INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE BALTIC 1660-1720

Jan Glete

This text was written in 1993-94 as Ch. 6 in Part III of The Baltic and the Baltic Region, 15th-18th centuries, a 3 volume work which remains unpublished. It is in increasing need of updating and re-writing but is here left in its original form.

From 1660 until the conclusion of several peace treaties in 1719-21 there were only marginal changes of the frontiers between the states in the Baltic region. After a century dominated by Swedish empire building (1561-1660), a phase of stability and balance of power followed until 1700. After that, almost 22 years of intense warfare radically changed the structure of international power in the region with Russia emerging as a new great power.1

With the simplification which always is necessary in a short survey we may trace three main trends in international relations in the Baltic in this period: the international effects of state building within the Baltic region, the political effects of the east-west trade through the Baltic and finally the effects of the great power struggle in Western Europe in the Baltic. Before we turn to the major events of the period something must be said about these long-term trends. If the present state of research had allowed it, it would have been tempting to bring them together under a heading such as "Trade and territory". It is evident that the rulers of the Baltic states in this period were interested in both territorial acquisitions and the development of trade in order to increase their power base. Their foreign policy and their trade policy were usually intertwined and it ought to be an important subject for future historical research to make comparative studies of how the priorities were set. What mattered most to different states and what were the results of the various policies adopted?

State building and changes in international power

State building is the process where the political elite create new structures and organisations designed to penetrate the society in order to regulate it and draw a larger volume of resources from it.2 Such activities were intense in this period and they were focused on the struggle of governments to raise the vast sums required to pay for the new permanent armies and navies that became necessary for the survival of European states in the 17th century. Sweden had passed through a period of rapid state building up to 1660, when permanent armed forces and an early modern bureaucracy had been created by the Swedish state.3 It had paid off in terms of territorial conquests and increased international power. From the mid-17th century, Sweden's neighbours began to pass through the same process, not the least in order to stop further Swedish expansion. This often meant conflicts between princes, aristocrats and estates about taxes and the power over the state. Especially in Germany, state building also often meant political and administrative integration of territories which in the past had been divided by ruling families according to feudal principles or assembled in a haphazard way through dynastic marriages, inheritance and war.

In this period, North German princes by various means also attempted to become kings outside the Holy German Empire. In this they were very successful. By 1720 the electors of Brandenburg, Saxony and Hanover had become kings of Prussia (formally in Prussia), Poland and Great Britain respectively; the heir to Hessen-Cassel was king of Sweden while the king of Denmark-Norway by inheritance was also the ruler of Oldenburg and part of Holstein. The dukes of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Holstein-Gottorp had or were about to create marriage alliances with the house of

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2State building: Tilly (1975), Tilly (1990), Glete.
3Nilsson, Lindegren, Loit.
Romanov which in the future would make their dynasties contenders for the succession to the Russian imperial throne.

State building in Denmark-Norway in this period started with a decisive turn from aristocratic rule to royal absolutism in 1660. The catastrophic result of the wars with Sweden from 1657 to 1660 was a strong stimulus for radical reforms and centralisation of power and the Oldenburg king Frederik III (1648-70) used it to break the power of the aristocrats.\(^4\) Up to 1720, Danish foreign policy was dominated by two questions - reconquest of the provinces lost to Sweden in 1645 and 1658 and the integration of the duchy of Holstein-Gottorp in the new centralised state. The main point of dispute was the duke's right to maintain troops and fortresses in his territory (parts of Slesvig in Denmark and parts of Holstein in the German Empire) without permission from the Danish king. As the dukes of this Danish-German state dynastically and politically allied themselves with Sweden against the Danish ambitions the question of reconquests from Sweden and political integration in southern Jutland became closely intertwined. Consequently, Denmark-Norway's foreign policy throughout this period was directed by her antagonism to Sweden.

Brandenburg and Prussia was from 1640 to 1688 ruled by Frederick William ("The Great Elector"), often regarded as the creator of the Brandenburg-Prussian military state. The bitter experience of the Thirty Years War and the example set by Sweden were guide-lines in his state building efforts which turned a scattered and military almost powerless mixture of territories into an efficient support for a large army. Frederick William was also much impressed of the success of the Dutch. Not unlike tsar Peter in a later generation he had a strong ambition to turn his state into a maritime power. His chief ambition was to conquer Western Pomerania (Vorpommern) or at least the Oder estuary with the important city of Stettin from Sweden. He even considered moving the capital from Berlin to Stettin. In spite of that he was successful in two wars (1658-60 and 1675-79) to conquer Stettin he had to give it up in the peace treaties. Contrary to Denmark however, Brandenburg-Prussia had other options than conflicts with Sweden and this state did not take part in the anti-Swedish alliance created in the late 1690s. It considered alliance with Sweden to gain Western Prussia with Danzig from Poland as a possible alternative. Only when Sweden's loss of its German empire to other powers seemed imminent in the early 1710s did Brandenburg-Prussia begin to take action to secure the parts which this state looked upon as its sphere of interest.\(^5\)

South of Holstein and the Swedish province Bremen-Verden an interesting case of state building took place from the 1660s to 1705. By agreements within the ruling Welf dynasty the Lüneburg duchies and other territories were unified into a new state, Hanover, which from 1692 also was one of the electorates within the German empire. This state created a sizeable army and played an important role in Baltic politics. The Lüneburg dukes were by tradition negative to increased Danish influence in Holstein and Hanover was usually on friendly terms with the duke and his Swedish ally. As active state builders the dukes on the other hand also had an interest in territorial expansion which meant that Swedish Bremen-Verden was an interesting object. When the elector George Louis (1698-1727) in 1714 inherited the English throne as George I, Hanover was ready to play a very active role in Baltic politics.\(^6\)

The duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin was during the 17th century often regarded as a Swedish dependency. It was situated between Swedish Pomerania in the East and Swedish Bremen-Verden and Holstein in the west and its main port and fortress, Wismar, was Swedish since 1632. It had no permanent armed forces of any importance. During the later phase of the Great Northern War tsar Peter was able to use this weak state as a base for his army, an advance into Germany that was possible because of duke Charles Leopold's desire to gain Wismar from Sweden and his hope of increasing his power against the aristocracy through a marriage alliance with Russia. It was a late attempt of state building that failed due to intervention from Hanover.\(^7\)

\(^4\) Jespersen.  
\(^5\) Schevill, Hassinger.  
\(^7\) Mediger.
Poland-Lithuania had been the great loser in the power struggle in Eastern Europe from 1648 to 1667. Earlier the leading power in this region it rapidly fell to a semi-anarchic state with an economy in decline. At the peace with Russia in 1667 considerable territories were lost in the east. Behind the military disaster a clear and well-known case of failure in state building can be found. Various attempts to strengthen the central authorities of the state and increase its ability to raise taxes and create a strong army were made in the 1650s and 1660s but they proved to be failures.

The regime of John Sobieski (1674-1696) created certain stability although even he failed to enforce permanent political reforms. Sobieski had a good military reputation and a domestic power base from which he could exercise control in the traditional way of Polish kings. This return to traditional forms of government was probably possible only because of favourable international conditions where Poland was spared external threats. Two of the three strong neighbours, Austria and Russia, saw Poland as an ally of some value against the Ottoman Empire while Sweden had no desire to renew its expansion in the east. Poland in the latter half of the 17th century was hardly a Baltic power. Its main Baltic port, Danzig, was a semi-independent German city. The death of John Sobieski in 1696 started a new international contest for the Polish throne. The result was surprising. The French prince of Conti was elected but the Elector of Saxony, Frederick Augustus, suddenly converted from the Protestant to the Catholic religion in order to become eligible. With the support of the strong Saxon army he was able to take control of the country and gather enough support to block the entry of the French prince.

The Saxon elector (Augustus II as Polish king 1697-1733) came from one of the most economically developed and effectively centralised medium-sized German states. He hoped to be able to turn his state building efforts to his vast and populous but politically archaic kingdom. Augustus wished to turn it into a hereditary monarchy and develop its economy by co-operation with Saxony and through a mercantilist program to foster Polish participation in the Baltic trade. To secure this he planned to conquer Livonia from Sweden, both in order to make himself popular in Poland and to get control over the rich trade through Riga. The union between Saxony and Poland thus became the connection between east and west which finally proved fatal for the Swedish empire. The Great Northern War also turned fatal for Poland which in this period became the battleground for the contending armies, went through a new period of internal conflicts and finally emerged as a political satellite to the new great power Russia.

Russia in this period more or less imported the new west European concept of a bureaucratic state. In one way, the tsars had already before 1660 achieved an important part of the state building program. Russia had a centralised state power with considerable permanent armed forces before absolutism became really fashionable in the west. Poland-Lithuania had felt the force of this state in the 1650s and 1660s and suffered badly. Against Sweden, Russia had been less successful and the peace of Kardis in 1661 lasted for nearly forty years. The idea of opening an outlet to the Baltic by conquests from Sweden was alive: it was a central part of the political program of Afanasij Ordin-Nashchokin, Russian chancellor until 1671. When tsar Peter I in 1689 took control of the Russian state it got a ruler who not only had a deep interest in creating a modern western-style society but also a special personal interest in promoting Russia as a naval and maritime power. This made access to the sea imperative.

In the 1690s his main efforts was directed to the south where he was able to secure a foothold on the Black Sea (Azov) during the coalition war against the Ottomans. By 1697, when he made his famous travel to Western Europe, he intended to activate Russia as a Baltic power. He began to regard the Swedish possession of Livonia, Estonia and Ingria as a curtain which mentally hindered Russian merchants and nobles to get in touch with the modernising forces in the west which he hoped to infuse into the Russian society. After a period of four decades when Russia, together with

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8 Frost.
9 The Cambridge History of Poland, Kalisch & Gierowski.
Poland, had been on relatively friendly terms with Sweden, Russia suddenly emerged as the most implacable member of the anti-Swedish coalition.¹⁰

Sweden emerged out of the turbulent 1650s as a relatively satisfied nation with considerable gains in territories. Charles X had hoped to enlarge the empire even further, by conquests in the east (Courland, Prussia, even Poland) or in the west (Denmark-Norway) but such an expansion had arisen too much opposition both within the Baltic and in Western Europe. In spite of this, Sweden had proved herself as a great power in the sense that only a strong coalition could check her conquests. The prestige of the Swedish army as an elite force was at its peak in 1660 and this was a capital which the regency of the young Charles XI (1660-1697, ruler from 1672) tried to live on. They had no desire to renew large-scale warfare but after many decades of active Swedish warfare in Germany, Poland and Denmark, they looked upon Sweden as a natural part not only of Baltic politics but also of German and West European politics.

In practice that meant that they were looking for subsidies from anybody who might have an interest of maintaining a strong Swedish military presence in Germany. This was something Sweden was unable to provide on her own in times of peace unless the state was able to reacquire the large domains ceded to the nobility during the long wars of conquests. Sweden had gained her great power position much out of the fact that the aristocracy had been willing to take part in the building of a strong and centralised state but they had demanded their share of the profit, mainly in land in Sweden and in the conquered provinces. When the wars ended this system of state finance left the armed forces with insufficient funds for their maintenance. The regency government hoped to develop new sources of income through the stimulation of Swedish trade and shipping but this at best might have long-term effects. In the meantime they wished to avoid war and use Swedish foreign policy to promote the balance of power in Europe.

This policy received a severe set-back during the war of 1675-79 when much went wrong for Sweden. A new phase of state building aiming at making the Swedish armed forces independent of foreign financial support was initiated by Charles XI and his advisors. As a result, the aristocratic families lost much of their political influence as well as much of their wealth and Sweden became an absolute monarchy. The soldier-king reorganised the Swedish state from offensive warfare based on the exploitation of occupied territories and subsidies from allies to defensive warfare supported by taxes and custom duties from both Sweden and her German and Baltic provinces. Defensive warfare meant that both the army and the navy must be able to respond quickly to foreign threats in order not to lose the initiative. The provinces in the periphery had to be held by fortresses and local forces until the navy brought in reinforcements from Sweden. To ensure this the main naval base was transferred from Stockholm to the new city of Karlskrona in southern Sweden. From this the navy could act from the strategic centre of the Baltic empire. The result of the reforms was armed forces which during the Great Northern War showed a marked improvement in combat efficiency compared to the earlier war and an organisation of recruitment that was able to raise soldiers for more than twenty years of wars against enemies of great strength.¹¹

During the late 17th century the former Danish and Norwegian provinces were effectively integrated into Sweden and contrary to the war of 1675-79 the Danish invasion of Scania in 1709-10 arose no local support. Considerable attempts were also made to impose absolutism on the Livonian aristocracy. This caused opposition and there were undoubtedly Livonian nobles who became interested in a change to Polish rule. This was however no serious problem for Sweden during the Great Northern War - it was absolutist Russia, not aristocratic Poland that effectively attacked Livonia and a large part of the Livonian nobility served as officers in the army of Charles XII.

¹⁰ Hellie, Wittram (1964), M S Anderson, Peterson, Mediger. The latter study is especially valuable for the commercial background to Peter I's interest in the Baltic.
¹¹ Roberts, Landgren.
Politically, the Baltic region interconnected with Western Europe in two ways: by trade and by alliances. The Baltic Sea was a major highway for international commerce of great importance for the West. Mercantile and capitalistic groups rose in political importance. Economically, the period saw the zenith and the beginning of the end of Dutch trade supremacy in the Baltic as well as in Western Europe. It also saw the rise of England as a great maritime and trading power, a rise that became closely intertwined with the rise of British power in international politics. One of the consequences of the great political success of the Dutch republic in the first half of the 17th century was that trade and mercantile development became first-rank political questions for territorial princes, including the kings of France and England and several rulers in the Baltic region. Trade relations with the Baltic, of obvious importance to the Dutch, was one field where other West European states sought to gain better positions.

Such positions could be achieved through mercantilist regulations, shows of force or agreements on trade and alliances with the Baltic states. The Scandinavian states themselves used these means to increase their share in the active trade between the Baltic and Western Europe. The Dutch, which by 1660 was the dominant trading nation in the region, used the same methods to protect their position although in their case they were resisting mercantilism and protectionism. Through most of this period the Dutch enjoyed or did at least believe that they enjoyed a competitive advantage in cheap shipping, efficient business methods and a wide network of contacts which gave them an interest in free trade in the Baltic. They were prepared both to make political concessions and to fight wars in order to achieve it. On the other hand, England and France as well as the Baltic states were ready to discuss trade privileges of a protectionistic nature in negotiations on political treaties.

For Western Europe, Baltic trade had a strategic as well as an economic importance. Apart from being a great supplier of grain (primarily through Danzig) and a growing market for manufactured goods, the Baltic was an increasingly important supplier of high-quality iron, guns, timber, masts and spars, hemp, flax, pitch and tar, products which usually are brought together under the general heading naval stores. They were the essential material base of both mercantile shipping and sea power, especially as the Baltic products were of the high quality types required by the state navies. For the West European states, especially the Netherlands and England, a regular supply of Baltic naval stores was important for the maintenance of their international position as this to a great extent was based on their power at sea. This fact was central in their alliance policy in the region. It was essential to keep the trade routes open and Denmark which controlled the Sound and Sweden which controlled both important production areas as well as ports had a trump card in their potential ability to close the supply.

However, this ability was often more useful as a threat or a temptation in negotiations about alliances than as a viable form of warfare. It would be realistic if one Scandinavian power joined a western power in an offensive alliance against another western power as they would then have a joint interest of cutting the enemy's supply of naval stores. This situation never arose in practice - the alliances between Western and Northern Europe were normally of a defensive character aiming at the preservation of status quo. To join a western power in offensive warfare against another western power seldom made sense to the Scandinavian states. Such a policy meant economic losses as well as a risk of being dragged into wars of little relevance for any Baltic state. The changing character of European wars in this period was also important to Scandinavian foreign policy. To close the Sound or the Swedish ports for one western power might be a realistic threat during short and exclusively maritime wars such as those fought between England and the Netherlands three times from 1652 to 1674. It could be used to make the western powers interested in various concessions of a political and economic nature. During the great continental wars (1672-79, 1688-

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12 Israel, Davis.  
13 Aström.
such a policy would hardly have been feasible for the Scandinavian states as it would hurt their own trade and custom incomes too much. The ability to delay or temporarily stop West European shipping was however a useful threat of reprisal when neutral Scandinavian shipping was harassed by the two maritime powers in their wars with France.

On the naval scene the Baltic and Western Europe had been closely connected since the 1650s when the new large battle fleets of the Dutch Republic and England showed their ability to make interventions in the Baltic as well as in the Mediterranean. In the 1660s France also dramatically improved its naval capability. With navies which from now on usually were three to five times as large as the two Scandinavian navies any of the three western powers had the possibility of sending a battle fleet to the Baltic and control the main sea lines of communication in the region. An alliance between a Scandinavian and a Western power meant that this alliance could gain regional command of the sea, a fact that often caused the other Scandinavian power to secure an alliance with an another western power. The two Scandinavian navies usually roughly balanced each other. Only in the last years of the Great Northern War was this balance upset by the rise of the new Russian navy.\textsuperscript{14}

Politically, the period 1660-1720 was very much the age of Louis XIV in European power politics. In a period when the organisation and centralisation of national resources to the states was uneven, the sudden political stability created in France from 1660 on rapidly turned Europe's most populous state into a semi-hegemonic power. With dramatically increasing armed forces under his control and with a conscious policy of expansion, Louis XIV rapidly filled the dominant position from which the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs had been forced out from about 1640 to 1660. The European system of alliances was realigned according to this new situation where every major and minor power from the Baltic to the Mediterranean had to find out whether their interests were best suited by adherence to the French giant or by joining an alliance against it. The choice was far from self-evident which explains the many changes of alliances which is typical for the period.

In the long term the most important result in the Baltic of the new French position was that Sweden, before 1660 France's most important ally in Europe, gradually lost sympathy for French political aims. Up to 1660, France and Sweden had several mutual interests and the Swedish expansion in the German Empire was favourable to French interests. The new expansionistic France showed interest in co-operation with a Sweden which no longer existed: the empire-builder in the Baltic. An expansionistic and war-like Sweden using its continental provinces as bases for military actions might have been a useful junior partner to France in her wars against Austria and the Netherlands: military interventions in Poland, Northern Germany and the Dutch landward provinces, actions against Dutch trade in the Baltic. But Sweden of the regency for Charles XI (1660-72) and of Charles XI himself (1672-97) was defensive and aiming at preserving the power of balance in Europe. Sweden had no interest in a further weakening of Habsburg power. Louis XIV's aggressive attitude towards Spain was of no interest to Sweden and in Germany Sweden for all practical purposes withdrew from her role as leader of the Protestant forces within the Empire.

French and Swedish political aims drifted apart, thus opening the possibilities for new alignments between Western and Northern Europe. As usual in such negotiations it was important both to join useful alliances with a minimum of commitments and to hinder potential adversaries from finding valuable allies of their own. Long negotiations between Baltic and West European states often had the aim of avoiding to make to firm commitments. The long-term trend up to 1700 is fairly clear however. The Baltic and the German Empire was no longer as in the past (up to 1660) centres of warfare and intense power struggle. The centre for such struggles was now in the west, in the wars between France, the maritime powers and the two Habsburg states. From the 1680s another centre appeared in the South-eastern Europe where Austria, Russia, Poland and Venice fought the Ottoman Empire. The only major war in the Baltic between 1660 and 1700 was caused by alliances between Baltic powers and the contending powers in the west, alliances which in themselves were not offensive in character. In these four decades the two Scandinavian states were looking for a

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Glete}, especially pp. 178-252.
security system against each other while North German states increasingly turned their political interest from the Baltic and the internal problems of the Empire to the power struggle in Western Europe.

From a Western European point of view the Scandinavian and North German states increasingly became important as suppliers of strong and well-organised military forces to West European warfare. Sweden in the 1660s and 1670s constantly searched for subsidies for her large army and Denmark hoped to secure similar support to rearm. The rise of the new German armies was partially a response to the possibilities provided by French, Dutch and English offers of alliances where the western powers paid for the upkeep of the armies when they used them in wars in the Netherlands and along the French-German borders. This was sometimes combined with subsidies in times of peace to ease the financial burden for the states to maintain permanent armies.\(^\text{15}\)

Especially the two maritime powers whose permanent armies were small compared to that of France were interested in this German-Scandinavian market for armed forces and during the long war period 1688-1713 they were anxious to monopolise it for their own use. In that period they formed an important part of the English-Dutch-Austrian alliance. There was a certain Continuity between this hiring of national armies from states and the upkeep of large mercenary forces in Germany during the Thirty Years War. The armies of states like Denmark, Brandenburg, Saxony, Hanover and Hessen (to name those which are relevant in a Baltic context) was to a considerable extent financed by western money. Western money helped the state building efforts of these states. Sweden - the largest military power in the region - in this period normally refrained from hiring regiments to foreign powers but in the 1660s and 1670s the attempts to gain subsidies to the army was a powerful force behind Swedish alliance policy.

**Peace and alliance policy in the Baltic, 1660-1675**

The peace treaties negotiated during 1660 between Sweden and her several enemies; Denmark-Norway, Poland, Brandenburg and the Emperor, had been brought about by pressure from Western Europe: France, the Netherlands and England, which wished to preserve a balance of power in this region. The fact that there were few wars for forty years and that the frontiers between the contending states remained unchanged until the Great Northern War (and that those between Sweden, Denmark and Norway remain unchanged until today) shows that the arbiters had been quite successful in bringing about a workable balance in a region where borders had been highly flexible since several decades. The peace concluded between Sweden and Russia at Kardis in 1661 gave the same stability in the east. The war between Poland and Russia continued until 1667 when Poland had to accept considerable territorial losses in the east but this was hardly a Baltic war.

During the 1660s the Baltic powers were to a large extent occupied with internal political problems.\(^\text{16}\) This in itself was no guarantee against wars but with the recent experiences of a war that had spread almost uncontrolled none of the old contending powers was looking for an immediate renewal. Instead they attempted to improve the financial situation of the states, promote trade and work out solutions to the urgent problems of interest aggregation which had appeared in the preceding decades. They made intense use of diplomacy to improve their security position. This decade saw many negotiations where the main object for the Baltic states was to find as many powers as possible that were willing to guarantee earlier peace treaties, existing frontiers and the existing balance of power.

The region where there was a distinct possibility that a Baltic war might erupt was Poland. The Polish court, the last Vasa king John Casimir (1648-68) and his French-born queen Louise Marie of Gonzaga-Nevers attempted to enforce an election of an heir to the Polish throne while John Casimir

\(^{15}\)Papke.

\(^{16}\)Fahlborg (1932), Fahlborg (1949) and Fahlborg (1961). This very broad five-volume study (almost 3 000 pages) is the standard work about international relations in the Baltic from 1660 to 1672. For a later study on Dutch Baltic policy: Römelingh
was still alive. This they hoped might give the new king a stronger position and a better chance to enforce constitutional reforms. Their candidate was the French prince of Condé ("the grand Condé" of international reputation as a military commander) or his son. This candidature was eagerly supported by Louis XIV as it might give France a counterweight in the east against Austria (and get rid of Condé as a potential troublemaker in France). The election question was very complicated as France officially also supported a neutral candidate, the German Duke of Neuburg.

Their real candidate was however Condé and Louis XIV hoped to achieve his election with the help of French money to the Polish diet and the threat of armed intervention if Condé, once elected, met resistance. As the conditions in Poland in the 1660s were anarchic and sometimes turned into a civil war (the most important being the crown grand marshal Jerzy Lubomirski's revolt) such intervention seemed likely to be necessary and might end in a war. In the French plans, Sweden was supposed to carry out the military intervention with French payment. The Swedish government, with recent experiences of war in Poland, regarded Louis XIV as overoptimistic in his Polish plans but at the same time the situation in Poland was potentially dangerous for her neighbours and French support for some kind of solution could not be dismissed.

In the end, Louise Marie - one of the most strong-willed and politically ambitious queens of the 17th century - died in 1667. John Casimir resigned the throne in the following year and the Poles - to the surprise of many contemporary observers - elected one of their own magnates, Michael Wisniowiecki (1669-73). He was succeeded by John Sobieski (1674-96). None of these Polish magnate-kings were able to reform Polish political institutions but Sobieski was at least able to stop the anarchy and to raise Poland's international prestige by his intervention to save Vienna from the Turks in 1683. From a Baltic perspective it is more important to note that Poland under Sobieski largely refrained from active intervention in Baltic affairs and turned the limited resources of the state towards south. The only exception is that he during the war of 1675-79 considered an alliance with Sweden to retake Eastern Prussia from Brandenburg but the Swedish inability to launch an offensive in the southern Baltic made such plans impracticable.

The early 1660s saw Sweden allied to France and the Dutch Republic with Denmark while France and the Dutch were allied with each other. The restored Stuart dynasty in England was at the same time looking around for potential allies in the Baltic, not the least to improve their trade in the region. For some years these five states carried out various negotiations about security and trade, normally with the common aim of keeping the peace in the Baltic. They all aimed at the optimal combination of favourable trade conditions and political security. The weakest of the five states, Denmark, tried to avoid falling to the status of a minor power and attempted as far as possible to achieve some kind of parity with Sweden in the eyes of Western Europe. Hannibal Sehested, the most influential Danish minister in the first half of the 1660s, was the architect of this policy. His main achievement was the Danish-French treaty of 1663 which irritated Sweden as it showed that France had alternatives in her northern alliance policy.

Between two of the five states, England and the Netherlands, conflicts about maritime trade and colonies were by 1664/65 turning into a general war. Denmark's gratitude to the Netherlands for the republic's intervention against Sweden in 1658-60 was not greater than that Frederik III in 1665 negotiated with Charles II of England in joining the English. The two kings hoped to start cooperation by a joint surprise attack on a rich Dutch convoy which had sought protection in Bergen (Norway). The plan went wrong as the local commander was not informed in time: the Bergen fortress successfully defended the Dutch merchantmen against the attacking English warships. By mistake Denmark went into the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1664-67) as an auxiliary to the Dutch rather than the English. Considering all the efforts the Scandinavian states in this decade paid to diplomatic negotiations and careful analysis of the political situation it is somewhat ironic that one of them went to war in such a haphazard way. The main achievement was that the Danish navy protected Dutch merchantmen in the Baltic in 1666-67.

\[\text{Böggild-Andersen.}\]
Sweden had earlier in 1665 signed a defensive alliance with England. The outbreak of the Anglo-Dutch war as well as several minor conflicts in Germany created a situation where the Swedish government saw it as a necessity to send a considerable army to Northern Germany in 1665. It gave the ability to strike against Denmark, the Netherlands or any German state if the situation required it and if any of the contenders were willing to pay for it. The problem of how this army should be paid without enemy territory to occupy soon became acute. Negotiations were kept going with both England and the Netherlands without any results. The achievements of the army were small. It undertook a blockade against the city of Bremen in 1666 to enforce old Swedish claims of sovereignty. Due to diplomatic interventions from various states only some minor concessions were extorted from the great trading city.

During 1667 a new opportunity to finance the Swedish expeditionary force appeared. Louis XIV in that year began his long sequence of aggressive wars against the Spanish Habsburg with an attack into Spanish Netherlands. It turned into a military parade and it became clear that Spain no longer was a power of importance in north-western Europe. This fact worried both the Dutch and the English governments. It made them more eager to conclude the peace of Breda in 1667 and together with Sweden - which had acted as mediator at the peace conference - they continued to negotiate about some kind of alliance to limit French ambitions. In April 1668 this resulted in the Triple Alliance between these three states. This had a certain effect as it made France more willing to conclude peace with Spain. From the Swedish point of view the aim of the alliance was - apart from the prestige - to get substantial Spanish subsidies for the maintenance of Sweden's German army. This was intended to be the most important part of the military force available to the three allied powers to protect the Spanish Netherlands.

Louis XIV reacted with a methodical policy to break up the Triple Alliance which after all was concluded between states with widely divergent interests. He regarded the republican Dutch as the chief culprits and prepared an attack on this state which was most vulnerable to French military power. The two monarchies, England and Sweden, he hoped to convert to allies with the help of money. In this he was successful. England became a secret French ally in 1670. Sweden agreed in the spring of 1672 to keep an army of up to 22 000 men in northern Germany to overawe German princes who might support the Dutch. France would pay considerable subsidies for this army.

Sweden joined the French alliance in the hope that this would make a general European war unlikely and at the same time give Sweden a long-awaited opportunity to strengthen her armed forces. There were fears that Denmark would be given the same opportunity if Sweden declined the French offer of an alliance. There were hardly anyone in Sweden who desired war or hoped for further conquests but many believed that the new situation would make the Dutch willing to consider concessions in questions of trade. The majority in the Swedish council who voted for the alliance supposed that the French army (not so highly regarded in Sweden) would soon get bogged down in the Dutch fortress system. Sweden should then act as a mediator and use the Dutch difficulties to gain trade advantages.

The war which started in 1672 turned out to be far more dramatic and intense than Sweden supposed. It began with an almost total French conquest of the Netherlands but the Dutch was saved by her successful navy - which fought off the combined Anglo-French fleet - and the decision to continue to fight a desperate last-ditch struggle in Holland and Zeeland. Europe was first overawed by the French show of force but gradually an anti-French alliance was formed. By 1674 England had left the war while Austria, Spain and several German princes had joined the Dutch. Brandenburg was one of the most important members of this anti-French alliance. The situation where Sweden had treaty obligations to support France against German princes had clearly arrived and France made urgent demands on her northern alliance partner. With considerable reluctance the Swedish army crossed the border to Brandenburg in 1674, officially only to find better quarters for the winter.
Sweden at Bay: War in the Baltic, 1675-1679

The Swedish empire had been shaped by an army that trusted its ability to create its own logistic base by quickly occupying enemy or even neutral territory at an early stage of a war. This ability had been based on a combination of the (up to about 1660) weak or non-existent peace-time armed forces of her neighbours and the tactical skill of the Swedish army which made its commanders confident that it could defeat any enemy in open battle. The resources of the empire had been connected by a navy able to defend the lines of communication between Sweden and the continent. The scattered character of the empire which a glance at a map from the period 1660-1720 shows is understandable if we remember that it had been created in an earlier period when the Swedish armed forces were supposed to connect and defend the territories by a combination of dynamic offensives on land and defensive control of the sea lines of communication.

The war of 1675-79 was to show that the basic military and naval preconditions for the Swedish empire had largely melted away during the preceding 15 years. To a considerable degree the difference was the result of rapid state building in Brandenburg and Denmark-Norway during these years. Both states now had absolute rulers and permanent armies and the Danish navy was to prove herself an elite force, qualitatively superior to its Swedish adversary. In Sweden the financial problem of maintaining adequate armed forces in time of peace had during the same period been shelved by the political decision-makers, mainly because its solution inevitably would hit the economic interests of the nobility.

The Swedish invasion of Brandenburg was not carried out with the ruthless rapidity that had been the rule in earlier wars. This reflected the reluctance with which Sweden entered the war as well as the lack of spirit among the army. The Swedish reputation for invincibility which was what Louis XIV really paid for was lost in the battle of Fehrbellin in June 1675 where the Elector Frederick William could claim a victory. The Swedish losses were unimportant but the fact that the Swedish army had retreated rather than immediately crushed the Brandenburg forces created a completely new situation. Once the spell of Swedish military supremacy was broken Denmark quickly joined the alliance against France and Sweden and sent the bulk of her army to Northern Germany. The aim was to eliminate the Swedish bases for an invasion of Denmark from the south which had proved so fateful in 1643-45 and 1657-58. The Swedish navy was unprepared for war and this left the Danes in control of the southern Baltic, thus making it impossible for Sweden to send reinforcements. The duke of Holstein-Gottorp was arrested and Wismar was taken in late 1675. A coalition army conquered Swedish Bremen-Verden during 1676.

By then the war had reached its climax in the Baltic. In June 1676 the Danish fleet combined with a Dutch squadron defeated the Swedish fleet at Öland. This opened up Scania for a Danish invasion which quickly followed in combination with an invasion of Western Sweden from Norway. For some months it seemed that the Danish-Norwegian hope for reconquest of the large territories lost in 1658 would become a reality. By the autumn of 1676, Sweden began to regain strength and make counter-offensive movements. One factor was that Russia - contrary to Danish hopes and Swedish fears - showed no inclination to use the situation for an attack in the east. Some Finnish regiments could be transferred to southern Sweden and in a campaign led by Charles XI most of Scania was retaken. The decision fell at the battle of Lund in December 1676 where the Swedish army again showed its old ability to secure its operational base in a rich territory by offering battle to a numerically superior enemy.

Plans for further counter-offensives in Germany or Denmark were however frustrated in 1677 when the Swedish fleet was decisively defeated by the Danes at Köge Bay. The Swedes attempted to fight an offensive and decisive battle in order to gain control of the sea in spite of that their

18Landberg et al, Roberts.
19Askgaard & Stade is a modern survey of the war. For Swedish foreign policy from 1672 to 1697 the following is mainly based on Landberg.
20Zernack.
ability at this time was mainly defensive. The Swedish Pomeranian army was thus left to fight alone, which it indeed did with skill and determination until late 1678 when Brandenburg finally occupied what remained of Sweden's German empire. Attempts to regain the initiative by a counter-offensive against Prussia from Swedish Livonia was much delayed and finally miserably failed in early 1679. By its stubborn defence of Pomerania Sweden had however kept a large part of the Brandenburg army away from the Rhine frontier, thus giving Louis XIV rewards for his subsidies.

Control of the sea also made it easier for the Danes to continue to occupy coastal areas and fortresses in Scania and Bohuslän as well as the island of Gotland. They stayed here as well as in parts of Sweden's German provinces until the end of the war. Without control of the sea lines of communication Sweden was unable to concentrate her army for a decisive action in one theatre of war and was thus reduced to fighting wars of attrition in several places. The Swedish army also had to fight an anti-guerrilla war in Scania where popular sympathies still were largely Danish. If the war had been an isolated one it is difficult to see how Sweden would have escaped without some territorial losses. It was however a coalition war and by 1678-79 Sweden's ally France turned out to be the victor, the semi-hegemonic power which was able to make favourable peace treaties with her many enemies one after another. By 1679 only Denmark and Brandenburg remained. France more or less dictated peacees where these states were required to evacuate practically all their conquest from Sweden: only Brandenburg gained a strip of land in Eastern Pomerania. Sweden also made peace with the Netherlands on terms which were unfavourable to her attempts to protect her own trade against Dutch competition.  

The peaceful corner of Europe: The Baltic 1679-1700

The end of the war in 1679 left the three contenders in the Baltic; Sweden, Denmark and Brandenburg, disappointed with their allies in Western Europe and the German Empire. Denmark and Brandenburg had some justification in feeling deserted - they had both made large and successful war efforts without any gains. Charles XI thought it was an insult on Sweden's prestige that Louis XIV made peace for his ally and he had no intention to continue a foreign policy where Sweden was tied to French interests. For a time in 1679-80 it seemed that Sweden and Denmark might become allies out of common frustration. Such an alliance should make it possible for the two states to form their trade and security policies without the handicap that other states always used their mutual distrust and competition to gain easy advantages in negotiations.

This became an episode, however. During 1681-82 a complete change of alliances took place. Sweden made a defensive treaty with the Netherlands while Denmark and Brandenburg joined France which after all had showed herself as a powerful and reliable alliance partner. Having failed in a great attempt to regain the lost provinces, Denmark throughout the 1680s hoped to use her now considerable armed forces to enforce a final solution of the Holstein-Gottorp problem. Christian V used a step by step method which in Slesvig should reduce the Holstein Duke to the position of a large landowner without political power. Sweden had not yet rebuilt her navy and was at least for the time being not in a position to help her ally as the Danish naval superiority made her vulnerable in Germany. The Danish Holstein policy caused a crisis in 1683 when Denmark and Brandenburg planned to renew the war with Sweden with the support of a French naval squadron. France however turned out to be a very cautious ally who used her influence to stop the war: it was not a French interest to weaken Swedish power in Germany or to start a new war with the Dutch who sent a squadron to make demonstrations in the North Sea.

Christian V continued however to act from a position of strength in Northern Germany and in 1686 the old Danish claim of sovereignty over Hamburg was raised anew with threatening moves of the Danish army. From a north German perspective Denmark began to look as a menace of the same type as Louis XIV with his recent reunion policy along the Rhine. Lüneburg (Hanover) and

21Rystad (1980).
22Lossky.
Brandenburg took anti-Danish measures and negotiated with Sweden. In 1688 Sweden and Lüneburg began to act in concert and in the following year they mobilised their armed forces with the open threat to attack Denmark if the duke of Holstein-Gottorp was not restored to his former position as a semi-sovereign prince in both Holstein and Slesvig. The threat got diplomatic support from England and the Netherlands. France gave only feeble support to Denmark and Christian V had to yield. A decade of attempts to integrate the complicated structure of Gottorp possessions in both Slesvig and Holstein with the Danish state had come to naught.

From 1688/89 to 1697 Europe was dominated by the great war between France on one side, England, the Netherlands, Spain, Austria and several German states on the other. Brandenburg and Lüneburg/Hanover joined this coalition while Sweden and Denmark-Norway only hired some regiments to it. Most of the Baltic states were more or less in alliance with the anti-French coalition and France had no longer any hope of securing alliances in this region, not even by exploiting mutual mistrusts. Scandinavia for a decade enjoyed the position of trade prosperity while the western powers fought each other on land and at sea. In 1691 the two states even agreed on a treaty of joint convoys to protect their merchantmen when they sailed in the war zone. The situation in Eastern Baltic was equally calm. Russia and Poland had periodically been at war with the Turks since the 1670s and they were now together with Austria and Venice occupied with the great coalition war against the Ottoman Empire which had started in 1683/84. It is however significant that the peaceful 1690s saw no reduction of armament cost in either Sweden or Denmark. These two states were still preparing for a possible conflict with each other.

Sweden's security policy was now based on defensive alliances with the two maritime powers, England and the Netherlands, both lead by the king-statholder William III. These together with Lüneburg/Hanover and possibly Brandenburg/Prussia might be expected to check Danish attempts to revise earlier peace treaties or agreements with Holstein-Gottorp. Lüneburg/Hanover and Brandenburg/Prussia were potential threats against Bremen-Verden and Pomerania respectively. But as long as antagonism against France decided most of Europe's alliance system they were normally to be found in the Anglo-Dutch-Austrian camp, that is with certain ties to Sweden. In the east there were no comparable system of Swedish alliances against Poland and Russia. Traditionally, Sweden relied on that these two powers could be played off against each other, but no treaties to that effect existed. The long period of calm in the east had made Swedish diplomacy rather passive in this direction.24

From a Danish perspective, there were no threats against her territories. If Sweden - against expectations - turned aggressive, the European balance of power would probably react one way or another just as in the fateful years of 1658-60. Denmark under Christian V (1670-99) and his son Frederik IV (1699-1730) was however basically a revisionist state which looked for a favourable opportunity to recreate the old territorial base of the Danish-Norwegian monarchy. This was why so much was spent on the armed forces and this was the reason why the Danish government eagerly took part in the alliance which began to be formed in the late 1690s.

The anti-Swedish alliance between Denmark, Russia and Saxony which was created from 1697 to 1699 was in some respect unusual. It was an offensive alliance between three powers which hardly ever before had been allied with each other. A fourth power very much concerned, Poland-Lithuania, was not a member in spite of that its old claim on Swedish Livonia was an aim for the war. The common interest between the three partners was the hope of gaining something out of Sweden's supposed weakness but behind it was also essential state building interests. Augustus hoped that a conquest of Livonia would make his precarious position in Poland firm, Peter I was convinced that a Baltic port was a cornerstone to his modernisation program of Russia while the Danish kings Christian V and Frederik IV saw a reduction of Sweden's power as the ultimate victory for absolute monarchy in Denmark-Norway.

24 Rosén, which is the standard work on Swedish foreign policy 1697-1721. Jonasson (1960).
The key to the alliance was the election of Augustus of Saxony to Polish king in 1697. He was not exactly the architect of the alliance but both geographically and diplomatically his activities formed a bridge between the other two partners. Augustus was also the partner who had clear alternatives. Saxony had no anti-Swedish traditions and in Sweden his election was generally supposed to tie Poland to the same English-Dutch-Austrian camp to which Sweden was loosely tied. In Augustus new kingdom, ideas of revenge against Russia was probably much more alive than hopes of recovering the long-since lost Livonia and for a Polish king it was a dangerous line of action to support Russian expansion and the reduction of Swedish power in the Baltic. Augustus pro-Russian policy was a break with Polish-Lithuanian traditions and in the end Poland was to pay an even higher price than Sweden for it.25

When Sweden looked as an attractive object for a war of conquest the explanation is to be found in considerable mis-conceptions about the real power relations between the three coalition partners and its victim. Sweden had been rather unsuccessful in the last war and since the introduction of absolute monarchy there were many reports about great dissatisfaction among the nobles in Sweden and Livonia. Disastrous harvest had caused a famine in Sweden during 1696-97. The death of Charles XI in 1697 and the succession to the throne of the 15-year old Charles XII (1697-1718) looked like a weakening of political leadership in Sweden. The effects of the reforms of the Swedish army and navy since 1679 had not been tested in combat while at least Saxony and Russia had armies with much recent experience of war. The three powers planned to make a joint surprise attack on Sweden and Holstein-Gottorp in 1700 with the intention of making rapid conquests which would create a fait accompli. They did not believe that Sweden would be able to make counter-offensives in three directions at the same time.

The Great Northern War 1700-1721

The almost twenty-two years of warfare which upset the established order in the Baltic have been the subject of much historical research both within and outside the region. The conflict has been analysed within the traditions of political, diplomatic, economic and military history, it has been regarded as a decisive turn of European history and it has not the least attracted much interest as a case of the influence of personality upon history. The personalities involved are of course primarily Charles XII of Sweden and Peter I of Russia.26

In a general European context it is important to remember that the great war was to a large extent decided when the western powers were occupied with the War of the Spanish Succession (1701/02-1713/14). On the diplomatic level this war influenced the Baltic region but no substantial military or naval forces from the west could intervene and influence the northern war after 1700 and before 1714. In this period the Baltic states were left to pursue their own interest. When peace returned to the west, Sweden; the power that obviously had a great need of support from forces which were interested in the balance of power in the Baltic, showed a remarkable ability of calling in new enemies.

Denmark invaded Slesvig-Holstein and Saxony attacked Livonia and laid siege on Riga simultaneously in February/March 1700. Tsar Peter had promised to join the war later in the year when he had redeployed his army after the end of the war with the Ottomans in 1699. The Danish attack was expected and Sweden had already in 1699 shipped troops to Germany to counter it. In the Danish case, Sweden's alliance system worked as smoothly as the mobilisation of her army and navy. England and the Dutch Republic sent a joint fleet to the Sound. It combined with the Swedish fleet and secured a Swedish invasion of Zealand in July 1700. Frederik IV who had hoped that Sweden by then should have been much distracted by events in the east quickly made peace.27

25Lewitter.
27Thornton.
fact, the Saxonian attack on Riga had failed in spite of that it had been a surprise for Sweden. When Charles XII in the autumn of 1700 sailed with an army to Livonia the threats from Saxony/Poland did not look imminent. He decided to strike first at the Russians who had begun a siege of Narva, one of the most important Swedish cities and fortresses in the east. In November a numerically much inferior Swedish force routed the Russian army at Narva.

The long-term effect of this battle on the two leaders of Russia and Sweden was probably very great. Charles XII understandably began to underestimate the military power of Russia which in a decisive battle had made such a bad impression. Traditional Swedish ability to send an army into a foreign territory in order to create its own logistic base might work against such an enemy. Tsar Peter realised that he had to continue a patient step by step process in order to improve the quality of his armed forces. For the rest of the war he also with great skill avoided to expose his forces to decisive battles with Swedish forces until the enemy had been either exhausted or greatly outnumbered. This explains both his scorched-earth strategy during the Swedish invasion of Russia and his later reluctance to carry the war to an end by an invasion of Sweden.

During 1701 and 1702 the Saxonian army - generally regarded as highly efficient - was also defeated and in 1702 Charles XII made the fateful decision to invade Poland to enforce the dethronement of Augustus. The Swedish king had begun to think in terms of radical and definite solutions to crush his eastern adversaries, solutions which had to be enforced by conquests and control of vast territories. This was only possible if Sweden could form alliances with strong political forces within the eastern countries. In Poland this proved possible although not to the extent that Charles XII gained an ally of any importance. A new Polish king, the young Stanislas Lesczynski was elected in 1704 although only under a more or less open threat from the Swedish army. His regime had to be upheld by Swedish armed force.

This was not a new experience in a country where Augustus II had been elected in 1697 with the support of his Saxon army and after that controlled Poland with this force. Stanislas was no puppet king; he gradually won the respect of his countrymen and he was in fact again elected king in 1733 in a free election, only to be ousted by Russian and Saxonian armed force. For Swedish strategy, Poland was however mainly useful as a vast area to feed her army. In fact, it was the occupation of Poland that enabled Charles XII to increase his army from a peace-time strength of around 65,000 men to about 100,000 in 1707 without serious consequences for the Swedish economy. It was this great army and its Polish base area which made it possible for him to contemplate a march to Moscow without denuding Sweden of defensive forces. Before that, Augustus II was finally forced to make peace when Charles XII invaded Saxony in 1706. This was an action which had been delayed for several years by Swedish consideration for the maritime powers who wished to keep the Northern War out of the German Empire in order not to disturb the market for soldiers.

Meanwhile, Russia had considerably strengthened her position. From 1702 to 1704 Ingria, Narva and Dorpat was conquered, thus giving tsar Peter I the access to the Baltic Sea which had been his aim in the war. The first warships of the Russian Baltic fleet were built in these years. Russia also sent considerable forces to support Augustus in Poland and gradually it became clear that it was Russia which was the senior partner in the anti-Swedish alliance. By 1707 Charles XII was ready for the long-awaited counter-attack on Russia. Instead of directing his main army to the north to retake the lost Swedish provinces, he chose to make an attempt to reach Moscow. His intention with the long march to the Russian capital must have been the usual with such moves in warfare: to force the enemy to fight a decisive battle over something he can ill afford to lose. Charles did however not try to find out whether Peter was prepared to fight such an action over St Petersburg, the new city he had founded on Swedish territory at the Neva estuary.

The general course of the Russian campaign is well known. The Russians retreated and were defeated but they could not be brought to a decisive battle. During 1708 Charles XII found that the ruthless Russian strategy of the scorched earth made it impossible to continue the shortest route to Moscow. A considerable Swedish force marching from Livonia with supplies to the main army was...
also defeated at Lesnoe. Charles decided to turn to south-east, towards Ukraine, to find fresh areas to support his army. He also hoped to form an alliance with Cossacks known to be in opposition to tsar Peter, but their resistance was largely crushed by Russian forces before the Swedes arrived. This turn of events, the march of the main Swedish field army into Ukraine, belongs to the more remarkable episodes in European warfare. The decisive battle about the Baltic was fought close to the Black Sea. It has been described as everything from a perfectly logical decision to strategic madness. The fact that the winter of 1708/09 became extremely severe and caused great losses to the army have often been used as an explanation of why a justified strategic move lead to a final failure.

The debate should not be opened here. It is enough to say that risks has to be taken in every war, that Charles showed little reluctance of playing with high risks and that he finally lost. It is however worth to note that his army showed a remarkable efficiency to survive under difficult conditions. After two years of long marches in enemy territory, several battles and sieges, extremely cold weather and many difficulties with the logistics, roughly half of the soldiers brought into Russia were still able to fight at Poltava. It was a surprisingly low degree of attrition: Napoleon's Grand Army, the next invader of Russia, did not even survive one Russian autumn before it completely disintegrated. Charles XII had not overestimated his own army. He had however underestimated his Russian adversary, primarily its ability to learn and improve its tactics and battle efficiency. For the Russian army, the Swedish campaigns in Poland and Russia had in fact been one large training camp lead by a tsar whose life was devoted to break down rather than defend Russian traditions.

The defeat of the main Swedish army at Poltava in July 1709 and its capitulation a few days later was the turning point of the war. The army itself was not irreplaceable - it was replaced - but Sweden lost the initiative in the war. Charles XII escape into Ottoman territory did not mean that the Swedish leadership survived intact. The king was in fact for years physically unable to return to the Baltic due to both enemy forces and the great plague epidemic in central Europe. The seaward route was safer but it meant commitment to one of the Western powers. Charles XII preferred to stay at his camp in Bender, close to the Dniestr estuary, trying to co-ordinate Swedish policy with attempts to form an alliance with the Sultan. This was in itself not impossible as the Ottomans clearly had axes to grind with the Russians. The main problem was how to exercise control over Sweden at such a distance.

After Poltava, Denmark and Saxony immediately rejoined the anti-Swedish alliance. Denmark sent the bulk of its field army to Scania only to have totally routed in the battle of Helsingborg in February 1710. This battle revealed that Sweden had kept a substantial and well-trained army at home to guard against Denmark, a fact that shows that Denmark had contributed to the Russian victory without taking part in the war. In the Eastern Baltic the Russian army was more successful when it in 1710 turned to this region to reap the fruits of Poltava. Livonia and Estonia was overrun. Riga - the second-largest city in the Swedish empire - capitulated after a half a year of siege. In Finland the important fortress of Viborg was taken and in Estonia Reval, Swedish since 1561, fell.

The maritime powers feared that the war would spread to Germany, thus disturbing the market for soldiers. To stop this, but also in order to give some help to Sweden, they negotiated a convention in early 1710 which would make the Swedish provinces in Germany neutral areas. This should make them immune to attacks but also prohibited as Swedish bases for offensive warfare. The convention was accepted by Sweden's enemies and the Swedish Council which directed Swedish policy and war efforts in the absence of the king. But Charles XII vetoed the convention as he intended to use his German provinces as bases for a new campaign in Poland. From his perspective it was essential to recreate a strong field army on the continent as this would induce the Ottomans to launch an offensive against the Russians. They indeed did so in late 1710 but concluded a rapid and favourable peace in 1711 after considerable successes. The split of opinions between the king and his council shows how differently they saw the future. At home the Swedish elite tried to save as much as possible by defensive warfare and attempts to gain support from traditional friends.
Charles, who had not been in Sweden since 1700, hoped to recreate his earlier position in Poland in order to pose a threat towards enemies in east and west. The Ottoman-Russian war as well as a severe plague epidemic in the Baltic delayed large-scale operations here until 1712. In that year a new Swedish field army was indeed transferred to the continent but its limited strength, insecure sea lines of communications as well as diplomatic negotiations caused it to turn towards Denmark instead of Poland. It won a victory against a larger Danish-Saxon army at Gadebusch in late 1712 - the last Swedish victory on the continent - but by the spring of 1713 it had to surrender due to lack of supplies. After that the Swedish province of Bremen was occupied by Denmark, Stettin fell to the Russians while Verden was (with Swedish permission) put under Hanoverian control. Brandenburg/Prussia, which earlier had tended to side with Sweden, now had to act if it was not to loose Pomerania to Sweden's enemies. The new king, Frederick William I (1713-40), made an agreement with Russia according to which his state took control of Stettin. In the north, Russia was able to occupy Finland during 1713-14. This was a fateful blow to Sweden, a strategic price paid for Charles XII's idea of sending the best part of the army to the continent in 1712.

Peter I had by 1714 achieved more in terms of conquest than he had hoped for. He was now mainly interested in bringing Sweden to conclude peace and accept her losses. During 1714 he hoped to achieve this by a Russian-Danish attack on Karlskrona and the Swedish battle fleet. The Danes declined as they did not feel ready for a new assault on the Swedish mainland. In late 1714 Charles XII finally returned to the Baltic. He took his headquarters in Stralsund and the campaigns of 1715 became concentrated on this city and the island of Rügen. Prussia - which by now was provoked by Charles XII into openly joining Sweden's enemies - together with Denmark and Saxony concentrated large parts of their armies to assault the Swedes and the Danish navy did it utmost to gain at least local control of the shallow waters in the area. This it succeeded to achieve through the battle of Rügen in July 1715 between the Swedish and Danish battle fleets. In itself the battle was a draw but as both fleets went back to their bases for repair, the shallow-draught Danish vessels in Pomerania gained local superiority. The Swedish forces in Pomerania capitulated by the end of 1715, Charles XII escaping to Sweden in the last moment. In April 1716 Wismar, the last Swedish trans-Baltic stronghold, fell.

By this time Sweden had got further enemies. Hanover had become an open enemy in order to gain Bremen-Verden while England - from 1714 with the same ruler as Hanover, George I - was dissatisfied with Charles' blockade and privateering policy against neutral shipping to the Russian-occupied Baltic ports. The naval stores exported from these were of critical importance for British sea power, the chief instrument of policy of this new European great power. In 1715 a large Anglo-Dutch fleet had been sent to the Baltic in order to secure this trade against Swedish attacks. By 1716 the English became openly hostile and intended to support the anti-Swedish alliance more openly. An English fleet was sent to support Denmark-Norway which had come under attack almost as soon as Charles XII returned to Sweden.

On a strategic level, 1716 is possibly the most successful year in Charles XII's career as a military commander. It has never been appreciated as such as it was a year without battles and the main event of the year was a cancelled invasion of Sweden. Peter I and Frederik IV had finally agreed to launch a Danish-Russian invasion in Scania in order to bring the war to an end. Sweden was able to delay this first by an invasion of Norway in early 1716 which distracted the Danes, then by active cruising of the Karlskrona battle fleet which delayed the transfer of Russian troops from Mecklenburg to Denmark and also delayed the arrival of the Russian Reval squadron to Copenhagen. When the large Anglo-Danish-Russian fleet finally had secured the lines of communication and the troops were ready, Peter I in September suddenly called of the invasion. He

\[Hatton (1968), pp. 403-404 and other authors have argued that the British Baltic fleet in the autumn of 1715 also had a decisive role in cutting the Swedish communication lines to Pomerania, thus facilitating its capture. Aldridge detailed study does not confirm this opinion. I am most thankful to Dr Aldridge who has given me access to the relevant section of his unpublished dissertation.\]
believed that Sweden had had time to strengthen coastal defence in Scania and that the season was too late for a successful campaign in Sweden. Possibly he had also been interested in diplomatic approaches from Sweden about a negotiated peace. This left Frederik IV in great bitterness as he had staked the meagre Danish resources on a now-or-never campaign. The opportunity was not to return.30

During 1717-18 Charles XII played for time with simultaneous diplomatic negotiations with both Russia and England/Hanover about separate peace treaties.31 The chief architect of this new Swedish policy baron von Goertz, a Holsteinian diplomat acting as Sweden's foreign minister since 1716. At the same time the king undertook a large rearmament program, forming a new army of 60,000 soldiers. It became gradually clear that the intended target was Norway although a shift of alliances (peace and alliance with either England or Russia) might give Sweden the superiority at sea necessary to invade also Denmark. Rumours about other plans, such as joint Spanish-Swedish support for a Jacobite rising in England also circulated. These were probably more a reflection of the generally fluid situation in European international relations in these years than serious Swedish policy.

The real plans of Charles XII in these final years have been much discussed. The most important point to remember seems to be that Peter I showed genuine concern in concluding the war with something Sweden and its proud king could regard as an honourable peace. He seems to have been aware of that the rise of Russian power in the Baltic made his country the probable target for the next great alliance concerned about the balance of power in Europe. If Sweden could be kept out of such an alliance the Russian power position would be much more secure. No promises were made but it is significant that Russia in 1717-18 chose to leave Charles XII undisturbed to promote his own plans. This looks like a free hand for Sweden to make conquests in Norway as a compensation for the provinces lost to Russia.

The final phase of the Great Northern War began when Charles XII in late 1718 was killed at Fredrikshald in Norway. In Sweden the Council and the Parliament took control. They left only limited power to Charles' sister and successor, Ulrika Eleonora and her husband, Frederick of Hessen (king Fredrik I of Sweden 1720-51). Just as the unlucky war of 1675-79 had discredited the old aristocracy, absolutism was now seen as the evil force which had led Sweden into an endless war with more and more enemies. The new government quickly decided to make peace with Hanover/England, Denmark and Prussia in order to concentrate on the war with Russia. England/Hanover had by this time become strongly anti-Russian, fearing that Russian control of the Baltic might upset Germany and give Russia a dominant position in the trade with naval stores. The King-Elector George I and his British and Hanoverian ministers hoped to form a great anti-Russian alliance with Sweden and Prussia, possibly also Austria, in order to recover as much as possible of the lost Swedish provinces and destroy the rapidly increasing Russian battle fleet.

In the peace treaties of 1719-20, Hanover got Bremen-Verden and Prussia half Swedish Pomerania with Stettin. Denmark finally got the long desired control of Slesvig and Sweden had to give up its freedom from the Sound Toll but Danish attempts to get some of the Swedish north German provinces was frustrated partially by French desire to maintain some kind of Swedish presence in Germany. France was allied to Britain at this time which gave this state a certain influence. The large anti-Russian coalition failed to materialise however. Great Britain in 1719-21 sent substantial fleets to the Baltic which joined the Swedish fleet in actions of blockade and protection of the Swedish coast against Russian galley fleet raids.32 The Swedish army was however not strong enough to use this control of the sea lines of communication for an invasion of either Finland or

30 Holm. Mediger has a detailed account of the events in 1716.
31 In addition to Rosén and Hatton (who also has used Russian studies), see also Jägersköld and Nordmann.
32 British and German books often gives a rather distorted picture of these raids, claiming that the British and Swedish battle fleets were unable to stop them. This is hardly correct. The only major galley raid was carried out in the Summer of 1719 when the Swedish battle fleet was in the southern Baltic guarding against possible Danish and British actions. R C Anderson has a good factual account of fleet movements in 1719-21.
Livonia and in the absence of Prussian or Austrian troops invading Livonia, Sweden finally had to make peace in 1721 on the terms long since offered by Russia. Russia kept Livonia, Estonia, Ingria, the Kexholm province and Viborg but gave back most of Finland.

There was one major victor in the Great Northern War: Russia. Tsar Peter had by his single-minded concentration on achieving an opening to the Baltic Sea galvanised his vast but underdeveloped country into a concentration of resources which in the end had made it a European great power. Russia's new position was of such a magnitude that the economic, social and political forces of the country hardly could make full use of it. It was only during the latter half of the 18th century that Russia, especially under Catherine II (1762-96) began to fulfil the role of a great European power that the Great Northern War had created. Prussia and Hanover were also clear victors of the war: they had gained substantial territories with only limited participation in the war.

Denmark-Norway was nominally a victor but the result of the war fell far short of her expectations. In fact, the most substantial achievement, the control of Slesvig and the removal of Sweden's support for the Holstein duke might have fallen as a ripe fruit if Frederik IV in from 1709 had left the fighting of Sweden to other powers. Denmark-Norway was as exhausted as Sweden and in the latter years of the war it had not been able to undertake more than limited actions on her own.

The hope of recovering the provinces lost to Sweden in the mid-17th century was buried after this war. If that had not been possible with the coalitions formed in 1700, 1709 and 1715/16 it was unlikely ever to succeed. Saxony and Poland had more or less left the war before it ended (Poland did conclude a formal peace with Sweden as late as 1732) but at least Poland must be regarded as no loser. The war had brought the country within a Russian sphere of interest from which it would not be able to escape.

The great loser was of course Sweden which, in spite of all sacrifices and the often brilliant performance of the armed forces, saw her empire and great power position disappear. In a long-term perspective it might be argued that the situation in the Baltic had returned to a more normal balance. Sweden had once gained an advantage because of early success in state building but when most of her neighbours learnt the trick they restored the order in the region. If Russia had joined the anti-Swedish alliance in 1676 and if France had been less successful in the 1670s the end of the Swedish empire might have come already then. This on the other hand points to the special circumstances of the Great Northern War: Sweden had no strong and determined ally while it had two extremely determined antagonists: Russia and Denmark-Norway. These two states were willing to make great sacrifices in order to achieve their aims. That Sweden also had to fight Saxony (after 1709), Prussia, Hanover and England must however to a large extent be put on the account of Charles XII's stubborn attitudes in diplomacy. These countries were in no ways Sweden's arch-enemies - Hanover/England did genuinely wish to uphold a strong Swedish position in the Baltic - but at least up to 1716/17 Charles XII gave them no hope of that he was prepared to give and take in a negotiation.

Both in Sweden and to European history this stubbornness has given Charles a reputation of a militaristic warmonger. In reality he was almost unique among contemporary European rulers in never attacking another power. Charles XII fulfilled to the utmost what had been Sweden's basic attitude in international relations since 1660: defence of the established order in the Baltic. In the end it proved impossible to resist the dynamic forces created by state-builders in the region. That Sweden fought so long and with such determination might have something to do with the king but it was Sweden's own long-term effort of state building and efficient organisation of the state which enabled the king to squeeze so many resources out of his people for warfare. One result of state building is visible here: before the advent of the strong states, the societies were often threatened by the consequences of foreign occupation and plundering troops. The advent of the strong state made this less of a threat but instead the new states were able to exploit their own societies for defensive or offensive warfare. The period 1660-1720 saw this transition come to a conclusion in the Baltic.
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