

New book proposes Nordic defense pact

by William Jones

A book recently published in Norway, *Det Blaser i grenseland*, (*The Storm Brewing Next Door*), in shedding light on the political and military situation in Scandinavia right before and during World War II—the period of the Finnish Winter War—exposes some nasty aspects of the much-lauded policy of neutrality. The book was written by a Norwegian member of parliament (now in office), Ingvald Godal, with much preparatory archive work having been done in Oslo and Helsinki. The book, although not yet translated into Swedish, was obviously written with a Swedish public in mind.

The thesis of the book is that the entire political geography of the “northern flank,” in particular, the special relationship between the Soviet Union and Finland, was the result of the political balance of forces stemming from decisions made during World War II, and more specifically, decisions made in Stockholm by the Social Democratic government of Per Albin Hansson.

The political situation in 1939 found Finland a free and independent nation, thanks to the victory of Finnish military forces during the Finnish War of Independence, in which the Finns, under the legendary Marshal Mannerheim, succeeded in putting down a Soviet backed communist uprising.

In 1939, Stalin tried to blackmail the Finns into transferring a large chunk of Finnish territory around the Karelian Isthmus. When the Finns resisted this blackmail, Stalin prepared to move on Finland militarily.

The situation for Stalin was ideal. The signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact gave him the necessary security to devote as many of his forces as he wanted to crush Finland. The goal was not merely to annex the Karelian Isthmus, but to impose a communist dictatorship on Finland under his lackey, Otto Kuusinen (the future mentor of Yuri Andropov).

An unequal battle ensued. Stalin devoted a significant number of his military forces to the Finnish invasion. All in all, 500,000 Russian soldiers were pitted against 175,000 Finnish troops. Furthermore, the Russians could throw in over 1,000 tanks and 800 planes. The Finns had, initially, neither planes nor tanks. Godal compares this with the German invasion of Norway, in which Hitler sent 11,000 troops against the Norwegian force of 100,000 men. The Norwegi-

ans, however, were totally unprepared. The Finns were not.

During the course of the Winter War (prior to Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union), the Finns sought assistance in their unequal fight. The most obvious candidates to help them were their neighbors to the West, Sweden and Norway. Sweden had a common border in the north with Finland, and only the easily navigable Gulf of Bothnia separated the long sea borders of these two countries. Sweden in 1939 was neutral, a situation which had existed for about 100 years. The Finnish dilemma, however, awakened warm feelings among the Swedes, many of whom had personal and family ties to Finland. (Finland was historically a part of Sweden for several centuries, until it was given to Russia by the Congress of Vienna in 1815.)

Swedes turn a deaf ear

The Social Democratic government of Per Albin Hansson remained deaf to the pleas of the Finnish envoys. It preferred to let Finland bear the burden and hardships of war, and perhaps the loss of its hard-won independence, rather than risk the security of a comfortable neutrality (and the freedom to deal with both sides) during a possible European conflict. In spite of strong opinion in Sweden favoring intervention on the side of Finland, as well as the promotion of such a policy by Swedish foreign minister, Rickard Sandler, Prime Minister Hansson consistently refused to come to the aid of Finland. Not only that, but when the Finnish representative, Vaino Tanner, mooted the possibility of receiving possible British and French military assistance through Swedish or Norwegian territory, Hansson declared that Sweden would use military force to thwart any military assistance to Finland to transit through Swedish territory!

In the face of Swedish (and Norwegian) refusal to come to their assistance, Finland was forced to fight alone. And fight they did! Not since the illustrious period of the great Gustavus Adolphus, have Scandinavian military forces accomplished so much with so little means.

Under the brilliant direction of the somewhat aging Mannerheim, the Finnish forces achieved their first victories in the Lake Ladoga area. The dark forebodings of the first weeks

gave way to a hope of victory. The moral strength they received from knowing that they were fighting for their very existence and the existence of their newly independent nation combined with knowledge and agility in utilizing the harsh Finnish winter to stop the Russian in his tracks. The Russian soldiers, pulled from every part of the sprawling Russian empire, were not accustomed to fighting in such an environment.

Small Finnish patrols dressed in snow-white uniforms and traveling with lightning speed on skis, would harass the Russian lines, moving on them by surprise and spraying them with fire from their automatic rifles. The "white death," as the Russians called these patrols, would hit with incredible speed and disappear just as quickly in the desert of white snow.

But it is not simply to relate this tale of unquestionable valor that motivated Godal to write his book, but rather to draw some conclusions from this historical record for the present strategic situation in the "northern flank."

The refusal of their Scandinavian neighbors to come to

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their assistance to a large extent forced the Finns into an alliance with Hitler, at the point that Hitler invaded Russia. Godal raises the question as to whether the Germans would have ever invaded Norway had there developed a military alliance between Sweden and Finland, making a military move in Scandinavia a somewhat riskier venture. The demonstrated assurance that Sweden would not risk its neutrality for the sake of a neighboring country put all the cards in Hitler's hands.

Finland's dilemma

Sweden's refusal to help Finland in its dire need also created the psychosis for Finns that in any eventual conflict, they would remain alone. Therefore, they have bent over backward in order to reach any agreements with the Soviet Union which would allow them to avoid such a conflict. In the immediate postwar period, the Soviets had again tried to manipulate the political situation to impose a Soviet-con-

trolled puppet government—a move which was decisively defeated. The cost, however, has been the successive sacrifice of national sovereignty in many vital areas, not least in the area of foreign policy, in order to maintain a modicum of independence.

Increased collaboration with the Soviet Union in the economic arena is, however, tightening the bands which might irrevocably tie the fate of Finland to that of the Soviet Union. Whether this process has become irreversible at this point remains to be seen. It is clear, however, that only the actions of forces outside of Finland would offer any solution to that problem.

One thing is certain. The maintenance of the Swedish neutrality which so devastatingly affected the balance of forces in the "northern flank" to the advantage of the Soviet Union would, under present conditions not even offer the modicum of "security" which Sweden so hypocritically enjoyed during World War II. In drawing conclusions for the present situation, Godal assists, quite correctly, that—then as now—the fate of the Scandinavian peninsula is dependent on decisions taken in Stockholm. To retain a stance of neutrality, especially under the treacherous hand of an Olof Palme, would only assure the Soviets that they would at least receive the same kind of guarantees that the Germans received during World War II. The recent submarine affairs should make it clear to even the most naive that the Soviets have no respect for any declaration of neutrality when it is a question of their strategic interests.

A mutual defense pact?

One obvious possibility for strengthening the situation in the northern flank would be for Sweden to join NATO, as was mooted (and rejected) during the immediate postwar period. Godal presents another, and quite interesting, proposal. Would it not be possible for Sweden to sign a mutual defense pact with its neighbor Norway, where each country commits itself to use military force to ward off a possible aggressor attempting to use its territory for an attack on the other?

This would be comparable to the treaty of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance signed between the neutral Finland and the Soviet Union. Such a treaty would tend to circumvent the formal objections which would undoubtedly be raised if Sweden joined NATO. At the same time, there should be no difficulty for Norway, as a member of NATO, to also have other commitments which would not jeopardize its NATO commitments. Godal goes a step further in posing the question as to whether such an agreement could then be extended to Finland to secure mutual defense against a potential aggressor.

A bold proposal—with interesting implications, and therefore well worth a discussion. One thing is certain. The continued Finlandization of Sweden, under the guise of "neutrality," can only bode ill—for all the countries in the northern flank, and for the entire Western world.