

Northern Flank by Göran Haglund

Selling out the Baltic to Russia

Facing Soviet threats, the Swedish regime signals a potential surrender of rights in the Baltic Sea.

In talks between Sweden and the Soviet Union, the Swedes have signaled their readiness to give up part of the Swedish economic zone in the Baltic Sea to the Russians. The Swedish regime's potential surrender of important economic and strategic interests follows a persistent pattern of Soviet military incursions and provocations in the Baltic.

The Russians have long disputed Sweden's rights to a 13,500 square-kilometer area in the Baltic Sea, along the western side of a half-way line drawn between Sweden and the Soviet-occupied Baltic coast. The disputed sea strip is located immediately to the east of Sweden's largest island, Gotland, the existence of which is ignored by the Soviet's own "half-way" line, drawn between the Swedish mainland and the Soviet Baltic coast.

Pending a negotiated agreement, the disputed sea strip forms a so-called white zone, which is open, for example, to fishers from all countries. The Soviets want instead to have the disputed area recognized as a "grey zone," in which Sweden and the U.S.S.R. jointly would exercise common jurisdiction, excluding third countries.

While fishing interests in the white zone are not unimportant, the precise border between the Swedish and Soviet economic zones will determine which one of the two states has the right to other forms of economic exploitation, for example drilling for oil, as well as non-civilian use of the area. But going beyond even such bilateral economic or strategic issues, at stake

here is two contrary views of the accessibility of the Baltic Sea.

Going back well over a century, since no later than Russia's 1809 occupation of Finland, Moscow has wanted to make the Baltic Sea a Russian lake, with limited or no access for states other than those situated on the Baltic coast. As the hegemonic Baltic power, Russia would then dominate the Baltic Sea. Sweden's national interest has been, and remains, that the Baltic Sea is an open sea where ships from any nation, for example France, Britain, or the U.S., can navigate freely.

In the negotiations with the Soviets, Sweden has therefore maintained that either an agreement must be reached regarding the disputed sea strip, or the sea strip remains a white zone, open to all.

The recent signals by the Swedish Social Democratic regime indicate a readiness to strike a compromise, where about 20% of the disputed area would be given to the Soviets. Such an approach, which is completely unprincipled from the standpoint of international law, means a return to the Swedish conciliatory line of 1981-82.

In spite of an unprecedented Soviet submarine incursion on Oct. 27, 1981, where a Soviet Whiskey-class submarine got stuck on a rock in militarily restricted waters, Sweden's then center-liberal coalition government, visibly supported by the Social-Democratic opposition, reopened long-interrupted talks on the economic zones in the Baltic Sea. At the time, the

Swedes floated a trial balloon which meant giving up 13% of the disputed sea strip.

As the Russians bluntly refused the concession as too small, and the humiliating proceedings were leaked to the public, a further concession going up to 20% of the area, already prepared by the Swedish foreign ministry, was never made. Under domestic political pressure, the government claimed that the 13% concession had been withdrawn, and that the negotiations were again back to square one: The half-way line was to be asserted uncompromised. But the damage had already been done.

Through the six years since, the Russians have waited for the Swedish appeasement faction to again assert itself in the foreign ministry preparation of this issue. Indicating a new readiness to accept compromises on several occasions during the spring of 1987, as part of Soviet party boss Mikhail Gorbachov's "liberal" reforms, Moscow has again duped the Swedes into gradually selling out increasing percentages of their economic zone in the Baltic, in exchange for a pat on the back in *Pravda* or *Izvestia*.

Where the carrot isn't attractive enough, the stick is applied liberally. In recent days, several new submarine incursions have been reported by observers whose credibility cannot be doubted. And an airliner pilot, with past experience in the Swedish Air Force, revealed that Warsaw Pact jet fighters regularly exercise tailing Swedish airliners en route through civilian air corridors over Baltic international waters, positioning themselves for firing a missile, and attaching their target radars to the airliner. Knowing that Warsaw Pact air combat training always occurs with live ammunition, the pilot said this means you know you're within one push of the button from death.