

# Sweden's Supreme Commander demands break with Palme policy

by Michael Ericson

"In 1972 the decision of 'fixed defense costs' was taken. We protested already at that time, and said it would never work. If we don't break with that principle and get a real growth in the defense budget, as in Denmark, Norway, and the Soviet Union, 30 years from now we will have halved our defense one more time."

Swedish Supreme Commander Bengt Gustafsson set off a political bombshell only two weeks after the Sept. 18 general elections. The above is roughly how he, at a well-attended press conference in Stockholm, explained why Parliament's five-year defense plan from last November has already collapsed.

The crisis of Sweden's defense is so acute that if things don't change, the Army will have to stop payments in a couple of months. Nor are the other branches of the Armed Forces much better off.

Supreme Commander Gustafsson chose this occasion to launch—without mentioning Olof Palme's name—a frontal attack on the late premier's defense policy which goes back to 1972. According to Palme's thinking, "an active international peace policy" would guarantee Sweden's security, while defense spending is frozen. "Not another crown [the Swedish currency] for defense" became one of the sacrosanct watchwords of the Swedish Social Democracy.

The Armed Forces had to continue finding their way out of "savings" imposed upon their own activity.

The result is well known in Sweden. Operational units of the Air Force and the Navy have been halved since the beginning of the 1970s—in a country which since the late 1970s has been penetrated by Russian submarine operations almost monthly!

Many political analysts in Sweden expected the financial crisis of the Armed Forces to be solved by formally cutting the Army to half of its former combat strength. Such a proposal could not be presented before the Sept. 18 elections, but was to be brought up right afterwards.

This writer warned that this political tactic could turn out to be very dangerous for its architects. They could be faced with an officers' revolt, which could rapidly gain broad popular support. I compared the staging of the September 1988 elections to those which occurred in 1985, when Olof Palme

ordered the media to keep the lid on all debate of real issues, and after Palme's party won the elections, a revolt broke out in the military, farm, and labor sectors.

## Gustafsson turns the tables

Supreme Commander Gustafsson, who was appointed only two years ago after a meteoric rise in the Army, actually did follow the planned script, but in a way that could turn the tables.

The "plan" he presented made it clear to everybody that the existing defense budget is a disaster. The Supreme Commander stated openly that this was not "his plan," but the best thing he could propose with the money he got from the Parliament. He accused the politicians of assigning the Armed Forces a task, without allocating the financial means for them to be able to carry out the assignment.

He says openly now that he wishes to see a great national debate on the defense policy of Sweden, and that he himself will present his proposal for Sweden's defense Oct. 14. Then, he will have to take a definite stand on a series of crucial questions concerning the Swedish defense that have to be addressed in the coming years.

He has already leaked that one of his proposals will be a demand for 3% real growth in the defense budget. Living under the continuous threat of a Soviet surprise attack, Sweden of course needs much more, but the demand would definitely make a significant break with the 20 years of Palme's disastrous defense policy.

## The 'disaster plan'

The proposed "disaster plan" to stop the financial bleeding of the Armed Forces includes:

- Most of the money is saved by cutting the mandatory military service in the Army from today's 7.5 months to 2.5 for one-sixth and 5 months for one-ninth of the conscripts. In the public debate the 2.5 month military "training" has been compared to the training which the boy soldiers of Khomeini got before being sent out to a sure death.

- The total number of Army brigades that can be mobilized (Sweden has a conscript army and no standing army) are cut from 28 to 21, a proposal which includes shutting

down 10 regiments, i.e., training camps, of the Army. Four of the remaining regiments will, however, still be very unmodern.

- The Navy has to cut its order of five Swedish-made submarines, the Submarine 90, to three and just build one, instead of three planned batteries for a new coastal surface-to-surface missile.

- No more development projects will be ordered from the highly developed Swedish defense industry, which has not seen new such contracts for a long time now. The Supreme Commander warns in his report that "the technological capacity of that industry will rapidly deteriorate." This is an industry that most Swedes are rightfully very proud of.

- The delays in developing the new Swedish air fighter, the "Gripen," have made it impossible to get a sufficient overview to plan cuts in the Air Force for the moment, the report states. But as soon as the picture is cleared, cuts have to be taken.

### The revolt

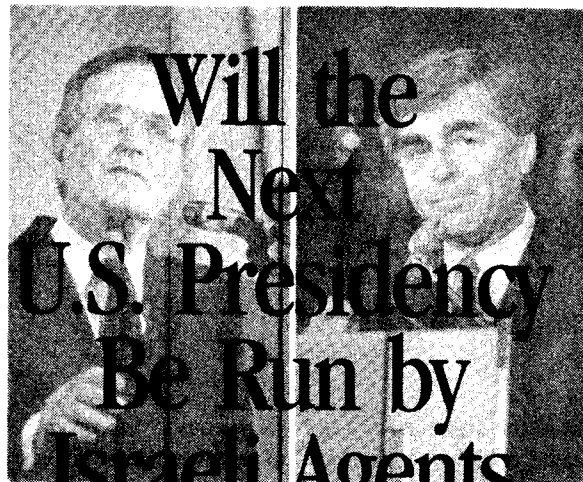
"You are lying!" shouted the men in uniform in front of the TV cameras to the Supreme Commander, on a visit to explain the emergency plan at the regiment of Vaexjoe, now threatened with shutdown. One interviewed military officer looked straight into the camera and appealed to the viewers of prime-time TV news: "I tell you, the fault of this is the politicians who don't wish to defend this country. For God's sake *Svensson* [all ordinary Swedes]: Do something!"

The reactions to the proposed plan have been very strong both from the military men and the general public, but not much has been said by either the politicians or the media. They have been tied up figuring out what to do with the situation that emerged after the elections of Sept. 18. Not only did the Green Party enter the Swedish Parliament for the first time, but the small Communist Party also got onto the defense committee of the Parliament for the first time in Swedish history, as did the Greenies, after some political maneuvering.

In the general election, the Social Democratic party lost 1% of its voter base, but it will be able to continue to govern with the support of at least one other party. That means that for the next three years, the Social Democrats can rule by themselves, either by turning for support to the Communists or the Greenies, or by putting forward a proposal which one of the non-socialist parties will support.

In reality, because of the tremendous problems Sweden has to deal with, that means that the political battles of the coming period will be fought out inside the Social Democratic Party.

The big defense debate now triggered is no exception: The defense minister, the old trade union leader Roine Carlsson, has already told his own Supreme Commander, who has well-known good connections in the party, that "there will be no talk about more money for defense."



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