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Justifiable caution: A re-assessment of Swedish Policy and Military Risk during the Second World War

Precaución justificada: Una reevaluación de la política sueca y el riesgo militar durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial

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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide an overdue correction to a dominant narrative in neutral Sweden's conduct during the Second World War; that the government under Prime Minister Hansson was over-cautious politically and militarily when the threat from Germany reduced and thereby failed to contribute to the Allied war effort and aid the victims of Nazism sufficiently. The government policy, consistent with their democratic remit, was to avoid death and devastation for Swedish citizens arising from military operations by any belligerent, not only Germany. The evidence of military operational planning by all belligerents demonstrates that the government's caution and policy responses to those risks was fully justified throughout the war, not only in the initial period of German hegemony.

Keywords: Sweden; Neutrality; Second World War; Military Planning; Risk.

Resumen

Este artículo intenta proporcionar una corrección atrasada a una narrativa dominante en la conducta de la Suecia neutral durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial; que el gobierno del primer ministro Hansson fue demasiado cauteloso política y militarmente cuando la amenaza de Alemania se redujo, y por lo tanto no contribuyó al esfuerzo de guerra aliado y ayudó lo suficiente a las víctimas del nazismo. La política del gobierno, de acuerdo con su mandato democrático, era evitar la muerte y la devastación de los ciudadanos suecos como consecuencia de las operaciones militares de cualquier beligerante, no sólo de Alemania. La evidencia de la planificación de operaciones militares por parte de todos los beligerantes demuestra que la cautela y las respuestas políticas del gobierno a esos riesgos estaban plenamente justificadas durante toda la guerra, no solo en el período inicial de la hegemonía alemana.

Palabras clave: Suecia; neutralidad; Segunda Guerra Mundial; planificación militar; riesgo.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Swedish political leadership during Second World War was criticised at the time and increasingly thereafter for following a flexed policy of neutrality which initially favoured the Germans – primarily due to their military threat– but was not later flexed sufficiently to favour the Allied war effort to the same extent when the Allies were gaining the advantage.

The objective of this study, using existing published sources, is to correct a now-dominant narrative that Swedish diplomatic and military caution was unjustified. Critics assert that Sweden could and should have faced down German demands and cooperated more readily with the Allies.

This study will show that there was a democratic duty for the Swedish government to protect the country and its people from the consequences of modern warfare, that there was a military threat of death and devastation to Sweden from all the belligerents' plans, not only Nazi Germany, and that Swedish policy to the belligerents, far from being over-cautious, was rational and prudent.

1.1. Neutrality and Prime Minister Hansson

Sweden's neutrality policy had protected the country from warfare throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries including the First World War. Sweden's Second World War Prime Minister, Per Albin Hansson, placed neutrality at the core of the country's relationships with the belligerents to avoid being drawn into that war and he symbolically personified that neutrality. Fortunately for Sweden, a democratically elected government under Hansson's leadership was in full control of military as well as economic policy. This ensured that military options were subordinate to considerations of the impact of 'societal risk' on the Swedish population. As well as death and destruction, adverse socio-political responses had to be considered.

The Swedish high command chafed under this control but accepted it. Risky military adventurism such as the army's enthusiasm for Swedish participation in the Winter War against Russia or to join Germany in the invasion of Russia was restrained by the civilian cabinet and discouraged by Hansson himself.

Hansson was no milksop pacifist. The pugilistic working-class politician had fought his way up the Swedish social democrat political ladder before, during and after the First World War to become at last coalition government Prime Minister in 1936. Along the way, he had been strongly anti-militaristic, flirted with Marxism and presided over the defence budget cuts during the 1920s as defence minister.

However, his policy of keeping Sweden out of war and his tight grip on military policy was grounded not only in his early anti-militarism but also in his shock at the devastation on the Western Front during the First World War where he visited Albert and Arras as a reporter in July 1918, including a flight in a British fighter plane. His biographer wrote about the impact that the devastation had on Hansson and was reflected in his reports:

> Poor France. Screwed up; how much bitterness and hatred must sprout from your blood-soaked soil, your destroyed villages and your burnt cities" he thought as he saw through the car window, the landscape of desolation where only the signs by the road indicated that he was passing a town or a village. The destruction was everywhere far worse than he had ever imagined, and faced with, as he wrote, a sea of ruins, the thought struck him that Social Democracy must reconsider its line of a negotiated peace without demanding reparations from the German aggressors.... "It was the Germans who invaded France, theirs is the blame... And then they should be required to rebuild what they had flattened," he thought. As he sat in the back seat of the car, he saw the battlefields spread out over the French soil like a desert, square mile after square mile of destruction, where almost nothing could be repaired. Cities, villages, churches, industries must be rebuilt from the ground up and he wondered how many decades it would take to recreate these devastated settlements. It was not difficult to understand the French hate. All this was actually the Germans' fault. "Of course, my thoughts are disturbed," he ended his article "but in the midst of devastation, emotions conflict with practical rationality. (Isaksson, 1990: 244-5)

Hansson was also affected by the human cost of the conflict, writing about the troops and prisoners that he saw:

> A large number of them looked like boys of 17 to 18 years and one got the feeling that the Germans now apparently had to resort to the last resource. The youthfulness of the prisoners became so much more eye-catching if one compared them with the healthy British troops who were marching on the west side of the road towards the city on their way to the battle, men in the best military age, resilient, strong; far too good, one thought, to be sent to their death or mutilation. (Isaksson, 1990: 244-5)

His personal experience of war was rare in Sweden where only a small number of the military would have had experience of such devastation and death from their voluntary participation in the ruthless Finnish Civil War of 1918.

In his reporting, Hansson also revealed himself to be no friend of the German militarism of the Second Reich any more than he was of the Third Reich. An anglophile, his excellent English was used in his personal correspondence with his relatives and while he viewed the British Empire with suspicion, he regarded the western democracies as the 'right side' should Sweden be forced to fight. (Isaksson, 2000: 365-6). The British Minister reported in 1942:

> 'M Hansson was in high spirits, and all of us were struck by the way in which his whole views were based upon the assumption that the war would end in the complete defeat of Germany…He did not attempt to conceal where his sympathies lay, but, of course, gave no indication whatever that he would ever budge from the neutral policy which he has pursued since the war began." (TNA FO 490/1 Northern Affairs Correspondence. Mallet to Eden 16.12.1942)

So, Hansson's policy was to avoid getting into situations where Sweden would be forced into or exposed to warfare and flexed neutrality was the main device that he and his Foreign Minister Christian Günther deployed to address crises and threats in Swedish relationships with the belligerents. Prime Minister Hansson's objective was to keep Sweden out of war.

1.2. Risks from military operations

Since neutral Sweden had no offensive military intentions, war for defensive Sweden meant not simply invasion but other risks of injury, death, damage and destruction arising from:

- deliberate invasion,
- inadvertent territorial incursion,
- intentional but limited territorial incursion,
- deliberate military action by one of the belligerents against their enemy on Swedish territory,
- military action short of invasion intended to pressurise Sweden.

The instability of war meant that these risks were ever-present, and Hansson's caution was well merited in this unstable situation. With Hitler directing the German war effort, a strong element of irrationality had to be factored into Swedish considerations of German responses and plans. Of course, irrational German operations could have created the risk of allied counteraction, dependent on the circumstances, and British responses could be subject to the caprices of their Prime Minister, Winston Churchill who had noted: 'You have to run risks. There are no certainties in war. There is a precipice on either side of you - a precipice of caution and a precipice of over-daring.'

However, Churchill had made a political career from over-daring with some disastrous results such as the failed 1916 Gallipoli Campaign costing the lives of over 34,000 British servicemen. (Ironically, German General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst studied that failure closely to ensure that Operation Weserübung, the 1940 invasion of Denmark and Norway, was successful.)

Yet, despite the absence of certainty throughout the war, Hansson's critics accuse him of ultra cautiousness which favoured the Germans long after (they assert) the military threat from Germany had diminished to insignificance. This caution, the critics argue, held Sweden back from a more active opposition to German abuses in Norway and Denmark as well as to the horrors of the Holocaust. In addition, Sweden should then have been firmly and actively on the allied side to aid their war effort to bring an end to Nazi crimes. (Åmark, 2011: 672; Linder, 2024: 182-202.) The risks to Sweden and its citizens that could have arisen from Swedish 'over-daring' are given minimal consideration.

1.3. Caution and criticism

The motives and drivers for Hansson's adherence to this increasingly unpopular cautiousness have been examined by his critics, largely to criticise the effects. His critics emphasise the diminishing likelihood of German military action against Sweden, a view held not only by the allies but also the Swedish military leadership. (Åmark, 2011: 652) However, this over-simplistic assessment completely fails to consider the brutal realities of consequences and implications

of 20th century warfare on civilians, from all military action. Its over-focuses on the threat from Germany and minimises consideration of military operations by belligerents, chiefly the Western Allies and Russia, near or on Swedish territory. Hansson was personally well aware of these, unlike many of his critics. There is also no evidence to suggest that the Swedish wartime electorate sought a Churchillian 'over-daring' approach to foreign policy

Hansson's critics have underestimated the military threat to Swedish citizens arising from the war being fought outside the borders of Sweden and that Hansson's caution, far from being inappropriate, met the main Lockean and Hobbesian security criterion for any leader of a modern democratic state, namely, to protect its citizens from foreign enemies. [In Second Treatise of Government (1690), Locke described the government's role as providing security against "injuries and violence from others." In Leviathan (1651), Hobbes argued, the state, exists primarily to protect individuals from this anarchy and external dangers.]

Military planning by the belligerents that would directly or indirectly create military combat activity on or near neutral Swedish territory is often assumed to have ended with the British withdrawal from Norway at the conclusion of the unsuccessful attempt by Britain and France to expel the German invaders and seize control of the Swedish iron ore shipments from Narvik. In fact, the threat of combat involving Sweden continued to feature in the belligerents' military planning right up to May 1945 due to Swedish policy, geo-political status, resources, and the changing war situation, while the main war focus was elsewhere in the European theatre of operations. Thus, Hansson's caution was fully justified in his strategic aim of protecting Sweden from the consequences of military operations on or adjacent to Swedish territory.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper attempts to summarise in one place, for the first time, all available evidence of planned and possible military operations that could affect Sweden during the war. These instances are certainly not new, but their collective impact has not previously been made clear by other commentators. This has prevented an informed view of Hansson's caution and the operation of Swedish government neutrality policy. To do this, documents have been used or consulted from The British National Archives (TNA), The United States National Archives (NA), the Swedish National Archive, Riksarkivet (RA) and the Swedish Defence Archive, KrigsArkivet (KrA). Several acknowledged secondary sources, well-grounded on primary material, have informed the narrative, analysis and conclusions of this paper. For British and United States military planning, Christopher Mann's 1998 thesis (Mann, 1998) has provided invaluable insight. German planning was analysed from captured documents for the Department of the [United States] Army by Earl Ziemke in 1960 and border defences by Jan Linder (Linder 2024.) Ziemke's work (Ziemke, 1960) also informed Carl-Axel Gemzell's extensive 1975 article on German plans for Sweden which used German archive documents

that had not been available to Ziemke (Gemzell, 1975.) This followed Gemzell's previous study of German naval planning for Norway (Gemzell, 1965). Additional understanding of Swedish importance to the German strategy in the Baltic was gained from Howard Davis Grier's 1991 thesis (Grier 1991). John Kiszely's forensic analysis of 1939-40 Franco-British planning for operations in Norway provided insightful details of the interaction between political and military considerations (Kiszeky, 2019) while various Swedish politicians and officials' diaries (Wahlbäck, 1972; Bagge, 2013) and memoirs (Hägglöf, 1971; Boheman,1964) reveal Swedish reactions and options for dealing with the belligerents. Swedish policy is detailed together with relevant archival sources in Wilhelm Carlgren's peerless masterwork (Carlgren, 1973) while Swedish military facts and figures are covered by Sven-Åke Bengtsson (Bengtsson, 2014) and earlier in a compendium edited by Carl-Axel Wangel (Wangel, 1982.) Supplementary articles by Leif Leifland (Leifland, 1992;1994; 1995) and Kent Zetterberg (Zetterberg, 1994) have expanded on the scope of policy considerations for belligerents and Sweden alike. Commentators exemplifying criticism of Swedish caution are Klas Åmark (Åmark,2011) and Sven Radowitz (Radowitz, 2005). Johan Östling (Östling, 2011) and Alf W. Johansson (Johansson, 2015) and Mikael Nilsson (Nilsson, 2022) have summarised the historiography implications. Finally, alternative *realpolitik* criteria to the predominant moral evaluations of Swedish conduct have been provided by Prantl & Goh, Reichberg & Syse, Schwarz & Sonin, and Leng & Walker.

3. BELLIGERENTS' PLANS AND THE CHANGING WAR SITUATION

As stated earlier, there were a large number of operational military plans under consideration by the belligerents with direct or indirect implications for Swedish security. These demonstrate that Sweden was on the military agenda for all sides throughout the war and the Swedish government could never be certain what might trigger an operation that endangered Swedish lives or territory.

3.1. German Military Plans

3.1.1. Response to attempted Allied transit 1939-40

The Russian attack on Finland in late November 1939 provided the Allies with a pretext to make a request to both Norway and Sweden in January 1940 for transit of an expeditionary force landing at Narvik to make its way over the border into Sweden and beyond to support the Finnish defence against the Soviet Union. Sweden had engaged the attention of the belligerents prior to the beginning of the Second World War due to its production and export of iron-ore. The need to use the ice-free Norwegian port of Narvik to export Swedish iron ore meant that Norway and Sweden were inextricably linked when the belligerents considered operations in either country. Germany had adapted its steel making to the

specific qualities of high-grade Swedish ore. In reality, the Allied aim was to seize the rail line carrying the ore and the mines themselves in Sweden. Finland's plight was very much a secondary consideration. The Norwegian and Swedish refusal of allied military transit to Finland in 1940 was unsurprising given the two countries' commitment to neutrality and their understandable reluctance to be drawn into a great power conflict leading to their countries becoming a battlefield. The Germans made it absolutely clear that if there was an Allied landing, then Germany would counterattack. Sweden was saved from this risk, over which they had constrained options, partly by their diplomacy to help secure an armistice between Finland and the Soviet Union in March 1940.

3.1.2. Maintenance of security of iron ore supply against British threat 1939-40

However, the Allied intentions had unsettled the Nazi leadership and in particular Adolf Hitler who welcomed a German navy proposal, advocated since 1926, to occupy neutral Norway and Denmark to avoid a repeat of the First World War Entente's sea blockade. (Gemzell, 1965: 21) Thus, Germany would gain an Atlantic coastline for its submarine fleet to operate against Allied shipping (unlike the First World War when the U-boats were bottled up in the North Sea), safeguard Swedish iron ore supplies from Narvik and secure the northern Scandinavian flank against invasion. There were no Swedish plans prior to February 1940 to combat an invasion from Norway (Wangel, 1982: 121). The German plan, *Operation Weserübung*, was carried out in April 1940 and brought military operations to the borders of Sweden and occasionally over them. The German message to Sweden, was "to be made absolutely clear that pro-German neutrality and complete fulfilment of all delivery obligations [of goods] is the sole road to preservation of its independence" (Ziemke, 1956: 31).

Earlier, in February 1940, the OKW planners had formulated proposals to be put to Sweden for a German *Kommando* force to 'secure' the Luleå-Narvik iron-ore railway line but not for an occupation of Swedish territory. (Gemzell, 1975: 209) At the same time, *Operation Eisberg* envisaged Abwehr sabotage of the iron ore mines, railways and power supply to deny them to the enemy should they land on the Norwegian coast. This suggestion was quashed by Hitler to avoid any leakage of Germany's plans for *Weserübung* and translated into a future demand through diplomatic channels that Sweden step up its defence of these facilities (Gemzell, 1975: 210, 212). The Swedish leadership did not of course know that and significantly, as a senior German diplomat in Stockholm, Werner Dankwort, made clear in his post-war interrogation, neither did he: '[…] no official infm (sic) from the Foreign Office or from any other sources […] he and his colleagues were vaguely aware that extensive plans were afoot [...]' (NA. OSS: 1946).

This tight secrecy as well as Hitler's unpredictability made for a formidable challenge to Swedish speculative forecasting about German war intentions.

3.1.3. German transit to Norway 1940-41

Any hope of military assistance to Sweden from the allies against Germany was ended by the Skagerrak blockade after the invasion of Norway. Sweden, despite its neutrality, became subject to German pressure to concede transit to Norway for its troops as early as April 1940. This was only conceded when the Norwegians surrendered in June. Nevertheless, the Swedish Prime Minister, Per Albin Hansson privately admitted that with this concession, Sweden had departed from neutrality. German pressure was primarily military with heavy hints about German capability. In one exchange, Hitler told a Swedish representative in April that '[…] he had crushed two countries and would do the same to every country that opposed him' (Wahlbäck 1972: 75). This clear reference to the invasions of Sweden's neighbours, Denmark and Norway, unnerved the Swedish cabinet. For Sweden, all three of its cities were within easy range of German bombers, yet a factor in Swedish decision making was the likelihood of retaliatory raids by the RAF against the proposed German troop trains and also iron ore shipments from Sweden. The reality is that unlike the plans for invasion of Norway by both sides, there is no evidence of an actual German plan in 1940 to invade Sweden while the British plan was seriously underdeveloped. Furthermore, the main archive of German *Luftwaffe* operations records contains no target planning for Sweden until 1943 (Von Rhoden Collection). Military threats were sufficient to achieve German objectives without tying down several Wehrmacht divisions that were needed for the forthcoming decisive campaign in France while the British looked on impotently as Swedish neutrality was bent – but not broken.

3.1.4. German land transit to Finland 1941

With France eliminated as a belligerent by mid-1940, Sweden now only had to reckon with British opposition to its military concessions to Germany and possible British offensive action in Norway, but events in 1941 were to alter that. The Finnish leadership had decided to seek German protection from the continuing Soviet existential threat to its sovereignty by allowing Germany increasing access to its territory for military purposes. This culminated in Finnish forces joining in the German invasion of Russia in June 1941 and a further German military demand to Sweden to allow a division of German troops under General Engelbrecht to transit from Norway to Finland with their weaponry. German threats were again made to force Sweden to either concede or prepare for a German military response. There is no evidence of German plans for such a response. The threat was another bluff by the devious Germans. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Hansson reportedly remarked to an acquaintance in May 1942 that:

> […] during roughly first 2 years of war he lived in constant state of anxiety that Germany would increase her demands on Sweden to a point where Swedish independence would disappear and that if Germany had pressed extreme demands

> it would have been physically impossible for Sweden to resist. The worst of these fears had not been realized. (Foreign Relations of The United States: May 6, 1942).

3.1.5. Response to possible Allied invasion 1943

After the transit concessions in 1940, Germany was reassured that Sweden would remain neutral and resolute in its rejection of war and Allied protests about concessions. Nevertheless, Germany continually fretted about the prospect of a Western Allied invasion of Norway and its effect on Swedish policy and possible entry into the war on the Allied side.

As the war progressed, the Germans became increasingly dissatisfied with Sweden. Hitler raged in March 1943 that Sweden now supported the enemy's side and even if they were too clever and careful to show it openly, they 'try to trip me up whenever possible' and they obviously realise, 'that I can do nothing to them.' (Carlgren, 1973: 393, n.177). This frustration may have been one of the factors behind military planning for an invasion. This is further evidence that Swedish government caution about German intentions was merited.

The Germans were sufficiently concerned about intelligence of a possible British landing in Scandinavia to commission a military study by von Schell of the 25th Panzer Division to:

> […] be prepared for the possibility that Anglo-Saxon forces in a large-scale attack on Scandinavia may thrust into Sweden or land airborne forces there and that Sweden cannot or does not wish to defend its territory [...] (Ziemke, 1956: 403).

The operation was based on the premise of limited resources and no reinforcements from elsewhere. Von Schell's response was to propose a daring and swiftly concentrated attack on Sweden using speed and strength to break through defences in central Sweden and so prevent Swedish reinforcements and re-grouping. *Blitzkreig* was the dominant offensive strategy and 'No pause' was the motto for the operation. (Zetterberg, 1994: 61) As the year progressed and German reverses on the eastern front grew in scale and frequency, the plan was constrained by a gradual bleeding of the resources that von Schell had gathered to execute it. From August 1943, the reserves necessary were deployed to Denmark, France and eventually Russia. By December, von Schell's superior in Norway concluded that:

> […] as long as the Army of Norway had no more than two divisions in reserve, an invasion of Sweden would be certain to bog down. If a full panzer corps were on hand, he concluded, the situation might be different (Ziemke, 1956: 417).

3.1.6. Three German-Swedish Tensions 1940-41

The senior diplomat in the German Legation in Stockholm, Werner Dankwort, stated during his post-war interrogation that he believed that there were three occasions when Germany would undertake operations against Sweden; first in January and February 1940 when the Franco-British pretence of intervention to support Finland might involve Sweden; secondly in April to June 1940 when Germany insisted on transit for men and supplies to Norway; thirdly in June 1941 with the demand for transit of the Engelbrecht Division from Norway to Finland. He also revealed that the German Foreign Ministry kept a 'register of Swedish sins' [*Sündenregister Schweden*] to justify any attack on Sweden (NA. OSS: 1946).

3.1.7. Naval plans 1943-45

It has become standard in some historical critiques of Sweden's wartime conduct to state authoritatively that Germany would not invade Sweden after Stalingrad. For example:

> The intelligence services […] knew only too well that, even if it could never be entirely discounted, the German threat especially after 1943, was ultimately more apparent than real (Levine, 2002: 26).

Yet, German Grand Admiral Dönitz believed that Swedish neutrality was increasingly unreliable and could threaten the navy's submarine vital training areas in the Baltic. This view was apparently shared by the author of a naval proposal in May 1943 to sabotage Swedish shipping in Swedish ports and so deny them to the Allies in case of Swedish defection to the Allied side (Grier 1991: 476-7). Again, in October 1943, the German navy initiated a review of options in the event of Swedish entry on the Allied side. The Baltic had now become a key area of naval interest due to its crucial importance in commissioning and training U-boats for service and an enemy presence in Sweden would threaten that (Gemzell, 1975:228). A stream of intelligence about Allied invasion plans for Norway further unsettled the German leadership but a review meeting in December 1943 merely noted the impossibility of diverting sufficient resources to attack Sweden from those that Hitler had ordered into Denmark (Gemzell, 1975:230-3). More relevant for Sweden was a stated German intention in February 1944 to secure the Baltic from enemy presence to build up the new submarine fleet. (Grier, 1991: 592-3). As late as January 1945, there were navy proposals to build launching facilities for V1 and V2 rockets to threaten Sweden (Grier 1991: 486). Hitler shared Dönitz' suspicions which resulted in the costly retention of German forces in Estonia and *Kurland* (Courland in present-day Latvia) from 1944 well into 1945 to act as a disincentive for Sweden to join the Allies. This threat appears to have been ignored in Stockholm and may in fact have been welcomed to discourage the Russians from occupying the Åland Islands – a key strategic

area for Swedish security (Grier 1991: 492-3). However, this decision of Hitler's overruled his senior military commanders and may have cost German casualties and scarce equipment. (Grier 1991: 452-3). The effect of the invasion of France in June 1944 on German concerns regarding Swedish intentions was significant. Yet a reassuring German assessment in January 1945 stated:

> Sweden has the opportunity to exercise its interests in contrast to Germany through […] the expansion of its army. It will try to maintain its neutrality and, to this end, accommodate both the Western powers and Russia as much as possible, but only participate on their side in a war against Germany in the event of an emergency. There are no signs of the latter, despite the unfriendly attitude of the government and public opinion (Gemzell 1975: 237) [author's translation].

3.1.8. A continuous German threat 1939-45

These instances demonstrate that Germany remained a constant threat to the end of the war, and as Hansson's colleague Gustav Möller remarked in 1945, 'Hitler was a madman and this meant that we had to take into account that Hitler and the German government did not react like normal people…' (Johansson, 2014:21). A man who could sideline his military advisers to declare war on the United States in 1941 and order the occupation of Hungary in 1944 could not be predictable with confidence as to his decisions about Sweden. While the Allies scorned Swedish caution after Stalingrad, they were never going to be answerable for the consequences of a wrong call by Sweden in its two-year unwinding from the toxic embrace of the Third Reich. German planning from 1943-1945 is further evidence that Swedish caution about German intentions was merited. Dismissal of those threats, deterrent and compellent, as 'more apparent than real' ignores the reality of risks that the Swedish government had to factor into their policy considerations (Reichberg & Syse, 185-7).

3.2. Western Allied plans

3.2.1. Interruption of iron ore supply to Germany 1939-40

British planning for economic warfare had anticipated that Swedish ore would become a contentious issue. Indeed, one diplomat casually remarked to a Swedish negotiator in April 1939 that, 'I'm afraid that we have to destroy your mines.' (Hägglöf, 1971: 27) The Swedes themselves were fully prepared for trading problems with the belligerents and undertook to conclude trading agreements with Germany and Britain as soon as possible after the war started. Unfortunately for Sweden, the British and to a lesser extent the French became obsessed with the prospect of seriously damaging the German war economy by interdicting the supply of Swedish ore. This fixation was enhanced for the French by redirecting the focus of hostilities away from France's borders to the prospect

of a new front in the far north of Europe. The Norwegian iron ore port of Narvik now attracted the attention of both the Allies and Berlin.

3.2.2. Allied landings and transit to Finland 1940

The strategic obsession in Paris and London with interdicting Swedish iron ore exports to Germany, personified by Churchill's arguments for action against the mines in Sweden and the port of Narvik has been argued authoritatively to be 'quite wrong' and 'quite mistaken' (Milward, 1977: 308-312). The Allies persisted with the expeditionary force –even after the Norwegian and Swedish refusals to allow them territorial transit passage. As noted above, German planners appear to have anticipated this with the *Kommando* force proposals. Churchill argued that 'it would be a mistake to cancel the expedition altogether merely because the Swedes *said* that they would not cooperate' (Kiszely, 2017: 24). Operation Avonmouth had envisaged one or two brigades proceeding from Narvik to the Swedish ore mines in Gällivare with two further Divisions as a back-up. Operation Plymouth involved a larger deployment of four to six Allied divisions landing in Norway and moving into southern Sweden to support the Swedes against German attack. A considerable naval force of up to forty destroyers would be required in support but this was deemed worthwhile as, 'By employing some five to six Allied divisions in Scandinavia, we may expect to compel Germany to divert perhaps 20 divisions to that area' (Kiszely, 2017: 31).

Prime Minister Chamberlain was reluctant to proceed due to the Scandinavian refusals, the probable reaction of the then-neutral United States, and the possible cancellation of the Norwegian shipping agreement while Churchill continued to urge its execution. Fortunately for the Allies, the 'hare-brained' scheme which had been approved finally on 12 March 1940 was cancelled due to the Finnish armistice. In a matter of days, the whole invasion force was disbanded and dispersed, stores and equipment had been withdrawn, and all planning records had been destroyed. But political pressure was again building in Paris and London for action in Norway.

3.2.3. Allied plans for invasion of Norway and Sweden 1940

The Franco-British Allies remained intent on moving the hostilities from France to Scandinavia, so Operations Avonmouth and Plymouth were again on the table from 30 March, now re-named as Operation R4. The British plan laid its primary emphasis on operations in northern Norway and Sweden. The main striking force was to land at Narvik and advance into Sweden along the rail line to Luleå, occupying Kiruna and Gällivare along the way. By late April two Allied brigades were to be established along that line. Trondheim was to become the major base in the south and the port of debarkation for Allied troops sent into southern and central Sweden to meet the expected German counterattack.

Eventually the British intended to put as many as 100,000 men in the field, and the French 50,000. (Ziemke, 1956: 46-47) 'Plan R4' was to be triggered when Germans landed in Norway "or showed they intended to do so." Narvik and the rail track to the Swedish border were the principal objectives (Ziemke, 1956: 48-49).

On 4 April, the British endorsed the planners' recommendation to send 150,000 troops. The combined invasion force was embarked in a mixture of warships and transports in Scotland by 7 April when the sighting of a large German naval force that day on passage to Norway was misinterpreted as a naval break-out into the north Atlantic instead of the invasion of Norway and Denmark. But, as the Royal Navy units set out on 8 April to carry out the mining of the seas off Norway to force ore-carriers away from the coast and expose them to British attack, the German invasion fleet had already sailed for Norway. The senior naval commander ordered all the army units for operation R4 to disembark and the navy set sail for a battle with the German navy. This decision had major consequences for the morale, equipment and provisions of the expeditionary force which quickly descended into disorganisation and confusion and fatally impaired Allied effectiveness in combat with the Germans. As the Germans consolidated their grip on Norway, the British force set off on 10 April but their whole plan failed to secure Norway and invade Sweden due to German initiative and boldness and Anglo-French dithering and delay. Swedish neutrality was now safe from invasion by the Allies but not necessarily from the Germans. Fighting continued in Norway between April and June which Sweden feared could spill over the Norwegian-Swedish border until the Allied forces departed in June to leave Norway under German occupation for the next four years. Even as late as May, in response to a suggestion that 'It […] would be greatly to our advantage if the iron ore area could be made a battlefield.', the view of the British Foreign Office's most senior official was that '[…] the best thing that could happen would be a Swedish-German war… I would do anything to bring it about.' (TNA FO 371/24832 Possible German moves in Northern Scandinavia 11.5.40) The whole episode demonstrated that British and French military planners and leadership were at least as careless about neutral lives and property as the Germans to achieve their objectives. The Swedish leadership was fully aware of that and acted accordingly.

3.2.4. Norway again 1941-45

In March 1941, the Norwegian government in exile Foreign Minister Lie attempted to persuade the British to bomb Norwegian targets with the aim of forcing Sweden to reject further German transit demands. He even envisaged a positive result being German offensive action against Sweden. The British rejected the idea on the basis the Britain could not reinforce Swedish defence in case of a German invasion.(TNA FO188/369 Swedish Policy, 19.3.41) The entry of Russia into the war in June 1941 revived British military interest in Norway – and unavoidably Sweden – partly as a result of Stalin's urging the British to act

to relieve pressure on the Red Army and partly due to Churchill's continuing obsession with the potential of attacking Germany through Norway. Churchill's enthusiasm was equalled by the military planners' coolness towards the idea and their respective viewpoints were to be unaltered throughout the to-and-fro exchanges between Churchill and his military chiefs from 1941 up to D-Day in 1944. Churchill never abandoned his 'Arctic Gallipoli' idea, and the planners never thought it feasible. The Swedes had also anticipated the threat to their neutrality of a British return to Norway and told the British in September 1941 that they needed to consider assisting Sweden in the eventuality of a German counterattack through Sweden. (Mann 1998: 132) This brought possible Swedish participation into British planning and for the planners, that extra complication rendered a British attack on Norway premature.

> Sweden is unlikely to take the offensive. In fact, the timing of an outbreak of war between Germany and Sweden is more likely to lie in German hands than in Swedish. The hypothesis on which our plan is based is dubious in the extreme (Mann, 1998: 134).

Churchill opposed this view but, unlike Hitler and Stalin, deferred to his military advisers while still harassing them with his views and continually demanding that his idea be reassessed.

Churchill's interest in Scandinavia was matched by that of Hitler who feared that a British attack on Norway would pressurise Sweden and be 'decisive for the war' (Mann, 1998: 163). This meant that German battleships were moved to Norway to discourage a British attack and were limited by Hitler's orders for their deployment. This deprived the Germans of valuable raiders against Allied shipping. In the same way, Hitler's insistence on garrisoning Norway against a British attack meant that, at times, there were five or six more German divisions in Norway than were required (Mann, 1998: 247).

Again in 1943, Churchill had to be reminded by the planners of the realities of Swedish entry into the war at a point when the Allies were preparing for D-Day (Operation Overlord.)

> Our appreciation shows that such operations [*i.e. an invasion of Norway*] would provide a possible but far less profitable alternative to 'Overlord'. Without the aid of Sweden – and the chances of Sweden entering the war in any circumstances are extremely remote – they [*i.e. the operations*] would be so cramped and confined that a postponed 'Overlord' would still be necessary as the most hopeful operation for the defeat of Germany [*author's notes*] (Mann 1998: 138).

The entry of the United States into the war on 11 December 1941, caused by Hitler's verbal Pearl Harbor attack on the "the Anglo-Saxon Jewish-capitalist world" and his accompanying declaration of war on the hitherto neutral United States, had altered the balance of considerations for both Sweden and the British. The three Allied great powers were to demonstrate that Sweden was subject to their military considerations as the war progressed.

3.2.5. Pressurizing Sweden 1943

Stalin's Foreign Minister, Molotov hosted the October, 1943 Allied Foreign Ministers conference in Moscow (in preparation for the Tehran Conference between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt in December) and used that occasion to propose to United States' Hull and Britain's Eden that the Allies should press Sweden to permit Allied airfields on Swedish territory similar to the neutral Portuguese government decision to allow Allied aircraft facilities in the Azores in August 1943, when it bowed to pressure from both Britain and the United States.

Hull and Eden responded to this unexpected Soviet Union initiative by saying that they would have to consult further. In doing so, Eden re-awakened Churchill's 'Arctic Gallipoli' pet project and forced his military planners to demolish it yet again. Churchill wrote 'We should gain a new country and a small but good army. Valuable facilities would be afforded to Russian Air Forces' (Leifland, 1994: 131). However, following a rejection by the US military planners who feared the negative effect on 'Overlord' planning, Hull and Eden suggested a compromise to Molotov that the airfields proposal to Sweden be postponed, in order to avoid needling their fickle Soviet ally.

Churchill also wanted to provide Stalin with other possible concessions to propose to Sweden and the British military planners produced a ten-point list for a pre-discussion between Churchill and Roosevelt. The suggestions would have tested the limits of German acceptance of Swedish neutrality and included radio signal stations for air navigation to improve bombing accuracy over Germany, meteorological forecasts, landing rights and refuelling facilities for British and Soviet aircraft, repair facilities for damaged aircraft, repatriation of interned military personnel, surveillance stations to intercept German radio traffic and fewer restrictions on SOE activities organised from Sweden against occupied Europe. They were designed to mollify Stalin and Molotov by demonstrating that the United States and Britain took the Russian view on pressurising Sweden seriously.

Predictably, Churchill was gung-ho and Roosevelt cool to the proposals but in the event, they were never presented to the Russians who appeared to have lost interest in Sweden – which was hardly mentioned during the Teheran Conference. However, the proposals remained in play for the British planners while Churchill's interest remained undiminished. A navigation signal station was in fact established in the British consulate in Malmö but the other proposals were quietly dropped until they became part of the British deception exercise to confuse Germany as to the location of the Allied invasion of Europe (Leifland, 1995: 133).

3.2.6. D-Day Deception 1944

'Operation Graffham' involved sounding out Sweden regarding airfields and rail facilities in the expectation that such enquiries would leak to the Germans

and encourage them to divert resources away from France to Scandinavia. (UD Hp1 Ab Vol 39 LII Aide-Memoire Mallet to Boheman 4.4 1944; TNA Air 9/283 JPS 16.7.1944.) That the Germans took any of this seriously is doubtful but shows that the British were now prepared to risk a German counter action against Sweden and increase the risk of Sweden being drawn into the war.

3.2.7. Surveillance and sabotage 1944-5

The Swedish government now flexed strict neutrality in 1944-45 in the Allies favour. It permitted the United States to fly Norwegian Brigade forces within Swedish airspace using Swedish airfields and the establishment of United States and British surveillance and sabotage bases on Swedish territory along the Norwegian border. These contributed to the sinking of the Tirpitz and the expulsion of German forces from north Norway (Gyllenhaal & Gebhardt, 2001: 120-147).

3.2.8. Baltic Threat 1944

In addition to the point noted earlier that Hitler's belief in 1944 that German forces in Estonia and Courland would threaten Sweden sufficiently to dissuade them from joining the Allied side, the Western Allies in August 1944 discussed how to get a favourable response to their threat to bomb and mine the south Baltic:

> We therefore propose to increase Swedish fears concerning their shipping in the BALTIC (sic) since this will provide them with a plausible pretext for withdrawal without appearing to have been forced to act under foreign pressure to commit an unneutral act (The National Archives: WO229/71. SHAEF Joint Staff Mission Washington, 10 August 1944).

3.2.9. Norwegian Intervention 1945

As the war moved towards its conclusion, concerns grew regarding the possible consequences of a German surrender in Europe while their troops continued to fight in Norway, the so-called *Festung Norwegen* scenario. Sweden had permitted the Norwegians to create a Norwegian Brigade on Swedish territory, nominally a police troop but in fact armed paramilitaries trained for military operations to be deployed to preserve order in liberated Norway when Germany surrendered. Despite this force, it was recognised that an Allied intervention in Norway might be required to prevent a disintegrating German army threatening the Norwegian population and creating conditions for disorder and bloodshed on both sides of the Swedish-Norwegian border.

The Germans, according to a German diplomatic source also anticipated such

an intervention which they thought would have Swedish military participation and so planned for preventive military action against Sweden – dismissed as unlikely by the Military Attaché (KrA Kempff Arkiv, Ö III:4 1944 Juhlin-Dannfeldt to Kempff 8.12.1944).

Pressed by strong Norwegian pleas to reluctant Allied commanders, SHAEF began from April 1945 to plan for the eventuality of sending an expeditionary force to Norway through Swedish territory. Unlike the Franco-British plans in January 1940 to force Sweden to permit their troops to transit, this time Sweden would be invited to participate in joint staff discussions to prepare for an Allied invasion of Norway from Swedish territory and with Swedish assistance.

On the morning of 30 April 1945, the British and US representatives in Stockholm requested the discussions – representing a major break with Swedish neutrality – and by the afternoon had informed their governments of Swedish government acceptance (Leifland, 1993: 107). Prime Minister Hansson had prepared the ground for this abrupt change in a secret meeting of the Swedish parliament on 27 April when he referred to 'altered circumstances' that might cause 'new considerations' for the Swedes (Leifland, 1992: 153). In the event, the surrender of the Germans in Norway on 8 May removed the issue for the Swedish government and the underground liberation forces there ensured an orderly and non-violent transfer of power.

For the final time during the Second World War, Swedish neutrality had been put into play by the belligerents' military imperatives, but Sweden had emerged from this testing time with its sovereignty and its democracy intact.

3.3. Russian plans

Swedish military planning had not envisaged a potential enemy on its western border due to the historical Swedish focus on Russia and its expansionist tendencies threatening the Swedish buffer defence provided by Finland. (Bengtsson, 2014: 271-274; Cronenberg, 2002: 91-121).

While the British registered strong protests regarding Sweden's 1941 transit of the Engelbrecht Division, the target of the transit, Russia, was much more muted. An insight into Hansson's policy considerations is seen in his diary entry for 24 June 1941 while the Swedish government was weighing the German transit demand «… any attempts to bomb the German transports were not likely but must be included in the calculation as a possibility» (Wahlbäck, 1972: 179). The Soviet Union had feared much more damaging Swedish concessions and were anxious to avoid propelling Sweden into active support for Germany and Finland through strenuous criticism. Military retaliation was also ruled out and so Swedish neutrality remained for the time being unthreatened by Russia until after Stalingrad.

Logistics concessions in 1940-41 (detailed below) reduced the resources that the Germans needed for transportation and storage of war materials to strengthen their positions in Norway and prosecute the war on the eastern front against the

Soviet Union. However, this last was to bring Sweden later into Soviet military thinking.

While the prospect of a restored Swedish-Russian border galvanised Swedish diplomacy to again facilitate a Finnish-Russian armistice as it had earlier in 1940, the Soviet Union now moved from its previously low-volume criticisms of Swedish concessions and ratcheted up its rhetoric by speculating openly about a secret Swedish-German agreement which could only be dispelled by a more accommodating approach by Sweden, for example by ending trading credits to Finland (Carlgren, 1973: 476-7). Swedish neutrality should now bend away from Germany towards the Allies.

Following the German reverses on the eastern front – symbolically highlighted by the surrender of the German Sixth Army to the Red Army at Stalingrad in January 1943 – a more assertive tone was increasingly adopted by the Allies in their relationship with Sweden. The Russo-Finnish 'Continuation War' also complicated Sweden's position *vis-à-vis* the great power Allies. Sweden feared the Russian advance westwards and the threat to Finnish independence that could lead to the Russian border coming within 100 kms of Stockholm where it had been throughout most of the nineteenth century. Bizarrely, in view of this looming Soviet threat to Sweden, one commentator expressed amazement that Swedish wartime historians 'have paid considerable, even exaggerated attention to events in the East' (Levine, 2002: 314). This is a further example of the military threat to Sweden being trivialised by commentators.

3.4. Swedish military responses

One significant inconvenience for the belligerents was Swedish defence capability which in Scandinavian terms was quite substantial in 1939. For Germany as well as Britain, the price of a successful invasion of Sweden was steep then and only became steeper as the war progressed. The von Schell planning exercise demonstrated the importance of Swedish defence. Swedish representatives frequently reassured both sides that a strong Swedish defence was in their best interest as it ensured that the other side could not occupy the country without considerable effort and resource expenditure. This stance allowed Sweden to benefit from increased quotas of materials and supplies from the belligerents as these requests were presented as assisting the re-armament of the country and increasing its defensive capability.

The large conscript army that reached 367,000 in July 1943 (Bengtsson, 2014: 268) was mobilised on several occasions when the government felt that a demonstration of strength was required to discourage the Germans, but the politicians were publicly even-handed in their stated resolve to see off all threats irrespective of whether these were from the British, Germans, Russians or Americans. Excepting Russia, all these countries had at one point threatened to bomb Swedish territory; the British to stop Swedish iron ore; the Germans to force transit; the Americans to stop Swedish ball-bearings supply. (Boheman, 1964: 270-

1) Only Russia actually did so in February 1944 claiming 'navigational error' but arguably to discourage Sweden from assisting Finland at a point when the Red Army was advancing on Finnish territory. Notably, this threat of bombing highlighted the significant Achilles' heel in Swedish defence. The conscript army was large, trained, and capable of offering resistance in terrain that was difficult for mechanised warfare. The navy was modern and effective in its home waters of the Baltic Sea as its offensive operations against Soviet submarines proved. It was the air force that was under-equipped with obsolescent machines, under-strength in numbers and struggling to match the belligerents' advanced technologies such as radio-communication.

Sweden responded to the German invasion of Norway with an uncoordinated mobilisation of the army which remained on alert until the summer of 1940 to deter the Germans (Cronenberg, 1990: 217-254). The Swedish leadership was evidently conscious of the impact of their military decisions on the Germans. Prime Minister Hansson noted in his diary on 14 May following the German invasion of the Low Countries that 'The Germans are clearly disturbed by our troop mobilisations' (Wahlbäck, 1972: 87). The cost and diversion of manpower was sufficient for the government to decide to stand down the conscripts to harvest the crops.

In March of 1941, 130,000 conscripts were again mobilised to signal to the Germans that Sweden would defend itself if the British, who had raided coastal targets in north Norway that spring, planned an operation involving Swedish territory. The army was not mobilised for the Engelbrecht Division transit in June 1941 to assure Germany of Swedish acquiescence but a further two mobilisations in 1942 and 1943 were intended to warn off any hostile intent arising from a German troop build-up on the Swedish border in February 1942 and the ending of transit for the Wehrmacht in August 1943.

The most obvious military planning by Germany or the Allies, intended to pressurise Sweden, was met by a Swedish military response. How effective that response would have been the subject of many reports from the belligerents' Military Attachés in Stockholm and assessments in London, Berlin and Washington. As the war progressed, Swedish rearmament also gathered momentum and estimates of Swedish resistance to attack varied between one month and three months (TNA FO371/33068 Mallet to FO 2.6.42.) The Swedish tactic of using Germanophile officers for liaison with the Germans to reduce tensions with the Germans misled them instead; in an otherwise sensible German assessment of Swedish resistance to a blitzkrieg attack, the Germans believed that 70% of Swedish officers were Nazi-oriented with the implication that they would not resist (Gemzell, 1975:226-227). This was highly unlikely. What is clear however is that the Swedish government put more faith in military capability than in the Hague Conventions as a deterrent to protect their country from the belligerents.

Allied military plans for Sweden after 1940 were mainly a consequence of any action that they contemplated in Norway to attack the German northern flank. Sweden was the geopolitical obstacle to any Allied plan to push southwards and eastwards towards Germany. Neutrality niceties worried them much less than

the likely Swedish response to an Allied incursion. Would the Swedish forces resist strongly to maintain neutrality? Or nominally? Or not at all? It was one of Sweden's diplomatic trump cards to keep the belligerents guessing and Sweden toiled to build up a meaningful military defence to back up belligerent fears of a strong resistance.

Germany was also plagued by concerns about likely Swedish actions despite apparently confident predictions from their Legation in Stockholm as late as May 1945 when possible Swedish involvement in Norway was being contemplated as this British ULTRA intercept shows:

> THE SWEDISH ARMED FORCES AND GOVERNMENT…ARE CONSCIOUS OF THE DIFFICULTY OF THEIR MILITARY TASK, NOTWITHSTANDING THE FAVOURABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SWEDISH ARMED FORCES, IN FACING RESTED GOOD, WELL-EQUIPPED AND WAR-TRIED GERMAN TROOPS IN DIFFICULT COUNTRY. THE LARGE SACRIFICES OF BLOOD AND MATERIAL ENTAILED, THUS WEAKENING SWEDEN FOR THE POST-WAR PERIOD ARE TO BE AVOIDED. THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TASK CALLS FOR TROOP REPLACEMENTS ON A SCALE WHICH WOULD SENSIBLY DISTURB SWEDISH ECONOMY. (TNA: ULTRA)

In other words, the battle-hardened German forces in Norway were seen as a deterrent to the untried Swedish forces, a fact also noted by the Western Allies in their evaluation of Swedish military assistance to liberate Norway, should that breach of neutrality be agreed to by Sweden.

Another deterrent to Swedish assistance was equipment shortages, despite the Swedish rearmament programme. In December 1944, when the scenario was raised, Sweden's Boheman told the British to «…remember that the Swedish army was an excellent defensive weapon but was much too short of aircraft and armour to be an offensive weapon» (The National Archives: NA WO229/71. Memorandum, CFA Warner 17 December 1944). It was perhaps fortunate that the Swedish forces were never tested in combat due to the agreements for Allied-Swedish staff talks being pre-empted by the German surrender in Norway.

3.5. Credible military threats

Sweden's military intentions and capabilities remained an unknown variable for belligerent military planners throughout the war. Nevertheless, the Swedish use of mobilisations signalled intention to resist to the Germans during tense periods of German-Swedish negotiations. All the belligerents were enthusiastic about using threatening signals to influence Swedish attitudes and the Swedish leadership noted those signals, while not always dancing to the belligerent's tune.

4. EXTENT OF MILITARY RISKS

4.1. Deliberate invasion

The threat of invasion was the foremost concern for the Swedish leadership and the one most readily understood by the Swedish population. As was evident from the events of 1940, none of the belligerents respected sovereignty far less neutrality if their war aims required otherwise. For example, the Allied pressure on Norway and Sweden for transit to Finland followed up by the mining of Norwegian waters and the German invasions of Denmark and Norway; the Russian occupation of Poland and the Baltic States were early indications of great power contempt for the security of smaller countries. One of the Swedish cabinet provided an insight in 1943 into what many geo-politically aware Swedes were thinking.

> We must start from the present situation that Sweden is really in. In this respect, it is clear that firstly the current basis for every small and democratic country to conduct a strong foreign policy must be clearly precarious. There is no longer any consideration from the great powers' side and our democracy makes it very difficult to make decisions when one has to ensure that there is unanimity between so many different viewpoints. We should remember that no matter how this war ends – and further –we know nothing at all currently except that both the main powers on each side clearly expressed that they do not intend to pay any attention whatsoever to small powers or to those who want to remain neutral. England as well as Germany will organize Europe under their hegemony and neither of them will pay any attention to Sweden other than […] how (far) we can cause inconvenience for them [...] (Blidberg & Johansson, 2013: 264) [author's translation].

Deliberate invasion at any point in the war would have been costly for the underequipped and untested Swedish forces. They and the Swedish population were particularly vulnerable to air attack due to obsolete defensive aircraft.

4.2. Inadvertent territorial incursion

Inadvertent territorial incursion was a risk to Sweden throughout the war. Most obviously, the risk as highest in 1940 and 1944-5. In 1940, fighting took place in Norway along the western border when the Germans pushed the Norwegian army and the western allies north and West. At the same time, the German forces In the Narvik area under Dietl were very close to crossing the border into Sweden which would have risked a pursuit by the allied forces.

In 1941, a Swedish Admiral told the German Naval Attaché that 'Sweden will open fire on any Russian warship which comes into Sweden's territorial waters.' (UD HP 39A Vol. 1676 Söderblom to Richert 9.7.41) This was almost certainly not a Cabinet-approved rule of engagement but indicates the risks arising from incursion.

In 1944, the Finnish army pursued the Wehrmacht into north Norway narrowly skirting the Swedish frontier with Finland under Norway. German

Commander Lothar Rendulic was unlikely to have respected the Swedish frontier if his forces had been under threat of annihilation by the Finns. In 1944-5, the Russian army occupied north Norway which had been devastated by Rendulic to secure it until a small Norwegian task force arrived to secure the area.

4.3. Intentional but limited territorial incursion

The main intentional incursions by the belligerents were into Swedish airspace. The Luftwaffe frequently violated Swedish airspace during the 1940 Norwegian campaign and the RAF also engaged in overflying. Swedish ground air defences were remarkably good - after all, Swedish Bofors guns were world leading anti-aircraft technology.

Later in the war, the British and American strategic bombing campaigns against Germany over-flew south Sweden as a safe shortcut to and from targets in north Germany. Some were engaged by Swedish anti-aircraft defences and brought down while others crashed landed as a result of damage inflicted by German flak.

In 1944, German V2 crash landed on Oland which may or may not have been as result of German deliberate targeting in order to convey a message to Sweden that Germany could act if Sweden joined the Western Allies. In the event, the wreckage was quickly dispatched to Britain for assessment and analysis, an example of covert Swedish support for the Western Allies war effort.

4.4. Deliberate military action by one of the belligerents against their enemy on Swedish territory

One of the major concerns for the Swedish cabinet in Spring, 1940 when considering the German demand for troop transit on Swedish railways between Germany and Norway, was the possibility of retaliatory action by Britain. This was expected to take the form of bombing by the RAF of the German troop trains. In the event, this never happened but the possibility haunted Swedish policy making.

The British did in fact target a German transit train in 1941 by sabotaging an ammunition shipment which blew up add the Swedish station of Krylbo. Fortunately, despite injury and extensive damage, no Swedish citizen was killed in the incident. The Swedish inquiry conveniently was unable to identify the cause of the explosion. Another explosion took place in Hårsfjärden which did result in the death of 43 Swedish sailors on board 3 destroyers damaged in the detonation. Again, the inquiry was unable to identify the cause of the tragedy, and the incident remains a mystery to this day. Suspicions remain that Russians were somehow involved in sabotaging warships which were involved in escorting German troop transits through Swedish waters.

Two risks which the Swedes took were firstly the establishment of training

facilities for para-military police troops recruited from Norwegian and Danish refugees in Sweden and secondly the permission for United States military transport planes to move Norwegian men and equipment to north Sweden. The police troop paramilitaries were trained and equipped with light weaponry and were intended to act as stabilising forces in the event of disorganised German capitulation in Norway in Denmark leading to civil disorder. In north Sweden, a series of nine bases were established by *Operation Sepals* with four on the Swedish side of the border with Norway to monitor German activity in the closing stages. This was a joint United States, British, Norwegian and Swedish operation. Both initiatives exposed Sweden to a potential attack by Germany, either on the facilities themselves or perhaps on more accessible targets.

4.5. Military action short of invasion intended to pressurise Sweden

In addition to the sabotage mentioned above, it was in fact the Russians who both torpedoed Swedish shipping and bombed civilian targets. Russian submarine activity in the Baltic was a threat that the Swedish Navy had trained for but nevertheless, the Russians were successful in sinking Swedish ships carrying iron ore to Germany and tragically a civilian ferry near Gotland with significant loss of life. Stockholm suburbs were bombed in 1944 in an incident which the Soviet government blamed on poor navigation by the aircrews who were alleged to be aiming for Finland. In both instances, the message to the Swedish government was clear: Russia could take military action to get Sweden to reduce supplies to Germany and not interfere to support Finland against the Red Army.

5. MILITARY THREATS AND SOCIETAL RISK

The examples in Sections 3 and 4 exemplify the very real threats but frequently under-estimated risks of planned military action by the belligerents and the scope of the resulting risks, possible and probable, to Swedish lives and territory.

The Swedish government was however acting rationally to protect Sweden from the risk of injury, death, damage and destruction during military operations. The potential downside was enormous but is frequently forgotten or omitted from commentators' assessments, so it is worth emphasising this aspect of what can be termed 'societal risk.' In Second World War military operations, approximately 150,000–200,000 Polish civilians were killed during the German invasion of Poland, which lasted from September 1 to October 6, 1939. Around 1,000 Norwegian civilians died during the German invasion of Norway, which began on April 9, 1940, and lasted until June 10, 1940, while in Denmark, fewer than 50 civilians were killed. Approximately 2,500–3,000 Dutch civilians died during the German invasion, which lasted from May 10 to May 15, 1940, while around 6,000–7,000 Belgian civilians died. in France 40,000 French civilians died during the German invasion which lasted from May 10 to June 25, 1940. Most

civilians died in bombing, shelling and other combat related incidents. Later in 1944 the Normandy Campaign involved heavy bombing and artillery shelling, causing substantial civilian deaths. Normandy's cities and towns suffered significant damage. Around 15,000 French civilians were killed during the intense fighting in June and in July 1944 another 20,000 French civilians died as the battle expanded across Normandy.

6. SWEDISH RESPONSES TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF MILITARY ACTION

The Swedish leadership used different responses to avoid the risk of military action. These tactics where criticised at the time and have been criticised by some commentators since as cowardly and/or unnecessarily generous in proportion to the military risks involved. They are briefly described to provide the context for each type of response and the ensuing criticism of the Hansson government's decisions.

6.1. Concede when threatened by Germany

This response was most applicable to German threats backed up by overwhelming military superiority. For example, When the Germans challenged Swedish neutrality in April 1940 by requesting transit of troops and supplies to Norway while the Norwegians were still fighting, the request was refused. There now began an extended period of confrontation during which the Germans employed classic coercive tactics. The Swedish government's position that it could not concede transit while hostilities continued fatally weakened their bargaining position when the hostilities ended. The resolution of the confrontation necessitated the painful Swedish concession of transit in June 1940. The Germans believed that their increasingly strident and explicit threats had been effective and would be used again in 1941. The allies almost never used this tactic (Reichberg & Syse, 2018: 185-7).

6.2. Avoid unnecessary disputes and 'prestige issues'

Günther was particularly keen to minimise tension and avoid win-lose situations for either side which positioned Sweden as the arbiter. Such an instance was the dispute over contested ownership of Norwegian ships trapped by hostilities in Gothenburg harbour. Günther had given assurances unwisely to the Germans that the ships would never be released to the allies. The allies responded with threats to suspend essential oil shipments to Sweden. After Stalingrad, German weakness meant that they were unable to penalise Sweden for the release of the ships.

6.3. Maintain independence of action

It was important for Hansson to maintain the impression of Swedish sovereignty underpinning independent decisions by the Swedish government. Perhaps with an eye to the post war power balance while the Soviet Union was watching Swedish conduct carefully, Hansson was reluctant to be seen to yield to allied pressure when ending the transit to Norway, the trade in iron ore and in ball bearings in case that encouraged Russian coercion.

6.4. Secure best trade terms to support re-armament

To combat the effectiveness of the German military threats, provide deterrence against potential western allied operations on or near Swedish territory and counter any Russian move westwards through Finland, Sweden needed to increase the military effectiveness off its defence forces. Due to inter war disarmament, Swedish military equipment was obsolete and following the outbreak of war was almost impossible to replace from outside sources such as the neutral USA. Sweden embarked on a programme of rearmament and training which required both fuel and materials from the belligerents. Due to the blockade of the Skagerrak from April 1940, Sweden had to turn to Germany for its coal and coke which the Germans exchanged for Swedish iron ore. Similarly, oil was required from the West to power vehicles, ships and aeroplanes. Swedish rearmament could only be achieved by cooperation with the belligerents.

6.5. Use diplomacy to minimise risk

Swedish wartime diplomacy could be summarised as a series of bargaining strategies, or "'influence strategies," where success is defined as a diplomatic victory or compromise settlement as opposed to submission or war. The authors of this term go on to conclude that one of these 'influence strategies' supports the efficacy of a reciprocating, or "firm but-fair," bargaining strategy as the best overall strategy, and, in particular, as the most effective strategy against a "bullying" adversary. (Leng & Walker, 1982: 574).

Yet, it has been the reciprocal nature of the successful bargaining with Nazi Germany that has attracted so much criticism.

6.6. Use deceptive diplomacy

Swedish officials were adept at appearing to be empathetic and helpful to all belligerents without breaking neutrality. During the period of German hegemony throughout 1941 and 1942 when isolated Sweden met further German requests for military facilities of a logistics nature. The Swedes listed all concessions in a

rather suppliant memorandum ahead of negotiations on trade in December 1941. (Documents on German Foreign Policy: December 1, 1941.) The thirteen-point list includes transit through Sweden for soldiers on leave from Norway, military material transit to Norway or Finland, courier personnel and flights through Swedish territory, shipping convoys escorted through Swedish waters, transit of wounded from the eastern front to Norway, transit depots of food and fuel in northern Sweden, supply of tents, stoves and trucks to the Wehrmacht, and the supply of food, munitions and trade credits to Germany's co-belligerent, Finland.

While none of these amounted to major strategic or tactical advantages for the Germans, the Wehrmacht troops on leave from Norway enjoyed protection from British action by not travelling on shipping exposed to British naval or air attack. Furthermore, the logistics concessions reduced the resources that the Germans needed for transportation and storage of war materials to strengthen their positions in Norway and prosecute the war on the eastern front against the Soviet Union. However, it is often forgotten that additional German requests in late 1941 for transit and equipment were refused and the Commander in Chief noted that '…as yet, no reprisal measures had been mentioned' (KrA Kempff Arkiv, Ö IV:1 Militärpolitisk Orientering 8.12.1941).

After Stalingrad, the Swedes were more helpful to the Allied war effort and less to Germany. Among the instances were the freeing of the embargoed Norwegian ships, the establishment of the Norwegian and Danish brigades, the transit of weapons to the Danish resistance, permitting RAF radio-location installation in Malmö, giving the wreckage of a crashed V1 rocket to Britain and providing Swedish sourced intelligence on German forces in Norway (Gilmour, 2010: 121, 101-2, 151, 148).

These instances are frequently ignored or trivialised in comparison to the emphasis placed on facilities provided earlier to Germany.

7. CONSEQUENCES OF SWEDISH POLICY

> «…statecraft is about securing state survival and prosperity…» «…Geared to contesting and negotiating conflicting strategic ideas and priorities…» while «… Representing policy issues in ways that generate support from key domestic and international audiences…» (Prantl & Goh, 2022: 47 & 451).

If these conditions for effective political leadership are accepted, then Swedish wartime government policy was successful. The fact is that democratic Sweden survived and achieved postwar prosperity. The stark wartime policy choices that it made were accepted by the majority of the Swedish people as demonstrated in successive electoral results while the belligerents tolerated rather than supported the decisions even when they favoured their opponents.

The most significant consequence of Swedish conduct was that the country and its people never suffered the devastation and death toll of its Nordic neighbours. Not unnaturally, this fortunate outcome was regarded with chagrin

by these unfortunate neutral countries which had neither sought nor anticipated the tragic circumstances which overcame them.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The Hansson government was successful in achieving its strategic aim of keeping the country and its citizens out of war. However, such success came at the price of criticism for having made too many concessions as well as trading with Nazi Germany. The successful Swedish rational response was resented by allies and neighbours alike. Almost fifty years after the war ended, following greater historiographical emphasis on the Jewish Holocaust and its Nazi perpetrators, further criticism was made of the relationship to Nazi Germany including implications that Sweden bore some responsibility for their victims. The threat of warfare on or near Swedish territory and the consequences for Swedish lives and homes which underpinned Swedish policy was downplayed or ignored. At the date of writing (2024), the effect of warfare on innocent civilians remains a global concern for commentators and analysts. Critics of the Hansson government's wartime caution need to bear in mind the real potential threat from the consequences of all belligerents' military operations and remember the democratically elected Swedish wartime governments' primary duty to its citizens and the deeply held beliefs of its Prime Minister, Per Albin Hansson.

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