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NEUTRALITY AND MORALITY: THE SWEDISH EXPERIENCE

KRISTER WAHLBÄCK^{*}

The theme of our conference—neutrality, morality and the Holocaust—suggests to most of us, I think, two things. First, this theme suggests that neutrality and morality are sometimes in conflict. Secondly, it suggests that this conflict is especially close at hand if the war in which some states are neutral is fought to save Europe from coming under the mastery of a power that is carrying out the Holocaust. For my own part, I agree on both points; however, I would like to add two qualifications.

First, while neutrality may sometimes be difficult to reconcile with moral rectitude, engaging in warfare entails moral problems as well. The controversies surrounding Dresden and Hiroshima indicate one example of such problems. Another example of this controversy is illustrated by American uneasiness about the logic of warfare that made them support their Soviet ally even as Stalin was imposing his rule on the Poles and the Balts in 1943-1944. Later, I shall discuss the unique way in which this dilemma presented itself to decision-makers in a small country, namely Sweden.

Second, while Sweden might have cut short the war and the Holocaust by joining the war against Nazi Germany, this is by no means certain. As one member of Sweden's Government observed in December 1939, "to choose preventive war is to try and peek at the cards held by Our Lord." Even at fifty years distance, it is not easy to gauge the net result of an alternative course of action. I think many of us are familiar with some contentious attempts to engage in simi-

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lar "counter-factual history." I shall discuss this issue in more detail, as well.

Moral issues such as these are not the first item on the agenda of the Swedish Commission on Jewish Assets at the Time of the Second World War ("Commission")—a body that was appointed by our Government in March 1997 and was asked to present its report in November of this year. In fact, the Commission's terms of reference make it clear that our task is much more concrete, namely to establish the extent to which Jewish property came into Swedish hands as a result of Nazi persecution. To the extent that Swedes took advantage of the plight of Jewish people, it is of course unacceptable. As such, there is a unanimous opinion in Sweden that no stone should be left unturned in the efforts to establish what actually transpired.

This is an extensive and complicated task. Not only are we looking for transactions that took place more than fifty years ago, but we are also finding that surviving records in public and private archives are often incomplete. In addition, we want to identify all kinds of transactions, whether they concern arts and antiques, bank accounts and safe deposits, patents and licenses, or shares and looted gold. All of this is to be investigated and clarified within a time frame of eighteen months.¹

And that is not all. Public debate in the media reflects a much broader range of issues concerning Sweden's policies related to the situation of our Jewish community during World War II, and our foreign and trade policy in general. The Commission may find it necessary to address these wider issues to some extent, even though it is against tradition for a Swedish Commission to go beyond its terms of reference and deal superficially with questions of great importance.

Whatever decision may be taken in this respect, it is obvious that the Commission shall have to confront the moral issues involved in the transfer of Jewish property to Sweden. Also, we will discuss the concept of neutrality, as it was understood at the time, in Sweden and internationally, and in particular as it applied to a neutral state's foreign trade and economic transactions with other countries. Thus, the

1. In October 1998, the Commission asked the Government to allow a delay for the final report until March 1, 1999.

dilemmas indicated in the heading of our conference today are certainly present in the minds of my colleagues in the Commission.

What I am going to say today, however, does not in any way represent the views of the Commission. I am only one of seven members, and the commission has not yet agreed upon any texts dealing with these issues. Thus, my remarks reflect only my personal views.

* * *

The controversial aspects of Sweden's wartime policies were, for several decades after the war, primarily the government's two major departures from the rules of neutrality as laid down in the Hague Conventions. The first major departures occurred in July 1940, when Germany was allowed to transport soldiers on leave from occupied Norway to Germany and back on Swedish railways. Although these transports, which continued on a daily basis until August 1943, saved the Germans the trouble of shipping their soldiers on leave by sea along the West Coast of Sweden, they were obviously of very limited significance from a military point of view. The same is true for the much less numerous transports of German soldiers on the Swedish railway from Storlien—close to Trondheim in central Norway—to Riksgransen—close to Narvik in northern Norway—and back. These transports, also granted in July 1940 and known in Sweden as the "horse-shoe traffic," eased the strain on German shipping along the Norwegian coastline, again in a marginal way.

The second departure from the Hague Convention's rules of neutrality occurred in late June 1941 as Germany was allowed to move an entire division, including its equipment, through Sweden from occupied Norway to Finland. At this time, Finland was, of course, a co-belligerent of Germany in the attack on the Soviet Union. The German division would support the Finnish offensive to regain the territories that they had been forced to cede during the Winter War in 1940. Again, the effect of this "one-time concession" was that the Germans did not need to use their naval transport resources to ship the division through the Baltic Sea, as they had to do six weeks later when the Germans came back with a similar request, only to have it rejected by Sweden.

With regard to the soldiers-on-leave as well as the 1941 division, the real importance was political and psychological. To the Nazi regime, the concessions implied that Sweden was finally beginning to

see the realities of power in the new Europe, and perhaps even to appreciate the Nazi design for pushing Liberalism out of Europe and exterminating Bolshevism. To many Swedes, on the other hand, the concessions signified a rather humiliating deviation from the rules of international law enforced by German pressure.

With respect to the June 1941 transit, the Swedish government publicly acknowledged that this was a breach of the law of neutrality. As a practical matter, the government noted that the disfavored party, the Soviet Union, delivered a late and weak protest. Obviously, Moscow had not expected that Sweden would get away with such a relatively modest concession.

Concerning the soldiers-on-leave traffic, the government argued that the Hague conventions of 1907 did not really regulate military transit through a neutral state, between a belligerent power and a country occupied by this power, and in which hostilities had ceased. I am uncertain of the validity of this argument in terms of international law. From a political point of view, it carried some weight in the summer of 1940, when there was much defeatism in Norway and a number of political leaders, including prominent Labor party politicians, were preparing an agreement with Germany that would have dumped the King and government in exile. In later years, however, when Norwegian resistance had picked up, the argument appeared casuistic.

The well-established concept of neutrality in international law seems to have served as a moral protection for many Swedes who felt uneasy about watching a battle that would decide the future of their own nation as a free democracy from the sidelines. If a posture of neutrality was fully accepted in international law, then it must be all right. By fulfilling the obligations incumbent upon a neutral state in international law, our policy would not be merely national egoism and opportunism. By the same token, however, any departure from legal neutrality rules destroyed the moral protection they were seeking. Thus, these two decisions to deviate from strict observance of the neutrality rules stirred a growing opposition.

In contrast, Swedish exports of iron ore to Germany, which were much more important to Germany's military capabilities but were perfectly all right from the point of view of neutrality law, did not arouse any significant objections. Only in recent years have the iron

ore exports become the target of criticism in our debate, but then mostly by people who seem to believe that this trade was somehow in contravention of neutrality in international law.

This sensitivity to infractions of the rules of neutrality, even when they had little military importance, as in the case of the transports, but indifference to a crucial strategic trade that came within the rules, as in the case of the iron ore exports, may seem a strangely legalistic attitude. It was, however, I believe, part of the mindset of Swedish elites developed in the course of a century-long tradition.

* * *

The Swedish Government's policy towards the media was a result of the German interpretation of the political concept of neutrality. Authoritarian and totalitarian regimes normally try to make the government of the neutral state responsible for the content of the country's press. Hitler was a master in conveying the impression that he might resort to violent means if offended by derogatory press comments in small countries within his reach. The Swedish government did not feel able to dismiss such risks. In 1940, the Swedish Government revived an obsolete paragraph in the constitution, allowing the confiscation of an issue that contained a piece that had caused "misunderstanding" with a foreign power. By this and other measures, sometimes of dubious legality, the government managed to induce the papers to moderate their language in editorials and to suppress some news items objectionable to the Germans.

Thus, the government failed to fully defend an important freedom granted to a neutral country in international law. It seems likely that this affected the "moral atmosphere," as it were, in 1940-42, in the sense that clear and ringing expressions of anti-Nazi views came to be regarded as unwise by many people who did not want to defy the government or who were convinced that the government must know best. At the same time, it seems difficult to prove that any significant information about the world war was withheld from the Swedish public. For instance, news about the persecution of Jews was freely published.

On the other hand, many of the minor Swedish concessions to Germany—some of them questionable from a legal point of view, and most of them assisting the German-Finnish war against the Soviet Union in 1941-43—did not become known to the Swedish peo-

ple until long after the event. This seems to have been due, however, more to effective secrecy and lack of investigative journalism than to confiscation or other similar instruments.

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A large part of our public debate in recent years focuses on the extent of pro-German or pro-Nazi sentiment among certain influential parts of Swedish society. It is true that when the Nazis tried their luck in parliamentary elections, they were singularly unsuccessful, more so in Sweden, I think, than in most other European countries. In the elections of September 1940, they did not even attempt to nominate candidates. The Communists, who did nominate candidates, polled 3.5 percent of the national vote, while the Prime Minister's party, the Social Democrats, attained a stunning 53.8 percent, and the three non-Socialist parties taking part in the national government got 42 percent.

Notwithstanding, I do not think this is a sufficient reason to maintain that there were fewer Nazi-sympathizers in Sweden than in most other countries. Rather, the difference is that the special temptation that German occupation for ambitious opportunists presented in other countries, never materialized in Sweden. As such, fewer persons exposed themselves, and only a handful were brought to justice as traitors or collaborators since the Germans never asked for their services in the same way they did in the occupied countries. It should be noted, furthermore, that no evidence has been found in German archives of Swedes emulating Quisling, i.e., encouraging a German attack and volunteering their support.

Those who had publicly defended Nazi Germany, even after the occupation of Norway and Denmark in April 1940, suffered mildly after the war by being excluded, as a practical matter, from public debate and political life. But a number of academics, officers, businessmen, and farmers who had assimilated large parts of Nazi thinking, sometimes anti-Semitism, but had been careful not to expose themselves publicly, were able to continue their careers as if nothing had happened. It is hard to see how this could have been prevented in a law-abiding democracy; however, it did create a feeling among many Swedes that something important remained unresolved in our country in comparison to most of Europe.

A special case is those people who believed that Germany would win the war and thought that Sweden should make concessions to Berlin, but who did not have the least sympathy for Nazi Germany. For example, the Chairman of the Liberal Party and Minister of Transport, a farmer who was completely alien to everything Nazi Germany stood for, took a pessimistic and defeatist view in 1940. The Foreign Minister, for his part, was a man of letters who voted with the Social Democrats at election time. As a diplomat of the realist tradition, however, he was anxious to maintain a *modus vivendi* with Nazi Germany, which he thought would dominate Europe for several years.

Apparently the Swedish government never really addressed the issue of whether German victory was indeed a possibility, and whether we should mentally prepare to save some measure of Swedish independence under such circumstances. Most members of the government refused to confront this issue, hoping that America and Russia would eventually be drawn into the war, and that, meanwhile, Britain would refuse to deal with Hitler. These hopes turned out to be well founded, and Sweden's ultimate moral dilemma never materialized.

* * *

With regard to Swedish attitudes to the Holocaust and its preliminaries in the 1930's, let me give you a few examples that I find particularly illuminating. First, Sweden could have easily have received ten thousand more Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria before the war without any serious difficulties, either in terms of relations with Berlin or in terms of employment at home. It chose not to do so mainly because political leaders did not want to challenge prevailing self-centeredness and latent xenophobic or anti-Semitic feelings among the public. This was shortsighted, primarily from a humanitarian point of view, but also because it would have produced the great benefits of an infusion of Jewish talent in Swedish intellectual and academic life. It is true that most other countries were equally reticent, and that no one could know for sure, even after the Kristallnacht in November 1938, what would ultimately happen. Still, this is, in my view, the most tragic of our failures in the World War II period.

Second, there are no signs that Swedish businessmen in the 1930's ever discussed the appropriate attitude to take to formerly Jewish

enterprises in Germany that had been subjected to "aryanization." Nor is there any sign that the government tried to encourage such a discussion, for instance, about restricting credits or business contacts with such "aryanized" companies that refused to account for the settlement reached with the former owners or for the possibility that these owners could move abroad if they wished. Obviously, individual banks or companies cannot be expected to design and apply a "code of conduct" of this kind on their own. To be effective, such a policy has to be worked out and agreed to by the organizations of the industry. In view of the political implications, and the importance of trade with Germany for the Swedish economy in the 1930's, only the government, in reality, could have assumed the responsibility for bringing this issue into focus. As I said, the government failed in this respect. More surprisingly, I have found no evidence that any similar ideas were discussed in London or New York—powers that had much more economic clout vis-à-vis Germany and also a greater tradition of close links to prominent Jews in German banking and industry.

Third, with regard to heirless accounts and looted gold, one has to keep in mind that Sweden in the early 1930's was not an international center for banking and finance. Sweden did not enjoy a reputation for safeguarding bank secrecy better than other countries. Nor was German a national language in our country. Thus, it is not surprising that out of some 650 heirless accounts and safe deposits—almost all of them identified by a previous review in the 1960's—only a few dozen would seem to have been established by German Jews.

As for the amounts of monetary and private gold looted by the Nazis and received by the Bank of Sweden, this is currently under intense review by a special working group within our Commission. A few months ago, the government ordered us to give priority to presenting a separate report on this matter as soon as possible. This order came after an account by an independent committee appointed by the Bank of Sweden detailed the information available in the Bank's archives, but did not answer all questions raised in our public debate. It did indicate, as one would expect, however, that the Bank of Sweden's role in German gold laundering was a relatively modest one. Yet it is, of course, a crucial task for our Commission to present a

full and accurate picture in this separate report, which will be published in early July 1998.²

An important issue for us to analyze is the extent to which the government knew about the Bank of Sweden's growing suspicions that gold received by the Germans might be looted monetary gold. The account published by the Bank of Sweden committee contains fairly convincing evidence that this was indeed the case by early 1943. Moreover, it seems that the government at this time turned down a proposal by the Bank to officially ask the German Reichsbank for assurances that upcoming deliveries would not contain looted monetary gold. Such a request would have annoyed the Germans. Even if the reply had been positive, it would obviously not have meant the slightest guarantee against German cheating.

Still, what seems to me nearly inexplicable is the fact that the government's stand on this issue appears to have been supported, if not decided, by the Minister of Finance, Ernst Wigforss. He was a brilliant mind and a deeply committed Socialist and anti-Nazi who used to be the foremost opponent whenever the government considered concessions to Germany in political-military matters. Yet, he preferred not to put the Germans on the spot with regard to the matter of looted gold, even though we would have had a legitimate case.

Perhaps this is but another sign of the Swedish inclination during the war to focus on neutrality rules in international law rather than economic factors that might affect the world war to a greater extent. Perhaps it is also—to judge by the memoirs of the Minister of Finance—a matter of a certain Swedish aloofness with regard to the big powers, an attitude which I shall discuss later, but an attitude which one would not have expected to encounter in a politician with such strong ideological commitment. Thus, for instance, writing in 1954, Ernst Wigforss states that:

[d]uring the war, we had hardly felt any need to justify our neutrality by any other argument than our own interest in avoiding the destruction of war. . . . When sometimes we were told that fighting Nazism was a duty for democrats, the usual and natural reply was

2. In October 1998, the report became available in an English translation. See REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON JEWISH ASSETS IN SWEDEN AT THE TIME OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE NAZI GOLD AND THE SWEDISH RIKSBANK (1998).

that we fulfilled this duty by defending our own country and keeping democratic freedoms there intact as much as possible.³

My fourth and last example is the German attempts in 1939-1942 to induce Swedish businesses to ease out Jewish members from their boards, using hints that this would improve their prospects on the German market in the future. According to documents in the archives of the Swedish security services, which apparently kept a close watch on such German activities, some Swedish companies seem to have yielded to this temptation.

Nevertheless, the Wallenberg bank—Stockholms Enskilda Bank—had a prominent Jewish publisher, Tor Bonnier, on its board. He was the favorite target of German and Swedish Nazis who wished to illustrate and condemn Jewish influence in Swedish society. He was re-elected during all of the war years, as was another Jewish member of the board, Josef Sachs. In his memoirs, Bonnier notes that there were only three board members recruited from outside “the family sphere:” Sachs, himself, and a third, non-Jewish industrialist. It is no wonder he states that he did not notice any of the anti-Semitism of which some have accused the Wallenberg brothers.

This raises the wider issue of Swedish attitudes to our Jewish community during the war. This is a large subject on which many Jewish people will have diverging recollections. While this is of course a very minor matter compared to the Holocaust, it was important to those affected, and it does tell us something about the political climate in Sweden during these years. One member of the Jewish community in Stockholm who grew up in Sweden during the war recently told me that, while he did not meet open anti-Semitism, he did feel lack of support. Personally, I think this may be as fair as you can get it in a one sentence judgement.

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Politically, the most important criticisms of Sweden's attempt to reconcile neutrality and morality during the years of the Holocaust are the statements in Under-Secretary Eizenstat's introduction to his report on Nazi gold that was published in the spring of 1997.⁴ A sec-

3. See ERNST WIGFORSS, *MINNEN III, 1932-1949*, at 438 (1954).

4. See *generally* UNITED STATES AND ALLIED EFFORTS TO RECOVER AND RESTORE GOLD AND OTHER ASSETS STOLEN OR HIDDEN BY GERMANY DURING

ond report is to be published shortly, but for the moment, we have to accept the statements in the first report as an important expression of American views. And they certainly raise issues that are crucial for the Swedish people as they try to form a considered opinion about our war-time policies.

Mr. Eizenstat states that before Stalingrad there was a legitimate fear of imminent German invasion. After that German defeat, however, the Swedes in his view "cooperated with Nazi Germany for their own economic benefit," and "continued to profit from their trading links with Germany, and thus contributed to prolonging one of the bloodiest conflicts in history."⁵ I am not sure that these statements are quite fair since they imply that Sweden had the option to do without any foreign trade, or alternatively, that Sweden preferred a profitable trade with Germany to a less profitable trade with other commercial partners. However, for a small internationalized economy such as Sweden's, substantial exports were vital to avoid economic collapse, in particular, since Sweden lacked coal or oil resources and must therefore import all such energy products. As for other trading partners, ever since the German occupation of Norway and Denmark in April 1940, Sweden was cut off from the West, which normally accounted for some seventy percent of Sweden's foreign trade.

After the spring of 1940, Sweden was utterly dependent upon Germany and countries under German control to get coal and coke for industry, and artificial fertilizers for agriculture. Without this trade, our economy would have broken down with fatal consequences for our capacity to withstand German pressure, as well as for our efforts to modernize and strengthen our defense forces.

With respect to profit motive, I find it hard to fault Swedish private companies who made profits out of their transactions with Germany. If they had not tried their best, they would, in effect, have been knowingly subsidizing the German war effort. In any case, from the government's point of view and the Swedish economy as a whole, it is apparent that foreign trade during World War II was not a question of profit, but of survival.

It is true that trade benefits both parties. Furthermore, Sweden's efforts to keep her own economy going inevitably had the effect of assisting the German war effort. This was one of the many moral dilemmas of Swedish neutrality in a war in which our own survival as an independent nation and a free democracy presupposed the defeat of Nazi Germany.

If Sweden had cut exports to Germany for political and moral reasons, and Hitler reacted to such a challenge by occupying Sweden or subduing us by other means, it is possible that the Germans would have exploited Sweden's industrial and economic resources with such ruthless efficiency as to extract a far greater contribution to their war effort than was the case. As stated previously, it is seldom easy for historians to gauge the net result of an alternative course of action.

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Such was our foreign trade situation since the Spring of 1940, and I am not sure that Stalingrad made much of an immediate difference. In fact, in September 1943, the United States and Great Britain acknowledged that Sweden had to conduct a substantial trade with Germany by concluding an agreement with Sweden that specified the acceptable quantity of Swedish exports to Germany for the coming year—1944. This agreement meant a reduction in Swedish exports to Germany, but allowed for sufficient quantities to safeguard Sweden's indispensable imports.

Mr. Eizenstat suggests that if Sweden and other neutrals had cut off all exports to Germany some time after Stalingrad, World War II would have ended earlier. At the time, the Allies realized, however, that Nazi Germany was still capable of striking fiercely at any country within its reach, as evidenced by its actions against Italy in September 1943 and against Hungary in March 1944. Nevertheless, after Stalingrad, Germany's leeway for such actions was constantly shrinking. But if Sweden had challenged Germany by cutting off her exports for political and moral reasons, Hitler did not necessarily have to launch a war of occupation to retaliate in a way that would have made the position of the Swedish government impossible. Let us consider Hitler's options.

First, such a Swedish policy would have run against the law of neutrality, which does not allow economic sanctions for political rea-

sons—except perhaps in case of decisions taken by the League of Nations. It would also have run against consistent Swedish declarations, made before and during the war, that only the interests of our national economy would dictate our trade policy. Thus, it would have been easy for the Germans to undermine national unity in Sweden by using German propaganda putting the blame on the Swedish government for provoking the conflict and the hardships that would ensue.

Second, while such hardships would have come fairly soon, as German exports of coal to our industry were cut off, there was also the option of inflicting hardship very rapidly, for instance, by making air strikes against a few major Swedish cities. These were all within easy reach of German bombers, and our air defenses were far too weak to prevent such attacks. I do not know how much destruction a small country can stand if it is unable to strike back and other countries are unable to give effective assistance.

A third option was subtler. The Germans could force the Swedish government into continuous mobilization by staging minor but ominous troop movements in surrounding occupied countries. Two such mobilizations, in the Spring of 1941 and in February 1942, that were not caused by German designs to wear us down, but by somewhat alarmist Swedish interpretations of German moves, proved very costly for the national economy. Political leaders and ordinary Swedes at the time took these weeks of waiting without any visible strain, but what if the crises had been repeated many times?

I think these examples demonstrate that a small country, surrounded by a dominant power, has to carefully consider the many forms of reprisals at the disposal of the more powerful country. The smaller country must tread carefully before challenging the more powerful country.

The Swedish government was under no illusions concerning Hitler's fundamental distrust of Sweden. The cancellation of favors granted to Germany in 1940-1941 and the increasingly open anti-Nazi attitude of the Swedish public raised suspicions in Berlin that the Swedes might join the Allies. Hitler feared an allied invasion in Norway because it would create precisely this kind of pressure on Sweden, and also provide the Swedes with credible prospects for effective Allied military support against Germany. Hitler dispatched

substantial military resources to Norway and even had his military consider a preventive strike against Sweden.

It was in the Allies' interest to encourage speculation about an invasion in Norway to bring about some dispersion of the German forces that were poised to meet the "real" invasion in France. As late as June 9, 1944—three days after D-day—the American and British ministers to Stockholm surprised the Swedish government by demanding renewed assurances that Sweden would indeed fight if attacked by Germany. This approach was probably a move intended to foster Swedish expectations of a subsidiary Allied invasion in Norway, the idea being that Swedish military preparations for such a scenario could affect German perceptions and induce Germany to keep substantial troops in Norway rather than moving them to France. As a result, in the Spring of 1944 the Swedish government could not ignore the thought that Germany might still be tempted to make a preventive strike against Sweden to consolidate its control of Scandinavia and preempt any attempt by Finland to make a separate peace with the Soviet Union.

The risk of a preventive strike might increase if Sweden were to make a unilateral decision to curtail 1944 trade below the quantities agreed to with Germany in January 1944 in accordance with Sweden's deal with the Allies in September 1943. In fact, in April 1944 the Allies asked for such large cutbacks, primarily regarding ball-bearings. The ball-bearing issue was settled in direct contacts between United States representatives and the SKF Company in June 1944. In August and September 1944, the Swedish government took decisions that effectively put an end to nearly all trade between Germany and Sweden. By this time, Sweden had succeeded in building up sizable stocks of crucial raw materials and was less dependent upon German deliveries.

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I have tried to account for the reasons that made the Swedish government proceed with great circumspection in its trade policies toward Germany. In retrospect, my personal view is that Sweden could have taken a somewhat tougher line without running excessive risks. The effect would have been relatively marginal, but at least we would have felt more comfortable with our wartime record today. Mr. Eizenstat's suggestion of a Swedish boycott of trade with Ger-

many in 1943, however, is quite another matter. This suggestion reflects a changed awareness in recent years. Today, as we have come to realize the atrocities of the Holocaust, as well as other suffering and destruction, it is natural that we look for alternative developments that might have shortened the war. With regard to the Holocaust, we are all aware, for instance, of the debate about the possible effects on the Nazi annihilation program had the Allies used their air superiority to strike at transportation lines to Auschwitz and other extermination camps. A neutral country like Sweden cannot expect to be unaffected by these perspectives.

But those who made the wartime decisions in Sweden did not think in these terms. After the war, the notion that Sweden had the ability to shorten the world war by breaking off trade with Germany in 1943 was simply absent in the Swedish debate for a very long time. Swedes were still quite conscious of the trade imperatives during the war and of Sweden's vulnerability to the brute force of Nazi Germany. Sweden also lacked much of today's awareness of the terrible destructiveness of the last year of World War II. There were also some other factors at play; a set of painful recent experiences that shaped the Swedish view of the country's proper place in European politics.

As a small democracy located close to Nazi Germany, the Swedish people were prepared to go to war with Germany to defend vital Swedish interests, and also, perhaps, to run some risks in order to assist her Nordic neighbors. But the idea, in 1943-1945, of trying to play a role in shortening the immense war between the great powers was simply alien to a small nation that had adhered to neutrality largely out of frustration with the great powers of Europe. In fact, at the outbreak of World War II, the mood in Sweden was one of disillusioned isolationism with regard to the great powers. The reasons are fairly clear.

Sweden had joined the League of Nations in 1920. Woodrow Wilson's idea of collective security had gained the upper hand over our strong tradition of neutrality present since the end of the Napoleonic wars. Sweden had accepted that it was mandatory for us to take part in economic sanctions against an aggressor, and that we had to prepare to apply military sanctions in some situations as well. Sweden had ceased to refer to itself as a "neutral" country.

The decision of the League of Nations in 1935 to make the collective security system work for the first time had been greeted with enthusiasm in Sweden. The British and French policies of avoiding such sanctions that would really have an impact on the aggressor, and the fact that fascist Italy was not prevented from conquering Ethiopia, however, destroyed much of Sweden's faith in international solidarity.

The appeasement policies towards Hitler further revived old skepticism in Sweden with regard to Europe's great powers. Just as France and Britain had imposed a flawed peace treaty in Versailles without caring about the views of other powers, they now switched to the opposite policy without regard for the effects on Germany's small neighbors. The United States had retreated from Europe when Woodrow Wilson's vision of a leading American role in the League of Nations was defeated in 1920.

In 1937-1939, Sweden withdrew from Europe and pinned its hopes on the possibilities of keeping the Nordic region out of a coming war. In a Europe increasingly dominated by fascist and communist dictators facing illusionist democratic leaders such as Chamberlain and Daladier, the notion of a "Nordic neutrality" had great appeal. Based upon a measure of Nordic solidarity between four small democracies, neutrality seemed promising to those Swedes who retained some ambition that our foreign policy ought to reflect values beyond mere isolationism or national egoism.

Some of this policy was carried out, in effect, when the Soviet Union attacked Finland in November 1939. Sweden did not intervene in the war, but it refrained from issuing any declaration of neutrality and used its status as non-belligerent to extend considerable support to Finland by shipping them large quantities of armaments. Finland survived, due to the heroic feats of its army, even if it had to cede a large part of its territory to the Soviet Union.

When Germany attacked Norway and Denmark a month after the end of the Soviet-Finnish War, a similarly supportive Swedish policy proved impossible. The Germans demanded at least neutrality. Sweden was within immediate reach of the German war machine, and the Norwegians were not successful in their struggle against the invader. Sweden reaffirmed its neutrality and avoided providing any support to the Norwegian government.

After the war had turned against the Germans in 1942-1943, however, the Nordic agenda again became paramount to the Swedish government. In the first place, Finland, which had joined the German attack against the Soviet Union in 1941 in order to regain the territories lost in 1940—and possibly to grab some more—had to get out of the war before it was too late. This would be impossible if Sweden were occupied by Germany or subdued by other means. The Finns would have to be able to rely on a friendly neighbor if they were ever to run the risk of breaking with Germany and seeking a precarious accommodation with the Soviet Union. Swedish support would be essential, not least to make up for German deliveries of grain and other products. The Finns did not switch sides until September 1944.

Sustaining an independent Finland was important for Sweden because Sweden did not want the Soviet Union as her immediate neighbor. This was also a moral issue. As stated earlier, to engaging in warfare may entail moral problems no less serious than remaining neutral. In the case of Sweden after the battle of Stalingrad, to take the risk of provoking a German occupation might not have had irremediable consequences for Sweden. In all likelihood, the Western Allies would liberate Sweden. For Finland, on the other hand, it would have meant the fate of Estonia.

As for our neighbors to the West, it was essential that Norway and Denmark be liberated without being ravaged by renewed warfare or domestic violence at the very end of the war. The Swedish government thought it might have a useful role both in training police troops recruited from the large Norwegian and Danish refugee communities in Sweden, and in persuading the commanders of the German troops in Norway and Denmark not to make last-ditch resistance.

With regard to Finland, as well as Norway and Denmark, there was, in Swedish minds, a blend of a sincere wish to help and an equally sincere self-interest. It would be an advantage for our Nordic neighbors, as well as for ourselves, if Northern Europe emerged from the war in a reasonably stable condition, not in ruins and in social and political turmoil, as was the case in much of Continental Europe.

In the Swedish view, such an outcome presupposed that Sweden succeeded in staying out of the war and concentrated its limited resources on trying to stabilize the Nordic region. This effort would be

easier if Sweden managed to maintain normal diplomatic relations with Germany. It was not too difficult to foresee that some Germans in commanding positions might be susceptible to Swedish persuasion as Hitler's system approached collapse during the final months of the war.

These Nordic efforts were one part of what the Swedish government considered a reasonably ambitious role for a small country towards the end of the war. The other part was directly connected to the Holocaust. The best known example is, of course, the actions of Raoul Wallenberg, who in July 1944, was sent to the Swedish Legation in Budapest by our government in cooperation with the American War Refugee Board and the World Jewish Congress. Estimates of the number of Jewish people he managed to save by unconventional methods vary, but 30,000 seems to be a conservative figure. Another example is Count Folke Bernadotte, who in the early months of 1945, succeeded in extracting some 20,000 men, women and children, many of them Jewish, from Himmler's concentration camps. It is also worth mentioning that almost the entire Jewish community in Denmark, some 8,000 people, managed to escape to Sweden in 1943, only days before they were supposed to be rounded up by the Nazis. The majority of the Norwegian Jews were also able to escape to Sweden.

For the Swedish government during the final years of the war, a natural "activist" role was not to risk attack or occupation in order to shorten the world war. Rather, it was to assist its Nordic neighbors and use its status as a neutral for rescue missions on the Continent.

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Were these endeavors sufficient to compensate for the moral ambiguities inherent in a position of neutrality during World War II? This issue has been debated many times in Sweden, and today's concern about Nazi gold and Jewish assets will add yet another dimension to the discussion.

The Swedish government recently launched a project called "Living History," a series of informational and education activities about the Holocaust, which has attracted immense interest among the Swedish public. This project does not explicitly address the issue of Swedish attitudes during the Holocaust period. It is bound, however, to raise interest in the moral dilemmas faced by neutral Sweden, not

only in relation to Jewish suffering, but also to World War II as a whole. It may well raise questions that extend to Swedish neutrality during the Cold War decades, and perhaps even to the very notion of neutrality as laid down in the Hague Conventions and international law in general.