

Northern Flank by Ulf Sandmark

Sweden's new militant neutrality

British and Russian strategists are cheering the shift in Stockholm, but the Baltic states are worried.

The Swedish Foreign Ministry has dramatically shifted its policy in recent months, from an orientation toward the western powers, back to the rigid "neutrality at any cost" that characterized the Cold War period. This change is fraught with dangers, during a period when numerous scenarios for East-West confrontation remain live, ranging from British geopolitical designs to spark renewed war in former Yugoslavia, to Russian threats against the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

A very explosive situation exists around the ethnic Russian minorities in the Baltic states, as well as around the negotiations concerning Russian traffic through Lithuania to the Russian enclave Kaliningrad, a major military base.

Sweden's shift away from supporting the Baltic states in military emergencies is therefore a matter of particular concern. Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallen stated in her Foreign Policy Declaration to the Parliament on Feb. 22 that the old formula is still in effect, according to which Sweden is nonaligned in peace, in order to be neutral in war. "To contribute to security stability, it is required that our actions be predictable," she said. She also put an end to the Swedish opening to increased military and security cooperation with the West, which came with Sweden's recent entry into the European Union. "Sweden is not aspiring to membership in neither NATO or the Western European Union," the foreign minister said.

This new line was named the "indifference doctrine" by opposition leader Carl Bildt. As prime minister

until September 1994, he had taken a very active role in supporting the Baltic states in the negotiations about Russian troop withdrawal during 1991-94. Sweden had taken on this role in a division of labor with both the German government and the Clinton administration.

In 1992, Sweden had left the Cold War formula of strict neutrality for a more flexible position, with the stated purpose of being able to give support to the Baltic states. There was no talk of military support for the Baltic states, but the comparison was drawn to the Swedish "voluntary" military support for Finland during the "Winter War" of 1939-40.

That new flexible foreign policy was maintained all through the negotiation process and referendum to join the European Union in November 1994. In fact, Social Democratic Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson stated as late as Dec. 14, 1994 that Sweden was "pursuing a maximal liberty of action in defense policy." Two months later, that policy has changed.

The general understanding in Sweden is that underlying this shift is part of a domestic quarrel. The Social Democrats tried to tar Carl Bildt, a Conservative, for having accused Russian President Boris Yeltsin of continuing submarine incursions in Swedish waters. On Feb. 10, Commander-in-Chief Owe Wiktorin published his yearly report about incidents involving foreign military powers on Swedish territory, in which he revealed that, of six incidents in 1992 and 1993 that had been evaluated as confirmed submarine activity, five were later reevaluated as being

caused by minke whales. The same day, the government attacked Bildt for his letter to Russian President Yeltsin based on the earlier evaluation. This letter was leaked to the press, and the whole affair developed into a brawl, which culminated with the new Foreign Policy Declaration of Feb. 22.

In truth, such dramatic shifts in the foreign policy of the Scandinavian countries are usually reflections of changes in policy of the larger powers. Such considerations have been very much present in Stockholm in the recent period, as British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd showed up on Feb. 14 to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. Hurd's discussion with his Swedish hosts was also about security questions in the framework of the Maastricht Treaty of European Union. On Swedish TV, Hurd came out praising Swedish neutrality.

Swedish neutrality is also in line with the Russian policy to stop the expansion of NATO. Then the Clinton administration dropped the ineffective Partnership for Peace arrangement. The expansion of NATO was high on the agenda when German Chancellor Helmut Kohl met with President Bill Clinton in Washington on Feb. 8. The Russian side has been consolidating relations with both Ukraine and Belarus, and has even gone so far as to bring up the old neutrality clause with Austria.

A Russian strategist, Sergei Karaganov, argued in a symposium in Berlin, according to *Svenska Dagbladet*, for a 1,500-km-wide neutral zone across Europe. This is the old Soviet nuclear-free-zone scheme, revived now to stop the expansion of NATO to the East. The new Swedish neutrality position clearly supports these efforts, undermining the stability of eastern Europe, and especially that of the Baltic states.