



If Sweden is attacked, the Swedish Armed Forces, with the support of the rest of the total defence, will defend Sweden in order to buy time, create room for manoeuvre and ultimately safeguard the country's independence. The resistance will be resolute and sustained. (Jimmy Croona/Swedish Armed Forces)

Rebuilding Total Defense in a Globalized Deregulated Economy

The Case of Sweden

By Karl Lallerstedt

National defence is often focused on military strategy, i.e. various ways of reducing an adversary's physical capacity and/or willingness to fight. However, the military assets of a state are only one aspect of its potential to deter and withstand aggression. The military capacity becomes largely irrelevant without broader societal resilience to withstand efforts to incapacitate the functionality of society, upon which both sustained military capacity and the political decision-making apparatus are dependent. Hence, military capacity needs to be seen in a broader context of total defense, or comprehensive defense.

During the Cold War, Sweden had one of the most comprehensive total defense systems in the world, only to dismantle it following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. This article gives a background on Sweden's decision to reestablish total defense, highlights some of the shortcomings in national preparedness laid bare by the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, lists a number of inherent challenges in creating a new total defense structure, and proposes some solutions to addressing these challenges. Perhaps some of the lessons being learned in Sweden could be of value to other states deciding to orientate toward a more comprehensive defense approach.¹

Building up an effective total defense system is both complex and costly, and political wishful thinking about the true costs of establishing a robust total defense system likely constitutes the single biggest threat to its effective implementation.

Sweden's Decision to Reestablish a Total Defense System

The Western optimism that characterized the early post-Cold War era has increasingly been replaced by concerns about the state of the global order, with 2020 being the 15th consecutive year of declining global freedom.² Democratic institutions are even under assault in some European NATO member states.

At the same time as Western values and cohesiveness are weakening, technological developments are making our societies more vulnerable. Digitalization has made key functions of modern society vulnerable to cyberattacks and has created new possibilities for influence operations. The development of long-range precision munitions has also made key infrastructure easier to target than ever before.

Against this backdrop of a more vulnerable West, Russian and Chinese power projection capacities and assertiveness have grown. For European states, the Russian invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine

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in 2014, where conflict is still ongoing, as well as massive regional military exercises, have been particularly alarming.

Albeit perhaps somewhat late in the game, several European states have finally woken up to the realization that the previous neglect of territorial defense in the early post-Cold War era can no longer continue. All European NATO states (except Belgium and Croatia) spent greater proportions of gross domestic product (GDP) on defense in 2019 than they did in 2014.³

The dismantling of the Warsaw Pact and the dissolution of the Soviet Union has shifted the key military focus in Europe from the former West German border to the Baltic region where Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania constitute a vulnerable de facto NATO “island” directly on the Russian border.

A conflict in the Baltics between NATO and Russia would almost inevitably involve the territory of neighboring non-NATO states Sweden and Finland. Use of their airspace would be key to shielding the Baltic States, or conversely to prevent NATO’s access. Consequently, NATO partners Sweden and Finland have reversed their previously declining military expenditure trends in the last few years.

Finland, having won its independence from Russia only in 1917, having suffered a communist-backed civil war and two Soviet invasion attempts since, as well as sharing a 1,340 kilometer long border with its eastern neighbor, is an exceptional case amongst Western European states. It never dismantled its conscript-based military and has the capacity to mobilize over 200,000 reservists should the need arise.⁴ Sweden, on the other



Finnish conscripts giving their military oath. They are wearing camouflage uniforms m/91 and carrying Sako m/95 7.62x39 assault rifle (Kalashnikov variant). (Karri Huhtanen from Tampere, Finland)

hand, abandoned its conscript training system for all practical purposes, only to reinstate it in 2018. But Swedish conscription is at present limited, and unlike in Finland, far from universal.

In addition to not having abandoned conscription, the Finnish state also maintained its total defense system—named comprehensive national defense—since 2010. Considering that Sweden swiftly and comprehensively dismantled its total defense system after the Cold War, it is somewhat ironic that Finland’s total defense concept was initially inspired by the Swedish total defense system.

With the renewed perception that territorial defense must be the priority for Sweden’s armed forces, it logically follows that some form of the total defense concept needs to be reestablished. In the summer of 2016, the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency published a document outlining a common vision for planning the country’s total defense system.⁵ Since then planning regarding total defense has been ongoing, including various government commissioned inquiries and a total defence exercise.

In 2021 a government commissioned enquiry presented its recommendations for the organization of the civilian side of total defense, and the government announced that a new government authority for psychological defense⁶ was to be established in 2022.⁷ Other government enquiries have been commissioned, and are planned, and although miniscule sums compared to the planned military budget the defense budget for 2021-25 does include increased spending on the civilian side of total defense.⁸

Background to the Present Situation Regarding Total Defense

During the peak strength of the Swedish armed forces in the 1960s, with the military possessing 1,000 aircraft and 1,500 combat vehicles, around 850,000 men and women could be mobilized. The mobilized armed forces were to a great extent

self-sustaining during the initial stages of a conflict, with an abundance of stores of every conceivable type, and with their own field hospitals, slaughterhouses, field bakeries, and kitchens, etc.

Whereas in the past, the Swedish military was in a position to support society, today the roles have been reversed. At fully mobilized strength, the armed forces today number around 50,000 uniformed personnel, a small number compared to today’s Swedish population, which exceeds 10 million inhabitants. The military is also less self-sustaining than in the past, with private companies supplying food services, and reliance on mobilized field hospitals being replaced by a reliance on the regular health system in the case of conflict.

The old total defense system rested on four pillars: military, civilian, psychological, and economic defense. The military’s own significant total defense capacity under the command of the military commander in chief, a civilian commander in chief headed the National Board of Civilian Preparedness, and two separate director generals headed the National Board of Psychological Defense and the National Board of Economic Defense.

Of these four pillars, only the much reduced military structure, which was primarily orientated toward foreign operations under UN aegis in the post–Cold War era, remained. This radically downsized military no longer saw a need for self-reliance, as had been the case during the period of focus on territorial defense until the collapse of the Soviet Union. In turn, it became much more dependent upon private service suppliers, rather than maintaining its own extensive in-house logistical capacity.

Yet despite the effective dismantling of many of the structures of an all-encompassing total defense system, a number of the laws granting the state significant rights to commandeer private individuals, firms, and property remain on the statute books. For practical purposes, however,

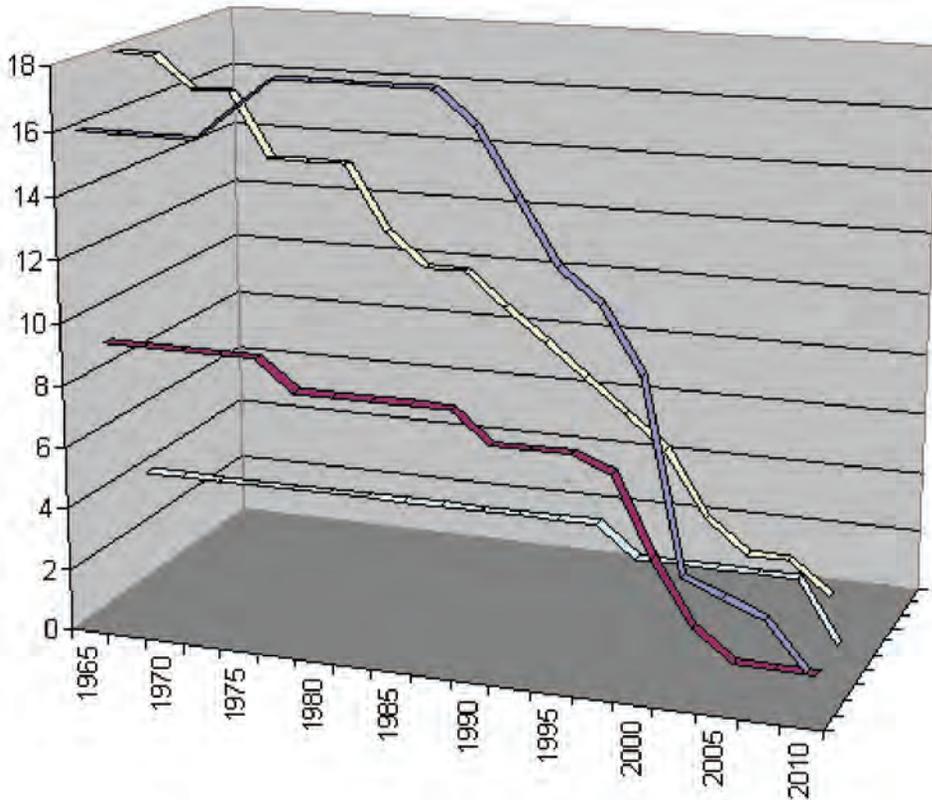


Chart showing the size of the Swedish Armed Forces 1965–2010. Yellow = number of air wings; Blue = number of infantry regiments; Red = number of artillery regiments; Green = number of coastal artillery and amphibious regiments. (Walle83)

without the proper structures and preparedness through regular and extensive exercises, the very wide legal powers enjoyed by the state will be extremely difficult to implement should the pre-conditions for their use arise. Under present law a state of war, or a government decision to “raise readiness” due to a perceived imminent threat of war, is required for most of these legal instruments to become available to the state.

The more limited powers—available to the state under normal peacetime conditions—do empower the state to place certain demands on private enterprise and to require them to participate in exercises. Yet there are many challenges and uncertainties regarding how this will be implemented in practice considering that the structures for use of such legislation are not yet in place, and

a considerably greater proportion of important infrastructure is not only in private hands, but also exposed to much fiercer global competition than in the past. This means that any burdens placed on Swedish businesses without adequate compensation risks hurting the the very enterprises most needed in a robust total defense system.

Lessons from COVID-19

The early stages of the pandemic illustrated the shortcomings in Sweden’s national preparedness, which have implications for the future development of total defense:

- When the pandemic hit, several Swedish regions had no stockpiles of personal protective equipment, despite recommendations from the

National Board of Health and Welfare to have such. Stockpiles of a range of other essential items—such as foodstuffs—do not exist either.

- No preexisting structures or preparedness existed to utilize the capacity of domestic producers to start producing essential items such as protective equipment and disinfectants.
- Emergency legal frameworks to facilitate the production of essential items did not exist, but had to be developed during the crisis, such as exceptions or simplifications of complex regulatory requirements required by the Swedish Chemicals Agency.
- Despite reliance on global supply chains, structures for coordination and cooperation proved insufficient, and early stages of the crisis showed that even within the European common market, individual member states blocked delivery of protective equipment en route to Sweden from third countries.
- Beyond handling the threat to life and health posed by the pandemic, the economic consequences of the crisis proved even more significant. Here Sweden was lucky that its relatively recent experience of a financial crisis in the 1990s and the financial consequences of the 2008 Lehman bankruptcy had left an institutional memory enabling it to relatively rapidly adopt measures to prevent an economic free fall. Yet there were aspects of the measures implemented—such as relatively high interest rates for loans offered to firms—suggesting that parts of the response were more of a copy-paste of the last economic crisis, rather than a ready-made and updated solution taken off the shelf for a contemporary crisis.

In short, the pandemic showed in a very concrete way that stockpiles, structures for coordinating private sector efforts, emergency legislation to reduce red tape, and economic recovery plans all need to be

in place before a crisis occurs. From the perspective of total defense—where a conflict in the region is the likely scenario—disruptions to society would be much greater than those caused by a pandemic. The shortcomings in the medical field would extend to all critical sectors of the economy, and the economic effect would be of a much greater order of magnitude. Under present conditions, it is very likely that the result of such a scenario would have been an utter collapse of the functionality of the economy.

The utility of Sweden’s armed forces—if society ceased to function—would become irrelevant. It is therefore apparent that securing a holistic total defense should be the primary national security priority of the Swedish state. Yet in practice, the Swedish focus the last few years has been too one-sided, rightly reestablishing military territorial defense but neglecting the more comprehensive defense requirements of the economy, upon which the military’s functionality is dependent.

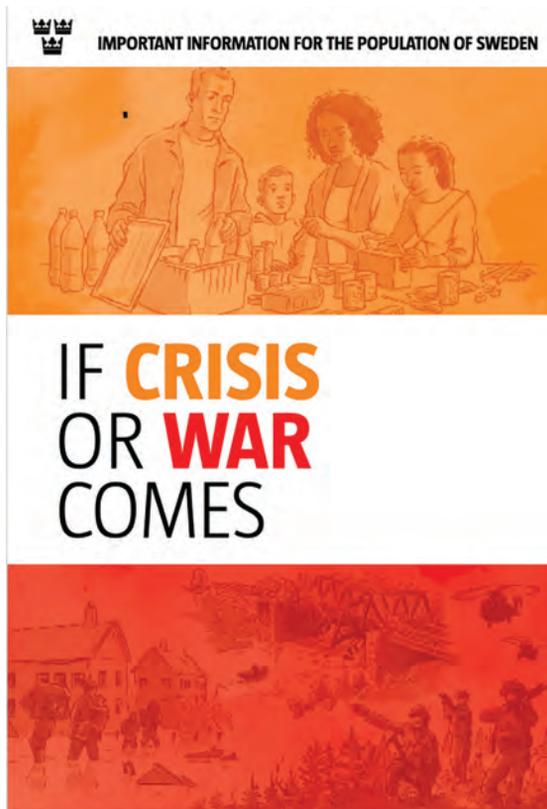
Challenges in Reestablishing a Total Defense System

The Swedish state is committed to the reestablishment of a total defense structure, yet the process is taking a long time—hardly surprising considering the immense complexity of the task.

There are a number of key challenges a state faces in such a process, which are listed below (not in order of priority):

The Inherent Difficulty in Building Up a System Without Setting Goals

Although the Swedish Armed Forces and the Civil Contingencies Agency formulated their common basic vision document for total defense back in 2016, concrete levels of “resilience” (such as stockpile levels and redundancy requirements in critical infrastructure) have not yet been set. Creating a new structure without having a clear goal in mind about the desired outcome is inherently difficult.



"If Crisis or War Comes:" pamphlet distributed by Swedish government to every household in Sweden in 2018. (Chris Redan)

A number of government commissions have been established to investigate particular aspects of total defense, but the approach so far has been a patchwork lacking an overarching strategy. Arguably, it would have made more sense to start with a holistic approach, determining what actually needs to be achieved and the overarching structures required to realize this vision, and following that tasking the specific government commissions with implementation. The current approach of starting with the specifics is like putting the cart before the horse—it has made the findings of the commissions less useful, and as the overarching questions have not yet been answered, much valuable time has been lost and the window of opportunity that an opponent can utilize to strike an ill-prepared society will be left wide open for longer.

Outdated Legislative Framework

As mentioned previously though the total defense structures were dismantled after the Cold War, much of the legislation remains on the statute books. In one sense this is positive—at least there are some legal powers that can be utilized by the state—but in practice it contributes to a false sense of security. The fact that the law empowers the state to place significant requirements on both public and private actors does not account for the radical change in how the economy is structured since the introduction of those laws.

Before the end of the Cold War, a much larger proportion of Swedish critical infrastructure was in the hands of public monopolies, including telecommunications, the postal service, pharmacies, the health care system, public transportation, the railways, and TV and radio. Furthermore, most of the energy supply was controlled by the state. Since then privatization, deregulation, and entry into the European Common Market transformed most of these parts of the economy to areas where private actors exposed to competition play a dominant role. Consequently, in the past, large total defense costs for stockpiling, redundancy, and readiness training could be concealed in the operational costs of public monopolies. However, this is impossible in the current reality where private actors exposed to constant transnational competition, is the norm.

Requiring a Swedish company to absorb higher costs due to total defense requirements will make that company less competitive compared to its commercial rivals abroad or at home. Hence, there is a risk that requirements placed on Swedish commercial actors—intended to raise the nation's total defense capacity—would have the opposite effect. Companies may shift production of key material out of Sweden if it becomes more expensive. Transportation firms may choose to register their assets, such as lorries or aircraft, abroad to avoid extra costs and regulatory requirements.

This new reality implies that there must be adequate economic compensation for the punitive defense readiness requirements placed on firms.

Expense

If the true costs of total defense can no longer be absorbed by public enterprises, they need to be covered in the government's budget. And not only will significant capacity cost a lot of money, it will also cost much more in the early stages of building new structures to handle stockpiles and creating adequate redundancy in critical capacity. Once established, the annual maintenance costs will be lower. Politically, this is very challenging, since securing financing for temporary high costs is harder than relatively low constant running costs.

Keep It Simple

When new interfaces between the public and private sectors are established to coordinate the new total defense system, it is essential that this is as simple as possible for the private firms involved. The number of public contact points for the firms concerned needs to be minimized—ideally a one stop shop, rather than a jungle of different actors with separate requirements. A firm operating in several locations in the country also needs to be assured that there are standardized solutions developed across the country, so that requirements from different regions, municipalities, and government authorities are as similar as possible.

Such simplicity will not only keep costs down, but since the private sector is the backbone of the economy, it is essential that the firms see their involvement is made as simple as possible. If their contributions are perceived to be overly bureaucratic, complex, and onerous, their willingness to constructively deliver will be undermined, hampering the actual effectiveness of their potential contributions and creating unwilling partners who feel forced to comply with yet another set of

unnecessary regulatory requirements. From the perspective of total defense, keeping the morale of businesses up is no less important than keeping the morale of troops in the field up.

*Competitive Equality*⁹

Simplicity of implementation and adequate cost coverage help facilitate the implementation of total defense requirements in the private sector in a manner that is competitively equal.

As mentioned above, overburdening firms without compensation risks undermining the very firms that total defense relies upon. Yet it is also important to bear in mind that firms should not benefit excessively either. If the state overcompensates a firm by covering costs that would also benefit them versus competitors, that becomes problematic for other firms and the overall functioning of the free market. Therefore, the Swedish Competition Authority should play a key role in ensuring that market interventions seeking to boost total defense capacity are as competitively equal as possible.

To the extent possible, public procurement tenders should be used as a mechanism to secure the contribution of the private sector. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that there should be no discrimination against foreign firms. Not only is it important for domestic firms that there is a level playing field—as Swedish firms provide services and goods to foreign states that have a bearing on their national security—but as a part of the European Common Market, a level playing field is also a constitutional requirement. To ensure this, the state must formulate its tender requirements in such a way that national security needs are adequately met, and the firms participating in a tender must be able to obtain the requisite security clearance where that may be appropriate.

The instinct may be to promote greater national autonomy in certain fields, but the emphasis must be

on ensuring supply chain security. National autonomy for a small economy tied up in a complex web of global interdependence is impossible. Even if it might be possible in certain areas, it would still leave the nation dependent upon others in several other areas.

International Flows and Integration with Other States

In the past, the total defense approach was to ensure domestic capacity in a range of areas. In the recreation of a new total defense system, the early focus has naturally been on the role of national authorities and key domestic sectors such as energy, transportation, health care, telecommunications, financial services, food and water supply, and security services.

This focus is logical, but the challenge is to integrate the complex international requirements in existing—as well as future—structures that are by their very nature state-centric, focusing on international capacity when cross-border flows are, in several cases, even more important.

Since 2009, Nordic cooperation on crisis preparedness has been formalized around ministerial meetings within the so called Haga-initiative. This is positive but insufficient, and cooperation must be both deepened and extended beyond the immediate neighbors to include key trade partners. In January 2021, the Swedish and Finnish governments endorsed a high-level binational initiative to train public and private sector representatives in crisis preparedness and civil defense (as well as to identify areas of future development), which was another movement in the right direction, but still a baby step toward what is ultimately needed.

New forms of transnational cooperation are needed. These will require deeply institutionalized cooperation, likely hosting personnel from other states inside Sweden, as well as posting Swedish representatives abroad, embedded within foreign government authorities.

Political Ownership

The reality for top-level political decisionmakers has changed in the past few decades. Not only has the complexity of society, and its web of intricate interdependence, increased, but so has technological complexity and the speed of information flows. Whereas in the past, a high-level political executive might have had both less complex issues to handle and more time to focus on them, today's more complicated challenges and the urgency of the 24-hour news cycle make it abundantly clear that even the most competent statesman is hard pressed to cope without an adequate structure in place, including collecting a holistic synthesis of a complex picture and distilling this down to key strategic decisions that need to be addressed by the political system. Without such a structure—which appears to be lacking—there is unlikely to be informed strategic leadership at the highest level, something that has certainly been absent in Sweden these last few years.

At the same time, the budget challenge prevents genuine political interest in addressing the problem, as the focus is on the next election and ensuring that adequate resources are directed toward policy areas most likely to win elections, rather than securing society against threats that are deemed unlikely by politicians (and the public) to actually constitute a clear and present danger.

In the Swedish case, the responsibility of the civilian side of total defense lies under the justice ministry, which is also the ministry responsible for crime prevention. As Sweden has seen an enormous upswing in the number of public shootings and criminal use of explosives in the last few years, the political attention span has been preoccupied by these pressing challenges that dominate the headlines, likely stealing attention from total defence.

Peacetime Domestic Security

Although Sweden is still a relatively peaceful society gang shootings and explosions are now more

common. The police estimate 5,000 members of criminal gangs are in residential areas deemed “vulnerable.” Non-ethnic Swedes are playing a dominant role in much of organized crime, and this has raised the prospect of crime becoming an instrument of foreign powers.

The growth of Islamist groups with international connections, extremist nationalist groups (of which some members have received weapons training in Russia), and left-wing radicals also threaten disruption. Consequently, ensuring domestic stability has become a much more important component of total defense than it was historically.

The transformation of Swedish society, with decades of large-scale immigration, has made it much less homogenous than before, and created new tensions to be exploited by foreign influence operations. As in all open societies, media consumption patterns have also been revolutionized. In the past, the state’s monopoly on television and radio broadcasts, and the limited number of national daily newspapers meant that there was a fairly homogeneous view of societal developments and the outside world. With alternative media now complementing mainstream media, social media as a new form of information dissemination, and the easy availability of international news sources, society has become much more fragmented from an information consumption perspective, leading to a greater polarization of views, and making the job of psychological defense much more challenging.

The increased presence of populations originating in countries such as Russia and China also implies new security challenges. In 2019,¹⁰ there



The police established the new temporary border control at, among other places, Hyllie station in Malmö. (Johan Wessman)

were over 22,000 persons born in Russia living in Sweden, and over 35,000 born in the Peoples Republic of China. The total number of people with connections to these countries grows if those born to parents originating there, or if ethnic Russians from the former Soviet Union are included. Furthermore, much larger numbers of residents have origins in countries such as Iran and Syria, which are on friendly terms with Russia and China. Over 80,000 Swedish residents were born in Iran, and over 191,000 in Syria in 2019.

Economic Integration with Potentially Hostile Powers

During the Cold War, economic interdependence with the Warsaw Pact and other Communist regimes was limited. Today, economic interaction with China in particular, is vast, both in terms of trade and investments. Economic exposure to Russia is much more limited, but over a quarter of Swedish crude oil imports originate from the Russian

Federation. Total trade with Russia was worth almost 60 billion kronor (Swedish currency, SEK) in 2019, and trade with China approached 150 billion SEK, close to the value of trade with the United States, which slightly exceeded 160 billion SEK.

A Swedish Defence Research Agency report from 2019 identified 51 majority acquisitions and 14 minority stake acquisitions of Swedish firms by Chinese firms since 2002.¹¹ Several Swedish firms have production in China, and many more are dependent upon Chinese suppliers. Chinese firms have also been free to participate in infrastructure bids in Sweden—not least Huawei as a leading supplier to telecom operators.

Although Sweden has been slow to react to this new reality, new legislation implemented in 2019 empowered the state to block the transfer of ownership of certain assets on security grounds. Signalling a new security consciousness relating to the role of foreign companies, the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority decided to exclude Chinese firms from participating in developing the country's 5G networks in October 2020, a move that has been criticized by the Chinese Government and by the affected companies who have challenged the decision's legality.

Yet the assessment of the strategic implications of deep economic interconnectedness with the world's most powerful authoritarian state is still in its infancy. Heavy economic exposure to China, and Sweden's economic dependence on international trade, will guarantee a conflict of interests in balancing security concerns against perceived economic gains.

Transparency in an Open Society

Sweden rightly prides itself on being a highly open and transparent society, but this transparency creates an asymmetry potentially benefitting an adversary. Open intelligence collection, facilitated by digitalization, empowers foreign powers to map individuals, firms, and public authorities.

New, smarter approaches must be developed to secure the benefits of societal transparency while protecting against the digital vacuuming of public data that can be used against society or for targeting individuals or firms by states or criminals. In Sweden—unless an individual enjoys protected identity—a citizen's address, vehicle type, income, convictions, and much more detailed information are instantly available online.

Possible Solutions

Although the challenges in building up a total defense structure are numerous, there are a number of take-aways from the above that would help Sweden or other countries intending to implement a new total defense structure to move ahead more effectively. These possible solutions are not listed in any order of priority.

Setting the Bar Before Real Work Begins

A group of senior civil servants, business leaders, and politicians, with support of several staff, should be commissioned to develop an overall total defense concept and set goals for what the future total defense structure should achieve. Once the overall ambition is set, the government commissions can work out the details of implementation. In Sweden, either this has not yet been done or it has been done poorly.

Develop Exceptional Funding Mechanisms

The unavoidable reality, as has already been mentioned, is that building up a total defense structure is going to cost a lot of money—at least if it is to have any real effect. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated that when the problem is acute, the state can make large amounts of money available. In the case of Sweden, the government debt levels are still low—26 percent of GDP at the end of 2020¹²—much lower than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development average. As it concerns national security, one solution would be an exceptional

debt financing for total defense costs. The political danger of this solution of course is that the political parties will then want to use similar funding for all sorts of unrelated “investments,” opening a Pandora’s box of fiscal irresponsibility. An alternative solution would be a total defense or “readiness” fee, the revenues of which are allocated to financing total defense costs, such as exists in Finland. In the case of Finland, the fee is placed on energy sales, but it is not the only revenue generated for the Finnish National Emergency Supply Agency. The Agency, which is technically not a government agency, also generates revenue from commercial holdings, so it receives its financing independently of the state budget, allowing the agency to operate outside the EU framework of state aid restrictions. Whether the Finnish solution is practical in the Swedish case is potentially doubtful as the Finns set up their system in conjunction with their EU accession. If Sweden were to set up a similar system—as long-time members of the EU—it might be construed as an effort to consciously circumvent EU state aid rules. The fact that the Finnish National Emergency Supply Agency is maintaining an existing system also means that it does not have the Swedish problem of needing to ensure very large funding at the early costlier stages of creating the structures of total defense.

The proposed budget allocations for total defense from 2021 through 2025 are such that allocations to the civilian side are disproportionately small compared to the military allocations. In 2025, the proposed military budget will be more than 20 times greater than the funding for the civilian side.

Consequently, some sort of loan structure appears to be necessary, as the political reality will almost certainly ensure that sufficient funding will not be secured through the regular government budget.¹³

One Bite at a Time

The old total defense system did not appear all at once; it evolved over time. Likewise, it would be

unwise and unmanageable to try to implement new total defense structures all at once. It would be logical to start with the most acute needs first. Considering that even basic emergency response structures are insufficient or lacking, fixing these would be a good place to start.

Address the Organized Crime Problem

Organized crime has grown to such an extent that it constitutes a potential threat to national security and stability. Robust crime prevention strategies should therefore be seen as an integral part of total defense efforts. These efforts also enjoy the advantage of delivering value even if a future conflict or crisis does not materialize. Crime prevention expenditure should furthermore be politically easier to justify politically than most other areas of expenditure relating to total defense.

Create a Well-Staffed National Security Council and a New Agency for Total Defense

The Swedish governance model with small ministries and large and independent government agencies has some advantages but it does not facilitate effective coordination between the different arms of the state.

A proper national security council would fill an important function by ensuring that the nation’s leaders have to take proper account of security dimensions of their decisions. It could furthermore ensure that the independent government authorities take action based on an informed holistic security assessment, reducing the risk of individual authorities operating as if in uniform silos focusing autistically on their own narrow remits.

A new authority responsible for the coordination of total defense, with clear powers to influence other authorities, would also be a prerequisite to ensuring all authorities act in a coordinated manner. Presently no such authority exists. The closest thing is the Swedish Civil

Contingencies Agency, but this agency has an enormously broad range of responsibilities preventing its leadership from adequately focusing on total defense. Furthermore, it lacks power of command over other government agencies. (Note: a government commission of enquiry recommended in 2021 that the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency should be given broader powers.¹⁴)

Focus on Problematic Firms

International interdependence is a fact and it is a strength that Sweden contributes to the security of other states. New restrictive and cumbersome legislation that complicates foreign firms' participation in total defense would add a further layer of regulatory burdens on firms. Rather the focus must be on identifying those particular firms where foreign ownership is considered problematic from a security perspective. The crass reality is that there are firms that could be swayed by foreign or domestic hostile actors. Hence, the reliance should be on security agency assessments of individual firms in sensitive sectors or those bidding to participate in related bids. Key personnel or owners need to be screened, and legal mechanisms developed to exclude potentially problematic actors on security grounds. This will be much more effective and pragmatic than onerous regulatory hoops that are applied to all firms.¹⁵

Take Political Responsibility for Social Media Regulation

It is a positive development that a recent government commission of enquiry proposed the creation of a new government authority for psychological defense, something that has been lacking since the abolition of the former National Board of Psychological Defence. The new agency will, according to a government decision, start operating in January 2022.

With digitalization and transformation of the media landscape, social media platforms have grown

to become a new critical component of information operations. So far, the Western approach to social media platforms has largely been to abdicate political responsibility and rely on self-regulation. This is unsustainable. Regulating social media is inherently difficult and raises several dilemmas concerning the right to freedom of speech in open societies. However, it is far more democratic to have clear and transparent rules set by parliaments than to rely on opaque decisions by corporate giants primarily driven by commercial interests, which may at times be at odds with broader national interests. Consequently, difficult political decisions need to be taken based on broad parliamentary support and clear principles that do not result in outcomes favoring particular ideologies or party interests.

Broaden Conscription

Sweden has already reactivated its military conscription and is set on increasing the numbers of conscripts. This is a necessity as the military was not able to recruit and retain enough soldiers under a purely professional military system.

The civilian side of total defense would also benefit from the activation of civilian conscription. The police force has not achieved its recruitment goals in the past few years; support from civilian conscripts could unburden police officers and personnel with simpler tasks, enabling the force to be more effective in its crime prevention efforts. Staffing of future stockpiling structures could also be partially filled by civilian conscripts, who could also serve to boost resilience in other aspects of critical infrastructure.

Focus on Strategic Resources

As illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, states will naturally prioritize securing their own national needs in time of crisis at the expense of other states. A lesson learned from this experience might be that individual states should develop self-sufficiency in every essential area. However, this is an economic impossibility.

The lesson should rather be to understand that if states are primarily driven by self-interest, we need to ensure that we have something to offer in return in order for us to get what we need.

Consequently, a focus on securing stockpiles of critical goods and ensuring enhanced resilience in our critical systems is insufficient. Every state should identify what raw materials, energy supplies, transportation capacity, industrial production capacity, and services will be essential to other states in a time of crisis. That strategic capacity, critical for other states, must be mapped and identified actors should be included among the prioritized sectors where future stockpiling and resilience is to be developed.

The Reality Ahead

Barring unexpected developments, most likely the political will to secure adequate funding for total defense will be left wanting. The rhetorical commitment to building up total defense will remain, but there will be a significant gap between required capacity and actual deliverable capacity. There may very well be efforts to fill some of this gap by placing significant and underfinanced burdens on the private sector. There are significant risks that this approach will result in suboptimal outcomes in sectors exposed to competition—in the worst case actually undermining the desired outcome.

Only clear political ownership and commitment to adequately fund total defense can ensure that the required societal resilience is actually achieved. Consequently, political wishful thinking and delusions that legislation can force the private sector to fulfill what is the core responsibility of the state constitute the greatest threats to the future of the Swedish total defense project. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ Even states predominantly concerned with power projection capacity, rather than national territorial defense, need to consider a comprehensive defense approach, lest a distant enemy disposes asymmetric means to strike at the homeland, which could threaten both the ability and will to actually deploy military force. The advent of the nuclear missile was a paradigm shift in the sense that, in the case of a nuclear war, the United States was no longer a strategic island. Today the vulnerabilities due to digitalization and precision munitions imply that even under a much lower conflict threshold, America can no longer be considered a strategic island. Expeditionary conflict far afield could imply highly destructive strikes against homeland infrastructure. Without adequate comprehensive defense structures, even the military credibility of a superpower would be in doubt.

² Sarah Repucci, *A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy*, Freedom House, Washington, DC, 2020, available at <freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy>.

³ NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2012–2019),” press release, June 25, 2019, available at <https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf>.

⁴ “Europe,” in *The Military Balance 2020* (Washington DC: International Institute for Strategic Studies, February 2020), available at <<https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/military-balance-2020-book/europe>>.

⁵ Swedish Armed Forces and Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, “Sverige kommer att möta utmaningarna: Gemensamma grunder (grundsyn) för en sammanhängande planering för totalförsvaret (translation: Sweden will meet the challenges: A common foundation for a cohesive planning of total defense),” June 2016, available at <https://www.msb.se/contentassets/f1298afdc0b1489eb4262d8ccbb63c86/sverige-kommer-att-mota-utmaningarna-2016-06-10.pdf>.

⁶ Swedish Government Offices, Ministry of Justice, “Struktur för ökad motståndskraft (translation: Structure for increased resilience),” April 2021, available at <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2021/04/sou-202125/>.

⁷ Swedish Government Offices, Ministry of Justice, “Inrättande av Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar (translation: Establishment of the Government authority for psychological defense)” March 2021, available at <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/kommittedirektiv/2021/03/dir.-202120/>.

⁸Swedish Government Offices,

“Totalförsvarsproposition 2021-2025: inriktning av Sveriges försvarspolitik (translation: Total defence bill 2021-2025: focus of Swedish defense policy)”, accessed on 25th August 2021 <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/forsvar/totalforsvarsproposition-20212025---inriktning-av-sveriges-forsvarspolitik/>.

⁹The term *competitive neutrality* is usually used instead of *competitive equality*, but as the word neutrality might be misunderstood in the context of security and international relations, the word equality has been used instead.

¹⁰Statistics Sweden, “Befolkning efter födelseland och ursprungsland, 31 december 2020, totalt (translation: Population according to country of birth and origin, 31 december 2020, total)”, december 2020, available at <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/>.

¹¹Jerker Hellström et al, Kinesiska bolagsförvärv i Sverige: en kartläggning (translated: Chinese business acquisitions in Sweden: a survey), Swedish Defense Research Agency, November 2019, available at <https://www.foi.se/rapportsammanfattning?reportNo=FOI%20Memo%206903>.

¹²Christian Holmström, “Central Government Debt,” *Economifakta*, August 6, 2021, available at <https://www.ekonomifakta.se/fakta/offentlig-ekonomi/statsbudget/statsskulden/>.

¹³This is not so say that a loan based solution is the ideal solution. The optimal solution would probably be for government to cut budget expenditure in other areas in order to enable increased expenditure on total defence without increasing net expenditure. Such austerity particularly desirable in the case of a country like Sweden that already has one of the world’s highest tax burdens.

¹⁴A government commission presented its recommendations relating to the governance and coordination of the civilian side of total defence in March 2021. Among the commission’s recommendations were that the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency should assume broader responsibilities for total defence, including the overall responsibility for planning civil defense, compiling overall resource requirements, supporting other government authorities in times of crisis and heightened readiness.

¹⁵A government commission of inquiry is currently looking into a screening mechanism regarding acquisitions of potentially national security related businesses.

