

## Partner number one or NATO ally twenty-nine? Sweden and NATO post-Libya

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### NATO's number one partner

“Number one partner”, “security provider,” “operational partner,” “like-minded partner” – there are many ways to describe PFP country Sweden and the role it plays vis-à-vis NATO today.<sup>2</sup> It first stepped out of the deep shadows of (official) neutrality in the mid-1990s when it was the first country, together with Finland, to join the brand-new Partnership for Peace program. Since then, militarily nonaligned Sweden has taken advantage of every opportunity to move closer to the Alliance, while gradually adjusting the official terminology to fit the process.<sup>3</sup> Sweden now maintains a truly special relationship with NATO, with a privileged position in the partnership pool. As its “number one partner”, Sweden is in many ways closer to NATO, and a more reliable contributor, than several of the allied countries.

As mentioned above, several terms thus come to mind in describing Sweden's position vis-à-vis NATO. There is, however, one word still frequently used in describing Sweden today which has actually been inappropriate for several years, even decades – and that is “neutral”. “Nonaligned”, yes – Sweden is not a member of a military alliance; but the days when neutrality and the policy of a third way between the superpowers were presented as the hallmark of Swedish foreign



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<sup>2</sup> The report is based on first and secondary sources such as speeches, statements etc., as well as reports and articles. It draws heavily on interviews conducted in the spring of 2012.

<sup>3</sup> For more on Sweden, Finland and NATO, see Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Sweden, Finland and NATO: Security partners and security producers”, in Robert Nurick and Magnus Nordenman (eds.), *Nordic-Baltic Security in the 21st Century: The Regional Agenda and the Global Role* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2011). Also the chapter on the same topic by Ann-Sofie Dahl and Pauli Järvenpää in the forthcoming book, Ann-Sofie Dahl and Pauli Järvenpää (eds.), *Security in the Nordic-Baltic Region in a Post-Unipolar World* (forthcoming, 2012).

policy are now long gone (as, indeed, is one of the superpowers).

Throughout the Cold War, the official security doctrine of the country was referred to, almost mantra-style, as “nonalignment in times of peace, leading to neutrality in times of war”. But with membership of the European Union in 1995, “neutrality” was for all practical purposes dropped as a description of Swedish relations with the outside world in general and with NATO in particular. This was perhaps belated, one could argue, since the country had as far back as the late 1940s entered into an extensive scheme of top-secret military cooperation with a number of NATO allies in order to secure Western military support in the event of war.<sup>4</sup>

As the Cold War was replaced by unipolar peace, Sweden went to great lengths – as did all the Nordics – to assist the three vulnerable Baltic countries in every possible way in their struggle for independence and NATO membership, though Sweden itself chose to maintain its nonaligned policy. That NATO membership for the small Baltic countries would greatly improve stability and security in the Nordic-Baltic region was never doubted in Stockholm, where every single government since the end of the Cold War has emphasized the significance of the transatlantic link.<sup>5</sup>

A major leap forward for the Swedish doctrine was achieved with the 2009 Solidarity Declaration, stating that Sweden would not remain passive if another EU country or Nordic neighbour was attacked. In addition, this document went one step further by declaring that Sweden must be in a position to “both give and receive support”.<sup>6</sup>

It is also important to note that there has been Swedish participation in almost every NATO mis-

sion since the end of the Cold War – from Bosnia all the way to the Libyan operation, with the sole exception of Operation Allied Force in Kosovo and Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean. As stated above, Sweden is thus presently referred to by many at NATO HQ as “the number one partner”, with a commitment and service to the Alliance that in reality surpasses that of several allies.

Two events last year reinforced this impression. In early 2011 there was a strong Swedish contribution to NATO’s Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya, where JAS 39 Gripen fighter jets delivered high-quality reconnaissance and surveillance on NATO’s behalf. Only six months later, in the fall, Sweden surprised everyone involved in the Crisis Management Exercise in Norway by stepping into the uncharted territory of offering Article 5 support from a partner to NATO – a contribution which will be discussed in detail later in this paper.

Heads were spinning in allied capitals and at NATO HQ at the conclusion of the exercise, with the Swedish performance in the skies above Libya still fresh in the memory. What were the Swedes up to? Was this in reality a Swedish shift from partner to allied status – should a filled-out application form for membership be expected to land soon on the Secretary General’s desk in Brussels? If not, how was this advance towards the very core of the Alliance to be interpreted – and how should NATO deal with a partner balancing on the thin but distinct line that separates partners from allies? What will be the consequences for NATO – and Sweden – if the distinction between these two groups becomes blurred? What are the lessons learned from 2011, for NATO as well as for Sweden? These are the issues discussed in this paper.

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<sup>4</sup> Dahl, *Svenskarna och NATO* (Stockholm: Timbro, 1999). Several studies have been published in the last two decades on the classified cooperation with NATO, starting with the official government study, *Had there been a war...* (Stockholm: SOU 11: 1994). The latest to date is by reporter Mikael Holmström: *Den dolda alliansen: Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser* (Stockholm: Atlantis förlag, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of security in the Nordic-Baltic region, including Swedish support for Baltic membership in NATO, see Ann-Sofie Dahl, *US Policy in the Nordic-Baltic Region. During the Cold War and After* (Stockholm: Santérus, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> “Mr. Carl Bildt, Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, 15 February 2012” (Stockholm: Regeringskansliet, 2012).



## Operation Unified Protector: Karakal

While Sweden has participated in nearly all NATO missions since the end of the Cold War, the operation in Libya as part of an international coalition to uphold UNSC Resolution 1973 was actually the first air force deployment to a combat mission by Sweden in fifty years. The Swedish air force has over the years taken part in a number of NATO exercises such as Cold Response, but the last time that Swedish pilots operated in a combat mission was with deployment of the J 29 Flying Barrel to Congo in the early 1960s. In OUP, Sweden was one of only a handful of non-NATO participants, and the only Western PfP country; the other non-NATO contributors were a group of regional Arab partners (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Jordan). In different ways, all the non-member countries added to the political legitimacy of the operation.<sup>7</sup>

The Swedish contribution to Operation Unified Protector – Operation Karakal – was highly successful, particularly the second part. Sweden received top assessments from the other contributing countries and at NATO HQ for a high-quality performance and an equally high level of interoperability. It was also considered to be well integrated within the larger international coalition.

Operation Karakal began with deployment to the US base at Sigonella (Sicily) on 1 April 2011, after a parliamentary approval process which broke all records for brevity. The Swedish contribution had broad support from all parties in Parliament except the small Sverigedemokraterna (an anti-immigration party with an isolationist foreign policy agenda, which probably could not see the value of going to the support of a Muslim country).

One key factor behind the speedy arrival of the

Swedes at Sigonella was the fortunate coincidence of OUP with Sweden's turn as framework nation (EU language for lead nation) of the EU Nordic Battle Group, NBG-11. This meant that there was a Swedish Expeditionary Air Wing (EAW) on standby, ready to deploy on short notice. All the necessary command structures, logistics, ground staff and mission support elements were already in place, and the pilots already equipped with "...a complete set of standing orders, standard operating procedures, and months of training behind them".<sup>8</sup> That OUP coincided with Sweden's lead of NBG-11 was a crucial element that facilitated the Swedish contribution to the operation and enhanced its performance.

The first phase of Operation Karakal lasted from the arrival in early April until the renewal of the mandate in June. The deployment comprised of eight JAS 39 Gripen fighter jets, a C-130 Hercules aerial refueller, plus technical and other staff, all stationed after some initial confusion at the American base in Sigonella. A grand total of around 200 Swedes were based in Sicily during OUP, to perform different tasks related to the air campaign. The mission of this first deployment was limited to a defensive air campaign, performing reconnaissance flights to uphold the No Fly Zone – a caveat placed on the contribution by the Swedish opposition.<sup>9</sup> Many in the government coalition of four center-right parties were in favour of a more muscular Swedish contribution which could also engage in actual combat if needed and bomb targets on the ground. However, such a scenario was unthinkable for Swedes with a more traditional peacekeeping mindset, who already found the presence of the JAS Gripen in a NATO mission rather provocative and excessively "war-like".<sup>10</sup>

At a press conference following a meeting with the Swedish Prime Minister, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen nevertheless stressed that the Swedish caveats were not a problem for NATO,

<sup>7</sup> For a list of the various contributions to the OUP, NATO as well as non-NATO, see Adrian Johnson and Saeed Mueen (eds), *Short War, Long Shadow: The Political and Military Legacies of the 2011 Libya Campaign* (London: RUSI, 2012), pp. IX ff.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Egnell, "The Swedish Experience: Overcoming the Non-Alliance Member Conundrum" (unpublished paper, 2012), pp. 14f.

<sup>9</sup> The establishment of a No Fly Zone was one of three operational tasks mandated by UNSC 1973. The other two were the protection of civilians and the enforcement of the arms embargo.

<sup>10</sup> "Bred majoritet för Libyeninsats", Svenska Dagbladet, April 1, 2011.

which is used to contributing countries arriving on a mission with a baggage of national limitations. Instead, Fogh Rasmussen emphasized to the Swedish Prime Minister how well the Swedish contribution fitted in with the overall operation.<sup>11</sup>

The eight Gripen fighters were reduced to five in the second half of the mandate, starting in June when the Libya mission was extended. The withdrawal of three planes was the result of domestic negotiations and demands from the Social Democrats (the main opposition party in Parliament), who, in addition to the reduction in the number of planes deployed, also originally requested that a maritime boarding force be added to the Swedish mission. This demand was eventually withdrawn when NATO made it clear to Stockholm that such a maritime force was neither requested nor needed.

More importantly, in its second stage the mission was redefined from the initial defensive air campaign upholding the NFZ (no longer in demand as the war progressed) to a tactical reconnaissance role. In essence, this meant that the previous caveat was lifted – in a humanitarian crisis like this, pure reconnaissance quickly proved unsustainable, and was frustrating for individual pilots who observed violence against civilians on the ground but were unable to process the information. Instead, the task for the JAS Gripens was redefined to surveillance and gathering intelligence directly for Joint Force Command (JFC) in Naples.

The Swedes excelled and impressed their NATO hosts in this role: “The Gripen aircraft”, Elizabeth Quintana concludes in a RUSI report on the Libyan operation, “proved outstanding in this latter role and outstripped other combat assets with the quality of its tactical ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance).” Also, the writer argues, “Sweden’s

longstanding collaboration with NATO as a Partner for Peace made co-operation relatively seamless, and may mean that Sweden will participate more readily in future operations.”<sup>12</sup>

Out of a total of approximately 240 planes participating in the entire operation, the small unit of five Gripen fighters from Sweden actually performed one fourth of all surveillance, and provided 37% of the surveillance reporting in OUP.<sup>13</sup> With a shortage of ISR capabilities in the Alliance, this high-quality contribution by a partner was particularly valuable for the Libyan operation. According to *The New York Times*, a NATO study of lessons learned is reported to have concluded, with reference to the US, that “NATO remains overly reliant on a single ally to provide ISR, collection capabilities that are essential to the commander.”<sup>14</sup> The Swedish contribution, with a strong emphasis precisely on intelligence and surveillance, thus made up for some of this shortfall and reduced the heavy reliance on one single ally – the US – to provide these capabilities.

The Swedish mission suffered from some technical problems in the early stages of the operation, which tended to be exaggerated in the Swedish media. Examples of these were difficulties related to the lack of compatible fuel in the first few weeks of the operation, as well as problems in accessing classified NATO information and integrating the tactical data exchange network.<sup>15</sup> The last of these problems was solved with the assistance of the Danish contingent – a Nordic Ally with whom the Swedes quickly developed a close working relationship, and who provided a valuable link between JFC and the Swedes. The Danes were also on the receiving end when the Gripens arrived at base, downloading and processing the surveillance results delivered by the Swedish unit.

<sup>11</sup> “Gripenplan kan lyfta på lördag”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, March 31, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Quintana, “*The War from the Air*”, in Johnson and Mueen 2012, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews, March 15 and 16, 2012. Also, “Nya förhandlingar om Libyeninsatsen”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, March 12, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> “NATO Sees Flaws in Air Campaign Against Qaddafi”, *The New York Times*, April 14, 2012. The agreement at the Chicago summit at the end of May 2012, for NATO to develop its own ground surveillance and reconnaissance capability to be fully operational in 2017, is an important step towards overcoming this limitation. See “Focus on Afghanistan at NATO Summit”, *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed report of the Karakal mission, see Egnell 2012. A discussion of these technical problems can be found on pp. 9-15.





The Swedish contribution was quickly up and running, with high interoperability from the start and Full Operational Capability (FOC) after only three weeks despite the technical challenges mentioned above. The performance was in many ways facilitated by the long practice of joint exercises with the Nordic NATO countries. “After all these years of common exercises, it was basically a matter of plugging in the Swedes,” as one Norwegian close to the operation puts it.<sup>16</sup> Considering that this was the first air campaign for the Swedish air force in half a century, both NATO and the Swedes thus had every reason to be pleased with the results. The OUP confirmed that Sweden is indeed NATO’s “partner number one”, one of those who contribute to the Alliance’s operations and share the risks.

### Crisis management over Libya

So why did Sweden choose to participate in OUP, operating for the first time in fifty years with combat aircraft, and as the only Western partner from outside NATO? What were the objectives behind the Swedish contribution? Was the aim to showcase the Gripen to an international audience of potential buyers, as was frequently suggested in the media and by critics of Operation Karakal? Or was it an opportunity for the Swedish air force to gain some real-life fighting experience, as was also argued during the Libyan conflict?

OUP did indeed provide the Swedish air force with a valuable chance to practise in a real-life combat mission, and the producers of the Gripen at SAAB certainly did not object to the chance to put their fighter jet on display. The actual grounds for the Swedish decision to participate in the Libyan operation were nevertheless consistent with traditional Swedish policy, and much less commercial in nature than was sometimes suggested.

Operation Karakal was quite simply a natural mission for the peacekeeping Swedes – with their long

experience of crisis management – to undertake. Sweden has been a regular “blue-helmet” peacekeeper – and later peace enforcer – under the UN flag since the very early days of the organization. For Sweden not to have participated in a R2P mission with a UN mandate would actually have been a more unusual situation, even though the presence of the air force added a new dimension to this particular mission. Only once has Sweden supported a mission not mandated by the UN, when the then Foreign Minister Anna Lindh took the (for a Swedish Social Democrat) highly unusual, even courageous step of politically supporting the NATO humanitarian operation to end ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. This stand may have cost Lindh her life – she was murdered in September 2003 by a Serbian nationalist.

For many in Sweden it is seen as practically mandatory, indeed as a moral obligation, to come to the rescue when the UN puts forward a request for assistance. This was particularly true for previous Swedish governments, with quite a romantic view of the ability and role of the UN. The present Reinfeldt coalition has a somewhat more sceptical view of the UN, and is instead a firm believer in the EU. Strong belief in, and adherence to, international law is in any case a permanent feature and a guiding principle of Swedish policy.

The bloodshed in Libya, where a ruthless dictator was slaughtering his own people, represented a clear-cut case from an international legal perspective: there was an obvious need for a humanitarian intervention to support and help the Libyan people. In many ways, this was a situation similar to the humanitarian intervention in Kosovo, though this time there was of course a UN mandate. When the request for Swedish assistance with the Libyan operation arrived from NATO HQ, it was thus not a hard decision to take for the Swedish government; the mission was again a humanitarian one, to help the people resist Qaddafi’s aggression.

There was strong backing from the Swedish pub-

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<sup>16</sup> Interview, May 14, 2012.

lic to act in the Libyan case. In the 2011 Transatlantic Trends, a regular survey of public opinion on foreign policy, the German Marshall Fund (GMF) found that an exceptionally high percentage of Swedes (69%) approved of the international military intervention in Libya. This was by far the strongest support expressed by any of the countries in the survey. By the same token, only 28% disapproved – the lowest number in the survey. Equally remarkable was the level of support for an intervention by the Swedish government to protect civilians – 89%, again the highest level in the survey. Among those interviewed, 73% even supported the idea of non-aligned Sweden intervening to remove Qaddafi from power, which was clearly outside the mandate given to the operation.<sup>17</sup>

The Prime Minister summarized the grounds for the government's support of the mission in four points, consistent with the conditions generally put forward for Swedish participation in a crisis management mission. First, the Prime Minister emphasized that there was a legal basis for the intervention, in this case UNSC Resolution 1973.<sup>18</sup> Second, that the issue of operational leadership of the mission was settled, with NATO in command. As was pointed out in an op-ed co-authored by the Prime Minister and the Foreign and Defence Ministers at the time of the Chicago summit, what matters to Sweden is that such operations are effective and solid missions, as is the case when NATO takes the lead.<sup>19</sup> Third, that there was an official request for a Swedish contribution from NATO. This request was delivered on the morning of March 29, after intense contacts between the Swedish NATO delegation and the Secretary General's office. Finally, the PM emphasized the need for – and the existence of – broad parliamentary support for a military operation in Libya. Other factors which probably also had an impact on the decision-making were the potential for refugee flows and the question of oil, though these were not mentioned in official statements.

A humanitarian crisis management operation such as OUP, with a UN mandate and under effective NATO command, was thus more likely than not to gain support from Sweden. At the same time, the Swedish participation in OUP was an exceptional event in three respects. First, the Swedish air force returned to international missions after fifty years of absence; second, there was an exceptionally high level of support, also in comparison with other countries polled, among the Swedish population for this mission; and third, the Swedish performance was very strong, surpassing that of many allies and filling an important gap for the Alliance in terms of tactical surveillance.

### CMX in Norway, October 2011

The Libya operation confirmed Sweden's position as a reliable operational partner. The favourable impression that NATO had of Sweden as a partner was further strengthened in the fall of the same year, when Sweden was invited with Finland to participate in NATO's 2011 Crisis Management Exercise (CMX).

Crisis Management Exercises are normally conducted annually by the Alliance, as a means to practise crisis management procedures at the strategic and political as well as military levels. In a CMX, both civilian and military staff in the capitals of the allied countries are involved, as well as national and international staffs at NATO Headquarters and the two Strategic Commands, Allied Command Operations and Allied Command Transformation. Partners are frequently invited to take part in these high-level exercises.

The 2011 CMX – the 17th such exercise since the series began in 1992 – was conducted between 19th and 26th October. It had originally been planned for March the same year, but was postponed for six

<sup>17</sup> The *Transatlantic Trends* report can be downloaded at [http://www.gmfus.org/publications\\_/TT/TTS2011Toplines.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/publications_/TT/TTS2011Toplines.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> The reference to "international law", rather than the UN, was thus typical of the center-right Reinfeldt government.

<sup>19</sup> Op-ed by Fredrik Reinfeldt, Carl Bildt and Karin Enström, "Ett nytt NATO växer fram", *Svenska Dagbladet*, May 21, 2012.



months due to the crisis in Libya – a real-life CMX. The geographical focus for the 2011 CMX – Norway – could be seen as a small victory for the long-standing Norwegian and Baltic efforts to convince their colleagues in NATO of the need to focus more on security developments in the High North. These efforts gained new momentum after the 2008 war in Georgia.

The 2011 CMX was also the first time in almost 10 years that a crisis management exercise had focused exclusively on an Article 5 collective defence scenario. The previous Cold War exercises – known as the WINTEX-CIMEX – were all based on scenarios where an attack against the Alliance had already occurred, and the collective defence procedures were practised in that context. The 2011 CMX was also fully in line with Norway's traditional role as one of the original "Collective Defenders" within the Alliance, strongly underlining the credibility of the collective defence guarantees in Article 5.<sup>20</sup>

The starting point for the exercise was a crisis scenario involving a fictitious island state – "Vineland" – located off the Norwegian coast, which was threatening to attack Norway. Neighbouring states Sweden and Finland were invited to participate in the exercise in their capacity as "consulting partners", and took their assigned seats in the NAC and the relevant crisis response committees. The exercise thus involved both consultations on the basis of Article 4 of the Washington Treaty and the invocation of the defence guarantees in Article 5. This was in accordance with the increased focus on the Alliance's core defence commitments, as well as on partnerships and emerging new threats, in the 2010 Strategic Concept adopted at the Lisbon Summit.<sup>21</sup> A number of international organizations, such as the UN, the Red Cross, the EU, the UN and the OSCE, were also invited to relevant parts of the exercise as observers (though they were excluded from certain elaborations of a more confidential nature as the ex-

ercise progressed).

By virtue of its long common border with Norway, Sweden had an immediate interest in the scenario. It quickly took on an active role in the preparations for, and planning of, the exercise. For Finland, the build-up to the presidential election scheduled for January 2012 limited the scope for involvement in the exercise.

Sweden started out by offering Norway political crisis management support. As widely expected, it also offered Norway – and by extension, NATO – the use of Swedish airspace for logistic communication. However, the exercise scenario was that NATO attempts to deter the attack by the fictitious belligerent state were failing. In addition, it quickly became clear that it was difficult for the Allies to find the necessary contributions to assist Norway. Sweden then rapidly proceeded to provide further assistance, well beyond what the Allies and NATO HQ could have expected during the planning of the CMX, even from a close operational partner like Sweden.

To the great surprise of everybody involved, Sweden took the exceptional step for a partner country of offering direct support to NATO, including maritime assets with ships and air capabilities. The clear intention was that they be placed under NATO command and control, though this was an Article 5 crisis. According to one report, Sweden offered to contribute a larger force than any participating Ally, with up to four divisions of JAS Gripens, a total of 48 aircraft.<sup>22</sup> Only the conclusion of the seven-day exercise timeframe, and thus of the "war", stopped the process of notionally transferring command of Swedish forces to NATO. At that point the aim of the exercise – to practise an Article 5 situation with Allies, subsequently including some partners – had already been fulfilled.

The Swedish offer of Article 5 assistance to neigh-

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the Collective Defenders, see Pål Jonson, "The debate about Article 5 and its credibility. What is it all about?" *NDC Research Paper*, No. 58, May 2010, pp. 3 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Press release, "NATO conducts annual Crisis Management Exercise (CMX)", *NATO Press and Media Service*, 19-26 Oct. 2011.

<sup>22</sup> This is reported in *Svenska Dagbladet*, "Jas-insats hölls hemlig i Nato-övning" on June 21, 2012.

bouring Norway astounded everyone around the table. A puzzled group of Allies found themselves confronted by a situation which had hitherto never been experienced or even envisioned (except perhaps for the top-secret Swedish cooperation with NATO during the Cold War): a partner country stepping into the role of contributing assistance to the Alliance in a potential Article 5 situation, thereby blurring the distinction between operational partner and Ally. The Swedes forced the individual Allies, NATO HQ and the Commands to engage in some creative thinking as to how to deal with this new situation, and the consequences and challenges it posed to the Alliance.

Though the main reaction to the Swedish activism was clearly and overwhelmingly positive, there was also some – albeit limited – concern among a number of Allies who chose to interpret this unexpected development as a partner crossing the red line into off-limits territory. In addition, the actual purpose behind the Swedish support was questioned: was the offering of Article 5 support in reality only a clever way for the Swedes to get a foot inside the door to the Alliance's inner circle, and gain informal access to privileges only available to actual Allies?

In other words, was the real aim behind the Swedish offer of assistance not so much to demonstrate solidarity with a next-door neighbour as to receive access to inside information and assets? And had the extensive Swedish assistance to NATO really received top-level authorization in Stockholm? (The answer is yes, it had.) However, such criticism was voiced only by a minority of NATO members; the main impression of the country's surprise move in the CMX 2011 was definitely very positive.

### **The Swedish Solidarity Declaration**

The Swedish performance at the CMX thus impressed – and puzzled – those involved. At the end of the day, the Swedes had unexpectedly come to dominate the exercise, and in particular the latter part: “It was all about Sweden”, one Baltic diplo-

mat involved in the CMX concludes, while praising Sweden for its active and forceful stand against the fictitious island “intruder”.

But how come Sweden stepped forward in this fashion, providing direct support to Norway and allowing this to be placed under NATO command and control – in other words, to all intents and purposes acting as if it were an Ally rather than a partner to NATO?

The simple answer is: because of the Swedish Solidarity Declaration. Active involvement in the 2011 CMX was seen as a way for Sweden to demonstrate its firm commitment to the Solidarity Declaration of 2009. The exercise was considered a golden opportunity to manifest Swedish readiness and capacity to provide, but also to receive, support in accordance with this declaration.

Solidarity has been a key concept in Swedish society – and in the country's foreign policy, with an extensive budget for development aid – for decades, but it entered the security policy realm only in the last few years. Sweden's 2009 Solidarity Declaration was an effort to coordinate national policy with the Lisbon Treaty, and with the principle of solidarity between EU member states formulated in Article 42.7 of the Treaty. According to this Article, the members of the Union are obliged to come to the rescue, with all available means, when the territory of a member country is attacked. In the Swedish case, this principle of solidarity was extended not only to its fellow members in the EU but to the Nordic region as well, by including the two Nordic non-EU countries (and NATO Allies) Iceland and Norway – the country under “attack” in the 2011 CMX.

The basic foundations of this policy of solidarity were most recently formulated by Foreign Minister Carl Bildt in the 2012 Statement of Government Policy to Parliament: “Sweden will not remain passive if another EU Member State or Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is similarly affected. We must be in a position to both give



and receive support, civilian and military.”<sup>23</sup>

In line with this perspective on regional and European security as indivisible, the 2009 Declaration was subsequently followed up by a common Nordic Solidarity Declaration, which was presented at the biannual meeting of the Nordic foreign ministers in Helsinki in April 2011.<sup>24</sup> Emphasizing the “spirit of solidarity” as a guiding principle for the Nordics when facing the challenges ahead (whether man-made or natural disasters, cyber attacks or terrorist acts), the Nordic Declaration of Solidarity went on to state that: “...should a Nordic country be affected, the others will, upon request from that country, assist with relevant means.”<sup>25</sup>

While officially nonaligned, Sweden has for more than sixty years built its security jointly with others in the West. As mentioned, this was done through top-secret cooperation during the Cold War, but Swedish dependence on the outside world for assistance is now openly declared. Even more importantly, so is the newly stated principle of reciprocity, with Swedish readiness to return the favour to its Nordic and European neighbours. This was previously a sore issue on the home front, where many could not see the point in sending young Swedes to die in far-away conflicts (though popular approval is very high for the Swedish presence in both Afghanistan and Libya, as noted in the above-mentioned report by the GMF, and Swedish peacekeeping has traditionally drawn strong support). This shift in focus also has a number of practical consequences and places new demands on the operative capacity of the armed forces to act internationally, as noted for instance in the Defence Bill in 2009.

With the 2009 Solidarity Declaration it is obvious that Sweden, in the words of Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, “builds security in solidarity with others”, with “threats to peace and security [...] deterred collec-

tively and in cooperation with other countries and organizations”.<sup>26</sup> However, the Swedish participation in OUP made it clear to many of those involved that the scope of the Declaration needs to be extended, with a transatlantic dimension added in order to demonstrate beyond doubt that Sweden is indeed a partner to be counted on for the Alliance. Turkey, in particular, voiced strong criticism of the geographical limitation of the Swedish Declaration to the Nordic countries and the EU – to the surprise of the Swedes, since their country is known as probably the strongest supporter of the Turkish aspiration to EU membership.

To outsiders unaccustomed to the intricate semantics of Swedish security policy, this emphasis on mutual solidarity might sound confusingly similar to an Article 5 guarantee. The line between solidarity in one form or the other is, indeed, at times razor-thin. In many ways, the Solidarity Declaration represents a radical shift in Swedish policy and a major leap forward in the evolution of the country’s security doctrine, not just in rhetoric; with the statement that support should be both given and received, it could be – and is – argued that Sweden is now nonaligned only in the sense that it does not belong to a military Alliance. There is, however, one major “but” in all of this: with limited EU forces available, the Solidarity Declaration is – just like the Nordic Declaration and the EU in its entirety – entirely dependent on NATO for its military backup.

### To join or not to join, that is the (real) question

Considering this limitation, it is tempting to ask whether it would not be easier for Sweden to join the Alliance directly, instead of relying on a regional organization with no military means to speak of – a situation not likely to improve with the present financial crisis. Since the Swedish, Nordic and EU

<sup>23</sup> “Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, Wednesday, 15 February 2012” (Stockholm: Regeringskansliet, 2012). Emphasis added by author.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the Swedish and Nordic Declarations, see Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Sweden, Finland and NATO: Security partners and security producers”, in Nurick and Nordenman (eds.), 2011, pp. 9ff.

<sup>25</sup> The Nordic Declaration of Solidarity is available at <http://www.formin.fi/Public/default.aspx?contentid=217312>

<sup>26</sup> “Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, Wednesday, 15 February 2012” (Stockholm: Regeringskansliet, 2012).

Solidarity Declarations which form the backbone of the present Swedish security policy cannot be implemented in a real-life military situation without the support of NATO, it might seem as if Sweden has embarked on something of a political and military detour.

The question which logically arises is thus: is the Solidarity Declaration perhaps simply the final shredding of the last remnants of the old nonaligned policies, and the first step towards a change of doctrine, from partner number one to NATO Ally number twenty-nine? Is there, as many at NATO HQ ask, a “master plan” behind developments in recent years, with the Solidarity Declaration as one key piece of doctrinal evolution, and with the strong Swedish performance during the Libyan operation and the 2011 CMX as decisive steps in this direction? To return to the question asked in the opening section of this paper: what are the Swedes really up to?

The somber reply to that question is, however: not much, if “up to” equals a plan for membership. The “master plan” that many envision behind the activism displayed by Sweden in the last few years, and which seemed to have accelerated in 2011, might be there, at least in fragmented form. But it is not so much a direct and straightforward road to a seat at the NAC, as a focus on making the most out of the country’s partner status: this is seen as quite simply the only available option for the time being. Membership of NATO is not now on the agenda, as stated again and again by official representatives.

There are several reasons why membership is not being pursued by Sweden, though it might seem like a logical next step for a country which has such a close working relationship with the Alliance and at times appears even more “member-like” than many actual members. One reason is the state of public opinion on NATO in Sweden, where the mental link between “neutrality” and “peace” – and the popular

assumption that the latter is the result of the former – still prevails.<sup>27</sup> After such a long period of peace, the need for Sweden to actually have to defend itself may not be all that obvious to everyone – let alone the need for outside assistance in such a situation, in particular perhaps from the US. The fact that the US handed over leadership of OUP to NATO probably helped in that regard.<sup>28</sup> As one observer provocatively puts it, if Sweden were to join NATO it would be in spite of Article 5 – while for Finland (acutely aware of its long border to the east), it would be because of Article 5.

Public opinion with regard to NATO, and to the pros and cons of Swedish membership, has been quite stable for years, with only rather minor fluctuations. It is more or less evenly divided into three groups, with the numbers of those in favour or undecided slowly increasing in the last few years.<sup>29</sup> Considering the limited debate on this issue, though it gained strength in the build-up to the Chicago Summit, support for membership is actually relatively high (25-30%), while the 30-35% who are undecided are an increasing group which could swing the balance.

In addition, the center-right government coalition is split with regard to NATO: there is strong support for membership in both the largest party, Moderaterna, and in particular, liberal Folkpartiet, while the traditionally isolationist Center Party is firmly against a Swedish change of doctrine. Since a change of policy of this magnitude would require broad support across party and ideological lines, and almost certainly a referendum, the firm anti-NATO stand in the opposition led by the Social Democrats effectively blocks any movement.

With the focus quite squarely on other issues, and the economy in particular, the Prime Minister (from the conservative Moderaterna) has his priorities elsewhere, and little interest in becoming drawn into a lengthy and difficult battle over membership of

<sup>27</sup> See Dahl, 1999 for a discussion of this and the Swedish-NATO relationship generally.

<sup>28</sup> Egnell 2012 makes this point, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> The results vary, depending on the method and the questions used in the polling; for an analysis of the problems related to this, see Dahl 1999, pp. 234 ff. For a discussion of Swedish and Finnish opinion with regard to NATO, see Leo Michel, “Finland, Sweden and NATO: From ‘Virtual’ to Formal Allies?”, *Strategic Forum*, National Defense University, Washington, DC, February 2011.



NATO. Since its re-election in 2010 the government also no longer enjoys a majority in Parliament. Though there has indeed been a rapid and steady deepening of relations with NATO at a practical level since 2006, when the Reinfeldt government came to power, the main organization for Sweden is clearly the EU, of which it is already a member, thus the focus on the Solidarity Declaration.

Pressure is, however, growing within the two pro-NATO parties: the rank-and-file and many parliamentarians are growing increasingly frustrated over the lack of political advancement on an issue ideologically close to the heart of many in the Non-Socialist block. As mentioned, there seemed to have been a certain momentum as the Chicago Summit approached, with frequent op-ed articles and editorials in the major daily newspapers – most of them in favour of Sweden joining the Alliance, but one or two arguing against such a step and against what anti-NATO circles often describe as an attempt to “sneak Sweden into NATO through the back door”.<sup>30</sup>

Such suspicions are only reinforced by the government’s reluctance to disclose information about some of the cooperation which Sweden pursues with NATO – for example, the Swedish Parliament was not informed of the participation in the 2011 CMX (let alone of the massive scale of the contribution offered to the exercise).<sup>31</sup> With little government interest in engaging in a debate, or even providing information on what NATO is and does, it is hard to see any forthcoming changes in public opinion with regard to the membership issue.

Many of those advocating a change of doctrine are pinning their hopes on Finland – the prime rival for the cherished title as NATO’s number one partner – which many observers see as perhaps more likely to move in the direction of membership at some point. Indeed, the new Finnish president, Sam Ni-

nistö, has made his pro-NATO stand clear.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, in the Finnish debate some are expecting Sweden to again take the first step, with the process leading up to EU-membership in recent memory (but also hoping that, this time around, Finland would be consulted beforehand).

Either way, it would be very hard to imagine only one of the two joining NATO; and the already close historical relationship between these two Nordic neighbours has deepened even further in recent years with Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO).<sup>33</sup> Originally designed as a money-saving device in times of budgetary cuts, NORDEFECO has since evolved into a major platform for extensive Nordic cooperation on a wide range of military matters, including joint exercises in which Sweden, Finland and Norway are very much involved (with Denmark as a more reluctant latecomer).

### **Outside or inside, partner or member – does it really matter?**

There is thus no clear-cut strategy for joining NATO. The Stockholm “master plan” is, instead, to maintain and make the most of Sweden’s privileged position as NATO’s “partner number one”. That the Swedish Prime Minister was invited (by President Obama himself, rumour has it) to give the introductory remarks at the partnership meeting at the Chicago Summit – focusing on the Swedish Karakal contribution to the OUP in Libya – was yet another sign of the close and special relationship between Sweden and NATO. The United States has made it clear that it wants Sweden to play an even bigger role in transatlantic cooperation, and strongly encourages every step in that direction.

The ongoing reforms of the partnership program to a more flexible format, allowing contributing and active partners to establish a truly intimate and more

<sup>30</sup> For the last view, see e.g. “Sverige ska inte smygas in i NATO,” op-ed by two parliamentarians from the Center party, *Svenska Dagbladet*, May 16, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> “Riksdagen kände inte till medverkan i Nato-övning”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, June 21, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> For a comparison of the two countries’ relations to NATO, see the chapter by Dahl and Järvenpää, 2012 (forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed analysis of the NORDEFECO; see Pauli Järvenpää, “Nordic Defense Cooperation: NORDEFECO and Beyond”, in Ann-Sofie Dahl and Pauli Järvenpää (eds.), (forthcoming, 2012).

formalized relationship with the Alliance in all respects save the final seat at the NAC, thus appear almost custom-made for Sweden. The enhanced partnership model will enable countries to deepen their cooperation with NATO as they see fit, with great influence for those who make significant contributions. Partners will now also be “welcome to play a bigger role in shaping strategy and decisions. This means that those who contribute will have a bigger say in the preparation of operational planning decisions than before, although the NAC alone of course still has the last word in decision-making in NATO-led operations.”<sup>34</sup> The greater influence provided by the new format is good news to Sweden, as emphasized by the country’s delegation to the Chicago Summit.<sup>35</sup>

The ultimate prize – the Article 5 guarantee, and the power of being one of the decision-makers in the NAC – is still out of reach (or not even on the agenda, as in the Swedish case) for even the most devoted and dedicated partner. However, the reformed partnership model provides countries such as Sweden with an instrument to continue on the path followed during the last few years, continuously strengthening practical cooperation and contributions to missions. As a contributor to ISAF, Sweden has been able to benefit from a natural and close network and enjoyed direct access to, and dialogue with, the relevant operational and political forums in the Alliance. As the Afghanistan operation winds down, and that door closes, other venues for cooperation – and new means to maintain a high level of interoperability – will have to be sought.

This process also has consequences for the Alliance,

as Deputy Assistant Secretary General Jamie Shea notes: “NATO will need to think how it can preserve interoperability through joint exercises, simulations, contingency planning, and coordinated force planning”; he goes on to observe that partners’ interest is likely to increase if they feel that NATO too shows an interest in their respective regions and security concerns.<sup>36</sup> Cyber defence and counter-piracy activities are among the tasks mentioned in this context.

The strategy – or master plan – emanating out of Stockholm is therefore to use the opportunities provided by the enhanced partnership model so as to maximize Sweden’s influence in the Alliance – hence the advances in the last few years, which seemed to have culminated in 2011 with the Swedish performances in the OUP and the CMX. Being the best in the partnership league undoubtedly has its advantages, such as freedom from the internal pressure to contribute which is exercised within the Alliance, and plenty of praise when it does contribute to a mission, as in the Libya operation. An Ally would probably not have found it quite so easy to avoid actual combat in an operation as partner country Sweden did in OUP.

As Stockholm realizes, such a strategy leaves Sweden short of the ultimate level of influence in political and operational decision-making which may ultimately involve the lives of Swedish soldiers sent on missions to far-off conflicts. However, as things stand on the home front the conclusion in the Swedish capital is clear: being the Alliance’s number one partner is the only option available for the moment; and with the enhanced partnership program, it is actually not such a bad one.

<sup>34</sup> Heidi Reisinger, “Rearranging Family Life and a Large Circle of Friends: Reforming NATO’s Partnership Programmes”, *NATO Defense College Research Paper*, No.72, January 2012.

<sup>35</sup> “Reinfeldt tvekar om NATO-krav”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, May 21, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Jamie Shea, “Keeping NATO Relevant”, *Policy Outlook*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2012.