

Changes in Sweden's Security Policy Messaging in the Country's Military and Civil Defense Publications During the Cold War Compared to Those After NATO Membership

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Sweden joined NATO following Russia's invasion of Ukraine to protect itself from its perpetual and primary enemy. To counter the current Russian threat following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Sweden evolved its security strategy of neutrality and territorial defense to one that supports alliance operations throughout the Nordic region. Some analysts suggest that to achieve that new strategy's goals, Sweden needed to change public attitudes and traditions resulting from two centuries of military non-alignment to those that support the country's role in multi-national operations. This essay's hypothesis is that Sweden evolved from its Cold War message encouraging the population to survive an invasion and conduct a guerilla war against Russian occupation to today's message that an alliance-based conflict is winnable if the Swedish military and civilian population fight without surrendering. To test that hypothesis, the author translated and compared Cold War Swedish armed forces and civil defense publications to those produced following application for NATO membership in 2022 to determine if there is an observable difference in messaging between the two periods. The results indicate that while Sweden is clearly on its path to integration into the NATO alliance, its security publications directed at the populace remain committed to total defense, emphasizing each person's individual and collective responsibility in ensuring the country's territorial integrity and the subjects' collective security.

Introduction

Recently, some analysts proposed that to achieve public acceptance of alliance-based defense, Sweden needed to change public attitudes and traditions resulting from two centuries of military non-alignment to those that supported the country's membership in NATO (e.g., Aronsson et. Al. 2023). Even with that new messaging, Sundelius and Eldeblad (2023) believed that it will take a generational change for the Swedish public to accept alliance-based values like common defense (i.e., Article 5). Using those propositions, this paper's thesis is that Sweden evolved from its Cold War messaging, which encouraged the population to survive an invasion and conduct a guerilla war against Russian occupation, to today's messaging that an alliance-based conflict is winnable if the Swedish military and civilian population fight without surrendering. An alternate thesis is that while Sweden is clearly on its path to integration within the NATO alliance, its security

publications encourage the population to remain committed to a total defense stance, a holdover from the Cold War, emphasizing each person's individual and collective responsibility in ensuring the country's territorial defense. To test the study's thesis, I translated and compared Cold War-period Swedish armed forces and civil defense publications to those produced following application for NATO membership in 2022 to determine if there is an observable difference in messaging between the two periods.

Sweden today views Russia as its number one enemy unequivocally, recently articulated by the security police (SÄPO) director Charlotte von Essen, who proclaimed that Russia is Sweden's primary threat (Ringstrom & Jacobsen, 2024). Without question, following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Sweden joined NATO to come under the protection of Article 5, although as a partner nation, Sweden was under the NATO nuclear umbrella for decades (Andrén, 2024).

Yet, the question can be asked – would the Swedish public support sending troops abroad or accept foreign troops to fight on its soil under the alliance's Article 5 mutual defense pact? That question is particularly relevant, especially when it comes to the defense of NATO's Arctic flank. Based on my forty years of ethnographic research, teaching, and extended residences in Sweden, I categorically state that regardless of what the government says, Swedes do not believe they are part of the Arctic. Rather, they view their own territory above the Arctic Circle as *Norrland* while “the Arctic” to Swedes generally consists of the circumpolar area bordering the Arctic Ocean including Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, and Norway [Svalbard].

Nevertheless, it is obvious that official government policy including joining the Arctic Council maintains that the kingdom is part of the Arctic. Regardless of being an independent member of the Arctic (along with Finland), Sweden's 2020 *Strategy for the Arctic Region* made no mention of NATO. However, it is possible to detect a movement toward collective security in the region in that publication, given statements such as

The Government will continue to strengthen Sweden's military capability to operate in the northern parts of Sweden and neighboring areas. The Government intends to work for the further development and deepening of Nordic and Euro-Atlantic security and defense policy cooperation focusing on the European part of the Arctic, the Cap of the North and the North Atlantic region (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020, p. 21).

Since all members of the Arctic Council are members of NATO except Russia, now the country is obligated to respond to an attack on any part of the Arctic and not only the Nordic region, as a requirement of Article 5. Thus, an important part of the defense publication messaging after joining NATO must necessarily involve changes that allow foreign troops to help defend Swedish territory, but also to support the country's armed forces participating in combat or deterrence operations abroad.

Sweden and NATO – the question that would not die

Before describing the study, its results, and some conclusions, we must ask - what does the Swedish public think about NATO membership? That has been a prime topic in my conversations with Swedes since I first arrived in that country during 1983 to conduct dissertation research. My discussions on the topic even travelled overseas to America. At the 1991 Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies annual meeting in Amherst, Massachusetts, I attended a

forgettable session on Nordic security. One of the presenters was an arrogant public relations official from the Swedish Defense Ministry who gave a typical statement about the invincibility of the country's military (remember Sweden had not been in a war for nearly 200 years). I asked him if there was a chance that Sweden would ever join NATO. The crowd of academics attending the conference who were somehow related to Scandinavia reacted loudly to my question with spontaneous comments like – “Ridiculous!” “What a foolish question.” “Who is that idiot?” The public relations official said simply, “No” and asked for another question. Three years later, I was standing in northern Sweden's meter-deep snow as a U.S. Army exchange officer with the K-4 Norrland Dragoons (*Jägare*). My host unit was preparing for a simulated attack by “the enemy” who everyone knew was Russia with even live-fire exercises using Soviet T-54 tanks as targets. Even then, while military cooperation with NATO troops was increasing due to Swedish infantry battalions serving in Bosnia with NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR), it seemed to many observers a far stretch to imagine Sweden joining the alliance. But not to me.

My qualitative impressions suggested that Swedes resisted giving up their neutrality late into the 1990s, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. But what did quantitative indicators suggest after the Cold War ended? The Society, Opinions, and Mass Media (SOM) survey conducted by the SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg, which has tracked the Swedish public's opinions on the country joining NATO since 1994, revealed that an “historic shift” occurred in those opinions sometime in the early 21st century. From its first survey year until 2012, Swedish opinion was consistently unfavorable toward joining NATO with roughly 40 to 50% of those surveyed believing that it was a bad idea. About 20% thought becoming an alliance member was a good idea. Those two strongly divergent opinions converged at approximately 35% each following Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014. During the 2022 SOM survey, the influence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused a radical shift in both viewpoints, with approximately 65% believing that joining NATO was a good idea, and about 15% responding that it was a bad idea (Jansson & Lundin, 2024).

Those results were consistent with other polls conducted during the pre-NATO period illustrating that an historic shift had taken place. In response to recent incursions of Swedish airspace by Russian military aircraft, a poll conducted in 2013 by the Swedish research company Novus revealed that only 6% of Swedes thought that the country could defend itself (Milne 2014). A second Novus poll conducted in 2014 for a Swedish television station following parliamentary elections revealed a small majority of respondents supported joining NATO compared to those opposed [37 to 36, respectively] (Scrutton, 2014). That poll helped elect a center-left government led by Prime Minister Stefan Loven who was adamant about not joining NATO.

In 2015, to increase public confidence in Sweden's total defense capability, the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences commissioned a study to determine the issues and problems with security observed in public sentiment surveys. The study was conducted by a group of senior military officers and scholars and summarized in a publication titled *White Book. A New Total Defense – Important Conclusions* ([*Ett Nytt Totalförsvar. Viktigare Slutsatser*] Rosenius, et. Al. 2017). In it was a proposal for improving the country's total defense capability that they called “The military defense 2030 – target image,” which called for a complete overhaul of the civilian and military structure and capabilities. The study did not mention NATO at all. Instead in a few instances, the authors use the phrase “help from other countries” as in the following statement.

The expanded total defense places demands, above all, on a strengthened regional leadership for military and civilian cooperation. The military regions therefore should be developed to be able to lead territorial [defense] activities, [incorporating] single battalions along with asking for support from additional units, Swedish as well as from *other countries* [italics added] (Rosenius et. al., 2017).

Presumably the authors were referring to the Nordic countries as specified in the 2017 Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF) 2017 agreement.

During the early part of the study period, official Swedish policy was non-alignment. As described by Kunz (2015), non-alignment had evolved to the so-called “Hultqvist doctrine” advanced by the then defense minister to increase the country’s self-sufficient defense capability as part of Prime Minister Loven’s non-alliance policy. Hultqvist and the government addressed years of decreased military funding as part of the failed so-called “peace dividend.” As a result of the doctrine, the government began to restructure the armed forces away from larger units designed to prevent invasions toward smaller, more flexible units to reinforce sovereignty disputes or maintain border integrity by responding to small incursions or other emergencies (e.g., terrorism). At the same time, the defense ministry accelerated its engagement with other militaries to achieve common defense objectives short of joining an alliance. The new policy depended less upon universal conscription and relied more on a professional military cadre with limited draftee support to allow for participation in multi-national crises operations abroad (Kunz, 2015). The need to improve Sweden’s ability to support crises overseas was shown by real world events such as repatriating over 500 Swedes killed in the 2004 Pacific Ocean Tsunami and evacuating 6,000 Swedish during the Lebanon crises of 2006 (Sundelius & Eldeblad, 2023).

While public sentiment favoring joining the alliance increased slowly, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine created a perceived urgency to move membership forward quickly. Preparation for NATO membership began with the Swedish government’s annual budgetary amendment of 2023. The budget increased defense appropriations by over half a billion Swedish Crowns (SEK; approximately \$50,000,000) and increased armed forces expenditures 93 billion SEK (\$8,500,000,000). The government proposed to make Sweden’s military capabilities more compatible with NATO’s systems including command and control, missile defense, and early warning. In addition, earlier versions of Sweden’s SAAB 39 Gripen were upgraded to be compatible with later JAS 39 models, so Sweden could integrate with NATO’s fifth generation aircraft like the F-35 Lightning II (Ministry of Defense 2023). In addition, for the first time, the budget also established funding for NATO contributions including for the Security Investment Program.

Aside from changing its military organization and weapons, joining NATO required major changes in Swedish organizational structures and thinking. Many government offices and entities, not to mention hundreds of civilian employees, needed to reorient their efforts to either focus on NATO’s planning or execution activities. Sundelius and Eldeblad (2023) suggested that so much organizational transition was required that it could be decades before Sweden is fully integrated. In addition, the authors stated that a generational change was necessary before the ingrained non-aligned total defense perspective evolved to an active alliance membership perspective with all that requires (e.g., Article 5).

Sweden's National Identity and Warfare

A major influence over whether Sweden's population will accept the full NATO responsibilities that go with membership relate to the national identity that formed the basis for Sweden's past neutrality. One of the most important parts of Swedish national identity is the kingdom's military history. A short summary here reveals that since its formation in the 1550s under the country's first absolute monarch, Gustav Vasa, until the early 19th century, Sweden was involved in almost continuous warfare. History Professor at the Swedish National War College, Gunnar Åselius, (2013) divides Swedish military history into four phases, starting from the creation of the country and ending in 1814 when Sweden fought its last war with Norway.

The first phase, from 1523 to 1560, began with Gustav Vasa establishing the country's first professional army and navy. During that period, Vasa used the Swedish military to defeat groups of Swedish (and other ethnicities) minor kings or groups of knights fighting for power in the emerging kingdom, and to defeat Norway and Denmark to establish Sweden's sovereignty. Although outside of Åselius' first period dates, continued interior feuding and warfare with foreign counties, especially Russia, until the 17th century forged the kingdom's national identity as a military power (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Crypt of King John III (ruled 1569 to 1592) located in the cathedral at Uppsala, then Sweden's capital. John killed his half-brother, Erik XIV, to claim the throne, then fought two wars with Russia. Photograph by the author.

Åselius' second phase took place from 1600 to 1660 with the emergence of Sweden as a European superpower, whose rulers fought religious and territorial wars on the continent. Although the kingdom continued to engage in large scale wars in Europe and the Baltic region into the 18th century, the superpower period ended with Gustavus Adolphus (d. 1632), defender of Protestantism, being killed in battle. Although the regents continued the extensive warfare following his death, using over a hundred thousand foreign mercenaries to fight in Europe, once Adolphus' daughter Christina ascended the throne in 1632 until her abdication in 1654, the kingdom suffered from her inability (and perhaps insanity) as she converted to Catholicism and essentially assumed a male identity (leading to her becoming an international queer icon that continues today). According to historian Michael Roberts (1995), these first two phases constituted a military revolution that saw widespread use of firearms, professional militaries, standardized uniforms and battle colors, and combined arms tactics. The latter was particularly important for shaping modern warfare. Now, instead of the tradition of fighting against their counterparts in separate battles (e.g., artillery duels), artillery and cavalry supported infantry in a combined arms attack just as they do in modern warfare today (plus aviation).

Åselius' third phase, extending from 1660 until 1721, involved Sweden defending or attempting to reestablish its territorial gains obtained during its superpower time especially in the Baltic region. However, without the extensive resources it once had (including the conscription allotment system where groups of villages provided soldiers), Sweden could not sustain its earlier combat power, especially when fighting larger states and emerging empires like Russia. The phase ended with Sweden's defeat in the Great Northern War (1700 - 1721), during which King Charles XII (d. 1718) was killed in action.

Sweden's final phase, according to Åselius, stretched from its loss in the Great Northern War to the kingdom's defeat as part of the northern reaches of the Napoleonic Wars. Russian decisively defeated Sweden during the Finnish War of 1808 to 1809, resulting in the loss of Finland, which became a semi-autonomous part of Imperial Russia (Figure 2). Although it could be considered a civil war, Sweden fought against Norwegian independence to form a union in 1814. Since then, the country has not experienced combat either at home or abroad. Since World War II, Sweden experienced sending and supporting troops abroad by fielding United Nations observers and specialists, and more recently, by participating in stability and security operations in places like Bosnia and Iceland (air policing of the Icelandic air defense zone). Yet, since its founding until 1814, Sweden was in an almost constant state of warfare, with much national pride in its military even in the modern period. Much of that conflict extending into the Cold War was with Russia, Sweden's perpetual enemy.



Figure 2. Sweden's last combat with Russia in the early 19th century. Following Russia's victory at the battle of Savar, where Sweden was pushed out of northwestern Finland on August 19, the next day a combined Swedish force of gun boats and infantry remnants fought Russia to a stalemate leading to peace negotiations that ended the Russian-Swedish War (1808 – 1809). In the lower left corner a group of Swedish officers directs the gunboat bombardment of Russian forces. From *Utsigt af affären vid Ratan* by Carl-Gustaf Gillberg. From the collection of the National Museum of Sweden. Used with permission.

According to Lund University Historian Dick Harrison (2023), the farther back in the previous millennium one travels, the closer the Swedish and Russian cultures and peoples become intertwined. Some believe that the heart of Russia was founded by the “Rus” or Varangian Vikings with the core of the Tsarist empire originating in the Kievan state their descendants established in the ninth century. During those early times, the Rus consolidated their territories by pacifying the Dnieper River watershed, developing and maintaining trade routes to the Black Sea, forcing the Germanic tribes’ conversion to Catholicism, and uniting the eastern Slavic peoples (Map Archive, 2025). While there is some debate in scholarly circles about Russia’s origins, Putin and many of his fellow countrymen believe that the Kievan Rus-founded country of Ukraine represents an integral part of Russian culture that must be reabsorbed into the home country; at the point of a gun if necessary.

The relationship between the two countries was reciprocal since as Sweden had done earlier in helping shape Russia, in the 1700s Russian culture would help shape modern Sweden. In fact, the relationship led to a change in Sweden’s national identity. During the Great Northern War, Swedish prisoners of war in the Siberian Arctic converted to Pietism, and upon repatriation brought the tenets of the Lutheran reform movement home, especially pacifism. Prior to the conversion, the Swedish Church supported the crown’s warfare totally as part of the earlier century’s defense of Protestantism under Lutheran Orthodoxy that provided justification for the Thirty Years’ War (Roberts, 1984). Along with the general devastation and death caused in Europe by the war, Sweden saw a significant part of its male population forced into conscription, with

some villages almost completely depopulated as a result. Although the number of war deaths is debated, the depleted male Swedish population was fertile ground for accepting the pacifism offered by the Pietist movement, which helped shaped Sweden's two centuries of non-alignment (Häggman, 2017). Ironically, given its national identity as a military superpower during the 16th through 18th centuries, Sweden developed a false sense of security that if tested (e.g., World War II), would have revealed the kingdom as a paper lion.

From its origin as a Viking territory to a European empire to an atomic superpower to today's combatant trying to regain past glory, Russia has been intimately bound with Sweden even to the point of making the kingdom abandon two centuries of non-alignment and peace. According to Harrison (2023, p. 20),

Russia also played several roles in Swedish history – neighbor, friend, relative, enemy, villain. [...] that has given us a wealth of experience to lean on. In a time when we once again have cause to be afraid, there is good reason to learn from those experiences. They may not be always be pleasant, but they rest on a solid foundation of reality, and they derive from a firm starting point as we look toward [Sweden's] future – a future that, both from superpower politics and for purely geographical reasons, finds itself in Russia's shadow.

In sum, from its origins as a founder of Russia, to its last defeats in battle and the loss of Finland and Norway, to the Cold War, to joining NATO to prevent an invasion, conflict with Russia has defined Sweden's military history (and part of its national identity) for nearly 500 years.

The country's long history of warfare combined with its modern weapons industry and universal conscription created a belief that the country was strong enough to stand on its own. Until Russia's aggression in Ukraine, that belief did not mean a uniform response by the Swedish population for NATO membership; quite the contrary. Like other countries such as Poland, despite its strong NATO commitment, the Swedish population's views show much variability with both support and resistance for joining the alliance. Further demonstrating variability in the will to fight for freedom among a country's population, even following the present Russian invasion, Ukraine had to create and enforce restrictions on adult males leaving the country. To overcome that variability in both support and will among its population, Swedish government messaging favoring alliance membership has to help obtain a clear majority in favor of it.

The Study – Content Analysis of Swedish Public Messaging

To test the study's hypothesis, I compared Cold War era Swedish armed forces and civil defense publications with those produced following application for NATO membership in 2022, to determine if there was an observable difference in messaging between the two periods. There were two types of publications used in the analysis. The first type was the basic military manuals that talk about how to be a service member published since 1994 by the Defense Ministry (*Försvarsmakten*) titled "Swedish Soldier and Sailor" (*Svensk soldat och sjöman*). That type included earlier Swedish military manuals related specifically to the Arctic region, especially the 1968 publication by the Commander in Chief of the Army of "Winter Soldier" (*Vintersoldat*) and the 1988 publication "Handbook. Survival" (*Handbook. Överlevnad*).

Although military publications were directed at armed forces personnel specifically, they can be considered public messaging for two reasons. First, Sweden's earlier universal conscription lasted

throughout the 20th century (from 1901 until 2010), which required that all men between 18 and 47 receive basic and refresher training. That meant virtually all adult males (and some females) in the country received the messaging through those military publications. Second, these military manuals are published today in Swedish, easy Swedish (*lätt Svenska*), and English, which makes them accessible to all members of the society including immigrants and others who reside in the country but may not have native language skills. Third, the manuals are available to anyone who wants them including non-Swedes (e.g., me). Thus, my assumption is that unlike America, where military manuals remain mostly esoteric to those not in the armed services, there is a general familiarity with such publications in Sweden.

The second type of publication I analyzed was the recurring civil defense publication titled “If the Crises or the War Comes” (*Om krisen och kriget kommer*), published most recently by The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency or MSB (*Myndigheten för samhälls- skydd och beredskap*) in 2024. The brochure was also published from 1943 to 1991 by the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces (*Överbefälhavaren för den Svenska försvarsmakten*). In addition, in past years when phone books were published, they contained the civil defense information.

Study Results

Differences between Sweden’s pre- and post-NATO public messaging about fighting to retain sovereignty, freedom, and traditional values were obvious in the ongoing discussion of the country’s national security policy. In its 1983 publication *The Swedish Army* (repeating the 1977 version verbatim), the government’s national security policy approved by parliament in 1968, 1972, 1977, and 1983 clearly stated the intent to remain unaligned and neutral.

One of the principles of our security policy is our determination to defend ourselves without entering into alliances with other states. The aim is to avoid being drawn into a war. One of the means that we have to achieve this principle is military defense. [...] If confidence in our ability to defend ourselves should weaken, our neighbors may be forced to reconsider their defense policies. This could lead to changes in the present stable situation in the Nordic area. In the event of war, both sides might try to prevent the other from gaining access to Swedish territory. [...] The great powers can detach only parts of their armed forces against us, since the main forces already are engaged against each other. It would require such vast resources and take so long to attack Sweden that the advantages gained would not be enough to justify their operation. Thus, it can be said of the Swedish defense that it preserves the peace (Commander in Chief of the Army, 1983, p. 9).

Compare that statement about non-alignment with a similar one from the most recent version of *Swedish Soldier and Sailor*, a manual for armed forces members (especially conscripts) published in 2024, after NATO became the foundation of the country’s alliance-based defense.

Sweden has sought membership in NATO. The long tradition of military alliance freedom that has characterized our country has transitioned to a desire to enter into a defense alliance with mutual security guarantees. Our participation in all security policy forums derives from a solidarity security policy, i.e., that Sweden shall build security together with others and therefore can provide and receive

both civil and military support. With membership in NATO, Sweden will be able to even contribute to the defense alliance's deterrence in our part of the world. By improving our ability to take part in international cooperation and crises management operations, peace and security is strengthened for Sweden, for the EU, and for the whole world (Ministry of Defense, 2023, p. 13).

The evolution in how Sweden defends its security with armed forces involves the transition from a non-aligned territorial defense to one that can participate in multi-national force structures within the country or abroad. Pre-NATO publications stressed how Sweden would use its territorial defense organization and capabilities.

The principal task of our defense is to preserve peace. Yet, should Sweden be attacked, the Army together with the Naval Forces and the Air Force will meet this assault and, *for as long as possible, prevent the aggressor from becoming established on Swedish soil* [italics added]. This is the most important task of the Defense Forces as expressed in the defense policy objectives approved by the Swedish Parliament (Commander in Chief of the Army, 1983, p. 13).

An important part of the statement above is the phrase “for as long as possible, prevent the aggressor from becoming established on Swedish soil.” That means there were three implicit aspects to Sweden's overall territorial defense – preserve peace by deterring aggression, prevent foreign military forces from invading, and after an invasion fight a guerilla-style conflict behind enemy lines together with conventional combat from unoccupied territory within the country.

It is not hard to see how such an approach might function given the current situation in Ukraine. As of this writing, Russia controls about 18% of Ukraine territory not including Crimea (BBC 2025). If Russia invaded and occupied nearly a fifth of Sweden as part of a wider war in the Nordic region, that would equate to all the Swedish territory above the Arctic Circle. Since previously there was no Article 5-type protection from an alliance, Sweden could be partially occupied (not conquered!), as part of a wider war between the two superpowers and their proxies. To prevent loss of Swedish territory to enemies for use in a larger conflict, if the country were prepared to fight back, it would be too costly for the invaders to consider. That strategy required Sweden to have post-occupation military tactics fought guerilla-style by Swedish units (and partisans) behind the lines and by regrouped armed forces in unoccupied areas attacking the invaders' front lines (as we have seen in Ukraine during the current war).

Supported by a strong air force to establish and maintain air superiority over Swedish airspace, and a strong navy (including submarines specialized for operating in the coastal and shallow waters of the Baltic) to prevent mass landings by sea, there were three basic territorial sectors on land for the army to defend with different types of brigades. In the south, where there was open, relatively flat terrain, consisting of agricultural fields and population centers, the armored brigades had primary responsibility. Mechanized infantry brigades could respond to and defend against attacks in the central part of Sweden where forests dominated the landscape, although infantry had the ability to conduct operations throughout the country. In Sweden's Arctic region, the Norrland Brigades were specially constructed for combat in the north regardless of season.

Designated as the Norrland Brigade 85, the Norrland brigades have the same units as the infantry brigade 77 but have more tracked vehicles and the 55 TOW anti-

tank missile system. The Norrland brigade can carry out cross-country surprise movements over long distances both on snow-covered and snowless [bare] ground. It is therefore particularly suited for all kinds of combat in terrain with few or no roads (Commander in Chief of the Army, 1983, p. 14 – 16).

In addition, there were two specialized Arctic warfare units supporting the Norrland Brigades during the pre-NATO period. These were the I 22 Lapland's Ranger Regiment in Kiruna and the K 4 Norrland Dragoon Regiment in Arvidsjaur, both referred to in Swedish as *Jägare* [dragoons or mounted infantry that dismount to fight]. I 22 was created in 1975 and deactivated in 2000. K 4 is an old Swedish Army unit, created in 1646, deactivated in 2006, and reestablished in 2021 (Figure 3). There is much confusion about the nomenclature *Jägare*; however, with increasing multi-national cooperation, the contemporary Swedish terminology is used as follows.

“Rangers” leads us to be some sort of Swedish version of the US Rangers, that we are not. Hunter is the English translation of *Jägare*, which also isn't right. We are a dragoon regiment so within the unit we call ourselves “dragoons” in different situations. The last years we started to use the Swedish word “*Jägare*” when we are in international contexts, just to make sure that we don't get lost in different translations which gives the wrong impression of the unit's capabilities (Gustafsson 2025: personal communication).

Although its 1990 publication, *Infantry and Dragoon Regiment – Dragoon Company, Norrlands' Dragoon Squadron [Jägarekompani Norrlandsjägarskvadron]* was a manual for conducting operations like attacking an enemy convoy, one statement in the book clearly outlines the Dragoons' operational environment and missions. “The Norrland's Ranger squadron is primarily intended for combat and intelligence gathering deep inside the enemy's territory” (Commander in Chief of the Army, 1990, p. 16). Since Swedish defense policy at the time was to conduct territorial combat within the nation's borders, the implication in that statement is that enemy troops have occupied at least some of the country.



Figure 3. Pre-exercise briefing, K4 Norrland Dragoons, Arvidsjaur, Sweden, November 1994. Photograph by the author.

A similar publication, *Handbook Survival* (*Handbook Överlevnad* 1990) described the hardships that military operations in occupied territory might involve. Remember, the primary message both before and after joining NATO was “We offer resistance – never give up!” [*Vi bjuder motstånd – aldrig ge upp!*] (Ministry of Defense 2023: i). That means even if some parts of Sweden are occupied, neither soldiers nor civilians should stop resisting whether they are behind enemy lines or in unoccupied territory. For the common soldiers, survival was a matter of using any means to resist and defeat the enemy including foraging for food (Figure 4).

An extreme survival situation in war occurs when soldiers and units do not have access to their equipment or cannot utilize the combat support units. To overcome a survival situation requires knowledge about yourself and knowledge about how one uses your equipment, provisional material, the environment and its assets, etc. In addition, the will to survive is of extreme importance. ... Generally, a survival situation is characterized as shortage of food and water, shortage of equipment, fatigue and hypothermia, isolation, and finding your way in difficult terrain, etc. (Commander in Chief of the Army, 1988, p. 5).



Figure 4. Life as a Swedish guerilla soldier in enemy-occupied territory. Illustration by Alf Lammerbäck, from *Handbook Survival* [*Handbook Överlevnad*] (Commander in Chief of the Army 1988). Used by permission.

As is necessary in partisan or guerrilla warfare, an occupied country's troops must use their knowledge of and training in local areas to exploit the terrain and weather over the invaders. An example is from the pre-NATO publication, *The Winter Soldier* [*Vintersoldat*] (Figure 5).

The snow and the cold can cause difficulties, which you must master. But remember, that your difficulties are also the enemy's. Those who best master them have the upper hand. *Winter is a friend, if you are a more skilled winter soldier than the opposition* [italics in original]. The conditions are good on your part. You receive good winter training and excellent winter equipment. But that is not enough. You must yourself contribute with a strong will to conquer all difficulties and accomplish your mission. You must be in good shape. Without good physical condition and knowledge about how your equipment should be used, you will never be a good winter soldier (Commander in Chief of the Army, 1968, p. 7).



Figure 5. The Swedish Army has prepared to fight in cold weather and in its Arctic region for over a century. This is the cover of *Winter Soldier* [*Vintersoldat*], showing light infantry troops on skis conducting combat operations/training. Illustration by Harry Holmström.

Conscription formed the basis for the pre-NATO Swedish Army, as part of the territorial defense along with the voluntary home guard. Instead of preparing for service in several theaters consisting of a variety of terrain and climate regimes, Swedish forces trained where they would fight. That was clear from the description of the way conscripts served.

To defend the whole country all able-bodied men and a great number of women are needed. Males between the age of 19 and 47 are required to perform military service through basis training and periodic refresher training. Conscripts make up field units, where officers and privates know one another [...]. Mobilization orders are prepared in advance and every trained man knows where he will be posted if Sweden mobilizes (Commander in Chief of the Army, 1977, p. 3).

Universal conscription in which active and reserve troops mobilized to the area where they have trained and prepared ended with the application to NATO. The current conscription system expanded the age limit, included female troops, and requires those activated to be prepared for service anywhere. It is important to note that there are certain occupations such as airport firefighter or police officer, which are considered civilian defense services, and those who hold such positions would remain in them during wartime. The expectations for who can be called and for what type of service are outlined in the defense ministry's 2023 publication, but the basic premise is described below.

Total defense conscription applies in Sweden. That means that all who are born here and are between 16 and 70 years old [47 for military duty] can be called up to help in different ways during conflict and war. All have a responsibility to contribute and all are needed. Even activities that are carried out through participation in bi- and multi-lateral cooperation strengthens the total defense [capability] and activities within the military. Defense can therefore be conducted individually and together with international cooperative partners. [...] For many years the preparations for conflict and war have been very limited in Sweden. Instead [of preparing for war] the authorities and municipalities concentrated on strengthening preparations for peacetime crises like floods and information cyberattacks. But in concert with a changed world the parliament and government have decided to strengthen the total defense. Therefore, the planning for Sweden's total defense has been taken up again. There will come a time to develop all the parts again. At the same time, the preparations for peacetime crises are an important basis for our resistance power in war (Ministry of Defense, 2023, p. 23).

The Swedish Soldier and Sailor, directed at the country's general population, provides information on such things as emergency callup, preparing for natural disasters like forest fires, and responding to human-made dangers like chemical release. They also include warnings for imminent air attack, which are divided into three parts; prepare for attack, attack, and danger over. It is not hard to see with current happenings in Ukraine and the Middle East how important it is to notify the population of air attacks by drones, rockets, bombs, and missiles.

Sweden's civil defense publication, *If the War Comes – guidance for the citizens of Sweden*, [*Om kriget kommer – vägledning för Sveriges medborgare*], which has been released periodically since 1943 (later editions are called *If the Crisis or the War Comes*), contains information for individuals, families, and municipalities to prepare for and execute total defense response including following the legitimate government even if it is in absentia.

Sweden is governed in wartime as in peacetime according to basic law. Any government that comes about in another fashion is illegal. It is your duty to follow the legal government and obey its directives. The government's leadership cannot in wartime remain in Stockholm. King, government, parliament, and officials will move from the capital city to smaller, predetermined places. The movement is not escape, even if the enemy's propaganda portrays it so. It is a measure planned in advance to ensure the leadership of our total defense (Royal Civil Defense Agency, 1961, p. 4).

The remainder of the 1961 brochure consisted of general information about what a total defense mobilization means, which authorities have responsibility for specific parts of the mobilization, and even a statement that Sweden must be ready in case of *blixtanfall* or “lightening attack” that seems to be a holdover from WWII’s Nazi *blitzkrieg*. An important section was how people with a war assignment, whether military or civilian, would be notified through an audible alarm, a letter, on the radio, or verbally (e.g., at a defense industry plant). The notification itself served as a travel pass to one’s assigned location. Civilians were instructed to ignore broadcasts or other messages saying the mobilization has been cancelled or that the country has surrendered.

Hypothetical evacuation plans were outlined, indicating where people should go and how they should travel there. Instructions specified what to pack for your family during an evacuation or how to prepare your home for a shelter-in-place order (e.g., fill bathtub with water). Arranging your eventual lodging, paying for it yourself, and registering where you are situated is important information that must be reported to the authorities. Given direct attacks on your position, people were ordered to take cover in civil defense shelters or to use alternate locations such as basements and subway stations. Sections followed on surviving air attacks, nuclear blasts, and obtaining non-contaminated food and water.

The section on vigilance prepared the population to be especially observant of their surroundings, since “fifth column” spies and saboteurs would already have been at work prior to the start of hostilities. The brochure also urged people not to talk about their assignments and to report suspicious activities. A Swedish television news program during my dissertation research showed how fifth column could lead to a defeat. At the time, it was required for all adult Swedes to list their occupation in the telephone directory, with the telephone system a government entity. The program showed how enemy operatives could look up important occupations like military pilot and then assassinate them leaving the country with sufficient air defense capabilities.

The 1987 version of *If the War Comes* was published by the Swedish Commission for Psychological Defense (Royal Swedish Civil Defense Agency, SPF), which was more extensive than earlier versions. The brochure stated that everyone who lived in Sweden must participate in the total defense, *whether citizen or immigrant* [italics added]. Several pages described the various alarm signals used for different attacks and illustrated how to prepare a shelter either by prepositioning supplies in a dedicated facility or by modifications to existing structures to reinforce them. Instructions on how to evacuate included what supplies and equipment (e.g., portable radio) to take, along with how people would receive gasmasks and other protective equipment from the government.

Defense against nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons made up separate sections of the brochure, along with advice on what might be sources of contamination from the weapons (e.g., insect bites carrying poison gas). Where to go for medical treatment discussed how hospitals and clinics would be used for the most important injuries such as operations or wounds, with those less seriously wounded directed to seek treatment for maladies at impromptu locations like converted schools. Unlike the 1961 version, the 1987 version contained rationing details with information on how to obtain and use ration coupons/books. The brochure also informed readers that during a wartime emergency the government could take your car or other possessions, and it outlined how citizens could be reimbursed for combat damage to personal property (SPF, 1987).

The 2024 post-NATO brochure version was published by the Authority for Society Protection and Preparation (MSB), which was formed in 2006 to build resilience across the society and replacing earlier agencies including the National Board of Psychological Defense and the Swedish Emergency Management Agency (Sundelius & Eldeblad, 2023). While there is an increased focus on natural and human-made disasters, wartime preparation remains the document's primary emphasis. The government restates that the total defense rests with both the military and the civilian organizations. In addition, the brochure also stated for the first time that

Sweden is also part of NATO's collective defense. The military defense shall protect Sweden and allied NATO countries against armed attack, protect our borders, and manage conflict. ... Sweden is included in the defense alliance NATO. The alliance's goal is that the countries together will be so strong that it deters others from attacking us. If a NATO land still gets attacked, the other countries in the alliance will contribute to their defense – one for all, all for one (MSB 2024: 7).

Defense conscription, reinstituted for both men and women in 2017 (Sundelius and Eldeblad 2023) includes both military draftees (*värnplik*) and civilian workers (*civilplik*) from 16 to 70. Post-NATO, the brochure notes the expansion of total defense service to Swedish citizens living at home and abroad, along with all people having Swedish residence. The remainder of the document continues earlier messaging with sections on the warning system, how to prepare for an air attack including by nuclear weapons, home, evacuation, shelter, psychological protection, terrorism or armed attackers, first aid, and for the first time, digital security (Figure 6). The brochure continues its instructions on crises such as extreme weather, pandemics, people who need assistance, pet care, and talking to friends, relatives, neighbors, and children (MSB 2024).



Figure 6. A new sign for civil defense shelter on a commercial building in downtown Umeå. Unlike the U.S. where Cold War signs for “fallout shelters” found in government buildings like post offices have fallen into disrepair, today Sweden takes the need for protection from air attack seriously. The increased urgency by the Swedish government probably relates to the extreme use of drone and missile attacks on Ukraine by Russia. Photograph by the author.

Conclusion

Cold War military manuals stressed Sweden's non-alignment. Having a strong air force, army, and navy, along with its own weapons industry, accompanied by an infrastructure and organization to mobilize forces quickly and at the right location, could not only defeat an enemy but it could deter aggression. Messaging to the public to fight a total defense on the country's territory without surrender was the key. Pre-NATO military publications sought to convince the citizen army that it could defeat Russia or any other attacker attempting to use Swedish territory by capitalizing on the natural conditions and terrain in the country, especially cold weather. Fighting from Swedish free territory using conventional units and weapons would be supplemented by specially trained or remnant regular forces behind enemy lines to repel an invasion and regain lost territory. Should the country be overwhelmed, an unspecified (but probably Nordic) ally would come to Sweden's aid if only the population resisted and did not give up.

Military manuals after NATO membership stressed alliance-based warfare to prevent attack on Sweden. While Article 5 supported Sweden, the new requirement for mutual defense required a complete change in the country's military from a total (and territorial) defense to one requiring new values including for the first time, allowing foreign military allies to conduct combat operations inside Sweden. Another value change required was the possibility of sending Swedish troops to engage in combat to protect a NATO ally. While that is a change, Sweden has experience deploying troops abroad through its extensive UN participation since its formation in the 1940s. Currently, hundreds of Swedish troops are serving as UN observers in eight different countries, including Iraq, Korea, Kosovo, Somalia, and on the Pakistan – India border (Defense Ministry 2023). While experienced in planning, logistics, and service abroad is important for possible future NATO missions, it would be a different level of participation to have large Swedish units (e.g., brigades) conduct combat operations as part of its Article 5 commitment.

Additionally, by tracing the history of the *If the War Comes* publications in chronological order, one can see the changes in Swedish defense messaging through the post-WWII, Cold War, and NATO membership eras. The 1961 version was concerned with being prepared sufficiently to respond to a quick attack and with maintaining legitimate government control in absentia as many northern European countries were forced to do in the Second World War (e.g., Denmark and Norway). The Cold War version emphasized Sweden being able to protect itself or to deter attacks, through its own, unaligned military preparations and total defense that included protection against nuclear, biological, and chemical attack. The post-NATO version emphasizes the importance of being an alliance member, with Article 5 responsibilities to other members, but also stresses its protection to Sweden. Perhaps even more so than military publications, the civil defense brochures illustrate the changing nature of pre- and post-NATO messaging to the public.

While there are differences with its security publications over time, the contemporary versions continue to encourage the population to remain committed to a total defense stance, a holdover from the Cold War, emphasizing each person's individual and collective responsibility in ensuring the country's territorial defense.

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