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A Swedish *Drang nach Osten*? Baltic-Nordic pendulum swings and Swedish conservative geopolitics

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes Swedish political scientist and conservative politician Rudolf Kjellén's advocacy in favour of a Swedish "Baltic program" directed at the Baltic Sea region and Russia in the decades preceding the First World War. These Baltic ambitions as well as their legacy in the interwar period are studied as a series of exercises in "para-diplomacy" on three different levels: 1) as a geopolitical reconstruction of a Baltic-Nordic "space of expectation;" 2) as a kind of Baltic-Nordic regionalism based upon early notions of "soft power;" and 3) as an inspiration to the geopolitical outlook of the Swedish military elite, business circles and trade policy-makers in the time period from the First World War up to the Second World War. This "region-work in the margins" contributed to modernizing Swedish conservative elites' geopolitical outlook into an ostensibly less aggressive vision of Swedish international influence through cultural, economic, and technological prowess.

Keywords: Baltic-Nordic regionalism, geopolitics, para-diplomacy, Rudolf Kjellén, Russian-Swedish relations

Over the past century, Sweden's relationship to the Baltic Sea region has usually been either poignantly troubled or programmatically oblivious. For some Swedish observers, often of conservative mind, the Baltic Sea region has been a canvas for projecting dreams, hopes and memories of past as well as future Swedish grandeur. For others, the majority, the Baltic Sea region has been a blank spot in the public mind, primarily conditioned by small power concern with great power tension in the region.[1]

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[1] For useful overviews of Baltic-Swedish interrelations from the First World War to the early Cold War years, see e.g. *Mellan björnen och* örnen*: Sverige och* Östersjöområdet *under det första världskriget, 1914–1918*, ed. by Johan Engström and Lars Ericson (Stock-

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At times, however, Sweden – a cosmopolitan in splendid isolation – has appeared on the verge of integrating with its immediate neighborhood. The fall of the wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, for example, temporarily reduced great power tension, globally as well as around this Northern European inland sea. This "window of opportunity" allowed for the possible reformulation of a Baltic regional project. Centered on the sea and manifested early on through the creation of the Council for the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) in 1992, a host of other macro-regional initiatives have followed. Successive Swedish governments, both left and right, have actively sought to promote closer Baltic-Nordic regional cooperation. Notably, the bourgeois government of Prime Minister Carl Bildt (1991–94) and the social democratic governments of Prime Minister Göran Persson (1996–2006), have taken on leading roles in this context.[2]

Against this backdrop, this article studies the relationship between earlier "windows of opportunity" – here understood as political conjectures which could potentially allow for a reimagination or rearrangement of regional relations – during the first half of the twentieth century as well as the successive attempts at capitalizing on these favourable moments for Baltic regionalism through various practices of "region-work in the margins."[3] A key actor in this context has been Swedish political scientist

holm: Armémuseum, 1994); *The Baltic in international relations between the two World Wars*, ed. by John Hiden and Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1988); *Contact or isolation? Soviet-Western relations in the interwar period*, ed. by John Hiden and Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1991); *Relations between the Nordic countries and the Baltic nations in the XX century*, ed. by Kalervo Hovi (Turku: University of Turku, 1998).

[2] See for example Ole Wæver, "Nordic nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War," *International Affairs*, 68:1 (1992), 77–102; Iver B. Neumann, "A region-building approach to Northern Europe," *Review of International Studies*, 20:1 (1994), 53–74; *Subregional cooperation in the new Europe: building security, prosperity and solidarity from the Barents to the Black Sea*, ed. by Andrew Cottey (Basingstoke: MacMillan 1998); Pirjo Jukarainen, "Norden is dead – long live the Eastwards faced Euro-North: geopolitical re-making of Norden in a Nordic Journal," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 34:4 (1999), 355–382; Lars Peter Fredén, *Förvandlingar: Baltikums frigörelse och svensk diplomati 1989–1991* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2004); Lars Peter Fredén, *Återkomster: Svensk säkerhetspolitik och de baltiska ländernas första år i självständighet 1991–1994* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2006); *Sverige och Baltikums frigörelse: två vittnesseminarier om storpolitik kring Östersjön 1989–1994*, ed. by Thomas Lundén and Torbjörn Nilsson (Huddinge: Samtidshistoriska institutet, Södertörns högskola, 2008); Krister Wahlbäck, *Baltisk befrielse: Svenska insatser för friheten* (Stockholm: Jarl Hjalmarson stiftelsen, 2012); Lars Ingelstam and Anders Mellbourn, *Fred, säkerhet, försvar: tyngdpunktsförskjutning i svensk politik* (Stockholm: Sveriges kristna råd, 2014), 22–29.

[3] While the Second World War certainly provided opportunities for Baltic regionalism as well, it also constricted the regionalist ambitions of marginal powers such as Sweden,

Rudolf Kjellén. Internationally mostly known as the "father of geopolitics," Kjellén was also a conservative politician and a prominent advocate for a more active Swedish foreign and trade policy in the years between the dissolution of the Union between Sweden and Norway in 1905 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. During this intense and tension-ridden decade in Swedish political history, Kjellén argued that Sweden needed to adopt a purposive "Baltic programme" with a view of not only extending Sweden's cultural and economic influence in the Baltic region in general and Russia in particular, but also establishing a new and more proactive position for itself in the global world order.

While Kjellén's scientific activities have long interested geographers, historians and political scientists internationally, Swedish researchers have mostly concentrated upon Kjellén's importance for Swedish domestic politics as a strategist for the *unghögern*, the Swedish Young Rightists, or the "Young Right."[4] In particular, his role in the emergence of *folkhem* (Peoples' Home) rhetoric and the conservative origins of this metaphor – later famously adopted by the social democrats as a rhetorical embodiment of the welfare state – has come under intensive and sometimes heated debate.[5] At the same time, Kjellén's geopolitical visions for Sweden and their legacy have remained rather obscure until recently.[6]

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which is the primary focus of this article. For a discussion of the general analytical concept of "region-work in the margins," see Mart Kuldkepp's and Carl Marklund's introductory text to this special issue.

[4] See for example Nils Elvander, *Harald Hjärne och konservatismen: konservativ idédebatt i Sverige 1865–1922* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1961); Rolf Torstendahl, *Mellan nykonservatism och liberalism: idébrytningar inom högern och bondepartierna 1918–1934* (Uppsala: Svenska bokförlaget, 1969); Birger Hagård, "Arvet från Rudolf Kjellén," *Svensk Tidskrift*, 58 (1971), 321–327; Staffan Källström, "Massan, eliten och civilisationens framtid," *Europas idéhistoria: 1900-talet, framstegets arvtagare*, ed. by Nils Runeby (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1998), 23–42; Torbjörn Nilsson, "Moderniseringens vän eller fiende? Den svenska högern 1904–2000," *Efter partistaten: uppsatser om politiska kulturer igår, idag och imorgon*, ed. by Anders Björnsson and Peter Luthersson (Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Högberg, 2000), 70–95.

[5] Mikael Hallberg and Tomas Jonsson, "Per Albin Hansson och folkhemsretorikens framväxt," *Makten, medierna och myterna: socialdemokratiska ledare från Branting till Carlsson*, ed. by Erik Åsard (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1996), 125–174; Fredrika Lagergren, *På andra sidan välfärdsstaten: en studie i politiska idéers betydelse* (Eslöv: B. Östlings bokförl. Symposion, 1999); Hans Dahlqvist, "Folkhemsbegreppet: Rudolf Kjellén vs Per Albin Hansson," *Historisk Tidskrift*, 122:3 (2002), 445–465; for a more recent analysis, see Ov Cristian Norocel, "Konstruktionen av högerradikala populistiska maskuliniteter i Sverige: en feministisk analys," *Arkiv*, 2 (2013), 45–67.

[6] Exceptions include discussions in *Geopolitik: en antologi*, ed. by Claes-Göran Alvstam and Gunnar Falkemark (Gothenburg: Padrigu, 1991); Sven Holdar, "The ideal state and the power of geography: the life-works of Rudolf Kjellén," *Political Geography*, 11:3 (1992),

This article primarily makes use of Kjellén's political journalism and popular science writings in Swedish on the regional position of Sweden, rather than his often German-language academic works. Widely read and discussed at the time, also by his social democratic and liberal critics, these writings serve as an entry point for an analysis of the broader context of predominantly conservative Swedish geopolitical imagination and subsequent region-work aimed at supporting future-oriented Swedish commercial and cultural activity in the Baltic Sea region and adjoining areas of Northwestern Russia. The article aims to place these rather lofty and admittedly marginal dreams in the context of actual economic and political conditions of Baltic-Russian-Swedish relations.

As such, these Swedish ambitions directed at the broader Baltic Sea region are here analyzed as a series of exercises in "para-diplomacy" on three different levels: First, they are studied as part of a geopolitical (re)-construction of a Baltic-Nordic "space of expectation" through practices of mental mapping, geographical imagination and historiographical reinterpretation of the early-twentieth-century inland sea, primarily based upon historical analogies with the seventeenth-century Swedish Empire.[7] Second, they are interpreted as early attempts at generating a kind of Baltic-Nordic regionalism based upon "soft power," projected through the intended usage of various immaterial power resources such as "Swedish" technical skills, know-how and business acumen in exploiting the Baltic and Russian markets to Swedish benefit.[8] Third and finally, the article discusses the legacy and impact of Kjellén's Baltic programme upon Swedish business circles and policy-makers in the time period from the First World War to the Second World War.

307–323; Jan Larsson, *Hemmet vi ärvde: om folkhemmet, identiteten och den gemensamma framtiden* (Stockholm: Arena [i samarbete med] Institutet för framtidsstudier, 1994); Mart Kuldkepp, "Sweden's historical mission and World War I: a regionalist theory of Swedish activism," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 39:1 (2014), 126–146; Carl Marklund, "The return of geopolitics in the era of soft power: rereading Rudolf Kjellén on geopolitical imaginary and competitive identity," *Geopolitics*, 19:4 (2014), 1–19; Carl Marklund, "Stor är stark, men liten är listig: Kjelléns baltiska program och geopolitikens lärdomar för en perifer 'mellanstat,'" *Rudolf Kjellén: geopolitiken och konservatismen*, ed. by Ragnar Björk, Bert Edström and Thomas Lundén (Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Högberg, 2014), 180–202.

[7] For the concept of "spaces of expectation," see Norbert Götz' current research project "Spaces of Expectation," funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation, <https://spacesofexpectation.wordpress.com/> (14. 09.2015).

[8] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft power: the means to success in world politics* (New York, N.Y.: Public Affairs, 2004); Janice Bialy Mattern, "Why 'soft power' isn't so soft: representational force and the sociolinguistic construction of attraction in world politics," *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 33:3 (2005), 583–612.

In conclusion, the article argues that the particular phenomenon of Swedish conservatives' projecting future Swedish grandeur not only onto the nearby Baltic Sea region and Northwestern Russia, but also to Africa,[9] the Arctic[10] and the Far East,[11] must be understood as part of a broader conservative re-reading of the logic of previous Swedish historical development as predominantly determined by "modern" factors, such as economic interests and political opportunities, rather than archaic aggression or heroism *per se*, a re-reading which sought to make Swedish foreign policy activism, both past and future, appear economically viable, politically sound and morally palatable to audiences both at home and abroad.

History: empire or enterprise?

In 1899, as the union between Sweden and Norway entered a new phase of tension, Swedish conservatives rallied around the objective of forcing Norway to remain within the union. Although an outspoken conservative, Rudolf Kjellén probed an alternate position in an article ostensibly dealing with the issue of Sweden's "borders."[12] Even if Kjellén regarded a Norwegian secession as a potential national and moral catastrophe for Sweden, he also noted that the ongoing conflict with the Norwegians on numerous economic and political matters sapped Swedish resources.[13] In fact, Kjellén argued, the union with Norway was far from "natural." The mountains separating the two quarreling nations split the Scandinavian Peninsula into two halves, one facing west and the other turning towards the east. Basing himself upon the latest findings of geological science, Kjellén sought to demonstrate how the geological "Baltic Shield" and the Baltic Sea's "water system" spelled a more natural geographical frame of reference for Sweden's spatial belonging than the Scandinavian Peninsula did.[14] Politically, Sweden was part of "a larger geographical unit, Fennoscandia," Kjellén

[9] See for example David Nilsson, *Sweden-Norway at the Berlin Conference 1884–85: history, national identity-making and Sweden's relations with Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2013).

[10] See for example Dag Avango, "Spetsbergen och Sveriges roll i den globala resurskolonialismen," *Sverige utanför – svensk makt och dess spår i utlandet*, ed. by Thomas Lundén (Stockholm: Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi, 2015), 151–176.

[11] See for example Tobias Hübinette, "Varför dras nazister och högerextremister till Asien?," *Orientaliska Studier*, 11 (2003).

[12] Rudolf Kjellén, "Studier öfver Sveriges politiska gränser," *Ymer* (1976/77 [1899]), 70–80.

[13] Elvander, *Harald Hjärne och konservatismen*, 274–275.

[14] Rudolf Kjellén, *Inledning till Sveriges geografi* (Gothenburg: Wettergren & Kerber 1900), 173.

argued, thereby making use of a novel geological concept introduced by Finnish geologist Wilhelm Ramsay in 1898.[15]

However, while Ramsay's geological notion of Fennoscandia included traditionally Russian territories such the Kola Peninsula and eastern Karelia, it excluded Russia's Baltic governorates, encompassing modern Estonia and Latvia. While geologically correct, Kjellén nevertheless found this omission inaccurate from the perspective of human geography, as the Baltic Sea had historically served to facilitate human contact around its rim. After all, Estonia and Latvia had been Swedish provinces until the early eighteenth century. While Kjellén concluded that "Fennoscandia's ancient glaciation" hardly could "serve as a precedent in a geopolitical context," he nevertheless noted that Austrian geographer Alexander Georg Supan's recently introduced concept of the "Scandinavian province" included Russia's Baltic governorates. Hence, it happened to coincide with the same territory as encompassed by the Swedish Empire of 1611–1721. Kjellén thus conceptualized this area as the natural scene of Swedish past exploits as well as a promising field for projecting future aspirations.[16]

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[15] Kjellén, *Inledning till Sveriges geografi*, 178. Apparantly, Kjellén was a pioneer in probing the possible geopolitical connotations of this geological concept, which would later expand into the eventually political notion of "Baltoscandia," most notably by Lithuanian geographer Kazys Pakštas, see his *The Baltoscandian Confederation* (Chicago, [1942]); for in-depth discussions of historical processes of Baltic-Nordic regionalism more generally and the concept Baltoscandia more specifically, see in particular Marko Lehti, *A Baltic league as a construct of the new Europe: envisioning a Baltic region and small state sovereignty in the aftermath of the First World War* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1999); Marko Lehti, "Baltoscandia as a national construction," *Relations between the Nordic countries and the Baltic nations in the XX century*, ed. by Kalervo Hovi (Turku: University of Turku, 1998), 22–52; *Post-Cold War identity politics: Northern and Baltic experiences*, ed. by Marko Lehti and David J. Smith (London: Frank Cass, 2003); *The Baltic as a multicultural world: sea, region and peoples* (Berlin: BWV, Berliner Wiss.-Verl., 2005); Marta Grzechnik, *Regional histories and historical regions: the concept of the Baltic Sea region in Polish and Swedish historiographies* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2012).

[16] Kjellén, *Inledning till Sveriges geografi*, 39, 54, 172–175. A similar logic encouraged Sir Halford Mackinder to later extend his famous notion of the Heartland – i.e., Eurasia – as the pivot of history to also include the lands draining into the Baltic "since no comparable land power lay between Western Russia and the coastlands of eastern Denmark and southern Sweden, the shores of the Skaggerak strait and the lands needed if one wished to close access to the Baltic." See Gerry Kearns, "Beyond the legacy of Mackinder," *Geopolitics*, 18:4 (2013), 918. The view that the Baltic extension of the Swedish Empire geographically matched the extension of Scandinavia including Finland would eventually become rather widespread in Swedish historiography. For example, a widely distributed work on Swedish history, edited by National Antiquarian Emil Hildebrand among others, echoed – without referencing – Kjellén's emphasis upon the lack of natural borders and the predominantly Baltic and essentially circummarine character of the Swedish Empire. Martin Weibull, "Geografisk öfversikt af det svenska

But Kjellén did not only make use of geological considerations in his search for an answer to the question of Sweden's "natural place on earth" and its regional identity. He also provided a more historical analysis by analyzing and comparing earlier periods of Swedish geographical expansion. Sweden's first expansion in eleventh century was certainly based upon "commercial interests," Kjellén argued. But it had lacked in geopolitical logic and staying power. The second Swedish expansion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was also short-lived. Yet: "While the former [Swedish expansion] stumbled eastward without any conscious plan or geographic principle at all, the latter is the result of a particular geopolitical idea: a *dominium maris baltici*, comprising as far as possible all the islands, bays, shores, and above all estuaries of this sea, being the arteries of trade, but hardly reaching further towards the east or into the continents than this."[17]

Furthermore, "the empire-building had been accomplished by a policy of looking eastward. Sweden's road to great power and empire was over the Baltic."[18] As such, the Swedish Empire depended more upon the "cohesive force" of the Baltic Sea and the trade routes which crisscrossed its' catchment area than any natural limits at the periphery of this primarily geographically and economically defined space.[19] Swedish great power era expansion had simply followed the dominant geographical and economic trajectories in this area, aiming to control the "arteries of trade." In this sense, the Swedish Empire was a "circummarine" political entity, according to Kjellén. However, just as most other circummarine states, Sweden had lacked the necessary continental power basis from which to exercise control over this maritime region.[20]

Indeed, continental Russia soon replaced Sweden's position in the Baltic Sea. After a number of unsuccessful attempts at regaining the losses, Kjellén interpreted Swedish statesmen as having consciously turned away

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väldet under senare hälften af 1600-talet," *Sverige historia intill tjugonde seklet. Afd. 6, Stormaktstiden: Senare skedet 1660–1718*, ed. by Oscar Montelius, Emil Hildebrand and G. R. Fåhræus (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söners Förlag, 1906), 371–372.

[17] Here, Kjellén heralded the latter historiographical reinterpretation of the Swedish Empire's expansionism as less influenced by military strategic security and religious solidarity than a desire to control the trade flows in the Baltic region. Kjellén, *Inledning till Sveriges geografi*, 55.

[18] *Ibid*., 54.

[19] *Ibid*., 56.

[20] *Ibid*., 58.

from the Baltic and towards the Atlantic,[21] aspiring to establish Sweden as a transoceanic economic actor on the power basis provided by the Scandinavian Peninsula through the union with Norway established in 1814.[22] In outlining this "territorial history" as he called it, Kjellén characterized Swedish political history as determined by a kind of pendulum movement, an oscillation between "Baltic" and "Nordic" or "Scandinavian" factors. The latter, according Kjellén, had always been in the "shadow" of the former. It was rather the result of failure in the east than any success in the west.[23] This image of geopolitically determined pendulum swings in Swedish economic and political history would continue to play a significant role almost all of Kjellén's later popular science texts and political pamphlets on Sweden's international position as a small state in a world dominated by great powers. As such, it served as a key element in his programmatic use of what Åsa Linderborg has conceptualized as "history-writing as an ideological power resource."[24]

A similar thesis had already been probed a few years earlier by conservative historian Harald Hjärne, who also influenced Kjellén to a considerable degree.[25] Until the late nineteenth century, Swedish historians had been mostly critical towards the Swedish Empire in general and Charles XII and his unsuccessful attempts at defending it in particular. However, in an article first published in 1889, Hjärne argued that the Swedish Empire should primarily be understood as a Baltic and economic project. From this novel perspective, it had admittedly been unsuccessful in channelling the Oriental trade across Russia towards the Western markets. But it had nevertheless successfully managed to contribute to "civilizing" Northern Europe in the process, according to Hjärne.[26]

In a following and highly influential 1897 article, Hjärne suggested that "Sweden's history turns since times immemorial towards the east."

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[21] Although not explicitly discussed by Kjellén, this conscious shift from east to west is evident in the political and economic negotiations undertaken by Swedish statesmen in the closing years of the Great Northern War. See for example Einar Ekegård, *Studier i svensk handelspolitik under den tidigare frihetstiden* (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1924), 212.

[22] Kjellén, *Inledning till Sveriges geografi*, 57.

[23] *Ibid*., 59; see also Rudolf Kjellén, *Sverige och utlandet* (Stockholm: Sv. folkförb:s, 1911), 3–5; Rudolf Kjellén, *Politiska handböcker, 4: Sverige* (Stockholm: Hugo Geber, 1917), 8–12.

[24] Åsa Linderborg, *Socialdemokraterna skriver historia: historieskrivning som ideologisk maktresurs 1892–2000* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2001).

[25] Elvander, *Harald Hjärne och konservatismen*.

[26] Harald Hjärne, "Sveriges Östersjövälde och Europa: några synpunkter," *Svenskt och främmande* (Stockholm: Geber, 1908), 80–97.

Its imperial experience could not be gauged from Sweden-centred studies of how its great power policies had affected Sweden itself, but from how it had contributed to the overall historical development of Eastern Europe more generally, with full inclusion of relevant Polish, Romanian, Russian, Turkish and Ukrainian perspectives. Perhaps paradoxically, Hjärne conceived of his novel historiographical program in the same nationalistic vein as many Swedes derived a sense of pride from the expansion and global reach of Swedish natural sciences since the times of Carolus Linneaus.[27]

This reassessment of the Swedish Empire did not only imply a fundamental reconsideration of Charles XII, the Swedish war aims, and the military ability of the Swedish Empire in defending itself during the Great Northern War. This struggle had previously been largely seen as disastrous and futile, just as the Swedish Empire itself. Now, this struggle was reinterpreted as having been a historical necessity which secured a measure of cultural continuity in the Baltic Sea region or even Eastern Europe more broadly, as Hjärne himself suggested. This reinterpretation of the Swedish imperial experience would eventually provide a key theme for the "activist" and expansionist sentiments which began to proliferate in particular among Swedish military professionals and the Swedish security elite in the time period between the world wars, as we will see.[28]

Also, this thesis would contribute to a reorientation in Swedish historiography concerning the Swedish Empire as such. Researchers increasingly begun to emphasize economic motives as driving forces of the East European policies of Charles IX and Gustavus II Adolphus, alongside the traditional explanations such as security interests and religious affinity.[29]

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[27] The full formulation reads "Sveriges historia vetter från hedenhös åt öster och samlar sig omsider i en väldig kamp, som omfattar hela Österuropa." Harald Hjärne, "Karl XII: en uppgift för svensk häfdaforskning," *Svenskt och främmande* (Stockholm: Geber, 1908), 129, 135; see also Harald Hjärne, *Karl XII: omstörtningen i Österuropa 1697–1703* (Stockholm, 1902).

[28] See in particular Sverker Oredsson, "Stormaktsdrömmar och stridsiver: ett tema i svensk opinionsbildning och politik 1910–1942," *Scandia*, 59:2 (1993), 257–296.

[29] For key works in this tendency, see Sven Svensson, *Czar Peters motiv för kriget mot Sverige: en problemställning* (Stockholm, 1931); Artur Attman, *Ryssland och Europa: en handelshistorisk översikt* (Stockholm: Ryska Institutet, 1946); Artur Attman, "Till det svenska Ostersjöväldets problematik," *Studier tillägnade Curt Weibull den 19 augusti 1946*, ed. by Åke Holmberg (Göteborg: Elanders, 1946); for more recent treatments, see Göran Rystad, *Ryssland eller Polen? Karl XII:s planer efter Dünaövergången: några synpunkter* (Lund, 1961); Kari Tarkiainen, "Faran från öst i svensk säkerhetspolitisk diskussion inför Stolbovafreden," *Scandia*, 40:1 (1974), 34–56; Artur Attman, *Ekonomiska förbindelser mellan Sverige och Ryssland under 1600-talet*, 2 vols. (Stockholm: Vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitetsakademien, 1978); Klaus Zernack, *Nordosteuropa. Skizzen und Beiträge zu*

Now, the Swedish Empire was understood as a primarily trade-oriented enterprise, which actively sought to not only control and tap, but to facilitate and expand the overland trade flows between China, Persia and Russia and Western Europe, in competition with the maritime powers and sometime cooperation with other trading interests, notably including the Armenians.[30] Economic historians increasingly began to seek connections between the diplomatic, military and political actions of seventeenth-century Swedish politicians and the ambition to control Baltic, Russian and Oriental trade flows of grain, naval stores, and luxury goods. In particular, seventeenth-century Swedish trade policies and company initiatives directed at Russia and the Orient more generally,[31] Swedish diplomatic missions and commercial intelligence in the East,[32] as well as how these ambitions played out in Swedish military planning and policy ambitions vis-à-vis Russia during the Great Northern War – even including some ideas on canalizing the great Russian rivers in the event of military success – were

einer Geschichte der Ostseeländer (Lüneburg: Verlag Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993); Per Tingbrand, *Sverige och den ryska ishavsrutten* (Storfors: Wermlands karoliner, 1995).

[30] I have not been able to find any indications that Swedish conservative historians derived inspiration from Karl Marx for this novel analysis, but similar interpretation had in fact been offered by Marx in his study of "the secret diplomacy" of the Great Northern War. Marx surmised that the maritime powers' interests in the Baltic export of grain and naval stores as well as the East India trade fanned the tension between the Northern powers as a means of blocking the emergence of an overland route across Russia and into the Baltic Sea area, thereby retaining the control and guaranteeing the profitability of their trade. See Karl Marx, *Secret diplomatic history of the eighteenth century* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Limited, 1899), 25–28.

[31] Pioneering studies include Eli F. Heckscher, *Produktplakatet och dess förutsättningar: bidrag till merkantil systemets historia i Sverige* (Stockholm, 1908); Eli F. Heckscher, *De europeiska staternas finanser på Karl XII:s tid* (Lund, 1922); Ekegård, *Studier i svensk handelspolitik*, see esp. chapter II. "Svensk merkantilism under 1600-talet," 46–95 and chapter III. "Planerna på öppnande av handel på Levanten under Karl XII:s regering och försöken att genomföra en merkantilistiskt-rationell ekonomipolitik under samma tid," 95–128; more recent studies include Stefan Troebst, "Debating the mercantile background to early modern Swedish empire-building: Michael Roberts versus Artur Attman," *European History Quarterly*, 24 (1994), 485–509; Leos Müller, *Consuls, corsairs, and commerce: the Swedish consular service and long-distance shipping, 1720–1815* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004); Stefan Troebst, "Närvaro i öster: Ryssland och Nordosteuropa," *Gränsländer:* Östersjön i ny gestalt, ed. by Jānis Krēsliņš, Steven A. Mansbach and Robert Schweitzer (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2003), 65–84; Stefan Troebst, "Sweden, Russia and the Safavid Empire: a mercantile perspective," *Iran and the world in the Safavid Age*, ed. by Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 253–258.

[32] Per Nyström, "Mercatura Ruthenica," *Scandia*, 10:2 (1937), 239–296.

now treated less as adventurous curiosities but as logical elements in the commercial strategy of the Swedish Empire.[33]

In this growing body of literature, the Swedish Empire thus reemerged, not as an aggressive and ultimately futile imperial project, but as a constructive and innovative enterpreneurial undertaking, to the benefit of not only the Baltic Sea region as such – culturally, as held by Hjärne – but also to Western European development on the whole – economically, as proposed by Kjellén. The implications of this reassessment of both the Swedish Empire and the Great Northern War can be followed in a variety of different writings on the future security as well as economy of Sweden and the wider Baltic Sea region before and immediately after the First World War, which the article now turns to discuss in greater depth.

Security: bear or eagle?

These projections of economic motives unto the history of Swedish expansionism around the rim of the Baltic Sea would eventually provide the basis for using historical analogies in projecting future Swedish security and trade policies. The military history department of the Swedish General Staff provided a key milieu for establishing this so-called "new school" as a kind of central narrative of the Swedish security elite during and after the First World War.[34] The main task of the General Staff was operational planning in the event of war. However, it also served as a center for the Swedish Army's drafting of military strategy and political lobbying. These activities were mostly assigned to a group of young officers who were considered an elite among Swedish military professionals. The officers of the General Staff regularly held important roles as governmental and parliamentary experts, tasks which they typically combined with the publication

[33] See for example Daniel Almqvist, "Några karolinska kanalprojekt," *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* (1935), 112–156; Helge Almquist, "En avslöjad anonym: Martin Neugebauers plan till ett svenskt fälttåg mot Moskva (1706)," *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* (1939), 7–14; Nils Fredrik Holm, "Kampen om ryska ishavsvägen på Karl XII:s tid," *Forum navale*, 9 (1948), 15–29; Karl-Gustaf Hildebrand, "Ekonomiska syften i svensk expansionspolitik 1700–1709," *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* (1949), 7–40.

[34] The new school remained influential for several decades, but has been sidelined in modern Swedish historiography on the Great Northern War since the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Alf Åberg, "Varför misslyckades Karl XII:s ryska fälttåg? Till 250-årsminnet," *Svensk Tidskrift* (1959), 265–273; for an indepth study of the Swedish security elite during this time, see Gunnar Åselius, *The "Russian menace" to Sweden: the belief system of a small power security elite in the age of imperialism* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell International, 1994).

of often anonymous pamphlets and articles advocating modernization of the Swedish armed forces.[35]

Military history was one of the main activities of the General Staff. For example, the General Staff's multi-volume in-depth analysis of the Swedish-Russian War of 1808–1809 was seen as an important means for broadening the Swedish officer corps' understanding of Sweden's contemporary security problem at the close of the nineteenth century.[36] Naval officer Herman Wrangel's volume book *Kriget i Östersjön: 1719–1721* ("The war in the Baltic Sea: 1719–1721") published in 1906–07 provides another notable analogy between Sweden's geostrategic position after the dissolution of the union with Norway in 1905 and the situation in the closing stages of the Great Northern War.[37] The General Staff's monumental work *Karl XII på slagfältet* ("Charles XII on the battlefield"), published at the close of the First World War and against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution and the Finnish Civil War in 1918–19, followed in the same vein and represented an almost official acceptance of the new school.[38]

On the basis of such historical analogies, however, most Swedish conservatives concluded that a Swedish "activist" programme in the Baltic Sea region would not only necessitate a costly expansion of the Swedish armed forces.[39] It would also require an alliance with Germany, if closer cooperation between the Scandinavian countries could not be ascertained.[40] Obviously, in line with historical analogy, Russia would remain Sweden's main adversary for the foreseeable future. The most prominent spokesperson for this position was explorer and public intellectual Sven Hedin.[41]

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[35] Jan Glete, "Förord till nyutgåvan," Herman Wrangel, *Kriget i Östersjön: 1719–1721* (Karlskrona: Marinlitteraturföreningen, 2007 [1906–1907]), iv–v, xvi–xvii.

[36] Generalstaben, *Sveriges krig åren 1808 och 1809* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1890–1922).

[37] Herman Wrangel, *Kriget i Östersjön: 1719–1721* (Karlskrona: Marinlitteraturföreningen, 2007 [1906–1907]). Acclaimed Swedish naval historian Jan Glete appears to have generally accepted Wrangel's view in the assessment of Swedish theoretical ability to defend itself in 1719–21, see Jan Glete, *Swedish naval administration, 1521–1721: resource flows and organisational capabilities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

[38] Generalstaben, *Karl XII på slagfältet: karolinsk slagledning sedd mot bakgrunden av taktikens utveckling från äldsta tider* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1918–1919).

[39] For more in-depth discussions of Swedish "activism," see Mart Kuldkepp's contribution to this special issue.

[40] L. Torbjörn Norman, "Right-wing Scandinavism and the Russian menace," *Contact or isolation? Soviet-Western relations in the interwar period*, ed. by John Hiden and Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell International, 1991), 329–349; Engström and Ericson, *Mellan björnen och* örnen; Åselius, *The "Russian menace" to Sweden*.

[41] For an influential statement of this thesis, see Sven Hedin, *Ett varningsord* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Boktryckeri, 1912).

However, several influential conservatives – notably including aforementioned Wrangel as well as Kjellén himself, both serving as representatives of the Right in the Swedish Parliament – used the very same historical analogies to reach an opposite conclusion. For their part, these conservatives noted grimly that Swedish reliance on foreign alliances had failed both in 1719–21 and 1808–09, sealing the fate of not only the Swedish Empire, but also of the Swedish-Finnish "Bothnian state," as Kjellén called it.

Indeed, Scandinavianism had proven a frail political construct during the crisis of the nineteenth century. Germany had proven little better. In fact, held Kjellén, an alliance with Germany would only make Sweden subservient to Germany's superior power and subsume it to German global interests. Sweden would run the risk of turning into a "German colony." Along with other Swedish nationalists, these conservatives regarded Germany's rising position in the Baltic Sea region with a great deal of skepticism. Kjellén only modified this position just on the verge of First World War, when he joined the mainstay of Swedish conservatives in warning for the so-called *ryska faran* ("the Russian menace"), demanding that Sweden should go to war on the German side, possibly by armed intervention in Finland.[42]

As the Russian Revolution in March 1917 unleashed movements of national liberation across Eastern Europe, Swedish wartime "activism" gradually transformed into "Finland activism," geared primarily at the goal of promoting Swedish support for the Whites in the Finnish Civil War during the course of 1918. However, official Swedish ambitions in securing control of the Åland Islands clashed with national security objectives of White Finland, complicating the close ties between Swedish and Finnish conservatives and nationalists. This said, Swedish quasi-official support, including some 800–1000 volunteers, did play a minor, if not entirely insignificant role in the later stages of the Finnish Civil War as well as during the early phases of the Estonian War of Liberation in 1918–20.[43] These

[42] See Rudolf Kjellén, *Den ryska faran* (Karlskrona, 1913); Otto Järte, Rudolf Kjellén, Yngve Larsson and Adrian Molin, *Sveriges utrikespolitik i världskrigets belysning* (Stockholm: Nordiska bokhandeln, 1915); see also discussions in Ivar Anderson, *Otto Järte – En man för sig* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1965); Sverker Oredsson, *Svensk rädsla: offentlig fruktan i Sverige under 1900-talets första hälft* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2001); Carl Marklund, "Revolution via ombud? Rysslandssynen i fyra Stockholmstidningar revolutionsvåren 1917," *Presshistorisk årsbok*, 23 (2006), 45–61; as well as Mart Kuldkepp's contribution to this special issue.

[43] Oredsson, "Stormaktsdrömmar och stridsiver," 257–296; *Norden och krigen i Finland och Baltikum 1918–19*, ed. by Lars Westerlund (Helsingfors: Statsrådets kansli, 2004); for a recent and comprehensive, if not exhaustive, overview of the participation of Swedish

quasi-official Swedish activities in the margins of the wave of national liberations set off at the close of the First World War shaped interwar Swedish foreign and security policy vis-à-vis the Baltic Sea region in different ways.

First, it provided a legacy for the preparations for unilateral Finnish-Swedish military cooperation in the event of future Finnish conflicts with Soviet Russia – a prospect many Finnish as well as Swedish conservatives regarded as a foregone conclusion during the early 1920s, in view of official Soviet Russian doctrines of world revolution.[44]

Second, the improved geostrategic position of Sweden after 1918 as well as the temporary Swedish regional naval supremacy in the aftermath of the wartime reductions of the Imperial German and Imperial Russian navies momentarily allowed Swedish military strategists to consider a more active role for the Swedish armed forces in an eventual future war in the region.[45] A most telling example of the latter is junior General Staff officer Axel Rappe's 1923 book *Sveriges läge* ("Sweden's position").[46] Here, Rappe reiterated the whole spectrum of Kjellén's geopolitical, historical and economic argumentation in favour of an active Swedish policy towards the Baltic Sea region, again, however, without reference.

Third, these activities also alerted members of the rapidly expanding Swedish social democratic movement – split in the tumultuous year 1917 into a revolutionary and a reformist branch, respectively – to the risks posed to Swedish neutrality and hence domestic peace by any such attempts at conservative adventurism directed at the wider Baltic Sea region. To the Swedish reformist social democrats, cooperation within the League of Nations, international disarmament, and unilateral Swedish arms reductions – eventually enacted by Hjalmar Branting's social democratic government in 1925 – would provide for Sweden's regional security, rather than any activist Swedish Baltic programme, military or otherwise.[47]

As these military reductions took place in Sweden, a circle of young General Staff officers sought to promote a more favourable public opinion towards military spending in 1927. By 1930, members of this circle published

volunteers in the Baltic and Finnish war theatres, see Lars Gyllenhaal and Lennart Westberg, *Svenskar i krig 1914–1945* (Lund: Historiska media, 2004).

[44] See Ainur Elmgren's contribution to this special issue.

[45] For Finnish-Swedish military cooperation, see Martti Turtola, *Från Torne älv till Systerbäck: hemligt försvarssamarbete mellan Finland och Sverige 1923–1940* (Stockholm: Militärhistoriska förl., 1987); for Swedish naval planning, see Lars Ericson, "Estland och Lettland i svensk marin debatt 1918–1925," *Forum navale*, 48 (1992), 39–55.

[46] Axel Rappe, *Sveriges läge: En krigspolitisk studie* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1923).

[47] Ulf Larsson, *Svensk socialdemokrati och Baltikum under mellankrigstiden* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1996).

a programmatic book entitled *Antingen-Eller* ("Either-Or") under the editorship of Helge Jung, outlining a new defence and security policy for Sweden which proved highly influential for future Swedish military strategic thinking, stretching even beyond the Second World War and into the emerging Cold War.[48] The authors underlined that any Soviet aggression directed against Finland would sooner or later also involve Sweden. As a consequence, Sweden should thus be militarily prepared to occupy Åland Islands, to block Soviet naval forces from accessing the Gulf of Bothnia, and to intervene in Finland with Swedish land forces. While these arguments resembled the Finland activism of old in terms of proposed military preparations and planning, it should formally be sanctioned under the provisions of the League of Nations, in marked contrast to the unilaterally Swedish interventions discussed by the activists during and immediately after the First World War.[49]

In the same year, in 1930, Swedish author, diplomat and conservative, later turned fascist ideologue, Rütger Essén, published a political treatise entitled Östersjön och östersjöpolitiken ("The Baltic Sea and the Baltic Sea policy") which sought to upgrade the significance of the Baltic Sea region in current Swedish foreign policy.[50] Like Wrangel, Rappe, and Jung before him, Essén reiterated here Hjärne's and Kjellén's main thesis on the importance of "the eastern direction" and the Baltic Sea as the central theme in Swedish history, far more crucial than ever the Scandinavian link to the

[48] *Antingen-eller: freds- och försvarsproblemet i saklig belysning*, ed. by Helge Jung (Stockholm: Ny militär tidskrifts bokförlag, 1930). Jung would embark on a stellar military career, eventually serving as Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces in 1944–51.

[49] For a discussion of the conflict of opinion between representatives of the navy of the maritime interest organization Föreningen Sveriges Flotta on the one hand and the predominantly army-oriented officers in the circles around *Ny Militär Tidskrift* on the other, see Bertil Åhlund, "Sveriges flotta: förening för sjöfart och sjöförsvar – en historik," *Forum navale*, 61 (2005), 17–37.

[50] Essén had a varied career, serving as a secretary in the Swedish Riksdag, as a delegate of the Swedish Red Cross in Russia in 1916–17, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1917–18, as chargé d'affairs in Tokyo 1920–21, and on various "special missions" in Sibiria in 1922. Together with some other politicians and public figures such as for example Nils Wohlin, Essén would later transmit Kjellénian ideas to early fascist and later nazi organizations in Sweden. For example, Essén contributed to the publications of Riksförbundet Det nya Sverige, he played a significant role in Sveriges Nationella Ungdomsförbund from 1934 and onwards and participated in the meetings of Riksföreningen Sverige-Tyskland during the Second World War. His most noted contribution as an author of fiction was also highly political, namely the overtly fascist novel *De släckta metropolerna* (Stockholm: Saxon & Lindström, 1937), published under the history-laden pseudonym Leif Erikson, *Vem är det: Svensk biografisk handbok. 1969* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1968), 258–259.

west.[51] Like Kjellén, Essén considered the intermediary periods in between Swedish Baltic engagements in terms of "national depressions" – such as the two centuries in between 1719 and 1919 – when Sweden had been forced by Russia to "turn away from the Baltic Sea and its tasks."[52]

To Essén, these recurrent pendulum swings had allowed Swedish public opinion to forget about its position in the world, allowing it to adopt what Essén considered a moralizing view of the geopolitical contests which engage other peoples around the world, contests which the Swedes viewed themselves too civilized and too mature to be interested in. But these contests would continue nonetheless, Essén surmised, incidentally providing Sweden with new opportunities for trade, security and business, opportunities which its statesmen and citizens were all too prone to ignore. Essén, by contrast, saw a new situation emerge around the Baltic rim, where Russia had receded and the inland sea once again promised to become a medium of communication between "awakening and striving peoples:" "Finland is free. The Baltic peoples as well. Poland has been reinstated in its natural position as a balance between Russia and Germany." However, Essén bitterly remarked, "All this has been accomplished without any significant Swedish contribution."[53]

Again, history would be called upon provide guidance for the future: "Is the Baltic Sea really designated to become a sea of communication among freely cooperating peoples, no longer merely a shallow moat against the irresistible and enormous Russian empire? Was the situation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the natural state of affairs, not the situation of the nineteenth century?" Essén asked rhetorically.[54] To him, just as to Hjärne and Kjellén before him, the Baltic policy of the Swedish Empire was by no means the adventurous and aggressive expansionism it has been posthumously interpreted as. It was, according to Essén, rather a kind of *trygghetspolitik* ("safety policy").[55] It had ensured cultural continuity and economic progress in the Baltic Sea region and Essén could inform his readers that it had continued to be appreciated by the Baltic peoples living "south of the Gulf of Finland" as such: "Here [i.e., in the Baltic states], Sweden possesses a valuable historical heritage and is met with more affection

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[51] Rütger Essén, *Sverige, Östersjön och östersjöpolitiken: Ett svenskt utrikespolitiskt program* (Stockholm: Sveriges nationella ungdomsförbund, 1930), 7.
[52] *Ibid*., 8–9.
[53] *Ibid*., 9–10.
[54] *Ibid*., 10.
[55] *Ibid*., 12.

and trust than hardly anywhere else in the world."[56] To Essén, the time was thus ripe in the early 1930s for what he termed *Ett baltiskt trygghetsprogram* ("A Baltic safety programme"), aiming to consolidate the auspicious situation around the inland sea by adding the little noun "safety" to Kjellén's geopolitical vision of two decades earlier.[57]

Economy: Baltic programme or Soviet treaty?

Noting the growing global interdependence and high degree of international exposure and openness of the Swedish economy by the late 1920s, mainly due to the expansion of Swedish exports as a share of national income, Essén concluded that Sweden should actively seek to capitalize on its goodwill in the wider Baltic Sea region. However, the countries of the Baltic Rim did not play any significant role in Swedish trade at the time, representing less than 1/10 of Swedish exports and less than 1/20 of imports. But, argued Essén: "[…] the relative importance of the eastern Baltic Sea countries will grow, and the great Russia beyond will under an economic development liberated from forced isolation always be a first-rate market of expansion for Sweden."[58]

But there are also cultural tasks awaiting in the east, in addition to the economic opportunities beckoning. Beyond the fact that technical development unites cultural and economic progress, Sweden also held a specific political duty to ensure the continued participation of the Baltic peoples in the Western legal tradition of liberty, held Essén: "This is the natural area for Swedish influence, an influence which will be exercised in forms adapted to modern conditions, devoid of any imperialistic character, an influence which will be met by a corresponding need among the yet stumbling and insecure Eastern Baltic nations."[59]

This regional expansion of Swedish influence would eventually become the trademark signature of the Swedish people during the twentieth century, Essén confidently declared, just as the past century had spelt isolationism and reluctance for Sweden, with the notable exception of transatlantic migration. To Essén, just as Kjellén before him, the Baltic Rim would not limit this new Swedish activism. Rather, it would serve as the basis for its further global reach, as Swedish entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists

[56] Essén, *Sverige, Östersjön och östersjöpolitiken*, 13–14
[57] *Ibid*., 11, 65.
[58] *Ibid*., 91–92.
[59] *Ibid*., 92.

would contribute to "world trade, world technology and world culture" using the Baltic Sea region as its platform: "Hence, let us gaze eastwards, not any longer in fear, reluctance and concern, but with vivid interest, natural sense of community and wide awake activity," Essén proclaimed.[60]

A few years later, in 1935, Essén would return to this theme in a work of popular history, tellingly entitled *Sverige upplever världen* ("Sweden experiences the world"). Here, Essén underscored the significance of international outreach for Sweden's economic success and political security.[61] Just as Rappe before him, Essén regularly reiterated *ad verbatim* Kjellén's advocacy for a Baltic programme in his treatment of Swedish future foreign policy. Their arguments often coincide, such as when Kjellén prophesied that "we will perhaps glimpse a real new era of greatness, in the east as always in Sweden's history, but this time with peaceful superiority – I am thinking of the large markets, which must arise after the Russian people's liberation."[62] To Kjellén, Sweden could again evolve into a transit route for Russian goods to Western markets as well as a provider of technology for the Russian market.[63] Just as Essén thirty years later, Kjellén wished to emphasize that this programme did not imply any aggressive imperialism. Rather, it involved a sort of cautious and tactically sensitive "resource colonialism," partly copied from contemporary German *Wirtschaftsnationalismus* in the Middle East, which mainly operated through trade, technology and the provision of loans and support of infrastructure investments.[64]

In hindsight, these proposals for a Swedish Baltic programme appear rather unrealistic. But it is clear that the prediction of a more prominent role for Sweden in the future economic development of Russia as well as the Baltic Sea region in the aftermath of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and at the close of First World War were held by many observers at the time.[65] Furthermore, these views were not limited to political

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[60] Essén, *Sverige, Östersjön och östersjöpolitiken*, 93.

[61] In this book, Essén's main ambition was to neutralize narratives on past and future Swedish outreach, redescribing them as a natural development of history as well as normal ambition of the foreign policy of any power. While acknowledging the criticism directed against Swedish First World War-activism for being both dangerous and presumptous, he also included a circumscribed defense of it. Rütger Essén, *Sverige upplever världen: vår politiska historia från sekelskiftet till nu* (Stockholm: Lindfors, 1935), 281–282.

[62] Rudolf Kjellén, *Nationell samling: politiska och etiska fragment* (Stockholm: Geber, 1906), 18, 28.

[63] Rudolf Kjellén, *Ett program: nationella samlingslinjer* (Stockholm: Geber, 1908), 43.

[64] Rudolf Kjellén, *Sverige och utlandet* (Stockholm: Sv. folkförb:s, 1911), 27.

[65] See for example Sten De Geer, *Rysslands ekonomiska geografi* (Jönköping: Lundgrenska boktr., 1917); Eirik Hornborg, *Sverige och Ryssland genom tiderna: politiska relationer och krigiska konflikter* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1941).

pamphleteers and academic project-makers, but could be found among businessmen and politicians as well. As such, these commercial aspirations for the future did not only rely on historical analogies and references to past Swedish imperialism. More recent entrepreneurial activities, such as the Nobel family's numerous business operations in Russia, especially the strategically important exploitation of Caspian oil, Oscar Dickson's and Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld's efforts in the opening up the Northeast Passage during the late nineteenth century and Sweden's transit position for the contacts between Russia and the Western Allies during the First World War provided inspiration for these grand ambitions.

While initially small, Swedish business interests in Russia had in fact expanded continuously from the mid-nineteenth century until 1917.[66] Swedish economic activity in Russia before the revolution focused upon trade and establishing branch factories.[67] Five major Swedish transnational corporations had established subsidiaries and production in the country by 1915: Wicanders kork, L M Ericsson, Gasaccumulator (AGA), Allmänna Svenska Elektriska AB (ASEA) and Svenska Kullagerfabriken (SKF). Some twenty Swedish trading houses operated in Russia by 1917, importing machines, engines, tools, steel and household appliances. By the time of the revolution, Sweden ranked eighth among capital investors in Russia. Geographically, Swedish economic activities concentrated around the Baltic Rim and Northwestern Russia and Swedish corporations clustered in Saint Petersburg, Riga and Moscow. Before the 1917 revolution, the Baltic provinces served as an entry point for Swedish businesses interested in establishing commecrial activities across the vast Russian Empire.[68] The increasing fusing on Swedish economic outreach in Russia as well as the Baltic Rim featured as a prominent theme in the Swedish-sponsored so-called Baltic Exhibition held in Malmö in 1914. In response to the commercial opportunities offered to businessmen and traders based out of neutral Sweden,

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[66] For a general overview, see *Swedish business history in Russia, 1850–1917*, ed. by Martin Kragh (Bromma: Centrum för näringslivshistoria, 2014).

[67] Anders R. Johansson, "Swedish branch factories in imperial Russia, 1885–1917," *Imperial power and development*, ed. by Don Karl Rowney (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1990), [151]–174.

[68] For further details, see Anders R. Johansson, "Swedish transnational enterprise in the Baltic countries: aspects of continuity of the pre-revolutionary process of direct investment in the Russian market," *The Baltic in international relations between the two World Wars*, ed. by John Hiden and Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: Centre for Baltic Studies, Univ., 1988), 253–279; Anders R. Johansson, "Swedish enterprise and immigrants in the Baltic region of imperial Russia," *The Baltic countries 1900–1914*, ed. by Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 245–261.

Swedish economic relations with Russia expanded fast in the decade before 1917. This was especially due to the First World War, which put an end to German competition and made Russia the third largest recipient of Swedish export after Germany and Great Britain in 1916.[69]

This fast and unprecendented expansion naturally caused wide-ranging discussions among Swedish business circles during the war, not the least on the pages of business journal *Svensk Export*, on how Russian-Swedish trade could be promoted after the cession of hostilities. Numerous spokespersons and representatives of pragmatic business interests emphasized, just as Kjellén had repeatedly done in the preceding decade, that Sweden had played a far too insignificant role in both direct and transit trade with Russia if measured against Swedish potential. Here, Sweden could capitalize on the decline of traditional transit operatives such as Germany, Great Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands. The most important step would be to open up a regular and direct shipping route between Stockholm and Tallinn and to establish a free trade port in Stockholm catering to the Russian trade.[70]

However, the global events which had initially allowed Swedish businesses to expand its role in Russia would also eventually limit its reach. In 1919, as Soviet Russia was placed under blockade by the Entente, Russian-Swedish trade dwindled to a minimum. Yet, there were some concerted efforts to reestablish Swedish direct trade with Siberia and areas of Southern Russia still under White control.[71] Swedish business operations abroad were not only troubled by the highly insecure post-war situation in the Baltic states, Finland and Poland, to not speak of Russia itself, but also by the volatile domestic political situation in Sweden. Importantly, the Bolsheviks had confiscated assets of Swedish corporations and private persons in Russia after the revolution, and this issue soon evolved into a serious obstacle for further Swedish-Russian commercial contacts. Contacts with the newly independent Baltic states could of course be probed, but had to be developed in competition with the ambitions of for example British capital in opening up these new markets.[72] Furthermore, Swedish trade policies were on the one hand shaped by Swedish social democrats'

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[69] Helene Carlbäck-Isotalo, *Att byta erkännande mot handel: svensk-ryska förhandlingar 1921–1924* (Uppsala: Univ., 1997).

[70] *Ibid*., 25–27.

[71] Sune Örtendahl, "Anteckningar om en svensk sjöburen handelsexpedition till Sibirien år 1919," *Forum navale*, 44 (1988), 55–72.

[72] For British trade interests in the Baltic states, see Merja-Liisa Hinkkanen-Lievonen, *British trade and enterprise in the Baltic States, 1919–1925* (Helsinki: SHS, 1984).

skepticism due to the longstanding conservative enthusiasm for "imperial" adventures in the east as well as more recent experiences with actual Swedish involvement, and on the other hand curbed by corresponding conservative concerns about the possibility of a Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War.[73] Due to these numerous concerns and obstacles, Swedish businessmen eventually opted for a rather cautious strategy towards the *Randstaaten* as well as Soviet Russia, despite the great hopes initially attached to the idea of rapid Swedish market expansion in the east immediately at the close of the First World War.[74]

By contrast, Swedish official trade policies directed at Soviet Russia would prove much more successful, at least formally.[75] In spring 1920, prominent Soviet Russian diplomat Maxim Litvinov entered direct negotiations with Swedish corporations, offering Sweden major privileges regarding the East-West transit trade, under the proviso that the Swedish government recognized the Soviet regime. As a consequence of these initial contacts and negotiations, Sweden became in May 1920 the first Western country to close a trade agreement with Soviet Russia. The so-called Krasin Agreement, named for the People's Commissar for Trade and Industry, Leonid Krasin, concerned the delivery of Swedish industrial products to Soviet Russia. Krasin had arrived in Stockholm at the invitation of Hjalmar Branting's social democratic government when he received an offer from Swedish businessman Gunnar W. Andersson of 1000 locomotives to be produced by Swedish firm Nydqvist & Holm and to be delivered to the Soviets during a period of five years.[76] Around the same time, Swedish banker Olof Aschberg traded Russian gold through a Tallinn subsidiary of

[73] See for example L. Torbjörn Norman, "Ansiktet mot öster: Svensk nationalism mot Nationernas förbund," *Väst möter öst: Norden och Ryssland genom historien*, ed. by Max Engman (Stockholm, 1996); Carlbäck-Isotalo, *Att byta erkännande mot handel*, 21.

[74] See discussions in Kārlis Kangeris, "Die schwedische Baltikumpolitik 1918–1925: ein Überblick," *The Baltic in international relations between the two World Wars*, ed. by John Hiden and Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: Centre for Baltic Studies, 1988), 187–207; Kārlis Kangeris, "Das Baltikum im Rahmen der schwedisch-sowjetischen Beziehungen in der Zwischenkriegszeit," *Contact or isolation? Soviet-Western relations in the interwar period*, ed. by John Hiden and Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell International, 1991), 351–371; *Emancipation and interdependence: the Baltic states as new entities in the international economy, 1918–1940*, ed. by Anders R. Johansson (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994).

[75] *Managing crises and de-globalisation: Nordic foreign trade and exchange 1919–1939*, ed. by Sven-Olof Olsson (London & New York: Routledge, 2010); Sven-Olof Olsson, *Sverige i det handelspolitiska maktspelet 1919–1939* (Stockholm: Cavefors, 2011).

[76] Carlbäck-Isotalo, *Att byta erkännande mot handel*, 29–30.

his bank Svenska Ekonomi AB.[77] These operations were of crucial importance for the fragile Soviet Russian regime in its attempts to circumvent the Western blockade and to obtain foreign currency in payment for the gold which could then be used in exchange for critical imports.[78] On the basis of these early contacts, several Swedish concessionaries were later granted by the Soviet industry, which were further expanded as more Scandinavian and other foreign corporations began operations in the newly established Soviet Union under the aegis of Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP).[79]

As could be expected, the ability of the Swedish government to approach the Bolsheviks was highly dependent upon the lack of coordination among the Entente powers concerning their position vis-à-vis Soviet Russia. Here, Sweden could again, if only momentarily, play an important role, although not as far-reaching as projected by successive generations of Swedish conservatives such as Hjärne, Kjellén, Rappe or Essén. Nevertheless, during the early 1920s, Sweden reached pole position in Soviet Russia's foreign trade and the Soviets became some of the most important recipients of Swedish industrial products. The most important development, if seen from the Swedish horizon, is how the initially conservative ambition for Swedish trade expansion into the Russian Empire transformed during this time into a social democratic concern with closer contacts with Soviet Russia. Swedish observers both to the left and to the right thus took turns in consciously relying upon and utilizing Sweden's international position as a neutral and small country in approaching Russia when others could not. The Bolsheviks themselves were keenly aware of Sweden's position and above all its ambition as a transit point for East-West trade and sought to use it to their own benefit, just as Kjellén had predicted that the Russians would eventually do once his Baltic programme was put in motion.[80]

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[77] Aschberg's left-leaning sympathies and high-level contacts with both the new Russian regime and the Branting governmant prompted him already in 1918 to propagate for Swedish trade with "the new Russia." Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek, Olof Aschbergs arkiv, Arkivnr 36, Volymnr 8; see also Olof Aschberg, *En vandrande jude från Glasbruksgatan* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1946), 138–147.

[78] *Ibid*., 183; see also Carlbäck-Isotalo, *Att byta erkännande mot handel*, 31.

[79] Sune Jungar, *Skandinaviska företag i Sovjetunionen: sovjetisk koncessionspolitik på 1920-talet* (Turku: Åbo akademi, 1974); Anders R. Johansson, "Swedish concessionaries in the Soviet industry: experiences of foreign participants in the rise and fall of NEP, 'The First Perestroika,'" *Contact or isolation? Soviet-Western relations in the interwar period*, ed. by John Hiden and Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1991), 189–207.

[80] Carlbäck-Isotalo, *Att byta erkännande mot handel*, 33.

Conclusions

Traditionally, Swedish conservative views upon the Baltic Sea region in general and Russia in particular have been interpreted as mostly guided by a historically informed narrative about Swedish past heroism, set in an aggressive and expansionist mindframe. It is true that Swedish conservative views on Sweden's geopolitical position in this particular regional space, past and present, have been deeply informed by sometimes unwarranted historical analogies. It is also true that much of the material surveyed for this article betrays a culturally and politically chauvinist tendency. In these works, Sweden is usually set in uncompromising opposition to Russia, its hereditary enemy, in what often appears an almost existentialist reliance upon the conception of Russia as dangerous and expansionist; at the same time culturally inferior and materially superior. In this context, however, the realistic conservative would also have to acknowledge that Sweden would always fight a losing battle if pitted against Russia. Its regional role could only be maintained as a subsidiary to Germany, supporting the latter's self-proclaimed mission of guarding "civilization" in the East.

At the same time, it has been the ambition of this article to show that there has been a competing theme present in Swedish conservative geopolitics, a theme where the promise of future Baltic pendulum swings outweighed the hopes for any Scandinavian or Nordic primacy for Sweden. This theme did not view past Swedish exploits in the east as primarily based upon either military prowess, organizational ability or strategic genius, but rather mundane, yet historically necessary, forces of economic development and geographical patterns. In this tradition, originally probed by Hjärne, further developed into a coherent thought system by Kjellén, and later reiterated by successive generations of Swedish conservative thinkers during the interwar period, the Swedish imperial experience of the past paved the way for imagining a future Baltic-Nordic cultural and economic regionalism which could rise at any time – naturally, as it were – as soon as Russia's interests turned elsewhere, either eastwards, southwards, or inwards.

Of critical importance for this tradition was Kjellén's purposive usage of geographical-historical, security and economic considerations, pointing to a geopolitical regional future programme for Sweden set in the Baltic Sea region, which were eventually picked up by other Swedish conservatives. The geopolitical speculations on the part of often marginal, but sometimes "quasi-official" representatives of the conservative academic, business, military and political elite of this small Northern European state did have some lasting impact: they paved the way for the modernization of

the Swedish conservative elites' long-standing fascination with the eastern shores of the Baltic Rim and the great power status of the past, eventually resulting in a more palatable vision of Sweden's international standing as based in peaceful activities such as commerce, culture and science, rather than military aggression.

While national romanticism and nostalgia for the Swedish Empire certainly played an important part as a rallying banner for already convinced Swedish conservatives, the mere projection of heroism and memory would not suffice in attracting broader support for this agenda. Conservative opinion-makers thus continued to rely on Kjellén's "scientifically" updated advocacy for Swedish "expansionism" in their subsequent apologetics for a more ambitious Baltic-Nordic regionalism on the part of Sweden. These optics primarily seem to have served to naturalize the idea of a purposive programme towards greater Swedish activism in the Baltic Sea region and possibly elsewhere, by convincing skeptics that such ambitions were neither as chauvinist nor as futile as they may have seemed before and certainly do appear in hindsight.

This modernized view on Swedish history and geography exercised a powerful pull on the "geopolitical imagination" of conservative Swedish academics, public intellectuals and sometime politicians, even until the end of the Second World War. As such, the projection of economic motives unto history provided the basis for historical analogies to future security and trade policies which confirmed the viability of an otherwise unlikely Swedish *Drang nach Osten*.

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Kokkuvõte: *Rootsi „tung itta"? Balti-Skandinaavia pendlivõnked ja Rootsi konservatiivne geopoliitika*

Berliini müüri langemine 1989. aastal ning Nõukogude Liidu lagunemine 1991. aastal alandasid ajutiselt Läänemere regioonis suurvõimude vahel valitsenud pingeid. See lubas Balti-Skandinaavia regionalistlikku projekti taas- ja ümbermõtestada. Taoline "võimalusaken" – mida siinkohal mõistetakse poliitilise hetkekonjuktuurina, mis võiks anda võimaluse regionaalsete suhete ümbermõtestamiseks või ümberkujundamiseks – ei too aga automaatselt kaasa regionaalset koostööd või regionalismi. Et uus regioon võiks tegelikkuseks saada, on vajalik ka aktiivsete "regiooniehitajate" "regioonitöö" (*region-work*). Mõnikord päädib nende pingutusi edu, teinekord aga mitte ning vastav liikumine marginaliseerub ajalookirjutuses.

Käesolevas artiklis vaadeldakse lähemalt ühe taolise, 20. sajandi alguses Rootsis tekkinud Läänemere regiooni ning Venemaa poole suunatud "marginaalse regioonitöö" lähtealuseid, eesmärke ja pärandit. Võtmetähtsusega isik selles oli Rootsi riigiteadlane Rudolf Kjellén.

Kjellén, kes on rahvusvaheliselt eelkõige tuntud kui "geopoliitika isa", oli ühtlasi konservatiivne poliitik ning 1905. aasta (Norra-Rootsi uniooni lagunemine) ja 1914. aasta (Esimese maailmasõja algus) vahel ka väljapaistev aktiivse Rootsi välis- ja kaubanduspoliitika eestkõneleja. Kjellén väitis, et sellel pingelisel ajajärgul Rootsi poliitilises ajaloos tuleb Rootsil tuleb omaks võtta eesmärgipärane "poliitiline programm" eesmärgiga laiendada Rootsi senist kultuurilist ja poliitilist mõjuvõimu Läänemere ruumis ja eriti Venemaal ning anda ühtlasi Rootsile uus ja proaktiivsem positsioon maailmaturul.

Artikli aluseks on eelkõige Kjelléni poliitilised sõnavõtud ajakirjanduses ning rootsikeelsed populaarteaduslikud kirjutised Rootsi regionaalsetest väljavaadetest. Neid tekste loeti ja nende üle arutleti omal ajal laialdaselt, sh Kjelléni sotsiaaldemokraatlike ja liberaalsete kriitikute poolt. Seega saab neid võtta lähtekohaks, et analüüsida Rootsi enamjaolt konservatiivset geopoliitilist kujutlusvõimet laiemalt ning ühtlasi mõtestada ka järgnevat "regioonitööd", mis oli mõeldud Rootsi kaubandusliku ja kultuurilise aktiivsuse edendamiseks Läänemere regioonis ja sellele geograafiliselt lähedastel aladel Loode-Venemaal. Artiklis püütakse asetada need üsna ambitsioonikad, kuid kahtlemata ka suhteliselt marginaalsed unistused Balti-Rootsi-Vene tegelike majanduslike ja poliitiliste suhete konteksti.

Rootsi Läänemere regioonile laiemalt suunatud ambitsioone analüüsitakse käesolevaga kui rida "paradiplomaatilisi" aktsioone kolmel eri

tasandil. Esiteks vaadeldakse neid osana Balti-Skandinaavia "ootusruumi" (*space of expectation*) geopoliitilisest (re)konstrueerimisest mentaalse kaardistamise, geograafilise kujutlusvõime ja historiograafilise uustõlgenduse kaudu, mis tõmbasid paralleele 20. sajandi alguse ning 17. sajandi Rootsi suurvõimu-ajastu vahele. Teiseks tõlgendatakse neid ambitsioone varase püüdena luua omamoodi "pehmel jõul" põhinevat Balti-Põhjamaade regionalismi, projitseerides tulevikku erinevate mittemateriaalsete jõuressursside kasutamist, nagu "Rootsi" tehnilised võimekused, oskusteave ja ärivaist, et Balti ja Vene turge Rootsi huvides rakendada. Lõpuks uuritakse Kjelléni Balti programmi pärandit ja mõju Rootsi äriringkondadele ja kaubanduspoliitika kujundajatele maailmasõdadevahelisel ajal.

Kokkuvõttes püütakse näidata, et see konkreetne nähtus – Rootsi konservatiivide poolt tulevikku projitseeritud Rootsi rahvusvaheline mõju (seda mitte ainult Läänemere regioonis ja Loode-Venemaal, vaid ka Aafrikas, Arktikas ja Kaug-Idas) – oli osa laiemast konservatiivsest Rootsi ajaloolise arengu ümbermõtestamisest. Viimane püüdis näidata Rootsi saatust millegina, mis on kujundatud eelkõige "modernsete" faktorite poolt, nagu majanduslikud huvid ja poliitilised võimalused, mitte aga puhtalt arhailisete agressiooni ja heroismi läbi. See ümbermõtestamine püüdis taaskontseptualiseerida Rootsi välispoliitilist aktivismi nii minevikus kui tulevikus ning jätta majanduslikult jätkusuutlikku, poliitiliselt turvalist ja moraalselt vastuvõetavat muljet üldsusele nii kodus, kui välismaal – seda mitte ainult konservatiividele ja rahvuslastele, vaid ka sotsiaaldemokraatidele ja liberaalidele.