

August 28, 1963

Research Memorandum REU-56 from Thomas L. Hughes to the Secretary, 'Sweden Still Faces Question of Acquiring Nuclear Weapons'

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Summary:

Based on the evidence, mainly various statements made by leading politicians, diplomats, and policymakers, INR experts concluded that most of the countries surveyed (Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, and Greece) were "relatively satisfied," while only West Germany was "restive" to the extent that some of its officials were interested in a NATO or European nuclear force

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum
REU-56, August 28, 1963

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH : S/S
FROM : INR - Thomas L. Hughes

Thomas L. Hughes

SUBJECT : Sweden Still Faces Question of Acquiring Nuclear Weapons

Sweden has long been considered to be a country which might attempt to develop nuclear weapons. This memorandum assesses the effect of the recent test ban pact on Swedish policy concerning this issue.

Abstract

Although warmly welcomed by the Swedish government and people, the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty has fallen short of resolving the question of whether Sweden should acquire nuclear weapons for its defenses. Both the government and people had hoped that the treaty would ban all testing and open the way for restrictions on the manufacture and use of such weapons. Swedish military authorities have concluded, however, that failure to prohibit underground testing will allow the Soviets to perfect the small weapons most likely to be used to threaten countries such as Sweden and that therefore Swedish security against Soviet pressure has not been improved. No one in Sweden has been able to counter the military argument that Swedish conventional defenses will become relatively ineffective in the face of the growing Soviet nuclear arsenal and that Sweden's traditional policy of relying on its own defenses, instead of allying itself with major powers or accepting international guarantees of its neutrality, may become untenable if Sweden does not acquire nuclear weapons.

When the Swedish Social Democratic government signed the test ban treaty on August 12, it simultaneously declared that the treaty did not bind it in any way concerning the acquisition of nuclear weapons. However, widespread domestic opposition to acquisition, now bolstered by the general hope for a detente engendered by the treaty, raises formidable if not insurmountable obstacles to the undertaking of a weapons development program, and the government, already in a minority in the Second Chamber of Parliament, will probably postpone any decision on the thorny question as it has in the past. It had indicated that a decision on a weapons

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development program would be made by about 1963 and on the manufacture and testing of weapons by about 1965. A Social Democratic Party position on acquisition was scheduled to be taken at the time of the party congress in 1964. Now, however, it would probably take a considerable worsening of the international situation before this or any likely successor government would act, although some research on weapons development under the guise of the current program for development of "defense against nuclear weapons," which was started in 1958, might be undertaken in order to create a capability for later action.

Swedish Ambivalence toward the Nuclear Weapons Issue. Since the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Defense Forces first asked in 1954 that Swedish forces be supplied with nuclear weapons by the end of the 1960's, the question of acquisition of nuclear weapons has grown increasingly difficult for the government. Swedish military authorities unanimously agree that nuclear weapons are necessary if the Swedish military establishment is to maintain the current level of effectiveness during a period when a potential enemy (always understood to be the USSR) is developing a nuclear arsenal. Otherwise, conventional defenses will become increasingly powerless to offer any significant resistance, and the traditional and popular policy of relying for security on Swedish defenses alone instead of concluding alliances with major powers will be impossible to maintain. The alternatives would be either to accept international guarantees of neutrality or to accept assistance from NATO or the US. Both alternatives are repugnant to Swedish traditions, and national leaders seem convinced by the military argument.

However, opposition to acquisition, based on emotional and moral arguments against nuclear warfare, has spread throughout the Swedish people. It has been centered in the left wing of the governing Social Democratic Party, and fear of defections has caused party leaders to avoid facing the issue. The party is already in a minority in the Second Chamber of Parliament, and the loss of only a few seats would tumble it from power. The Center and Liberal party leaders, although more openly sympathetic to the military argument, are also cautious on the issue because of considerable opposition among their rank-and-file. Only the Conservatives have consistently advocated an immediate government declaration of intent to secure nuclear weapons.

Prime Minister Tage Erlander has used technical arguments to postpone action. He holds that Sweden cannot acquire nuclear weapons from abroad because any circumstances under which they are likely to be available from the US or the UK would contravene Sweden's neutrality policy, and that therefore Sweden can only secure them through manufacture from native resources. No decision on a weapons research and development program need be made until these resources have been developed sufficiently for a meaningful program to be started. In 1959, the Supreme Commander declared that the point had been reached where weapons research could profitably be separated from the peaceful uses program, and tried to force the issue. The four noncommunist

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party leaders reached agreement in early 1960 on expansion of the facilities of the Defense Research Institute concerned with the "defense against nuclear weapons program" started in 1958, but postponed a decision on weapons research and development until about 1963 and a decision on weapons manufacture and testing until about 1965, on the grounds that these dates were the earliest by which any effective action could be taken. Delays in the construction of atomic energy plants, however, have made these dates questionable.

Security Situation Unchanged by Test Ban Treaty. Virtually all Swedes have hoped that their country could avoid the nuclear weapons dilemma and have therefore been strong proponents of international nuclear control and disarmament agreements which would decrease the Soviet nuclear threat to Scandinavia. The government has often taken initiatives to reach these goals in the UN and at the 18-Nations Disarmament Conference in Geneva, of which Sweden is a member. Swedish military leaders believe, however, that the terms of the Limited Nuclear Weapons Test Ban Treaty do not improve Sweden's security position. They declare that the failure to ban underground testing will allow the Soviet Union to perfect small nuclear weapons most likely to be used to threaten such countries as Sweden. The treaty therefore will have little effect on the growing obsolescence of Swedish conventional arms as time passes, and Sweden faces the prospect of increasing inability to ward off Soviet pressures.

In this situation, the Swedish Government, supported by the leaders of the four noncommunist parties, has publicly declared that Sweden's signature on the test ban treaty still leaves it free to develop nuclear weapons if conditions require, but has expressed hope that future disarmament agreements and international developments will make such action unnecessary. Only a few leaders, including former Foreign Minister Östen Undén, have stated their belief that the treaty removes any need for Swedish nuclear weapons.

No Action Likely in Near Future. The atmosphere created by the test ban treaty will now probably make it doubly difficult for the political leaders of any party to take positive action toward nuclear weapons acquisition. While the press has generally warned the public against drawing the conclusion that a significant detente between the USSR and the NATO powers has taken place, there is nevertheless a general feeling that Soviet willingness to sign the treaty is the result of changes within the Soviet Union and the Communist group of nations. The resulting Russian attitude, it is felt, is likely to continue, and therefore further Soviet actions leading toward further detente and a lessening of the danger of Soviet aggression may well follow. In addition, most Swedes desire to cooperate with the current nuclear powers in preventing further proliferation of nuclear weapons.

In this atmosphere it is very unlikely that any political leaders, not even the Conservatives, will speak out in favor of taking actions that

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could be interpreted as opposing the spirit of the test ban treaty and complicating the efforts of the current nuclear powers to reach further agreements in the nuclear field. Most probably, the government will seek to avoid any public debate on the launching of a weapons development program scheduled for this year, while keeping itself free to undertake a program at a later time. Delays in the atomic energy program offer a convenient excuse to declare once again that no decision need yet be made. Similarly, Social Democratic leaders will probably try to postpone once again, on the same grounds, a debate on nuclear weapons acquisition scheduled for the next Social Democratic Party congress in 1964.

Only a worsening of the international situation would make likely any positive action on the part of the government. Prime Minister Erlander has reportedly stated that should Soviet nuclear weapons be introduced into Finland, the Swedish Government would also acquire such weapons. The Swedish people generally, however, would have to be convinced that no further disarmament or weapons control agreements were probable and that the danger of Soviet aggression had increased to the point where more security measures would have to be taken. Even under such circumstances, the present Social Democratic minority government might not risk taking responsibility for a weapons program, but might instead ask the other three noncommunist parties to join in a national coalition government for the purpose.

Nevertheless, the demands of the military and Conservative leaders are likely to persist. In order to meet them without provoking a public debate, Erlander may once again seek to reach a private agreement with the leaders of the other noncommunist parties that would allow some further expansion of current research on "defense" against nuclear weapons, which would constitute preparation of a capability for a later weapons development program.

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