

Defending Sweden under the new government coalition

The September, 2014, national elections presented an unusual outcome. The right-wing coalition "The Alliance" had lost power, after eight years of rule. The Social democrats had increased their support among the voters, but was not able to form a majority coalition. The xenophobic and value conservative party the 'Sweden Democrats' had doubled their percentage to almost 14 %. The government solution became a coalition between the Social Democrats and the Green Party. The Green Party had never before been in power, and had also lost a few per cent's support since the last election. The Social Democrats on their part have since 1932 had the prime-ministerial post for all but fifteen years (with 44 consecutive years from 1932-1976). Together, the two parties represent 36.9 % of the votes.

The Social Democrats and the Green Party are unlikely and uncomfortable bedfellows when it comes to defence policy. The Social Democrats represent the stable and proud traditions of non-alliance to military alliances (i.e. NATO) paired with a high Swedish autarky for arms and defence technology. The Green Party represents a radical, anti-industrialist, pacifist, anti-nuclear energy and defence-sceptic electorate. This Party, that does not have a Party Leader but pairs of Spokesmen/-women, has been accustomed to being a criticizing party in opposition, and will now have to negotiate and accommodate within the mutual decision-making of a government coalition (with the Social Democrats representing five times as many votes). The political area where these two parties differ the most is probably the defence area.

The Green Party before the elections expressed sharp criticism to costly, indigenous arms projects as Gripen and submarines. They have also expressed skepticism to arms export in general, and demand far-reaching restrictions for which nations Sweden can export to.

The Social Democrats, however, express strong support for that Sweden must have a credible defence that can operate in the now more threatening, near environment in the Baltic Sea. They are also positive to supporting Swedish industry in general and also

defence industry. Remember that the Prime Minister Stefan Löfvén is a former national union leader, and who started his work career as a welder with the defence company Hägglunds. So what is new with the new government?

To start with, there are a number of already launched reform projects, that the present government supported under the previous government, and continue to support: the 2009-2019 Defence reform (to create a more accessible, operative and agile military); the defence logistics reform (2013 onwards); the Air Defence 2040 Committee; and the termination of conscription in 2010 and introduction of all-voluntary soldiers.

There are also ongoing assessments soon to be published, led by non-political committees on several topics that will result in changes: the KRUT committee (April, 2015) on how the Swedish arms export should be regulated in order to better support human rights and democratic values; and the quinquennial (five year) Defence Direction Bill (April, 2015).

The new defence minister Mr. Peter Hultqvist has more clearly than the previous stressed the strategic importance of supporting the existing two vital strategic interests (*Combat aircraft* and *underwater technology*) and suggests to formulate further (that enable exceptions from Article 346 in the Defence and Security Procurement Directive). In a recent newspaper interview he suggested C3I as a candidate for becoming a vital strategic interest. Otherwise, there are no new, major defence materiel acquisition plans with the new government – the acquisition plans are overall unchanged.

In the new government's first budget bill of October, 2014, they declared continued support for 60 Gripen E, and for continued development of submarine NGU. This must have been most reluctantly accepted by the Green Party. However, the budget bill also declared that the Defence Export Authority FXM was to be closed down by January 1, 2017 – this likely being the Green Party's trophy in a defence policy negotiation with the Social democrats.

The defence ministers of Sweden and Finland on January 12, 2015 jointly declared a profound pact between the two nations for military cooperation; its militaries shall act jointly and give reciprocal support. Regarding the pact with Finland, Swedish Defence minister stressed that it creates options for action for Sweden and Finland, and a threshold effect for potential aggressors (i.e. Russia).

In a recent speech on March 2, Mr. Hultqvist underlined that Sweden in its military ambitions and obligations is cooperating on a number of arenas: as a member of EU, for the UN, together with NATO, with the Baltic States, within the Nordic cooperative organization NORDEFECO, towards the Scandinavian North and the Arctic, in a pact with Finland, together with Denmark (regarding the shared strait between the two), and finally with the US. The development of Gripen would not be possible without a trustful and close cooperation with the US. Regarding NATO, Hultqvist specified that Sweden towards NATO is in a 'cooperative mode', not a 'membership mode'. Comment: the practical difference may not be very big, but not being a member excludes Sweden from access to the innermost strategic discussions within NATO.

The Foreign minister Ms. Margot Wallström reluctantly mentions NATO specifically (since Sweden is non-aligned – a holy principle for the Social democrats) and stresses that there is no military alliance between Sweden and Finland; it is a 'pact'. Furthermore, in 2015 the government will present its 'feminist foreign policy'. The entire foreign policy should not be understood as being foremost a feminist policy. However, the Swedish foreign policy and the actions of the Foreign Service should (according to the political rhetoric) be permeated by – and have as an integral, shared set of values – that gender issues and women's rights in all aspects of work, education of society must be seen as a non-negotiable trademark of Swedish foreign policy.

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