

NATO and a new international system in the making

Why Sweden will not join NATO?

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Introduction

Relations between Sweden and NATO established right after the creation of the latter. During and after the Cold War deep relations have always been at the centre of attention and posed suspicion that Sweden would give up neutrality and join the alliance. Over the past few years, the rapprochement between the country and the alliance, the change of positions of the public opinion and political representatives as well as the presence of external threats around Sweden, caused by violation of the country's territorial boundaries and threats to the Baltic Sea countries after Russo-Georgian and Crimean wars were the reasons why one of the representatives of the nomadic countries was once again active in the military alliance. Recent events made the issue current and have brought forward the main question of the paper: what factors play a role in changing the attitude of domestic political powers towards membership of NATO? It is possible that the neutrality policy that is established in the political society of the country and the government, might not make membership of an alliance such as NATO a priority, despite external factors. Sweden has a great chance to become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, while actively participating in NATO programs, in addition, the neutrality could not be regarded as a security guarantee for the country that is represented by the measures Sweden takes to strengthen security policy. (Bergqvist, 2016). Taking everything into consideration, the fifth article of the Washington Treaty after NATO membership would become a new and powerful defence mechanism for Sweden. This paper will represent the key role of Sweden in the region while focusing on Swedish-NATO relations and its effect on the neighbouring countries.

Brief Analysis

The Swedish position was clear from the beginning - it was not going to enter the alliance according to neutrality. However, due to foreign policy, NATO's proposed involvement in the projects was one of the mechanisms for implementing security policies for the country. In addition, Sweden's advanced industrial economy and high-tech expertise opportunities in the air, cyber and civil space made the country one of the strongest non-aligned partners. (Gotkowska & Szymański, 2017).

Following the Russo-Georgian and Crimean wars, Sweden's foreign policy agenda was prone to intensify security policy in order to defend itself from Russian aggression. Of course, in this case, the most logical step for Sweden was to get close to NATO. In 2011 Sweden and Finland were the only ones that participated in the annual teaching of crisis management.

Swedish neutrality as a security guarantor could not prevent a simulated attack by Russia on the Stockholm, The first time after the Cold War Russian submarine appeared in the Baltic Sea area and the country also violated Swedish airspace. These and other circumstances contributed to Sweden's entry into NATO's rapid reaction force (ERR) in 2014, the participation in the Icelandic Air Force and the Observation Mission and the signing of the ASDE-AIR Situation Data Exchange in 2014. It is important to mention the agreement between the Alliance and Sweden - Host Nation Support, which states that NATO can use the territory of the country as a result of peace, crisis or conflict in land, sea or airspace, of course after agreement with the partner country. (Forsberg & Vaahtoranta, 2001).

Considering these and other factors, we can say that the consensus established by the political community remains unchanged, although it has little to do with the neutrality declared in 1812. This is, of course, natural, because events in the international system are constantly changing and the current balance gives the country a chance to manoeuvre. (Gotkowska & Szymański, 2017).

The absence of a zero chance of non-alignment is reflected in the official statements and draft laws. It is noteworthy that Sweden's Defense Defense Bill 2016-2020 is prepared by five parties: Social-democrats, Moderate, Green, Centrist and Christian-Democratic parties. It emphasizes that Sweden does not intend to join NATO, it says that it will cooperate with other Scandinavian countries, bilateral politics with Finland, the United Nations and so on.

It is important to mention that a doctrine prepared by the Swedish Defense Minister, Peter Hulqvist is partly looking for balance in cooperation with NATO. It only uses the support of the alliance only to maintain balance. The Defense Minister also said that the close North-European cooperation will be the direct response to the enemy. It also voiced the idea that the United Nations is playing a much greater role in ensuring peace and that it should be the key for Sweden - the North Atlantic Alliance is fully under the UN. (The Ministry of Defense, 2015).

Apparently, the country has not made any statement that would be oriented towards NATO membership. It should also be noted that none of the parties openly support NATO membership. Of course, it is possible to select several parties that think of better defence mechanisms for Sweden in the form of membership in the Alliance. At the same time, it is possible to make a brief analysis of what kind of attitude is within the country, even though there was no necessity to speak about the possibility of membership in NATO. Part of the Left Party and part of the Greens Party consider the North Atlantic Alliance as an instrument of US imperialism in Europe. Ultra-right parties remain loyal to neutrality, although there are separate changes in the party regarding reevaluation of opinions. Radical and left wing and radical-minded people think that defiance of the alliance protects from interference. As for the conservative opposition bloc, which is composed of Moderate, Liberal, Centrist, and Christian-Democratic parties, this block is more supportive of the alliance. In order to see the so-called consensus within the majority of the government, it is enough to present the results of the elections held in the 2014 parliamentary elections. (Gotkowska & Szymański, 2017, 11).

The Baltics and Russia

Sweden's accession in NATO for Russia was always perceived as a threat. The country has repeatedly condemned the entry of the Baltic States into the North Atlantic Alliance, which was mainly represented by threats. From the 1990s, Russia for the second time has begun to react to Sweden's entry into NATO. In May 1997, Russia's Foreign Minister, Evgeni Primakov, was critical of the "founding act" signed between NATO and Sweden. This step by the Swedish side was perceived as a direct blow to Russia. The Federation ignores all other goals of the Alliance, except the military. Therefore, we can say that NATO's accession to the Baltic States does not guarantee Moscow's security. (Blank, 1998, 115).

Facts can prove that Sweden really feels danger from Russia. In 2013, two "tu-22m3" bombshells and four "Sukhoi Su-27" crashes in the 40-kilometre distance from Gotland Island once again has been the challenge for Swedish security. Sweden is trying to strengthen this island, which is one of the strategic objects in the Baltic Sea region and which was virtually unacceptable for so many years. The target of Kremlin's aggression may be the Swedish island in the vicinity of the Russian territory, and that is why it needs to be strengthened. Russian actions did not end by that fact, in 2014 the underwater boat appeared in the Swedish territory. (The

Economist, 2017). It is clear that the country does not have a strong military army nowadays. Within the framework of the domestic policy, attention has been paid to this topic over the last few years, it is said that this issue is more active from the Russo-Georgian war. This is confirmed by the development of the Doctrine by the Minister of Defense that aims to strengthen military forces, and represents an agreement between Finland, Sweden and NATO member states to implement the "Avroa-17" - a clear expression that the Swedish government sees the danger. Sweden has also started compulsory recruitment for women and men, with about 4,000 new recruits. (The Economist, 2017).

Due to Russia's current perspective, he is still sceptical of NATO membership in the Baltic States. But Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, "The honest politician knows very well that Russia will never attack NATO member country. We do not have such a plan. " (Sharkov, 2016). Swedish attitude is also noteworthy, the country wants to sort relations with Russia. This is confirmed by Swedish Foreign Minister Margao Vallström's meeting with her Russian counterpart, under which she underlined the importance of face-to-face dialogue between the two countries. (Winiarski, 2017).

Therefore, according to this chapter, there is a clear threat to Sweden, but it should be noted once again that, due to country's policy, it does not consider necessary to become a member of NATO, only enhances the deepening cooperation between the two sides. In contrast, it is trying to establish a peaceful relationship with Russia, it can be said that Sweden plays the role of mediator between the West and the Federation.

NATO's point of view

Taking into consideration the examples of partnership between Sweden and NATO, both sides should support deepening cooperation. NATO's support for Sweden's statements, including the statement by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, indicates that if Sweden decides to join NATO, he thinks that the country will have a great deal of support from the member states. In addition, the Alliance sees the need for a more deep-seated partnership, sharing information, intelligence and operational awareness. The goal of NATO is also to avoid Sweden's propaganda, misinformation, enhance cybersecurity between the two sides. (Fryc, 2016, 61).

However, the ruling Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom and a number of parties remain in favour of neutrality and their statements have not yet been disclosed in the Alliance's favour.

The USA factor

Speaking of foreign factors, the paper discusses the role of US in Swedish-NATO relations. It is noteworthy that in 2016 it was evident from the very beginning that the country's newly elected president's and Sweden's values did not coincide with each other. Trump declared anti-feminist statements that contradicted the natural environment and the political significance of the principles. Feminist policy spokesperson and Swedish Foreign Minister Margo Vallström said, according to Trump's unpredictability, they do not exactly know how NATO-US relations are going. (Siitonen, 2017.)

The above-mentioned view will be strengthened by Trump's characterization of NATO as an "outdated" mechanism that "cannot cope with terror". He also emphasized the significance of America's importance in the Organization in March 2017 while hosting German Chancellor Angela Merkel, where he expressed his dissatisfaction with German side that is not contributing much in the Alliance. However, it should be highlighted that the Trump administration has not yet had clear statement addressed to Sweden. In 2016, the agreement between the US, Finland and Sweden indicates defence cooperation that despite the personalities of Trump, the Parties will continue to cooperate. Furthermore, the US is considering Russia as a threat to the Baltic States, and therefore, one of the key factors for NATO is to assist non-NATO members. Taking everything into consideration, the Donald Trump factor is not an obstacle to joining NATO. However, it is obvious that, as Margo Vallström said, neutrality and non-alignment allow the country to manoeuvre, which does not exclude cooperation with any of the parties in the international system. (McNamara, 2017).

Sweden and Finland

The common boundary, history, identity and interests between the two countries existed for a long time. The neighboring countries are sympathetic, organizationally different, but being on one geographical ground, essential for each other. One of the factors that gets them closer is that they are not members of the North Atlantic Alliance, unlike other nomadic countries. Both countries understand that in case one of the parties joins NATO, the other side will be forced to

do so, the reliance between the two countries is very important. The unanimity between Sweden and Finland was clearly expressed in May 2014 when Defense Ministers Carl Haglund and Karin Enström presented an action plan that included long-term commitment to defence cooperation between Sweden and Finland in the regional context means strengthening security. As well as cooperative growth in domestic and international levels jointly. (Swedish Defense Forces and Finnish Defense Forces, 2015).

The Swedish Foreign Minister once again emphasized the significance of the country's neutrality in January 2016 and told Finland that the country would not change its existing foreign policy. Later, at the end of 2016, Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven added to Vallström's statement that the change of country's foreign policy would be an unmistakable behaviour, an unexpected process that would change the status quo. Vallström and Löfven's statements can be perceived as a message for Finland, to prove that Sweden will remain loyal to the neighbour.

Thus, one of the motive powers in maintaining neutrality has been identified in political terms. Strengthening the policy of non-alignment and the commitment of the foreign course to Sweden is determined by the reliability of the neighbouring country, the sovereignty and identity of the countries are closely linked to each other. (Juntunen, 2018).

Swedish society

For liberal democracies, it is necessary to take into account the public opinion. We can say that people's opinions and foreign policy are the foremost for countries in this form of democracy – the leader follows the decisions of the masses. In the case of Sweden, a clear example of the previously mentioned is an attempt of creating atomic bomb in 1945-1968, which was resisted by the society, tensions between the ruling team and the people were so intense that the Swedish government was forced to refuse the plan. (Jonter, 2010, pp. 61-65).

The "Swedish model" in the majority of the society still maintains popularity, indeed, a good Swede is a neutral Swede. Why should the country lose its sovereignty and engage in conflicts while the neutrality of 200 years has brought peace? In addition, as discussed in the paper, the Social-Democratic Party, which remained for decades in the government is opposed to joining the North Atlantic Alliance. However, this does not mean that the public perception is no longer important, the country is a liberal democrat, and therefore, if the public changes its

attitude, the government will also have to change the foreign course. After the Russo-Georgian and Crimean wars, the Swedish community is more and more likely to join NATO. In spite of all, there has been no serious response from the public so far that the issue of joining NATO was on the agenda - the referendum is a distant future prospect.

Conclusion

The paper aimed at studying the key factors that led to the relationship between Sweden and the North Atlantic Alliance. As discussed in the main part of the work, NATO is not a priority issue for the country; Sweden remains committed to neutrality, which, according to the research, is a foreign policy mechanism. In order to strengthen the above mentioned, the foreign factors that are attributable to the relationship between the alliance and the country were brought in and taken into consideration. Specifically, analysis has shown the issue of unpopularity. Deliberating about Swedish-NATO relations, it can be said that there is a goodwill between both sides. In analyzing Russia's policy, the paper emphasized the fact that the Republic saw the prospect of Sweden's membership. The paper also mentioned Sweden's desire to negotiate with Russia. As for Finland, the work has shown a trust factor between the two neighbouring countries and aspects of general policy. The research partially touched upon the US topic, Donald Trump's dependence on the Alliance and the course towards Sweden. In analyzing the public opinion, the importance of the society was shown and the widespread notion of Swedes was underlined.

In conclusion, the country's neutrality is a priority that does not need NATO membership, more precisely, because of the 200 years consensus in Swedish political society joining the Alliance does not represent the agenda.

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