

Northern Flank by Göran Haglund

Commander Hofsten sounds the alarm

A Swedish officer warns that a Soviet attack is a real threat, even probable, and breaks with the country's "neutrality" taboos.

The Soviet Union is conducting advanced war preparations on our territory. I do not rule out the possibility of an isolated attack against Sweden. Completely without any forewarning and without any preceding crisis in Central Europe."

Those are the opening words of an interview with Navy Commander Hans von Hofsten, published on March 3 in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, a daily based in Malmö, southern Sweden. The harsh warning issued by an active officer and former chief commander of a destroyer, now the head of the Navy Staff's Nautical Department, has in effect added his professional weight to a campaign launched at the end of February by the Schiller Institute.

In a series of public forums throughout Sweden and a new mass-distribution pamphlet, "The Russian War Machine," the Schiller Institute has documented the Soviet military build-up, and called for Sweden to join the Western alliance, contribute to the U.S. Strategic Defensive Initiative (SDI), and to its European tactical (TDI) complement, as well as obtaining neutron weapons as the best defense against a Soviet invasion.

After an initial round of five campaign forums in southern Swedish towns, the regional daily *Småalänningen* on March 7 ran a full-page article, headlined, "The Schiller Institute: The Red Army is Being Built to Expand Soviet Territory." The daily described the new pamphlet, noting that Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-La-Rouche is now the chairman of a political party, Patriots for Germany.

Without directly commenting on the Schiller Institute campaign, Hofsten, in his March 3 interview, broke with Swedish "neutrality" protocol, naming the enemy:

"It is obvious that the Soviets are conducting energetic preparations for a surprise strike. . . . The underwater activity has been chiefly concentrated at Navy bases, the permanent facilities of the coastal artillery, the mined areas, and larger ports. One is interested in Air Force radar stations and is mapping their personnel. An investigation commissioned by the Commander-in-Chief, for example, showed that in the Östersund region, less than 3% of the population had been visited by Polish art salesmen. But 60% of those visited were Air Force pilots. This cannot be accidental."

Hofsten disagreed with official Swedish security policy, which assumes advance warning provided by a crisis situation in Central Europe:

"It is a Swedish and Western point of view that Sweden is interesting merely as a transit country in the event of a great European war. One forgets that the Soviet Union is conducting a long-term and aggressive foreign policy, characterized by successively moving its positions forward, as long as that can be done without engaging in open conflict with the main adversary.

"Through a sudden, well-prepared and broadly deployed sabotage operation . . . followed by occupation troops rapidly moved in from peacetime units, one can quickly get our

country under control. I can hardly believe that NATO would have the resolve and capacity to intervene fast enough, as long as the Soviet attack is limited to Sweden.

"An occupation of Sweden would give the Soviets significant strategic advantages. Norway cannot be defended. The Murmansk base will be well protected. The Soviet Union, in effect, would be on the Atlantic." Breaking another taboo of Swedish neutrality, Hofsten raised the issue of a Swedish alliance with the West:

"We have really only two alternatives. Either to join NATO or to organize our defense such that the threshold is increased. It does not necessarily have to mean more aircraft, vessels, and tanks. But we need a certain number of units permanently organized for war, chiefly from the Navy and the Air Force. Some form of standing alert, which reduces the probability of success of a surprise attack, and which can protect our mobilization."

Hofsten asserted that many senior officers share his professional view, but sometimes distrust his openness: "I have been obliged to make it clear that I am speaking as a private person and individual officer. But somebody must speak a clear language. Neither the authorities nor the Swedish people seem to realize what is happening. At any rate, nobody is prepared to take the consequences."

Speaking to journalists that same evening, Commander-in-Chief Bengt Gustafsson called for a new defense debate, saying, "Completely wrong issues have been discussed by the politicians," who have "not discussed defense goals with the Swedish people." Noting the inadequacy of the new defense bill, Gustafsson asked whether Sweden is expected to defeat a superpower tank assault on its southern plains.