

Summary in English

This summary deals mainly with the conclusions presented by the investigator, as well as the most important reasons for these conclusions, and some background information.

The assignment

On October 5, 2000 the Government decided to appoint a special investigator to analyse the political and military conduct of the submarine question from 1980 until today. The investigator's assignment was to describe and evaluate how the Government, the Armed Forces and other competent authorities dealt with established and apparent underwater violations of Sweden's territorial waters since the early 1980s.

The security environment

The submarine violations to which Sweden was subjected in the 1980s and 1990s should be considered in their broader security context. The inquiry therefore starts with a description of the strategic and security environment in the Baltic Sea region. This was one of the coldest periods of the Cold War, when the world came closer to nuclear war than for a long time. It was followed by a *détente* and political liberation in Eastern Europe and the emergence of a completely new political and strategic landscape.

The most frequent incidence of submarine violations occurred at the beginning of this period. During the post-war period the Soviet Baltic Fleet was the dominant military factor in the Baltic Sea region, although Sweden, and later West Germany, maintained significant naval capacity. Interest in the North Atlantic and Northern Europe increased as a result of strategic developments.

The rapid naval buildup of the Soviet Union under Admiral Gorshkov created a new strategic situation. The expansion and modernization of the Soviet submarine force played a key role. However, the USA maintained technological and qualitative superiority, which the Soviet Union sought to offset by quantity.

The shift to a forward American naval strategy at the start of the 1980s increased the pressure, in particular, on the Soviet submarine fleet, and the areas immediately adjacent to Scandinavia in the North Atlantic and the approaches to the Baltic Sea emerged as points of intersection in terms of naval strategy.

Due to the increased emphasis on the possibility of a major conventional conflict on the continent, the need of military transports along the southern Baltic coast became an important factor. At the same time, NATO showed growing interest in the possibility of disrupting the Warsaw Pact's troop movements and logistics transports through the southern Baltic to the central front. From the Soviet point of view, the Baltic Sea became a top priority strategic area, and the transport and supply routes in the southern Baltic were key components. As a result, the Soviet side upgraded the military significance of Sweden's territory.

During World War II Sweden's archipelagos had sometimes been used by the submarines of belligerent states as 'safe havens'. During the Cold War the Soviet Baltic Fleet had to take into account the possibility that in the event of war West German submarines might try to use Sweden's territory. For this reason the Soviet Union might have considered it important to monitor the development of Sweden's anti-submarine defence and to take steps to prevent NATO (West German) submarines using Sweden's archipelagos for operations directed against the Warsaw Pact.

Two decades of submarine problems

The period 1980-82 may be called the formative period, when Sweden's frame of reference for dealing with the submarine question took shape. The main issue at that time was: which state is responsible for the violations? After the Hårsfjärden incident there was a period of political confrontation and continued violations. The main issue was: why are the violations continuing? From 1987 onwards a gradual reappraisal of the situation took place and the

conventional wisdom was increasingly challenged. The main issue now was: to what extent did violations actually occur?

The formative period 1980–82

As a result of the 1972 Defence Resolution a significant part of the navy's submarine hunting capability was abolished. When international tension increased, this meant that the Swedish navy was ill-equipped to meet an increasingly serious submarine threat.

The Utö incident

The Utö incident in 1980 seemed to mark the beginning of a new pattern of submarine violations since the violating submarine did not immediately leave Sweden's territory after being detected. The handling of the incident was marked initially by some restraint in the employment of weapons. The Minister of Defence called for more resolute action. This was one of the few occasions on which the Government sought to involve itself directly.

The Utö incident was something of an alarm bell and led to a limited review of Sweden's submarine hunting resources.

It was not possible to establish the nationality of the submarines involved in the violations. The Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces referred to several indications that pointed in the direction of the Warsaw Pact, including signal intelligence. However, this is open to doubt, and the remaining evidence consists of an optical observation at a distance of 300 metres. The behaviour of the submarine or submarines was thought to indicate that it was either a modern Soviet submarine type that had not previously been observed in the Baltic Sea or a West German submarine. However, both these alternatives were rejected. The general view was that they were Soviet submarines, and the possibility of a West German intrusion was not taken seriously.

U 137

The intrusion of the Soviet submarine U 137 into Gåsefjärden Bay on October 27, 1981 confirmed to the Swedish authorities and the Swedish public that Soviet submarines were violating Swedish

territory. The incident attracted considerable attention, both nationally and internationally.

The handling of the U 137 incident was in many ways a successful example of a small nation's management of a serious crisis, not least thanks to the clear division of roles between politicians and the military. The Supreme Commander's decision to proceed on the assumption that the violation was deliberate, without discussing it with the Government, set the tone for Sweden's conduct throughout the crisis.

The unusually clumsy nature of the intrusion and the submarine's atypical behaviour raised questions as to whether or not the intrusion was deliberate. It has come to the knowledge of the inquiry that the Soviet side searched for the submarine for six hours in its designated patrolling area east of the island of Bornholm before realizing that the submarine was on Swedish territory. This has been known to the Swedish Armed Forces ever since the incident. However, the 1995 Submarine Commission concluded that, in view of the navigation and visibility conditions at the time of the incident, the intrusion must have been deliberate.

The investigator has not found it necessary to take a definite stand on the question of whether or not the violation was deliberate. Sweden's political and military conduct after the incident was based on the assumption that it was deliberate. Whether or not this assumption was correct, the crisis was handled firmly and the deterioration of relations between Sweden and the Soviet Union may be regarded as a consequence for which the violating state must be prepared, regardless of whether the violation was deliberate.

The Hårsfjärden incident

The Hårsfjärden incident was preceded by Operation Notvarp, a secret Swedish operation whose purpose was to capture a submarine and force it to the surface. Notvarp was the first proactive Swedish operation and it has not previously been disclosed. Together with an American naval visit and large-scale NATO manoeuvres in the Baltic Sea both before and after the Hårsfjärden incident, the operation was part of the naval environment in which the incident occurred.

Perhaps one could say that Operation Notvarp achieved results at the right time but in the wrong place. Nevertheless, the planning of this operation may be questioned, particularly in view of the fact that it was carried out during an ongoing change of government in Sweden and replacements among the chiefs of staff. Had Notvarp produced results, this could hardly have come at a time when Sweden was less well-prepared.

The handling of the Hårsfjärden incident was marked by hesitation and confusion, not least as regards orders. Due to an obvious lack of tactical leadership and central intervention from the military leadership, there was a failure to take action and opportunities were missed. This gave rise to a number of rumours and speculative hypotheses: for example, that some or all the intrusions were made by NATO submarines with the tacit consent of the Swedish Navy, that the chiefs of staff deliberately allowed submarines to violate Swedish territory, that submarines were released with the tacit consent of the Government, etc. The inquiry has not found any factual basis for these rumours and concludes that they may be attributable to a confused chain of command.

The handling of tapes and other evidence, in particular, must be criticized. The tapes recorded during important events were not carefully stored, the results of water samples and oil analyses, as well as photographs, were not preserved, and data were found to be missing from the Supreme Commander's military diary.

The investigator agrees with the assessment of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Constitution that the division of responsibilities between the Government and the Armed Forces was normal and appropriate. Other aspects, such as relations with the media and the Government's handling of the situation that arose, were not equally satisfactory.

The 1983 Submarine Defence Commission

The Submarine Defence Commission presented what it called "the probable course of events". However, this was only one of several possible scenarios that the Armed Forces and the Analysis Group presented to the Commission. The problem was that the Commission did not make a sufficiently clear distinction between assessments of missions for military operational purposes and assessments of missions for political purposes. The Commission's

assessments were not sufficiently reliable and realistic to provide guidance for balanced political decisions.

Today, the evidence advanced for identifying the Soviet Union as responsible for the violations does not seem conclusive. The Commission's chairman, Sven Andersson, and its members made a political rather than an objective judgement. They considered the identification necessary regardless of the evidence. The same goes for the Government's decision to endorse the Commission's conclusions although, in view of the prevailing political situation, it seems unreasonable to criticize this decision.

However, the Government's decision to appoint the Submarine Defence Commission meant that it ceded control of the political outcome of this key issue, and it must therefore be questioned. The submarine issue had a great impact on Sweden's foreign policy during the 1980s and made a rational approach to security and defence policy difficult. The reason for this unfortunate development was not that the Government agreed with the conclusions of the Submarine Defence Commission, but that it ceded control by appointing the Commission in the first place.

Political confrontation and continued violations

After the Hårsfjärden incident the submarine question became a political divider in Swedish politics and triggered a succession of political "affairs" – the Bildt affair, the Ferm affair and the Bodström affair – while reports of new violations poured in. Neither political nor military measures seemed capable of putting an end to the violations. This situation eroded the confidence of the media and the public in the Armed Forces.

The Sundsvall incident, 1983

The Sundsvall incident in 1983 occurred at the same time as the Submarine Defence Commission presented its report to the Government. It was interesting for several reasons, one of which was the large number of optical observations that were made. Tapes that were recorded in connection with this incident were subsequently lost.

The Analysis Group concluded in its analysis that the action taken was on too small a scale and that depth charges must be dropped in large fields to have any effect.

The experiences of the Hårsfjärden and Sundsvall incidents led to the conclusion, on the one hand, that more depth charges should be used since they had not had sufficient effect, but on the other hand that mines should only be used restrictively until the functioning of the systems had been properly checked, since their effect might appear excessive. This dilemma is an instructive illustration of the parameters of Sweden's submarine hunting efforts.

The Karlskrona incident, 1984

The events in the Karlskrona area during the first quarter of 1984 were difficult to understand and gave rise to several unanswered questions. Even while these events were unfolding a number of theories were suggested as to what was happening. The Supreme Commander was initially somewhat doubtful about the validity of the reported indications, but became more certain as time went on. The local military authorities, and to some extent the Defence Staff and the Naval Analysis Group, seemed more convinced. Assessments of what happened were to a large extent based on the conclusions of the Analysis Group.

Weapons were rapidly employed on rather uncertain grounds. The reliability of observations and indications varied, and most of the military personnel had no training for such activities.

The Government assumed a cautious and somewhat sceptical attitude, as did the media. In connection with the investigator's visit to Karlskrona both local military commanders stated that they were no longer certain whether a submarine had in fact been inside the island barrier.

Violations 1984–87

A widening credibility gap between the Armed Forces on the one hand and the public, press and politicians on the other, became increasingly apparent. This gap was a result of the inconclusive outcome of the Hårsfjärden incident and became wider still after Karlskrona. As a result of increasing demands for evidence, the

Armed Forces adopted a more restrictive information policy, which was a feature of reporting about violations in 1984 and afterwards.

The Töre incident, 1987

The Töre incident was one further example of the "sentry effect", i.e. people see what they want to see. There were indications that a foreign power was engaged in underwater operations, but they could not be confirmed.

The commander of the area repeatedly requested that the submarine hunting force should be sent up to Töre. These requests were not granted, partly due to staff holidays, but also due to the suspicion of submarine activities in other places.

Although the operation demonstrated the will and ingenuity of the Armed Forces, the lasting impression was one of failure. Instead of launching such an operation, it would have been better to recognize that there was no prospect of a successful operation.

Reappraisal of the submarine question

A process of reappraisal of the submarine question appears to have started in response to the Supreme Commander's report in 1987. Perceptions of the threats changed, and technical analyses subsequently threw new light on the extent of the violations.

The Supreme Commander's report, 1987

The Supreme Commander's 1987 report described the general state of knowledge since the early 1980s. The description of submarine hunting operations presented in the report was not confined to individual operations. A picture emerged of self-perpetuating activities. Proactive operations provoked events that provided justification for further action and use of resources.

At the centre of this setup were the forecasts made by the Analysis Group. These forecasts, rather than individual indications, decided where and when operations were to be undertaken or concluded. The crucial question was whether the forecasts were correct, i.e. whether the action taken was appropriate in terms of

space and time. Information gathering became an end in itself and sometimes took precedence over interventions that should have been undertaken in accordance with the "Armed Forces Instructions in Peacetime and Wars in which Sweden is Neutral" on the grounds that such interventions might "prejudice the aims of the action".

The report describes a self-perpetuating method: Sweden itself decided where to take action regardless of whether there were any indications of violations. The aim was to gather as much information as possible in order to substantiate hypotheses about the alien systems. It was therefore important not to frighten off the intruder by unnecessary use of weapons. Evaluations were carried out with the help of the indications generated by the internal system, which almost always showed that the hypotheses were correct.

Since the level of secrecy had to be high, a system within the system was set up, an inner circle that directed the anti-submarine operations mainly on the basis of forecasts and analyses. Such a system entails an obvious risk of losing touch with reality.

The investigator finds it difficult to accept the idea that those responsible for operations felt free to ignore the obligation to repel submarines under the Armed Forces Instructions with a view to maintaining a long-term deterrent. Although these methods were dubious, it must be said that the buildup of capacity and innovative submarine hunting methods gradually achieved results, and the reduction of the number of assumed violations towards the end of the 1980s may in part be due to enhanced submarine hunting capability.

With his 1987 report the Supreme Commander sent the Government a signal that there were grounds for publicly identifying the Soviet Union as the violating state. However, the Supreme Commander himself stated that there was no conclusive evidence, and instead the report once again mentioned a number of factors that were considered links in a chain of circumstantial evidence pointing to the Soviet Union.

The Prime Minister appointed an inquiry group from the Government Offices for the purpose of examining the Armed Forces' analysis. The group concluded that there was no valid basis for identifying any nation or military alliance as responsible for the violations.

By subjecting the Armed Forces' analysis to an inquiry overseen by the Prime Minister's Office, the Prime Minister retained political control of the issue. This also made it possible to strike a balance between the strategic and security dimensions. Unlike the situation in 1982, the Government retained full control of the submarine question and thus of its political consequences.

Violations 1988–2000

There continued to be indications of underwater operations conducted by a foreign power, although at a lower level, well into the 1990s. Following a reappraisal of the material in 1994 on the basis of an analysis of the cavitation effect, it was declared that the last violation established by the Supreme Commander had taken place in 1992. There is no conclusive evidence of continuing alien underwater operations in Swedish territorial waters during the years 1995-2000.

As regards the nationality of the violating submarines, the Supreme Commander continued in his reports up to 1996 to refer to the chain of circumstantial evidence set forth in the 1987 report that identified the Soviet Union, now Russia, as responsible for the suspected underwater missions against Sweden and stated that the indications were even stronger than before. Nevertheless, the Supreme Commander pointed out that there was insufficient hard evidence.

The Hävrings incident, 1988

The analysis of the Hävrings incident was considered to have established conclusively that at least one and probably two submarines were present in the area.

This incident offered perhaps the navy's best chance of a successful operation. A foreign submarine was almost forced to the surface by massive use of depth charges. This demonstrated that the submarine hunting capability of the Swedish navy was now such that foreign powers could no longer conduct underwater operations on Swedish territory with impunity.

The Swedish-Russian expert talks

The Swedish-Russian expert talks that took place in 1992-94 can scarcely be said to have clarified the points at issue. This is not surprising. The Russians could hardly be expected to accept Swedish technical evidence which was neither clear-cut nor uncontroversial, and which in the final phase of the negotiations was significantly undermined by new technical findings by the Swedes themselves.

The talks were held against the background of a former Soviet Union in a state of collapse. While the view that it was appropriate to make use of this opportunity to come to terms with the past is understandable, the ends and means that were chosen were perhaps not the most appropriate.

Sound recordings – submarine "type sounds", the cavitation effect and the correspondence between Bildt and Yeltsin

The Armed Forces had been in regular contact with foreign experts for the purpose of analysis of the "type sound". One country's acoustic experts concluded in 1994, after repeated analyses, that there were three possible hypotheses for the origin of this sound; one of these was that it came from a submarine, but it was not believed that the submarine technology of the time would have been capable of keeping the sound level as low as that recorded by the Swedish navy. Experts from another country were more sympathetic to the Swedish analysis, but they could not exclude the possibility of biological causes. Differences of opinion gradually emerged in the Armed Forces itself and there were growing doubts about the connection between these sounds and submarines.

Foreign expertise also questioned at an early stage the Swedish analysis of the compressed cavitation effect. Some experts had their reservations as early as 1992. Analysts in another country became gradually more sceptical, and in 1993 they considered it unlikely that the recorded sounds came from a submarine. Instead, they thought they could be caused by a biological source. Experts in a third country were more in favour of the idea of a submarine, and even the Russian side accepted this assessment in the Swedish-Russian talks although, like experts from other countries, they

expressed their doubts due to the absence of certain low-frequency sounds that a submarine normally sends out.

Despite all these doubts, and despite the fact that the analyses carried out in Sweden were increasingly sceptical, the Supreme Commander's report on violations in 1993, which was presented in March 1994, contained no warning signals. In the spring, doubts increased in the Armed Forces, and in May the mandate of the Working Group on the Cavitation Effect was extended.

However, none of this seemed to penetrate into the Prime Minister's Office, which prepared a letter concerning the violations from Prime Minister Bildt to the Russian President Yeltsin. Although the Supreme Commander mentioned the absence of sufficient evidence ever since 1987, and despite the uncertainty of the evidence, the Soviet Union/Russia was identified as the violating state.

The Prime Minister presented no direct evidence for his far-reaching claims of Russian responsibility, but referred to Sweden's experience of Soviet submarines in previous years and to ex-Soviet structures. He also added a warning that continued violations might well entail more far-reaching consequences.

The writing of this letter was a mistake, both in objective and political terms. With his proposal that the matter be subjected to international political scrutiny Yeltsin had put Sweden on the defensive. The attempt to rescue the Swedish-Russian expert talks became a problem that in time overshadowed the foreign and security policy aspects on which Sweden should have concentrated.

The 1995 Submarine Commission

The question of appointing a new Submarine Commission had been discussed ever since the mid-1980s. The proposal was rejected for many years on account of the ongoing Swedish-Russian talks. Now that a final report on these talks had been submitted to the Government, there was no longer any reason to postpone the matter. And when the Armed Forces presented the results of the study of the cavitation effect in February 1995, a new Submarine Commission became inevitable.

The Submarine Commission rejected the 1983 Submarine Defence Commission's assessment of the nationality of the violating submarines. It also confirmed that U 137's intrusion into

Gåsefjärden was deliberate. Furthermore, it established that Swedish territory had been violated by foreign submarines on at least eight more occasions and that violations had probably taken place on several other occasions.

However, the Swedish Government found no reason to withdraw its protest note of 1983 on these grounds.

Sweden's capacity – the Armed Forces Instructions

The Armed Forces Instructions were adopted in 1951. Their main purpose was to provide guidelines for action in the event of a surprise attack. As violations of Sweden's territorial waters became more frequent, the Instructions were increasingly viewed as guidelines for the handling of incidents in peacetime.

On July 1, 1979 Sweden extended its territorial waters from 4 to 12 nautical miles. This made it necessary to issue a new edition of the Instructions, which were tightened up as a result of the submarine incidents. Even more stringent guidelines were laid down in subsequent editions.

Sweden's submarine hunting capability

The Submarine Commission described developments in the navy up to 1995. Further development has taken place since then. Significantly more sensitive sonar devices have made it possible to record underwater sounds that were not previously known, and this has made it possible to classify the submarine type sound and the compressed cavitation sound. Developments have also taken place with respect to weapons.

The navy's activities changed radically when submarine activities were given precedence over training in invasion defence. These changes led to much longer patrol times for ship units and round-the-clock surveillance duties for land-based anti-submarine units. The navy became a 'contingency navy'. Tactical methods and the capacity for analysing completed operations were improved.

Among other significant developments the navy has, together with the Swedish Maritime Administration, carried out a survey of the seabed in the Swedish archipelagos. The submarine incidents made it necessary to relax the rules on working hours. Agreements were negotiated with the trade union organizations that made it

possible to carry on anti-incident activities without being hampered by the rules on working hours.

The Armed Forces' analysis capacity

The Navy Analysis Group became in many ways the nucleus of the Swedish Armed Forces' capacity for assessments of events in Swedish waters. The members of the Analysis Group represented a body of expertise that could not be challenged either within or outside the Armed Forces.

The Group's assessments gained wide acceptance and greatly influenced the views presented by the Armed Forces, on which the Government based its conduct of foreign policy.

The Analysis Group's treatment of various indications during the Hårsfjärden episode showed, with one or two notable exceptions, a tendency to exaggerate rather than critically examine the material that was reported. The Group's assessments during the following incidents made it clear that it was not on the side of those elements in the Armed Forces that were most sceptical to various indications.

The Group also played an important part in the preparation of the 1987 report. It was often at the centre of the system within the system that is described in the section on the report, where the risk of such a closed system losing touch with reality was also pointed out.

This was not the fault of the highly professional individual analysts who were responsible for the analyses. But the system would have worked better if broader foreign policy expertise had been given a place in these activities. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the work of the Analysis Group contributed greatly to a marked improvement and concentration of operations and to submarine hunting operations of high professional and technical precision.

Handling of the tape recordings made in autumn 1982

The handling of the tapes must be criticized. They represented potentially important evidence and as such they should have been registered immediately and then handled and stored with all due care.

The international picture – other countries' experiences

Underwater violations have also taken place in other countries. However, in these countries the attitude to informing the public and the media about these incidents is considerably more restrictive than in Sweden.

Soviet midget submarine systems

Since the Swedish Armed Forces and some experts consider that the Soviet midget submarine system was responsible for a large number of the reported violations of Swedish waters, the inquiry describes some of the available information about these systems.

For various reasons this material is not very extensive. The Russian side has denied having had any midget submarines for military use other than the Piranha class submarines which were launched in 1987, and were mentioned in the Swedish-Russian talks.

Other information has, for example, been presented by Carl Bildt in a speech in which he described two different types of Soviet midget submarines that were involved in operations against Sweden.

Similar information has also been presented by two retired British naval officers, who outlined the specifications that the midget submarines might be required to meet for the needs of the Soviet Baltic Fleet.

It is a moot point whether the Soviet Union developed midget submarine systems of the type described by Carl Bildt. It cannot be considered very likely that such systems would have been developed specifically for use against Sweden.

Cooperation with other countries

The inquiry mentions an episode in 1960 which suggests that informal agreements on joint exercises between Sweden and other countries may have occurred. However, no evidence was found for the pattern of coordination and preparedness tests described, inter alia, by the American former Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger.

The media

The media played a key role. This role was not always that of the critical observer; TV, the radio and the press often seem to have been used, or have let themselves be used, by various players. The media, like everyone else, were carried away by the dramatic events and sometimes became directly involved in shaping them. Only in recent years have the media resumed their critical, analytical role, and a clear division of roles between the media and other players has been established.

Perspectives on the submarine issue – motives and facts

There is plenty of evidence that the violations were linked to the Baltic Sea's growing strategic role and to rivalries and conflicts between the military blocs. The significance of Sweden's extension of its territorial boundary from 4 to 12 nautical miles in 1979 must also be taken into account.

The violations could probably not be motivated as actions directed primarily at Sweden's security. Rather, they should be seen in the context of the bilateral confrontation between the power blocs. Knowledge about and access to safe areas and fixed and other signal systems, mine lines, etc. could in the event of a conflict be of great importance when it came to securing logistics, troop supplies and forward operations in a conflict in Central Europe.

The submarine operations must consequently be seen in a broader security and foreign policy context.

The overall conclusion is that alien underwater operations occurred in Swedish waters during the 1980s and up to and including 1992. The number of established violations during the

period 1980-2000 is less than ten. Apart from this, the possibility of violations should be taken seriously in the case of about thirty other incidents.

There is no solid evidence that allows any conclusions to be made about the nationality of the violating submarines.

It is not unlikely that the Soviet Union, as the largest naval power in the Baltic Sea, may have had reasons for intruding on Swedish territory. The Soviet Union can therefore scarcely be excluded as a possible violating state. Nor can the possibility of intrusions by Western submarines be excluded. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it has not been possible to identify the nationality of any of the submarines.