

Northern Flank by Göran Haglund

Hunting submarines and killers

After a period of relative lull, Swedish men-of-war have again opened fire on a "foreign" submarine.

There were months of relative peace in Swedish-Soviet relations, due to a long, icy winter unsuitable for submarine incursions, and the Social Democratic regime's resolve not to let anything upset the prime minister's visit to Moscow in April. But on June 6, Sweden's National Day, Swedish warships opened fire on an intruding submarine.

Although lesser incidents in what the Swedish government euphemistically terms "foreign underwater activity" are reported continuously, this is the first actual submarine hunt since 1984, when 2,000 men tried for over a month to catch a submarine near the Karlskrona naval base, site of the famous 1981 "Whiskey on the Rocks" incident, in which a Soviet submarine of the Whiskey class ran aground in militarily restricted waters.

Two days after Navy exercises began on June 2 in the archipelago north-east of Stockholm, sonar contact by patrol boats and observation by private persons indicated the presence of a foreign submarine. After new sonar contacts on June 6 and 7, several depth charges and some 50 anti-submarine grenades were launched.

No evidence is available to suggest that the submarine was hit. But the very fact of a new submarine hunt, occurring after weeks of publicity about Soviet plans to kidnap the Swedish king and plots by Soviet spetsnaz commando units to kill Air Force pilots, catalyzed public outrage.

This coincided with the results of a grass-roots fund-raising drive for the

Navy. Initiated after the "Whiskey on the Rocks" incident by pensioner Nils Arvidsson in the little village of Åseda, tens of thousands of small contributions have accumulated a sum of Skr 1.2 million, officially given to Navy Chief Bengt Schuback at the National Day parade in Åseda, in a live broadcast on national TV.

"We who during World War II had the world's fifth strongest navy, today can no longer protect ourselves from coastal intrusions," said Arvidsson, explaining the reason for his initiative.

This sentiment was also reflected in newspaper editorials calling for upgrading military defense, particularly making it a national priority to acquire the capability to either sink a Soviet submarine, or force it to the surface.

"The situation of the submarine hunt can be compared to the hunt for Olof Palme's murderer," *Svenska Dagbladet* editorialized on June 9. "The unreserved, operative goal of the police is to catch the murderer and have him convicted. The unreserved, operative goal of the Swedish military is to catch red-handed those who are preparing a military assault on Sweden."

The paper promptly backed off from the implication of Soviet involvement in *both* cases: "The difference between the hunt for the murderer and the submarine hunt is that in the latter case, we know who is guilty. . . ."

A less concealed connection between the authorship of the Palme

murder and the submarine incursions had already been made the day before by Navy Commander Hans von Hofsten, known as the spokesman of the "Swedish officers' revolt." In a June 8 *Dagens Nyheter* op-ed, Hofsten, formerly the chief officer of the destroyer *Halland* and now the head of the Navy Staff's Nautical Department, listed the Palme murder as part of a series of Soviet pre-war operations against Sweden.

Without even mentioning the word "Soviet," Hofsten made his point plain, polemicizing against the official doctrine that there will be plenty of warning-time before any attack:

"An authoritative military source has said that 'I definitely do not believe in anything like a coup assault as a bolt from a clear sky.' This must be axiomatically true. But is our security political sky clear?"

"Is it clear, when foreign naval forces operate one year after another on Swedish territory?"

"Is it clear, when our defense forces get involved in week-long operations with live ammunition inside the bases and ports of the Navy?"

"Is it clear, when you see a foreign power probably planning the assassination of our fighter pilots?"

"Is it clear, when the superpower on the opposite shore retools its fighter formations to fighter bomber formations?"

"Is it clear, when foreign jet fighters make grave and repeated intrusions?"

"Is it clear, when the prime minister is assassinated?"

"What else has to happen to make the sky seem cloudy? After all unanimous talk of the strongly increased strategic significance of the Nordic countries, you don't have to be an alarmist to recall Churchill's words of *The Gathering Storm*."