takeover by the French; on the other hand, Sweden’s King Gustav IV Adolph, leading an anti-Napoleonic crusade, entered into an alliance with Great Britain, leading to a Danish invasion of southern Sweden, as well as a war with Russia (the Finnish War). In this war (1808-1809), Sweden irretrievably lost more than a third of its territory, most notably Finland, which, by the Fredrikshamn Agreement, came under the rule of Tsarist Russia, remaining part of it until 1917. Finland, which had been an integral part of Sweden since the 12th century, became an independent and separate state after the fall of the Tsar.

The disastrous policies pursued by Gustav IV Adolph led to a coup d’état and his dethronement in 1809. His uncle, who later acceded to the throne as Charles XIII, became the nation’s regent. The period of his reign significantly changed Sweden and its position on the international stage. In 1809, the Form of Government Act (1809 års regeringsform), a new constitutional law, was passed, the provisions of which led to the transformation of the monarchy in Sweden – from an absolute to a parliamentary. In

addition, the heirless king, as a result of the actions of France and Russia, adopted the Napoleonic Marshal Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte in 1810, who as Charles John (later Charles XIV John) was proclaimed heir to the Swedish throne with the right of succession, giving rise to the new Bernadotte dynasty, which reigns in Sweden to this day. Charles John, who, as a result of Charles XIII’s illness, exercised de facto power in Sweden from 1811, led to the formulation and adoption of a new foreign policy, known as the Policy of 1812. Its main thrust from a military point of view was a shift from an offensive to a neutral policy [2, p. 35] – along the lines of the doctrine: “non-alignment in peace, neutrality in war” (“alliansfrihet i fred, neutralitet i krig”). Since then, Sweden has not started any wars and has maintained its neutrality in two world wars. Although in the case of the World War II, Sweden’s behaviour during the war repeatedly bore to certain degree the hallmarks violation of this neutrality, which has been, and still is, the subject of national debate¹.

After World War II, Sweden, which had the third strongest military air force in the world and a strong defence industry, clarified its foreign policy regarding security and defence, defining its doctrine of neutrality as “non-alignment in peacetime, aiming to neutrality in war”

¹ Some political scientists, criticising not so much the legitimacy of the neutrality policy itself as its *de facto* façade, pointing out that although the doctrine was perhaps effective, it hid another policy other than the one publicly declared. Cf. e.g. W. Agrell, trying to establish an alleged gap between theory and practice of the Swedish neutrality policy, claimed that it was a policy of «secret alliance in times of peace, aiming at an open alliance in case of war». (Agrell, W. (1991), *Den stora lögnen : ett säkerhetspolitiskt dubbelspel i alltför många akter*, Ordfont).

[3, p. 35, 145], as Sweden had committed itself to the West in everything but security. The principle of non-alignment with military alliances allowed Sweden to occupy both geographically and politically a strategic position between the North Atlantic Alliance in the West and the Warsaw Pact in the East, even though both sides were clearly aware of the political choices of Sweden, whose political sympathies, despite its long-standing social democratic rule, lay firmly on the side of the West. This was particularly important from the point of view of Finland, which for a long time had remained within the sphere of the Russian threat, which, incidentally, was one of the premises of the Swedish assumption to remain outside the military alliances. The Swedes feared that any involvement that could be perceived as a breach of their principle of neutrality could have disastrous consequences for Finland, with which Sweden had always been linked by extensive and friendly contacts [4].

In doing so, Sweden's defence doctrine did not exclude the use of intelligence from NATO countries, including above all the US and the UK, and the acceptance of assistance from the Alliance in the event of hostile steps taken by the Warsaw Pact [5].

After the end of the Cold War, Sweden narrowed the doctrine of neutrality in its foreign policy, defining since 1992 its position as a state that seeks to remain neutral in the event of armed conflicts in its immediate neighbourhood¹.

¹ In 1995, following Sweden's accession to the EU, the Riksdag's combined foreign affairs and defence committees confirmed the definition of Sweden's neutrality policy, embracing rather than changing it, stating the validity of the doctrine of "Sweden's military non-alignment with the aim that our country can maintain neutrality

The Swedish accession to the European Union in 1995 meant that the policy of neutrality as a principle in foreign policy was abolished, for although Sweden joined the EU with guarantees of being able to maintain its doctrine of neutrality and non-alignment, the country nevertheless committed itself to embrace the EU's common foreign, security and defence policy. It was recognised that the confrontation between the superpowers, which characterised the Cold War, had largely ceased, and that the new international situation, by providing space for different forces and new players on the global political scene, had resulted in a significant reduction in the risk of regional crises developing into large-scale inter-power conflict. The new security policy came to emphasise that, also in the new Europe, military non-alignment (*militär alliansfrihet*) continued to be the best way to serve Sweden's security interests. At the same time, however, the lack of certainty about Russia's intentions in the long term was underlined, recognising that "it will yet remain uncertain for a long time which political forces will be guiding the country" [6, p. 4]. In retrospect, the Swedish government's concerns proved to be more than justified.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the centre of gravity of Sweden's view on security policy changed. The membership of the European Union and the geopolitical changes that have taken place particularly in the Baltic Sea region have significantly influenced the expression of a new security policy, reaffirmed in the

in case of war in our vicinity", *Totalförsvaret i förnyelse*, Prop. 1995/96:12, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/proposition/totalforsvar-i-fornyelse_GJ0312/html (10.10.2022).

government's 2008 Statement of Foreign Policy [7, p. 319] and called it a solidarity policy: "Sweden's security is intricately linked to the developments in the surrounding world. (...) Sweden will not remain passive if a disaster or an attack were to affect another Member State or Nordic country. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is affected. Sweden should have the ability to provide and receive military assistance".¹

Analysis of recent research and publications. The long tradition of Swedish neutrality, and later the broad consensus on the continuation and perseverance of the policy of military non-alignment, kept the general political debate on Sweden's possible accession to NATO rather on the margin. The academic discussions on the topic, on the other hand, has been vigorous and diverse over the years with a rich literature. Russia's aggression on Ukraine and the dramatically shifted security situation in the region changed the perspective instantaneously. Previous policies were obviously abandoned or reinterpreted and the question of a Swedish membership in NATO became suddenly a reality with very few opposing voices. This background is for natural reasons reflected in the different published analysis presented before and after this decisive change. The academic debate on various aspects of Sweden's

neutrality and non-alignment focused for many years on the question of how the country can develop close cooperation with NATO partners and with the organisation itself, without losing the credibility of its security policy independence and the tradition of neutrality and non-alignment.

Critics of what was considered a historical policy of double game – publicly maintaining a policy front, repeating the credo that neutrality continues to serve Sweden successfully, while in reality and without public knowledge, developing ever closer cooperation with NATO partners, almost on par with its members, strengthening the country's ties closely committed to the west. This view was shared by, among others, Wilhelm Agrell in numerous publications and particularly in his polemical book "Den stora lögnen: ett säkerhetspolitiskt dubbelspel i alltför många akter" (Ordfront, 1991). Similar critical view is to be found in Mikael Holmström's book "Den dolda alliansen" (*Den dolda alliansen: Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser*. Forskningsprogrammet Försvaret och det kalla kriget (FOKK): 28, Atlantis) and by Thomas Jonter, disputing the functionality of security guarantees as shown by historical experience, arguing in favour of maintaining the policy of non-alignment (Thomas Jonter "Sverige in i Nato?", Ordfront 1999, no. 5). Jonter was not alone in his view before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many Swedish researchers was questioning the existence of any real threats against Sweden or Finland.

The main idea was that even if a deteriorated situation would occur, NATO membership would only increase the risk of being involved in the upcoming conflict. Others, on the other hand, argued

¹ "Sveriges säkerhet är intimt kopplad till utvecklingen i vår omvärld. (...) Sverige kommer inte att förhålla sig passivt om en katastrof eller ett angrepp skulle drabba ett annat medlemsland eller nordiskt land. Vi förväntar oss att dessa länder agerar på samma sätt om Sverige drabbas. Sverige bör ha förmågan att kunna ge och ta emot militärt stöd", *Ett användbart försvar. Regeringens proposition 2008/09:140*, p. 29, <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/6557E5D5-E368-4236-9422-B946CC3A1491> (22.10.2022).

that the Swedish neutrality was never of the static and rigid type as Switzerland's and that several changes of the definition of neutrality over the years indicated towards a more practical application of security policy. Olof Kronvall's and Magnus Petersson's book "Svensk säkerhetspolitik i supermakternas skugga 1945-1991" (Santérus Academic Press Sweden, Stockholm, 2012) gives a comprehensive overview of the background of the Swedish security policy up to the end of the Warsaw Pact. Presenting this view from a broader European perspective, as Kjell Engelbrekt does in his comparative analysis "Security Policy Reorientation in Peripheral Europe" (*Security Policy Reorientation in Peripheral Europe: A Comparative Perspectivist Approach*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2002), as well as in his paper "From Neutrality to Solidarity: Swedish Security policy after EU accession" (unpublished paper), where he examines the changed implications after Sweden's EU accession. Engelbrekt is also joint author of an essential work on Swedish security policy (Engelbrekt, Kjell, Holmberg, Arita & Ångström, Jan (ed.) "Svensk säkerhetspolitik i Europa och världen", Norstedts juridic, Stockholm 2015). Consequences for Sweden's security in view of more recent events has been widely discussed in various publications, reassessing previous policies (as in Anna Wieslander's paper "'The Hultqvist doctrine' – Swedish security and defence policy after the Russian annexation of Crimea", *Defence Studies*, Vol. 22, 1/2022, p. 35–59). An important part of published analysis on the Swedish application of its non-alignment and the country's adaptation of its neutrality concept to the surrounding political situation is to be found in numerous

official documents (as "Totalförsvaret i förnyelse"), presented by parliamentary and governmental committees (the most recent, dealing with the Sweden's NATO membership application, is "Säkerhet i ny tid").

The aim of this article is to briefly portray the historical and geopolitical background, the development, and the reasoning of Sweden's long history of neutrality policy, as well as present the causes that directly influenced the change of this policy and the implications of Sweden's NATO accession for the country's security policy

Sweden's cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

Since the beginning of the Cold War, there had been extensive cooperation between Sweden and the USA when it comes to military technology and intelligence cooperation, particularly regarding military reconnaissance vis-à-vis the USSR¹. Sweden signed similar secret agreements with Denmark and Norway [8, p. 190]. Despite this, and for reasons of its security policy, Sweden did not join the NATO², established by the

¹Sweden's intelligence cooperation with the UK was, among other things, the direct cause of the shooting down of a Swedish military aircraft by Soviet fighter planes over international Baltic waters in 1952 (*The Catalina Affair*). Cf. Holmström, M. (2011), *Den dolda alliansen: Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser*. Forskningsprogrammet Försvaret och det kalla kriget (FOKK): 28, Atlantis, p. 53.

²On 4 April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty) was signed in Washington, D.C., establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). It is a political-military alliance with currently 30 members (12 founding members: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Holland, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, UK and USA, as well as countries that joined later: before the collapse of the USSR – Greece, Germany, Spain and Turkey; and after its collapse – Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech

Washington Treaty in 1949. At the same time, Sweden continued to cooperate with member countries of the Alliance. An example of such cooperation is the agreement on military and technical cooperation signed with the United States on 1 July 1952 under the Mutual Defence Assistance Act¹ passed by the US Congress in 1949. The agreement put the US on a par with NATO members in certain respects. Sweden was allowed, for example, to buy military equipment and raw materials from the US. In May 1957, Sweden was included in NATO's defence structures as part of the adopted defence doctrine, establishing that Scandinavia should always be treated as undivided as possible in the event of an attack. The following year, Sweden was included as a co-combatant in NATO strategies in the event of an attack by the USSR.

From the late 1960s onwards, and in the wake of the Vietnam War, official Swedish-American relations became rather tense. This did not prevent secret military cooperation with the USA [8, p. 299] to be strengthened. Swedish foreign policy was also moving away from that of most Western European countries. This was one of the reasons why Sweden did not join the EEC at the time. From the early 1970s and onwards, the Swedish government led by Prime Minister Olof Palme enhanced the military cooperation with the United States, and senior Swedish officers were trained in the USA.

Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

¹The Act was the first US Foreign Military Assistance Act during the Cold War and a continuation of the Economic Cooperation Act (Marshall Plan), signed in 1948, for non-military aid which provided economic and development assistance to Europe.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact had a significant impact on Sweden's neutrality policy. On 10 January 1994, the Partnership for Peace was established in Brussels under the authority of the North Atlantic Council, and Sweden joined the initiative. The main objective of the Partnership was to expand and intensify political and military cooperation in the Euro-Atlantic area, to increase stability and reduce threats to peace in the region. Joint activities within the framework of the Partnership for Peace focused particularly on the promotion of transparency in defence budgeting, as well as democratic control of defence ministries, the joint planning and military exercises and the preparation for interaction with NATO forces, including in rescue and humanitarian operations [9].

The principles underpinning the Partnership, i.e., primarily the protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms and human rights and the protection of freedom, justice and peace through democracy [9] – were fully in line with core Swedish foreign policy. Furthermore, the obligations of the parties to the Partnership for Peace to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, to respect existing borders and to settle disputes by peaceful means [9], fully coincided with Swedish defence policy.

Since joining the Partnership for Peace, Sweden has become an active participant in NATO peacekeeping missions

in Bosnia¹, Kosovo², Afghanistan³ and Libya⁴.

Swedish intelligence cooperation with NATO was further expanded and deepened in 2008, when the so-called FRA law⁵ came into force. Due to Sweden's geographic location, the vast majority of Russian data transmission was carried out using the Swedish cable network, hence the decision to amend the law made by the FRA Act, which granted the National Defence Radio Establishment (FRA, Försvarets radioanstalt)⁶ the right to carry out, by government decision, signal surveillance of cable traffic crossing Sweden's borders, including telephone traffic and a large proportion of internet traffic.⁷

In 2014, Sweden signed an agreement with NATO (Host Country Agreement),

authorising NATO forces to conduct joint military exercises and manoeuvres on Swedish territory. The agreement also provided security guarantees for Sweden, allowing the deployment of armed forces from Alliance member states on Swedish territory in the event of a threat to Swedish national security.⁸

That same year, at the Wales Summit, the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII) was launched with the primary objective of maintaining and deepening the interoperability developed by NATO forces and partner countries during jointly conducted military and humanitarian operations and missions. With interoperability means the ability to operate jointly with NATO forces in accordance with NATO standards, rules, procedures, using similar equipment. The PII initiative envisaged that as interoperability deepened, there would be an increased and closer cooperation between NATO and partner countries, through regular political consultations on security matters, increased access to interoperability programmes and exercises, information sharing and closer linkage of such partners in case of crisis and during the preparation of joint operations [10]. Immediately following the Wales Summit, Sweden was awarded Enhanced Opportunity Partner status.⁹

In the second half of 2015, the Swedish government decided to prepare a report on a NATO membership. Its purpose was primarily to analyse the political and economic consequences of Sweden's

¹ The Implementation Force (IFOR) – from 20 December 1995 till 20 December 1996; then the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) – from 20 December 1996 till 2 December 2004

² Kosovo Force (KFOR) – NATO peacekeepers operating since June 2009 and gradually reducing their involvement as the newly established Kosovo National Force takes over their duties.

³ ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) – from 20 December 2001 till 28 December 2014

⁴ Operation Unified Protector – from 23 March till 31 October 2011.

⁵ The so-called FRA Act signifies a whole series of legislative amendments concerning, among others, the Defence Intelligence Act (*lagen 2000:130 om försvarsunderrättelseverksamhet*), the Electronic Communications Act (*lagen 2003:389 om elektronisk kommunikation och Sekretesslagen*) and the Secrecy Act (replaced in 2009 by the Public Access and Secrecy Act – *Offentlighets- och sekretesslagen 2009: 400*) and, above all, the new Act on Signal Intelligence in Defence Intelligence Activities (*lagen 2008:717 om signalspaning i försvarsunderrättelseverksamhet*), which was adopted in 2008. The FRA Act was the subject of lively debate even before its final adoption and long afterwards.

⁶ FRA is Sweden's national authority for signals intelligence (www.fra.se), established in 1942.

⁷ Lag (2008:717) om signalspaning i försvarsunderrättelseverksamhet.

⁸ The agreement was ratified by the Riksdag on 25 May 2016 (Riksdagens protokoll 2015/16:111)

⁹ In addition, such status has been granted to Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan and in June 2020– Ukraine. Cf. https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_132726.htm (22.09.2022).

possible accession to NATO. This was the beginning of deepened political discussion on an accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. While a strong political majority favoured the continuation of the traditional policy of neutrality, the total defence budget expenditure steadily increased, reaching 1.7 per cent of the GDP in 2021.¹

Russia's Military Aggression on Ukraine – the Long-Term Consequences of a Shift in the Balance of Power

On 24 February 2022, Russia militarily invaded Ukrainian territory and started a war. The Russian aggression on Ukraine changed the global geopolitical situation on a scale that no one expected, even if the annexation of Crimea should have been a warning of the direction Russia was taking following the country's imperial goals. Sweden, like Finland, found itself in a situation where it became necessary to re-examine and redefine its security doctrine.

The dramatic situation, threatening the security of the whole of Europe, caused a radical turn in Swedish policy, resulting in, on the one hand, the start of discussions about rapidly joining NATO and, on the other hand, fundamental changes in budgetary spending. Already in the spring of 2022, it was decided to dramatically increase defence spending to 2 per cent of the GDP, meaning that from 2014 to 2025, the country's defence spending would increase by 85 per cent of the GDP [13].

The reaction of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in the face of the aggression on Ukraine clearly confirmed

that Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty only applies to members of the Alliance. This fact contributed significantly to Sweden's decision to become a NATO candidate. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (established in 1969) clearly states that agreements between states do not establish any rights or obligations in relation to a third party, without its consent. Theoretically, therefore, if a third party consents, it could be considered that under a defence pact, a consenting third party could be granted the right to assist in defending against attack. However, the current situation shows that it was in no way the intention of the signatories to the North Atlantic Treaty to create rights or obligations for third countries – this includes extending the right of a NATO member state to be assisted by other NATO states in the event of an attack – to any third country, even with its consent [11]. At the same time, it is clear from the UN Charter (Article 51) that every country has the right to defend itself. Thus, even though Ukraine does not have the right to request defence assistance from NATO based on the UN Charter – since the country is not a party to NATO, there is nothing to prevent any NATO member state (or any other) from providing defence assistance [13]. However, since it is a question of a “wish” on the part of the Alliance, it means that for this “wish” to become an obligation – one must be a member of NATO.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 16 March 2022, the Swedish government decided, following a Swedish political tradition, to set up an 11-member parliamentary working group with representatives from each of the parties represented in the Riksdag. The group deliberated under the chair of the Min-

¹ Defence budget expenditure increased, for obvious reasons, during both world wars. During the Cold War, starting in 1949, the defence spending increased consistently and gradually until 1989, when it was reduced. Their renewed growth only began from 2015 onwards.

ister of Foreign Affairs and included the Minister of Defence. The main task of the group was to prepare a report on the consequences of the rapidly changing security situation as a result of Russian military aggression on Ukraine and its impact on the global balance of power.

In the report *Deterioration of the security environment – implications for Sweden* [12], presented by the group in mid-May 2022, it was argued that Sweden was faced with the question of how best to guarantee the country's security in a changing world and what security policy could most effectively safeguard Sweden's sovereignty, core democratic values and national interests – in order to preserve its freedom of choice and protect itself from political, military and any other external pressure. So far, Sweden's bilateral cooperation in defence and security policy with numerous Western countries and organisations has not provided sufficient guarantees in the event of a threat or attack. The report concluded that only Sweden's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance would provide such guarantees [12].

It was emphasised that the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is the largest and most dangerous military aggression in Europe since the end of World War II, has far-reaching consequences not only for European security, but also for the global balance of power. Russia's actions, including its war crimes, constitute a flagrant violation of international law. Considering Russia's escalating demands to change the European security order, as well as the war against Georgia in 2008, the illegal annexation of Crimea and the war against Ukraine launched in 2014, the systematic strengthening of military capabilities and the ability to conduct

hybrid attacks, Russia's crisis must be considered structural, systematic, and permanent. The report determined that Russia's unprovoked aggression against sovereign and democratic Ukraine on 24 February 2022 clearly demonstrated that Russia, in the name of its own interests, does not hesitate to violate international law and conduct military aggression – even on a large scale. The example of Ukraine shows that it is prepared to deny the statehood of other countries and their right to exist. This fact requires serious considerations on how to guarantee Sweden's security.

The report points out that, although Sweden is engaged in a number of partnerships with military dimension, including *Nordic Defence Cooperation*¹, the *Joint Expeditionary Force*² and close cooperation with NATO, they do not include either binding military commitments or guarantees of military assistance

¹ Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) – defence cooperation between the Nordic countries (the Scandinavian countries plus Finland and Iceland) to continuously strengthen the capacity for joint action in times of peace, crisis and conflict, including through extensive training activities, exchange of air-surveillance information, mutual access to each other's territories, secure communication systems. (Cf. Report *Deterioration of the security environment – implications for Sweden*, p. 22-28, <https://www.government.se/49d7dd/contentassets/05ffb51ba6404a459d7ee45c98e87a83/deterioration-of-the-security-environment---implications-for-sweden-20228> (22.09.2022)).

² Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) – UK-led coalition forces comprising Denmark, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Iceland, Finland and Sweden. They can be used across the full spectrum of military operations. (Cf. Report *Deterioration of the security environment – implications for Sweden*, p. 22-28, <https://www.government.se/49d7dd/contentassets/05ffb51ba6404a459d7ee45c98e87a83/deterioration-of-the-security-environment---implications-for-sweden-20228> (22.09.2022)).

for Sweden in the event of an attack. At the same time, the report considers the consequences for the security of the region in the case of a Swedish and Finnish NATO membership, concluding that “Swedish NATO membership would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a deterrent effect in northern Europe. If both Sweden and Finland were NATO members, all Nordic and Baltic countries would be covered by collective defence guarantees. The current uncertainty as to what form collective action would take if a security crisis or armed attack occurred would decrease” [12].

On 16 May 2022, a parliamentary debate on the report took place in the *Riksdag*, in which the positions of the incumbent parties regarding Sweden’s NATO membership were once again presented. Of the eight sitting parties in the *Riksdag*, five – the Swedish Social Democratic Party (*Socialdemokraterna*), the Moderate Party (*Moderaterna*), the Christian Democrats (*Kristdemokraterna*), the Liberals (*Liberalerna*) and the Centre Party (*Centerpartiet*) unconditionally supported the government’s decision to start the accession process to the North Atlantic Alliance, one party, the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*), made its support conditional on Finland’s position on its accession to the Alliance, while two – the Green Party (*Miljöpartiet*) and the Left Party (*Vänsterpartiet*) – were against, with the Left Party also advocating an end altogether to cooperation with NATO.

On 17 May 2022, Sweden applied to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and on 5 July 2022, the accession protocols of Finland and Sweden were signed at the NATO headquarters in Brussels¹.

¹ By 15 October 2022, the accession protocols had been ratified by 28 of the 30 Alliance member

Until Sweden achieves full NATO membership, the country will be at increased risk of external threats. To minimise this risk and to prevent external pressure on the issue of NATO membership, Sweden has received guarantees of support from certain NATO countries (USA, UK, Germany, France, Spain, Norway, and Denmark).

The issue of Sweden joining NATO dominated the Statement of Government Policy, delivered during the parliamentary debate on foreign affairs in the *Riksdag* on 10 June 2022. In the statement, Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde concluded unequivocally “that it is the Government’s assessment that the best way for Sweden to protect its security is for Sweden to join NATO.” Minister Linde added, that “with Sweden and Finland as NATO members, the security of all NATO countries would be strengthened” [14, p. 4].

The Statement of Government Policy of 2022 also refers to the EU’s mutual defence clause.² Article 42.7 of the EU Treaty [14, p. 4] contains similar obligations to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, but also covers EU Member States that do not belong to NATO. Sweden’s accession to NATO today is therefore perhaps not as radical a step as it would have been before the current

states. Hungary and Turkey have not yet ratified.

² Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). With the clause, the Lisbon Treaty strengthens the solidarity of EU countries in responding to external threats. The clause stipulates that if any EU country is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other EU countries have an obligation to assist and support it with all the means at their disposal, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. The obligation of mutual defence extends to all EU countries, without prejudice, however, to the principle of neutrality of certain EU countries and in accordance with the obligations of EU countries that are members of NATO, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:mutual_defence (12.10.2022).

Treaty of Lisbon. The nature of the EU obligations is of course different from the Alliance agreement. There is even some discussion in Sweden as to whether there is some ambivalence in the interpretation of the two commitments and whether or not the Lisbon Treaty contains a common defence commitment [11]. On the one hand, the Statement of Government Policy emphasises that Article 42.7 of the EU Treaty constitutes an international commitment for the member states, but not in the form of a common defence commitment, as the matter of national security and defence is essentially the responsibility of the Member States (as mentioned in Article 4.2 of the Treaty). On the other hand, the text of the Statement of 2022 referred to the EU treaty as a “common defence clause”.

Regardless of the question of interpretation of the treaties regarding mutual defence obligations, EU obviously lacks the military resources of NATO. Added to this is the ongoing discussion on the direction of a common defence policy. Nevertheless, the EU remains the most important international arena for Sweden when it comes to foreign and security policy issues.

Conclusion

For more than two centuries, Sweden’s security policy was characterised by pragmatism rather than dogmatism. The country’s neutrality policy needed to be credible in the face of the world, so it required both consistency (albeit with some flexibility) in its implementation, as well as strong enough defence forces on its own. The aim of Sweden’s neutrality policy was always to safeguard the country’s national interests. Consistently staying out of conflicts allowed for a certain degree of freedom in dealing with the final outcome of the disputes. At the same time, it should be emphasised that

Sweden’s successful policy of neutrality was favoured by its geographical and geopolitical location.

While maintaining neutrality, Sweden has never turned to symmetricism in international policies. The country has always unequivocally identified itself with Western Europe, and its commitment to the right of freedom and human rights has never been questioned – even though the independent and sovereign decision to choose one’s own course of action has always been an existential issue for the Swedes. In doing so, Swedish international policies cannot be described as entirely selfish. The effectiveness of the security policy and the concept of pragmatic neutrality over almost two centuries, contributing to the prosperity of this small northern European state, enabled at the same time the development of a society characterised by a high sense of social solidarity. This solidarity, reinforced by a certain sense of contrition arising from the consequences of Swedish choices during the World War II in order to maintain its neutrality, often manifested itself in the imperative to assist nations and people threatened by totalitarianism, war, oppression or simply poverty.

To a certain extent, the decision to join the North Atlantic Alliance could be interpreted as another expression of this pragmatic way to exercise neutrality policy. The vast majority of the Swedish political scene came in a very short period of time to the conclusion that a policy whose main objective for centuries had been to guarantee the security of the country now requires a radical step. The basic reasons on which Sweden’s decision to join NATO can be summarised as follows:

- in view of the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Europe, the previous

policy of neutrality does not provide sufficient security guarantees;

- joining NATO, Sweden gains necessary guarantees for the protection of the country in a new European security situation, guarantees which current military and security policy cooperation cannot provide;

- Sweden, by being part of NATO, will be able to take greater responsibility for Euro-Atlantic security, as well as expanding and developing cooperation with other member states of the Alliance, without giving up the long-established Swedish commitment to the defence of international law and human rights or its engagement in arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament processes [16].

The decision to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation should therefore not be seen as a deviation from a two-century-old policy, but rather as a consequence of its practice. Indeed, only NATO membership provides Sweden with the necessary security guarantees that it could previously provide on its own. Sweden has always attached immense importance to being able to make its own decisions regarding its security, but in the current geopolitical situation, this possibility is de facto no longer available. The decision to join the Alliance is also an expression of solidarity, stemming from the conviction that today, more than ever before in history, one's own security is built together.

To do nothing is not an alternative.

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