

Conversation with Jaruzelski

Record of Investigator's Conversation with Jaruzelski Swedish Government Memorandum Ministry for Foreign Affairs 26 September 2002

On the 18th of this month, Rolf Ekéus had an approximately two-hour-long discussion with the former Polish president, prime minister, minister for defence and commander-in-chief, Wojciech Jaruzelski. Other participants in this conversation, which was held at the Swedish Embassy in Warsaw, were Ambassador Mats Staffansson and the undersigned.

Ekéus began by describing the Swedish government's enquiry into security policy and explained that he wanted to learn how Poland, during the cold war, viewed Sweden, Swedish foreign policy and the Swedish Armed Forces and their capability. Further, the plans of the Warsaw Pact (referred to subsequently as WP), particularly with regard to the Baltic region and the role of the Baltic Sea, as well as to what degree there were plans directed at Sweden.

Jaruzelski (referred to subsequently as J.) began by saying that he had been appointed chief of the general staff in 1965 and that since then he has attended all the WP meetings and all discussions on military and security matters. His starting point was the Cuban Missile Crisis, and he explained that this had constituted a shock, and a realisation that a war in Europe would also have developed into a large-scale war and a nuclear war. Ever since then, there was a total awareness of this.

The twenty years from 1969 to 1989 could be divided into periods. The first period stretched from 1969 to 1975, the Helsinki Treaty. From 1975 there was an increasing awareness that war was not possible, but, J. said, "Si vis pacem...". From the highest level there was an awareness that a war with nuclear weapons would be an absurdity. So why were we preparing ourselves for one? Why were there offensive plans? Yes, that was a paradox of the cold war. One side put the other in check. Clausewitz said that war was politics with other means. Armament was a continuation of foreign policy, but it also affected politics per se.

The military-industrial complex played an enormous role. Even Eisenhower had warned of the role of the military-industrial complex in the United States. It was the same in the Soviet Union. There, other mechanisms were in play, but put together they became a strong factor that placed pressure on the politicians. One of the reasons for Khrushchev's fall was that he was not close enough to this military-industrial complex. Brezhnev on the other hand was very close to it, and listened to it. In particular Ustinov affected this process. He advocated the idea that one had to be armed, that weapons were an asset. We knew that we did not have a chance of catching up to the living standards of the West, however we could be equal militarily. The paradox was that military strength led to civil weakness.

Ustinov had a strong position. One, he was secretary of the central committee, and two, he had been a minister back in Stalin's time. Incidentally he spoke of Stalin with great respect. Ustinov was less interested in arrows on maps than in arsenals.

After 1975 another political climate prevailed. Détente had led to a thaw in relations between the superpowers. Early examples of this were Nixon's visit to Moscow in 1972, and the Brezhnev-Ford Vladivostok meeting in 1974. The Helsinki meeting created a new climate, which was not favourable to excessively militaristic rhetoric.

1982-1983 was again a period of chilled relations, after the crises in Afghanistan and Poland. But also this passed. Gorbachev's assumption of power represented a radical change. Like Khrushchev, Gorbachev was no good friend of the marshals. Gorbachev had told J. of the enormous pressure placed on him by the military-industrial complex.

The second half of the 1980s was another period again, characterised by a new détente. All military manoeuvres were more playful in nature.

Poland was a medium-sized country located in a very neuralgic point in Europe, an important and prestigious location. But there was a huge gulf between the capabilities of Poland and the Soviet Union, greater than for instance that between the United States and the United Kingdom. The Soviet politicians tended to be very closed. We knew little about their global thinking. We did not know how their thinking would be implemented in a global war.

As far as Poland was concerned, in the event of a war we had been assigned a front with some 450,000 men in three armies. Two of these armies were in the first echelon and one was in the second. However all the divisions were not complete. Most only had a capacity of 30 to 40 per cent. To achieve full capacity would have required a considerable amount of time, which meant that a surprise attack was an impossibility. And if you took into account modern capabilities in the area of reconnaissance, for instance in the detection of regrouping, it was not realistic to achieve any surprise effect.

In all scenarios, war could break out as a result of various events, in Europe, in the world. Examples were Cuba and the Berlin Crises. Growing tensions, for instance during a border conflict, could lead to a military scenario developing, which ultimately led to an attack on the WP from the West. Such an attack could continue for three or four days and take Nato 50 or 60 km into East German territory, possibly with troops landing east of Szczecin. Nato could possibly also establish a front in the south, in the Caucasus or from Greece.

During these first days a mobilisation takes place in the east with regrouping and a counteroffensive. In this, Poland would be active on the northern part of the front. One of the two armies would move towards Jutland, and the other westwards towards Hamburg. The third army would wait in the second echelon. Poland would follow the Soviet troops into the GDR. It was estimated that after ten to fifteen days the WP troops would reach the Rhine. When we thought about this, it occurred to us even then that this was not realistic! Nato would certainly use its nuclear weapons, and then we would use ours. The prediction was for several hundred nuclear explosions in this limited area. It was absurd!

These plans were a function of politics and their purpose was to serve politics and show the United States that we were powerful and that we could win a war. Against this background we expected that the status quo from Cuba - Vietnam would continue.

In the Soviet Union they were obsessed with the idea of being surrounded. That had happened in the First World War with intervention from Polish territory and from the north and south. During the Second World War this fear of being surrounded grew and it remains to this day. The Soviet Union was the country that saved the world from fascism. Furthermore they always felt that they had a mission.

With regard to Sweden and Scandinavia / the Nordic countries, in Poland we did not have access to Soviet plans which extended beyond the joint WP planning. For us it was self-evident that the Soviet Union, as the only WP country with nuclear weapons, something which gave them special privileges, planned certain things by themselves and kept it under lock and key. We were enlisted in the total context, but did not have all of its parts. What we had was our own planning, and in terms of the Nordic countries it was focussed on Denmark as it was a Nato country, and a landing on Zealand. The resources we had at our disposal gave us little opportunity to realise such plans, but the philosophy was that we would demonstrate our power.

In the vicinity of Sweden there was Bornholm, which could possibly be taken, but that was further in the future, not in the first days of the war. Jutland was not a target in itself, but a way of securing the northern flank. Øresund interested us, as did Kattegatt. There were reconnaissance missions there, but our navy was small.

The Baltic Sea was far down on our list of priorities, it had third - fourth priority. There was a joke in the Soviet marines, which was something like that the Northern fleet was a strong fleet, the Pacific fleet was also a fleet, the Black Sea fleet was a kind of fleet, but the Baltic fleet was a former fleet. That demonstrated the order.

From 1965 I attended every WP meeting, J. said, and not once did Sweden come up as a problem per se. Swedish neutrality was accepted as something obvious and natural.

I talked to Grechko and Ustinov a few times about Scandinavia and the Nordic countries. Regarding Finland they were convinced about where the Finns stood. The border to Norway was difficult and complicated. Norway was of interest only because the coastline was a base area for Nato's fleet and air forces. But as I understood it, no offensive activities were planned against Norway. That would have been difficult to implement. If the advance towards the west on the Continent was successful, the matter of Norway would solve itself.

Sweden was always spoken of with respect, considering the up-to-date Swedish defence and the stable Swedish economy. Sweden would not depart from the position it had, to risk becoming involved in a conflict. The Soviet Union was interested in Swedish neutrality being maintained. So its marshals did not foresee any action that could provide grounds to intervene. However there was concern that situations could develop where Nato drew in Sweden, perhaps not directly but to create a rear front.

Without a doubt there were various intelligence services, including the Polish, interested in the new technology in Sweden. The Polish intelligence service's results in that respect were quite poor however. Nor did J. believe that the Soviet Union had achieved very much in Sweden - if so, Poland would have found out about it.

The Polish-Swedish relations developed well, with lots of contact and visits not least in the area of the economy. Olof Palme was greatly respected. J. had himself visited Sweden in the capacity of chief of the general staff, and he remembered well General Almgren, General Synnergren (the Supreme Commander) and the Minister for Defence, Sven Andersson. There had also been a naval visit and the atmosphere had been exemplary, and a model for East-West contacts.

The state of emergency in Poland had been a difficult period for the Polish-Swedish relations. We understood that Sweden would interpret what happened negatively. But we noted that there were no nervous actions from the Swedish side. The Swedes tried to understand and analyse the situation. J. had been notified of Almgren's statement where he said that he knew J. and that he could not believe that J. would make any decision that went against the interests of Poland.

We knew that Sweden would give assistance to Solidarity among others. To a degree this flow of assistance was controlled by us. In Malmö and Ystad there were informers who reported what was coming in. Some was confiscated by us. But I do not remember exactly whether we took much action. I did not handle that matter in detail.

This state of affairs passed and the situation changed. In the end the idea of a large-scale conflict became a sort of joke. Not least the CFE negotiations played an important role. One must view this period in all of its complexity.

To Ekéus' question about whether they actually perceived any threat from Germany or whether this disappeared in conjunction with Brandt's actions, J. responded that the armament processes were governed by their own logic - if the Americans introduced new elements to the picture, which they did continually, then the East would have to respond. The drama was a result of the lack of trust and the awareness that a war would have been a catastrophe. Armament affected the political thinking.

Ekéus asked whether it was so that the Russians began, which people in the West suspected, a substantial armament around 1975. Why did they do this in spite of the positive political climate? Nato did not intensify its armament until the end of the 1970s, during Carter's last years in office.

Without a doubt Ustinov's taking office strengthened the armament sector in the Soviet Union, but at the same time one must consider the developments on both sides, J. responded. The Soviet intelligence service was larger and broader than ours. The principal documentation for the meetings of the WP ministers of defence was supplied by the Soviet staffs, plus the East German staffs. This material indicated that the West was continually introducing new weapons and weapon types, and conducted training exercises. Large exercises took place each year in Denmark, West Germany and the Baltic Sea. We registered this.

It is correct that we had a large number of tanks. But the important thing is not the number, but the quality. Nato had a qualitative advantage. The greater part of the weapons systems was up-to-date and moreover the West had professional armies. C3 - Command, Control and Communications - was better. No longer do you measure the strength of an army in terms of quantity, and in the 1970s and 1980s Nato was headed towards such a situation. Therefore we always had the feeling that we had to balance with quantity. Not just us in Poland - we had fewer tanks than Czechoslovakia, something which was always criticised in the WP. But we did not have the money.

We were in an absurd spiral. Everyone was aware that it could not lead to war. But it was like a Greek drama - everyone knows where it is going, but they still continue forwards.

To Ekéus' question about whether the Baltic Sea played a role, J. answered yes, especially with regard to logistics. Therefore careful mapping had been conducted of the straits and to what extent they could be utilised. However, independent operations in the Baltic were not foreseen.

Did one expect that transports would be attacked by West German submarines? Yes. However the Baltic Sea was shallow and therefore submarine activities were seen to be limited. There were submarines but this was not a main focus, nor was it for the Soviet Baltic fleet.

To Ekéus' question regarding whether the violations of the Swedish archipelago and who could be behind these, their number and what the motives could have been, as well as whether these had ever been discussed within the WP, J. shook his head and answered no, this is the first time I've heard this. He recalled that there had been some sort of Swedish diplomatic intervention. Both the Soviet Union and Poland had said that they did not have anything to do with it. And I have no reason to hide anything now, J. added. Today we are talking about far more important matters.

Theoretically it could not be ruled out that a Polish submarine could have entered by chance. But I do not think so. Of course it is difficult to rule it out. It is difficult to see how anyone but the Soviets could have been involved. But what objectives would operations like that have? Perhaps someone from the marines could answer that. Perhaps to test the reactions of the Swedish navy, to investigate certain waters. It could also be a matter of a navigational error.

J. also denied it, when asked whether he knew anything about midget submarines. In that case it was something that the Russians kept secret from us, he said.

Ekéus asked whether the new cold war during Andropov's time had created a situation that was so dangerous that it resembled the Cuban Missile Crisis. J. explained that in September 1981 he had a conversation with Ustinov. At that time J. was prime minister and minister for defence. This was in Ukraine, in conjunction with the big WP exercise, Zapad 81. Ustinov had kept J. in the helicopter, and they had sat there for an hour by themselves. Ustinov spoke of the concern that they felt in Moscow about the situation in Poland, and said that the Soviet Union now had three fronts: it was Afghanistan, it was China (which Bush had just visited and signed a treaty with) and it was Poland, where Solidarity was in practice a support for Nato. Poland was the most threatening front. For me this was an important signal, J. said, and it was this that led to the 13th of December.

The Zapad 81 exercise was a sort of demonstration that we were strong and would not allow anyone to attack us. The situation had elements of a return to the days of the cold war. But it was still quite a long way away.

Andropov was very ill, and J. had only had one conversation with him. His office more resembled a chemist. Andropov was very intelligent, and he knew more than others. He knew that the Soviet Union was in the process of losing the battle with the West, but still the philosophy was that we had to demonstrate our power. As for me, I am now a person from the past, J. said. And I am aware of all the serious sins. I am now trying to see things the way people saw them then.

As regards Czechoslovakia 1968, we got signals from the Soviet Union that a large penetration from the West was occurring. From our point of view the situation was not far from 1939. Then, from Czechoslovakia came one of the main blows against us. Many of Poland's problems had come that way. Therefore we can not say that we were forced to participate. Gomulka and Ulbricht were, on the contrary, the principal instigators of the invasion. Then, afterwards, it turned out that the weapons caches and sabotage units that we had heard about had been faked by certain specialist services.

In the spring of 1981 Brezhnev rang the then party leader Kania and told him that someone would have to find some weapons caches that Solidarity had deposited...

In conclusion, J. said that he admired Sweden "as a country and as a system". For him, as a member of the left, it was natural that the state should serve all people and not only those who were strong. And for that Sweden was a model. He himself was proud of the current Polish leaders whom he has known since the time they were young. Incidentally he had just this very day had a visit from someone whom he had put in prison, and who was now a candidate for the left...

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