

National Revanchism at a Critical Juncture: Sweden's Near-Involvement in the Crimean War as a Study in Swedish Nationalism

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Abstract

This article argues that the persistent revanchist feelings in Sweden vis-à-vis Russia over the loss of Finland in 1809 constitute a broad undercurrent in Sweden's otherwise peaceful modern history. The Franco-British attempts to draw Sweden into the Crimean War (1853–1856) against Russia are studied as an example of one such 'critical juncture' that brought Sweden very close to joining a war with the expectation of reconquering Finland. Facilitated by the development of the modern public sphere in Sweden, the war enthusiasm in the Swedish liberal press reflected a deeply-felt national humiliation over the defeat in 1809, but also linked to anxieties over the development of Finnish (Fennoman) nationalism and the possibilities of realising the goals of the Scandinavianist movement.

Keywords

Sweden, Finland, Scandinavism (Scandinavianism), Crimean War

Scandinavian countries today enjoy a global reputation for their promotion of peaceful conflict resolution, with Scandinavian politicians often taking on the role of mediators in international peace negotiations (see e.g. Ingebritsen 2002: 17–18). Perhaps even more than its neighbours, Sweden has been able to claim legitimacy as a peace-builder, its pacific reputation bolstered by the fact that it has managed to stay out of any and all wars since 1814, making its 200-plus year tenure in peacefulness the most impressive in the entire world.

Yet for all its peacefulness today, the country has an exceedingly warlike past. In the seventeenth century, known in Swedish historiography as the Great Power Era (*Stormaktstiden*), Sweden was one of the most successful military powers in Europe, conquering over the course of more than a century vast territories from its neighbouring Denmark in the south, but also on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea and in Northern Germany. This territorial overextension was not to last, however. Sweden was conclusively defeated by a coalition of states in the Great Northern War (1700–1721), and by the terms of its 1721 Nystad Peace Treaty with Russia, it was forced to give up all its eastern possessions except for Finland and Karelia.

Sweden's eighteenth-century attempts at revanche against Russia ended either in loss of still more territory (in 1741–1743) or the reaffirmation of *status quo ante bellum* (in 1788–1790). In the end, the old national humiliation of 1721 was overshadowed by an even worse one in 1809, brought about by Sweden's disastrous involvement in the Napoleonic Wars. Through a series of political and military moves, Russia managed in 1808–1809 to conquer, and, by the terms of the Peace Treaty of Fredrikshamn, permanently sever from Sweden the whole of Finland, which had been Swedish since the twelfth century. Five years later, Sweden was able to compensate for this loss by wrangling Norway out of Danish hands with the 1814 Peace Treaty of Kiel, even though the Swedish-Norwegian union would never quite replace what had been the eastern third of the Swedish state. Still, by declaring Sweden a satisfied power and concluding an alliance with Russia against possible French aggression (the so-called policy of 1812; see Munch-Pedersen 1996 for details), the new Swedish king

Carl XIV Johan (1763–1844) turned the brunt of Swedish foreign policy away from the east, and towards the west.

1814 has long been taken as the starting point of a congratulatory narrative about Sweden's exceptional peacefulness in the modern era. In an article published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1959, the famous Swedish political scientist and public intellectual Herbert Tingsten argued that Swedish foreign policy and, indeed, 'Sweden's attitude towards the world at large' had been essentially determined by two factors: its long period of peace and neutrality from 1814 onwards, and its exceptionally calm internal development. Even though Tingsten admitted that 'on a few occasions' Sweden had shown some willingness to take part in a war (during the Crimean War, in 1864, in 1905 and in the First World War), changes in the political or military situation or the strength of the pacifist public opinion had in all cases rendered such plans inconsequential (Tingsten 1959: 474).

The opinion that such incidents were no more than blips on the radar is a common one. For example, in his article 'Acquisition and Transmission of Pacifist Mentalities in Sweden', seeking to explain how the famed Swedish peacefulness came about, Ernst L. Moerk argues that after Carl XIV Johan 'laid the foundations for Sweden's neutrality and definitely turned her aspirations away from her age-old military competition with Russia to socioeconomic and cultural goals', the bellicose episode of Sweden's near-involvement in the Crimean war 'suggests that Sweden had not yet entered a state of stable and secure peace at this time and that the old antagonism against Russia still had a hold on the mentality of the leaders' (Moerk 1995: 294–295). The implication is again that the overall direction of Sweden's history from 1814 onwards was away from war, any atavistic opportunism on part of its leaders notwithstanding.

During the recent 2014 celebrations of the 200 years of Swedish peace, the near-war situations of the long nineteenth century were with very few exceptions (see Iko 2014) left almost totally unmentioned. In a festive speech given on the occasion by Ove Bring, Professor of International Law at the Swedish Defence University, Oscar I was even praised for 'engaging Sweden in one of the first-ever peacekeeping operations' as the speaker styled his limited military intervention into

the first Schleswig-Holstein war in 1848 (Bring 2014). Even when doubts were raised over whether Sweden had indeed been all that peaceful for two centuries, it was rather the more recent weapon exports and involvement in Afghanistan that were pointed out as problematic (Ramel 2014).

This progressivist narrative of modern Swedish history, depicting it as extensively peaceful from 1814 onwards, is nevertheless a post-fact construction, informed by our knowledge of what happened – or failed to happen – next, making it thus easy to neglect these near-war situations as something worthy of attention. The aim of this article, on the contrary, is to consider the ways that a warlike spirit – particularly encouraged by bitterness over the loss of Finland to Russia – persisted in Sweden, and how it could erupt into open calls for political and military action at the various critical junctures of its modern history. The term ‘critical junctures’¹ is used to designate historical turning points which offered a chance to fundamentally alter Sweden’s policy course. Precisely such a situation arose during the Crimean War of 1853–1856, when Britain and France tried to tempt Sweden into joining their anti-Russian coalition and presented it with the tantalising prospect of reconquering Finland as a prize. Even though ultimately nothing came of these plans, they testify to the popularity and strength of revanchist sentiment in Sweden, and the continuing allure its interests ‘in the east’ – long after 1814.

Scandinavianism, Sweden and Finland

Finland’s transfer to Russia in 1809 happened at a time when ideas of liberal nationalism had begun their spread in Europe, carrying the message of the unique worth of all nations with their distinctive languages and cultures. Finland was no exception, and its new status as an autonomous Great Duchy in the Russian Empire greatly aided the birth of Finnish nationalism. Cut off from the Swedish motherland but retaining their high social status, the more liberally-minded Swedish-speaking intellectuals in Finland launched in the 1820s the so-called Fennoman movement. As explained in a well-known dictum by one of them, Adolf Ivar Arwidsson (1791–1858), ‘svenskar äro vi icke mera,

ryssar kunna vi icke bliva, därför måste vi vara finnar' (we are no longer Swedes; we cannot become Russians; we must be Finns), i.e. they would henceforth adopt the Finnish language, culture and education as their national cause. In this, they were initially encouraged by the Russian central government in St Petersburg which had a natural interest in loosening the cultural and political ties between Finland and Sweden (Jussila et al 1999: 24; Barton 2005a: 140).

For Sweden, likewise, the loss of Finland had far-reaching consequences. Most immediately, the catastrophe was blamed on the ineffective leadership of King Gustav IV Adolf who was arrested and forced to abdicate in March 1809. Nominally, he was replaced by his frail uncle Carl XIII, but from 1810 onwards the factual head of state was former Napoleonic marshal Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, who had been elected Carl XIII's heir-presumptive. Upon Carl's death in February 1818, Bernadotte was crowned King of Sweden under the name of Carl XIV Johan. Already in 1809, however, Gustav IV Adolf's forced abdication had triggered a constitutional change and the ultimate end of absolutism in Sweden. The new constitution of 1809 proved to be a long-lived one, remaining in force until 1974.

Not unexpectedly, liberal nationalism raised its head also in Sweden. Early organisations such as The Geatish Society (*Götiska Förbundet*; 1810), mainly preoccupied with contemplating Norse antiquity, gave way in the 1840s to the broader Scandinavianist movement as the dominant form of Swedish liberal nationalism. The main aim of the Scandinavianists was to strengthen the intellectual and cultural, but also political ties between the two Scandinavian kingdoms: the Swedish-Norwegian union and Denmark. The movement itself had originated in Denmark, where the desire for increased cooperation with Sweden was motivated by fears that the largely German-speaking Danish duchies of Slesvig/Schleswig and Holstein would come under threat from the Prussian-led initiative to unify German-speaking lands – as indeed soon happened (Stråth 2012: 105–108). To counter this security threat, a defence union was envisioned between Denmark and Sweden. Longer-term, the Scandinavianists took the similarities between the Scandinavian languages and cultures to mean that Scandinavia, just like the fragmented German-speaking or Italian-

speaking small states on the continent, constituted a potential great power in waiting, and would ultimately be united politically (Elvander 1961: 368).² Scandinavianism was a youthful and dynamic movement, especially popular in academic circles, and its ideas were widely circulated in pamphlets and newspapers.

Soon, the champions of Scandinavian unity also took an interest in Finland, regarded by them as a lost member of the Scandinavian family. Anti-Russian and pro-Finnish slogans were spread during the Nordic student meetings in Stockholm and Uppsala (1843) and Copenhagen (1845), much to Russia's dismay. In Sweden, this sentiment linked to a broader liberal discontent with Carl XIV Johan: amidst demands for economic, ecclesiastical and parliamentary reform, the king's Russian-friendly policy of 1812 naturally also came under criticism and new appreciation of Finland fitted well into this context. A particularly important forum for airing views of that sort was the leading liberal daily *Aftonbladet*, established in 1830 and sometimes called Sweden's first modern newspaper (Zetterberg 1999: 102–103).

However, what the liberal preoccupation with Finland also suggests is that many in Sweden continued to see the loss of Finland as a deep national humiliation and wish for its reversal.³ Especially at a time when Scandinavianism was leading to some demonstrable consequences, with Sweden providing limited military aid to Denmark and acting as a mediator between the two belligerents in the first war against Prussia over Schleswig and Holstein (1848–1851), anti-Russian sentiments and calls for the reconquest of Finland grew more frequent. The new king Oscar I (1844–1859), who was not averse to making use of the public opinion for his own political ends, had taken up more active foreign policy towards Denmark probably as way of deflecting demands for broadened political representation. In his diary, however, he also expressed private anti-Russian feelings, and there is certainly a sense that his Scandinavianist aspirations in Finland might have been genuine (Stråth 2012: 52–67, 105–106, 109–112; Eriksson 1940: 666–668). At the same time, in 1842–1852, official Swedish foreign policy grew even more intimately close to that of Russia, earning frequent praise from Russian diplomats (Jansson 1961: 56).

Importantly, the Swedish Scandinavianists' infatuation with 'lost' Finland was combined with a strong dislike of Fennoman nationalism. In the heated pamphlet war over Finland that went on in the 1840s, different sides advocated either its reunification with Sweden or argued against it from a Fennoman perspective. The central question was whether the Finns were indeed developing into a nation of their own or whether they were 'still basically Swedes' (Barton 2005a: 136–139). Significantly, the Swedish Scandinavianists tended to take the latter position – although in principle sympathetic to all national liberation and unification movements, they made an exception to the one that had arisen as consequence of the humiliation of 1809 and was now claiming sovereignty for a Finnish nation separate from Sweden. By imagining Finland as one of the Scandinavian countries only in a narrow, Swedish sense, they effectively denied Finnish-speakers the right to their own national movement and counted only the Swedish-speaking population as the 'real' Finns (see Elvander 1961: 368).

Such views were combined with age-old prejudices against Russia, a country called by *Aftonbladet* in 1839 'the incarnation of illiberalism', any defence of which was supposedly 'tantamount to a declaration of war against free government, against everything that is European' (Gullberg 1952: 331). According to liberal newspapers, Finland's Swedish-speaking population was suffering under Russian despotism and insinuations were made that the creation of the Grand Duchy and even the Fennoman movement were some sort of Russian conspiracy called into being to rid Finland of its last remnants of 'Swedishness'. As an important consequence of these debates and exposés, the Finnish question became better known and was kept alive in the imagination of the educated public. Kari Tarkiainen has suggested that before the 1850s, most Swedes had not even been aware that the majority population in Finland spoke a different language (Tarkiainen 1999: 74, 79 Barton 2005a: 142).

The Crimean War, Sweden and Finland

The Crimean War was fought from October 1853 to February 1856 between Russia on the one side, and a coalition force of the Ottoman

Empire, France, Great Britain and Sardinia on the other. Often regarded as the first modern European war, it saw the first widespread use of explosive shells, railways and the telegraph, but also of modern nursing, with Florence Nightingale as the most iconic single individual figure known from this war.

The immediate cause of the war was obscure, involving the rights of Christian minorities in the Holy Land (in the Ottoman Empire). A major long-term cause, however, was the decline of Ottoman power and French and British unwillingness to allow Russian territorial expansion at its expense. This concern with the European balance of power included a fear that Russia would try to expand not only towards Turkey, but also towards Scandinavia. An important question was therefore where would it be most advantageous to attack Russia – in the Black Sea or in the Baltic?

By autumn 1854, first alternative had been chosen. Nevertheless, for the first year of the war, the Baltic remained of great strategic interest, and saw some naval action as well as a British blockade of Russian harbours (Anderson 1969: 264). The possibility of major future operations in the Baltic theatre made the Western allies also consider a strategic role for Finland and Sweden. It was precisely for this reason that the Crimean War brought Swedish revanchism to its culmination: it opened a real possibility of reconquest of Finland.

On 15 December 1853, Sweden and Denmark issued a joint declaration of neutrality, which, however, had a pro-Allied bent, as it allowed all foreign ships to enter Swedish ports. As Russia already had its own Baltic ports, it was pointed out from St Petersburg that this promise was much more important to the Allies (Jansson 1961: 79–80). It was also quite clear that Sweden continued to see Russia as a security threat. This was partially due to Russia's reputed territorial interests in Finnmark, its recent fortification of the strategically important Åland Islands between Sweden and Finland (the construction of the major naval fortress of Bomarsund had started in 1832), and, not least, painful historical memories of Swedish defeats in the hands of Russians (Anderson 1969: 263–264). Russia in its turn demanded 'strict neutrality', which would have amounted to an assurance that Sweden would not use weapons against Russia in any circumstances. King

Oscar I refused to provide such an assurance, claiming that by doing so it would conclude 'an alliance with Russia' (Elgström 2000: 56). He thus left open the possibility of joining the war at a later date, and soon afterwards, Great Britain and France started secret negotiations trying to make Sweden do just that.

In a secret meeting on the island of Gotland on 15 June 1854, with two special envoys of Napoleon III, Oscar I was offered the Åland Islands as compensation for Sweden's participation on the Allied side with 60 000 troops and 200 gunboats (Anderson 1969: 266). By this point, the king had already drawn up preliminary plans for Swedish invasion either in the Baltic provinces or in Finland, but before agreeing to implement them, he presented the envoys with extensive counter-demands, which included large subsidies and the deployment of 60,000–70,000 Allied troops in the Baltic theatre. While these remained unfulfilled, the king refused to interfere, even when he was again offered the Åland Islands in early autumn 1854, when the fortress of Bomarsund had been completely destroyed and the islands were under the temporary occupation of 10,000 French troops (Anderson 1972: 48–50).

The option of intervention was nevertheless kept open. To some extent secretly encouraged by the king, as Sven Eriksson was able to determine, the liberal Scandinavianist press now began calling for Sweden's entry into the war, reconquest of Finland and either its outright annexation by Sweden or inclusion in a Nordic federation as a separate state (Eriksson 1939: 30–60; Holmberg 1946: 231–233). Themes from earlier Scandinavianist writings reappeared, and phrases such as 'Finnish brothers' and 'liberation from Russian yoke' were used to frame the Finns as a kindred nation to Sweden, casting the Russian rule as unequivocally oppressive (Barton 2005a: 142–143).

At the same time, Finnish shipping and coastal areas suffered in Allied naval operations. Many Finnish merchant ships were destroyed and bombardment of Raahe/Brahestad, Oulu/Uleåborg, Loviisa/Lovisa and the Åland Islands instilled fear in the hearts of the population (Runeberg 1962: 255–281). However perfunctory, these moves kept half of Russian land forces tied down and idle in the Baltic area, ready to fight off a possible invasion. The Allies were nevertheless not strong enough to harm the naval base Kronstadt and the capital St Petersburg.

Even though Napoleon III had plans to step up Allied activities in the Baltic theatre, the British disagreed (Anderson 1972: 50–51), and when the main offensive began in Crimea in September 1854, the attention shifted away from the Baltic entirely.

As immediate war enthusiasm subsided, growing awareness appeared in the Swedish liberal press that the Finns were not necessarily looking forward to Swedish intervention. Characteristically, *Aftonbladet* framed this as a cultural issue: by becoming Fennomans, the Finns had supposedly forgotten about their previous culture and history. Therefore, it would perhaps not be advisable to welcome them back after all, as they were already contaminated by the Fennoman sentiment. At the same time, there was some parallel recognition that the re-admission of Finnish conservative nobles into the Swedish parliament could be detrimental to liberalism in Sweden (Barton 2005a: 146–147).

The opinion in Finland itself is difficult to gauge due to press censorship. Only the Finnish émigrés in Sweden could express their views freely, but they could be biased in other ways. In any case, the expectations in Sweden that there would be a Finnish uprising in the event of a Swedish invasion were probably unfounded – Oscar I himself admitted as much already in June 1854 (Holmberg 1946: 233). Some Fennoman intellectuals like Arwidsson were also taking a clear stance against the prospect of Swedish intervention, lacking trust in Sweden's military capabilities, even though they supported the Allies (see Junnila 1971: 145–148). Other sources tell of the upper classes' and the general population's loyalty to Russia (Runeberg 1962: 85). H. Arnold Barton suggests that the loyalty of the former is understandable, since the Finnish elites enjoyed important new benefits thanks to Finland's status as a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire that they had never had in Sweden. The ravages of the British fleet, the main victim of which had been the Swedish-speaking coastal population, further cemented loyalty to the Tsarist regime. A Swedish invasion, while possibly not entirely unwelcome, would have forced the Finns to choose between their two loyalties: the Swedish king and the Russian Tsar (Barton 2005a: 147–149).

A year later, when Sevastopol had been conquered and the Russian defeat seemed imminent, the Allies' attention briefly turned back to the Baltic. Now, Oscar I felt it was finally the right time to get involved. In November 1855, he presented to Napoleon III's envoy an ambitious plan for a combined British-French-Danish-Swedish offensive against St Petersburg in the following year. His demands, however, were also quite extensive: the acquisition of preferably the whole of Finland, or at least the Åland Islands, formal alliance with Austria, large subsidies for the Swedish war effort, deployment of 60,000-70,000 Allied soldiers to the Baltic, and, finally, the restoration of Russia 'to a position less threatening to the future of Europe' as an official war aim (Jansson 1961: 104-109; Elgström 2000: 57).

Oscar I's ideas were quite compatible with Napoleon III's own far-reaching plans of transforming the Crimean War into a general war of liberation of the oppressed European nations. According to this strategy, the Scandinavians were to be called in to incite Polish, Finnish and Estonian uprisings against the Russian rule. In June 1856, 20,000-30,000 Swedes and Norwegians, supported by the British navy, were supposed to occupy the Åland Islands, while 40,000 Allied troops would land on the Estonian islands, supported by the French fleet. Afterwards the Swedes would land in Finland, while the Danes and the Western Allies would occupy Livonia and Estonia. The main force would be directed towards St Petersburg, while the force operating in what is now Latvia would join the Polish revolutionary troops. Sovereignty over Finland, and possibly also over the Baltic provinces, would be handed over to Sweden (Anderson 1969: 270-271).

Again, heated discussions flared up in liberal Swedish newspapers and pamphlets, with *Aftonbladet's* editor August Sohlman urging Finland to be united with Sweden as a self-governing region, like Schleswig and Holstein under the Danish crown (see Barton 2005a: 143-147). As a preliminary step towards intervention, Sweden concluded on 21 November the so-called November Treaty with Britain and France, promising not to cede any land to Russia in the north in exchange for an allied pledge to help and support Sweden in case of possible Russian incursions (Elgström 2000: 57). These alliance plans of 1855, leading to the November Treaty, were as close to a formal

military alliance as Sweden ever came in the nineteenth century (and indeed in the twentieth).

By January 1856, Sweden had moved very close to entering the war; something that was widely expected to happen before the summer (Elgström 2000: 57). However, unbeknownst to the Swedes, at the same time as the November Treaty was being concluded, the French emperor was already seeking peace with Russia. Rather than destroying Russia in a grand war of national liberation, the danger of Swedish and Austrian invasion was used to put more pressure on the new Tsar, Alexander II (1855–1881), who finally gave way and allowed the peace of Paris to be concluded on 30 March 1856. The prospect of Swedish participation was thereby quickly forgotten, and in the end, Sweden was not even invited to participate in the peace talks – an honour that was accorded to non-coalition members Prussia and Austria (Anderson 1969: 274–275).

Swedish Revanchism during the Crimean War – Merely an Accident of History?

Thanks to Alexander II's determination to learn the lessons of Russia's defeat, the Tsarist regime turned more liberal in the following decades. This increased Finnish loyalty and reconciled more Swedish liberals to Russian autocracy. Nevertheless, the war scare had left its marks. The more Swedish-minded intellectuals were accused by ardent Fennomans of disloyalty and conspiracy with Sweden, which led to the emergence of the pro-Swedish Svecoman counter-movement in the 1860s. Up until 1917, it was always the Swedish-speaking intelligentsia that most resolutely opposed Tsarism and supported Finnish independence from Russia (Barton 2005a: 150–151).

In 1853–1856, Sweden itself had been through a remarkable pendulum swing from a markedly pro-Russian policy stance in 1848–1852 to almost participating in the Franco-British anti-Russian alliance in 1856. Oscar I was cautious and tried to retain his freedom of action for as long as possible, ready to jump on the bandwagon only when Allied victory already looked certain. By trying to reap the benefits at this late stage, Sweden showed its neutrality to have been quite

unprincipled (Elgström 2000: 46, 55, 58), even though there was certainly also much genuine support for neutrality policy. However, as Oscar I's gamble failed, the pendulum was ready to swing back in the other direction. H. Arnold Barton argues that although the November Treaty meant that the policy of 1812 was effectively over, the neutrality norm in Sweden had in fact been strengthened, paving the way for further joint Scandinavian neutrality declarations in the coming wars (Barton 2005a: 150).

By suggesting that since war activism had failed in this instance, it was therefore also becoming obsolete in Swedish history (generally speaking), Barton's argument feeds into the progressivist narrative of Swedish peacefulness outlined in the beginning of this article. Furthermore, in another 2005 publication, he argues more broadly that in the nineteenth century and even beyond, there were in fact two competing forms of Swedish nationalism. One was the old conservative – even reactionary – and staunchly monarchist patriotism that longed for the seventeenth-century Great Power Era and entertained dreams of regaining past imperial grandeur. Oscar I's plans for reconquest of Finland were an example of such feelings resurfacing. The other form of nationalism, Barton suggests, was a newer kind of progressive, pacifistic, tolerant *fosterlandskärlek* (love for one's native land) that accepted Sweden's small-power role in the world, was idealistically Scandinavianist in relation to its Nordic neighbours, and sympathetic to Norway. It was the latter form that eventually gained the upper hand, determining the course of Sweden's following history (Barton 2005b: 318–319).

Nevertheless, what we can observe when considering the example of Sweden's near-involvement in the Crimean War is in fact a temporary convergence between these 'reactionary' and 'progressive' branches of Swedish nationalism. While this is not enough to dispute their existence as separate political movements, it does hint at a shared revanchist substrate between the two, at least in the mid-nineteenth century (and possibly well into the twentieth). Otherwise it would be difficult to explain why in 1854, and then again in 1856, the king and the liberal press were jointly preparing the ground for Swedish

intervention against Russia for the sake of reconquering Finland and, in one form or another, reuniting it with Sweden.

Was this convergence altogether spontaneous? Allan Jansson (1961: 56) has characterised Oscar I's media strategy as complex; at times following the public opinion, at times trying to lead it. Sven Eriksson (1939: 30–60; see also Eriksson 1940; Gullberg 1952) has accorded him the role of an *éminence grise* behind some highly impressive propaganda initiatives: there is indeed some (not always conclusive) evidence that he was actively encouraging pro-interventionist opinion both in Sweden and abroad. However, even if subjected to royal encouragement, it seems unlikely that the liberal press could have been outright coerced into supporting the war plans. This is supported by the fact that a credible ideological basis for Swedish revanche already existed in earlier Scandinavianist writings, criticising Russia and decrying the loss of Finland.

As pointed out by Nils Elvander, the pro-interventionism of the liberal press rather demonstrates that the Swedish Scandinavianist radicals were quite ready to put their demands for liberal reforms on the backburner and work with the king when the king adopted a Scandinavianist policy himself (Elvander 1961: 369). The prospect of overcoming the humiliation of 1809 was thus enticing enough to change the whole nature of the Scandinavianist movement: after having begun as a form of liberal opposition to the conservative ruling authorities, it was now turning into a tool for royal foreign policy (see also Glenthøj 2018: 244–245). No less significantly, the fact that Swedish liberal criticism was directed not only against Russia, but also against the Fennoman Finns, reveals its essentially nationalist character. By blending their disapproval of Russian autocracy with bitter feelings over the treachery of the Finns who had dared to abandon their Swedish-Scandinavian identity in favour of a purely Finnish one – and by preferring a Swedish imperial solution to the Finnish question in general – the Swedish liberals appeared just as reactionary as their conservative opponents.

Finally, the Crimean War was merely the first in a series of modern-era 'critical junctures' during which the sceptre of the Finnish question would make a comeback in the Swedish public debate and political

discourse. Indeed, it is by studying Swedish policymaking and public debate during warlike conflicts involving Russia – thus triggering Swedish political and military opportunism – that we gain essential insight into the post-1814 persistence of Swedish militant nationalism. Other similar occasions that followed were the Polish uprising of 1863–1864 (Barton 2005a: 151–152), the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, and most spectacularly the First World War, when the idea that Sweden should ally itself with Germany against Russia was being floated in the highest echelons of Swedish society (Kuldkepp 2015: 253–256). In 1918 there was indeed some limited Swedish intervention in the Åland Islands, masterminded by the Social Democratic Naval Defence Minister Erik Palmstierna (Rystad 1999: 154). Finally (?), as late as in 1941, the Supreme Commander of the Swedish armed forces, Olof Thörnell (1877–1977) made a proposal to the Swedish government that a Swedish expeditionary force be sent over to Finland to fight against the USSR; thereby effectively proposing an alliance between Sweden and Nazi Germany (Åmark 2011: 64–65).

Conclusions

While every historical situation is unique, there are also patterns of continuity resulting from the persistence of collective memory and resilient images of national and geopolitical interests. In the modern era, when widespread literacy and cheap newspapers allowed for widened participation in the public sphere, perceptions of past injustices could be used with increasing ease to influence and mobilise public opinion in support of action in the name of hurt national pride. The press, particularly in conjunction with politicians, could create a basis for even the most radical steps, including participation in war. That this would happen in Sweden is not in itself surprising, but given Sweden's peaceful reputation today, it seems particularly pertinent for historians to trace this undercurrent in Swedish history in order to cast light on alternative paths of development – unrealised but never impossible – that highlight how fragile its supposedly more than 200 years of peace have actually been.

Based on the evidence we have – of which the case study of the Crimean War is just one example – it would be hard to argue that Swedish anti-Russian revanchism over Finland ever truly disappeared before the twentieth century, perhaps not even until the end of World War II. While never a dominant or even consistent feature of Swedish politics or public sphere – after all, there must have been deep awareness of the obvious inferiority of Swedish resources, manpower and political clout compared to that of Russia – Swedish revanchism was latent and ready to flare up during major conflicts in which Russia was at its weakest and there appeared a possible window of opportunity for bandwagoning with its enemies. The fact that such plans never quite came to fruition is no evidence of a particularly peaceful mindset on part of Sweden. The Crimean War is a case in point – the Swedish intervention only failed to happen because of changes in Allied strategy, not thanks to any Swedish pacifism.

Endnotes

¹ Critical junctures are defined in *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism* as ‘situations of uncertainty in which decisions of important actors are causally decisive for the selection of one path of institutional development over other possible paths’ (Capoccia 2016).

² For recent research on the origins and development of the Scandinavianist movement, see Glenthøj and Nordhagen Ottosen 2014, and Sandström 2005, and Hemstad, Fabricius Møller and Thorkildsen 2018.

³ On the various kinds of Swedish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* dealing with the loss of Finland, see Elenius 1999.

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