

July 28, 1966

Research Memorandum REU-52 from Thomas L. Hughes to the Secretary, 'Nuclear Weapons Question Continues to Plague Swedish Government'

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Summary:

In 1966, Sweden's Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Torsten Rapp, sought funds to support planning to produce nuclear weapons.

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REU-52, July 28, 1966

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes

Subject: Nuclear Weapons Question Continues to Plague Swedish Government

Once again the nuclear weapons question has surfaced in Sweden, and pressures have built up for and against authorizing planning for possible production of nuclear weapons in the 1970's. This Memorandum examines these pressures and the dilemma in which the government finds itself.

ABSTRACT

Sweden's military leadership argues that a very modest outlay of funds for planning and research would shorten the time required to make relatively crude atomic weapons for tactical or short-range purposes from domestic resources from seven to three or four years. The government would thereby retain a greater flexibility as to the timing of any decision on the separate question of production of nuclear weapons in Sweden, which the military feels is necessary for the pursuance of the traditional policy of maintaining a defense force strong enough to command respect (particularly Soviet) for Swedish neutrality. The Swedish government has recognized the validity of the military argument in security terms, but has delayed acting, principally for political reasons, using the argument that Sweden's ambitious peaceful-uses program has not yet reached the stage when a weapons program would be meaningful. Now this argument is losing plausibility, since domestically-produced plutonium will be available in significant quantities by the early 1970's. The government has hoped for the successful negotiation of an international agreement to control nuclear weapons manufacture and use, but

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that hope is now waning.

At the present, however, fear that authorization to go ahead with the planning phase of a weapons program would add to already serious discontent on the left wing of the governing Social Democratic Party makes it highly unlikely that governmental leaders will take any action on this potentially divisive question in the near future. Social Democratic support in Parliament is shaky, and any defections from the government's parliamentary ranks could tumble the party from power.

If effective international controls over the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons are not obtained and the danger of proliferation persists, the Swedish Government sooner or later will probably authorize the necessary planning for weapons production so as to avoid any serious deterioration in Sweden's defense capability and to maintain its freedom of action to make weapons with a minimum lead-time. Such action would incur considerable political risk, however, and the present Social Democratic Government will no doubt try to delay a decision as long as possible.

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Nuclear weapons question Korvald. In late May, the Liberal Oppsala By Tidningen (BYT), often termed Sweden's Manchester Guardian, once again raised the question of providing nuclear weapons for Swedish defense forces. It proposed that the special Royal Defense Commission, established last year to study Sweden's defense needs and make recommendations for a new four-year defense plan to commence in 1967, would soon have to take a definite position on the question.

The government's excuse for past procrastination has been that Sweden's ambitious peaceful-use program has not reached the stage where a weapons program, using domestic resources, could be undertaken. Now that excuse is no longer valid; the relatively large nuclear reactor being built at Barsebäck will provide sufficient quantities of plutonium by the early 1970's for construction of a significant number of nuclear devices.

At issue is not a decision to launch a full-scale weapons construction program, but a request by the supreme Commander of the Defense Forces, General Torsten Rapp, that authorization be granted to lay plans for weapons construction. A modest sum of about \$2 million for this purpose would, in his estimation, shorten the time required to make weapons after a decision is taken by the government to manufacture nuclear weapons, from about 7 to a "few" years, interpreted as meaning from 3 to 4 years. By limiting the request to authorization for planning instead of an outright demand for actual production, as has been traditional since 1954, the chances for approval would possibly be enhanced, despite the fact that a favorable decision on planning is generally equated among informed Swedes with an informal decision on production itself.

Pressure on government to authorize planning. Military leaders have maintained since the early 1950's that relatively crude atomic weapons with delivery systems consisting of airplanes and short-range missiles must be incorporated into the Swedish military arsenal during the 1970's if the traditional policy of a defense force strong enough to command respect (particularly Soviet) for Swedish neutrality is to be maintained. Most national leaders, including some of those in the governing Social Democratic Party (SDP), seem generally willing to accept the military argument, especially if the danger of nuclear proliferation continues and if no effective international controls on the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons are achieved.

However, the government to date has shied away from committing itself to either production of or even planning for a nuclear weapons program, largely because of the potential divisiveness of this question for the SDP membership. It has maintained that a decision could be postponed without adverse effect on Sweden's defense capabilities and that Final "Freedom of action" in this matter has been preserved. General Rapp claims, however, that unless planning is started now, thus cutting down the lead time to a minimum, this "Freedom of action" will in fact become illusory.

The left wing of the SDP has been the principal center of opposition to nuclear weapons production or acquisition, and defections among this group could

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destroy the SDP's already shaky control over Parliament.* Because of the existence within, especially, the Liberal Party and, to a lesser degree, the Center Party of groups also opposed to nuclear weapons for Sweden, these two parties have tended to follow the Social Democratic example of hedging on the "big" question of actual production, but have tended to be much more favorably disposed toward the "little" question of research and planning. Since the Conservatives have also chosen not to make the weapons question a major issue in the past, the government has been able to evade the issue while at the same time obtaining the agreement of all these noncommunist parties on nonpartisan four-year defense plans. Because the Conservatives are basically strong supporters of nuclear planning, and favor weapons production, and since the top Liberal leadership is probably also persuaded by the military arguments that the time has come when a decision on planning must be made, continued nonpartisan defense agreements would probably not be possible any longer unless the government agrees to General Rapp's request for planning. If this were the case, defense questions, including the nuclear weapons question, would probably become a major political issue, a development which the Social Democratic leadership must try to prevent since its disruptive effect would be greatest within the SDP.

In 1959 the military leadership indicated that research on nuclear weapons should be started apart from research for peaceful uses, and in early 1960 the Social Democratic Government reached a compromise with the other noncommunist party leaders whereby research on "defense against attack by nuclear weapons," authorized two years earlier, was expanded through the allocation of additional funds and a loosening of the formerly restrictive terms of reference. Prime Minister Erlander at that time publicly stated that the lack of a decision to authorize specific weapons planning would not increase the lead time for construction of weapons, once a program was decided upon. Since then, the date when testing and construction of the first weapons could start has nevertheless shifted backward from 1965 to the early 1970's, primarily because of delays in the peaceful-uses program.

Political Pressures Against Nuclear Weapons Production. Present political conditions indicate, however, that the Social Democratic Government will avoid taking any decision on the matter if it can avoid it. Left-wing elements that have traditionally opposed weapons production are already restive over other domestic and foreign policy issues, particularly over what is considered the government's inadequate stand in opposing the American Vietnam policy.

*The Social Democrats have a majority in the First Chamber but are in a minority in the Second (the two Chambers are equal in power). As a result, it must seek support from other parties for passage of legislation in the Second Chamber. On foreign and defense matters, the government has so far always sought support from the parties on the right.

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SDP leaders fear sizable defections to the Swedish Communist Party, which under new leadership has moderated its policies and sought with fair success to gain greater respectability. As a consequence, the SDP leadership has shifted slightly to the left, particularly in foreign policy issues, in an effort to prevent defections. Memories of controversy over the nuclear weapons issue in the early 1960's, when a few Social Democrats bolted and helped establish a splinter party which has since disappeared, are still fresh and will induce great caution. In addition, the public has followed the general trend in believing that the threat of Soviet aggression has declined and that there is less need now to increase defense effectiveness than before.

Finally, SDP leaders are sensitive to international pressures against further proliferation of nuclear weapons and would hesitate to act if other comparable powers did not do so. They would eagerly subscribe to any agreements effectively restricting nuclear weapons testing and production as a way out of their dilemma. The government welcomed the Limited Test Ban Treaty as a step in the right direction, but felt forced, when signing it, to reserve the right to launch a nuclear weapons program if conditions so warranted.

Government's Dilemma Likely to Remain. Most government officials seem to share the general opinion of Swedish political leaders, however, that any early and effective international control over nuclear weapons testing and production is unlikely and that further proliferation is to be expected. They take the position that, if a deterioration of Swedish defense capability is to be averted, Sweden must, under the circumstances, take steps to maintain the flexibility to decide to make nuclear weapons without undue delay. Therefore, it appears likely that the Supreme Commander's request for authorization to initiate the planning phase of an atomic weapons production program may eventually be granted, but only with the greatest reluctance. Even this minor step carries considerable domestic political risk, with it, and the government will probably continue to delay taking it as long as possible. Moreover, if the Swedish government should go even this far along the road toward a nuclear weapons program, it would be a bold step, indeed, and could have considerable repercussions on its relations with the Soviet Union and probably also the US and the UK, not to mention its Scandinavia neighbors, who have carefully avoided any contact with nuclear weapons, even -- with respect to Norway and Denmark -- in the NATO context.

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