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Invasions, Insurgency and Interventions:  
Sweden's Wars in Poland, Prussia and Denmark 1654 - 1658.

A Dissertation Presented

by

Christopher Adam Gennari

to

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in

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Abstract of the Dissertation

**Invasions, Insurgency and Intervention:  
Sweden's Wars in Poland, Prussia and Denmark.**

by

**Christopher Adam Gennari**

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in

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In 1655 Sweden was the premier military power in northern Europe. When Sweden invaded Poland, in June 1655, it went to war with an army which reflected not only the state's military and cultural strengths but also its fiscal weaknesses. During 1655 the Swedes won great successes in Poland and captured most of the country. But a series of military decisions transformed the Swedish army from a concentrated, combined-arms force into a mobile but widely dispersed force. Fiscal necessities also drove acts of violence which quickly angered the Polish populace. This sparked a religiously fueled partisan insurgency against Swedish occupation. This insurgency created a stalemate in the war. This stalemate allowed foreign powers, including Austria, Muscovy and Denmark, to intervene in the Swedish-Polish war to advance their own interests. This dissertation examines the dangers of a strong military power trying to occupy a culturally diverse and exotic state without adequate resources to obtain all of the military and political goals of the war.

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## Abbreviations

RA – Riksarkivet, Stockholm

RR – Riksregistret (Riksarkivet)

RHB - Rådets Handlingar och Brev (Riksarkivet)

RRP - Svenska Riksrådets Protokoll

SVARP - Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags Protokoll

CXGS – Carl X Gustaf Studier

SPJT – State Papers of John Thurloe

SIE – Michael Roberts, *Sweden's Imperial Experience*

SGP – Michael Roberts, *Sweden as a Great Power: Collection of Primary Sources.*

QCGC – Michael Roberts, “Queen Christina and the  
General Crises of the 17th Century”

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## Chapter 1: Sweden in the Western Perspective

Sweden should have won the Second Northern War.<sup>1</sup> In July 1655 Sweden invaded Poland intent on annexing the mercantile cities of Royal and Ducal Prussia. It should have crushed Poland, taken Royal Prussia, humiliated Brandenburg, remained at peace with Muscovy and scared Denmark into submission. None of those things happened.

This dissertation seeks to understand how Sweden came so close to dominating the Baltic world and why it ultimately failed to do so. It examines the underlying foundations of Swedish strength in military organization and cultural institutions. Over a five year period Sweden was able to overrun both Poland and Denmark, absorb Prussia -- perhaps the richest territory in eastern Europe -- and fight Muscovy to a standstill despite having an army supported by minimal reinforcements and ravaged by plague. This dissertation argues that Swedish military strength derived from possessing an army which was superior to its adversaries.

Its superiority derived from the twin pillars of tactical innovations and political inclusion of the commonality. The Swedish army looked and fought differently from its opponents. This allowed the army to win battles, capture cities and force treaties on defeated foes. The second pillar, political inclusion of the masses, supplied Sweden with better soldiers and more resources than other states while maintaining a level of social stability unmatched by any other great power of the seventeenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> A series of interconnected but independent wars involving Sweden, Poland, Denmark, and Muscovy were fought between 1655 and 1660. Other states like Transylvania, Brandenburg and the Netherlands also took part.

Instead of having to exploit, extract and coerce the commonality into military service or granting of funds, the Swedish state included representatives of the peasantry in the decision-making process. By doing so, the monarch was able to legitimize royal policy and peaceably acquire a comparatively high level of social support, conscripted recruits and granted fiscal resources. As national soldiers in national service led personally by their national leader -- Swedish kings were among few monarchs who still actively participated in leading the troops in battle -- these citizen-soldiers were more willing to subjugate themselves to the training and discipline necessary to turn them into professional soldiers rather than armed thugs. This high level of discipline and training allowed the Swedish army not only to dominate battlefields but also to accomplish audacious acts, like the walking over the frozen Danish belts (at the time one of the busiest shipping lanes on earth, equivalent to walking from Manhattan to Brooklyn over a frozen East River 30 miles wide), or the secret wheeling of an entire army around the Polish flank at the Battle of Warsaw, which few other armies could emulate at the time.

This dissertation also tries to demonstrate the ways in which Sweden, with all of these advantages, was unable to accomplish its goals. Swedish failure was predicated upon three interrelated occurrences. First, for rational political and fiscal reasons, Charles X broke up his concentrated force into small batches of occupying garrisons throughout Prussia, Lithuania and Poland. This gave the Swedes control over a wide swath of territory but robbed the field armies of their advantage in

concentrated firepower and weight.<sup>2</sup> The power of the soldiery was further diminished by plague which killed large numbers of soldiers in the field and in garrisons. Although victorious in 1655, the Swedish army in Poland and Prussia became weaker even as reinforcements came into the theater of operations.

These two aspects of Swedish military decline would have been unimportant had fiscal issues, typical of early modern European armies, not forced Swedish troops to plunder the Polish population to confiscate resources including food and pay. Unlike most armies of the seventeenth century, the Swedes had a sophisticated logistical supply system capable of feeding the Swedish army with local resources without destroying the economic integrity of occupied territories. Unfortunately, Poland lacked the centralized systems at both the national and local levels to allow Sweden access to the country's considerable resources. Poland, in 1655, simply fell apart as a cohesive state. The Swedes, as foreigners and Lutherans, lacked both the manpower and the cultural authority to reconstitute the disparate, heterogenous state.

Without access to willingly granted food, supplies and currency, the Swedish troops -- both native and mercenaries -- resorted to plunder of the local population in Poland and Lithuania. The Protestant Prussias, with a denser network of urban cities and better local governance, were more capable of supplying the Swedish army with contributions and did not suffer from Swedish plundering during the war. In

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<sup>2</sup> Weight is an amorphous concept but regards the combined mass of the martial participants (all of the men, animals, muscle, shot, and momentum of one force) being thrown into another. Thus having superior *weight* can allow a force to break through or push back enemy forces to dominate the battle-zone. Weight is especially significant in combat fought hand to hand and in close quarters where the push and momentum of both physical and metaphysical *weight* can bring both survival and victory rather than disorder and death.



fact, the Prussias became the favorite prey of Polish and Lithuanian raider-horsemen who treated Prussian territories as a heretical and traitorous fatted calf. During the war, Swedish troops became the protectors of Prussian cities and remained in many of them until the peace treaties of 1660.

The plundering of the local populace and the wealthy Catholic Church inaugurated a religiously inspired uprising of the Polish peasantry. This guerilla uprising, while not in and of itself threatening to the Swedish army, eroded the authority of the Polish nobility -- the center of gravity of the state. To regain their authority, many of the nobles who had, in 1655, accepted Swedish suzerainty left Swedish vassalage to become champions of the people and the holy mother church. This allowed undefeated and disaffected Polish lords to raise personal armies and attack Swedish forces. The Swedish garrisons were too dispersed to counter-attack and the Swedish field forces, transformed from a heavy, firepower-based army into a mobile cavalry force, lacked the manpower and weight to decisively defeat the Polish forces.

What ensued was an indecisive war of raids, plunder and movement. The Polish forces lacked the infantry, artillery, tactical discipline or national organization to eject Swedish garrisons from Polish cities. The Swedish field armies lacked the weight to crush these insurgent groups into submission. Even though the Swedish armies won nearly every violent conflict they had against the Poles, the Polish insurgent armies simply disappeared into the wilderness to reappear weeks or months later. Polish raiders, looking for their own succor, increasingly plundered the Prussian countryside and unwalled towns.

This stalemate allowed foreign powers to enter the fray. The Dutch sent a fleet to annex Danzig, the most important Prussian city, as a protectorate. The Muscovites, who had been at war with Poland since 1653, made peace with the Poles and attacked Swedish possessions in Livonia and Ingria along the Baltic coast. Brandenburg joined with Poland in order to gain control of Ducal and Royal Prussia. Finally, Denmark entered the war to reverse the losses to Sweden in 1645.

The Danish intervention allowed Charles X to transfer his army out of Poland, where his army was bogged down, to Denmark, where his army could decisively win a war. Denmark was territorially small, it bordered Sweden and Swedish possessions and it lacked both the cultural differentiation and free roaming cavalry of Poland-Lithuania. Charles's army was able to quickly overwhelm Denmark and forced the king, Fredrick III, to make the peace treaty that created the modern borders of Scandinavia.

Sweden's strength had come from the combination of an inclusionary constitutional government with tactical military reforms. The military reforms were predicated upon combined arms integration: the use of multiple military organizations, working together, to achieve a decisive battlefield victory by obliterating the opposition. The creation of linear infantry units, instead of the neophalanx *tercio*, gave Sweden's infantry units both mobility and firepower. The combination of this new infantry with an *arms blanche* heavy cavalry and a supremacy of battlefield artillery gave Sweden a substantial advantage over its opponents. Historian Russell Weigley called the Swedes "the first disciplined fighting force in Europe since the Roman legions to be able to combine all available combat

arms in cohesive action either offensively or defensively: the first of the modern armies.”<sup>3</sup> This modern army allowed Sweden, a poor and peripheral state, to overrun far larger, wealthier and more populous states than itself.

Sweden’s constitutional and social differences were just as important in creating this new model army. Uniquely in Europe, Sweden’s parliament included the peasantry, who owned a far larger percentage of the land they worked than their continental counterparts. Consequently, they had a vested interest in the success of the state by keeping Sweden’s ubiquitous enemies away from their towns and farms. Since the fifteenth century Swedish peasants had had a role in national decision-making processes and willingly served in the armies. Dalarna peasants formed the backbone of Gustav Vasa’s army that liberated Sweden from Denmark in 1523. From the very beginning of the country, the Swedish state relied on the voluntary military service of its free landowning citizenry rather than the forcible impressment of the unwilling dregs of society. Weigley noted: “Individualism was a remarkably prominent ingredient in the Swedish Army, though always of course in counterpoise with the discipline that made this army in reincarnation of the legions.”<sup>4</sup> This inclusion in decision-making granted legitimacy on royal policy and made the peasantry shareholders in the country’s future survival and success.

This constitutional difference provided the state with a social stability, loyalty and dependability few other states possessed. Sweden did not suffer from what Hugh Trevor-Roper, and most other historians of the period, called the “General

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<sup>3</sup> Russell Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 3, 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Crisis of the Seventeenth Century.” There was no French *Fronde*, no English-style Civil War, no provincial secessions like Catalonia’s and Portugal’s rebellion from Spain. Instead, Swedish monarchs bestrode Europe while perfectly safe at home. Gustavus Adolphus was away from Sweden for twenty years of his reign. Charles X Gustav spent four of his five years as king away from Sweden. Charles XII spent sixteen years away from Sweden, five of them as a semi-prisoner in Turkey, before he returned for a six-month sojourn in Stockholm. None of the three faced any rejection or serious challenge to their authority or legitimacy.

Nor did Sweden ever suffer from the financial crises of far larger and wealthier states. Sweden was at war for every year between 1598 and 1660, yet never suffered a bankruptcy or collapse of its credit standing. Far larger states, such as France and Spain, suffered multiple bankruptcies during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because of the costs of military operations.

The Swedish monarchy gained tremendous freedom of action from the inclusion of the peasantry in national and local decision-making. In return, the peasantry gained the protection of their property and rights. The monarchy was seen as the kingdom’s protector, not only from foreign invasion but also from any changes in the balance of power among the estates. This contradicts Charles Tilly’s model of state creation, in which a strong monarch used his power to exploit his populace and forcibly extract resources from them. Perry Anderson also described this method of state-building in *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, and argued that the state acted as “an apparatus of royal power built to repress the peasant and plebeian

classes.”<sup>5</sup> In both Tilly’s and Anderson’s models the instrument of royal oppression was the royal army.

In Sweden, however, the lower orders consistently demanded a more powerful monarchy, whether it was in the granting the king levies of soldiers or demanding an outright confiscation of previously sold royal lands, known as a *reduktion*. Jan Glete has emphasized the difference between Sweden and the Tilly/Anderson model of state creation. In *War and the State in Early Modern Europe*, Glete wrote that the Swedish state was built upon the “active participation of estates and elites to support the state,” allowing for “broad participation in political decision making.”<sup>6</sup>

Then why was Sweden at war for so long? As Glete described the question “of *why* Swedish elite groups and peasants, who had the ability to say no to their ruler’s demands for extraordinary taxes and large-scale conscription in parliament, nevertheless did choose to support an offensive and expansionist war policy based on massive resource extraction from Sweden, has seldom been regarded as a central problem in Swedish historiography.”<sup>7</sup> Swedish historians of the period correctly understood see the expansionistic foreign policy as evidence of royal legitimacy; therefore, why wouldn’t the estates and peasants support the King?

There is much historical evidence that the lower orders in representational governments support bold or expansionary foreign policy when the leadership describes the action as one necessary to protect the property, rights and freedoms of

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<sup>5</sup> Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London:Verso, 1974), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as Fiscal-military States, 1500-1660* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2007), 3, 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 175. Emphasis in original text.

the commonality -- even if the state has not been directly attacked. Whether it was the Athenians sending their men to Sicily (415 B.C.), the Romans waging the first war against Carthage (264 B.C.), Britain's renewed war against Napoleon (1804) or the two wars against Germany (1914 and 1939), or the United States sending troops to France (1917) or Iraq (2003), each of these societies supported the war because it was better, in their calculation, to fight the enemy "over there" than to be forced to fight them "here." "Sweden's population figures," Glete explained, were "in fact favorable compared to Poland and Germany which suffered enormously from the destructions of military operations. From a demographic point of view it was certainly better to invade than to be invaded and the argument was sometimes used in the Swedish parliaments in order to persuade peasants to agree to conscriptions."<sup>8</sup> When the legitimate leadership of a representational people has asked permission to defend the country and the people, even if this required a great sacrifice of young men and treasure, few societies have historically rejected the claim.

Aggressive royal policy in Sweden obtained a second layer of legitimacy because the monarch personally led the citizenry. In July 1655 two armies marched from Pomerania to invade Poland, one led by Arvid Wittenberg and the other under the command of Charles X. Wittenberg's force was primarily composed of German and British mercenary troops. Charles X's army was primarily composed of conscripted Swedish troops manning provincially raised units.

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<sup>8</sup> Jan Glete, "Swedish Fiscal Military State in Transition and Decline; 1650-1815" (lecture, XIV International Economic History Congress from Department of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, August 21, 2006), 10.

Under this system, who would deny the king the men and money necessary when he personally led those men and oversaw the spending of the money? From 1595 until 1718, the *riksdag* continuously supported royal foreign policy with grants of men, taxes and resources. Glete estimated that between five and ten percent of Swedish men left for service every year of the century-long *Stormaktstiden*,<sup>9</sup> with “a total of 800,000 to 1,050,000 men” serving in Sweden’s army between 1621 and 1721 out of a population of consistently less than two million people in all the home and conquered provinces.<sup>10</sup> Political inclusion bound the people to royal action and state success; as long as Swedish kings won the wars, the populace kept their religion, their farms, and their ancient rights. This explains why peasants continued to show up for service -- most provinces had well above 90 percent attendance rates for conscripted men -- even in unpopular wars.

The more important point for this dissertation is not that Swedish peasants supported royal policy but that Swedish monarchs *had to ask the permission* of a representational assemblage of all peoples before embarking on any dramatic foreign or domestic policy. From March until June 1655 Charles X Gustav, *the King of Sweden, the Goths, Geats and the Wends; Grand Prince of Finland; Duke of Estonia, Livonia, Karelia, Bremen, Verden, Stettin, Pomerania, Lord of Ingria and Wismar; Count Palatine of the Rhine, Duke of Bavaria, Jülich, Cleves and Berg*, actually had to argue, discuss, debate, and negotiate with the commonality in order to wage war in Poland. And Charles X

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<sup>9</sup> *Stormaktstiden* literally translates to “The Great Power time” and is generally referred to as the 100 years between the capture of Riga in 1621 and the Treaty of Nystad in 1721. It is a short hand notation to mean the period of time when Sweden was the ascendant power in Scandinavia,

<sup>10</sup> Glete, “Swedish Fiscal-Military State in Transition and Decline, 1650-1815,” 10.

would call three such parliaments during his reign to debate and legitimize royal action.

Even before he brought the lower orders together he met, in December 1654, with the elite nobles of the country to ask their *advice* on Sweden's response to Poland's collapse against Muscovy. In no other state in Europe did a king willingly subject himself to so much oversight. Charles I of England's violent rejection of such a system eventually cost him his head. The Bourbons of France did not call a general assembly for 175 years, and when Louis XVI finally did it eventually cost his head as well. Yet it was this system of legitimization that allowed Swedish kings their tremendous freedom of action and the mobilization of "an unusually large proportion of its society's resources for military use."<sup>11</sup> These resources were transformed into a national army, personally led by the king, capable of overrunning far larger, wealthier and more populous states than themselves.

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<sup>11</sup> Glete, *Swedish Fiscal-Military State in Transition and Decline, 1650-1815*, 7.



## Historiography

The historiography of this dissertation falls into three sections:

1. Swedish-language monographs concerning Charles X Gustav's reign/wars.
2. Swedish-language monographs concerning the *Stormaktstiden* in general.
3. English-language comparative studies in which Sweden is one part of a larger theory.

This organization of materials is necessary because Sweden is a periphery state in English language historiography. Michael Roberts remains the only English-language historian to have devoted much of his research career to Sweden during the early modern period. In 1991, Roberts wrote, “when I was an undergraduate striving to get a handle on the seventeenth century, the only literature in Charles X seemed to be a solid chapter in the old *Cambridge Modern History*...half a century later the situation has scarcely altered.”<sup>12</sup> Little has changed since Roberts wrote those words nearly twenty years ago. Sweden is typically discussed as an element within larger, comparative, theoretical work or as a transitory, if interesting, actor on the seventeenth century narrative stage. Roberts's works are usually the only “Swedish” sources used by these comparative works.

This dissertation relies on the theoretical ideas of Jan Glete, Michael Roberts, and Victor Davis Hanson. Glete's comparative work *War and the State in Early Modern Europe* found Sweden's military power in the efficient use of its national resources; power, in Glete's thesis, was created through better organization. These efficiencies reflected larger social harmonies that allowed the national government to peaceably obtain necessary resources that it turned into superior military power.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Roberts, *From Oxenstierna to Charles XII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2.

Roberts's older work supported Glete's principles. However, in *The Military Revolution*, Roberts argued that the revolution in tactical developments produced political reforms of the state rather than the other way around. These reforms moved the army toward a more flexible force while developing the state apparatus necessary to conscript, arm, train, deploy, pay, feed, and supply this new army overseas. For both historians, the Swedes' unusually heavy reliance on citizen-soldiers was a touchstone of their entire political-military system.

Hanson, a classical military historian, argued in *Carnage and Culture, The Western Way of War* and *Soul of Battle* that free societies have historically produced better soldiers and military organizations than repressive societies. Hanson argued that "consensual government, equality among the middling classes, civilian audit of military affairs, and politics apart from religion" created "a sense of personal freedom, superior discipline, matchless weapons" and a "preference for shock battle of heavy infantry."<sup>13</sup> Although Hanson is a classicist many of his points – from superior discipline, to consensual government, and a preference for shock battle – are well accepted in the Swedish historical narrative.

This dissertation argues that it is the high level of relative freedom in Swedish society that allowed for unique levels of political inclusion in decision-making processes. This inclusion had two results: (1) the efficient resource extraction and the societal stability described by Glete and Roberts; and (2) the tactical superiority of Swedish armies on Polish, Prussian and Danish battlefields.

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<sup>13</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise to Western Power* (New York: Anchor, 2002), 4.

## **The Importance of Inclusionary Government**

Charles Tilly's *Coercion, Capital and European States, A.D. 990-1992* provide this study with its primary model of state development in the early modern period. Tilly argued that states are primarily coercive institutions built by social elites in order to extract resources from a repressed and oppressed populace.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, English-language writers have been unified in rejecting the application of this model to Sweden.

Perry Anderson followed Tilly's model -- seeing state development in the exploitation of the middling classes' labor. Anderson also saw Sweden as an exceptional state. In Sweden, the peasants owned half of the land while large manors composed less than ten percent of land tenure.<sup>15</sup> This relative wealth of the peasantry, Anderson argued, combined with the relative poverty of the nobility and burgher classes, created a "unique" political system in which peasants gained extensive rights while the power of the monarchy and aristocracy to exploit peasant labor was limited. Additionally, Anderson found the Swedish *riksdag* was "unique for its four curia system;" the army was unique because it was primarily a conscript force, and governmental power was unique because the royal house was always able to maintain its power without a major overthrow or challenge to the system.<sup>16</sup> All of these points were benefits of a system of constitutional governance, balance of power and large scale political inclusion of the social orders.

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, A.D. 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Perry Anderson, 178.

<sup>16</sup> Perry Anderson, 181, 182, 184.

In *Birth of the Leviathan*, Thomas Ertman saw seventeenth century Sweden as an unusual constitutional state built around the seemingly contradictory notion of a strong monarch and a representational parliament. Ertman found Sweden to have a system built upon “participatory forms of government” with peasant assemblies, the *härad*, going back to the thirteenth century. Ertman interpreted the *riksdag* as the political pivot of the state, preventing royal absolutism while simultaneously limiting the powers of the nobility by maintaining the initiative of the monarchy.<sup>17</sup>

Brian Downing portrays Sweden as an unusual case study since it possessed an “extremely vigorous” local government and had a constitution which was largely unaffected by the continuous wars Sweden fought in the seventeenth century. Instead, “Swedish constitutionalism, notably in village government and peasant rights, was far ahead of its fellow European countries.” Swedish kingship, far from eradicating these structures, was superimposed on them. “Sweden had weak towns, strong village government and personal rights, peasant representation in the national parliament, and a national army that strengthened constitutionalism.”<sup>18</sup> Instead of an oppressive or absolutist regime, “the *riksdag* and *råd* supported wars politically and financially,” emphasizing the role of consensual government. The army, Downing agreed, “resembled in critical ways the Roman Republican soldier-citizen army.”<sup>19</sup>

Roberts’s work in “Queen Christina and the General Crises” and “Charles X and His Council” also emphasized the inclusive nature of Swedish politics. In

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9, 305, 313, 314.

<sup>18</sup> Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 30-32, 187, 188-189, 193.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

“Queen Christina and the General Crises,” Roberts analyzed the constitutional crises of 1650 in which the three lower estates demanded a *reduktion*, equality before the law with the nobility, and a meritocracy with fixed salaries in government service. “The crisis of 1650 was not about actual loss but the potential for loss; of liberty, land and political rights.”<sup>20</sup> The crisis of 1650 emphasized the importance of political inclusion and consensus. The idea that the lower estates, and especially the peasantry, supported the crown’s resumption of land -- and thus a strengthening of its fiscal position -- as a constitutional protection illustrated the importance of balance within the constitutional system.

In *Charles X and His Council*, Roberts illustrated the importance of the *råd* as a administrative body for Charles X. The council of state was “the driving wheel of the whole central government of the country.”<sup>21</sup> Roberts presented the relationship as a partnership on the model of Gustavus Adolphus’s relationship with Axel Oxenstierna: the king and the high nobility working together towards furthering the state’s success. Charles continuously relied upon the *råd* to advise him on important state decisions and to staff the hierarchy of the government. Roberts’s description of the relationship between king and council reflected debate, participation and consensus.

Swedish authors have also emphasized the inclusionary nature of Swedish political society although they place the weight of political power differently than English language historians. Stellan Dahlgren, in his essay “Charles X and the

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Roberts, “Queen Christina and the General Crises of the Seventeenth Century” (hereafter QCGC), *Past and Present*, 22 (July 1962): 113, 123.

<sup>21</sup> Roberts, *From Oxenstierna to Charles XII*, 57.

Constitution,” saw the king as the most kinetic force of the polity. The role of the peasant estate was to “lessen taxes and voice judicial reforms,” but played a “subordinate role” in the government. More important, for Dahlgren, was the constitutional tradition of inclusion and balance of power: the king was bound by the rules of the land, had to govern with the council of great nobles, might not tax except under extraordinary circumstances (which required the consent of representatives) and could not establish new laws without the people’s consent. Dahlgren wrote that Charles X stretched his authorities while at war but also made great efforts to ask for counsel “protecting himself from later accusations.”<sup>22</sup> Dahlgren emphasized that Charles X made political decisions but also “wanted the support” of leading members “on matters of great importance” so that no decision seemed arbitrary or self serving.<sup>23</sup> Dahlgren’s essay reflected an inclusive system but one in which the Crown was the driving force of the state.

Anna Maria Forssberg’s recent *Att hålla folket på gott humör (Keep the Peasants in Good Humor)* discusses the complicated relationship of the central government with the local population. Forssberg argues that Swedish kings were anxious to explain and justify wars in order to gain the population’s support for royal actions. It was important for the central government to engage the peasantry through a “system of information.” Forssberg also illustrated that an information campaign was used to explain the four major parts of war: the causes for the outbreak, mobilization, maintenance of state support through duty, and to explain the peace. Ms. Forssberg

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<sup>22</sup> Stellan Dahlgren, “Charles X and the Constitution” in *Sweden’s Age of Greatness*, ed. Michael Roberts (London: Macmillan, 1973), 179-180, 190.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

shows that the kinetic energy of the state derived from the monarch and worked through the rest of society. Importantly, the dissemination of information relied on the local parish priest who was himself usually a peasant of modest means.<sup>24</sup> In this manner, the ordinary peasant was kept abreast of the reasons and possible results of royal policy. Because the monarchy usually possessed a monopoly of information it was able to drive policy and attempt to shape public opinion. Yet, it was extremely important that the Swedish monarchy felt any obligation to keep in people “in a good mood” towards royal policy.

The notion of inclusion has not been a topic usually associated with Swedish historiography. Instead historians have associated the *Stormaktstiden* with two more prevalent historiographical notions: “The Great Leader” (the “Old School”) and Marxist determinism (the “New School”). Both schools endeavored to explain the reasons for Swedish expansion in the seventeenth century, but neither attempted to explain the reasons for its success.

The “Old School” of Swedish historiography was prevalent from the nineteenth century to the 1960s. It argued that Sweden expanded for purely defensive reasons and this policy was royal policy; the world was a dangerous place and the enemies had to be pushed farther away from the Swedish-Finnish homeland. “The history of Sweden,” Eric Geijer famously wrote in the nineteenth century, “is the history of its kings.”<sup>25</sup> The driving engine of success was the royal general. Fear

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<sup>24</sup> Anna Forssberg, *Att hålla folket på gott humör* (Stockholm: Stockholm Universitet, 2005), 1-5.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Geijer quoted in Michael Roberts, “On Aristocratic Constitutionalism in Swedish History,” *Essays in Swedish History* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), 14.

was the driving force of expansion.<sup>26</sup> In a century that produced royal generals like Gustavus Adolphus, Charles X Gustav, and Charles XII, the monarchy certainly looked like the dynamo of Swedish success.

The “New School” was more circumspect; it saw the overseas expansion of the state as promoted by economic forces. The wars of expansion were motivated by economic gain and not security. Control of the Baltic trade and a siphoning off of western capital into the coffers of the monarchy and the aristocracy led society’s elites to wage war on the Continent. For the New School the security issue was an overblown excuse to wage offensive and economically profitable war against less sophisticated peoples.

More recently, in the 1990s and 2000s a more fragmented School arose emphasizing the role of the individual within these far larger systems. Historians such as Peter Englund, Erik Ringmar and Anna Forssberg saw the role and experience of the individual as paramount to these great imperial acts. Whether through Englund’s description of a Swedish infantryman’s preparation for battle against Polish Hussars or Ms. Forssberg’s descriptions of pulpit propaganda in the midst of foreign war, the experience of the individual became important to the story. Most of these historians also saw the wars as a waste of lives and treasure. They regarded Sweden’s last two hundred years of warless neutrality as proof that a state does not need war and conquest to prosper. If anything, Sweden’s avoidance of the last century’s hot, cold, civil, and overwhelmingly destructive wars has left these

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Roberts, *The Swedish Imperial Experience 1560-1718 (SEI)* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 3, 9.



scholars with distaste for the glories of military action that Geijer emphasized a century earlier.

This dissertation subscribes to a combination of views. It follows most closely Roberts's and Glete's arguments. It sees Sweden as an exceptional state in seventeenth century Europe and argues that exceptionalism was transformed into military power. That military power was used overseas primarily to protect Sweden from the ring of enemies surrounding its borders. That expansionary push did bring economic gain that was a justifying, but not determinative, factor in bringing about Sweden's invasion of Poland in 1655.

## Chapter 2: Sweden's Military Superiority

During the seventeenth century and particularly during the Second Northern War, the Swedish army had a qualitative advantage over all of its enemies. French observers worried in the 1640s about “a nation as warlike and ambitious as Sweden.”<sup>27</sup> Johan Salvius, Sweden’s chief negotiator at the Westphalian peace conferences, noted that “people are beginning to see the power of Sweden as dangerous to the balance of power.”<sup>28</sup> The dramatic rise of Sweden from periphery kingdom to Great Power was accomplished entirely by military success. So natural, then, was Swedish military success in the eyes of Swedish historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that there was virtually no discussion about *why* the Swedish armies were successful in the seventeenth century.

A twenty-year-old Charles Gustav wrote that “Sweden’s greatness rests above all on war” when he asked his queen-cousin for a commission in the army.<sup>29</sup> His first post was in Lennart Torstensson’s army in Germany. As a cavalry officer he was involved in the victory over Denmark and the final assault into Silesia and Bohemia. In 1648 Charles Gustav became generalissimo, was a negotiator at Westphalia and was responsible for the politically sensitive job of decommissioning the troops. In 1650 he was made heir by the *riksdag* and Christina. In 1654, following Christina’s abdication, he became king and began a new royal dynasty. He was at war for every year of his reign, fighting in five different theaters (Bremen, Poland, Prussia, Muscovy and Denmark). He never returned to Stockholm after joining his army in July 1655.

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<sup>27</sup> Archer Jones, *The Art of War in the Western World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 262.

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years’ War* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 184.

<sup>29</sup> Georgina Masson, *Queen Christina* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1969), 56.

By the time of his death in 1660, he had been the leader of men at war nearly all of his adult life.

The Swedish army also looked different from its contemporaries. Unlike the pressed armies of the continent the Swedish army was not composed of the dregs of society but by free landowners who had a long history of inclusion in the political system. Unlike any other kings in Europe, Swedish kings needed the support of commoners to pursue an active foreign policy; conscription and taxation were negotiated rather than imposed. The raising of levies was done at the local level, by local leaders, instead of being demanded from up on high. Regiments were locally organized, giving the unit an instant cohesion through identity. Swedish military discipline, harsh by any modern standard, carried with it the principles of justice and jurisprudence of the homeland. Swedish soldiers received trials -- and punishments -- akin to those in their home villages. They were also punished by their fellow troops rather than by their social superiors. Finally, the king personally led and fought with the army. He simultaneously represented military, political and social authority. The Swedish army acted differently than its contemporaries because it was culturally different. This cultural difference -- free men freely engaged in a political endeavor -- was a key component to Swedish military strength.

## **The “Swedish Method” of War**

The Swedish army’s superiority in using combined arms tactics made it terrifying to its opponents. To Weigley, the Swedish army represented a “combination of shock and missile unknown since the legions.”<sup>30</sup> He noted “the triumph of Sweden’s disciplined infantry brigades and cavalry regiments is because they embodied a new kind of tactical proficiency in both firepower and maneuver.”<sup>31</sup> The emphasis on firepower and the use of multiple levers of force to obliterate an enemy army was part of a new philosophy.

Western war in the seventeenth century was dedicated to the conservation of force and its deployment in besieging fortresses and cities. Armies should not, it was felt, be risked in battle because they were too expensive to create and too fragile to maintain. Infantry units, either in the form of the Spanish *tercio* neo-phalanx or the Dutch linear units, were too limited to be decisive in battle.<sup>32</sup> The Spanish *tercio* had mobility but no firepower; the Dutch linear forces had firepower but no mobility. During the Eighty Years’ War the Spanish *tercio* was consistently withered by Dutch firepower, but the Dutch forces were incapable of either destroying the Spanish army or ejecting it from the Netherlands. The war then dragged on to the detriment of combatants and the occupied peoples for decades without a clear resolution.

Consequently, sieges and not battles came to dominate the philosophy of early modern European warfare. First Earl of Orrery Roger Boyle wrote in *The*

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<sup>30</sup> Weigley, *The Age of Battles*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>32</sup> This was Geoffrey Parker’s argument in *The Military Revolution: Military Intervention and the Rise of the West*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

*Treatise of War*, “you will have twenty sieges for one battell [sic].”<sup>33</sup> Battles were unpopular with both the men and the rulers. Battles killed many people indiscriminately and the results were unpredictable.<sup>34</sup> Battles were seen as “the sign of an incompetent commander,” while military campaigns were viewed as “often perfunctory.”<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the decisive arm of medieval armies, the heavy cavalry knight, had all but disappeared from western armies. The cavalry became a secondary unit. The earth-shaking charge of armored lancers astride massive warhorses was replaced by the caracole: “a maneuver...in which [the cavalry] trotted up to the enemy, with each rank discharging their pistols in turn before wheeling away to the rear.”<sup>36</sup> Jean de Billion, and other French theoreticians, argued that the pistol was the natural weapon of the cavalry and the caracole was the most efficient use of cavalry troops who were best regulated to support roles.<sup>37</sup> Against non-gunpowder troops (the Swiss phalanx), this formation may have had purpose because it allowed cavalry to attack an otherwise impenetrable mass. Against experienced musketeers the caracole was a silly expression of impotence because its pistols were inaccurate, had limited range, and left the horse and rider exposed as a large and stationary target. Even the cuirassiers, the remnants of the heavy knight who wore armor and carried a sword,

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>34</sup> David Chandler, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Marlborough* (Staplehurst: Spellmount Publishers, 1994), 13.

<sup>35</sup> Parker, *The Military Revolution*, 16; Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, 103; J.I. Israel, “A Conflict of Empires: Spain and the Netherlands, 1618-1648,” *Past and Present*. (August 1977), 34.

<sup>36</sup> Frost, *The Northern Wars*, 64.

<sup>37</sup> Parrott, *Richelieu's Army*, 35.

never charged the enemy at speed.<sup>38</sup> Instead, the cuirassiers scoured the countryside for vulnerable foragers to murder in some forgotten field.

Artillery lost an importance on the battlefield. The problem of battlefield artillery stemmed from the scientific and logistical limitations of the period. First, badly cast guns were as likely to kill their crews as the enemy. To reduce the possibility of implosion, artillery guns were made to sustain the enormous pressures of repeated firings. This dramatically increased the weight of the guns making them hard, if not impossible, to move around the battlefield. A typical English field gun required nine horses to move it, a siege gun required twenty-three horses and fired too slowly to be of practical use against oncoming infantry.<sup>39</sup> The sheer time required to load, aim, fire and reload left the crews, who were independent contractors and not professionalized soldiers, exposed to enemy musket fire. “In the face of musketry, field artillery declined.”<sup>40</sup> During the English Civil War, for example, “ordinance might be crucial in sieges,” but the “conventional wisdom” was that it scarcely affected battles.<sup>41</sup>

The Swedish army, after Gustavus Adolphus’s reforms, used infantry, cavalry and artillery in combination. Tactically the Swedish army combined the firepower and mobility of the Dutch infantry and the devastating charge of the Polish cavalry

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<sup>38</sup> C.R.L. Fletcher, *A Hero of the Far North* (London: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1890), 123.

<sup>39</sup> Albert C. Manucy, *Artillery through the ages: a short illustrated history of cannon, emphasizing types used in America* (Washington, D.C.: Division of Publications, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1985), 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Ian Gentles, *The New Model Army: In England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645-1653* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 58.

with a particularly Swedish skill in ballistics.<sup>42</sup> In appearance, the Swedish army looked like an evolutionary rather than revolutionary institution. Its thin rectangular infantry units, interspersed with artillery, pikemen and cavalry, did not look fundamentally different from other seventeenth century armies. Philosophically, however, the army was a revolutionary device. It was going to move, dig in, fight and move forward again with the purpose of not occupying land but rather smashing armies and killing men. The infantry rhythmically moved forward firing volley after volley; the cavalry charged into the flanks and rear of distressed enemy troops; and the artillery not only pounded enemy units, killing men and breaking their defensive cohesion, but moved around the battlefield to maintain a continuous cascade of fire and death. The Swedish army, in the Scottish soldier Robert Munro's opinion, was "ever advancing to the enemy, never turning back, without death or victory." Then this army, having just fought a dramatic battle, moved forward and plunged deeper into enemy territory and farther from its homeland in order to capture land, command resources and force future battles. Munro estimated he walked 4,200 kilometers (2,600 miles) in three years as a mercenary in Gustavus Adolphus's army.<sup>43</sup>

The best analysis of this Swedish development in combined arms tactics -- and its implications -- was done by Michael Roberts. Roberts argued that Gustavus Adolphus needed to reconstitute the army in order to defeat the Danes, Muscovites and Poles who all fought very differently. The Danes relied on mercenary soldiers under royal employ, the Polish army was a motley crew of noble heavy cavalry,

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<sup>42</sup> Glete, *War and Society*, 203

<sup>43</sup> Parker, *The Military Revolution*, 23.



Cossack irregulars, and pressed serfs. The Muscovite armies were composed of light cavalry irregulars, serf infantry, and an increasing number of western mercenaries. What the Muscovite army lacked in quality it made up for in quantity of soldiers.

To defeat these different forces, sometimes simultaneously as in the 1610s, required a disciplined force capable of combining “missile weapons with close action...to unite hitting power, mobility, and defensive strength.”<sup>44</sup> For Roberts, Gustavus Adolphus found and embraced the Roman tactics of linear formations, recently resurrected by the Dutch in their war against Spain, and added firepower -- much firepower -- to maintain their shock power.<sup>45</sup> He “restored to cavalry its proper function, by forbidding the caracole; he made it charge home with the sword; and he insisted that it rely for its effect upon the impact of the weight of man and horse.”<sup>46</sup> The purpose was to enable the Swedes to turn the defensive minded Dutch formations into offensive units capable of achieving decisive victory through the destruction of enemy armies. Gustavus Adolphus then combined this new tactical and philosophical behavior with the sheer weight of an artillery arm elevated by “a century of notable technological progress.”<sup>47</sup>

The new linear formations, combined with the new infrastructure necessary to mold them into victorious units, required a permanent standing army of trained officers and universal discipline. Sweden, with a “conscript national militia – the first

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Roberts, “The Military Revolution” in *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, ed. Clifford Rogers (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

truly national European army,” proved capable of turning peasants into professional, disciplined and loyal soldiers. “Not only were the Swedish armies better than any mercenaries; they were also incomparably cheaper.”<sup>48</sup> This raising of peasants -- and their value as soldiers -- had important classical underpinnings. Influential Roman writers, like Vegetius, had argued that “no one, I imagine, can doubt that the peasants are the most fit to carry arms” because they were hard men used to hard work.<sup>49</sup> The peasants had formed the backbone of every Swedish army since Gustav Vasa fought for independence from Denmark. Under Gustavus Adolphus, these citizen-peasant-soldiers now obtained the training of regimented professional killers -- a rare thing for an early modern king to willingly create.

Economics played a decisive role in the form of the army’s development. It was a political and economic truism at the time that Sweden had to export its army in order to maintain its solvency.<sup>50</sup> Per Brahe, the leading figure of the *råd*, pointed out during the *decemberrådslagen* in 1654, “[F]or us to raise our militia with six or seven German regiments (for we could hardly hire much less) and let them sit still, is to make war on ourselves.”<sup>51</sup> Salvius, a negotiator at Westphalia in 1648, commented that while “others wage war because they are strong, Sweden, in contrast, must wage them because she is poor, to improve its material condition.”<sup>52</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>49</sup> Rhenatus Flavius Vegetius and N. P. Milner, *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), I.2.

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, *SIE*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Per Sonden, ed., *Svenska Riksrådets Protokoll* (hereafter *RRP*), vol. xvi, 1654-1656 (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt and Söner, 1929), 5.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Robert Frost, *The Northern Wars: War, State and Society in Northeastern Europe, 1558-1721* (New York: Longman, 2000), 114.

Sweden's army was an offensive army. It had to fight its wars abroad and win quick and decisive victories. The Swedish state simply could not endure a grinding affair like the Habsburg-Dutch Eighty Years' War, which bankrupted Spain several times without achieving important battlefield victories. The behavior of Spain's Army of Flanders proved how disastrous bankruptcy could be on state objectives. "The suspension of payments in 1575 immediately doomed the efforts of [Phillip II's] armies to crush the Dutch Revolt...within six months the soldiers of the Army of Flanders...had indeed either mutinied or deserted."<sup>53</sup> The desertions wrecked the morale and order of the army; the mutinies and plundering wrecked any chance of a political settlement.

Sweden required quick, lucrative victories even when its army was abroad. During the post-Nördlingen occupation of northern Germany, when the German war had settled down into a grinding affair of occupation and sieges, Axel Oxenstierna's brother wrote to him describing the situation back home in Sweden. "The branches expand while the tree withers at the root. We have conquered lands from others, and to that end ruined our own."<sup>54</sup> To achieve this kind of offensively-minded army required better discipline, more officers, more pikemen, better cavalry, a huge arms industry for a poor country, a more developed logistical infrastructure, and a supremacy of battlefield artillery.

The Swedish army was broken down into regiments of about 2,400 men, each of which were broken down into squads of 400 men each. The Swedish infantry was

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<sup>53</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *Grand Strategy of Phillip II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 88.

<sup>54</sup> Roberts, *SIE*, 25

broken into alternating rectangles of pikemen and musketeers while a few light artillery pieces (three- or six-pounders) filled in the spaces between infantry units. The heavy cavalry was stationed on both the right and left wings of the infantry. Heavy artillery (either large -- but rare -- eight-pounders, devastating twelve-pounders or the truly thunderous twenty-four-pounders) lined the hilltops in the rear and poured murderous volleys into enemy units from far behind the Swedish front line.

The Swedish army was an army designed for killing men in hand-to-hand combat, yet it invested heavily in new methods of firepower. The effective range of the seventeenth century musket was about 60 paces, ground easily covered by the opposing infantry after the first volley. The Dutch created the countermarch to maximize its fire volume against approaching *tercios*. The Dutch infantry cycled troops through the ranks after they fired their muskets. Like a great turned gear, men fired, stepped aside, marched to the back of the line while the next rows did the same. This allowed for continuous but inaccurate fire and a slow -- if forward -- progression. Gustavus Adolphus changed the tactic from the countermarch to the salvo -- a devastating simultaneous eruption of fire and lead. English military handbooks called it "The Swedish Method."<sup>55</sup>

The salvo worked in the following manner: the Swedish infantry, cavalry and light artillery marched forward in step to the drums of a marching cadence -- something new in early modern war -- while the heavy artillery hammered away at enemy formations from a distance, trying to kill men, scatter survivors and break up

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<sup>55</sup> William Watts, *The Swedish Discipline* (London: John Dawson, 1632), 5.

unit cohesion. Then, at about 60 paces, the Swedish army stopped moving. The men of the front row would kneel, the second row would bend and the third row stood straight. All three rows along with the light and heavy artillery fired a massive “shattering, demoralizing blast” designed to “pour as much lead into the enemy bosom at one time as possible.”<sup>56</sup> Tightly knit *tercios* blew apart. Thin linear formations disintegrated. The front three rows would give way to a new three rows, who might fire a second salvo or march even closer before firing. Meanwhile, the serrated pikemen came charging across the no man’s land against the stunned enemy as the heavy cavalry, brandishing swords and screaming their lingual war-cries (*bakkaa päälle!*, or “chop ‘em down!”) delivered the final terrifying blow.

The cavalry, who wore no armor to increase their speed, were taught to “balk at no obstacle” as they came charging on the mass of disorganized men like thunder.<sup>57</sup> In this multi-lever tactical assault the cavalry achieved “the exact role they had under Alexander the Great.”<sup>58</sup> Men who stood their ground against the Swedes were impaled; those who ran away were lanced. Caracole pistoleers were run over. By the end of such a battle the enemy army was not only defeated – it ceased to exist.

The king personally led cavalry assaults, exposing himself to danger and death. Every Swedish king of the seventeenth century was wounded in battle. Two, Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII, were killed in battle. Gustavus Adolphus cast a long shadow on his successors. He “personally led the charge of Finlanders,” adding

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<sup>56</sup> Parker, *The Military Revolution*, 185.

<sup>57</sup> Chandler, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Marlborough*, 56.

<sup>58</sup> Jones, *The Art of War in the Western World*, 250.

to their already considerable élan and reputation.<sup>59</sup> He was wounded numerous times in battle; one time his shoulder was smashed by a musket ball during a cavalry charge. He almost drowned in a battle on a supposedly frozen lake on the Ingria-Novgorod frontier.<sup>60</sup> At the Battle of Lech (1632), he personally sighted some of the 60 guns firing at imperial forces.<sup>61</sup>

He was “beloved and admired” by his soldiers, who saw him as “fearless of danger, he ever recognized bravery in others and was ready to take his full share of every hardship and every peril.”<sup>62</sup> Charles X, “whose training had been to a great extent military” saw his kingship and his role as warrior-general-king as a continuation of the behaviors of Gustavus’s reign.<sup>63</sup>

In many ways the Swedish army resembled the Roman armies of the Republic. Both armies relied on citizen conscripts and professionalized recruits. Both societies contained representative assemblies, along with the contradictory existence of high levels of social stratification and a meritocracy. Both armies relied heavily on mid-level officers, the tactical use of linear formations, the scientific use of digging and fortifications, and the use of shock infantry. Both societies combined the political with military power through the personal leadership of the consul and king.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> G. A. Henty, *The Lion of the North*, 1886 ed. (London: Dodo Press, 2000), 123.

<sup>60</sup> Masson, *Queen Christina*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Fletcher, *A Hero of the Far North*, 121.

<sup>62</sup> Henty, *Lion of the North*, 70.

<sup>63</sup> Dahlgren, *Charles X and the Constitution*, 175.

<sup>64</sup> Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 192.

In other ways the Swedish army looked nothing like its Roman counterpart. The Swedes used the pike rather than the sword, relied on heavy cavalry as the *coup de grace* and were at the forefront of using field artillery. The Swedish army combined different weapon systems in ways Roman armies did not. Roman armies did not incorporate a large cavalry contingent nor did it play a decisive role in battle. Edward Luttwak figured the cavalry composed only 120 of nearly 6,000 men in an early imperial legion (less than two percent of the total). Artillery, composed of perhaps 60 men, was even less important.<sup>65</sup> In many ways the Swedish army instead resembled the hammer and anvil armies of Alexander the Great, but with a post-gunpowder emphasis on firepower.

Charles X's Royal Army set out for Poland with 35 percent of its manpower in cavalry (4,294 of 12,282).<sup>66</sup> Even more importantly, Charles's army was a modern firepower army supplied by an arms industry that was the "largest exporter of cannon in Europe."<sup>67</sup> Gustavus Adolphus had amazed Europe when he arrived in Germany with 72 total artillery pieces.<sup>68</sup> Charles X's Royal Army (which was only one of three equally invested invasion forces) carried 178 field pieces in three-, six- and twelve-pound calibers in addition to 72 siege guns, which included eight newly forged 24-pounders; massive cannons that required up to twenty four horses to move. These

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<sup>65</sup> Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1979), 14-16.

<sup>66</sup> Lars Tersmeden, "Carl Gustafs Arme," in *Carl X Gustaf Studier (CXGS)*, vol. 8, ed. Arne Stade (Stockholm: Militärhistoriska Förlaget, 1979), 243-244 (tables).

<sup>67</sup> David Kirby, *Northern Europe in the Early Modern Period: The Baltic World, 1492-1772* (White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group, 1990), 149.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus and the Rise of Sweden*. (London: Hodder Arnold, 1974), 106.

guns were fed by an arms industry that produced almost 20,000 shells and shot in 1654 alone.<sup>69</sup>

Danish observers watching Charles's army could not help but admit "the formidable artillery contributed a great deal to the superiority of the Swedish army."<sup>70</sup> Patrick Gordon, then a mercenary in Wittenburg's advance force, noted in his diary that the Swedish army departed for Poland "with a gallant traine of artillery."<sup>71</sup> In June 1655, as Swedish forces prepared to move, Dutch observers were stunned by the concept that the Swedes, in the little Duchy of Bremen, had not only raised infantry regiments but also "400 artillery horses."<sup>72</sup> Considering that one horse was enough to move a light field piece and only two or three horses were necessary to move a "regimental" field gun, this was fantastic and terrible news.

More impressively, Sweden's arsenals continued to produce more guns than were needed throughout the war. Swedish industrial output made it the "largest exporter of cannon in Europe."<sup>73</sup> In 1656, 1658 and 1660, Sweden exported more than 1,000 field pieces to western Europe while being at war with, respectively, two, five, and six simultaneous adversaries.<sup>74</sup> Swedish armies possessed far more than battlefield superiority during the Second Northern War. Against Poland, Prussia and

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<sup>69</sup> Jonas Hedberg, "Carl X Gustafs artilleri" in *CXGS*, vol. 8, 306, 345, 338.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>71</sup> Patrick Gordon, *Passages from the Diary of General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries: A.D. 1635 - 1699* (New York: Printed For The Spalding Club, 1859), 19.

<sup>72</sup> John Thurloe, *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe* (hereafter *SPJT*), vol. 3 (London: Thomas Birch, 1742), 554.

<sup>73</sup> Kirby, *Northern Europe in the Early Modern Period*, 149.

<sup>74</sup> Tersmeden, *CXGS*, vol. 8, 295.



Denmark the Swedes possessed battlefield *supremacy* in artillery. At the Battle of Warsaw in July 1656, the Swedes maintained a 2:1 advantage in artillery over the Poles when all of the Polish guns had been recently captured from Swedish garrisons. Every artillery piece fired at the Battle of Warsaw, the largest battle of the war, had been manufactured in Swedish factories.<sup>75</sup>

Swedish artillery advantages were impressive even by later historical standards. The Swedes in 1630 had 9.4 cannon pieces per 1,000 men. Charles X's armies, with less total troops and more artillery pieces, had an even higher rate. Most early modern armies carried less than one artillery piece per thousand soldiers. Napoleon's armies, hailed for their artillery, were well armed if they had four guns per thousand. In the Boer War (1899-1902), the English troops, benefiting from the Industrial Revolution and a sophisticated supply chain linking Cape Town to Manchester, had only 2.5 artillery pieces per thousand.<sup>76</sup> In 1655, there was simply no other army on earth as heavily armed for battle as the Swedes.

Adding to this numeric advantage were Swedish innovations in creating shrapnel (grape shot) and canister shot, ballistics designed specifically to kill as many men as possible over as wide an area as possible. Artillery was so important to the military's efficiency that the general of the artillery was the third highest ranking officer in the army and carried the rank of Field Marshal. During the Thirty Years' War, Lennart Torstensson rose from Head of the Artillery to Generalissimo of the armies.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Sten Bonneson, *Karl X Gustav* (Malmö: Gleerups Förlag, 1958), 139; Tersmedan, *CXGS*, vol. 8, 314.

<sup>76</sup> Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, vol. 2, 234. Manucy, *Artillery Through the Ages*, 11-12.

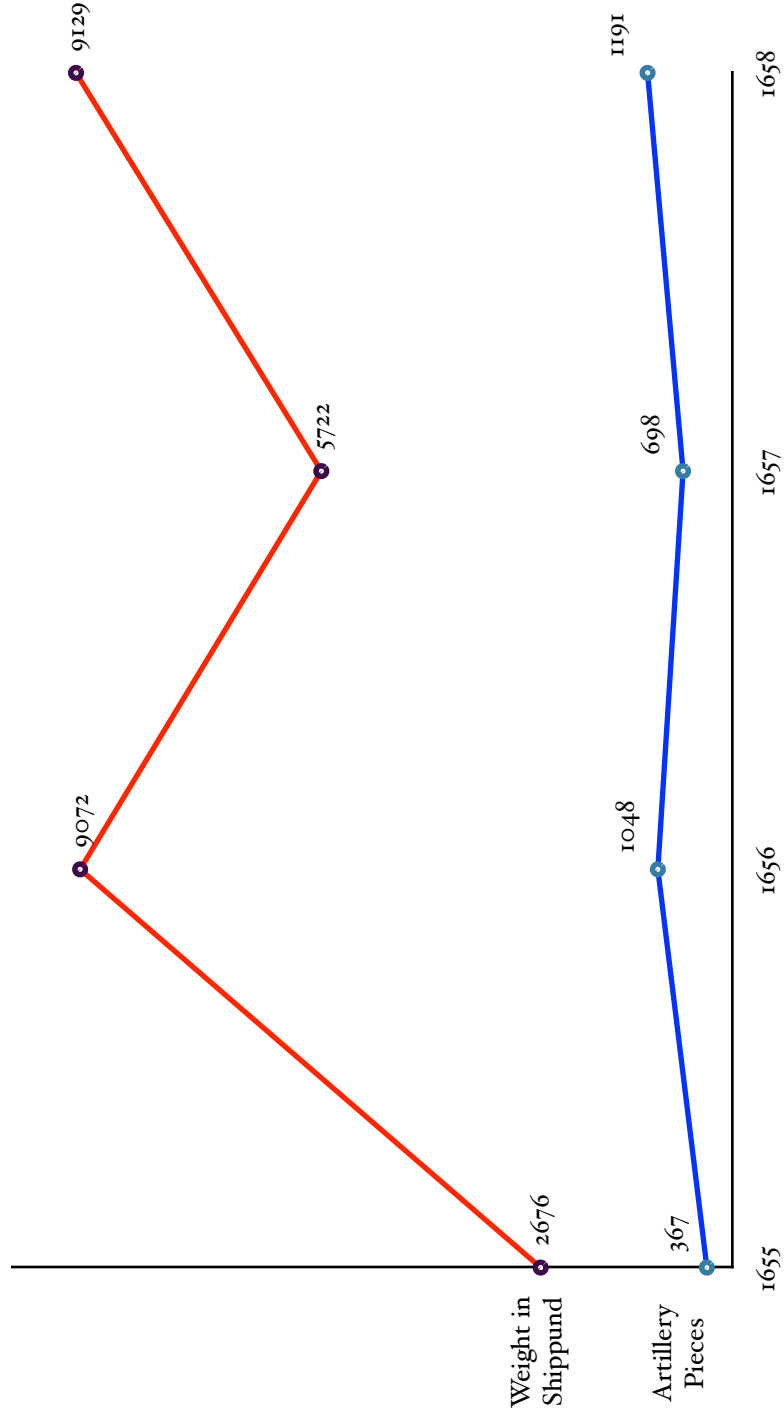
<sup>77</sup> Hedberg, *CXGS*, vol. 8, 280.

Sweden's primary advantage lay in metallurgy. Sweden was awash in the high quality metals necessary for casting superior guns. This allowed the state to manufacture pieces at far lower costs. The high purity of the ore allowed the Swedish arsenals to make better, lighter and more reliable guns relative to their adversaries. Gustavus Adolphus took personal interest in the development and experimentation of new guns, always aiming for lighter and more mobile weaponry. Manufacturing was streamlined from sixteen calibers to four (three-, six-, twelve- and twenty-four-pounders). Royal investments and rewards caused a brain-drain from the continent as talented Dutch and German artillerists came to Sweden. The results were palpable: in 1625, Gustavus Adolphus's artillery traine included 36 guns, 220 wagons and 1116 horses to move it all; by 1630 his 72 guns in Germany required less than half the number of wagons and 100 fewer horses. Sweden not only went to war with both a qualitative and quantitative advantage in artillery but also possessed a radically superior system of integration of artillery into the command structure of the army.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, vol. 2, 232.

Swedish Export of Artillery Pieces (in Weight and Number)  
to Holland and Lubeck:  
1655-1658



Sweden's advantages in possessing this sheer brute force were assured by an astounding concentration of manufacturing for such an impoverished state. Charles X could rely on twelve arsenals, twelve dedicated cannon foundries, twenty shot factories, and four gunpowder factories producing thousands of muskets, pikes, cannons a year and tens of thousands of shells, shrapnel, canister and shot a year. Swedish industry even produced 10,000 spades in 1654, allowing the Swedish infantry to throw up earthworks with astounding speed.<sup>79</sup> The Swedish infantry at the Battle of Warsaw was able to quickly build impressive -- and necessary -- fortifications against the Polish cavalry despite having to come to a battlefield already occupied by the Poles and Lithuanians.

Furthermore, Sweden's Imperial possessions in Germany and the Baltic assured that Swedish manufacturing, already close to its raw materials, was safe from wartime interdiction and could continue to produce high quality pieces in high volumes. The Poles and Danes found their arsenals quickly overrun by Swedish troops and either destroyed or turned to Swedish production. The implications were staggering. Sweden, a country with only one continental-sized city and a diminutive burgher estate, was out-manufacturing France and Spain and nearly all of a combined Germany in artillery guns while hiring away their talented intellectual capital and then turning the results into decisive firepower on continental battlefields.

Against this dramatic advantage in firepower it is not surprising that the Poles were willing to fight only one set piece battle during the war. Rather, the Poles fought small affairs of a few hundred or thousand men in which they risked little and

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<sup>79</sup> Hedberg, *CXGS*, vol. 8, 344.

gained nothing. The result was always a Swedish victory, although the Polish horsemen fled the battlefield living to fight another day. Problematically, Sweden's sheer advantage in firepower led the Poles to fight the war unconventionally, negating much of the Swedish advantage in organization, tactics and firepower.

Yet, Charles X Gustav's army remained the most powerful Swedish force of the seventeenth century. Every Swedish unit in the army in 1655 had seen action in the Thirty Years' War as had every high ranking officer. All of the Field Marshals had been generals during the Thirty Years' War and were officers in the Prussian War of the 1620s.<sup>80</sup> This institutional knowledge, and an élan for victory, translated into immediate victories in 1655, an impressive sustaining ability in 1656 in Poland, and a dramatic recovery in 1657 against Denmark.

### **Inclusionary Government, Conscription and the Cultural Difference**

Sweden's tactical superiority was built on a unique cultural foundation. The army of Gustavus Adolphus epitomized not only a new way of organizing an army but also a new method of building a state. The Swedish army of the *Stormaktstiden* was different from its contemporaries because it was founded on the willing service of the peasantry, the aristocracy and the royalty. Each social order had a role in the political decision-making process and thus a vested interest in the success of the state. Additionally within the Swedish cultural system, the peasants and noblemen were willing and able to sublimate their rights and freedoms in order to achieve an invaluable level of discipline and order. Finally, the Swedish army acted differently

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<sup>80</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 134.

from contemporary armies. Instead of plundering and pilfering its way through occupied lands, the Swedish army built a logistical infrastructure by selling protection to local lords and collecting contributions. All of these strengths flowed from a particular political development that stressed balance.

Balance was achieved through the inclusion of all social orders into the political decision-making process. This does not mean the system fostered equality among the different institutions and power groups, however. The monarchy was the acknowledged dynamo of the system as well as the protector of the liberties of all the other groups within the system. In the classic Tilly thesis of state development, the monarchy and the aristocracy ally to command, control and exploit the peasantry. Quite the opposite occurred in Sweden: the peasantry sought the *empowerment* of the monarchy to protect it from the encroaching power of the nobility. Unlike continental Europe, in Sweden it was “public policy to maintain peasant rights.”<sup>81</sup>

Sweden’s political balancing act created unusual behaviors. Michael Graves explained that in a traditional European state “royal minorities enhanced parliamentary power” while parliaments were rarely called during an adult monarch’s reign.<sup>82</sup> Yet Perry Anderson noted in Sweden “the royal house always lost power in minorities but always gained it back.” Likewise, Charles X Gustav, who became king at thirty-two years of age, convened three different *riksdags* during his reign (Spring 1655, Spring 1658, and Spring 1660). For the Swedish system to work it required the balance of the monarchy, the *råd*, and the *riksdag* with its unique peasant estate.

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<sup>81</sup> Anthony Upton, *Charles XI and Swedish Absolutism, 1660-1697*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Graves, *Parliaments of Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 2001), 37-38.

This balancing act was particularly evident in the demands and debates concerning the *reduktion*. The peasants complained in 1650 of being reduced to “Livonian slavery” arguing that if “the peasants go under then so will the others,” and without land, there would not be need of a monarch.<sup>83</sup> To Queen Christina, the lower estates acknowledged, “for we esteem your Majesty’s royal power as the buttress of our liberties, the one being bound up in the other and both standing or falling together.” By reclaiming alienated and sold crown lands the Queen could “restore the commonality to its proper and normal liberty,” solving, the lower estates argued, the problems of the realm and the protection of “our liberties.”<sup>84</sup>

When the aristocracy came to the queen for its own protection, fearing Christina might agree to the lower estates’ demands, she forced the aristocrats to make Charles Gustav hereditary heir – something they had long resisted. The aristocracy agreed and Christina sided against a *reduktion*. Charles Gustav, upon becoming Charles X, immediately demanded a *reduktion* and consequently much of the spring 1655 *riksdag* was consumed more with the reclamation of crown land than the war in Poland.

But the Crown could not rule the kingdom by allying with freeholder peasants only. The Crown needed the wealth, education and resources of the aristocracy. The government was staffed by members of the aristocracy; aristocrats were generals, admirals, diplomats and department heads. They also held the

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<sup>83</sup> Roberts, *QCGC*, 117.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in *Sweden as a Great Power 1611-1697 [SGP]*, ed. Michael Roberts (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1968), 101-104.

institutional knowledge of the kingdom, as most of the great families had histories reaching back into the Middle Ages.

This created dramatic and long lasting rivalries within the aristocracy. As Axel Oxenstierna increasingly centralized authority during Christina's minority, there were other families, including that of Charles Gustav, who increasingly became staunch opponents to the Oxenstierna faction. Fighting broke out over who Christina might marry; would it be an Oxenstierna or a de la Gardie or, the safest choice for social harmony because he was technically a foreigner, Charles Gustav? When Charles Gustav became king, he kept an Oxenstierna as chancellor but allowed his sister to marry a de la Gardie. During the long royal minorities of Christina and Charles XI it was seen as possible that the entire *råd* might split into factionalism and disorder. There was also a growing split, one an adult Charles XI would ruthlessly exploit, between the high and low aristocrats over access to bureaucratic positions.

In the Swedish system, however, no single social order could overwhelm the others. Instead, each needed the support, participation, and protection of other estates in order to maintain its own liberties and powers. The peasantry needed a strong monarchy to protect it from the aristocracy *and* blood-thirsty foreigners who wanted to impose slavish slavery and Roman Catholicism. The aristocracy needed a strong monarchy to protect its wealth and privileges from the jealousy or anger of the lower estates and to grant its members the important government posts that brought both income and honor. The king needed both the *råd* and the *riksdag* in order to legitimize his policies and supply his wars with men, money and material. The



monarch needed to maintain the tax paying peasantry in order to fill the ranks of the army and the coffers of the treasury. Likewise, the king needed access to the institutional knowledge and expertise of the aristocracy in order to run the highly efficient government Sweden needed to compete against larger, wealthier powers. It is not surprising, then, that when the state had vigorous royal leadership the country seemed to exude confidence and strength. The surprise of the *Stormaktstiden* is not that a strong monarch was successful in creating a stable state; but that Sweden had such a string of them for so long.

Yet this balance of political power, rights, and freedoms transformed Sweden's army into one of the most powerful military forces in Europe. It allowed Gustavus Adolphus to build a citizen-soldier army in an age when monarchs were afraid of the commonality. "Few monarchs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were prepared to establish national armies; for most of them agreed with Christian IV of Denmark and John George of Saxony in being unwilling to put arms into the hands of the lower orders: only where the peasant had been reduced to real serfdom was it esteemed safe to proceed upon the basis of conscription."<sup>85</sup> Nearly every kingdom of Europe relied on mercenaries or serfs to fill the ranks. Mercenary armies were politically safe even if they were also qualitatively unreliable and "ruinously expensive."<sup>86</sup> Many European armies also favored the "social convenience" of using rootless men, drunks, prisoners, paupers and youths, trading efficiency for safety.

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<sup>85</sup> Roberts, "The Military Revolution," 17.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Desertion in these hired or serf armies was as high as 80 percent. Many units existed only on paper.<sup>87</sup>

Edward Gibbon made a straight comparison between the glories of Roman arms and eighteenth century armies. Roman military success, he argued, derived from the arming of free, land-owning, citizens. “In the purer ages of the commonwealth, the use of arms was reserved for those ranks of citizens who had a country to love, a property to defend, and some share in enacting laws which it was their interest as well as duty to maintain.” It was the “patriotism” derived from this social service which “rendered the legions of the republic almost invincible.” The decline of Roman arms came, according to Gibbon, when the army was composed, “like the mercenary troops of modern Europe,” of the “meanest, and very frequently the most profligate, of mankind.”<sup>88</sup>

The “scum of the earth” were not wanted in the ranks of the Swedish army. Swedish citizens found images of Germanic and Baltic serfdom “repugnant” to their ideas of liberty.<sup>89</sup> Instead the provincial regiments preferred craftsmen, journeymen, young peasant laborers and farmers. Sweden, in a manner proposed by Aristotle, “desired men of property” in the army.<sup>90</sup> In exchange for the protection of their ancient liberties, the peasantry continually supported royal initiatives by sacrificing

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<sup>87</sup> V.G. Kiernan, “Foreign Mercenaries and Absolute Monarchy” in *Crises in Europe*, ed. Trevor Aston (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 133 and Hillary Zmora, *Monarchy, Aristocracy and State in Europe, 1300-1800* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 28. The so called “ghost units” are also discussed in Parrott, *Richelieu's Army*.

<sup>88</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Mueller (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), 16.

<sup>89</sup> Roberts, *QCGC*, 123.

<sup>90</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, vol. II (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 207; Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, vol. 2, 209.

their lives and treasure. Throughout Charles X's wars many provinces reported attendance rates over 90 percent for conscripted men.<sup>91</sup> Peasants reported for service despite the lack of even a minimal level of compulsive force, highlighting the legitimacy royal policy enjoyed through inclusion.<sup>92</sup>

Conscription was left to a local peasant assembly called the *tingstyen*. This local assembly would choose the conscripted men based upon the negotiated levels (in 1656, for example, the level was 1 in 10 men in the province). Not all of those men would serve as a fighting man. Instead, Sweden created a *rota* system by which every ten men "conscripted" outfitted one fighting soldier. This spread the cost of mobilizing and arming a soldier but also kept the cost from being ruinous to the individual farmer. During the 1640s and 1650s the non-fighting conscripts paid their share directly to the treasury, which took over the outfitting of the soldiery.<sup>93</sup> A soldier was then supported by the income of local farms: a private in 1630 received one-eighth of a farm's yearly tax, while the socially elevated cavalry received the entirety of a homestead's state tax.<sup>94</sup> This system created a cost effective standing army with the time and income to become professionalized and disciplined.

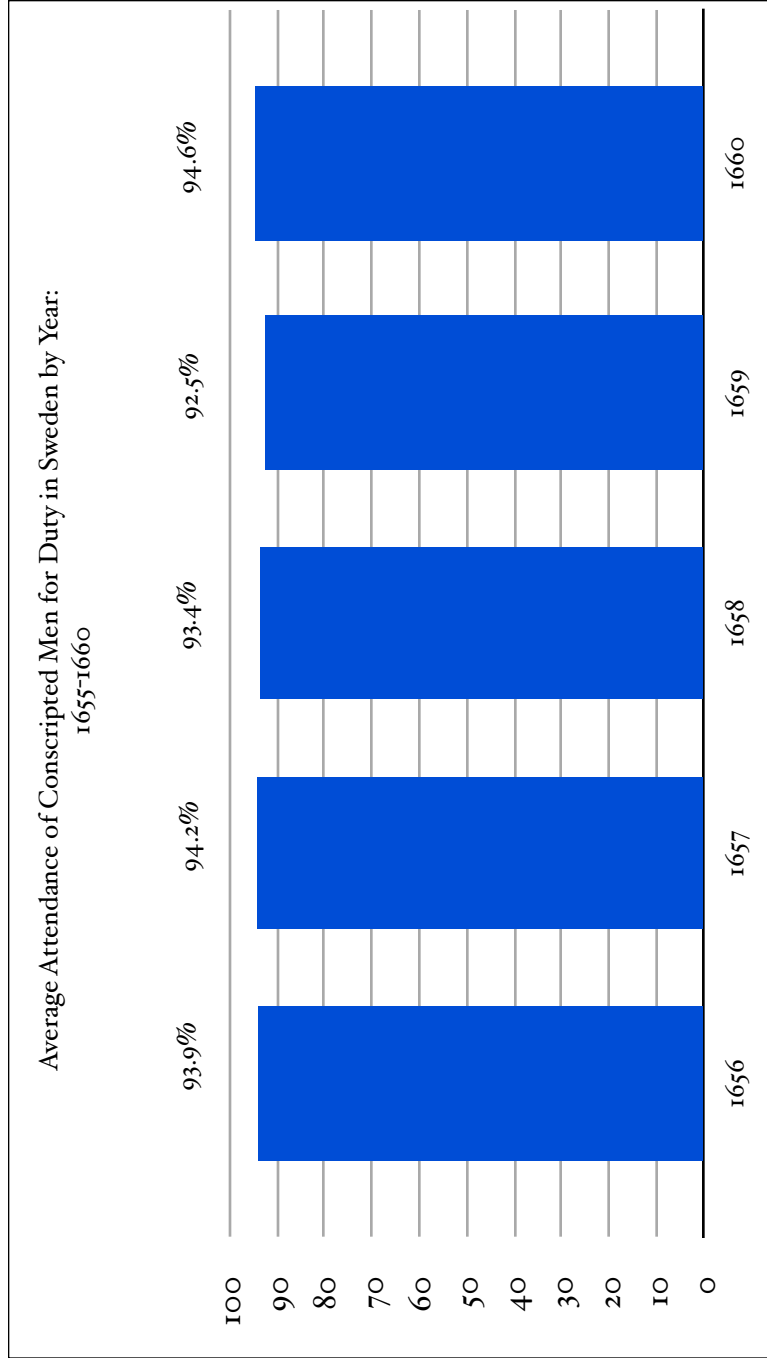
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<sup>91</sup> Tersmeden, "Carl Gustafs Arme," *CXGS*, vol. 8, 249.

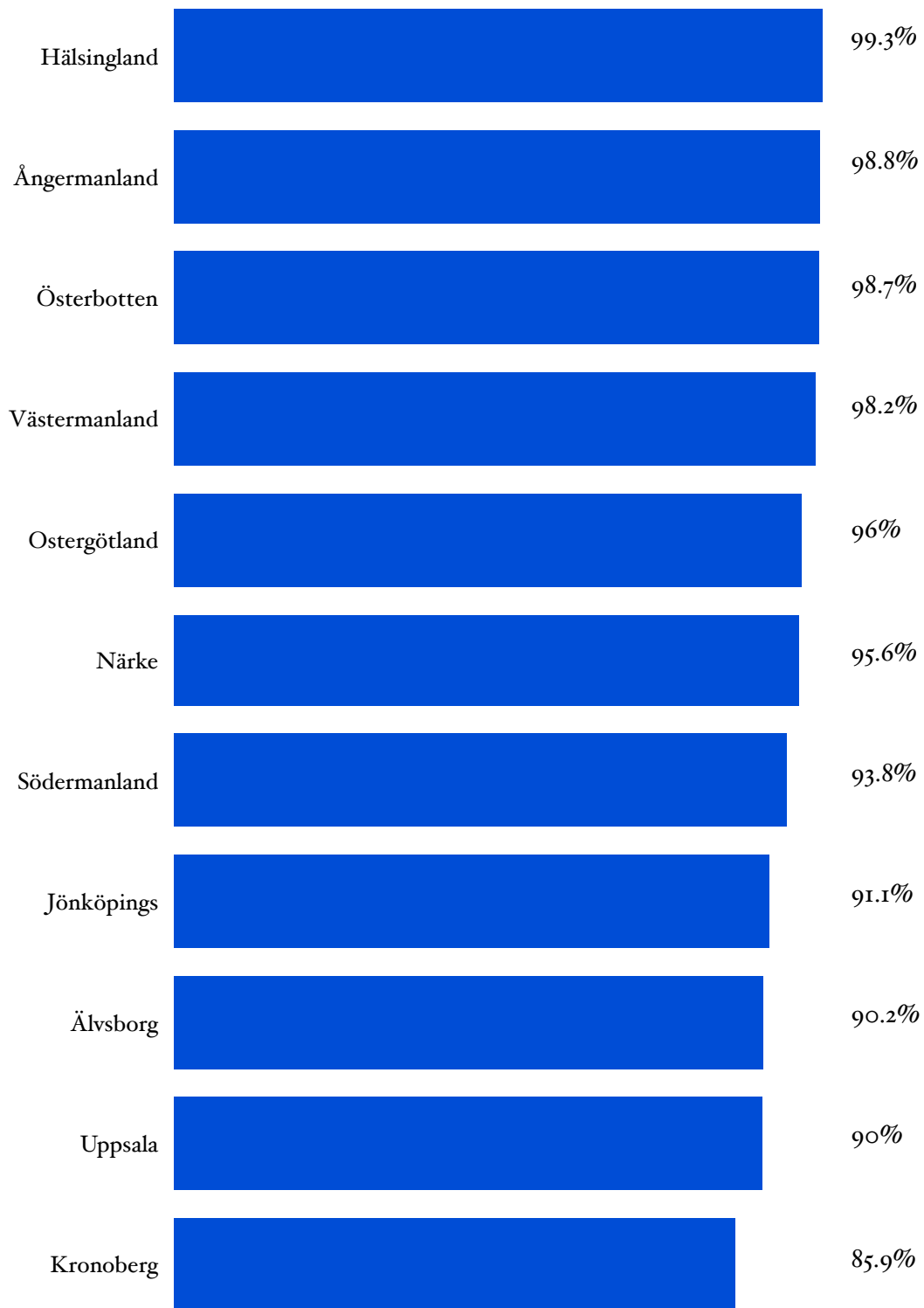
<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>93</sup> Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, vol. 2, 209.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 215.



Average Attendance of Conscripted Men for Duty by Province: 1655-1660



The nobility were not subject to conscription but served as volunteers. During the *Stormaktstiden*, martial service was highly valued and brought great rewards in title, position, land, and loot. Nearly every member of the Charles X's *råd* had been an officer in Prussia or Germany; some, like Robert Douglas, had become *råd* members as a reward for military service in the war. The quickest way for a family to rise in Swedish society was to participate -- and succeed -- at war.

As in the days of the Roman Republic, political success depended upon military service. During the Prussian War (1620s), contemporaries commented, "it could be said the greater part of the nobility were out of the country."<sup>95</sup> War, travel and success also changed the noblemen's worldview. The German war continentalized the Swedish nobility as they brought back French and German concepts of high architecture, fashion, literature, and art along with their plunder.

Sweden's new army also created another strange Swedish anachronism: the warrior-king. From Karl IX to Charles XII, every king led troops into battle. One of Queen Christina's justifications for abdicating the throne was "the realm would be granted a man...who...could ride with his people to battle, while a woman could not."<sup>96</sup> After the death of Gustavus Adolphus the army suffered a dreadful listlessness and hesitancy completely at odds with the bold confidence of its behavior a year earlier. This martial confusion resulted in the disastrous defeat at Nördlingen, referred to as "the slaughter" twenty years later.

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<sup>95</sup> Roberts, *SIE*, 62.

<sup>96</sup> Curt Weibull, *Christina of Sweden*. (Göteborg: Svenska Bokforlaget, 1966), 82.

The warrior-king was an important, if not wholly unique, aspect of Swedish military war-making. Kings in eastern Europe, like John Casimir of Poland and Alexis of Muscovy, still went to war but not like the Swedish monarchs. Each king from 1600 until 1718, save Charles XI, spent the vast majority of his reign at war and far from the capital.<sup>97</sup> Gustavus Adolphus spent more than twenty years away from his capital. Charles XII only returned to Stockholm once, for less than six months, during his eighteen years of war. Charles X never returned to his capital after joining his army in July 1655. Yet none of them ever met a serious opposition to their authority.

During the *Stormaktstiden*, perhaps as many as one million Swedes served under arms. At any one time three to four percent of the total population was under arms.<sup>98</sup> Yet the state was able to maintain this level of militancy without sparking either a social or fiscal crisis during the seventeenth century. The combination of warrior-king, citizen-soldier, battlefield victory and social stability imbued the army with a tremendous confidence, allowing it to commit acts of audacity incapable by other armies. The confidence, which flowed from the king to the citizen-soldiers, provided “a psychological asset of incalculable importance” allowing the army “with relatively limited but highly efficient forces” to achieve great victories. “One would have to be blind,” Clausewitz argued in discussing the Swedes, “not to see the role of

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<sup>97</sup> Once Charles XI, who led the final, victorious cavalry charge at the Battle of Lund in 1676, kept Sweden at peace for the rest of his reign.

<sup>98</sup> Glete, “The Swedish Fiscal-Military State in Transition and Decline,” 10; see also see Claes Goran Issacson, *Karl X Gustavs Krig* (Stockholm: Historiska Media, 2002), 37.

military spirit” in victory.<sup>99</sup> Clausewitz put *Stormaktstiden* armies in league with the “Macedonians under Alexander” and the “Romans under Caesar.”<sup>100</sup> David Parrott argued that the Swedes were consistently victorious because they thought themselves better at war than their opponents. One only had to look at the contemporaneous French army, he wrote, “to show what happens” when an army lacking experience and motivation goes into battle.<sup>101</sup>

## **Discipline**

Too much liberty, though, could be damaging to the efficiency of the army. If the king was too much a politician and not enough of a general the whole enterprise could fail. The Battle of Kirkholm in 1605, against the Poles, illustrated what could happen if an army, especially one composed of inexperienced citizen-soldiers, lacked the hardening elements of discipline and order.

Kirkholm was one of the few battles in which the Swedes commanded a significant numeric advantage, and despite possessing a 3:1 advantage in troops they were wiped out. Peasant freedom – indulged by Karl IX’s political and personal weakness – helped bring about the disaster. In the 1560s and 1570s, Erik XIV had built an army along western lines: pikemen, musketeers and some light cavalry. This army had achieved some success and gained control of Estonia. During the usurpations of Karl IX the peasant infantry “made all speed to discard the pikes and

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<sup>99</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Everyman’s Library, Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. 221.

<sup>100</sup> Roberts, *SEI*, 56; Clausewitz, *On War*, Everyman’s Library, 712, 221.

<sup>101</sup> David Parrott, “Strategy and Tactics in the Thirty Years War” in *The Military Revolution Debate*, ed. Clifford Rodgers (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 234.



body armour which [Erik XIV] had compelled them to bear, and robustly asserted their right to be slaughtered in their own fashion, unconstrained by royal tyranny.”<sup>102</sup> Karl IX, unable or unwilling to enforce order on his libertine subjects, led an army that more closely resembled a mob than a robust fighting force.

Alternatively the Swedes faced a Polish army which maintained a strong heavy cavalry. “The Polish horse was the best in Europe...If Karl had searched the whole continent he could not have found an adversary whom his soldiers were less fitted to fight.”<sup>103</sup> Poor leadership, little discipline, and disorganization resulted in the wholesale slaughter of the Swedish army. The westernized light cavalry proved no match for the hard charge of the Hussars; unprotected by either cavalry or pike the peasants fled in disorder and were hunted down by Polish light cavalymen.

The destruction of the army at Kirkholm compromised the entire Baltic position. A poor leader had led thousands of men to their deaths, crippled an institution, and endangered his entire political position. The lack of discipline and order in the army had allowed it to be slaughtered.

Peasants needed to be turned into soldiers by training and discipline. One eighteenth century instruction manual described the purpose of drill was to take recruits and “to give the air of a soldier, so that the peasant in him is removed.” Only in this way could backward rustics be turned into “blindly obedient soldiers.”<sup>104</sup> Military drill manuals proliferated Europe showing in both words and images the

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Roberts, *The Early Vasas: A History of Sweden 1523-1611* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 400.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Harold Kleinschmidt, “Using the Gun: Manual Drill and the Proliferation of Portable Firearms,” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (1999), 613.

complex maneuvers and positions of using pike and musket.<sup>105</sup> It showed how to pick up the weapon, how to carry it, position it for use against other infantry or prepare to accept shock cavalry. English military drill manuals like *English Military Discipline* in 1672 referred to *salvo* firing maneuvers as “Swedes’ Way,” emphasizing the familiarity English-Scottish soldiers had with Swedish techniques by the end of the century.

Vegetius, perhaps the most important classical authority in military matters in early modern Europe, set out the importance of drill, training and discipline in the first paragraph of his treatise. “Victory in war does not depend entirely upon numbers or mere courage; only skill and discipline will insure it. We find that the Romans owed the conquest of the world to no other cause than continual military training, exact observance of discipline in their camps and unwearied cultivation of the other arts of war.” This was because “the courage of a soldier is heightened by his knowledge of his profession, and he only wants an opportunity to execute what he is convinced he has been perfectly taught. A handful of men, inured to war, proceed to certain victory, while on the contrary numerous armies of raw and undisciplined troops are but multitudes of men dragged to slaughter.” Well trained men know their role and “the objects with which we are once familiarized are no longer capable of inspiring us with terror.”<sup>106</sup> Vegetius, 1,200 years earlier, precisely described the transformation of the Swedish army between Karl IX’s time and Charles X’s reign fifty years later.

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<sup>105</sup> One such examples is Thomas Callaway's *Manual of The Compleat Militiaman, Armes, Equipment & Drill of the St. Maries Citty Militia*.

<sup>106</sup> Vegetius, *De Rei Militari*, I.

Discipline and punishment were harsh in the Swedish army, as they were in all seventeenth century armies. The national nature of the force allowed for a stricter level of discipline because the army's general was also the legal and political authority of the realm. In this way, the Swedish kings cared not only for the soldiers' battlefield actions and rote maneuvers but also for the strength of their souls. The Swedish army was to be a godly army.

The entire first part of *The Swedish Discipline* concerned prayers for the king, the country and the souls of the soldiers (a Lutheran prayer in which a soldier is reminded "for thee to obey my Captaine I give due thanks").<sup>107</sup> The king pledged that through "gentleness and admonition unto some" he would root out "many strange and enormous abuses" that had infected the army's behavior.<sup>108</sup> This strictness of mind, body, and spirit was meant to instruct the men "in the right use and handling of the Arms, so as may best enable them for our service and the defense of our native Country."<sup>109</sup>

The Articles of War were read once a month beginning in 1621. It was not a reciprocal document, and it spelled out the obligations of the soldier to the Field Marshal (Royal or otherwise). It emphasized godly behavior, church service, and morality. It was an attitude Robert Munro thought indoctrinated men into the army. He wrote that men of a lower sort were excoriated from the army and that the conversations of the men were "to be of God and his mercies" without foul language

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<sup>107</sup> William Watts, *The Swedish Discipline* (London: John Dawson, 1632), 25.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

or any other “unseemliness in [the Swedish nationals’] behavior.”<sup>110</sup> Army discipline was meant not only to create a national army but a national citizen, not only a better soldier but a better man.

This is unsurprising given the muscular nature of Swedish Lutheranism. Bulstrode Whitelocke, writing during his 1653-1654 embassy in the aftermath of Cromwell’s Puritan victory, considered the Swedish Church “somewhat strict, and may be construed as an assumption of infallibility.”<sup>111</sup> This orthodoxy helped to define both Church and Swedish social organization. “In an age when Lutheranism elsewhere appeared to be sunk in torpor. . . Swedish Lutheranism developed a vigorous inner life, an effective organization, a social authority and a self assurance in its relations with the state which set it apart from all other Lutheran churches.”<sup>112</sup> Swedish soldiers were each given prayerbooks and each regiment had a chaplain who conducted prayers twice a day. Harsh penalties were prescribed for blasphemy, drunkenness and missing morning or evening prayers. Ministers were held out as the standard-bearers of behavior and held to account by the king.

Different part of the Articles of War emphasized the personal connection between the soldier and the King. It was the soldier’s duty to help the King protect the country, and they promised never to flee from the colors, to obey the officers who were the King’s proxies, and to endure the hardships of war *as the King did*.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, vol. 2, 242.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Roberts, “The Swedish Church,” in *Sweden’ as a Great Power, 1611-1697* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), 141.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 173

<sup>113</sup> Watts, *The Swedish Discipline*, 17.

Emphasis was put on efficiently accomplishing the dull necessities of war: orders were to be followed promptly, all men were to dig fortifications (something Karl IX was unable to enforce), officers were responsible for the work of their men, and watch-guards had to stay awake.

Death penalties were levied on about forty offenses, but even in the harsh realm of seventeenth century military discipline the free nature of the Swedish social system is evident. No harsh penalty was summarily executed. In fact, no penalty could be exacted until a higher general signed off on it. In most cases the penalties were soft for the first offense but much harsher on second and third offenses. To end up in prison for 24 hours for missing prayers (a serious offense for an army determined to be on the right side of God in a conflict), a soldier had to be “admonished by his Captain” three times, which defined the man as incorrigible.<sup>114</sup>

The Articles proclaimed “very requisite it is, that good justice be holden amongst our soldier, as well as amongst our subjects.”<sup>115</sup> To accomplish this the Articles created a complex court system in the field with both regimental courts and courts of appeal. The King handled final appeals and pardons. The courts were made up of a juror pool of thirteen officers, while the High Court included the great men of the Army. Guilt had to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, rulings had to follow regimental precedence, proceedings occurred under “the blue skies,” and judgments, opinions and punishments were read publicly. Officers were allowed to act as solicitors in cases involving their kinsmen, which was very important in

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, 7.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

regiments composed entirely from men of the same province because many men were likely to either be related or closely associated through village ties. It also promoted the ideas of a meritocracy within regimental hierarchies.

Like the Roman army but unlike most contemporary European armies, it was possible for Swedish peasants to become general-officers. It was acknowledged as natural and right that this *bönder*-officer maintained close ties to his enlisted kinsmen. Thus it was an important part of justice and unit cohesion that a general officer be able to speak in court on behalf of a soldier under his command.<sup>116</sup> It was an exception that most armies, whose officers were social elites who violently oppressed the dregs underneath them, did not consider.

Swedish jurisprudence transferred the *hovrätt* system of local and Supreme Courts from Sweden to the army. Swedish soldiers thus had a level of legal protection and appeal not found in any other continental army. The peasants, in accepting royal military authority and discipline, did not lose their legal protections and inherent rights.

Swedish military law even included a morals clause against illegal orders 300 years before the Nuremberg tribunal. “No colonel or Captaine,” the law stated, “shall command his soldiers to do any unlawful thing” but “if at any time [a regular soldier] discover that they are commanded upon a service which is to [the king’s] prejudice...then shall that soldier not obey him...but presently give notice of it.”<sup>117</sup> This emphasis on individuality and individual responsibility attempted to elevate the

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119, 143-149.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

behavior of the individual and the army that would further the political goals of the state. Three hundred years before David Galula began formulating the principles of counterinsurgency, Swedish kings understood that the behavior of the individual soldier had a determinative factor in mission success or failure. The plundering of Swedish troops in 1655 and 1656, due mostly to financial and logistical limitations, was the determinative cause for the rise of a Polish peasant rebellion, the success of the insurgency, and the compromising of Charles's political gains.

The emphasis on individual freedom even extended into the forms of punishment. A unique Swedish punishment was the *gattlop*, or running the gauntlet. The *gattlop* was used instead of flogging, which would have been considered a humiliation of subordination, because one had to be flogged in public by an officer.<sup>118</sup> Instead, by running the gauntlet, the punishment, both the kind and degree, came not from aristocratic decree but from the criminal's peers.<sup>119</sup> The defendant, his guilt assured by a regimental court and the appeals to the High Court and King, ran between two lanes of his platoon-mates, *gata*, over some distance, *lopp* (literally "course"). As he passed by his platoon-mates whipped him with a knotted cord. Given the homogenous nature of Swedish regiments, the men who meted out the punishment were from the same province and possibly the same village as the criminal. The severity of the man's punishment was left to his social equals who could hit him as hard or as softly as they wished -- should they feel his punishment was deserved or not. In this way social hierarchy did not pollute concepts of justice

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<sup>118</sup> George Gush, *Renaissance Armies, 1480-1650* (Cambridge: Patrick Stephens Ltd, 1982), 113.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

and punishment while still aligning the behavior of the individual with the expectations of the king, platoon, brigade, regiment, and society.

To an extent unique to armies of the time, there was a effort to maintain the constitutional order of the culture within the army. The Articles of War emphasized the importance of the individual conscript in working with the King in the serious effort to defend the realm. In lands of serfs, mercenaries and absolutist princes, the Swedish army was an oasis of national culture in a foreign land.

### **Logistics**

The Swedes also created a new system of logistics and supply for the army. Typically armies lived off the plundering of the land. The costs of early modern warfare was staggering and far too high for most early modern states to afford. French armies increased from around 15,000 in the sixteenth century to 150,000 during the Thirty Years' War to a peacetime army of 72,000 men in 1660. Spain's Army of Flanders by itself equaled about 60,000 men for nearly a century even though Spain had four or five other, simultaneous, theaters of war. In the 1620s, Spain had between 130,000 and 150,000 men under arms. Sweden's armies rose from 15,000 in the sixteenth century, to 40,000 Swedes in the 1620s (on a population of 1.25 million), to nearly 100,000 men in garrisons in 1700. The costs were so staggering that between "1550-1650 the costs of war-making were fatal to states."<sup>120</sup> "Simply feeding 100,000 men was beyond the bounds of the state."<sup>121</sup> Even large

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<sup>120</sup> Jack Goldstone, *State Breakdown*, American Journal of Sociology, v92 n2, 268.

<sup>121</sup> Chandler, *The Art of Warfare*, 19.



states like Spain and France were forced to declare bankruptcy from their war loans. Spain's military expenditure more than quadrupled in the sixteenth century, going from two million to nine million florins.<sup>122</sup> Warfare in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was constant, continuous, bloody and expensive. Treaties, like the Spanish-Dutch treaty of 1609, were caused more by exhaustion and bankruptcy than defeat and occupation.

Financial problems stemming from war led to the English Civil War and the *Fronde* in France. Sweden was the rare state able to continually maintain armies in the field while never being seriously threatened with either financial or social collapse. Uniquely, *Stormaktstiden*. Sweden was never "even near" bankruptcy in time of war.<sup>123</sup> Gustavus Adolphus's solution, and the one Charles X relied upon, was a contribution system.

In effect, Sweden paid for its wars not by plunder but by selling protection.<sup>124</sup> The system allowed the Swedes to maintain a funded military in foreign lands, and allowed occupied people's to maintain not only their existence but a level of tribute-paying normalcy - which now went to the Swedes rather than the previous lord. The system allowed territories to remain economically and demographically viable instead of becoming the wasteland of desolation when an army occupied *ex rapto*. Gustavus Adolphus complained, in the early days of the German War, that "we have been forced to conduct the war *ex rapto*; much to the disgust and harm of our friends. We still have no means to supply our troops but by their intolerable plundering and

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<sup>122</sup> Parker, *The Military Revolution*, 47.

<sup>123</sup> Roberts, *SIE*, 48.

<sup>124</sup> Glete, *War and the State*, 193-194.

looting.”<sup>125</sup> The plundering of Swedish troops threatened the entire German endeavor because it alienated people while simultaneously depriving Sweden of future revenue from occupied territories.

The contribution system only worked if Sweden had states and lords willing to pay for protection. Secondly, wars had to be fought abroad; the entire system was predicated on not having to live off the revenue of Swedish farmers. Thirdly, the army must be on the move and remain intensely mobile. Armies that stayed in an area too long would either oppress the occupied or strip the region bare, rendering it economically useless. In 1629, in the dying days of the Prussian War between Sweden and Poland, the Lithuanian territory of Memel contained 154 horses, 236 oxen, 103 cows, 190 pigs, 810 sheep. By 1631 – despite the departure of most Swedish troops for Germany – there remained only 26 oxen and one cow, the others being killed or taken.<sup>126</sup> Per Brahe acknowledged the importance of fiscal gain when he described the goals of the German war. “Amnesty [for allied German princes] honorable,” he wrote to Oxenstierna after Gustavus’s death, “compensation useful, but the contentment of the soldier is essential” to end the German war.<sup>127</sup> For the war to be a success, in Brahe’s consideration, Sweden’s soldiers had to make a profit but plundering, while a short term boon, was a long term economic and political disaster. The contribution system remained the only efficient way for Sweden to transfer the bulk of the cost of maintaining the army overseas without ruining allied or occupied territories.

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<sup>125</sup> Eli Heckscher, *An Economic History of Sweden*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 80.

<sup>126</sup> Parker, *The Thirty Years War*, 124.

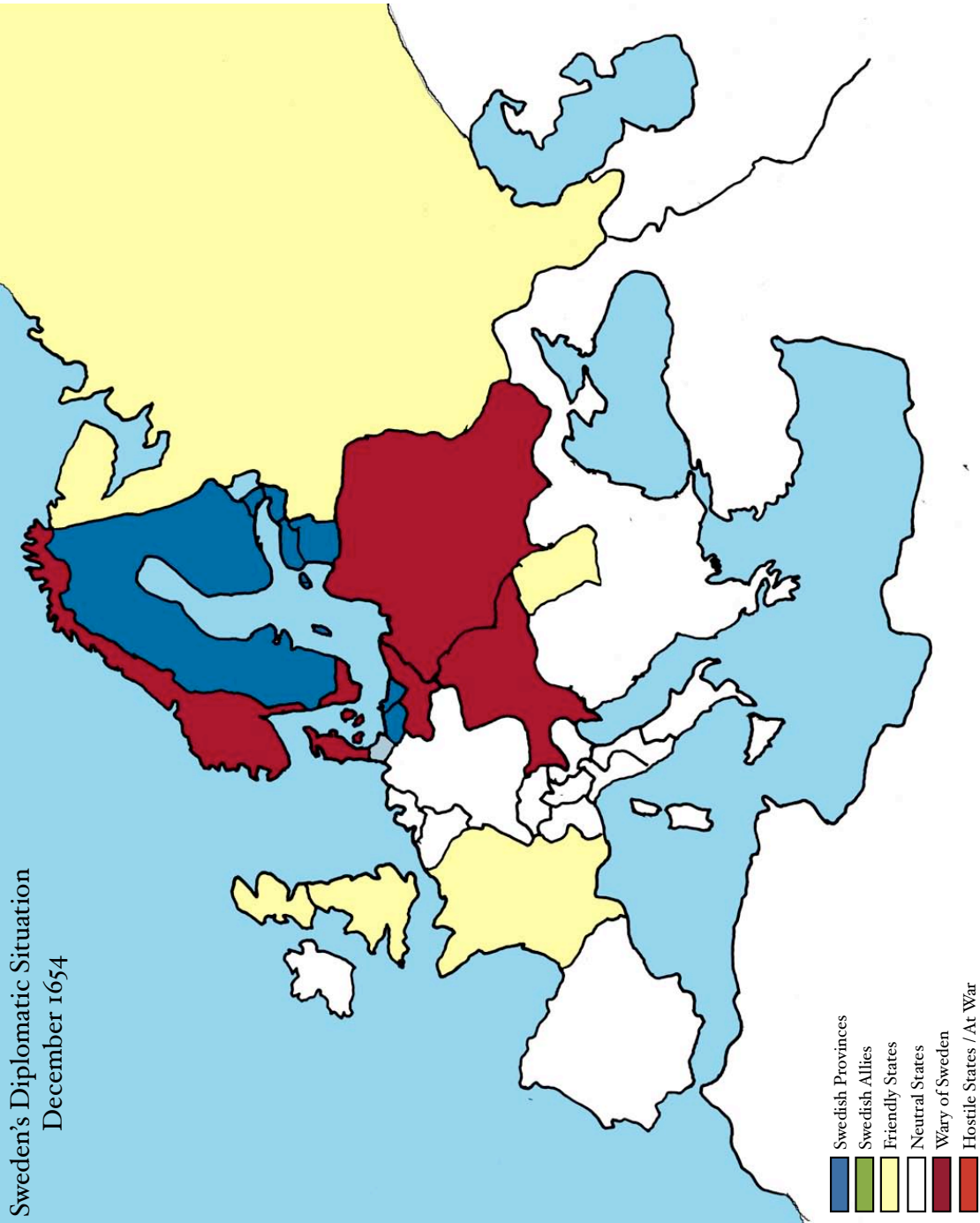
<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

As the Swedish armies marched through Poland, Lithuania and Prussia in 1655 the generals actively sought to ally their needs with the local lords' needs for protection. Charles X, as we will see, entreated his generals to bring foreign lords and cities to his "devotion." The treaties of Ujescie, Kiedjany, and the dozens of negotiations with individual cities in Prussia all revolved around the same exchange of resources (from the Lords and cities) in exchange for protection (of ancient noble privileges and/or physical protection from Muscovite or Brandenburg conquest). Ultimately, the lords of Poland were unable to uphold their end of the bargain and Swedish soldiers began plundering Polish villages and churches with dire consequences for Swedish policy. In Lithuania, the Swedes turned out to be unable to protect the Lithuanians from the Muscovites, also with dire consequences, because the insurgency in Poland drained away the mass of men from the eastern theater who might have been able to block Muscovite advances. Ultimately, only in Prussia did the contribution system work. The Swedes were given the resources necessary to maintain their soldiery who did not resort to plunder and the Swedes likewise protected the Prussians first from Brandenburg encroachment (the Treaty of Königsberg) but also from Polish and Lithuanian insurgent raiders.

In the seventeenth century even great states collapsed into civil war, provincial secession, regicide and bankruptcy. Sweden remained firm and steady; its armies advanced while others receded. Sweden's army, unlike most other early modern armies, was a bulwark for its countrymen and a terror to its foes. Swedish troops in the seventeenth century stood in Warsaw, Cracow, Königsberg, Riga, Prague, Berlin, Copenhagen, Novgorod, and Munich, while Stockholm, Uppsala,

Dalarna and Småland remained safe. These achievements were accomplished by the complimentary affects of tactical reforms and an inclusionary political culture. Without either part, or any of the necessary expressions of those parts, there might not have been a *Stormaktstiden* Sweden. With them, Sweden possessed an army superior at fighting wars than any of its competitors in 1655.

Chapter 3: December 1654, the *Decemberrådslagen*, and how Sweden Chose  
to go to War in Poland instead of Denmark or Muscovy



Sweden's decision-making process for going to war was neither random nor authoritarian. The decision to go to war in Poland was part of a long process that started with the convening of the *råd*, continued through the Spring *riksdag* of 1655 and resulted in declarations of support from representatives of all of Sweden's social orders. This constitutional process was as old as Sweden and went back to the original Land Law. In seventeenth century Sweden it bound the different levels of society to political action through incorporation. Five different levels of society (high nobility, low nobility, priests, burghers and peasants) had to support the political action and then support the sacrifices of men and treasure in order to carry out the policy. The *decemberrådslagen* of 1654 was an important step in bringing Sweden to war in Poland. Understanding how these leading men of the realm saw the dangerous world around them is integral to understanding how Swedish farmboys ended up a thousand miles from home, staring at the Carpathians and shooting at Tartar horsemen.

Yet during the summer of 1654, the conflict between Poland, its rebellious Cossacks, and Muscovite intervention did not seem a large concern in Stockholm. On 22 July, Charles X wrote to his brother and did not mention the war in Poland. Instead he wondered about the Franco-Spanish war currently being fought in Flanders. "I wonder," Charles wrote, "would the German princes get involved?"<sup>128</sup> He was also concerned about the conflict with Bremen. Bremen, a small but lucrative city-duchy strategically located at the Weser River estuary and the base of Danish Jutland, had not accepted the Westphalian treaty that handed the city over to

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<sup>128</sup> Riksarkivet Stockholm (hereafter RA), Riksregistret (hereafter RR), Huvudserie, vol. 293, Charles X till Adolf Johan, 22 July 1654.

the Swedes. A problem had been brewing since 1648 and in 1653 erupted into open conflict. In his letter to his brother, Charles X wrote that he wanted “to be allowed to gain satisfaction in this issue.” Charles was hoping that his army, which had occupied the duchy and besieged the city, would be able to capture the city without the Emperor or the Danes getting involved.<sup>129</sup> A few weeks later, Bengt Oxenstierna, Charles X’s diplomat-at-large on the continent, wrote extensively of the Bremen situation but made no mention of the Polish-Muscovite-Cossack war.<sup>130</sup> In September, Charles X wrote a long letter welcoming Magnus de la Gardie to the royal family as his brother-in-law. Within six months, Magnus was put in charge of Sweden’s third largest army and charged with the task of subduing Lithuania while blocking Muscovite advances to the Baltic shore.

In September, Charles made no mention of the situation in Poland-Lithuania or the need of Magnus to ready himself as protector of Livonia -- the most important Baltic possession in Sweden’s empire. Instead, Charles X wrote a letter defining their relationship. “I am sure,” Charles wrote to Magnus de la Gardie, “that you will do everything in your power to deserve the sentiment I have for you.” But, the king announced -- indicating the royal figure’s most important job was to provide balance within the social orders -- while he may love Magnus as a brother-in-law, Charles X would “not put his sentiments for [you] over other lords.”<sup>131</sup> Magnus would not get special treatment from the King. He would be put in charge of the Livonian army in 1655, but when he proved less than capable of defending Livonia from Muscovite and

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<sup>129</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 293, Charles X till Adolf Johan, 22 July 1654.

<sup>130</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 294, Bengt Oxenstierna till Charles X, 5 August 1654.

<sup>131</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 294, Charles X Gustav till Magnus de la Gardie, 19 September 1655.



Lithuanian forces he was fired from his military job and replaced Englishmen Robert Douglas, a *råd* member, who proved his military skill in Poland and Prussia. Douglas's appointment reflected the meritocracy of the Swedish system. Despite being a foreigner and not related to the royal family he was given command of an important front in the war. He succeeded by deflecting Muscovite advances in Livonia and breaking the Muscovite siege of Riga.

This lack of concern about the Polish situation in the summer and early fall of 1654 was in marked contrast to the near obsession that gripped Stockholm in late 1654 and early 1655. In the summer of 1654, Muscovite forces were battering Smolensk. Six months later, the entire Polish state seemed on the verge of collapse and the entire southeastern Baltic appeared up for grabs. In December 1654, while the *råd* was deliberating on what to do about the Polish situation, Charles X wrote to his brother that "the Duke of Brandenburg aims to go against us in Prussia." Charles emphasized that his goal was an absorption, or at least a protectorate, of Royal Prussia. "I will do all in my power to limit the Duke's interest in these duchies and the duchies' interest in him."<sup>132</sup> This was an important statement because it sets up much of the action of the next few years from the invasion of Poland to the contentious -- and outright hostile -- relationship with Brandenburg, who coveted Royal Prussia as well. The King and *råd* were of a similar mind. The *råd*, in its due diligence, may have debated the merits of war against Denmark or Muscovy, but the government's first priority was settling the dynastic issue with Poland and the absorption of the protestant cities of royal Prussia.

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<sup>132</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 296, Charles X to Johan Adolf, 9 December 1654.

During the Fall 1654 the Polish situation continued to deteriorate. Commissioner Lilienthal's report of the situation, which arrived on 23 November, was "a devastating description of the chaos, dissensions and military weakness" of Poland.<sup>133</sup> Muscovite armies had descended into Polish Ukraine. The Muscovite Czar's forces laid siege to Smolensk. When the city surrendered, "the Russes, contrary to what was capitulated, killed men, women and children in the most barbarous and inhuman cruelty as can be imagined." There were even reports of barbarity against the bodies of the dead.<sup>134</sup> The sudden implosion of Poland and its apparent unwillingness to defend itself endangered the Swedish imperial provinces by encircling Riga. "Equally alarming was a possibility of a Muscovite advance into Royal Prussia, culminating – in the very worst case – in the taking of Danzig and its consequent control of all the trade that flowed down the Vistula."<sup>135</sup>

It was in this climate that Charles X called a meeting of the *råd* in December 1654 to discuss Swedish responses to the Polish situation. In these discussions and debates the *råd* strove to build a consensus of action that the King could then take to the *riksdag* in order to gain public support for any decision. Consequently, the *decemberrådslagen* was an important example of the inclusive nature of Swedish decision-making and the corporate responsibility created by the political system. The *decemberrådslagen* was the first step in a process, rational and diffuse, which led to the war in Poland and everything that came after.

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<sup>133</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 108.

<sup>134</sup> *SPJT*, 16 December 1654, vol. 3, 26.

<sup>135</sup> Roberts, *Oxenstierna to Charles XII*, 103.

Nearly all of the principal actors of the Swedish political system met in one place to discuss the concerns, needs and worries of national security. These men would scatter during the war to assignments all over the Empire. Several would never return to Sweden once the war began. These discussions were examples of the ways in which an Early Modern State and the Swedish constitutional system, in particular, debated and prioritized the needs of the State. The *decemberrådslagen* not only showed in stark terms the concerns of the State and its leading figures but also the constitutional strength of the Swedish system. This was quite at odds with the contemporary feelings about states and wars. Patrick Gordon, the Scottish mercenary who started in Charles X's service and ended his career as one of Peter the Great's foremost generals, blamed the war on Charles X's personal adventurism and the need of a new king to achieve some grand glory.<sup>136</sup> Samuel Pufendorf wrote "it can not be denied he was indispensably obliged to prepare himself and take up arms not only lest the courages of so many brave officers would droop by too much ease and that was obscure the luster and glory of the Swedish nation."<sup>137</sup> Even some of the Councilors admitted that the Sweden might need a good war because the "armies are aging, our generals are getting old; and we know from the scantiness of our resources and the warlike temper of our nation what it was that prompted the ancient Goths to other lands. Such reasons as these – if the cause be good – are arguments enough

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<sup>136</sup> Patrick Gordon, *Passages from the Diary of General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries: A.D. 1635-A.D. 1699* (New York: Printed For The Spalding Club, 1859), 25.

<sup>137</sup> Samuel Pufendorf, *The Compleat History of Sweden*. (London: Elephant at Charing Cross, 1702), 560.

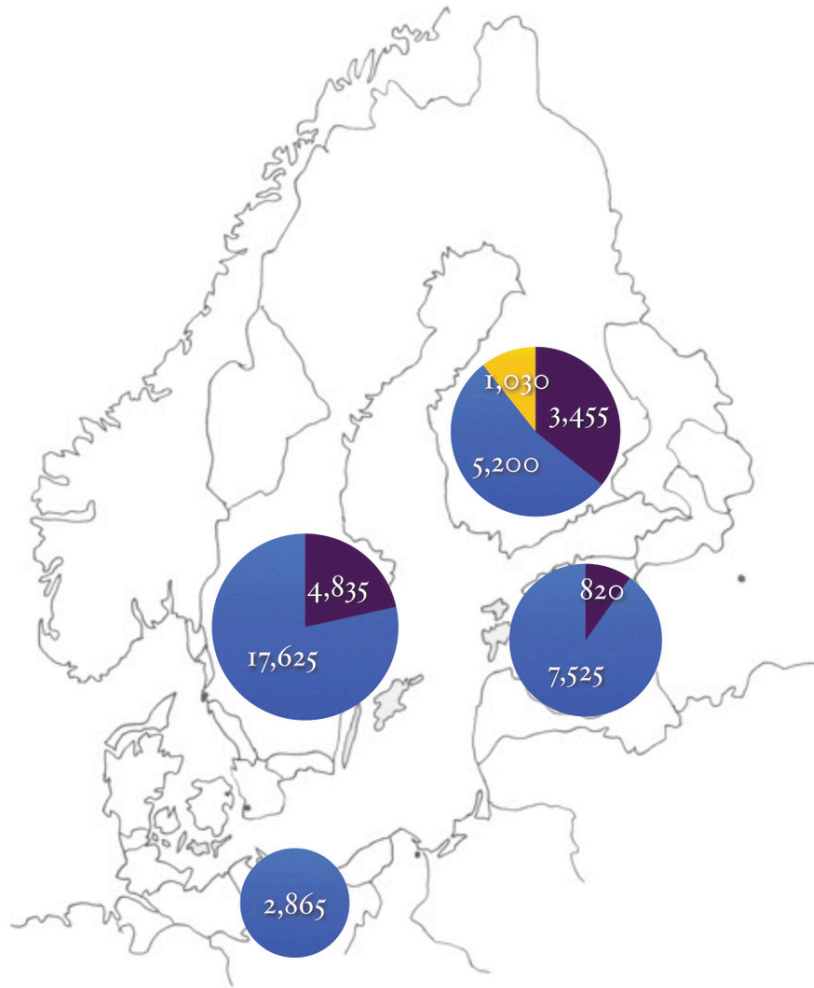
for arming.”<sup>138</sup> There was a popular notion in the sixteenth century that a country needed a good war every so often to keep its army from getting rusty.

It is important to note the corporate nature of the body and its discussions. Not all members were present, nor were the same members present at each meeting. In all of the meetings, less than half of the membership was present. This reflected the dual nature of the institution and its membership. Because of the prominent position given to Councilors in the *Form of Government*, many of the members were out of the country as governors, others as generals and admirals, still others as ambassadors. Roberts’ argued that Charles’s *råd*, as an institution, was not large enough to fulfill its roles as a deliberative body *and* as the bureaucratic leadership. Importantly, it worked as a singular body aiming to create a consensus.

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<sup>138</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 166.

Distribution of Swedish Troops: June 1654



Region	Total Troops	Percentage of Total
Sweden:	22,460.	52%
Finland:	9,685.	22%
Baltic:	8,345.	19%
Pomerania:	2,865	7%
Total:	43,355	76% Infantry 21% Cavalry 2% Dragoons

It did not work as a democratic or republican body where each member strenuously spoke his personal opinion. Instead, the *decemberrådslagen* was held as an academic debate where the pros and cons of different actions are discussed by different members of the body. The purpose was not for each member to express his personal opinion but for the body to reach a singular conclusion to the questions and then, as a body, present the answer to the Crown. The Principals of the government (Erik Oxenstierna, Per Brahe, Gustav Bonde, Herman Fleming and others) were consistently present and formed the backbone of the political and military hierarchy during the war.

### ***Decemberrådslagen***

Charles X convened but did not appear at the council meetings. The purpose was for the councilors to debate the issues, on their own, and come to some kind of consensus. Instead, the meetings began as academic debates; councilors were selected to present a position (war with Muscovy, for example), regardless of their personal feelings. Other councilors would then interject, add their own opinions, and the debate would change direction. Issues of seniority, position, and tradition dictated much of the proceedings. Per Brahe, the eldest councilor in the *råd*, dominated much of the discussion. Erik Oxenstierna, Charles X's chancellor, spoke on behalf of the king and constitution. Oxenstierna was very keen to point out when the debates crossed from *råd* jurisdiction concerning "advice" into the *riksdag's* jurisdiction of legitimizing actions.

Charles X asked his councilors to answer three questions:

1. Did the situation in Poland “demand” a mobilization of Swedish forces?
2. Should the arming be directed towards the “Eastern Crises?”
3. Should the mobilization of forces be offensive in nature or should it be to strength the defenses of the realm?<sup>139</sup>

Minutes of the first days discussions are no longer extant. By the second day the *råd* had answered the first question. The military collapse of Poland forced Sweden to have to mobilize its troops. Erik Oxenstierna conceded, “We have resolved...to mobilize and indeed in the present circumstances it is inevitable.”<sup>140</sup> Jacob de la Gardie argued that “the need is so great that the King must arm.”<sup>141</sup> Bengt Skytte agreed, “We should counsel His Majesty in view of the dangers of the moment to provide himself with a considerable force.”<sup>142</sup> Mobilization was a two step process: the mustering of home-stationed troops and the hiring of foreign mercenaries.

Sweden maintained extensive garrisons throughout the provinces (Pomerania, Bremen, Verden, Livonia, Estonia and Ingria), yet most soldiers of the army were at home working on farms as part time laborers. This decreased the cost to the state to maintain these troops in peacetime, allowed troops to both make a living and helped the local economy through their labor. It also allowed the state to quickly gather professionally trained and experienced soldiers in times of war. Mobilization would

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<sup>139</sup> *Svenska Riksrådets Protokoll (RRP)*, vol. xvi (1654-1656), ed. Per Soden (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söner, 1923.), 2.

<sup>140</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 163.

<sup>141</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 20.

<sup>142</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 168.

immediately muster most of these home-stationed troops but would also transfer their cost to the state treasury.

The hiring of foreign mercenaries was equally necessary part of mobilization but was dangerously expensive. Per Brahe -- the High Steward -- reminded the council that mercenaries were essential to war even “in France who is a powerful and populous kingdom.”<sup>143</sup> To mobilize the home guard and begin the mass hiring of mercenaries was a *fait a accompli* towards war. Per Brahe put the situation bluntly: “For us to raise our militia with six or seven German regiments (for we could hardly hire much less) and let them sit still, is to make war on ourselves.”<sup>144</sup> Leijonhufvud agreed that it was “out of the question that we can assemble any really imposing army without recruiting foreign mercenaries.”<sup>145</sup>

Herman Fleming, the treasurer, reminded the members “when we look at the country’s finances...the wisest thing is to avoid war if we possibly can,” but acknowledged the problem in Poland saying “yes, I approve of arming.”<sup>146</sup> Fleming thought “we should attack the Russians because of the situation in Poland.”<sup>147</sup> Per Brahe reminded the members “how profitable the wars have been to us.”<sup>148</sup> Arvid Wittenberg, soon to be a Field Marshall, acknowledged that during the Prussian War of the 1620s the capture of the medium sized town of Pillau “gave us the means to

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<sup>143</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 29

<sup>144</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 5.

<sup>145</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 168.

<sup>146</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 167 and *RRP*, vol. xvi, 24.

<sup>147</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 167-168

<sup>148</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 31.



maintain the militia” by itself.<sup>149</sup> It went without saying that the Prussian tolls in the 1630s had funded the invasion of Germany. It was also understood that the end of the Prussian tolls in 1635 coincided with the collapse of the Swedish position in Germany and the “Nördlingen slaughter.”<sup>150</sup>

This is how much of the conversations and debates transpired. The councilors fluidly changed topics from arming and mobilization to attacking one country or the other. The very act of raising troops meant that the armies, once formed, would have to be exported to a war zone to live off someone else’s land. It was prohibitively expensive to maintain troops as a purely defensive force. This thinking was compounded by the fact that foreign wars had been good for Sweden and that all the men debating the policy had been beneficiaries, in one way or another, of the imperial experience.

Of course, the estates would have to approve a declaration of war and the exportation of the army to the continent. Oxenstierna spent parts of every day reminding the members that the discussion was not about war but only mobilization; “to advise the beginning of a new war [required] the consent of the Estates.”<sup>151</sup> This reflected the inclusionary nature of the Swedish system. The estates would have to be gathered, consulted and give their approval before Swedish soldiers could go abroad. The estates had approved of every major royal initiative since the days of Gustav Vasa; if Charles X thought war was necessary, and his council already felt the

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<sup>149</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 20.

<sup>150</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 31.

<sup>151</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 169.

fiscal-military situation made war a certainty, then the estates would likely give their consent.

### **War Against Whom: Denmark, Muscovy or Poland?**

The next question Charles had asked the council to consider was if the army should be used in the east (against Poland or Muscovy), indicating there was a possibility of using the Polish-Muscovite war as cover to settle some scores with Denmark. Carl Gustav Wrangel, the admiral and Field Marshal during the Thirty Years War who defeated the Danes at the naval battle of Fehmarn, noted that “between us and [the Danes] there is a natural hatred. They have always searched for an occasion to hurt us.”<sup>152</sup> Wrangel felt the danger from Denmark was unique since “[Denmark] is so situated to hurt us very much; and can invade us.”<sup>153</sup> Gustav Bonde, the future ambassador to Cromwell and negotiator at Roskilde, said that Denmark “was not arming but, all the same, they are steadily building up their navy and it is already quite formidable.” Additionally, “Denmark’s alliance with Holland is directed against us,” because the Danes were “jealous” of Swedish control of Baltic ports and the “Dutch are jealous of our power and increasing trade.”<sup>154</sup> Erik Oxenstierna conceded “we always have good reasons for a war against Denmark.”<sup>155</sup>

The Danish option struck a cord with many of the councilors. Denmark was the natural and traditional enemy. With its navy, control of Norway, and territories on

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<sup>152</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 3.

<sup>153</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 3.

<sup>154</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 164.

<sup>155</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 19.

the lower Scandinavian Peninsula, Denmark threatened Sweden's existence. The Danes had recently been humiliated in the 1643 war but with control of the *Sound Passage*, and the subsequent tolls of ships entering and leaving the Baltic, it was unlikely Denmark's kings would accept being eclipsed by a former province. Between 1636 and 1640, the Sound Dues tolls brought in over two million riksdallars to the Crown of Denmark.<sup>156</sup>

There existed a long standing dream for Sweden gaining control of the *Sound Passage*. Axel Oxenstierna argued in 1640 that "the Dane holds the Sound and therefore the key to our progress."<sup>157</sup> Charles X would even attempt its conquest in 1658-1659. Eliminating Denmark solved several problems at once. The capture of the *Sound*, the taking of Skåne, and the subsequent tolls on shipping would not only eliminate the Danish threat but would pour hard currencies into the Swedish treasury. Per Brahe confidently mused "it would be a good thing to dispose of Denmark once and for all."<sup>158</sup>

Yet there were problems with that plan. Brahe noted: a just cause, Danish allies (i.e., the Dutch), the German Reaction (especially the reaction of the Emperor), and "the inconvenience and the expense."<sup>159</sup> Eliminating Denmark ran afoul of the western powers. Brahe himself noted "Denmark has many friends [Germany, England, Holland], none would wish to see her ruined."<sup>160</sup> Brahe focused

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<sup>156</sup> Charles Hill, *The Danish Sound Dues and the Command of the Baltic*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1926), 115.

<sup>157</sup> Hill, 124.

<sup>158</sup> RRP, vol. xvi, 3.

<sup>159</sup> RRP, vol. xvi.3.

<sup>160</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 164. and Roberts, *SGP*, 166.

on the role of the Dutch. “Holland will not help in an attack on Denmark for they pay the tolls” and the Dutch were unlikely to sit idle to such a dramatic change in the Baltic.<sup>161</sup> When Charles X tried to obliterate Denmark in June 1658 the international community immediately organized against it. France and England sent negotiators to end the dispute (and keep Denmark extant) while the Dutch sent a fleet sweep the Baltic of Swedish shipping and reinforcements. Gustav Bonde remarked bluntly “our fleet will not best the Dutch and Danish fleets,” and he reminded the Councilors of the difficulty of the 1640s war when they had Dutch naval support.<sup>162</sup> War against Denmark, for which there was much support in the debates, was ultimately considered too hazardous to risk in 1655.

A Muscovite war was likewise both advantageous and problematic. The Danes were the traditional threat but by 1654 Sweden was clearly the superior of the two. Muscovy, on the other hand, was a rising power who possessed so much *potential* strength that the councilors were increasingly worried about its intentions. The sudden Russian advance in Poland was of great concern to the Councilors. Poland had seemingly collapsed under the pressure and now Russia might advance as far as the coast and might, “in the very worst case scenario” might take Danzig.<sup>163</sup> Gustav Horn, Governor-General of Livonia, was ordered on 9 September to “take all necessary steps, not to be ‘constrained by any concern’” to protect Livonia from the Russians. It was the same day that the Lithuanian army was destroyed at

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<sup>161</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 17.

<sup>162</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 18.

<sup>163</sup> Roberts, *From Oxenstierna to Charles XII*, 103.

Szepelewicze, leaving all of Lithuania open to Russian advance, all the way up the Duna River to Riga.<sup>164</sup>

Per Brahe was an early proponent of the Russia-Now school. “Russia is now so terrible,” he told the Councilors, “so powerful in money and men that we can well understand his attack on [Poland] and on [us].”<sup>165</sup> Worse, it appeared the Czar was intent on using his military power in scary and unpredictable ways. “[The Czar] began such a war” Brahe continued, “for a small and insignificant thing. This must give us pause.”<sup>166</sup> Muscovy invaded Poland-Lithuania ostensibly as the protector of the Ukrainian Cossacks, who happened to be vassals of the King of Poland. The real goal was to regain land lost in the wars of the 1630s. This Muscovite recovery plan was a direct threat to Sweden’s Baltic possessions. Brahe pointed out that the “pretension the Czar advances against Poland [the recovery of traditional lands] are pretensions which he also advances against us.”<sup>167</sup> Brahe, by far one of the oldest and most experienced men on the council, reminded the younger members of the council that if the Czar wished to reclaim all the lands which once belonged to Muscovy there was the entire Baltic coast from Finland to Riga which might fall under that definition.

To many, a Russian war seemed inevitable. It was better, in this argument, to strike them now while Sweden held a qualitative advantage than to wait for Muscovy to catch up. Carl Soop, unimpressed by Muscovite quantities, advocated “letting rip

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<sup>164</sup> Roberts, *From Oxenstierna to Charles XII*, 107.

<sup>165</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 5.

<sup>166</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 5.

<sup>167</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 166.

against the Russians.”<sup>168</sup> Bonde agreed that “when one considers the Russian, one now knows of his great advantage, his nature, his great ambition,” which Bonde plainly states was “to have a foot in the Baltic.”<sup>169</sup> Magnus de la Gardie agreed “we must direct our thoughts to the quarter where the danger is the greatest and it is argued that it is greatest on the side of Russia.”<sup>170</sup>

As dangerous as Muscovy had become there was no simple strategic solution. What was the goal of a war with Muscovy? A war against Muscovy without a Polish alliance opened the door to Polish attacks on Livonia. And several Councilors openly worried at the prospect of a Russian-Polish détente.<sup>171</sup> Leijonhufvud, who argued “we should attack the Russians,” feared that in a war against Muscovy “others might want to start something against us if we were at war against Muscovy.”<sup>172</sup> Casimir was unwilling to concede the dynastic issues between the states and the Polish kings had never reconciled themselves to the loss of Riga in 1621. Consequently, Poland would always be a rear action threat even if Sweden attempted to save Poland.

Even if the problems with Poland could be resolved, where would be the territorial gain to make Sweden safer? Where was the fiscal gain to “satisfy” the troops? Sweden did not have the financial wherewithal, as Fleming pointed out, to fight a war without some big fiscal gain. By the end of the discussions the terms *assecuratio och satisfaction* turn up constantly. The questions of security and

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<sup>168</sup> Roberts, *Oxenstierna to Charles XII*, 116. also see *RRP*, 8. Roberts translation is more dramatic and probably strikes a closer chord than a word for word translation.

<sup>169</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 15.

<sup>170</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 165.

<sup>171</sup> *RRP*, xvi, 34-35.

<sup>172</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 165 and *RRP*, vol. xvi. 8.

territorial gain directed the momentum of the armies. On both counts, a Muscovite war seemed to offer little security or satisfaction.

There was the possibility of capturing Novgorod. The Muscovite city lay between Swedish Ingria and Moscow and had been occupied in 1610 and 1611. Yet the land around the city was remote, hard to defend, and not of much fiscal value. Besides, the population was decidedly Slavic and orthodox unlike the Germanic and Protestant Baltic coast. An assault on Novgorod was not considered during the debates. The possibility of a capture of Archangel, in the Russian Arctic, was mentioned once but not seriously considered.<sup>173</sup> The problem of a Muscovite war was that there were no obvious objectives other than the destruction of the Muscovite army which could not achieve both *assecuratio* and *satisfactio*.

Erik Oxenstierna, during a long discussion of 11 December, argued “on the side of Denmark all this [trouble] may possibly be the case; on the other side it *is* the case already.” To Oxenstierna, Poland was the immediate problem that needed to be solved. There were three major problems that justified a Swedish invasion of Poland:

1. Polish collapse against Muscovy and the possibility that Muscovy might gain the lucrative Prussian cities, including Danzig. This would threaten the entire Swedish imperial system, allow for a Muscovite navy in the Baltic, and give Muscovy an incredible economic cudgel with which to batter Poland and Sweden in the future.
2. The continual Polish threat to Swedish control of Livonia and Riga; and
3. John Casimir’s Catholic claim on the Swedish crown.

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<sup>173</sup> RRP, vol. xvi, 15.

The first problem was the immediate cause of the December meetings. The other two were decades old problems going back before many of the Councilors were even born.<sup>174</sup>

The entire eastern crises was founded on the principle that Poland was “too weak to resist the Russian attack for long.”<sup>175</sup> For Skytt the news out of Poland made it clear “Poland is now finished,” and not only might the Russians gain from Polish collapse but “in their total ruin Transylvania and the Tartars might get involved.”<sup>176</sup> Besides, as both Christer Bonde and Per Brahe noted “when perhaps should we get another such opportunity” and that it would be “deplorable to let such an opportunity slip through our fingers.”<sup>177</sup>

The opportunity most referred to was the absorption of Prussia and Courland. Taking the coast would create a land-bridge between Pomerania and Riga while simultaneously pouring tax revenue into the Swedish treasury. With control of Prussian cities in the 1630s, Sweden had invaded Germany and transformed the Thirty Years’ War. Without the tolls after 1635, Swedish arms withered in Germany and the economic situation worsened in the home provinces. Axel Oxenstierna once said during the dark days of the late 1630s, “the Polish war is our war, win or lose. This German war, I don’t know what it is.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Riga was captured from the Poles in 1621. Charles X, for example, was born in 1622. Of the Councilors present in the meetings only Per Brahe had been a commander during the first Prussian war. The Catholic Vasa claim to the Swedish throne went back to Sigismund’s deposition in 1600.

<sup>175</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 165.

<sup>176</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 5.

<sup>177</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 165, 166.

<sup>178</sup> Roberts, *From Oxenstierna to Charles XII*, 31.



For many of the councilors, and privately Charles X Gustav agreed, the prize of war was Royal Prussia. Skytte pointed out that not only was it the “eye of the Baltic” but Prussia was the “bastion for Livonia” and could “hold Poland *and* Brandenburg in check.<sup>179</sup> Meanwhile, he mused in the midst of Swedish glory, “[we could] extend protection to all who asked for it, even all Poland.”<sup>180</sup> Erik Oxenstierna thought mobilization “should cost six, seven tons gold or 1 million [riksdallars]...could we not win it in Poland [and Prussia].<sup>181</sup>

Gustav Bonde, who opposed much of the adventurism in the room, admitted “Yes, one could get Danzig and it would not be undesirable.” But one has to look forward to see what might happen.”<sup>182</sup> He pointed out that the First Prussian war went poorly.<sup>183</sup> The Prussian War in the 1620s turned into a hard slog of a slower moving Swedish army --weighed down by protecting Prussian cities -- unable to crush lightly armed but mobile opposition despite impressive tactical superiority. Much like the 1656-1657 campaigns would become for Charles’s troops.

Wittenberg, the future Field Marshal and leader of the first assault into Poland, commented “we are likely to have a hard time in Prussia,” and wondered to the group “how difficult it will be to raise men in Prussia.”<sup>184</sup> In Germany, the Swedish army had access to large numbers of hirelings. At one point the Swedish

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<sup>179</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 168.

<sup>180</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 168.

<sup>181</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi. 19.

<sup>182</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 29.

<sup>183</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 30.

<sup>184</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi. 20.

core of Gustavus's army was only 25 percent of the total. Prussia, in Wittenberg's opinion, would be different. The mercantile cities had no history of war-making or mercenary activity. It was unlikely that Catholic Poles would flock to the protestant Swedes' banner. Besides, Wittenberg interjected with some historical perspective, "the Dutch would not have suffered [the taking of Pillau in the 1620s] if they had not been in the German War."<sup>185</sup> It was unlikely they would sit back while the Swedes feasted attempted to take the substantially larger prizes of Danzig, Elbing, Marienburg and Thorn.

Furthermore, any invasion would lack surprise. Erik Oxenstierna noted, "the King of Poland knows how interested Sweden is in Prussia."<sup>186</sup> The mobilization of troops and hiring of soldiers was impossible to keep secret. Letters were already flowing into John Thurloe's office in London concerning possible Swedish military action in the east. Casimir would know the war would be for the control of Prussia and would presumably act to defend the cities.

By the end of December, Oxenstierna would proclaim "all members assented that [Sweden] should arm and do it with a view to war between Poland and Russia."<sup>187</sup> A Danish war was off the table, mobilization was approved, and the use of force *somewhere* in the Baltic was agreed to be necessary. There remained the question of whether to fight Poland or Muscovy; Poland had the wealthy prizes worth fighting for but Muscovy was the obvious military threat.

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<sup>185</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 20.

<sup>186</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 29.

<sup>187</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 165.

## **Negotiations or War?**

To get around the problems of a war with Poland yet still satisfy the needs of security and the fiscal goals of the war, the Councilors discussed a political, negotiated, settlement with Poland that would lead to an armed alliance against Muscovy. Perhaps then Sweden could gain fiscally important territory while simultaneously dealing with the Muscovite military problem. Per Brahe said, “If it comes to a settlement...we could come to Poland’s rescue. But if not...it would be best to take the chance and use our opportunity. We could either help her or skelp her according to how she behaved.”<sup>188</sup> Erik Oxenstierna agreed saying [we could tell the Poles] “either agree or you will get what’s coming to you.”<sup>189</sup>

Charles X sent a note on 12 December asking, “since we have to arm, should we give way [settle with Poland] on our points: (1) Livonia, (2) the Crown? Or should we ‘screw up the terms’ to satisfy the mercenaries and provide security that Poland would make no more trouble?” Then Charles X brought up two important points concerning a settlement. If peace was reached and war not decided upon, then the mercenaries and native militia would have to be disbanded with the promised pay, which, Charles X admitted, “would be hard for the crown to pay.” *And* would not the men who signed up for a promised war of glory, honor and gain “feel foolish” and thus make the King of Sweden look foolish?<sup>190</sup> Honor, glory and pride were very important to the men of the Swedish state.

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<sup>188</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 165.

<sup>189</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 165.

<sup>190</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 168.

Charles X was the inheritor of Gustavus Adolphus's mantle and the despondent pamphlet *The Promotion of the Protestant Cause in Poland by the Armies of his Majesty the King of Sweden* (1659) reflected just how disappointed people -- in this case a Calvinist in Prussia -- were if the current king did not live up to idealized images of the past. There was simply no possibility that a soldier-king like Charles X would commit to an action that could have the double effect of humiliating him in the eyes of foreign soldiers -- whom he might need to hire later -- while angering the peasantry for having to mobilized and conscripted them for no perceivable gain.

Brahe noted perhaps Sweden "could secure a piece of land which they could cede, which would be of no great consequence to them, but of great advantage to us."<sup>191</sup> While not explicitly said, the meaning could only be of Courland. Royal Prussia was far too wealthy to be "of no great consequence to them," while Ducal Prussia was technically owned by Brandenburg, who would not let it simply pass over to Sweden. What remained was the coastal region of Courland bordering Livonia. With no great river port, it nonetheless had strategic value. The Duke of Courland had built a small fleet that could come into Swedish possession and Courland itself would become a hinterland to Livonia, extending Swedish control of the Baltic coast to Ducal Prussia and allowing for a future land grab if the opportunity was right.

Still, as Bonde noted, "insisting on security and satisfaction is...to embark on a new war; and we can't decide on that without the knowledge of the estates."<sup>192</sup> Bonde's appeal to the constitution was to remind the Councilors of what they were

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<sup>191</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 10.

<sup>192</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 168.

discussing. In the end the decision for war or peace came down to the Diet and not a room of High Noblemen. And then Bonde voiced what was to be future path of policy. “Be content with Livonia and the Crown. Unite with Poland and turn against Russia which is now the most formidable power and the one which needs watching.” Ominously, Bonde noted, “What would the prospect be [of future success] if Poland were reconciled with the Muscovite and they joined hands to attack us?”<sup>193</sup> Ultimately, the *råd* recommended the king mobilize the army, including foreign mercenaries. Mobilized forces would both increase garrisons and create a mobile field army, and these forces should be directed and concentrated in the east. Negotiations should be conducted towards solving the outstanding problems with Poland to achieve contributions towards paying the troops, an acknowledgement of rightful Swedish ownership of Riga, and the end of any Catholic Vasa claim on the Swedish throne. Finally, Muscovy was the military enemy, but if Poland could not meet the terms proposed, Sweden should take what it wants from the Poles including, most importantly, Prussia.

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<sup>193</sup> Roberts, *SGP*, 169.

## Chapter 4: Preparations for War: Spring 1655

The decisions of the *råd* set off a fury of activity. On 20 January 1655, a month after the the *decemberrådslagen*, Charles X sent a letter to Gustav Stenbock ordering him to Pomerania to put together mercenary regiments.<sup>194</sup> By the end of March, two weeks after the *riksdag* opened debate, Charles X wrote to his brother that he wanted to be ready for action by May. He wanted the “politics” out of the way so “he could join the army.”<sup>195</sup> The politics that remained included convening a *riksdag* to discuss two interrelated constitutional issues: the raising of troops and taxes for a war in Poland and the passing of a *reduktion* -- a royal confiscation of lands donated, granted, sold or awarded to the nobility since the death of Gustavus Adolphus in 1632.

Charles X’s first *riksdag* was called together a mere six months after the previous one. In June 1654, Christina had called the *riksdag* together in order to abdicate the crown and advance her cousin to the Swedish throne. Interestingly, Gustavus Adolphus and Charles X both promised in their Ascension Charters not to “burden” the estates with too many Riksdags.

In Sweden, since the days before independence, the *riksdag* legitimized the monarchy’s policies and provided the resources to turn those policies into action. What made the Swedish parliament unique in Europe was that it included the peasantry as a fully independent part of the institution. Surprisingly, this composition of four estates allowed the Crown to be far more active in its foreign policy. The lower estates desired a strong monarchy to support the structure of the

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<sup>194</sup> RA, Rådets Handlingar och Brev (hereafter RHB), box. I, vol. 20, folder 35, Charles X till Gustav Stenbock, 20 January 1655.

<sup>195</sup> RA, RHB. box. I, vol. 20, folder 1, Charles X till Johan Adolf, 31 March 1655.

state and protect their privileges. The elite also desired a strong monarchy in order to protect its own status from the lower estates. Consequently, the Swedish *riksdag* was at once an important constitutional instrument and yet a very passive body willing to follow the protocol of the monarchy. For Perry Anderson the docile nature of the *riksdag*, given its inclusion of the peasants, was a curious happenstance. One would think that the peasantry would be *active and resistant* to the demands of the monarchy like it was in Germany, France and England.<sup>196</sup> Instead, in Sweden's case, the estates consistently endorsed the Crown's expansive foreign policy as a means of allowing the king to protect Swedish farmers and property from dangerous, covetous neighbors.

In this way the *riksdag* became a place to air grievances (as the lower estates did in 1627 and 1650) and demand action by the Crown.<sup>197</sup> It also formalized political conflicts between groups into a non-violent arena.<sup>198</sup> This explains the large number of parliaments in Sweden when compared to continental Europe. Charles X, in five short years, participated in four different *riksdags*. French kings, on the other hand, did not call an Estates-General between 1614 and 1789. In Downing's and Ertman's opinions it was this parliamentary composition that prevented both absolutism and the creation of an aristocratic, oppressive state. Instead, the *riksdag* allowed for a strong monarchy while the state perpetuated local rights and traditional freedoms.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Perry Anderson, 51.

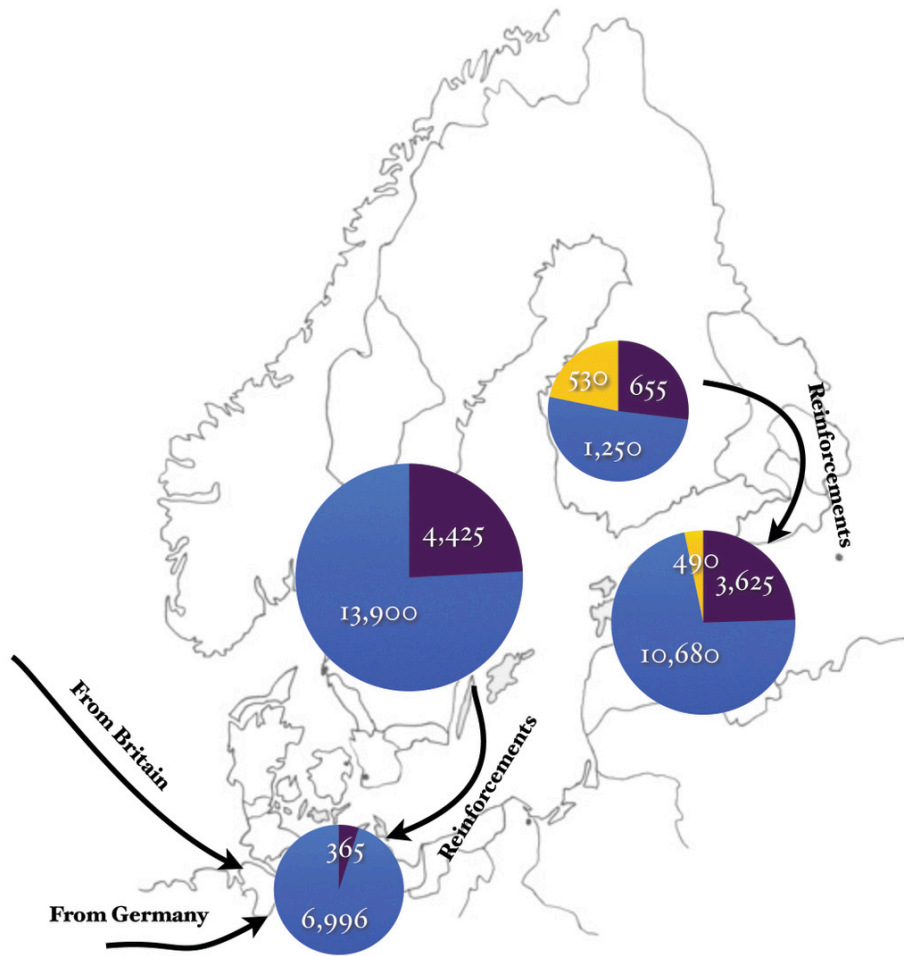
<sup>197</sup> Göran Rystad, "The Estates of the Realm the Monarchy and Empire 1611 – 1718" in *The Riksdag: A History of the Swedish Parliament*, edited by Michael Metcalf (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 99.

<sup>198</sup> Glete, *War and the State*, 193.

<sup>199</sup> Ertman, 314. Downing, 373.



### Distribution of Swedish Troops: March 1655



Region	Total Troops	Percentage of Total
Sweden:	18,325	43%
Finland:	2,435	6%
Baltic:	14,795	34%
Pomerania:	7,360	17%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>42,915</b>	<b>76% Infantry    21% Cavalry    2% Dragoons</b>

## **The Spring Riksdag of 1655**

The Swedish Riksdag called together in the Spring of 1655 was not a perfect representational instrument, nor was Sweden a liberal democracy in the Enlightenment mold. Finland was always underrepresented, as were the imperial possessions, despite their importance to both the manpower and economy of the state. Attendance, especially for the peasantry, was dependent on distance, time and procedure.<sup>200</sup> The peasant representatives who came overwhelmingly represented the wealthier landowners since they could afford the expenses of travel and lodging. The 1655 riksdag was usually given short shrift in the historiography. Neither Pufendorf nor Prade referred to it all in their contemporary histories. Neither Issacson nor Bonneson spent any time on evaluating the råð or riksdag. Anna Forsberg reflected the opinion of many twentieth century historians, arguing the Diet endorsed a war that had already begun. Yet the importance was not in their decision whether or not the war had already begun. The importance of the spring *riksdag* was that it was convened. In very few, if any, states in Europe did a king feel obliged to ask his subjects' opinions on war, finances or much of anything else.

On 12 March, Charles X opened the *riksdag* with a long speech laying out the problems, national and dynastic, Sweden faced. Charles X was emulating his uncle who “agonized to a surprising extent about the legitimacy of war.”<sup>201</sup> Charles X's interaction with the estates belied the same concern with legitimacy. When Bishop Laurelius spoke that one does not go to war “for title's sake” Charles responded that

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<sup>200</sup> Michael Metcalf. *The Riksdag: A History of the Swedish Parliament*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988.), 95.

<sup>201</sup> Roberts, *SIE*, 19.

the war was not a personal conflict between himself and John Casimir, the king of Poland whose grandfather had been deposed from the Swedish throne, but “an effort for the safety of the country.”<sup>202</sup> Charles X went to pains to emphasize the political situation, in both the abstract and the particular, emphasizing “there is a sense of great danger to the fatherland from one side or the other.”<sup>203</sup> Charles X cited that the Crown had searched for treaty without success, there was a risk to the German provinces, and Poland had always searched to harm Sweden in dangerous times. Charles X, expressing the strategic dilemma of the moment, later told the estates, “Muscovy has searched for reasons against us. He wants Ingria and a foot in the Baltic. If he has the chance, he will not sit still.”<sup>204</sup>

Charles X increasingly saw war as the primary solution to the problems. When Consul Holm, the burgomaster of Stockholm, proposed a series of requests: examine all the causes of a war (essentially slowing down the decision-making process), then search for an amicable solution to the problem, and finally, at least, “keep the king home.”<sup>205</sup> Yet Charles, a military man of a martial family, was determined to go off to war. On 20 March, Erik Oxenstierna opened the proceedings by telling the estates the king was planning on going to the regiments to lead the army in the field.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Forsberg, 123.

<sup>203</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 96.

<sup>204</sup> *RRP*, xvi, 97.

<sup>205</sup> B. Taube, ed., *Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdags-protokoll* (hereafter *SVARP*), vol. 5 (1655) series 1 (Stockholm, 1875), 91.

<sup>206</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 82.

At times different estates questioned the necessity of the war. They asked the king to search for peace, to gather more information. “As a question of conscience,” they wondered, “had Poland really broken the peace.”<sup>207</sup> Legally, Sweden had a truce with Poland, since 1635, that would not expire for another few years. If Sweden attacked a distressed Poland, it would not put Sweden in a positive light, especially when Poland was seen as a far preferable kingdom to deal with by the West than a semi-civilized Muscovy. Charles X acknowledged the legalities and the public relations problem: “The proposition [to attack Poland] will cause great apprehension with the Emperor [of Germany], perhaps Holland and perhaps Denmark.” But, he assured the estates, “one must have a firm resolution to take the opportunity presented.”<sup>208</sup>

Increasingly the *råd* members spoke up in support of war in Poland. Erik Oxenstierna pointed out Poland had not been so innocent during the truce: Poland had “helped Austria” during the Thirty Years’ War; it had also “treated with Denmark” in the 1640s while Sweden was at war with the Danes; Poland also wanted to “build a fleet.” Per Brahe argued the Poles hoped “to take Livonia again.”<sup>209</sup> Charles X told the estates that “it is possible that Poland, in this low state, might go under. We have to use this opportunity.”<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Forssberg, 122-123.

<sup>208</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 101.

<sup>209</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 84, 98.

<sup>210</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 97.

All of these issues were taken as truth. “Who is so knowledgeable as the King?,” one noble representative rhetorically asked.<sup>211</sup> It was this general lack of information combined with a common trust of the king which gave the monarchy flexibility in policy. Charles declared “the intention is peace” and promised the *riksdag* that when he received Polish envoys, “one should first search for peace and if they will not approve the terms, then we should go to war.”<sup>212</sup>

### **Contributions and the Reduktion**

The issue of whether or not to go to war passed fairly quickly. A far more entrenched problem concerned the relative contributions to the war effort by the various estates. And very quickly the idea of a *reduktion* dominated the *riksdag*'s discussions. March turned to April and April to May and May to June. Despite its length, the *riksdag* was siding with Charles's policies. In a letter to his brother in May, Charles wrote “my people are in good humor.”<sup>213</sup> But the expectation that he would be going to war by May 1655 would not be fulfilled.

Both the Burgher and Peasant estates emphasized their poverty from paying previous extraordinary taxes over the last few years.<sup>214</sup> The peasant estate told the treasury to “first treat with the nobility” because, the peasants feared, if the Crown received donations from the lower estates first the nobility “will not let go of their rights and will stand fast in their privileges.” Oxenstierna assured them “the king will

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<sup>211</sup> Forssberg, 123.

<sup>212</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 241.

<sup>213</sup> RA. RR. Huvudserie, vol. 306, Charles X till Johan Adolf, 26 May 1655.

<sup>214</sup> Forsberg, 124.

return good favors” and “the people will do well in this affair.”<sup>215</sup> Oxenstierna promised, “It is the intention of these estates to put everything in proper order and safety,” and if the peasants still felt uneasy they could “request His Majesty to judge over [the complaints about local lords].”<sup>216</sup> The peasants, though, held fast. They could not promise anything before the issue of a *reduktion* was settled.

The *reduktion* increasingly dominated the proceedings. The problem was one of financial math. The Crown, since Gustav Vasa’s *riksdag* enacted the Reformation, was cash poor but land rich. Rewards for service were paid out in land grants. Since the death of Gustavus Adolphus so much land had been traded from the Crown to the aristocracy that not only had it affected the fiscal health of the Crown but had a detrimental affect on the Sweden’s inclusionary political culture.

The first calls for a *reduktion* occurred in 1627 but were of secondary concern until the crisis of 1650. The three lower estates demanded a *reduktion*, a resumption by the Crown -- without compensation -- of all the estates which had been handed out during Christina’s regency and reign. By reclaiming alienated and sold crown lands the Queen could “restore the commonality to its proper and normal liberty,” solving, so the lower estates argued, the problems of the realm and the protection of “our liberties.”<sup>217</sup>

The crisis of 1650 emphasized the importance of political inclusion and the importance of inclusion towards the philosophy of the Swedish state. If the

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<sup>215</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 189.

<sup>216</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 227.

<sup>217</sup> *Handlingar til Konung Carl XI:tes historia*, vol. x, 70-98. quoted in *Sweden as a Great Power 1611-1697 [SGP]*. ed. Michael Roberts (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1968.) 101-104.

aristocracy was allowed to dominate the financial landscape it could squeeze the peasants and burghers out of the political landscape. Without the lower estates the Crown would be defenseless against a predatory nobility. The Swedish Crown, without control of a profit center like the Danish kings controlled, might end up like the Polish kings. The *reduktion* was not a declaration of social war. It was a demand for a restitution of balance within the system.

This meant that no one institution could overwhelm the others and instead needed the support and participation of the others in order to maintain its own liberties and powers. The peasantry needed a strong monarchy to protect it from the aristocracy *and* blood thirsty foreigners who wanted to impose slavery and Catholicism. The aristocracy needed a strong monarchy to protect it from the lower estates and from itself meanwhile supply members with indispensable income from government service positions in the bureaucracy. The king needed both the *råd* and the *riksdag* in order to legitimize any bold action of foreign or domestic policy. It is not a surprise then that when the state had vigorous leadership the country seemed to exude efficiency and strength. The surprise of the *Stormaktstiden* is not that a strong king was necessary in creating a strong state, but that Sweden had so strong kings many for so long.

In 1650, the aristocracy feared a social revolt against them and begged for Christina's protection. She squeezed from them, quite unwillingly, their support for Charles Gustav to be made heir. With that ace in her pocket, she then quieted down the lower estates with a series of threats and promises and some indignation that the

estates would think her to be so easily seduced by charlatans and flatterers. She had given out the land after all.

By 1654, Sweden needed the *reduktion*. Charles X came to the throne with the *reduktion* as a major priority. The crisis in Poland made it a necessity. The crown's revenues had fallen dramatically since 1632 and war, especially one requiring the hiring of mercenaries, required a large outlay of cash.

The lower estates again asked for a *reduktion*. This time they had royal support. Charles X had already informed of the high aristocracy of the need for a *reduktion* and the question settled upon what kind of resumption would occur: a full *reduktion* like the lower estates demanded or something less.

The nobility was exhorted to put patriotism before privilege "even by fellow noblemen."<sup>218</sup> And the nobility estate agreed to pay extraordinary taxes for a period of three years: the Estates would contribute 150,000 rixdallars (*rds.*) to the war, and pay a custom duty on copper equaling an additional 130,000 *rds.* From the Estonian and Livonian estates would come an additional 45,000 *rds.*<sup>219</sup> The issue of the *reduktion* dragged into the early summer. Eventually, the nobility, led by *råd* members who had the most to lose in a *reduktion*, brokered a quarter-*reduktion*. One fourth of donated lands would be turned over - plus the peasants on donated lands kept their rights to representation in local and national government. Herman Fleming, a *råd* member, was put in charge of a new College of the *Reduktion*. A supporter of a strong crown, Fleming turned out to be ruthless in his resumption of

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<sup>218</sup> Roberts, *SIE*, 77.

<sup>219</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 141.



land and paid a heavy political price after Charles X's death. Yet the quarter-reduktion poured essential tax money into the state coffers. Charles X's treasury might not compare to the vast holdings of the Sun King but during four years of war the state was never close to bankruptcy and always able to raise credit and resources.

On 25 June 1655, Charles addressed the *riksdag* for the last time; the Spring 1655 meetings now having extended into the summer campaign season. He addressed each estate, as Gustavus Adolphus had done in 1630, separately. To each estate he appealed for unity and strength since he was leaving the country to lead the armies and spoke of their great traditions.

### **Preparations for War**

Even before the *decemberrådslagen* there were preparations for military action. In November 1654, a few weeks before the *decemberrådslagen* took place, Swedish soldiers in Pomerania were ordered to return to Sweden for the winter and Gustav Stenbock, the governor-general of Pomerania, was given an order to hire a regiment of German foot soldiers in order to garrison Pomerania.<sup>220</sup> Later, Stenbock was ordered to buy horses for the artillery, supply and ready Konigsmark regiments of German hirelings, and then prepare Wittenberg to take over command of the army being built in Pomerania. Stenbock was to “provide the Field Marshall with your assistance with the troops.”<sup>221</sup> Stenbock was already becoming a trusted confidant of the king.

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<sup>220</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 295, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 18 November 1654.

<sup>221</sup> RR, RHB, Box I, vol. 20, folder 35, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 19 May 1655, 10 April 1655 and 22 May 1655.

After the *decemberrådslagen*, Sweden seemed to inhale and exhale soldiers and equipment. On 15 December, a few days after the conclusion of the meetings, Hans Konigsmark was commissioned to raise twenty-four companies of Germanic mercenary infantry and two companies of cavalry. In January Charles X wrote that he was “quite anxious that [the hiring of mercenaries] would be carried out and completed.”<sup>222</sup> Patents were continuously sent out to a host of officers to raise troops. Welling was commissioned to hire a regiment in the Swedish imperial lands of Kexholm and Ingria; Kijssell was ordered to raise troops, Henrick Horn and Gustav Klock were sent to command and train regiments in Livonia; Lewenhaupt was commissioned to hire Germanic troops and assemble in Pomerania; Gustav Horn was ordered to organize the conscription rolls in Livonia so that the state was ready to induct peasants into the army after the spring *riksdag*.<sup>223</sup>

During the *riksdag* debates Charles X was involved in the raising of foreign troops and the preparations of Swedish born soldiers. He was very concerned with the order and behavior of troops arriving in Livonia and Pomerania. In a letter to Stenbock in Stettin he wrote “all the men must have good order and the cavalry are not to give any insolences to Brandenburg’s people [as we cross Brandenburg on our way to Poland].” He continued that the foreign troops “must take as an example our Swedish troops who appear to be best behaved when stationed outside our great cities.”<sup>224</sup> To Wittenberg, Charles X sent a thank you for “finding the army’s good

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<sup>222</sup> RA, RR. Huvudserie, vol. 297, Charles X Gustav to Konigsmark, 20 January 1655.

<sup>223</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i Konzept, vol. 138, Charles X Gustav to Erik Oxenstierna, 13 and 18 January, 13 January, 24 January, 30 January, 23 January 1655.

<sup>224</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 298. Charles X to Gustav Stenbock, 20 March 1655.

contentment.”<sup>225</sup> On 14 April Wittenberg was given full command of the German troops assembling in Pomerania. He was to “organize and discipline the new recruits.”<sup>226</sup>

Charles continued to direct action throughout the spring, but left much of the enactment to trusted lieutenants. Phillip, the German Duke of Sulzbach, was given a patent to raise German troops; Gustav Baner raised two companies of cavalry in Uppland and Småland.<sup>227</sup> Aschenberg was given a commission to raise Germanic cavalry while Toll was commissioned to raise four companies in Livonia (Aschenberg was later commissioned to raise more troops in June and then again in August)<sup>228</sup> This continued through the spring and summer and even the Duke of Hamburg, George the Younger, was commissioned to raise regiments of infantry and cavalry.<sup>229</sup> Gustav Horn was sent to Riga to organize and train regiments in Riga.<sup>230</sup>

In England Peter Coyet arrived with a request to hire between 6,000 and 7,000 Scots and create an Anglo-Swedish alliance to oppose any Danish and Dutch involvement in the Baltic.<sup>231</sup> Coyet was followed by Cromwell's son-in-law, George Fleetwood, who argued to a hesitant Cromwell that allowing the Swedes to hire

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<sup>225</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 299. Charles to Wittenberg, 23 June 1655.

<sup>226</sup> Lars Tersmeden, “Carl X Gustafs strategi i kriget mot Polen 1655” *Militärhistorisk Tidskrift* vol. 2 1980, 16.

<sup>227</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i Koncept, vol. 141, Charles X Gustav to Erik Oxenstierna, 5 March 1655, 23 March 1655.

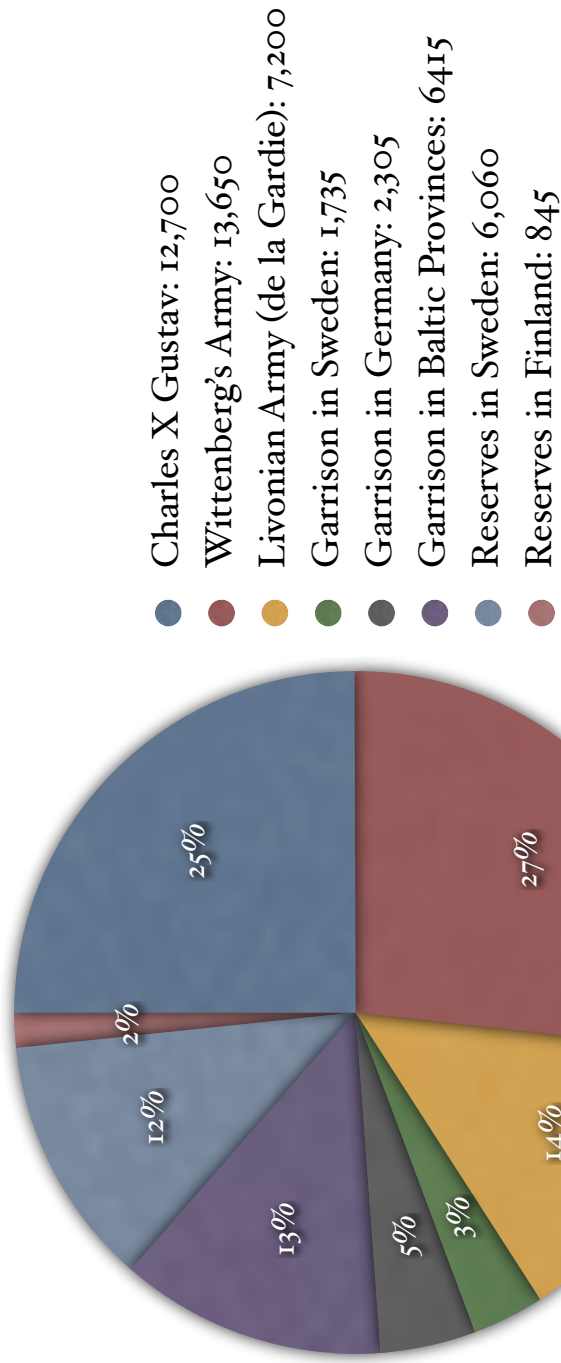
<sup>228</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i Koncept, vol. 142, Charles X Gustav to Erik Oxenstierna, 14 April 1655, 27 April 1655.

<sup>229</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i Koncept, vol. 147, Charles X Gustav to Erik Oxenstierna, 9 September 1655.

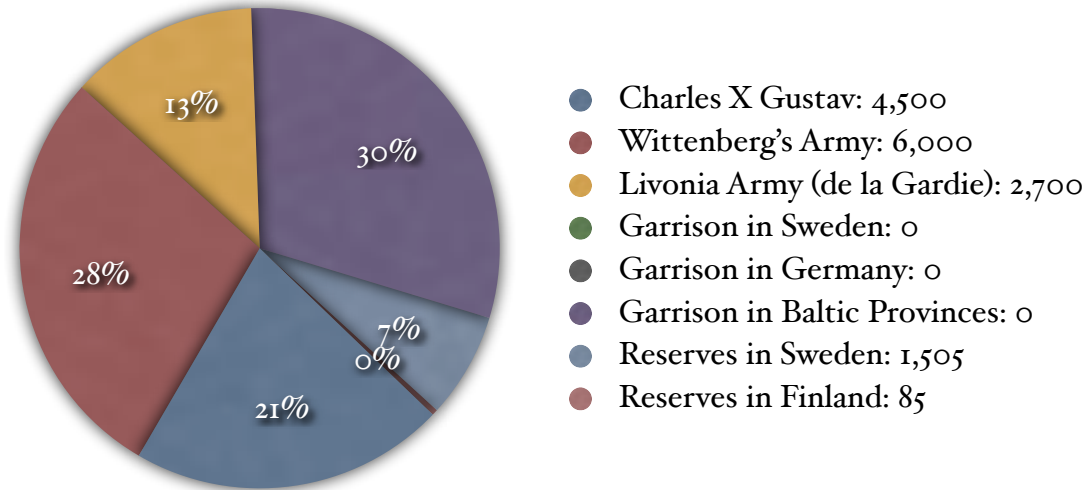
<sup>230</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 16. Charles X Gustav to Gustav Horn, 7 April, 1655.

<sup>231</sup> Roberts, *Diplomats in Cromwell's Court*. 46.

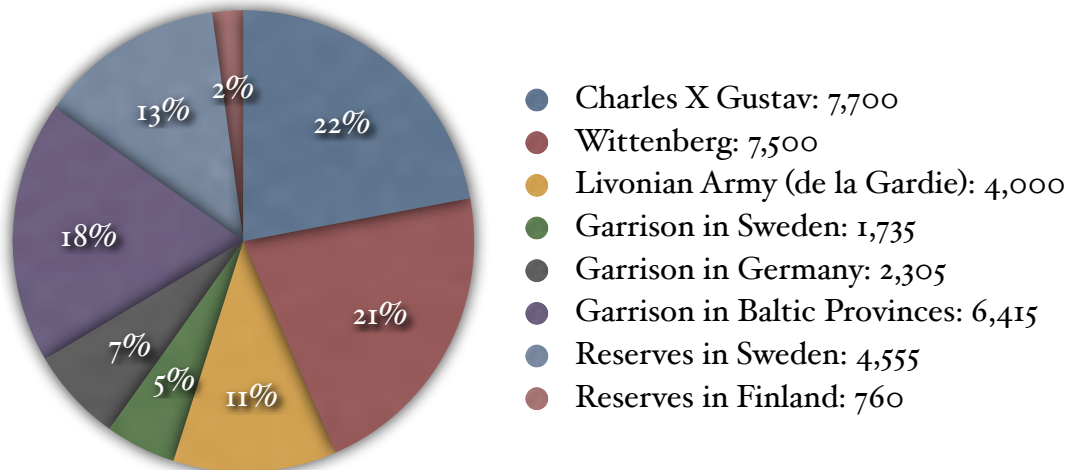
### Swedish Force Distribution on the Eve of War with Poland



### Distribution of Swedish Cavalry on the Eve of the Polish War



### Distribution of Swedish Infantry on the Eve of the Polish War



thousands of firebrand Scots for service in Prussia would make Scotland more politically stable.<sup>232</sup> Cromwell eventually allowed the hiring of a few thousand mercenaries and, for the first time, Britons even joined a foreign navy in large numbers allowing for a quick expansion of Swedish shipping capacity.<sup>233</sup>

Ambassadors were also scattered to the corners of Europe in order to gain friendships, hire soldiers and gauge potential enemies. Gustav Bielke was sent to Moscow and Gustav Bonde went to England to work on an alliance. To Oxenstierna, he wrote about the readiness of particular regiments, commenting “Hammerschilde’s regiment is not complete” enough to be sent to war and needed more supply and reinforcement.<sup>234</sup> Supplies and reinforcements, all paid for by royal credit -- because the *riksdag* had not provided funding for any operations -- came streaming into Pomerania, Sweden and Livonia throughout the spring.

The Swedes were paying as much as four riksdallars per pound for cannon essentially ending the export of Swedish artillery to the continent. One observer complained that if this continued “no one else will have any.”<sup>235</sup> Naval stores including tar, pitch, heavy woods, hemp were also being bought by Sweden from its merchants living in Swedish Baltic ports. The Swedes had a victorious reputation from the Thirty Years’ War and Charles, generalissimo of the armies in 1648, had been generous in his decommissioning of the foreign troops. Infantrymen could be

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<sup>232</sup> Mary Ailes, *Military Migration and State Formation: The British Military Community in Seventeenth Century Sweden*. (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>233</sup> Ailes, 19.

<sup>234</sup> RA. Kungliga brev i Konzept, vol. 142, Charles to Erik Oxenstierna. 28 April 1655.

<sup>235</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 3, 424. (5 May 1655).

hired for six to nine riksdallars per month, cavalymen for about twenty riksdallars.<sup>236</sup> Thousands of men came first to Bremen where they were outfitted and then marched to Stettin where they were assembled, introduced to Swedish discipline, and waited. Eight thousand mercenary troops eventually composed General Wittenberg's 13,650-man army, although Charles X's army and the Livonian army were entirely composed of Swedish and Finnish troops. The force Sweden was assembling was three separate armies: one based in Riga commanded by Magnus de la Gardie, one based in Stettin commanded by Arvid Wittenberg and the royal army, commanded by Charles himself, which would sail to Stettin and then follow Wittenberg's army to Prussia. The armies assembling to wage war on the continent were perhaps the finest military forces Sweden put into the field in the seventeenth century. Arvid Wittenberg Patrick Gordon, a Scottish mercenary in Wittenberg's army, described "the foot well armed and clothed and above all the officers in extraordinary equipage," carrying with them a "gallant traine of artillery."<sup>237</sup> Letters described "the Swede above all other princes in these parts is the most considerable."<sup>238</sup>

Ambassadors were also sent to the Holy Roman Emperor, the Netherlands, France, and Denmark. Rumors immediately crisscrossed the continent concerning the purpose and power of the Swedish force. Charles's request to put the country on war footing during the spring *riksdag* confirmed that Sweden intended on changing the international situation. In April rumors spread in Moscow that the Swedish

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<sup>236</sup> Roberts, *Diplomats in Cromwell's Court*, 257.

<sup>237</sup> Gordon, 19.

<sup>238</sup> *SPJT*, 30 March 1655, vol. 3, 345.

troops were intended for use against Alexis.<sup>239</sup> Others wrote, “some are of the opinion that [the Swedes’] intentions are only against Prussia; others believe they will make use of their opportunity to attack Culick, Cleve, and Berg on their way to Silesia and the hereditary lands [of the Hapsburgs].”<sup>240</sup> In mid-May, English Secretary of State John Thurloe wrote to Henry Cromwell “all the discourse now is concerning the Swede.”<sup>241</sup> Likewise a series of commissions were being granted to officers. On 2 April, Arvid Wittenberg was promoted to Field Marshal. A month later he had postponed his marriage and set sail for Stettin to begin preparations for command of one of the three field armies. Lewenhaupt and Konigsmark were both promoted to Field Marshal, Lind was promoted to full general and Stenbock was promoted to *rikstygmästare*.<sup>242</sup> In June Magnus de la Gardie was promoted to “lieutenant general over the military districts of Livonia, Estland and Ingermanland” giving him command of the forces in the Baltic imperial provinces.<sup>243</sup>

Charles was concerned less with Poland than with foreign intervention in his war. He was especially concerned with the Duke of Brandenburg and the Holy Roman Emperor. To Applebloom, the ambassador to Holland, he wrote “find out what the Duke of Brandenburg is trying to negotiate [with the Dutch] and do what you think is necessary to hold up any accord.”<sup>244</sup> To Wolfsberg, the ambassador to

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<sup>239</sup> *SPJT*, 18 April 1655, vol. 3, 388.

<sup>240</sup> *SPJT*, 5 June 1655, vol. 3 513.

<sup>241</sup> *SPJT*, 15 May 1655, vol. 3, 440.

<sup>242</sup> RA, Skrivelser till konungen. vol. 9, folder 45. Erik Oxenstierna to Charles X Gustav, 2 April 1655, 14 April 1655.

<sup>243</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol, 299. Charles X Gustav to Magnus de la Gardie. 1 June 1655.

<sup>244</sup> RA, Diplomatica Hollandica. box I, vol. 93, Charles X Gustav to Applebloom 19 May 1655.



Brandenburg, Charles X wondered “is there any way to get the Duke’s support. I do not believe he has much to interest the Dutch to war and will not want to fall out of our favor so quickly. Perhaps I could persuade him to our side. Let it be known if he wanted peace I would receive him.”<sup>245</sup>

A month later, Charles X wrote to Wolfsberg telling him that if Brandenburg continued to seek an alliance against him it would provoke him to act.<sup>246</sup> To Wittenberg, then with the army in Pomerania, Charles wrote “my only fear is the Duke of Brandenburg and the Emperor will seek to hinder our designs...Therefore you will have to keep your eyes open...until there is a treaty between Bengt [Oxenstierna] and the Duke of Brandenburg. I know he might make an alliance with Poland. All he wants is free passage and communication between his duchies and the Mark [Brandenburg proper] over the Vistula.”<sup>247</sup>

A possible alliance between Brandenburg and the Emperor was a main concern in spring 1655. To his brother he admitted “the Emperor is giving off angry impressions about my arming...and he has not been pleasant to us nor our happy community.”<sup>248</sup> Charles expressed similar concerns to Stenbock. He wrote that Stenbock and Field Marshall Wittenberg needed to “find out if the Emperor has designs on the Polish prize. If the Duke of Brandenburg is not in league with the Emperor will the Duke fall on the Vistula and try to take Royal Prussia?”<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> RR. Diplomatica Brandenburg. box I, vol. 9, Charles X Gustav to Wolfsberg. 26 May 1655.

<sup>246</sup> RR. Diplomatica Brandenburg. box I, vol. 9, Charles X Gustav to Wolfsberg. 6 June 1655.

<sup>247</sup> RA. RR. Huvudserie, vol. 299, Charles to Wittenberg, 23 June 1655.

<sup>248</sup> RA. RR. Huvudserie, vol. 298, Charles X to Johan Adolf, 26 May 1655.

<sup>249</sup> RA. RR. Huvudserie, vol. 299, Charles X till Stenbock, 23 June 1655.

Surprisingly few letters discuss actual goals of the war. The exception are a series of letters to Gustav Horn in Livonia who was acting, much as Stenbock was in Pomerania, as the governor-general-high commissioner of the soldiers before the Field Marshall, Magnus de la Gardie, arrived.

In a 21 May letter, he bluntly told Horn “I am going [to war - and it seems he means “going” both figuratively and literally] to divert the Muscovites’ march from the [Baltic] sea. A week later he wrote to Horn worried that Sweden might be missing her chance to make gains before the Muscovites grab everything. “Is it to our advantage,” he asked, “to give Muscovy time to continue consuming [Poland-Lithuania] and the time to attack Dunaberg? Can we take Dunaberg without high umbrage or offense to the Muscovites? We do not want them joining our enemies.”<sup>250</sup>

The main concern of the preparation period were with the “contentment” of the armies and concerns about foreign intervention in the war. In 1655 neither issue became much of an issue. The quality of the Swedish armies reading for war in Poland, Prussia and Lithuania was excellent. The armies were well supplied, well armed, well trained and experienced and carried with them a history of victories and successes. No other state wished to stand in the way of these armies; not Brandenburg, the Emperor or even the Czar. By late 1656 the entire axis of those concerns changed. As the armies’ quality declined with its quantity and foreign states actively intervened to thwart Swedish designs.

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<sup>250</sup> RA. RHB, box. I, vol. 20, folder 16, Charles X till Gustav Horn. 21 May 1655 and 1 June 1655.

## **European Reactions in the winter and spring of 1655**

Fiscal expediency forced the Polish war towards accomplishing what Gustavus Adolphus could not do in the 1620s: wrest control of Royal – and even Ducal – Prussia from Poland. If the war was not going to destitute the state's finances a large profit had to be made.<sup>251</sup> The only places with that potential of fiscal ability were the Prussian cities. Problematically, Swedish goals were “not only incompatible with Alexis's goals but also with Fredrick William, who wanted full sovereignty of Ducal Prussia and control of Royal Prussia.”<sup>252</sup> Additionally, the very success, or even the threat of Swedish success caused complications with the Dutch concerning trade policy, Denmark concerning military policy and Austria who “feared [a change] in the German order.”<sup>253</sup>

The mobilization of Swedish troops had an immediate reaction throughout the continent. The King of Denmark, who wanted to control Bremen and Hamburg, was caught “low and without power and dares not to help.”<sup>254</sup> Other observers found the Danes to be “irresolute to deploy the sea” and “afraid of war on land.” Which only emboldened the Duke of Holstein, Charles's father-in-law, to continue his policy of independence from Denmark creating an unacceptable strategic “annoyance” right in the middle of Denmark's home domains.<sup>255</sup> It was clear in the spring and summer

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<sup>251</sup> Floren, 58.

<sup>252</sup> CXGS, vol. 8, 7-8.

<sup>253</sup> CXGS, vol. 8, 8.

<sup>254</sup> *SPJT*, 4 June 1655, vol. 3, 474 and *SPJT*, 12 January 1655, vol. 3, 100.

<sup>255</sup> *SPJT*, 17 August 1655, vol. 3, 703.

of 1655 that the military and political initiative of northern Europe had moved from Copenhagen to Stockholm.

The Dutch, whose “mother trade” was concentrated in the Prussian cities, immediately panicked. The Dutch worried that Charles would “have command of all the trade in the Baltic” and began seeking resolute allies to stand up to the Swedes. First they approached the Danes, who were unwilling to replay the 1643 disaster. Next they approached the Duke of Brandenburg, who controlled two minor ports in Ducal Prussia --Memel and Pillau.<sup>256</sup> But the Duke of Brandenburg had his own machinations and was scrambling to pick up valuable Prussian cities *before* the Swedes got to them first. Even in May, before Swedish armies began marching, Fredrick William’s ambassadors were declaring daily the alarm the Elector had of Swedish ambitions. In Royal Prussia his agents portrayed him as the only one who could stop the Swedes - *if* he had massive military support from the Prussian cities.<sup>257</sup> Fredrick William demanded from the Dutch 200,000 riksdallars, 4,000 Dutch soldiers to serve under his command and “a sufficient and powerful fleet” to engage the Swedes at sea.<sup>258</sup> This opportunism did not sit well with either the Dutch nor Charles X. The Dutch contemplated sending their own fleet into the Baltic. Charles X sent Schlippenbach to inform the Duke of Brandenburg “Sweden will not suffer,” and continued Brandenburg interference.<sup>259</sup> With less than 8,000 troops spread throughout his domains, Fredrick William was in no position to resist Swedish

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<sup>256</sup> *SPJT*, 4 June 1655, vol. 3, 474.

<sup>257</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 3, 424.

<sup>258</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 4, 311.

<sup>259</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 3, 708.

armies.<sup>260</sup> He acquiesced to Charles's demand to allow Swedish troops to cross Brandenburg territory (Hither Pomerania) to invade Poland. During 1655, Frederick William continuously backed down in the face of Swedish force.

Muscovite armies continued to make advance during early 1655. In January, Muscovite armies captured Dunaberg, a Lithuanian city only twenty five miles upstream from Riga. Poland-Lithuania looked finished: the only hope for the Poles is that the "insolent actions" of the Czar will provoke the King of Sweden to save Casimir from "utter ruin and destruction."<sup>261</sup> Muscovite armies were reportedly depopulating Lithuania.<sup>262</sup> Even if the Muscovites did not actively depopulate the territory their mere presence had the same effect. "Muscovite rule was viewed with nothing less than trepidation" as large numbers of peasants fled the Muscovites, who deported thousands. Increasingly, most Polish and non-orthodox Lithuanian magnates believed it was better to be ruled by Sweden than Moscow.<sup>263</sup> Many Poles were convinced the Swedes would help them if John Casimir gave up his own claim to the Swedish crown and Polish claims to Livonia and though Sweden would eventually come to Poland's rescue.<sup>264</sup> But saving the Polish nobility did not resonate with many *råd* members back in Stockholm. "To turn to [the Polish nobility]," one

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<sup>260</sup> Sidney Fay, *The Rise of Brandenburg-Prussia to 1786* (Berkshire Studies in European History. Austin: Holt, Rinehart And Winston, 1967), 51.

<sup>261</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 3, 108.

<sup>262</sup> Prade, 73.

<sup>263</sup> Frost, *The Deluge*, 48.

<sup>264</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 167.

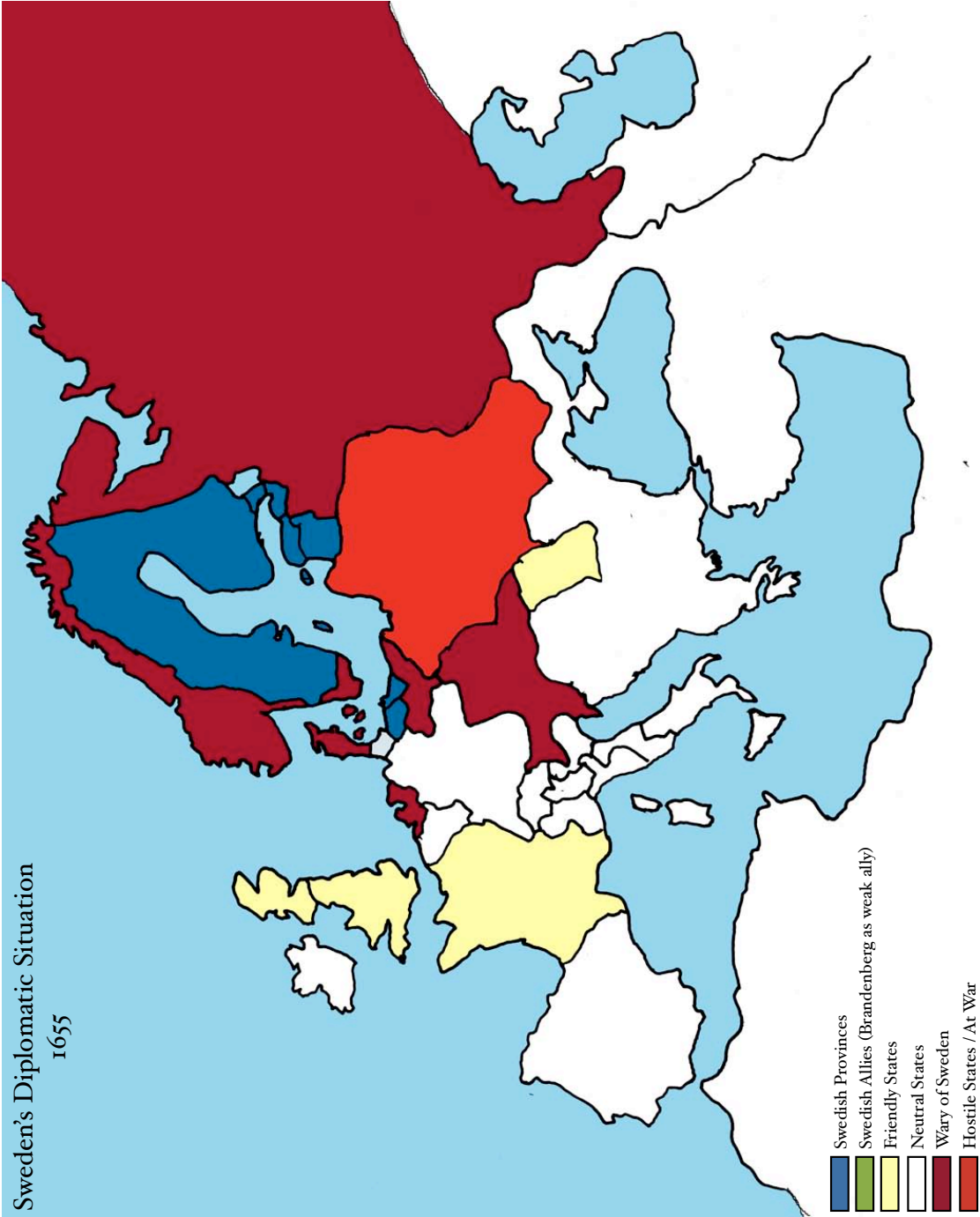
councilor argued in spring 1655, “is disorder and not unity. They are weak. With them nothing can remain stable.”<sup>265</sup>

But as the Swedish armies assembled in the spring and summer of 1655 the very things the *decemberrådslagen* council had worried about seemed to be coming true: Poland was collapsing, it seemed unable or unwilling to save itself, the Prussian coast was vulnerable to conquest and it was far better for Sweden to get the prize than allow Muscovy or Brandenburg to claim the Prussian cities.

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<sup>265</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 259.

## Chapter 5: Swedish Success in Poland and Prussia in 1655





The armies being assembled were perhaps the finest armies Sweden created during the *Stormaktstiden*. Paul Lockhart called the armies of Charles X “far superior to that which Gustavus Adolphus had led in 1626.”<sup>266</sup> These armies were, even taken as a collective, far smaller than the lumbering forces of the Thirty Years’ War. The Swedish armies of 1655 were tight and regulated units composed of soldiers experienced at war and used to victory. All of the Swedish general officers had led troops during the Thirty Years’ War; Charles X, who was responsible for the decommissioning of mercenary forces in 1648, had a good reputation as a generous benefactor. Swedish noblemen like Konigsmark found a ready market of available ex-soldiers in Germany. The raising of the armies had also been relatively easy and relatively inexpensive.

The three armies gathered in Sweden, Pomerania and Livonia. De la Gardie's Livonian army totaled 7,200 men (2,700 cavalry, 4000 infantry and 500 dragoons) and was composed of Finns and Balts. Arvid Wittenberg's force gathering at Stettin totaled 13,650 (6000 cavalry, 7500 infantry and 150 dragoons) and contained nearly all of the continental mercenaries. Charles X's force assembling in Sweden totaled 12,700 men (4,500 cavalry, 7,700 infantry and 500 dragoons) and was composed entirely of citizen-subjects of the Crown. The Swedish forces created for the violent purpose of destroying enemy soldiers in the field and smashing enemy fortifications that were in the way. Fifty-seven percent of the total forces were infantry and 39 percent of the forces were cavalry, most of it was heavy-battle cavalry. This gave the Swedes a qualitative advantage on the battlefield but slowed their mobility in raids

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<sup>266</sup> Lockhart, 96.

and pursuits of opponent cavalry. Additionally, each army possessed a stunning supremacy in artillery.

Wittenberg's force carried 72 heavy guns including several devastating twelve-pounders. The Royal army was even more heavily equipped. Charles's army had 178 "field pieces" and 72 heavy guns, including eight massive 24-pounders that required nearly twenty horses each to move.<sup>267</sup> These were armies designed to smash through any men or fortification standing in its way. One Danish observer reported that Charles X's "formidable artillery contributed a great deal to the power of the Swede."<sup>268</sup> Poland, on the other hand, "lacked artillery and infantry," putting them at a disadvantage should the generals decide to stand and fight.<sup>269</sup>

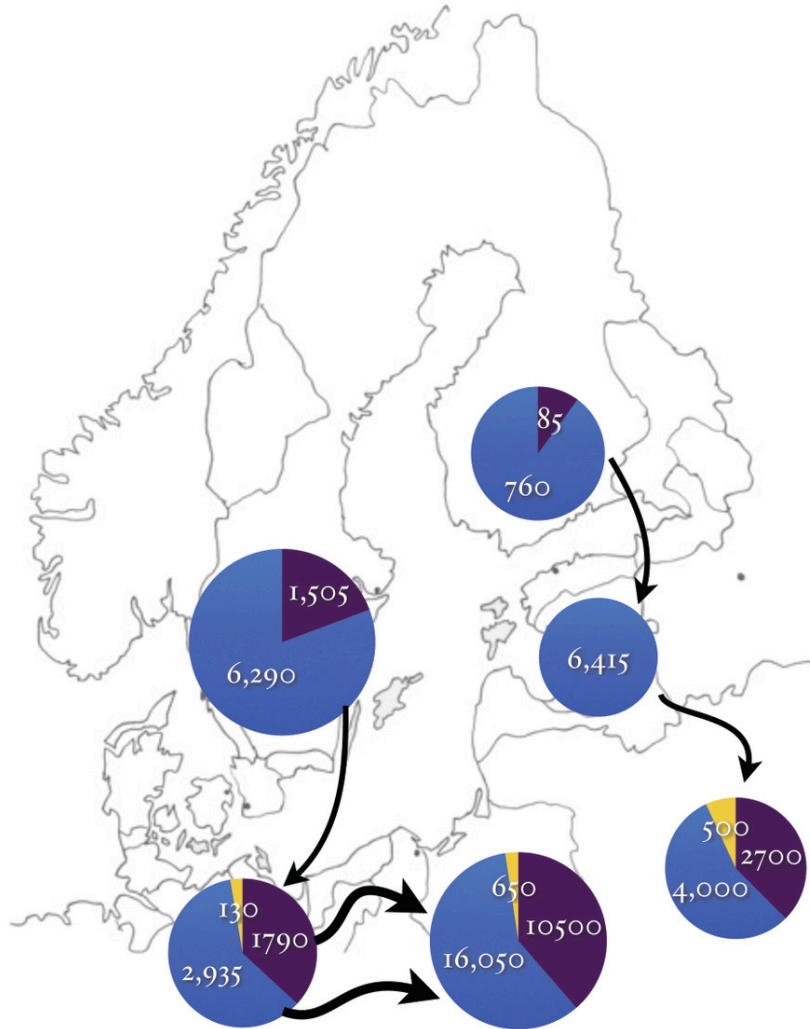
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<sup>267</sup> Hedberg, CXGS, vol. 8. 243, 344-345.

<sup>268</sup> Hedberg, CXGS, vol. 8. 345.

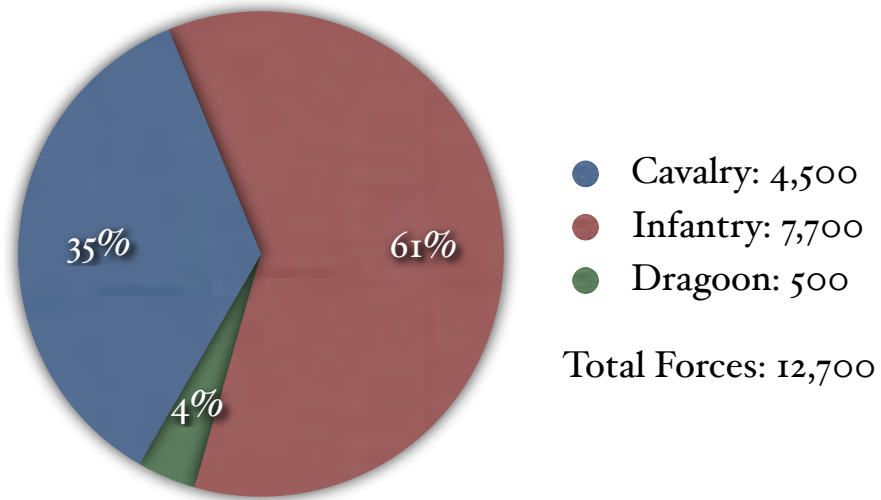
<sup>269</sup> Frost, *The Deluge*, 46.

### Distribution of Swedish Troops: July 1655

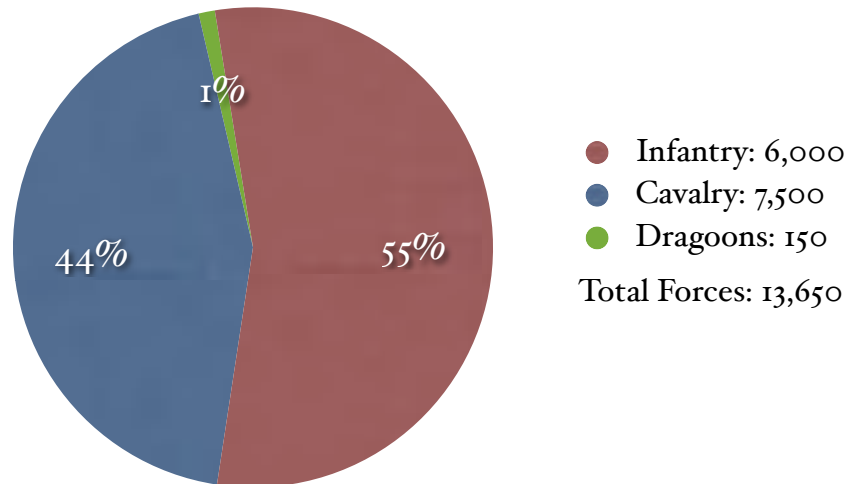


Region	Total Troops	Percentage of Total
Sweden:	7,795.	14%
Finland:	845.	2%
Baltic:	6,415.	12%
Pomerania:	4,855.	9%
Poland/Prussia:	27,200.	50%
Lithuania:	7,200.	13%
Total:	54,310	67% Infantry 31% Cavalry 2% Dragoons

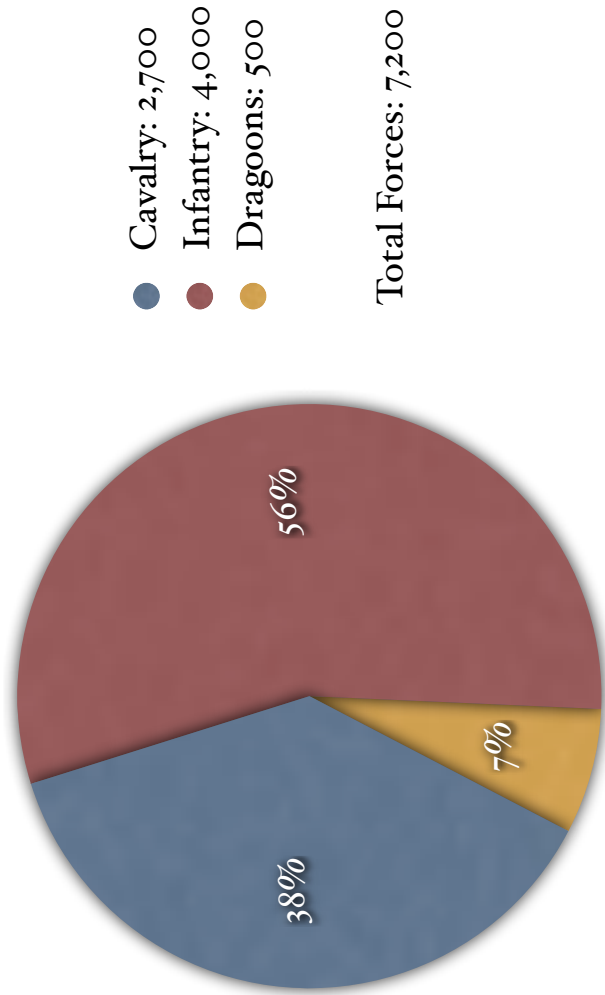
Charles X Gustav's Army Composition: June 1655  
(Invasion of Poland)



Field Marshal Wittenberg's Army Composition: June 1655



Sweden's Army of Livonia: July 1655  
(Invasion of Lithuania)



### **Swedish Success in Poland, 1655.**

In early July, Swedish forces began to move into Polish and Lithuanian territory. Wittenberg's army left Pomerania, crossed Brandenburg territory and then entered northwestern Poland. Wittenberg's place was taken by the assemblage of Charles X's army that had left Sweden by ship and began to assemble in Pomerania. Magnus de la Gardie's army left Riga and headed up the Dvina River. Leaving a small garrison, de la Gardie's force entered Courland and occupied the capital of Mittau, charging the city 300,000 riksdallars "contributions" for the troops.<sup>270</sup> A small detachment of troops then occupied the coastal town of Courland while the main Livonian force marched towards the remains of the Lithuanian army at Kiejdany. De la Gardie was also told to enter into negotiations with Czar Alexis and "get what one can" from the Muscovites.<sup>271</sup>

None of the armies met serious resistance. On 12 July, Magnus de la Gardie entered Dunaberg without having to fire a shot. Polish noblemen, known as palatinates, dealt with the invasion on an individual, not national, level. On 24 July, Wittenberg's army encountered the local levy of noble cavalry and "hurriedly" assembled peasant infantry of the palatinates of Kalisz and Poznan.<sup>272</sup>

The two armies at Ujescie reflected the differences in the political-military structures of the two competing states. Even though the two armies were roughly the same size, the Swedish army was vastly different in its composition. The Swedish force was 60 percent infantry -- with more musketeers than pikemen -- 40 percent

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<sup>270</sup> *SPJT*, 14 August 1655, vol. 3, 707.

<sup>271</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 300. Charles X Gustav to M. de la Gardie, 27 July 1655.

<sup>272</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 168.

cavalry, and carried 72 artillery guns in an assortment of both heavy and field calibers. The Polish levy facing them, from across a river, was 92 percent cavalry and carried zero artillery pieces.<sup>273</sup> The advantage in missile weapons proved decisive: as the artillery scattered the Polish cavalry the Swedish infantry made two crossings of the river. Rather than be routed, the Polish leaders surrendered.<sup>274</sup> The two Polish lords, plus their retinue, joined the Swedish army, agreeing to become “his majesty’s most obedient servants.”<sup>275</sup> The whole host entered the city of Posen, which the Scottish mercenary Patrick Gordon called “the most pleasant city in Poland,” and waited for a rendezvous with Charles X’s army.<sup>276</sup>

The news of the battle and surrender of palatinates was well received. Erik Oxenstierna prayed that the “all powerful God give us favor against the Pole, favor all the realms under the King’s protection and give defense from [John Casimir] who [the Polish lords] have gone against.”<sup>277</sup> The *råd*, upon hearing the news, sent out a letter congratulating the king on his “wonderful and happy progress and beautiful victories.”<sup>278</sup> This happiness led to some exuberance in planning. In the *råd* one of the senators stated, “[W]ith Russia on one side and Denmark on the other it is easy to overexert the army. This is where one provides council” to the king.<sup>279</sup> Some of

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<sup>273</sup> Frost, *The Deluge*, 46.

<sup>274</sup> Frost, *The Deluge*, 46.

<sup>275</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 276.

<sup>276</sup> Patrick Gordon, 16.

<sup>277</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i koncept, vol. 145, Erik Oxenstierna to Charles X Gustav, 27 July 1655.

<sup>278</sup> *RRP*, xvi, 260.

<sup>279</sup> *RRP*, xvi, 259.

the senators were already engaging in thoughts of the next war – before the current one had concluded.

Charles entered Poland with the plan to “grab the Vistula,” create a diversion between Poland and Prussia (so the two areas could not assist each other), “and then go on to Warsaw.”<sup>280</sup> The two Swedish armies combined at Posen on 24 August. In a *memorial* to Wittenberg Charles X explained both his general’s orders and his own plans.

Charles X would head for Warsaw and then Cracow, bringing the “towns up and down the Vistula to the king’s devotion.” Wittenberg was given two goals: “follow after the King of Poland” and “treat with the Palatinates,” while maintaining the “good order and discipline” of his forces. These tasks should be easy to accomplish because “the King of Poland was not drawing noblemen to him and is not as strong as he was before.”<sup>281</sup> Gaining the allegiance of the Palatinates was given a heavy emphasis; “since this expedition can not endure alone by weapons” it was extremely important for Wittenberg, who was given full authority to make any treaty he could in the king’s name, to bring the Polish nobility to alliance.

Charles emphasized the same behavior in letters to de la Gardie. “Give out my protection,” Charles wrote, though he wanted to be informed of the conditions and warned de la Gardie not to give too much away. Charles also ordered his brother-in-law “go immediately with the army, with as much force as you can strike at the enemy.”<sup>282</sup> These twin tactics provided the methodology of 1655. On one side

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<sup>280</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i koncept, vol. 146, Erik Oxenstierna to Charles X Gustav, 16 August 1655.

<sup>281</sup> RA, RR. Huvudserie, vol. 301. Charles X Gustav to Wittenberg, 27 August 1655.

<sup>282</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i Koncept, vol 145, Charles X Gustav to M. de la Gardie. 20 July 1655.



Swedish generals were to do what their armies had been designed to do: search out the enemy, fight him in battle, and destroy the organized resistance to the Swedish invasion. Likewise, Swedish generals were ordered to treat with Polish and Lithuanian nobles; to bring them to agreement. In short, the Swedish aim was to replace, in the Polish nobility's mind, the reign of John Casimir with the reign of Charles Gustav.

Early on in the war these methods seemed to work. In mid-August came news that “the Royal Part of Lithuania and the Prince Radzivil [Grand Duke of Lithuania], finding themselves wholly deserted, have surrendered themselves to Swedish devotion.”<sup>283</sup> The Treaty of Kiejdany (17 August) effectively ended the centuries old Commonwealth between Poland and Lithuania. At Kiejdany, Janusz Radzivil, surrendered to Magnus de la Gardie in the hope of gaining protection from Muscovy. Radzivil promised to supply the Swedish army with Lithuanian supplies, allowed Lithuanian troops to join the Swedish army (as long as they did not fight Poles) and swore fealty to Charles X. The news of Ujscie was taken by Radzivil as “the ultimate betrayal” of Lithuania.<sup>284</sup> To Lithuania, which had been the battle ground of the Cossack rebellion and was now being overrun by Muscovite armies, the Poles proved to be failing cousins. Ujscie was compounded by the fall of Vilno on 8 August to Muscovite forces. The city was sacked, burned and depopulated, leaving little doubt in the Lithuanians' minds about the nature of Muscovite lordship. The Muscovites “continue to spoil the churches and homes...of everything especially

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<sup>283</sup> *SPJT*, 14 August 1655, vol. 3, 707.

<sup>284</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 168. Frost, *Deluge*, 50.

bells and copper.”<sup>285</sup> “Above all,” wrote one report, “the Muscovite is to be feared.” The writer continued that if the Muscovites were forced by the Swedes to leave Lithuania, “[Alexis] will not leave much” for the Swedes to protect.<sup>286</sup> The Livonian army, leaving garrisons along the way, headed for Royal Prussia. Meanwhile, diplomats arrived from the Duke of Brandenburg “with full credit and power” to negotiate an alliance and conjunction of armed forces *against* the King of Poland.<sup>287</sup> By late summer it was becoming clear which way the dominoes were falling.

Late summer witnessed a steady stream of Swedish victories. By mid-August Warsaw already “promised to surrender” to Charles X.<sup>288</sup> In late August, Wittenberg and Charles fought a small battle against Casimir. “Our cannon brought fear, confusion and the running away of the whole Polish cavalry,” Charles X wrote.<sup>289</sup> Following this victory, Charles led a force of three regiments of cavalry and 1,200 men against Warsaw. At Sabata, Casimir stood again and again a Polish charge of troops was “destroyed” by Swedish superiority in artillery. The Swedish infantry then swept the field the Polish cavalry fled.<sup>290</sup> Casimir fled “in great confusion” towards Cracow.<sup>291</sup> A week later, on 8 September, Warsaw surrendered to the Swedes without firing a shot. Instead, they approached Charles X with “plenty of ammunition and

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<sup>285</sup> *SPJT*, 25 September 1655, vol. 4, 36.

<sup>286</sup> *SPJT*, 3, 749.

<sup>287</sup> RRP, xvi, 276.

<sup>288</sup> *SPJT*, 14 August 1655, vol. 3, 710.

<sup>289</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 70, Charles X Gustav to Gustav Wrangel, 26 August 1655.

<sup>290</sup> Prade, 72.

<sup>291</sup> RA, RR, vol. 146, Charles X Gustav to de la Gardie, 30 August 1655.

provisions,” including 50 cannon.<sup>292</sup> Charles was “well received” and called an assembly of the governors, lords and nobility to negotiate the terms of contributions for the army.<sup>293</sup> Then the Swedes set out for Casimir and his capital of Cracow.

Casimir began fighting a series of running retreats but without much success or hope against the formidable army arrayed against him. “If the Polander has but the resolution enough to stand [and fight]...thus all may be over already.”<sup>294</sup> If Casimir did not stand to fight, the Swedes continued to push through his lands, treating with his nobles and absorbing the resources of his cities. Most thought at the time, if he did stand and fight, the Swedish force would crush him. Edward Rolt, an English envoy in Poland, wrote that Casimir himself wanted to fight but his army was composed of only 8,000 men “that are soldiers.” Casimir’s army also contained “uncertain numbers of peasants who know neither discipline nor courage.”<sup>295</sup>

Charles even began formulating plans to call a Diet of Polish lords. The *råd* viewed this as a true comeuppance for the Polish king. “[Casimir] has to ask why the senate has not hindered [Charles X’s] intentions. Therefore it follows – with the wrong head, the body avenges.”<sup>296</sup> The Diet never occurred but left the tantalizing possibility that Charles just might have been elected King of Poland and gained the logistical support necessary to actually accomplish Swedish goals. In the end, it was

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<sup>292</sup> Prade, 73.

<sup>293</sup> *SPJT*, 11 October 1655, vol. 4, 45.

<sup>294</sup> *SPJT*, 1 September 1655, vol. 3, 728.

<sup>295</sup> *SPJT*, 25 August 1655, vol. 3, 736.

<sup>296</sup> RRP, xvi, 258.

the insurgency of the peasants – and the consequential shift in the center of gravity in the kingdom – which destroyed any chance of this counterfactual possibility.

Between Warsaw and Cracow the Poles and Swedes continued to fight a running series of small skirmishes. In one incident the Poles were surprised and “threw themselves into the woods” by night, leaving their artillery and all their baggage.<sup>297</sup> At this point there seemed little hope in saving the Polish state. “We are already destitute of all ordinary means of saving ourselves” worried on Polish lord.<sup>298</sup> Even extraordinary means were not possible. Casimir noted that help from abroad was unlikely and altogether worthless anyway. “If the Poles and tartars fear the crash of firearms, the [Transylvanians] are equally seized with dread.”<sup>299</sup> Casimir was admitting that the Poles simply did not have the same composition as this new Swedish army that seemed to revel in the crash of firearms and artillery. The combination of training, experience and firepower seemed to overwhelm the Poles whenever they stood their ground.

Cracow proved to be Casimir's last stand. A week after the capture of Warsaw, his levies threatening to disband, he stood at Zarnow, outside his capital. The Swedes under Wittenberg had 6000 cavalrymen, 4500 infantry and 40 artillery pieces. Casimir had 6,000 royal soldiers and about 4,000 peasant infantry soldiers. Swedish firepower, infantry and artillery again overwhelmed the Polish cavalry.<sup>300</sup> Twelve hundred Poles were killed, Casimir's bodyguard standards were taken, and the

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<sup>297</sup> Prade, 74,

<sup>298</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 48.

<sup>299</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 67

<sup>300</sup> Frost, 169.

Royal army collapsed. Casimir fled to exile in Silesia with some saying that he planned a comfortable retirement on a French estate.<sup>301</sup> Without the king, Polish noblemen acted on their own; some came to agreement with Charles while others resisted. Poland's throne was vacated. In Silesia Casimir gained the protection of the Emperor. Charles wrote to the Emperor to advise against the Kaiser's intervention. "The King of Poland," Charles argued, "has quit his Kingdom," giving up any authority, title, or help by the international community.<sup>302</sup> It was best, Charles wrote, "for [Casimir] to forget he was ever King of Poland."<sup>303</sup> Hoping to place himself paramount in the Polish political system Charles X ordered his officers to do "what you think is best to gain their devotion."<sup>304</sup> In October 1655, Charles wrote, "I thank God that through all the difficulty attacking me this war moves towards a resolution."<sup>305</sup>

What was left to fight the Swedes was not a unified authority but a collection of provincial and urban centers. Cracow's population readied for a siege. The Poles burned the suburbs of Cracow to impede the Swedes. Guerilla bands began attacking the army. Patrick Gordon reported that General Konigsmark ordered 400 guerilla soldiers hanged.<sup>306</sup> The siege began on 25 September and grew tighter. On 3 October, the Swedes defeated a relief army and on 19 October Cracow surrendered.

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<sup>301</sup> *SPJT*, 4 December 1655, vol. 4, 278,

<sup>302</sup> *SPJT*, 12 October 1655, vol. 4, 64-65.

<sup>303</sup> Prade, 78.

<sup>304</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 55. Charles X Gustav to Stenbock. 3 October 1655.

<sup>305</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 55. Charles X Gustav to Stenbock. 20 October 1655.

<sup>306</sup> Gordon, 21.

The capture of Cracow was celebrated back in Sweden with a day of thanksgiving.<sup>307</sup> The next day in Lithuania, Radzivil signed the treaty of Kiejdany making Charles X Grand Duke of Lithuania. A week later, a Polish army surrendered its 5,400 men, two days later another army of 10,000 men surrendered. Three days later the Swedes and Mazovian levy fought a battle at Nowy Dwor. Again the combination of Swedish infantry and heavy artillery broke the Polish resistance. The Mazovian levy surrendered. In Sweden, the *råd* declared “a thanksgiving shall be held over the whole kingdom” and “thanked God for the favorable progress of the army.”<sup>308</sup> On 28 November, the *råd* members, obviously near bursting with joy, wrote to Charles to announce even more good news. “The queen has gone through childbirth,” they wrote, and blessed the King’s house “with a young son.”<sup>309</sup> Charles, who had come to a crown by unique circumstances and from a small speck of a German duchy, found himself the founder of a new dynasty of one of the Great Powers of Europe.

Charles found himself bestrode a prostrate Poland. In three months time, Charles X conquered “a kingdom of vast extent; nay, he had driven things so far that his coronation was talked about in Poland.”<sup>310</sup> The *råd* reported “the Princes and sires of the realm wrote to the king asking for his friendship and protection, which the king subsequently declared to give.”<sup>311</sup> Charles had accomplished an act of conquest in three months that Gustavus Adolphus was unable to achieve (or even

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<sup>307</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 322.

<sup>308</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvi, 322.

<sup>309</sup> *RRP*, xvi, 349.

<sup>310</sup> Pufendorf, 563.

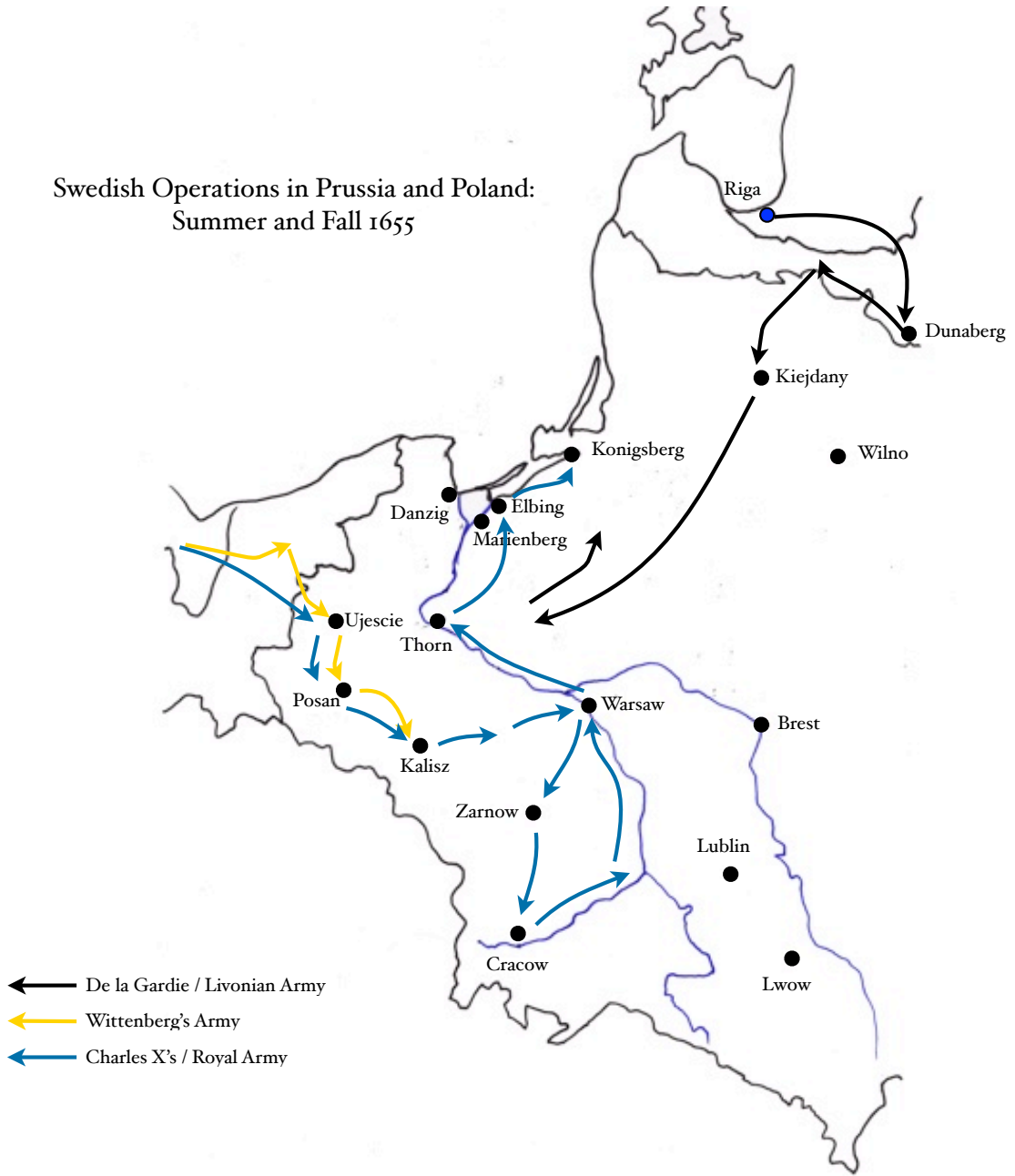
<sup>311</sup> *RRP*, 340.

attempt) in ten years of war with Poland. His forces had fought several battles in both in the East and the West, had followed the Vistula all the way to Cracow and had won every battle. The Polish king had left Poland, the great magnates of both Poland and Lithuania had pledged subservience, and cities greeted Charles's arrival. It was "such progress all of Europe was amazed by it."<sup>312</sup> At every point the Swedish system of military power had proved superior to its opponent. Swedish troops, many of whom were citizen soldiers, occupied Polish and Lithuanian castles and citadels and not the other way around. At this point, having crushed, co-opted or disbanded all Polish opposition, Charles took his army north to gain the real prize of the war: Prussia.

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<sup>312</sup> Pufendorf, 563.

Swedish Operations in Prussia and Poland:  
Summer and Fall 1655





## **Operation Prussia: October 1655 - January 1656**

The next few months experienced the highpoint of the Swedish advance in Poland. With the princes of Lithuania swearing allegiance to Charles X as their “Great Duke,” Casimir having fled his kingdom for exile in Germany, and most of the important Polish nobility willing to accept (or at least not protest) Swedish suzerainty, the future looked bright. Charles wrote to Stenbock that he “thanked God” that events “move towards a resolution.”<sup>313</sup> Others following the armies’ progress felt much the same way. “The Swede being master of [Poland] and marching against Prussia puts the Duke of Brandenburg and the cities in a great doubt to what to do...Most wise men think they will take the law of the conqueror...Holland and the Emperor will have to accept a Poland divided between Sweden, Muscovy, Tartars and Cossacks.”<sup>314</sup> By November, General Douglas was negotiating with the Cossacks to discuss provisions and quarters – in a general agreement of division of Polish territory and military alliance.<sup>315</sup>

There were rumblings of problems. The high costs of maintaining the armies on the march led to complaints and some rebellions among the peasantry. Cities disliked the high cost of the monetary contributions and peasants disliked the loss of their animals, crops and horses. Logistical support was the main problem for armies during the seventeenth century. The state was simply in no position to pay or support large numbers of soldiers on the march because neither the financial nor logistical infrastructure existed. These problems were considered ordinary and of

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<sup>313</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 55. Charles X Gustav to Stenbock. 20 October 1655.

<sup>314</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 4, 133. October 1655.

<sup>315</sup> RA, RR. Huvudserie, vol. 295, Douglas to CXG. 3 November 1655.

little importance. In early September, Henrick Horn was ordered to take some cavalry and “bring the rebellion in the Posen district to an end.”<sup>316</sup> Cities had little choice to pay the contributions since they could not resist a siege, as the fall of Cracow after a mere two weeks proved, and no one, including Charles X, wished to have a wholesale plundering of the urban wealth. Peasant revolts were likewise considered a nuisance. Both would end anyway once the war moved to the wealthier regions of Royal and Ducal Prussia. And once Prussia was taken, the war would be over and the armies might then be disbanded, alleviating the problem all together.

There were problems in international public perception. Charles Stuart, the exiled scion of the overthrown Stuart dynasty, commented, “I hear from Vienna that the King of Sweden is absolute master of Poland. When he is crowned king of Poland, Danzig and the Baltic will be under his government.”<sup>317</sup> Charles Stuart thought the Swedes so successful, and so aligned with Cromwell, that “these two will fill Europe with troubles unless prevented.”<sup>318</sup> The Hapsburg Emperor called a meeting of his princes to discuss an imperial response and a need for a common defense. Even the Pope worried about the collapse of Poland, “which is all in the Swede’s power.”<sup>319</sup>

More worrisome were the reports of Muscovite armies making their way across Lithuania and Ukraine and threatening to enter either southern Poland or

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<sup>316</sup> RA, RR. Huvudserie, vol. 294, Charles X Gustav to Henrick Horn. 9 September 1655.

<sup>317</sup> Mary Anne Everett Green, *Calendar of state papers / Domestic series / Commonwealth: preserved in the State Paper Department of Her Majesty's Public Record Office*. (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1882), 389. 20 October 1655.

<sup>318</sup> Green, *Calendar of state papers*, 315. 4 September 1655.

<sup>319</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 4, 77-78. 16 October 1655.

Prussia.<sup>320</sup> “[Alexis] will not leave much of Lithuania to the protection of Sweden,” commented one observer in September. “Above all, the Muscovite is to be feared.”<sup>321</sup> Ultimately, Muscovy would have to be dealt with and any solution would, ideally, be a diplomatic one. In November a number of entreaties were sent to Muscovy.<sup>322</sup> But in November 1655 the table was not yet set and for both sides there was still much to gain. Prussia was within the grasp but not the hand. The Duke of Brandenburg offered allegiance and devotion with one hand while his other worked feverishly to create an anti-Swedish Prussian alliance. And then there was the problematic ambiguity of the Dutch. The Netherlands had so far not affected the Polish War but they cared little for who controlled the Vistula. The control of the export cities – or more importantly the control of the export duties of the Prussian cities – was of grave concern to the Dutch merchantmen and politicians. If the Dutch decided to send a full fleet into the Baltic Sea, there was little the Swedish navy would be able to do to stop them short of risking its own existence. But in November 1655 the glories of the 1620s still seemed obtainable.

Royal and Ducal Prussia were a part of the Commonwealth without being *of* the Commonwealth. Germanic in ethnicity, Protestant in religion, and decidedly urban and mercantile in culture, Prussia was very different from the kingdom surrounding it. The cities of Prussia were semi-independent and had nominal fealty to the king of Poland but they were not represented in the Diet. Despite being the exporter of the continent’s interior, Prussian cities were more economically tied to

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<sup>320</sup> CXGS, vol. 8, 30.

<sup>321</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 3. 749. 10 September 1655.,

<sup>322</sup> *RRP*, xvi, 338.

Holland than to Mazovia. Even the Prussias were different. Royal Prussia was directly answerable to the King of Poland who was able to collect tolls on exports, much like the King of Denmark collected tolls on shipping through the Sound. Ducal Prussia was the vassal territory of the Duke of Brandenburg; an arrangement which went back to the absorption of the Prussias into Poland. Royal Prussia had been conquered, while the Teutonic leader of the less urbanized Ducal Prussia had agreed to be absorbed peaceably into Poland in exchanging revenue for territory.

Royal Prussia was centered upon a quartet of port cities: Danzig, Thorn, Marienburg, and Elbing. Ducal Prussia had Pillau, Memel and the less economically important Königsberg. These cities were the economic prize of the Second Northern War, just as they were the prize for Gustavus Adolphus in the 1620s, Polish kings in the 1460s, or Hanseatic merchant raiders in the 1200s. Through these cities flowed the commerce linking eastern Europe and the West. Whoever controlled the cities would be able to skim revenue off the top. In the 1630s, Sweden had financed much of their early intervention in Germany with the 600,000+ riksdallar tolls being produced by the cities. These cities were also the only ports in the Baltic not under Swedish control and both Danzig and Königsberg were capable of being naval bases for large fleets. One observer speculated that “if [Charles] masters [Prussia] it will be worth more to him than all his kingdom of Sweden.”<sup>323</sup> Taking control of the Prussian cities would present Sweden with a multitude of advantages: Prussian tolls were a panacea for all the economic troubles plaguing the Swedish strategic security situation; control of Danzig and Pillau would eliminate the creation of an anti-

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<sup>323</sup> *SPJT*, 15 May 1655, vol. 3, 440.

Swedish fleet in the Baltic capable of landing troops in Sweden; and control of the Prussias would unify Sweden's holdings in the Baltic so that a Swedish army could walk from Bremen to Narva to Finland while always being on Swedish imperial territory.

Prussian cities had strong defenses, could be supplied by sea, and were close enough geographically to aid each other. Once taken, the cities could be held easily against the weak artillery and infantry of the Poles. The Prussian War of the 1620s witnessed just such a reversal of action. Once Gustavus Adolphus captured a city his forces were never dislodged. Royal Prussia was centered in Thorn, Elbing, Marienburg and Danzig. Ducal Prussia, which was more rural, contained Königsberg, Pillau and Memel. Control of the cities brought the additional advantage of being a "shield from the rest of Poland and any Polish counterattack."<sup>324</sup>

In October it was thought that a "united Prussia is very strong and would cause a great deal of trouble to Sweden" unlike the "open country" of Poland.<sup>325</sup> In the wake of the Swedish march through Poland the Prussian cities began to organize themselves. The "free cities of Royal Prussia do deliberate among themselves what they shall do in case Poland doth abandon them."<sup>326</sup> And their representatives met at Marienburg in the end of October "to discuss defense of Prussia."<sup>327</sup> The cities of Prussia certainly could resist Swedish besiegement but were in no condition to save Prussia itself from conquest without the aid of a foreign power. From the very

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<sup>324</sup> CXGS, vol. 8, 28..

<sup>325</sup> *SPJT*, 11 October 1655. vol. 4, 45.

<sup>326</sup> *SPJT*, 11 October 1655, vol. 4, 45.

<sup>327</sup> *SPJT*, 22 October 1655, vol. 4, 78.

beginning of the war, Brandenburg sought to fill that gap as protector of Royal Prussia.

For the Prussian cities, the idea of replacing their autonomy with Brandenburg mercenary garrisons was upsetting. Danzig would not even consider the idea to Brandenburg's "great anger."<sup>328</sup> Nor did Thorn, which would not let the Duke or his army into the city.<sup>329</sup> There were several problems with Brandenburg protection. First, it would be almost impossible to get the garrisons to leave on their own once they had been let into the city. Second, the Elector looked to make the Prussian cities pay for the quartering of the troops -- in effect he was offering protection in order to relieve himself of the fiscal burden of his quickly raised force. Third, the Elector had no reputation for greatness, especially when compared with Charles X and the Swedes. Additionally, as he spread his forces around in the small defenseless towns of Royal Prussia, it seemed his occupation would provide very little actual protection. One observer scoffed "Brandenburg wishes all the great and little cities to take his garrisons. A fine protection! How would he have furnished [the great cities] when he had not enough to supply the little ones?"<sup>330</sup> Indeed, as the Elector was portraying himself as the lone salvation for Prussia he had his own diplomats scrounging western Europe hoping to find a paymaster.

Frightened Prussian citizens began glutting the cities with "cattle and effects" as the Swedes headed down the Vistula in early November, using pontoon ships to

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<sup>328</sup> *SPJT*, 19 November 1655, vol. 4.

<sup>329</sup> *SPJT*, 17 December 1655, vol. 4, 290.

<sup>330</sup> *SPJT*, 17 December 1655, vol. 4, 290.

carry the heaviest siege guns.<sup>331</sup> Marienburg allowed Brandenburg garrisons to be put in their cities perhaps 10,000 troops in all.<sup>332</sup> As the Swedes came north, these Swedish and Brandenburg forces increasingly came into conflict. “It looks to be a winter war,” noted Edward Rolt, “the King appears not so much as think of leaving the field in person.”<sup>333</sup>

Charles X was already directing the operations against Prussia even before Cracow had fallen. From his mobile camp Charles X directed the movements of his armies as commander in chief. Through an impressively constant stream of letters he directed troops’ movements – ordering his noble generals where to go and with how many men. He authorized treaties and negotiations. He was helped in this endeavor by the *råd* back home in Stockholm. Per Brahe wrote in early November to tell the king, “The *råd* is doing its duty in all the acts it has taken.”<sup>334</sup> Brahe reminded the senators that “there was much still to be done. We must be ready when the king’s orders arrive.”<sup>335</sup> One of the most important aids by the *råd* was Ulf Sparre’s conscription of the necessary shipping to send a steady stream of artillery guns and shot to the armies in Poland.<sup>336</sup>

In late September he ordered Stenbock and Henrick Horn to march to Royal Prussia with about 4,000 horse and some infantry – after fortifying Warsaw with

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<sup>331</sup> *SPJT*, 4 December 1655, vol. 4, 278.

<sup>332</sup> *SPJT*, 8 December 1655, vol. 4, 252.

<sup>333</sup> *SPJT*, 2 December 1655, vol. 4, 175.

<sup>334</sup> *RRP*, xvi 312.

<sup>335</sup> *RRP*, xvi, 336.

<sup>336</sup> *RRP*, xvi. 265.

about 2,000 more soldiers.<sup>337</sup> A week later Charles wrote to Stenbock from Cracow informing him that operations there had nearly concluded and that “I will be with you soon in Prussia.” In the meantime Stenbock was to “do what you consider best to gain the devotion” of the Prussians.<sup>338</sup> The war in Prussia, now that the main Polish field forces had either been beaten, retired or surrendered, was not seen as a difficult undertaking. “No one there can offer great resistance,” Charles wrote to Stenbock, “such cavalry there cannot stand.” Stenbock, like Wittenberg, was reminded to “have good order in Prussia and good correspondence with the Duke of Brandenburg.”<sup>339</sup> It was very important to keep the locals supportive of Swedish lordship.

At the same time he was ordering Magnus de la Gardie to converge with part of his Livonian force – between 3,000 and 4,000 soldiers and 2,500 horses – with Stenbock in Prussia.<sup>340</sup> A large chunk of the Livonian army traveled half way across the Commonwealth in order to help subjugate Prussia. It left the Eastern provinces exposed to Muscovite attack. But Prussia, not Muscovy, dominated the letters heading to Magnus de la Gardie.

Of the four large Prussian cities, Thorn was the farthest south and thus the first one Charles X's army encountered. Thorn did not take a Brandenburger garrison and had an “ordinary garrison of 300 to 400 men,” but decided not to resist when the Swedish army arrived. Charles wrote to Wittenberg announcing that he

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<sup>337</sup> RA. RR. Huvudserie, vol. 295, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock. 30 September 1655.

<sup>338</sup> RA. RR, Huvudserie, vol. 295, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock. 3 October 1655.

<sup>339</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 295, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock. 30 September 1655.

<sup>340</sup> RA. RR, Huvudserie, vol 295, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock. 14 October 1655.



was waiting outside of Thorn and expected the city to soon capitulate.<sup>341</sup> Two days later Thorn went the way of Warsaw and opened its gates to the Swedes despite there being “a great consternation among the people when the Swedes entered” the city.”<sup>342</sup> When Charles X arrived, Thorn disbanded their own militia, took on 1,000 Swedish garrison troops and received “confirmation of the burgomasters rights and privileges” while promising to supply the Swedish army with “victuals.”<sup>343</sup>

Edward Rolt described Thorn as “one of the keys to Prussia.” Its capitulation seemed to embody all the contrasts of the Swedish invasion. The army that came to Thorn had an overwhelming advantage in size, experience and firepower. Although Charles not only brought thousands of men and 80 heavy guns to Thorn he “ordered not a gun fired against the town.” Like at Ujescie, Conitz and Warsaw, the Swedes brought an olive branch in one hand and a sledgehammer in the other. In 1655, very few seemed willing to resist the olive branch when given the choice. At Thorn, a Protestant and Germanic city, Charles was welcomed with “great magnificence,” the first time a conqueror and the conquered went to church to celebrate the taking of the city. The great men of the city and Swedish army sang *Te Deum Laudamus*, a hymn of thanksgiving.<sup>344</sup>

A week later, on 27 November, Charles X set out with much of his force towards Elbing and Marienburg, both of which had Brandenburger garrisons (though the Duke of Brandenburg apparently occupied Elbing as the garrison was “taken very

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<sup>341</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i koncept. vol. 149, Charles X Gustav to Arvid Wittenberg 19 Nov 1655.

<sup>342</sup> *SPJT*, 4 December 1655, vol. 4, 236.

<sup>343</sup> *SPJT*, 26 November 1655, vol. 4, 246.; *SPJT*, 8 December 1655, vol. 4, 52.

<sup>344</sup> *SPJT*, 4 December 1655, vol. 4, 278.

ill” by the citizenry).<sup>345</sup> Ultimately, the goal was to reach Danzig, which was “certain to oppose the Swede” given its ongoing preparations for a siege. But in the meantime, there was an increasingly violent break between Brandenburg and Sweden. Edward Rolt reported that Charles was particularly angry at Brandenburg because his quartered forces in Royal Prussia plundered the land.<sup>346</sup> Reports came streaming out of Poland and Prussia predicting war between Brandenburg and Sweden. Few of these opinions gave Brandenburg much of a chance against the continually victorious Swedish armies. “Many believe...Brandenburg will declare against the Swede. However they add to it that this said Elector shall then feel what it is to oppose his majesty of Sweden.”<sup>347</sup> Others, commenting on the hostilities, noted “the Swede can ruin the Brandenburg in a small time.”<sup>348</sup> At this point there was no clearer demonstration of the collective belief in Sweden’s military power; one simply did not cross Sweden in 1655 and expect to get away with such behavior.

Despite having a Brandenburg garrison in the city, the Swedes “expect no more resistance” from Elbing than they received from Thorn.<sup>349</sup> Still, in this fluid movement of armies within close proximity of each other, individual groups began to fight with opposing forces. Prade records that Stenbock “put the Elector's cavalry to flight.”<sup>350</sup> In late November, reports filtered out of Prussia that full skirmishes were

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<sup>345</sup> *SPJT*, 2 December 1655, vol. 4, 175.

<sup>346</sup> *SPJT*, 2 December 1655, vol. 4, 175.

<sup>347</sup> *SPJT*, 4 December 1655, vol. 4, 278.

<sup>348</sup> *SPJT*, 12 November 1655, vol. 4, 145.

<sup>349</sup> *SPJT*, 4 December 1655, vol. 4, 278.

<sup>350</sup> Prade, 79.

occurring in the field; "[Swedish] troops have already held conflict with all of Brandenburg's party about Tribnitz and got the better."<sup>351</sup> Other writers reported that the foragers of each army became the prize in a daily game. Cavalry forces attacked and captured the foragers while searching for food and then released them in the opposing force's camp. While such attacks on foragers were seen at the time as a game, such actions by the relatively light Brandenburger forces should have been a warning to Charles X and his generals concerning the vulnerability of their logistical forces.

On 20 November, Charles sent his first demands to Fredrick William: Ducal Prussia was to become a fief of Sweden and only the Elector's direct line – no cousins – was to succeed him; (2) Marienburg shall be left to Sweden; (3) the harbors of Pillau, Memel, Königsberg were to be open to Swedish shipping; (4) Pillau and Memel would have Swedish – not Brandenburger – garrisons; (5) any alliances with the Dutch were to be renounced; (6) Fredrick William would not “give protection” to any land or individuals in Poland or Lithuania; (7) Brandenburger troops would join Swedish armies.<sup>352</sup> In his moment of triumph Charles X was offering peace for the near total submission of Fredrick William in his Prussian lands. It would be a clear declaration of impotence from the Elector to agree to such terms; but he was holed up and isolated in Königsberg, the Swedish armies were quickly occupying Royal Prussia, and his Electoral lands in Brandenburg -- while currently protected by the diplomatic

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<sup>351</sup> *SPJT*, 20 November 1655, vol. 4, 219.

<sup>352</sup> *SPJT*, 20 November 1655, vol. 4, 219.

nicety of being part of the Holy Roman Empire -- were a short walk from the assembly grounds of Stettin in Swedish Pomerania.

The common belief was that the “Elector will either deal with Sweden or fight.”<sup>353</sup> However, the events since the fall of Cracow and the easy progress the Swedish armies made through Prussia had eroded any confidence in the Elector as a protective counterbalance. “The Brandenburger doth lose much of his reputation; though that it be flattered; for true and real he never had; for he never had anything but very much exact his country and to bad purpose.”<sup>354</sup> Even the Dutch abandoned Brandenburg as a counterpoint to Swedish control in the Baltic. “Sending a fleet to Brandenburg,” relayed one coded letter, would be like “the fish sending relief to the birds.” The writer, so turned against Brandenburg and his home government’s policy, noted, “[Y]ea and very ridiculous it was that Amsterdam have so laboriously sought the amity of Brandenburg as if the philosopher’s stone were in him.”<sup>355</sup> Another writer commented, “[I]t is madness to believe that Brandenburg can do what neither the Dane nor the Emperor dust do.”<sup>356</sup>

While Charles seemed to offer a degree of protection *and* continuity to the people in his new territories, the same did not seem to be true of Fredrick Wilhelm who, very publicly, was eliminating local privileges in his hereditary lands, garrisoning would be allies with free-booting mercenaries, and replacing long held legal traditions

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<sup>353</sup> *SPJT*, 13 November 1655, vol. 4, 188.

<sup>354</sup> *SPJT*, 24 December 1655. vol. 4, 313.

<sup>355</sup> *SPJT*, 24 December 1655. vol. 4, 312.

<sup>356</sup> *SPJT*, 24 December 1655. vol. 4, 313.

with violence and dictatorship.<sup>357</sup> “The Elector withdrew his army to Marienburg [leaving the rest of Prussia alone] and himself to Königsberg. It is said that the person of a general is worth 10,000 men, *ergo* he doth weaken his army. The Swede, on the contrary, doth leads his army.”<sup>358</sup>

As the Swedes marched northwards, more cities, suddenly abandoned by Brandenburg, surrendered to the Swedes, who promised the same conditions as they did to Thorn.<sup>359</sup> The *råd* commented that the Prussians “having understood the Elector’s intentions have ended their alliance with him.”<sup>360</sup> Grudens, “a city capable of resisting the whole Swedish power” surrendered without a fight.<sup>361</sup> Stasborg did the same. On 4 December, Elbing welcomed Charles into the city and again *Te Deum* was sung in the Lutheran church. As 1655 ended Marienburg and Danzig were the only cities that resisted the Swedish advance. “Marienburg is possessed by the Elector’s troops,” Charles wrote to Stenbock and ordered him up to the city to investigate the situation “and keep a firm eye on the city.”<sup>362</sup> The problem to the situation was not Marienburg -- “I have the horse who will gladly accompany me” Charles wrote -- but Brandenburg. On 13 December, he wrote to Erik Oxenstierna,

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<sup>357</sup> William Hagen, "Seventeenth Century Crisis in Brandenburg: The Thirty Years' War, the Destabilization of Serfdom, and the Rise of Absolutism," *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 2 (April 1989): 303.

<sup>358</sup> *SPJT*, 17 December 1655 vol. 4, 290. .

<sup>359</sup> *SPJT*, 4 December 1655 vol. 4, 236. ; vol. 4, 270;

<sup>360</sup> *RRP*, xvi, 362.

<sup>361</sup> *SPJT*, 18 December 1655, vol. 4, 296. .

<sup>362</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 55, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 10 December 1655.

“We go now to Königsberg,” where the Elector was fortifying himself against a possible assault.<sup>363</sup>

In the months since the beginning of the Polish War the Elector’s political and military positions had eroded. His entire hand was a bluff and Charles, with a victorious army, was calling him on it. Charles believed the Elector would eventually come around “to a wise agreement” once he saw the Swedish army in his territory.<sup>364</sup> “The elector is coming to see me,” Charles wrote, “and I am happy for the day when I can present to him my army in the field.”<sup>365</sup> When Charles’s army arrived on the outskirts of Königsberg, the Elector immediately submitted. Charles wrote to General Styrumb, “The Elector is requesting an armistice and a discussion of a treaty...I am ordering you to cancel all hostilities against Brandenburg.”<sup>366</sup> And with this order the building tension toward violence broke. Clearly, the Elector had given up the fight even before it had begun. The two leaders consequently entered into negotiations, resulting in the Treaty of Königsberg (17 January 1656) in which nearly all the terms of 20 November were ratified. Frederick William would remain lord of Ducal Prussia but was now a vassal of the King of Sweden. Swedish troops and ships could use and quarter in the cities, and Sweden would collect the lion share of the export tolls.

But Charles did not like the Elector nor did he trust him as a supposed ally. He wrote to Erik Oxenstierna that it was time to find “other friends,” even if it was

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<sup>363</sup> RA, RR. Huvudserie, vol. 296 Charles X Gustav till Oxenstierna, 13 december 1655.

<sup>364</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 296, Charles X Gustav till Oxenstierna, 25 December 1655.

<sup>365</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 297, Charles X Gustav till Oxenstierna, 2 January 1656.

<sup>366</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i Koncept, vol. 152, Charles X Gustav to Greve Styrumb, 2 Jan 1656.

to the “prejudice and damage of the Elector.” Sweden needed new friendships to produce “other advantages.”<sup>367</sup> Charles submitted a request to the *råd* a few weeks later asking for advice on the matter, beginning a series of discussions that pondered the “What next” phase of the war: war with Muscovy and division of Poland?; alliance with Poland and Brandenburg and war with Muscovy?; or division and retrenchment – taking the coast and ceding the rest to some would be earnest ally (essentially the plan Charles XII took in 1705)? Major conflict operations of the war seemed to be over – minus some of the “mopping up” operations.

Politically, this was the high point of the war in Poland. The conquest of Marienburg was still months away – as was a true showdown with Danzig – but in a space of six months Charles X and his well-prepared army had smashed one Great Power, occupying nearly all of its major cities, and humbled a middling -- if significant -- power. The Muscovites seemed “to be stationary” and happily absorbing eastern Lithuania.<sup>368</sup> Charles had gained the “resolution on which I and my people can hereafter be ordered.”<sup>369</sup> The war seemed to have accomplished all of its goals with little trouble or bloodshed. The King of Poland had fled his realm, the Polish elite had come to Charles and willingly submitted to his suzerainty, as did the Elector of Brandenburg and most of the cities of Royal Prussia. There existed no serious organized resistance to Swedish arms. When the Poles had stood they had been blown apart by superior Swedish firepower and run off by the Swedish infantry. All of the great cities surrendered rather than engage in a siege – even Cracow gave

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<sup>367</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 296, Charles X Gustav till Oxenstierna, 31 December 1655.

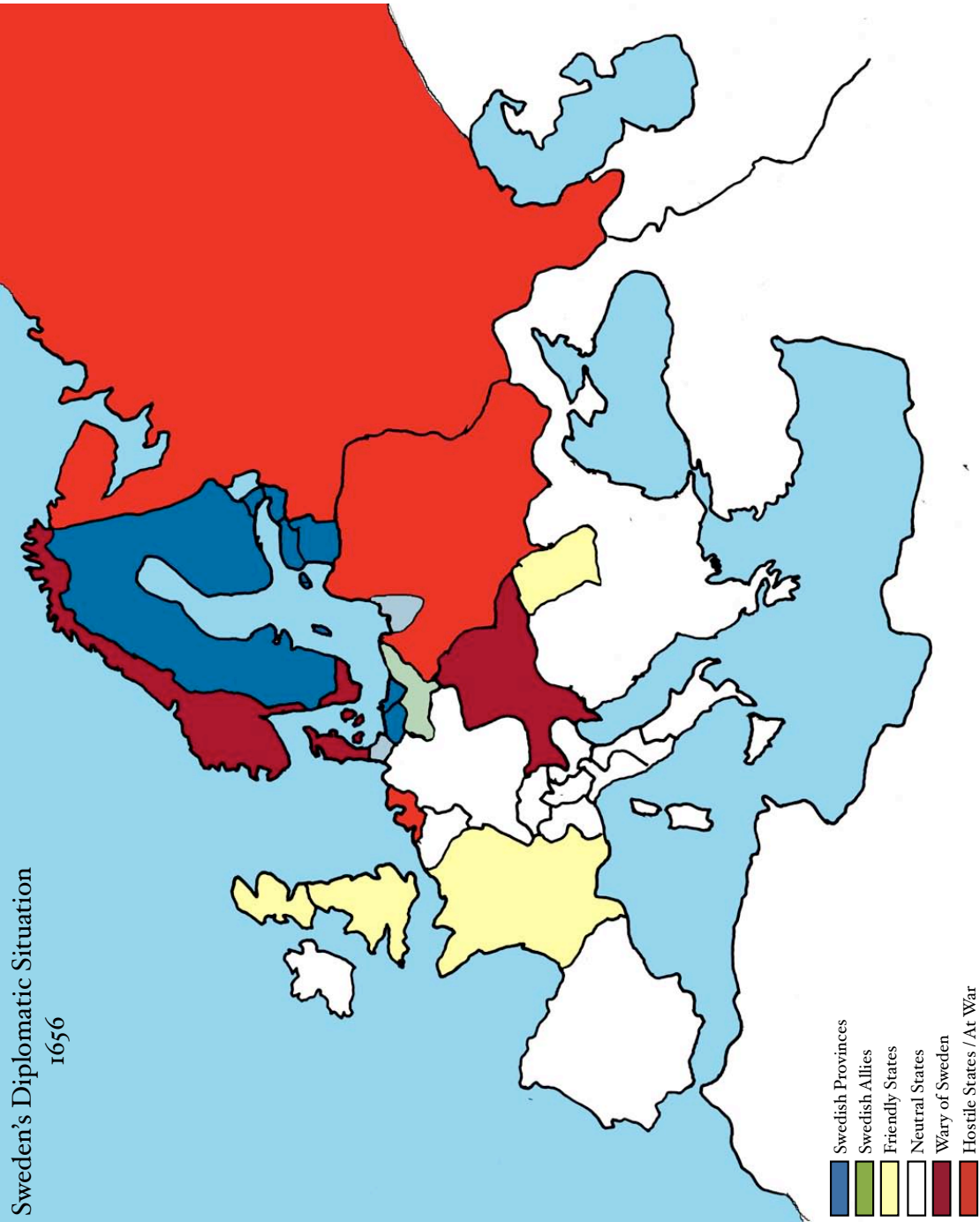
<sup>368</sup> RRP, vol. xvi 461.

<sup>369</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 296, Charles X Gustav till Oxenstierna, 24 December 1655.

up once the Polish relief forces had been defeated. For a time the Swedes had built a barrier between the sea and Muscovite arms. Perhaps some final reckoning between the two remained somewhere in the future, but in the giddy days of the winter of 1656, few worried about future conflict. The first six months of the Polish war had been a nearly flawless demonstration of military strength and charismatic patronage. Few would have imagined just how quickly the entire “adventure” would collapse.



## Chapter 6: Insurgency and the Decline of Sweden's Army in Poland: 1656 - 1657



The opening of 1656 found Sweden at the height of its power and Charles X at the height of his glory. Nearly every city in western Poland was occupied by Swedish troops. Polish noble armies were either co-opted or swept aside. John Casimir had lost his capital, his castle, his army and his kingdom when he fled for safety in Hapsburg Silesia. Then Charles X marched into Royal Prussia and humbled the so-called “Great Elector” into accepting Swedish lordship. Only Marienburg and Danzig had not welcomed Charles X through their gates as a hero -- and the former would be dealt with in early 1656. Without control of Danzig, the largest, wealthiest and most strategically important Prussian city, the Polish expedition was incomplete. But, perhaps, it could be made to accept Swedish protection. Sweden, after all, controlled Danzig’s hinterland, coastline and shipping lanes. Charles X even planned on calling a Polish Diet and there was a chance he might be elected King of Poland. He was already Grand Duke of Lithuania after the treaty with Radzivil in October 1655. Yet from this great height came a sickening fall.

This chapter deals with that military and political fall. How did Sweden lose the war in Poland and come away from the conflict without achieving *any* of its intended goals? This chapter argues that three points dramatically changed the balance against the Swedes. The combination of these three factors compromised the Swedes’ ability to bring the war to a successful conclusion and to make permanent gains:

1. the collapse of the concentrated weight of the field armies;
2. the inability to peaceably dominate Poland and efficiently gather resources; and
3. the inability to pacify the insurgency.

The period after January 1656 began a second phase of the war. In the first phase Sweden invaded Poland with a superior force and successfully fought a conventional war. The second phase was marked by a transformation of the war into an unconventional conflict of guerilla activities, small group raids on logistical supplies, and a reluctance of Polish troops to fight pitched battles. This second phase lasted through 1656 into 1657. The inability to end the war quickly allowed foreign states to intervene in the conflict in order to carve out or protect their own zones of influence. This intervention moved the war into a third phase. This phase, Intervention, began in 1656 and ended with the Swedish defeat of the Danes in February 1658. The effects of these four points on the decline of Swedish forces was best illustrated by the one large scale conventional battle of the war: the three day battle of Warsaw in July 1656. By this point, Charles X's army had completely transformed.

### **Mass divided by Space:**

#### **Swedish Garrisons in Poland, Lithuania and Prussia.**

Clausewitz argued "the best strategy is always *to be very strong*; first in general, and then at the decisive point. No higher and simpler law applies than that of *keeping one's forces concentrated*. No force should ever be detached from the main body unless the need is definite and urgent."<sup>370</sup> Charles X was breaking this fundamental theory of war. He was spreading out detachments (even though he was concentrating his main armies first in Greater Poland and then again in Ducal Prussia) and trying to

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<sup>370</sup> Clausewitz, 240 (italics in original)

occupy a wide swath of territory. The importance of this concentration of strength is clearly delineated when combined with Clausewitz's *center of gravity* theory:

It is against that part of the enemy's forces where they are most concentrated that, if a blow were to occur, the effect would emanate the furthest; furthermore, the greater the mass our own forces possess when they deliver the blow, the more certain we can be of the blow's success. This simple logic brings us to an analogy that enables us to grasp the idea more clearly, namely, the nature and effect of a center of gravity in the mechanical sciences.<sup>371</sup>

The concentration of forces, especially when used against the perceived *center of gravity* could bring about a complete victory of the war. Clausewitz argued that such a blow would certainly have important and long lasting effects on the battlefield. Victory, consequently, could be achieved by bringing decisive weight of military forces to bear at the enemy's *center of gravity*. As Charles X spread out his forces in the fall of 1655 he was essentially robbing himself of the concentration of forces necessary to deliver that final blow.

The Swedish armies invading Poland, Prussia and Lithuania in 1655 were powerful but not particularly large forces. As the Polish state fell apart, Swedish soldiers fanned out across the country to occupy the urban centers. A stream of letters emanated from Charles X ordering his officers to take all manner of small towns and villages. De la Gardie was to bring his army from Riga all the way to Prussia and occupy towns along the 400 mile route to protect the logistical routes and block Muscovite access to the Baltic. General Muller received a letter to occupy the important places of Great Poland *and* protect the border with Silesia.<sup>372</sup> Henrik

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<sup>371</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 810. translation by Lieutenant Colonel Antulio J.Echevarria II, " Clausewitz's Center of Gravity" 110. *Naval War College Review* winter 2003 vol LVI, no. 1.

<sup>372</sup> RR, RA, 18 October 1655 (to de la Gardie) and 9 November 1655 (to Muller)

Horn's small detachment was to occupy towns in Prussia; Kruus was ordered to Samogitia "to occupy adequate land between Poland and Livonia." Kruus was given only three squadrons and some dragoons – less than 1,000 men, to occupy the territory connecting Riga to Prussia.<sup>373</sup> This had two practical effects: first it spread out the Swedish army robbing it of concentrated force; and second, it increased the contact of Swedish soldiers with Polish and Lithuanian civilians. Both results, which may have been necessary at the time, produced dire consequences for the Swedish military.

There were several militarily-sound reasons, to spread Swedish forces out. First, Poland appeared finished as a great power. The sheer magnitude of Sweden's victories in 1655 bore this out. With Muscovite armies marching through Lithuania, the Ukraine, and parts of lower Poland, the Swedes needed to lay claim to territory before Muscovite forces could take the towns. The Polish collapse had create a vacuum, and in this version of "finders keepers" one had to occupy as much as possible or lose it to one's rival. If Poland really was finished, then every city, town and province was up-for-grabs. On 31 October, Charles wrote to De la Gardie asking whether one should consider Muscovy "a friend or an enemy."<sup>374</sup> Gustav Bielcke was sent as ambassador to Moscow in order to "get the most out of them," but war was increasingly a possibility.<sup>375</sup> Charles asked Magnus de la Gardie to begin negotiating with Cossack and Tartar leaders about a possible alliance, and for Douglas to help

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<sup>373</sup> RR, RA, 1 September 1655

<sup>374</sup> RA, RR, 31 October 1655. Charles to De la Gardie

<sup>375</sup> RA, RR, Charles to de la Gardie 7.20.1655.

secure Cossacks winter quarters and provisions.<sup>376</sup> Increasingly there were troubles with peasants in Poland and Lithuania who had not quite accepted their new provincial status. But what were these remnants compared to the glorious blue and yellow clad legionnaires?

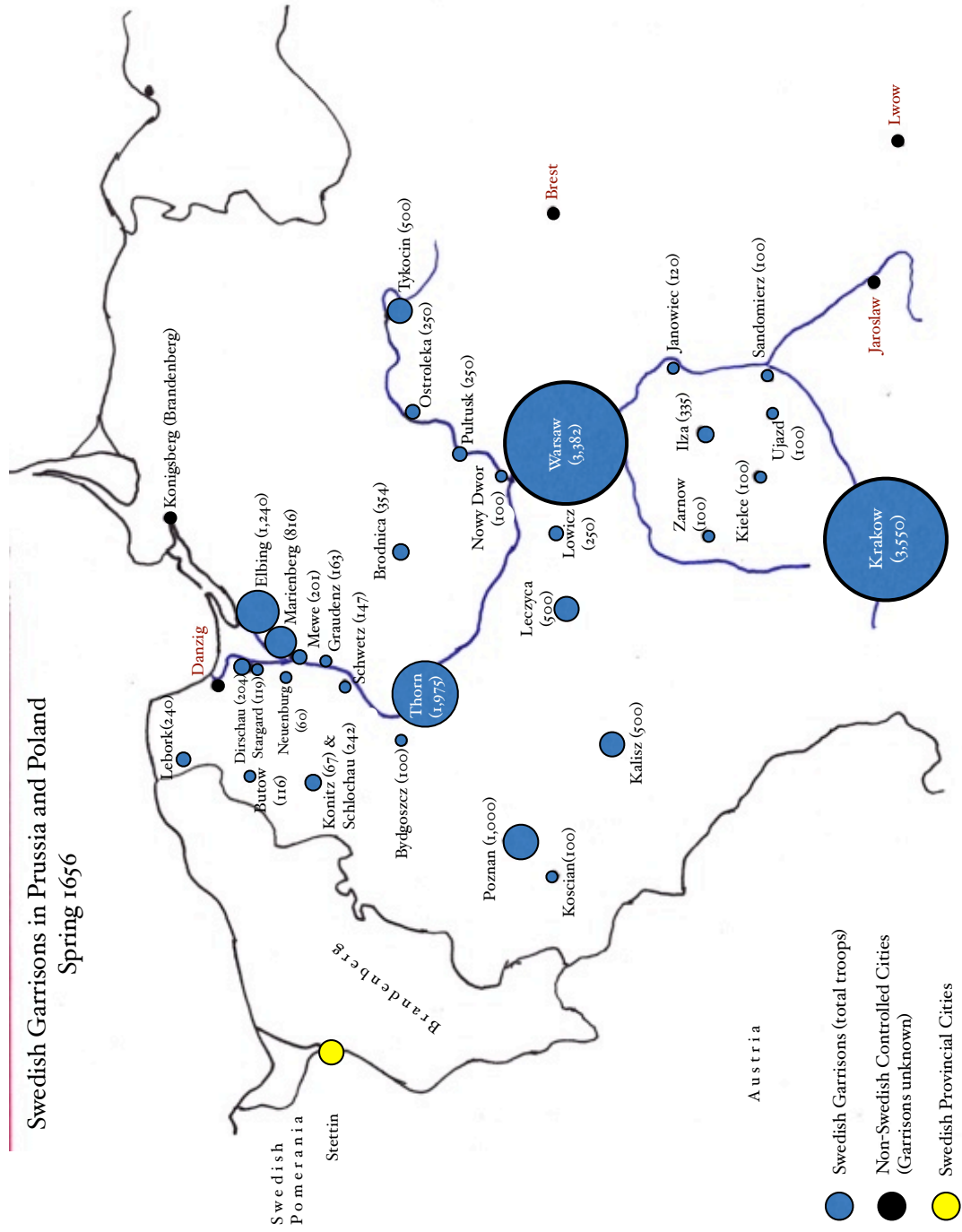
The plan to garrison much of Poland was audacious in its breadth. Thirty one urban centers had garrisons, including every large city in Poland and Royal Prussia except for Danzig. Prussia alone accounted for 6,501 garrison troops in 1656.<sup>377</sup> Elbing had 1,240 troops; Marienburg (after it fell in Spring 1656) had 816; Thorn had 1,974. There were also garrisons in Glowa, Dirschau, Stargard, Mewe, Nuenburg, Schwetz, Konitz, Lauenberg, Butow, Grudens and Strasburg; in total, fifteen cities in Royal Prussia alone. The occupation of Poland was even more dramatic; 6,479 total troops occupied Warsaw, Cracow, Nowy Dwor, Janowiec and Ilza. But only about 1,700 of those troops were cavalry soldiers.

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<sup>376</sup> RA, RR, Charles to de la gardie, 10.12.1655. Charles to Douglas 4 Nov. 1655

<sup>377</sup> CXGS, vol. 8, 256.

## Swedish Garrisons in Prussia and Poland Spring 1656





Consequently, the garrisons, while protected from direct assault, were unable to police the local area against bandits, guerillas, or organized oppositional forces.

Garrisoning Poland robbed the field armies of their concentrated strength. By June of 1656, Sweden had 34,000 soldiers protecting cities in Poland. These troops, garrisoned away in isolated cities and hamlets, were unable to contribute to battlefield victories necessary to ending the war.

The garrisoning of troops had a disastrous affect on the Royal Army. Charles's field army declined by nearly 11,000 soldiers between July 1655 and June 1656. His decline in cavalry was nearly by half and he lost 38 percent of his infantry.<sup>378</sup> Charles had lost 14,900 men from his Royal Army, a population greater than Wittenberg's entire army at the start of the war. Yet the Swedes maintained several independent armies. Magnus de la Gardies's force was rushing around Lithuania trying to put down revolts. Stenbock operated an army of a few thousand men outside of Danzig. A field army of 8,000 men evenly split between infantry and cavalry operated in Prussia, trying to protect the territories for Polish and Lithuanian insurgents who plundered Prussia as ruthlessly as if it was a foreign state. In Poland, a field army had only 3,585 men (500 more cavalry than infantrymen) to pacify a territory orders of magnitude larger than Prussia with a far more hostile populace.<sup>379</sup>

The entire garrisoning and controlling of Poland, the Prussias and northern Lithuania was complicated by the sheer size of the endeavor; distance and space were terrific problems. Important cities were widely scattered. Royal Prussia was a dense

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<sup>378</sup> CXGS, vol. 8, 259.

<sup>379</sup> CXGS, vol. 8, 254-255.

network of Germanic, Protestant, urban areas much like Germany during the Thirty Years' War. Danzig, Marienburg, and Elbing were clustered in the northwestern corner of the country, but Cracow lay 375 miles to the south and Lwow, now in Ukraine, was 200 miles east of there. One reason that Lithuania proved such a hot bed of rebellion was that the provinces of Samogitia and Wilenskie lay 300 miles distant from *both* Elbing and Riga, Sweden's administrative centers. These two loci of war and government lay 400 miles away from each other. Poland was simply too large for Sweden to occupy with an army of 50,000 total troops.

General Douglas's situation in the winter of 1655-1656 represented the Swedish problem in Poland. He was put in charge of protecting twelve different castles and towns in Greater Poland. He also had reserves spread out between another two towns. General Douglas was charged with maintaining order among the peasantry, protecting allied noblemen, collecting contributions, and shielding the Royal Army's advance into Royal Prussia while Polish cavalry forces still transversed the kingdom. His woefully inadequate field force contained only 2,500 soldiers to deal with three Polish forces with tens of thousands of soldiers.<sup>380</sup> By December, Charles X, who was in Royal Prussia, was contemplating sending all the "English" units to Douglas "who so desires them."<sup>381</sup> Unfortunately, reinforcing one area meant weakening another – equally important – area. This mix-match of garrison and field forces was further complicated by the interventions into the war of the Dutch, Austrians and Muscovites.

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<sup>380</sup> CXGS, vol. 5, 253.

<sup>381</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 303, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 12.26.1655.

Worse was that the Swedish army suffered from disease and was being whittled away. The “wastage rate” -- the rate at which men died from combat or disease, or deserted -- was very high. Even in September and October reports were coming out of Poland discussing the disease rates in the Swedish armies. Charles was writing as early as September 1655 asking about the “large numbers of sick soldiers” left behind in Conitz and Posen during the initial invasion.<sup>382</sup> Plague also struck garrisoned Prussian cities throughout 1656, further whittling away Swedish troop levels and complicating government functions as governors and officers fled plagued cities.

In infantry regiments twenty-four percent of the men died from a “natural death” (not battle-related) while at any time another three percent of men were unable to perform duty due to sickness. About the same percentage of men were being killed or wounded in battle. The cavalry suffered losses in much the same way. Twenty-one percent of its forces died from disease while three percent suffered from illness. The cavalry, perhaps because it was more in the field armies than the garrisoned infantry, suffered twelve percent of its losses from combat. Another six percent were captured or “lost.” Despite all of these losses, the solidarity of the Swedish system did manifest itself on the battlefields of Poland. Less than three percent of soldiers were termed “not present” for duty -- meaning the Swedish army did not suffer desertion rates in anything resembling an early modern army.<sup>383</sup> The garrisons and the wastage rates robbed the Swedes of the weight to control and

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<sup>382</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i Koncept, vol. 145. Charles X Gustav to Wrangel, 15 August 1655.

<sup>383</sup> Information assembled through charts in CXGS, 8, 254-255.

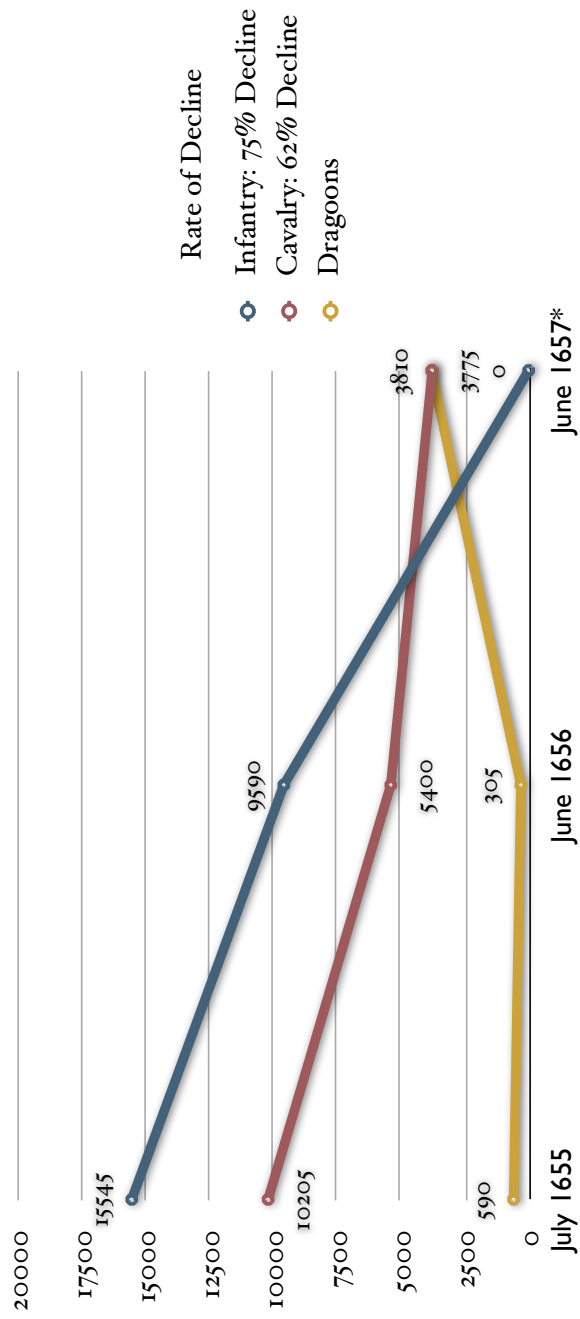
influence battlefield initiative. Garrisoned cities, without adequate cavalry troops, were increasingly islands of Swedish control surrounded by an alien and hostile land. Even in January 1656 between 30 and 50 foragers a day were being captured by enemy forces.<sup>384</sup> From Thorn came reports that all the Scottish soldiers “are dead from plague” and 600 men died daily from disease in the city.<sup>385</sup> Disease, far more than peasant guerillas or battle, ravished Charles’s army on its Jaroslaw campaign.

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<sup>384</sup> SPJT, vol 4, 688.

<sup>385</sup> SPJT, 5 September 1656, vol. 5, 345 and 19 September 1656, vol. 5, 394.

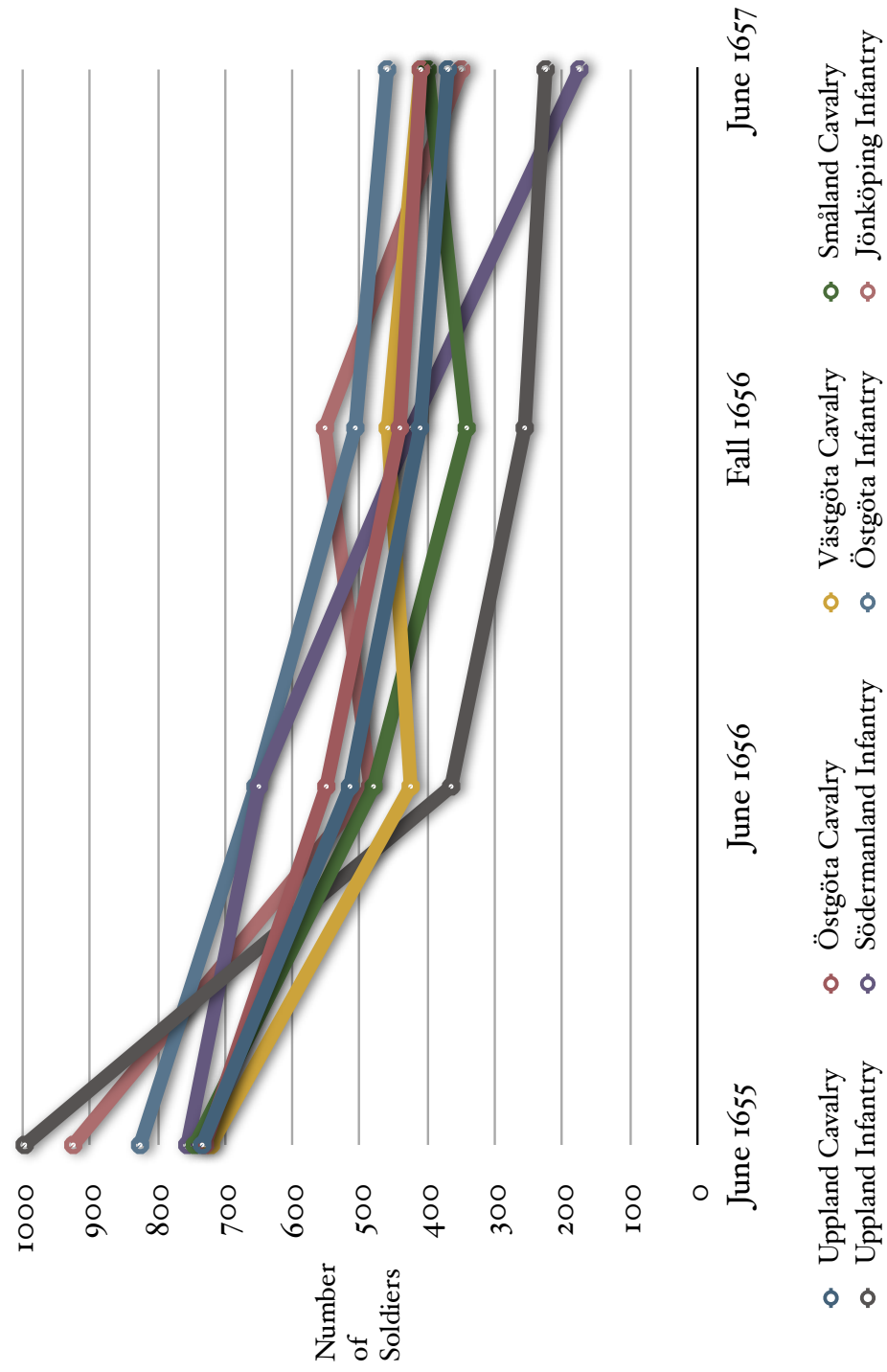
### Decline of Swedish Field Forces in Poland and Prussia: July 1655 - June 1657



\*Charles X Gustav responded to the Danish declaration of war on Sweden (June 1657) by taking nearly 11,000 troops from Prussia and Poland. The infantry troops remaining in Prussia were transformed from foot soldiers to horse-riding dragoons. This was to more troops to have mobility to defend their garrisoned cities.

From June 1657 until the end of the war in 1660 large scale offensive operations in Prussia and Poland ceased. The "field" forces instead represented a mobile defense of harassed or besieged garrisons.

Decline of Provincial Regimental Manpower in Poland and Prussia: June 1655 - June 1657.



The Swedish armies were wasting away; disintegrating in the middle of the war. Polish and Prussian troops were reluctant to join Charles's armies; only about 9,000 troops joined and they refused to take part attacking Polish cities or troops. They quit altogether once the Polish resurgence began.<sup>386</sup> In December 1655, Edward Rolt, a British ambassador in Poland, noted, "I am apt to believe the King of Sweden may have greater trouble to keep what he has got than he had in getting it."<sup>387</sup>

The only other way to reinforce the army in Poland-Prussia was to import Swedish and mercenary troops from overseas. But the initial invasion had so stripped the provinces of troops that they were vulnerable to attack by hostile neighbors. In the fall of 1655 there were simply no troops protecting the Baltic provinces, Pomerania, nor the home territories.

Finding replacement garrison troops was the first order of business. By June 1656, 1,780 troops garrisoned Pomerania, 335 troops garrisoned Wismar and 2,145 troops garrisoned Bremen.<sup>388</sup> Meanwhile, the homeguard was bolstered by nearly 13,000 troops (2,347 cavalry and 9,564 infantry).<sup>389</sup> These troops reportedly showed "great zeal and fervency to oppose and wage war against the Dane," but did not want to be sent to Poland or Prussia.<sup>390</sup> Increasingly, the threatening behavior of Denmark meant that those Swedish troops were increasingly kept at home instead of reinforcing the battlefield. The Baltic provinces (including Finland) likewise

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<sup>386</sup> CXGS, vol. 5, 70.

<sup>387</sup> *SPJT*, 31 December 1655, vol. 4, 362.

<sup>388</sup> CXGS, vol. 8, 268.

<sup>389</sup> CXGS, vol. 8 261.

<sup>390</sup> *SPJT*, 6 January 1657, vol. 5 and Frost, *Northern Wars*, 181.

encountered the same fate. After the original invasion, the Baltic provinces were stripped of troops down to a few hundred. By June, the problems in Lithuania and the threat from Muscovy created a crash conscription of Finns and Balts to protect the provinces. By June 1656, 12,000 men were waging war in the East.<sup>391</sup> The Swedish army trying to occupy northern Lithuania, deter a Muscovite attack and aid the Royal army in Prussia had only 4,700 troops while the army protecting the eastern provinces (from Narva to the Duna River) had only 3,420 soldiers.<sup>392</sup> Revel, the most important city in Estonia, had only 800 men garrisoning it during the Muscovite war.<sup>393</sup> Even in October 1655, flush with victory, Charles wrote to de la Gardie ordering him to bring his army to Prussia “but leave as much of your army in Livonia under Lewenhaupt as they are needed to hold Lithuania together.”<sup>394</sup>

This reinforcement of the provinces was an impressive accomplishment but it meant there was simply not enough troops to be strong everywhere. As the war went on, this situation became worse. Sweden was able to raise, by June 1656, nearly 30,000 troops -- larger than the combined armies of Wittenberg and Charles X at the start of the war -- but they were spread out on three different fronts. These fresh troops provided almost no benefit to the field armies and played no role in the offensive war in Poland and Prussia. This allowed for the war to drag on and the insurgency to grow in strength during the war. There were simply not enough troops available to pacify the revolts. Increasingly, the role of offense and defense became

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<sup>391</sup> CXGS, vol. 7 222.

<sup>392</sup> CXGS, vol. 7, 102.

<sup>393</sup> CXGS, vol. 7, 102.

<sup>394</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 303, Charles X Gustav to de la Gardie, 10 October 1655.



reversed. Sweden, by 1656, found itself having to defend far-flung cities of dubious defensive ability while Polish troops were able to rampage the countryside unhindered by the need to defend anything or ever stand and fight. The Swedish field armies, even in a desiccated condition, still proved qualitatively superior to the Poles. Time and again the Swedes would defeat some Polish or Lithuanian force only to have it slink away to fight again -- with even more men than before. The Swedes were not losing battles, but the decline in their offensive manpower was ruining any chance of winning the war. They simply lacked the weight to force a conclusion to the conflict.

### **Creating an Insurgency**

The decline of the field forces robbed the Swedish military of the ability to force a decision in the war. In January 1656, this did not seem to be necessary. The war, for all intents and purposes, was over. Poland was defeated, its cities occupied, its king in flight, and the only possible defender, the Duke of Brandenburg, was hiding in his Königsberg castle hoping no one would take notice of his Machiavellian plots of the previous summer.

The garrisoning of the cities seemed to be a wise move in both claiming territory and diffusing the burden of supplying the army and paying the troops. But this also put more Swedish soldiers in contact with Polish and Lithuanian peasants who resented and increasingly rejected the costs put upon them. Charles's letters to his officers in this period do not seem to worry about a possible guerilla issue; instead Charles focused on the remnant forces of Potosky, Landkronsky and Czarniecki, who

had taken refuge in the Lotharingia of unoccupied Poland between the Swedes and Muscovites.

Sweden's defeat in Poland ultimately came from a misunderstanding or changing of the center of gravity in Poland. The Swedes put too much confidence in the Polish and Lithuanian nobility. The nobility ultimately proved unable to maintain order and then unwilling to try and pacify the insurgents who operated without them.

Clausewitz discussed the *center of gravity* in two parts of *On War*. The discussion of the center of gravity – as it concerns the conflict of armed forces – has already been discussed. But in Book Eight Clausewitz discussed a more nuanced view of the *center of gravity*, one more closely related to its modern definition as “those characteristics, capabilities, or locations from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.”<sup>395</sup> By co-opting, capturing or smashing this center of military power, a force was capable of obtaining victory in war. According to Clausewitz there were three parts to gaining victory: (1) destruction of the armed forces of the enemy; (2) occupying the enemy country; and (3) breaking the enemy's will to resist. This last part was achieved by convincing the defeated of the improbability of victory and the unacceptable cost of continued resistance.<sup>396</sup> By January 1656, the Swedes had accomplished the first two through the quantitative use of a qualitatively superior force. The Swedes never achieved the last part and subsequently never accomplished their goals in going to war.

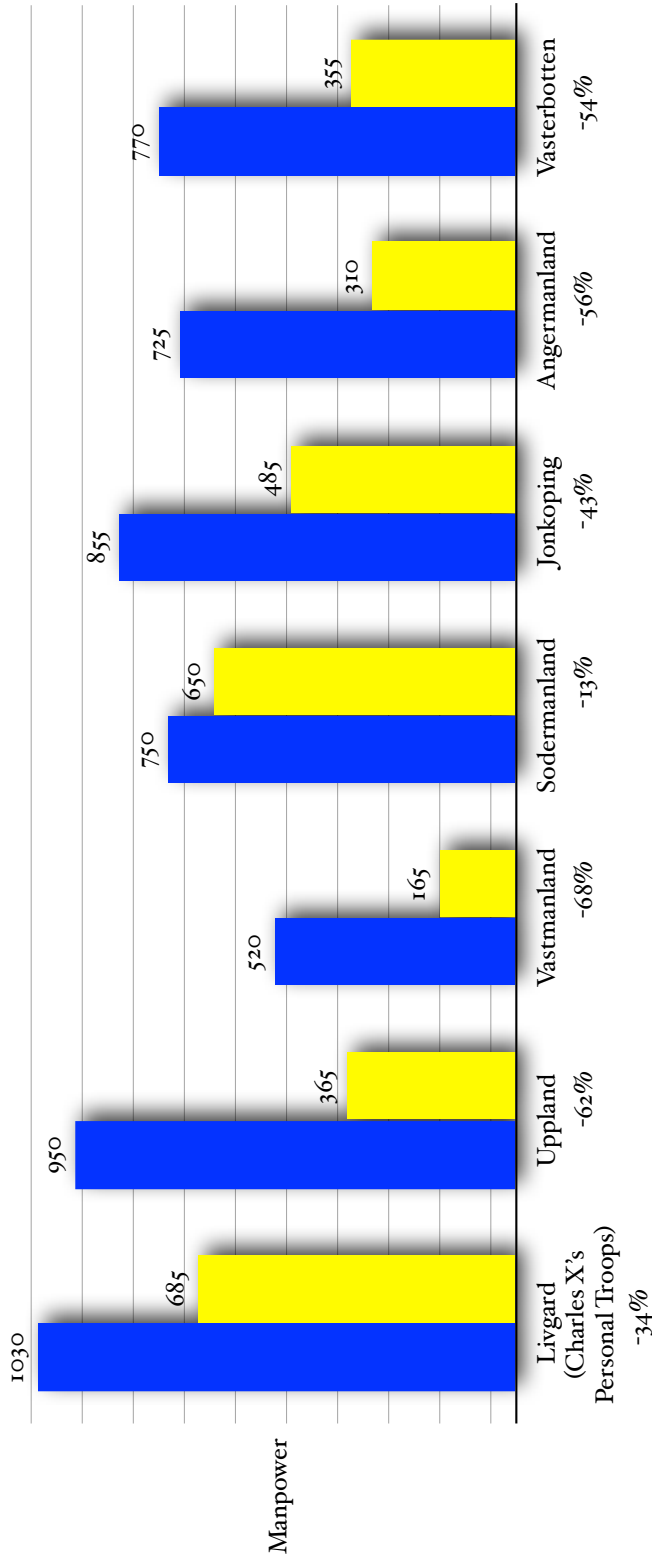
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<sup>395</sup> Department of the Army, Field Manual 3.0, Operations, (Washington, DC: 2001, para 5-27). See Clausewitz Book Eight for a discussion on the social-political aspects of the center of gravity.

<sup>396</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 75 and 92.

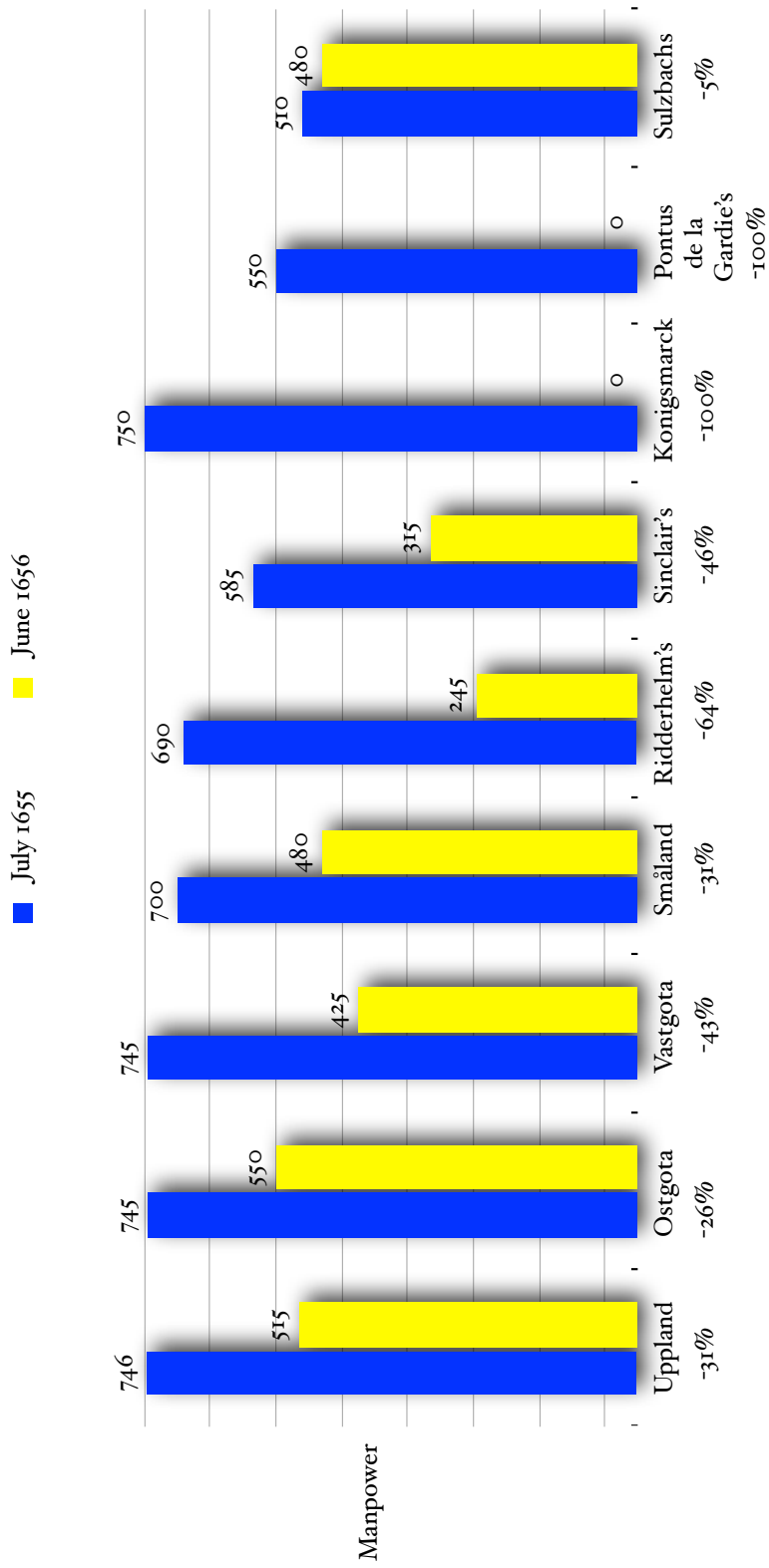
## Manpower Decline of Swedish Infantry Regiments Between July 1655 and June 1656

■ July 1655 ■ June 1656



Swedish infantry units suffered a dramatic decline in strength during the first year of the war. The *average decline* among twenty different regiments was 42%. Seven regiments suffered a decline over 50% while an additional four regiments suffered more than 40% decline. This decline in absolute numbers was compounded by the decline in the relative proportion of infantry in the field armies as infantry troops were used to garrison Prussian, Polish and Lithuanian cities.

### Manpower Decline of Provincial and Aristocratic Cavalry Regiments Between 1655 and 1656



During the first year of the war Swedish cavalry regiments suffered a dramatic decline in manpower and effective strength. Between July 1655 and June 1656 Swedish cavalry strength *declined on average by 38%*. An analysis of twenty different provincially conscripted and aristocratically employed regiments finds only one, Herman Engel's Regiment, increased in manpower over the course of the year; three different regiments suffered such massive losses they were dissolved.

In Poland-Lithuania, the center of gravity was the traditional nobility. The palatinates of Poland dominated their regions, organized their own armies, and maintained control over the tax base and population. Only noblemen, not even cities, were represented in the *Sejm*. The armies that surrendered at Ujescie and in Lithuania were not royal armies but regional levies; the militias in Thorn, Marienburg and Elbing were not national forces but urban hirelings. The conquest of Poland, Prussia and Lithuania thus had less to do with the conquest of territory and the destruction of armies than with the co-option of noble lords and urban oligarchies. With the vassalage of nobles, Charles X seemed about to be elected king of Poland; deprived of the same vassalage, John Casimir left Poland altogether.

An alliance with the Polish nobility seemed the answer to all logistical problems the Swedish army faced in its invasion. The nobles could tap the local infrastructure to supply the Swedes with resources, the nobles were already capable of extracting money from their peasants, and the *Sejm* existed as a collective forum capable of national acquiescence yet incapable of unified resistance.

The Swedish army entering Poland came willing to either bludgeon or befriend the Polish nobility. Charles X wrote to Wittenberg, Stenbock, Douglas, Henrik Horn, and Magnus de la Gardie, ordering them all to do what they could to bring Polish noblemen to Charles's *devotion*. He wrote to Stenbock and others ordering them to “have good order” as they passed through territories.<sup>397</sup> He told de la Gardie to “give out my protection” in order to bring people to Sweden's side.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 302, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, September 30 1655.

<sup>398</sup> RA., RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 7, Charles X Gustav to Magnus de la Gardie, 20 July 1655.

The seventeenth century writer Samuel Pufendorf thought Charles treated the “Poles with sweetness and civility assuring them, that he would preserve all their ancient privileges, as well as the liberty of their religion.”<sup>399</sup> In May 1656, amidst a guerilla war, resurrected Polish resistance and foreign interventions, an English diplomat in Stetting noted “The people in Pommerania are melancholy of the news [from Poland] and believe the good nature of the king has done him in since he let defeated Polish soldiers live.”<sup>400</sup>

Charles X and the Swedes, despite their fearsome reputation did not come into Poland as some kind of Protestant Huns. In his diary, Patrick Gordon complained that the rules of behavior were *too strict* in protecting the Poles, citing several examples of people who were tried and executed for attacking or stealing from Poles. In one example, a boy of fourteen was hanged “for flinging stones” at a Pole under Swedish protection. By the time they reached Posen, Gordon claimed 470 people were put to death for offenses, claiming the actions “were not justice but tyranny.”<sup>401</sup>

All of this emphasis on good order, discipline and civility was to convince the Polish lords that the King of Sweden was a worthy sovereign capable of providing them the order and protection these nobles sought. The conditions of Radzivil's surrender illustrated this desire for a peaceable transfer of loyalty and behavior:

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<sup>399</sup> Pufendorf, *Complete History of Sweden*, 561. *Promotion of the Protestant Cause*, 7. Also claims Charles X promised not to interfere with Catholicism in Poland - much to the Calvinist writer's dismay.

<sup>400</sup> *SPJT*, 2 May 1656, vol. 4, 721.

<sup>401</sup> Gordon, 21.

Governor General of Livonia [Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie] on behalf of the Swedish King took the Lithuanian nobility, townspeople and ordinary people under his Royal power. The king promises them kind treatment and guaranties defense from all enemies.<sup>402</sup>

The terms of the treaty also emphasized the provisioning of Swedish troops with “food and money” and the negotiated rights to garrison particular citadels and cities. The treaty bringing Lithuania into Swedish political orbit was one that transferred concepts of vassalage from one lord, John Casimir, to a new one, Charles X Gustav. In exchange for loyalty and service (including contributions to the Swedish troops), Charles and his officers guaranteed protection from Muscovite invasions and from Swedish pillaging. Five hundred and fifty Lithuanian noblemen signed the treaties the vast majority were Protestant in their religious beliefs, although several Catholic bishops also supported the treaties between Lithuania and Sweden.<sup>403</sup> On 20 October, Grand Duke Radzivil and many powerful noblemen formally separated themselves from the Polish confederation by passing the Union of Kedainiai in which Charles X became Grand Duke of Lithuania just as he would become Lord of Ducal Prussia after the treaty of Königsberg. In theory, the confederation was to link Swedish military power to Lithuanian defense in a war against Muscovy. However, the whole project ultimately floundered because of the deterioration of the war in Poland.

The deterioration in Poland began reflecting a harder edge in interactions between the Swedes and Commonwealth subjects. In October 1655, the Poles had

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<sup>402</sup> Andrej Kotljarchuck *In the Shadows of Poland and Russia: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Sweden in the European Crises* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2006), 101.

<sup>403</sup> Kotljarchuck, 103, 105.

burned the suburbs of Cracow to keep them out of Swedish hands.<sup>404</sup> Pufendorf claimed that the Swedish soldiers did not endear themselves to the Poles because they were very “mischievous in several places, whatever care the King could take to make them observe strict discipline.”<sup>405</sup> Gordon claimed that he took some books from a monastery library Wittenberg had expropriated.<sup>406</sup> He also claimed that he had not been paid and that the troops lived by plunder. Letters from Prussia in January 1656 were reporting “the Swedes have not yet been paid and must get it by sack.”<sup>407</sup> Increasingly that plunder targeted the Catholic Church. The plunder of temples and monasteries, by what Bonneson claimed were “raw soldiers,” threatened the Catholic Church, which was taxed for contributions. In addition, the religious storm brewed as individual soldiers destroyed icons and relics while church bells and clocks were brought down and smelted into cannon, coin and shot.<sup>408</sup> The looting of the wealth of the Catholic Church, outright atrocities against Churchmen and peasants, were seen through the prism of confessional reputation and created outrage among the population.<sup>409</sup> Worse was the crowd control problem of evangelical thugs in Swedish employ attacking Catholic priests, monks and parishioners. Deacons and monks were attacked, brutalized and murdered.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Gordon, 21.

<sup>405</sup> Pufendorf, 565.

<sup>406</sup> Gordon, 21.

<sup>407</sup> *SPJT*, 7 January 1656, vol. 4, 356.

<sup>408</sup> Bonneson, 104.

<sup>409</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 2.

<sup>410</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 170.



Additionally, concentrated armies in the Early Modern World were not self supporting but had to “live off the land.” An army of 25,000 men (about the size of Wittenberg’s and Charles’s combined armies after uniting at Posen) could easily strip even a rich countryside bare of resources. The *contribution system*, created by Gustavus Adolphus during the first Prussian war, lessened but did not negate the effects of an occupying army. In a letter to Axel Oxenstierna, Gustavus Adolphus wrote in 1630, “We have been forced to conduct the war *ex ripto* much to the disgust and harm of our friends. we still have no means to support our troops but by their intolerable plundering and looting.”<sup>411</sup> Charles X’s forces, for all their military power, were still creatures of early modern Europe. Feeding 30,000 men alone required a daily supply of 225 bullocks, 30 quintiles of bread, and 90,000 liters of beer, while 20,000 horses (including not only cavalry warhorses but artillery transport stags and teamster horses) required 400 acres of grazing land a day.<sup>412</sup> A stagnant army could very easily strip a land like a plague of locusts. The garrison and contribution systems were created and enacted in order to alleviate the worst of the problems but could not eliminate the issue entirely. In this manner, victory “freed Charles from [the costs of] supporting the army.”<sup>413</sup>

Poland, Prussia and Lithuania could support an army in their midst. The Polish Commonwealth was one of the largest and most populated states in Europe. It contained about 11 million people and was spread over almost 400,000 square

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<sup>411</sup> Heckshcer, *An Economic History of Sweden*, 80.

<sup>412</sup> Parker, *Thirty Years War*, 178.

<sup>413</sup> Åberg, "Swedish Army," *Sweden's Age of Greatness*, 275.

miles.<sup>444</sup> The Vistula valley and Ducal Prussia contained a large number of populous and economically important cities: Danzig (50,000 people), Cracow (22,000), Lwow (20,000), Posen (18-20,000), Elbing (15,000), Thorn (12,000), Warsaw (10,000) and Vilno (14,000). The urban population of Royal Prussia in 1600 was 36 percent -- making it one of the most urbanized parts of Europe, east or west.<sup>445</sup> Most importantly, Poland was a net exporter -- one of the few nations at the time -- of foodstuffs. It fed millions with its grain shipped out of Danzig in Dutch boats. Fifty thousand Swedes should have been able to exist in this surplus quite comfortably.

Problematically, the resources could not be efficiently and effectively collected nor distributed. Poland was a massive hodge-podge of local noble authorities, minor duchies, independent-minded cities and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Commonwealth was composed of German Lutherans in the Prussias and northern Lithuania, Orthodox peasants in lower Lithuania, Catholic Poles, and a not insignificant number of Jews. There were clear divides between Pole and Lithuanian, Catholic-Protestant and Orthodox, and rural versus urban. The Polish Commonwealth was so large and so diverse it was an impressive act of statecraft to hold it together -- with the Cossack revolt, the Muscovite invasion and the Swedish *deluge*, the kingdom seemingly fell apart along demographic and cultural lines.

In Germany during the Thirty Years' War, the Swedish army operated in a two fold function: the field army would maintain a concentration of troops to advance the war towards victory; meanwhile much of the weight of the army would be

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<sup>444</sup> As a source of comparison, according to the New World Encyclopedia, modern Sweden is 173,000 sq miles and modern France is 260,000 sq. miles. In 2009, at 990,000 sq. km. the Polish Commonwealth would be the second largest European state after Russia.

<sup>445</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 8.

dissipated into garrisons in both friendly and occupied areas in order to lessen the logistical burdens of the war zones. Victory solved the problem of “organizing available German resources effectively” by allowing Sweden to maintain a large field army while garrisoning units, and thus spreading out the costs, all over Germany.<sup>416</sup> Poland was supposed to operate on the same principle: garrisons to hold the territory, a smaller – but mobile – field army capable of smashing any remaining organized resistance, and negotiated contributions from local lords and cities to supply the logistical needs of the Swedish troops.

This *contribution system* that had been developed during the first Prussian War and perfected by the Thirty Years’ War. Jan Glete described the contribution system as a method of “selling protection” and transferring the costs of war to less militarily sophisticated peoples.<sup>417</sup> The contribution system could be stunningly successful and profitable. The Prussian tolls brought in 600,000 *rd*s a year from 1629 to 1635. The tolls from the duchy of Bremen in 1648 brought in more money than the celebrated French subsidies. Saxony alone contributed 40,000 rixdallars a month in 1632.<sup>418</sup>

Of course, paying protection is a fungible endeavor. From 1630 to 1635, German princes paid for protection from the Habsburgs. After the Peace of Prague in 1635, many Protestant princes paid contributions for protection *from* the Swedish army. In this way the contribution system worked as a method of “systematized

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<sup>416</sup> Glete, 206 and 207.

<sup>417</sup> Glete, *War and Society*, 7.

<sup>418</sup> Glete, 207, Roberts, *Rise of Sweden*, 123, 126.

plunder.”<sup>419</sup> States would use their infrastructure to maintain an occupying force in their midst or a far worse -- and wholesale -- destruction would befall them.

The contribution system set out to extract resources from the conquered and surrendered cities and governors. Warsaw was charged 240,000 zloties representing “many times larger than the annual tax revenue;” Cracow was charged 300,000 zloties.<sup>420</sup> The Swedes collected 100,000 *rd*s in Prussian contributions.<sup>421</sup> Magnus de la Gardie reportedly demanded 300,000 *rd*s and quarter from the city of Mittau in Courland.<sup>422</sup> The Prussian cities also had to accept garrisons, which they were required to support financially and logistically. Elbing, for example, initially agreed to garrison 3,000 men.<sup>423</sup> Even with all of these contributions, however, “the Polish war did not pay for itself.”<sup>424</sup> The financial situation was complicated by the recent extractions immediately before the war. In 1654, 10 million zloties were collected in taxes from the nobility while some 8.5 million zloties were paid to the Polish troops on the eve of the war.<sup>425</sup> Meanwhile, Ducal and Royal Prussia had been ransacked for perhaps as much as 600,000 thalers from the Duke of Brandenburg making the Prussias already economically stressed even before Swedish garrisons arrived.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Lockhart, *Sweden in the Seventeenth Century*, 53.

<sup>420</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 170.

<sup>421</sup> Bonneson, 85-86.

<sup>422</sup> *SPJT*, 14 August 1655, vol. 4,, 707-708

<sup>423</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 4, 362.

<sup>424</sup> Roberts, *SIE*, 55.

<sup>425</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 43. and CXGS, vol. 5, 100.

<sup>426</sup> Bonneson, 94.

The Swedish invasion *hoped* to be more benign to the population through a *negotiated* contribution system. There are few references in Charles's letters to Douglas, de la Gardie and Stenbock to direct contribution demands. Instead, Charles ordered his officers to "take out contributions" and "search out the army's good contentment."<sup>427</sup> This situation was further complicated by the problems of raising adequate money to pay the troops. "The war in Poland did not pay for itself."<sup>428</sup> Patrick Gordon complained that the soldiers had not been paid and resorted to plundering villages.<sup>429</sup> This inability to find the money to pay the soldiers created a negative feedback loop. Soldiers plundered Polish townspeople who resented the plundering and increasingly struck back violently. The Swedish troops "began to punish [peasants and guerillas] with severe methods for offenses against them," reaching "a frightening scope" in a short time. Villages were torched, cities burned down, and multitudes killed whether or not they actively fought against the Swedes.<sup>430</sup> Swedish actions pushed the peasantry into active resistance, endangering the entire endeavor because of the thin dispersion of Swedish troops.

Swedish attacks against the Catholic Church became crystallized by the siege of monastery of Czestochowa, which became a nationalist propaganda event for Poland. The monestary was a reinforced defensive position that was besieged by a detachment of German troops on 18 November "against explicit orders not to attack

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<sup>427</sup> RA, RR. Huvudserie, vol. 300, Charles X Gustav to de la Gardie, 23 June 1655. RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 301, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 10 August 1655.

<sup>428</sup> Roberts, SIE, 55.

<sup>429</sup> Gordon, 27.

<sup>430</sup> CXGS, vol. 5, 350-351.

national monuments.”<sup>431</sup> At one point the soldiers fired 340 twenty-four-pound shots at the fortifications but were unable to break into the monastery. The siege, which ended a month later with the Swedish troops simply withdrawing from the area and moving elsewhere, highlighted several problems simultaneously:

1. Monasteries and churches were economically important in Poland. Obtaining that wealth was imperative given the economic model being used during the war, but getting at that wealth was politically impossible given the Catholic/Lutheran divide.
2. As the Swedish troops spread out through upper and lower Poland, Lithuania and Prussia it was impossible, given the number of German and British mercenaries who were in Poland for additional profit, to police their behavior.
3. Poland was not a unified country with a working political hierarchy and was proving impossible to lead or harness.

Even more problematic was the fact that the siege, while a half hearted attempt by a small detachment of the main army, was a failure. If the Swedish force could not overwhelm an isolated, if well defended, monastery-fortress then how was it going to succeed against the fortifications of Danzig, a city which needed to be besieged by land, river and sea? Alfred Jensen, a Polish historian, considered Jasna Gora to be “the episode where Charles Gustav's continental policy crashed.”<sup>432</sup> The defense was portrayed as “an awesome manifestation of love for the fatherland and an example of national strength.”<sup>433</sup>

When the nobility surrendered to Charles X, as a protector against the Russians, the nobility “promised a general complacency” despite the “multitude of

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<sup>431</sup> Issacson, 55.

<sup>432</sup> Bonneson, 111.

<sup>433</sup> Bonneson, 103.

the commonality being quite of a contraire mind.”<sup>434</sup> Attacks on the Catholic Church transformed the dynamic of the war and created a viable opposition out of previously compliant (for Poles as well as the Swedes) peasants. Religion was seen as an important motivating factor for people and states. According to a pamphlet published in 1633, the largest reason for the uprising of subjects against their master was if they were “persecuted and harassed in [religious] matters.”<sup>435</sup> These uprisings, more importantly of note, were not a rare phenomena. According to Janos Bak these religiously motivated revolts did not have to be purely confessional. While the “justification of resistance is the duty of the orthodox to refuse communion with the transgressors,” religious revolts among the less doctrinal peasantry were usually linked to “popular perceptions of justice and the concept of natural rights.”<sup>436</sup> This explains two parts of the early Polish war: the lack of immediate support for John Casimir to fight off a Swedish invasion, and a lack of a peasant uprising until a series of demands, attacks and atrocities, most significantly against churches and clergy, motivated the peasants.

For Samuel Pufendorf, writing after the wars, and Bonneson, writing in the early twentieth century, the guerilla uprising was not the manifestation of nationalist pride -- the Polish peasantry had no more resisted the initial Swedish conquests than the Polish nobility -- but was a reaction to the religious assaults by heretical protestants on Catholic institutions.<sup>437</sup> “The simple people,” Pufendorf recorded

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<sup>434</sup> *SPJT*, 27 October 1655, vol. 4. 119.

<sup>435</sup> Vogler, 173. Quoting Johann Neumair, 1633.

<sup>436</sup> Janos Bak, *Religion and Revolt*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 3-4.

<sup>437</sup> Bonneson, 104-106.

with a typical dismissive tone of one who thought the Catholics backward and ignorant, “were frightened by the priests, who made them believe that for the future they would not be permitted to believe in purgatory or bow to an image and the like.”<sup>438</sup> Bonneson claimed the peasant uprisings were caused by a rejection of the “taxes, contributions and coercion to support Swedish troops,” or “the general indignation” in response to Swedish behavior towards religious places like Jasna Gora or even as a simple reaction to “the ordinary plundering by soldiers.” All of these violent events took place within a religious worldview in which the ordinary plundering of a church or monastery took on the iconography of a great religious struggle whether it was intended to or not.<sup>439</sup>

This religious worldview was fueled by the propaganda of the Catholic priests and monks under attack.<sup>440</sup> Pufendorf claimed that John Casimir “found it no hard task to excite the Poles against a nation of contrary religion, different languages and manner very opposite; besides, that of a long time [the Poles] had a natural aversion to the Swedes.”<sup>441</sup> The Polish King, representing a divinely ordained political system, still possessed a cache of authority but the Catholic Church had the ability to reach the ordinary Polish peasant and motivate them towards action.<sup>442</sup> This religious motivation was apparent in the centers of activity of partisan activity. Partisan activity was particularly intense in areas of religious difference -- provinces like

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<sup>438</sup> Pufendorf, 565.

<sup>439</sup> CXGS, vol. 5, 350. CXGS, vol. 5, 413. CXGS, vol. 5, 72.

<sup>440</sup> Bonneson, 106.

<sup>441</sup> Pufendorf, 565.

<sup>442</sup> Please see Ms. Forsberg's book regarding the similar abilities of the Swedish church in the 17th century.



Orthodox Samogitia and Catholic Greater and Lesser Poland. Interestingly, the Swedish footprint had little effect on the intensity of the partisan activity; Samogitia was a province of light Swedish garrisoning and lay midway between the foci of Riga and Royal Prussia. Provinces in the west like Masovia, Kalisz, Pozan and Cracow were heavily garrisoned by thousands of Swedish troops spread out in dozens of locations. The partisans, especially the more organized insurgent groups, were aided by the safe havens of unoccupied eastern Poland -- areas such as Lubin, Lwow, and Brest -- which were not conquered in the Fall 1655 campaign.

The Swedes experienced minimal partisan activity in the Protestant areas of Royal and Ducal Prussia. Consequently, Polish troops were unable to dislodge Swedish garrisons in Royal Prussia until long after the bulk of Swedish troops were removed to fight wars against Denmark. Some of the garrisons in Prussia were never dislodged and the Swedish troops only left after the 1660 peace treaty.

Guerilla warfare, or partisan warfare as it was called, was not new to the Northern War. "Hatred of the peasants lay in the background of every war in the period."<sup>443</sup> After Brietenfeld, in 1631, the defeated Imperial army was devastated not by Swedish pursuits but by the rise of the local peasantry who devoured fleeing soldiers. The Imperial general Gallas's army of 17,000 was likewise devoured by peasant guerillas after its defeat by Torstensson in 1644. Only about a 1,000 men returned safely.<sup>444</sup> The rise of larger armies without the national means of supporting those armies led to increased violence practiced on the peasant population as soldiers

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<sup>443</sup> M.S. Anderson, 67.

<sup>444</sup> M.S. Anderson, 64.

“lived off the land.” This violence could take a form of direct attacks on the population in the form of looting, rape, and murder, or could be indirect violence through starvation, by stealing all the local food and livestock, or disease that the soldiers carried.

The Polish uprisings differed from the examples of the Thirty Years’ War because Polish “notable persons” turned a religiously motivated guerilla movement into a new military organization capable of demanding -- if not completely achieving -- political goals.<sup>445</sup> Importantly, while the partisan activities of 1655 and 1656 “inflicted many defeats” on the Swedes, it was “unable alone to drive the Swedes from the land” because they were “badly armed and untrained at war.”<sup>446</sup> But the plundering of peoples and churches had ended any chance of Sweden being seen as a protector of Poland or Lithuania.

Modern counterinsurgency theory, which began in the wake of the French-Algerian war in the 1950s, understands insurgency to be “primarily a political struggle” incapable of being won purely by military means.<sup>447</sup> The United States Field Manual calls counterinsurgency “war at the graduate level,” and primarily a “struggle for the support of the population. Their protection and welfare is the center of gravity for friendly forces.”<sup>448</sup> Additionally, and for the Swedes it was the crux of their problems in 1656 and 1657, “counterinsurgency campaigns require extensive military, diplomatic, and economic resources over prolonged periods of time, and

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<sup>445</sup> CXGS, vol. 5, 350 and Bonneson, 106.

<sup>446</sup> CXGS, vol. 5, 72.

<sup>447</sup> United States Counter Insurgency Guide, 2009. 2.

<sup>448</sup> United States Field Manual 3-24, 2006. 1-134.

ultimately require resolution of some of the underlying political grievances that led the insurgents to take up arms.”<sup>449</sup> Once the insurgency began, given its religious and eventual national inclinations, the Swedes found themselves fighting a completely different war than they had intended to fight and then continued to fight this new conflict in the old methodology. Charles X continued to look for a decisive battle to give him victory while holding out the option of political *reproachment* with disaffected Polish noblemen. Only in the Protestant and Germanic cities of Prussia did Sweden retain both control and loyalty -- or at least neutrality -- of the population, which only increased as Polish raiders and partisans increasingly looted Prussia for their own gain.

Clausewitz considered “war by means of popular uprising” to be a “phenomena of the nineteenth century” and to be a waste of time, energy and resources because it was “a state of legalized anarchy that is a threat to the social order at home as to the enemy.”<sup>450</sup> Clausewitz wrote that the success of popular uprising “which consumes the basic foundation of enemy forces” would either be suppressed or grow into a larger social crisis. Besides, Clausewitz argued, its success could only occur in a place with such a disproportion of forces to space “that would never occur in practice.”<sup>451</sup> In 1735, Ewald defined partisans as a party who “know the country very well; [the partisan] is employed in surprising enemy convoys,” but not large organized battles.<sup>452</sup> For Ewald, like Clausewitz, this type of war was the

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<sup>449</sup> Bensahel, 279.

<sup>450</sup> Clausewitz, 578.

<sup>451</sup> Clausewitz, 579.

<sup>452</sup> Ewald, 2.

theater of Eastern Europe, of the Turks, Tartars and Cossacks, and not of civilized Europe.<sup>453</sup>

Insurgency, for Clausewitz, was the resumption of war by a not-quite-defeated combatant. “Once the victor is in sieges, left strong garrisons to protect communications or has sent detachments to suppress adjoining provinces: The time has come for the defending army to take the field again.”<sup>454</sup> It is surprising that just when defeat seems the most evident and the victor is occupying the country that the defender would then take the field – but this is precisely what happened in Poland. With garrisons spread out over a wide swath of territory, the Swedes gave up their concentrated advantage. Meanwhile, Polish insurgent armies – who had not been defeated in the 1655 campaigns – took the field with the aid of peasant guerillas. The Swedes were too spread out and preoccupied with Marienburg and Danzig to offer immediate and crushing response. The dissipation of strength on the Jaroslaw campaign and Charles’s near capture at the San River only exacerbated the problem.

In the early months of 1656, Charles X left Königsberg to continue the campaign to defeat the insurgent army of Czarensky. The path led his army of 11,000 men through Prussia to Warsaw and then east to Lubin and on to Jaroslaw. Through February and March 1656, Charles’s army recorded one victory after another. Not only was there a field army under Charles, but there was another army, led by Eric Oxenstierna, invested in Marienburg and a third force harassing Danzig. In early January, a Swedish force won a “total rout and defeat” on two Polish palatinates.<sup>455</sup> At

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<sup>453</sup> Ewald, 10-12.

<sup>454</sup> Clausewitz, 584.

<sup>455</sup> *SPJT*, 13 January 1656, vol. 4, 414.

Golombi, in early February, a small Swedish force led personally by Charles X smashed a Polish army “much stronger in men” in the open field. Casimir was accused of abandoning his army before the battle “fearing” the approach of Charles while Charles sought to “find [Casimir] out and engage him.”<sup>456</sup> Charles commanded the cavalry while Robert Douglas, who would rise to Field Marshal by the end of the war, commanded the right wing and Wittenberg commanded the left. The battle started on the right, then the left wing attacked the Poles and then Charles led an assault on the flank. The Poles fled and the pursuit lasted for two miles while many fleeing Poles drowned fleeing across the Vistula River. Importantly, “not one Swedish unit fled the field” despite being “weak and tired.”<sup>457</sup>

In March, Charles X won a series of battles. Edward Rolt reported that Charles defeated Czarniecki outside of Samosch and then took the town. Then Charles defeated Casimir's army again. Again Charles led the cavalry charge while Casimir watched from a high hill. Casimir fled the field “when he saw all was lost.”<sup>458</sup> Finally, Charles won a large battle against the Palatinates Potosky and Landkronsky. This battle was a decisive victory with twenty-two colors taken, 1,600 Poles killed and another 3,000 captured including Landkronsky. Potosky, who had once been High Constable of Poland and, like Landkronsky, had surrendered to Charles in the initial invasion, “gave up his ghost flinging himself into the River Bug.” The victory was important enough that the *Te Deum* was sung afterwards.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> *SPJT*, 8 February 1656, vol. 4, 514.

<sup>457</sup> *SPJT*, 8 February 1656, vol. 4, 515.

<sup>458</sup> *SPJT*, 11 March 1656, vol. 4 597,

<sup>459</sup> *SPJT*, 12 March 1656, vol. 4, 599.

Then this army marched towards Jaroslaw in order to capture a safe haven for the insurgency. Pufendorf related that after the disastrous march to Jaroslaw, the army was “much reduced to a miserable condition, for a great number of them perished from hunger and cold and those who, being tired, lagged behind in that unhappy journey or who were lost away were massacred by the country people.”<sup>460</sup> Reaching Jaroslaw, the Swedes found the Poles unwilling to fight for the city. Charles took the city without issue but found himself a prisoner within it as Czarniecki’s army raided the surrounding countryside, attacked foragers, and acted to starve the Swedes into surrender. Believing it “beneath his dignity to stand skulking behind walls” Charles left the city to have battle with Czarniecki.<sup>461</sup> The Swedes booby-trapped much of the ammunition that they could not transport out of the city. After they departed, spoilers attempted to ransack the encampment and were blown up with a large part of the town.<sup>462</sup> The event was spectacular enough that rumors reached Prussia and then Germany of the Swedes taking the war to a frightfully new level of violence with a report of a Polish city being burnt to the ground.”<sup>463</sup>

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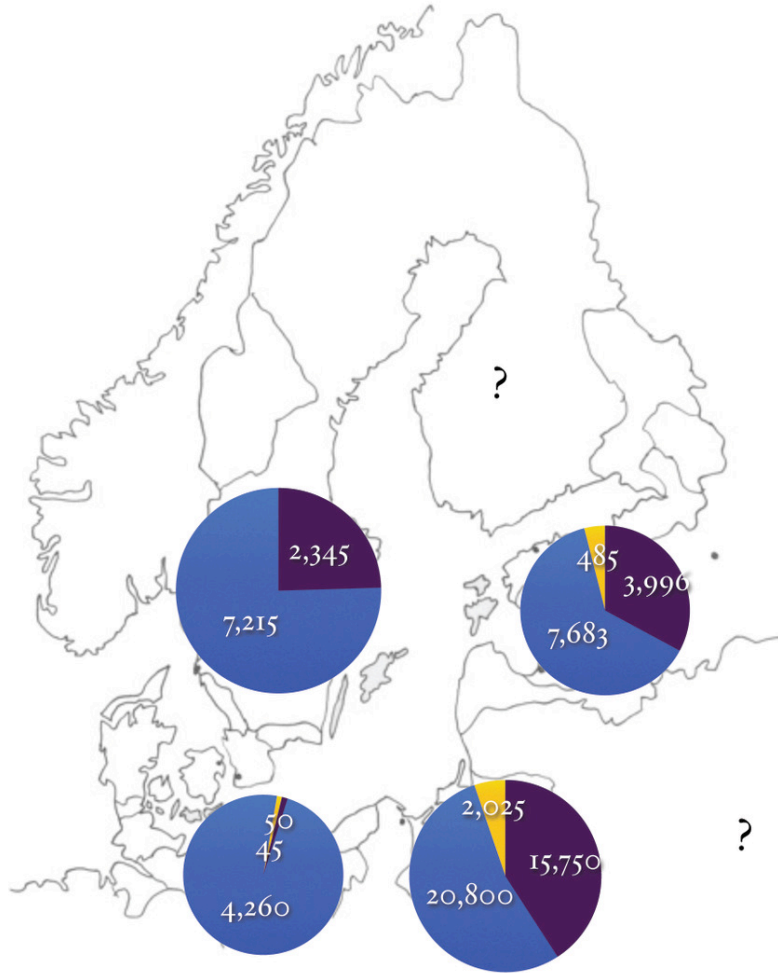
<sup>460</sup> Pufendorf, 566.

<sup>461</sup> Prade, 84.

<sup>462</sup> *SPJT*, 22 April 1656, vol. 4, 691.

<sup>463</sup> *SPJT*, 12 May 1656, vol. 4, 755.

Distribution of Swedish Troops: June 1656



Region	Total Troops	Percentage of Total
Sweden:	9,560.	15%
Baltic:	12,164.	19%
Pomerania:	4,355.	6%
Poland / Prussia:	38,575	60%
Lithuania:	?	[small garrisons]
Finland:	?	[with "Baltic" total]
<b>Total:</b>	<b>64,654</b>	<b>62% Infantry    34% Cavalry    4% Dragoons</b>

By this point Charles only had about 5,500 troops left and were being chased by three separate armies (Czarniecki, Casimir's – which was coming from the south – and a Lithuanian force). At the confluence of the San River and the Vistula, it appeared Charles and his army were trapped. A Swedish relief force from Warsaw, under Fredrick of Baden, marched to aid the king. On the night of 6 April, Charles and his army, leaving behind their heavy canons, struck across the river, scattered the Lithuanian force – made entirely of light cavalry – and escaped the trap. Charles, in a letter to Stenbock, wrote of breaking out with the infantry in great confusion; the dragoons saved the few artillery pieces they could carry.”<sup>464</sup>

The next day, the relief force was crushed, and Fredrick of Baden was killed, by the a Polish force outnumbering it 5-1. It had served as enough of a distraction to allow Charles the moment to escape. <sup>465</sup> Even though he had escaped, a rumor was quickly circulated that Charles had been killed in battle. Hearing the news polish citizens revolted “and in several places cut the throats of 3,000 Swedes.”<sup>466</sup> The Lithuanians gave the Swedes “little or no quarter...believing it better spoiled land than a lost land.”<sup>467</sup> One observer wrote “if [Charles's death] is true we have to expect a great revolution everywhere and the most cruel persecution of our religion.”<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i koncept, vol. 154. Charles to Stenbock, 30 March 1656. [The modern calendar timeline puts the date of the break out 5-6 April 1656.]

<sup>465</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 173.

<sup>466</sup> Prade, 87.

<sup>467</sup> *SPJT*, 26 April 1656, vol. 4, 703.

<sup>468</sup> *SPJT*, 6 May 1656, vol. 4, 734.



When Charles appeared again at Thorn there was much rejoicing but the “Swedish forces are few and weak.”<sup>469</sup> “My lords!” reported one enthusiastic writer, “his royal majesty has arrived personally with about 3,000 men,” which was all that was left of the 11,000 men who left Prussia in February intent on ending the war. Hereafter the Poles found little trouble in gaining recruits for insurgent armies despite their near total failure to win battlefield victories. Charles referred to John Casimir’s army as 20,000 “drunkards sitting around.”<sup>470</sup> Fighting the war in a traditional method had done nothing to quell the revolts or bring Sweden closer to victory in Poland – in fact the campaigns of the winter and spring of 1656 confirmed the fragility of the entire endeavor: Polish armies could be continuously defeated and Polish cities systematically taken and occupied without a decisive end to the war, but *one* Swedish setback or logistical disaster could ruin everything for the Swedes.

Clausewitz considered counterinsurgency methods to be a combination of war and policing; “restless villages can be garrisoned, or even looted and burned down as punishment.”<sup>471</sup> But these actions continued to miss the problematic nature of insurgency: increasing the level of violence on the population was actually counterproductive to the effort to obtain victory. Plehn wrote, “[T]he requirement for low collateral damage among the host nation’s people and property cannot be understated” because the destruction of people and property “dilutes the legitimacy and effectiveness” of counterinsurgency.<sup>472</sup> The US Field Manual section 1-125

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<sup>469</sup> *SPJT*, 19 April 1656, vol. 4, 713.

<sup>470</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 1. Charles X Gustav to Johan Adolf, 30 March 1656.

<sup>471</sup> Clausewitz, 581.

<sup>472</sup> Plehn, 60.

subtitle announced “The More Force Used, the Less Effective It Is,” and described “the more force applied, the greater the chance of collateral damage and mistakes. It also increases the opportunity for insurgent propaganda to portray lethal military activities as brutal.”<sup>473</sup> In the end, the Clausewitz model was unsustainable because “the goal of counterinsurgency is not just to penalize or defeat an enemy but to bring a disaffected population back to...allegiance.” Consequently, “threats of overwhelming force, massive retaliation or unlimited escalation cannot be credible.”<sup>474</sup> In fact, according to one study, “repression could also be affected by escalation” and counterinsurgency forces would become trapped in a cycle of escalating violence. According to the study, violent repression would ultimately be self defeating.<sup>475</sup>

The Polish revolt, which one observer wrote was caused by “the want of pay and good discipline in the Swedish army,” was quite barbaric and violent. “Nobles and peasants of the Samoite [Lithuanian] province are revolted,” went one report. “[The Poles] have not only put the Swedes to the sword but also all the inhabitants that were Roman Catholics and all such who looked like the Dutchman [Calvinists.]”<sup>476</sup> In another attack, 50 or 60 Swedes “who occupied a convent near Marienburg were attacked at night by horsemen and all were taken.”<sup>477</sup> Following news of Charles’s death came reports from Elbing that “the Poles do revolt

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<sup>473</sup> Field Manual 3-24, Section 1-125.

<sup>474</sup> Paul Kecskemeti, *Beyond Deterrence*, (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, February 18, 1960), 8.

<sup>475</sup> Rand, 27 and 29.

<sup>476</sup> *SPJT*, 27 May 1656, vol. 5, 35. .

<sup>477</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 4, 590.

everywhere....and that they are all taken up arms.” Worse were reports that one particular palatinate was “using Swedes, where he can find any, much worse than any other Polanders.”<sup>478</sup>

This violence quickly enveloped other peoples within the diverse kingdom. As the quote above shows, Roman Catholics in an Orthodox province were attacked – even though they were Polish subjects. Very quickly came reports from Prussia that “troops of the Polish army have committed great cruelties against inhabitants [of Prussia].”<sup>479</sup> A Prussian Calvinist complained of “Calvinists so horribly dealt with” by the Poles that they had little choice but to seek protection from Sweden or even Brandenburg.<sup>480</sup> While there seemed to be less Polish plundering in Poland itself – their armies (with their contingents of Cossacks and Tartar cavalymen) continued to lay waste to areas of the Polish Commonwealth. One letter from November 1656 reported “Poles and Tartars do commit incredible insolences whereforever they come...with plundering, firing and ravishing women and maid: this is their daily work.” According to the writer, the King of Poland aided this behavior.<sup>481</sup> These reports reflected that ethnicity and religion were far more important than “national” identity because Protestant Prussians were a loyal part of the Commonwealth in 1655 and yet the necessities of army logistics – a Polish army was reportedly mutinied for lack of pay – directed Polish destruction towards the most fiscally important but

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<sup>478</sup> *SPJT*, 19 April 1656, vol. 4, 713. .

<sup>479</sup> *SPJT*, 6 May 1656, vol. 4, 736. .

<sup>480</sup> Promotion of the Protestant Cause in Poland, 4.

<sup>481</sup> Thurloe, 14 November 1656, vol. 5, 552.

least “Polish” of the realms of the Commonwealth. This behavior explains why Prussian cities remained in Swedish hands throughout the war.

The Swedes in many cases did not help their cause. “Swedes began to punish with severe methods” and “in a short time reached a frightening scope allowing officers to commit reprisals against ‘rebels.’”<sup>482</sup> Patrick Gordon reported that Konigsmark hung “400 ambushers,” while another report noted “Earl Tot hath forced three towns and destroyed 6,000 poles.”<sup>483</sup> Meanwhile, Charles X, even as he searched out Polish armies for battle, maintained a hope of negotiating with Polish lords. He sent a letter to Polish lords “asking for their return to loyalty and they would be treated well. If not, he would reward their murderers.”<sup>484</sup> In a letter to Stenbock in December 1655, Charles ordered him to “bring Marienburg to accommodation” and the Polish lords “to reason.”<sup>485</sup> To Stenbock and Charles’s brother, Johan Adolf, he wrote about reinstating *loco judicera* and bringing palatinates back into the fold. Charles was quite upset by the defection of Konispolski and wrote to several advisors about the situation, asking Stenbock to “go with all haste and deal with this situation.”<sup>486</sup> After the victory at Golombe he confided, “I know the enemy can be brought to reason,” noting he was still willing “to accept capitulations.”<sup>487</sup> The combination of violence and surrender continued

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<sup>482</sup> CXGS, vol. 5, 350.

<sup>483</sup> Gordon, 21. and *SPJT*, 19 May 1656, vol. 5, 5.

<sup>484</sup> Prade, 88.

<sup>485</sup> RA; Kungliga brev i Koncept, vol. 151, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 13 December 1655.

<sup>486</sup> RA. RR, Huvudserie, vol. 305, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 14 February 1656.

<sup>487</sup> RA, RR. Huvudserie, vol. 305, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 14 February 1656.

throughout the war. But this escalation of violence did nothing to bring the Swedes nearer to victory in Poland.

Throughout the winter and spring of 1656, Charles continuously saw the issue as a military one: “God has given me a weapon,” he wrote to de la Gardie, “and with God I go to the enemy.”<sup>488</sup> Meanwhile, he continued to ask for reinforcements to be sent from Pomerania and from Sweden to increase garrisons. But there was almost no mention of a peasant revolt; the insurgent armies of Czarniecki and others were called “my enemy” but there were few letters explicitly discussing the peasant situation. In 15 September 1655, Charles wrote to Henrik Horn to “bring rebellion in Posen to an end,” and in February 1656, he wrote to Erik Oxenstierna, the chancellor, that the punishment for revolting peasants should be forced labor on building fortifications. But he noted the important fact that “the revolt is here in Poland” and not in Prussia.<sup>489</sup>

When the Swedes entered Poland in 1655, they had entered hoping to co-opt the population, or at least the politically active part of the population. What happened is that – save for some remnants like Czarniecki, they were largely successful. But the requirements of payment and supply floundered on the availability of supply of those goods. In the end the Swedish armies plundered the people, attacked the churches and monasteries of supposed heretics, and lost the goodwill of Catholic Poland and Orthodox Lithuania. Kecskemeti claimed that the “key condition for successful deterrence [of insurgency] is credibility.”<sup>490</sup> The

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<sup>488</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 7, Charles X Gustav to de la Gardie, 8 February 1656.

<sup>489</sup> RA, Kungliga brev i Koncept, vol. 153, Charles X Gustav to Erik Oxenstierna, 4 February 1656.

<sup>490</sup> Paul Kecskemeti, *Beyond Deterrence*, 2.

plundering and looting during the autumn of 1655 had eliminated just this aspect to the occupation and allowed the insurgency to grow and spread throughout the war.

### **The Undecisive Decisive Battle of Warsaw**

The Swedish army found itself fighting a war it was not prepared to fight: the Swedish army was built for a quick knockout blow against the enemy's concentrated armed force. To fight this new war required a radical transformation away from the army honed by nearly half a century of continuous conflict. Charles X abandoned the powerful, but slow moving, combined arms force. Instead, his army would match the Polish insurgents he was trying to hunt down; he would have a light, mobile, cavalry based force. During 1656 all of the developments of the past were thrown out in the quest for speed. Infantry troops and artillery were designated to garrisons where they were either stunningly vulnerable to attack (small towns in southern and eastern Poland and Lithuania) or were impervious to attack (urban Prussian garrisons). This quest for speed gave up the essential advantage of the Swedish military: decisive firepower and weight.

Since the reforms of Gustavus Adolphus, the Swedish armies carried an advantage of being able to obliterate their enemies through the use of firepower, infantry assault and cavalry collision. The three tools worked together to enable one decisive result. By transforming the army from a firepower based organization to one of speed and quickness, he gave away the one advantage left in the Swedish quiver in Poland: the chance to completely smash John Casimir (or anyone else's) insurgent army, kill their leaders, destroy their cohesion and crush their morale. By mid-1656,

with a partisan insurgency ranging in the four corners of the occupied domains, the decisive battle was the last means of forcing the insurgents to negotiate a treaty. Instead, Charles fought a series of battles, all of which he won, which brought no conclusion when the defeated Poles, on their own horses (and with superior knowledge of the terrain and the support of the local populace) simply disappeared into the countryside. Charles was exhausting himself and his men playing a never-ending game of “whack-a-mole.” The detrimental effect of this transformation, and how it allowed the war drag on towards a Swedish defeat, was most clearly seen in the largest battle of the war.

Between July 1655 and July 1656 the field armies in Poland and Prussia declined in strength by 54 percent. Cavalry numbers declined by half and infantry declined by almost as much. The field armies were getting smaller; divided by garrison duty, withered by illness and violence, being ground down by exhaustion due to the constant fighting. Operations in Poland and Prussia were sapping the strength and ruining the edge of a finely tuned machine. The Jaroslaw campaign -- a combination of violence, disease and exhaustive overstretch -- pushed the Royal army over the edge into collapse. The Royal Army, in the middle of a guerilla war, needed to be reconstituted, allowing for the Poles to take the initiative in the spring of 1655.

Casimir used that initiative to try to get his capital, Warsaw, back. Charles X's army numbered 30,000 men when it captured Warsaw on 8 September 1655 and was well balanced between infantry, cavalry and artillery. The Swedish army fighting Casimir at Warsaw in July 1656, a year later, numbered only 9,500 men composed of

80 percent cavalrymen. The Swedish situation was very different from 1655 when the infantry held the place of prominence in the army and the Swedes possessed a supremacy of battlefield artillery.

Even in a ruined state following the Jaroslaw campaign, the Swedish army was still qualitatively superior to the Poles and Lithuanians. On 19 May, the Swedish field army won a battle in Prussia, suffering “few killed or wounded,” in which “the Poles were wholly routed by the Swedes and made to fly, and in pursuit were wholly defeated, leaving behind them 21 standards and 600 killed [in the battle] and 1,500 killed in pursuit.”<sup>491</sup> The day before, John Casimir had laid siege to Warsaw. Historian Robert Bain supposed there were 4,000 troops, led by Field Marshal Wittenberg, inside Warsaw when the siege began but its difficult to know for sure.<sup>492</sup> Writers at the time did not believe the city was well protected, though Warsaw does not seem to have been a structurally well fortified city. Patrick Gordon wrote that the city was “feebly fortified” and Pufendorf wrote that the city was “indifferently fortified.”<sup>493</sup>

John Casimir’s army outside of Warsaw represented the typical Polish force during the war. Ninety percent of the force was cavalry, its infantry was not professionalized regulars but recruited -- or pressed -- noble peasants, and the army lacked the heavy artillery necessary for battering a city into submission. But it was a force of perhaps 40,000 men.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> SPJT, 19 May 1656, vol., 5, 5.

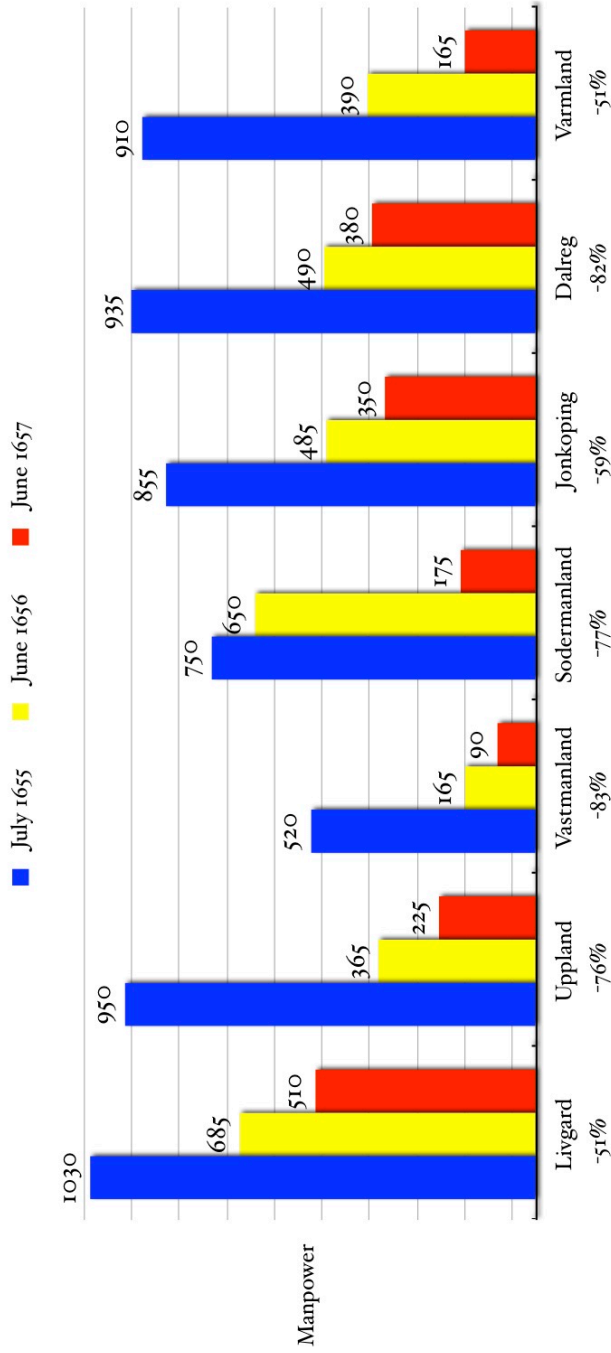
<sup>492</sup> Bain, 237.

<sup>493</sup> Gordon, 22. Pufendorf, 567.

<sup>494</sup> CXGS V, 291.



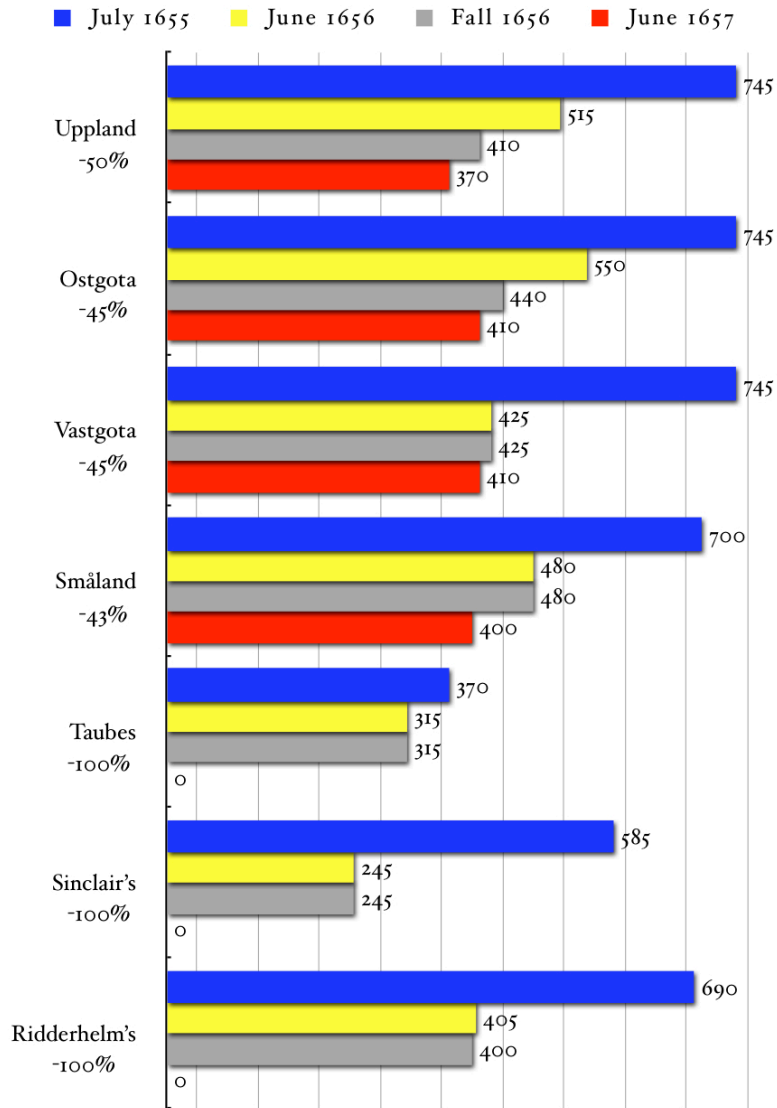
Manpower Decline of Infantry Regiments Between June 1655 and June 1657



Manpower levels in Infantry units declined precipitously during the war in Prussia and Poland. Regiments declined in strength due to the disease and violence. But were impacted by a lack of reinforcement from Sweden since manpower was increasingly needed to remain in the home provinces as a deterrent to Danish aggression.

This decline is most apparent in the transformation of the Royal Field Army. Charles X's army which entered Poland with 65% of its troops as infantry. In July 1656, at the Battle of Warsaw, the Royal Army was composed of 79% cavalry. Disease, violence, and garrisoning of occupied towns transformed the field armies robbing them of experienced infantry.

### Manpower and Percentage Decline of Cavalry Regiments Between June 1655 and June 1657



This chart illustrates the dramatic decline in Sweden's cavalry strength during the two years of war in Poland and Prussia. In an analysis of twenty different cavalry regiments the *average decline* during the war in Poland was almost *70% per regiment*. Even though the Swedish military increasingly relied upon cavalry in 1656 and 1657 those units were quickly being whittled away by disease, violence, exhaustion and a lack of available reinforcements

Surprisingly, Charles X did not rush to save Warsaw. Instead, he waited in Prussia -- at Marienburg - to meet with the Elector of Brandenburg to negotiate an alliance. Meanwhile, Stenbock, with only 6,000 men, was ordered to continue the siege bombard Danzig. Johan Adolf, the king's brother, was sent with a small force -- only three cavalry regiments -- to relieve Warsaw. Johan Adolf, aided by Field Marshal Gustav Wrangel, won a battle in Prussia, on 27 May and "retired in good order."<sup>495</sup> Johan Adolf then relieved Nowo Dwor -- the city between Warsaw to Thorn -- and scattered another Polish force larger than his own. But when he reached the outskirts of Warsaw he hesitated and returned to Nowo Dwor. His force of three cavalry regiments had almost no infantry nor artillery.<sup>496</sup> It was no match to fight the 40,000 Poles, Tartars and Lithuanians camped around Warsaw. Relief would require the Royal Army and Charles X was stuck in Prussia rebuilding the army from the Jaroslaw campaign and negotiating an alliance with Fredrick William.

Worse for Wittenberg was that his force was not only being battered by defending the city, but it was increasingly sickened by plague. The *råd* reported in a 17 July meeting (three weeks after Warsaw had fallen -- reflecting the problem of information in Stockholm during the war) that Wittenberg had only 500 men with 1,200 soldiers too sick to fight.<sup>497</sup> Prade, writing in the eighteenth century, believed Wittenberg commanded only 1,500 soldiers at the beginning of the siege, though they were much reduced by the end of the siege. Bain, writing in the nineteenth century, reported that the 4,000 men guarding Warsaw were reduced in the month

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<sup>495</sup> SPJT, 27 May 1656, vol. 5, 35.

<sup>496</sup> Bonneson, 135.

<sup>497</sup> Bain, 237. Prade, 88. RRP, xvi, 345.

long siege to 510 sickened men. Wittenberg's army gradually grew weaker. Prade wrote that Wittenberg "did all that prudence and valor could do for above five weeks. . . seeing that he was reduced to extremity and that the enemy was lodged on the ramparts."<sup>498</sup>

The Poles assaulted the city several times and were bloodily repulsed. Contemporaries reported that the Swedes repulsed five assaults (Prade claims it was seven) before breaching the walls. There followed a running battle through the streets of Warsaw as Swedish forces retreated to the safety of the royal castle and Poles "put to the sword all they found in arms."<sup>499</sup> The Poles attempted several assaults of the castle, all of which failed. But surrounded, with no hope of rescue, Wittenberg surrendered the citadel with Casimir's promise of free passage for the remaining soldiers to Prussia. Those troops heading towards Prussia were attacked on the road by Polish forces not obeying John Casimir. They were taken prisoner and sent off to Zamosc, far to the southeast near the Ukrainian border. Arvid Wittenberg, who had participated in every major Swedish battle since 1622 and commanded the mercenary army that won continuous victories in 1654, died in that prison a year later.

Charles learned of the fall of the city two days later. The following day, he and Fredrick William signed the Treaty of Marienburg – giving Brandenburg, for the first time, sovereignty over Ducal (later, East) Prussia. To get Fredrick William to move, Charles reversed the Treaty of Königsberg he had forced on the Elector six months

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<sup>498</sup> Prade, 89.

<sup>499</sup> SPJT, 9 July 1656, vol. 5, 170.

earlier. The coming battle, and there would be one because John Casimir finally had a place he must stand and defend, carried large expectations of finality. A coded letter reported “the Swede is going against [Casimir’s force] and this may decide the quarrel.”<sup>500</sup>

Meanwhile, having won his greatest triumph in the war, John Casimir found himself leading an army he could not control. Not only had elements of his force waylaid the Swedes after his promise of safe passage, but it was widely reported that Polish forces were “in great dissension, they demand payment and continual war with the Swede and they are ready to plunder all Swedish garrisons, but Casimir desires peace.”<sup>501</sup> His amalgamated Polish army was perfectly ready to plunder every city in their own kingdom, making them less an army than opportunist brigands.

The 18,000 men marching from Marienburg in July 1656 towards Warsaw reflected just how different the Swedish army had become over the course of a year. First, almost half of the troops were foreigners under the command of a foreign lord. There were 9,500 Swedish troops to 8,500 Brandenburg soldiers. An even worse indication was that there was actually more Brandenburger infantrymen than Swedish infantry (3,500:2,000).<sup>502</sup> Only 30 percent of the total force was composed of infantry a ratio reversed since June 1655. However, Charles still had an impressive artillery train. This allied force had 58 artillery pieces at the battle -- 42 of which

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<sup>500</sup> SPJT, 7 July 1656, vol. 5, 162, and 8 July 1656, vol. 5, 167.

<sup>501</sup> SPJT, 21 July 1656, vol. 5, 203.

<sup>502</sup> CXGS, vol, 5. 291.

were “light pieces,” a marked difference from the “gallant traine” of devastating twelve- and twenty-four-pound cannon originally carried into the war-zone. <sup>503</sup>

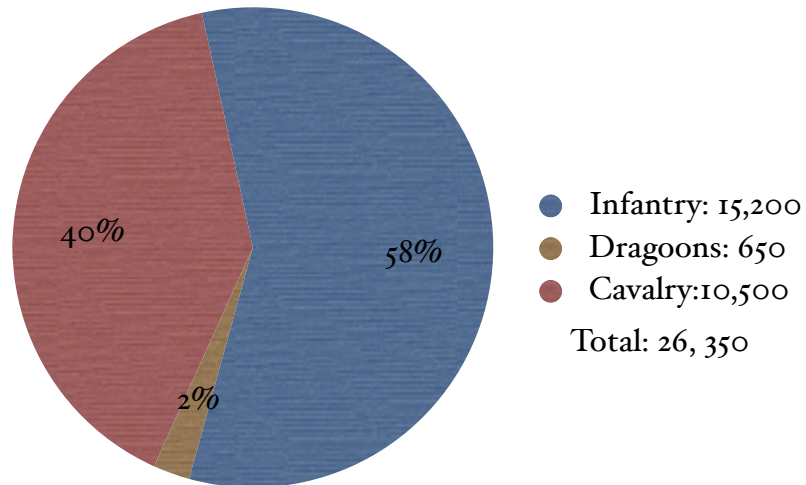
John Casimir’s force looked like a typical Polish force of the war; only ten percent of its men were infantry. The army was so large it still amounted to 4,000 men -- more than either Sweden’s or Brandenburg’s contingent -- which was only slightly smaller than the allied total infantry. Polish artillery amounted to only 30 pieces -- all Swedish guns taken from the Warsaw garrison -- while the Lithuanian contingent “had none of their own.” <sup>504</sup>

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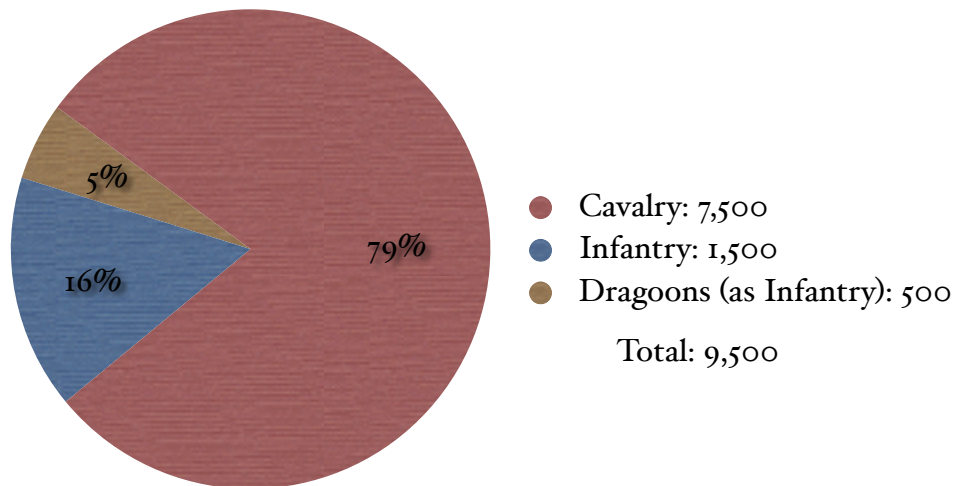
<sup>503</sup> Bonneson, 139. and Tersmedan, CXGS, vol. 8, 314.

<sup>504</sup> Bonneson, 139. and Tersmedan, CXGS, vol. 8, 314.

Charles X's Army on 8 September 1655  
at the Capture of Warsaw



Charles X Gustav's Army Composition: July 1656  
(Battle of Warsaw)



### **‘The Last Eighty Meters of the Middle Ages’<sup>505</sup>**

The battle took place on the right bank of the Vistula within sight of Warsaw. The Swedes and Brandenburgers were on the north side of a narrow battlefield hemmed in on the east by a forest. As Charles marched south from Prussia he absorbed all the erstwhile mobile contingents protecting Prussia. Robert Douglas’s cavalry joined the Royal Army as did Johan Adolf’s force at Nowo Dwor.

The Battle of Warsaw included every important officer of the war except for Stenbock, who was besieging Danzig, and Magnus de la Gardie who was protecting Livonia from Muscovite advances. Charles X and Fredrick William were both present at the battle, as were John Casimir and Czarniecki on the Polish side. Johan Adolf commanded the Swedish right wing, including regiments led by Sulzbach, Douglas and Hendrich Horn. Karl Wrangel was on the left with the Elector’s forces and Earl Tot, and Bengt Oxenstierna commanded the artillery.<sup>506</sup> The battle was a venerable “who’s who” of the Swedish noble officers and represented the largest concentration of Swedish officer talent since the beginning of the war.

The allies found the Poles dug in, guarding the lone bridge crossing the river. The battle began with Swedish-Brandenburger frontal assault against the Polish earthworks. The allies made little progress the first day. During the night, Charles carried out one of the more audacious actions in Swedish battle: he pivoted, at great risk to his army, the entire allied force around the Polish right flank. From this position, on a narrow plain overlooking the Polish army, the allies could devastate the

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<sup>505</sup> From Peter Englund’s *Ofredsår*, quoted in Frost, *Northern Wars*, 16, describing the repulse of the Hussar charge on the second day of the Battle of Warsaw.

<sup>506</sup> Prade, 92.



Polish army. John Casimir, needing to eliminate that threat, sent in his heavy cavalry, the Hussars to smash the left wing of the allied troops. Casimir had a reason for confidence; the Hussars had been the finest cavalry unit in all of Eastern Europe for centuries. They carried a history of victory against Swedish soldiers. But there were less than a thousand of them and as they charged gloriously across the field they were subject to withering bombardment from canon and musketry. Swedish historian Peter Englund called this charge “the last eighty meters of the Middle Ages.” He contrasted the Hussars, “the magnificent remnants of a long-dead tradition, kept alive by a moribund noble dominated society,” with the Swedish and Brandenburg infantry composed of “commoners, whose services were paid for by the toil of good honest burghers. Experienced and well drilled, these disciplined modern soldiers loosed coordinated volleys which ploughed bloody furrows through the glittering ranks of the hussars...Discipline had conquered individualism; modern technology had drawn a firm, black line under the Middle Ages.”<sup>507</sup> For Englund, the Hussars were the past and the allies represented the future of war and society.

Future or not, the Hussars and the Swedish infantry suffered from the same problem at Warsaw. Neither was enough in quantity to decide the battle. The Hussars were only 800 soldiers in an army of 40,000 men. Likewise, the vaunted Swedish infantry made up only one-ninth of the allied army. There were simply not enough of them – well armed, trained, and professionalized as they were – to roll through the Polish lines sweeping all before them.

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<sup>507</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 16.

On the third day of the battle, most of the Polish horsemen simply escaped, squirting out the sides of the battlefield heading north, south or west as the Swedish army crushed the Polish center. The three days at Warsaw, the largest battle of the war, had simply returned the situation to the 1656 status quo. The Swedes, in recapturing Warsaw, had another city to garrison and defend; the Poles, unhindered by any connection to geography, could continue raiding and plundering.

The transformation of the Royal Army led to this result. The army of 1655 was designed to fight this kind of battle and win a crushing victory. Instead of the infantry moving forward in a great salvo of fire and steel, they were forced by their diminutive numbers to hide behind earthworks and fortifications. The Swedes had given away or lost the significant advantages they possessed. All of this change had been caused by military necessities and demographic realities. Garrisoning cities combined with disease in the rank to rob the Royal army of much of its strength. Fighting the many different Polish insurgent groups, who appeared and disappeared almost randomly, required a mobile cavalry army. Footmen and artillery slowed the force down. But in making that bargain the Swedish force lost weight and firepower to force an end to the war.

The victory at Warsaw was a famous victory for Charles. It was the largest battle of the war and he had accomplished his goals: he had smashed the Polish army and regained Warsaw and had done so with few casualties. Letters poured out of Poland to inform Europe of the news.<sup>508</sup> On 12 August, the *råd* received the news

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<sup>508</sup> See SPJT, August 1656 for many examples and descriptions.

that “Warsaw was again under the King’s devotion.”<sup>509</sup> Many hoped it would usher in some sort of negotiation to end the war.

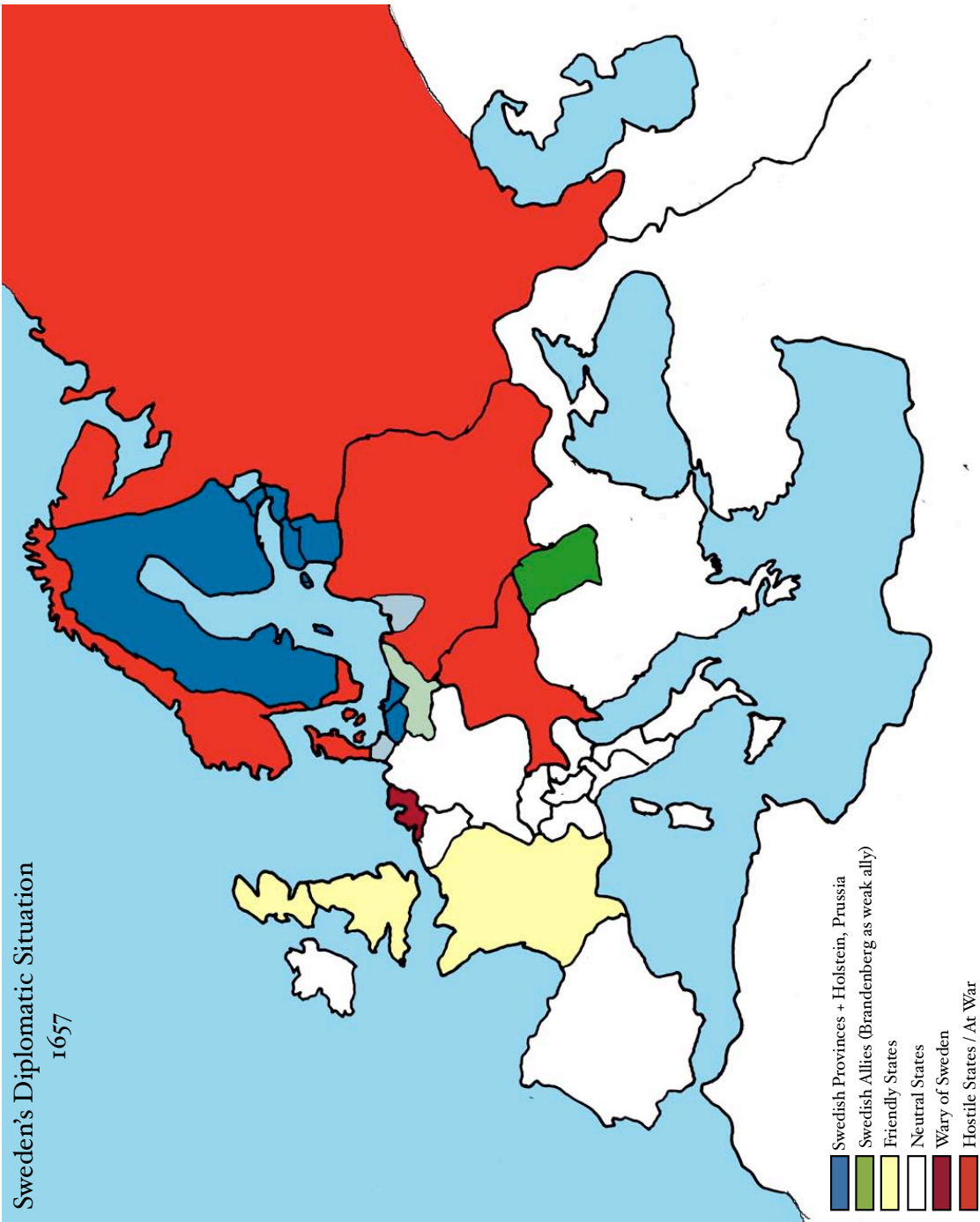
A new dynamic entered the conflict to turn the tide against Swedish success, however. Foreign states, perceiving the declining strength of Sweden and its army, intervened in the war. Austria, Muscovy, Brandenburg, the Netherlands, Transylvania and Denmark all entered the conflict in order to carve out their own zone of influence. Only the Transylvanians entered the war to aid the Swedes. Denmark and Muscovy both attacked Swedish provinces rather than intervene in Poland. This new dynamic profoundly changed the nature of the conflict by expanding it from a localized conflict to a regional one. Gustav Horn, General Lewenhaupt and newly-appointed Field Marshall Robert Douglas were all sent east to protect a 500 mile front running from Finland to Riga from a Muscovite army estimated to be 100,000 men. Douglas headed east with 3,000 cavalymen, no infantry and no artillery. No longer was the Swedish army in any condition to accomplish its political mission. The war in Poland, Prussia and even in the Baltic provinces was no longer about taking and expanding, but holding and maintaining one’s position.

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<sup>509</sup> RRP, xvi, 421.

Chapter 7: The Effects of Foreign Intervention

in the Swedish-Polish War: 1656 -1657.



The Swedish project in Prussia failed for two interrelated reasons: the inability to quell the Polish insurgency and the intervention of other states into the conflict against Sweden. The Polish insurgency robbed Charles X of the manpower he needed to deliver a *coup d' grace* against Danzig. Capturing Danzig could end the war but the city was heavily defended by *trace italliene* fortifications and simply capturing the suburbs of the city turned battle into a drudgery of digging and fighting. Once captured, like Elbing or Marienburg, Danzig would be impenetrable to Polish counterattack. Danzig could be a Swedish Gibraltar on the Vistula and would provide the Swedes with two anchorages in the Baltic, Riga being the other, from which they would not be ejected.

The inability to quell the insurgency forced Charles to maintain a large garrison presence in Poland and to keep the Royal Army (as well as several other mobile forces) far from the battle-zone. Sweden could not win the war in the Polish provinces. The near disaster at the San River proved Sweden could only lose the war in southern and eastern Poland. This stasis left the war in a strange place: the Swedes could not end the war as long as John Casimir and other Polish and Lithuanian nobles raided Swedish occupied territories and garrisons. The Poles likewise could not win the war (or expel the Swedes) without fighting a decisive battle which, in 1655-1656, they were likely to lose.

This indecision allowed other states (first the Dutch, then Muscovy and Austria, and finally the Danes) to intervene in the conflict. The Swedish failure during this new period of the war was that only one state - Transylvania - sided with Sweden. These interventions challenged Sweden's ability to achieve its military goals.

The interventions contributed to lengthening the war and allowing Sweden's enemies to continue fighting beyond their original resources. Sweden, for all its power, could not fight all of eastern Europe alone.

Erin Simpson, a political scientist, wrote "third party interventions will increase the duration [of a conflict] because they support an otherwise weak rebel group."<sup>510</sup> Austrian intervention, for example, was meant to keep John Casimir's forces on the battlefield. But Austrian support was also not so egregious as to spark a Swedish invasion of Silesia which would have been a disaster for Austrian foreign policy. When Austrian troops, under Austrian banners, finally marched into Poland it was as Charles X was leaving Poland to fight Denmark. Since "unilateral interventions...are positively associated with duration"<sup>511</sup> the Austrian objective was to keep the Swedes from winning. This would drain the state of resources, grind away at the efficiency of the army, and keep the Swedes to occupied in Poland to attack Germany.

The Dutch intervened not to prolong the conflict but to protect their own economic interests. Fred Lawson argues foreign "countries will try to impose order on volatile situations that might affect their own security."<sup>512</sup> For the Dutch, Danzig went to the heart of their economic security. Dutch letters reflect a clear paranoia about *what will the Swedes do* if they get control of Danzig. Renato Corbetta argues

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<sup>510</sup> Erin Simpson, "Analyzing Third Party Interventions in Civil Wars Using Propensity Scores" (reading, Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, Quebec, Montreal, March 17, 2005), 3.

<sup>511</sup> Simpson, 2.

<sup>512</sup> Fred Haley Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War: Thirty Years of Confrontation*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 456.

that “studies generally support a thesis that interventions have balance of power concerns” and so it seems the case with to the Dutch intervention.<sup>513</sup> There was a genuine fear in Amsterdam that the Swedes would become too powerful if they gained control of Prussia and Danzig and that this power would be used against Dutch interests.

Muscovy’s intervention was caused by a whole different paradigm: the exploitation of Sweden’s perceived weakness in the Baltic provinces to recapture Estonia, Ingria and absorb Livonia. According to Robert Rauchhaus, intervention allows parties to exploit the situation by taking riskier actions or making larger demands.<sup>514</sup> For Muscovy, the ongoing conflict in Poland and Prussia - combined with the interventions of Austria and the Dutch - allowed Muscovy to do something it would not have done on its own: an invasion of Sweden’s Baltic provinces.

Sweden and Muscovy had been at peace since 1617 and their amity was based on their mutual enmity of Poland. Muscovy had the opportunity to transfer a war against Lithuania to the Swedish Baltic provinces because the Swedes were bogged down in far off western Poland. The capture of Narva or Revel would reestablish Muscovy as a Baltic state. The capture of Riga might transform Muscovy into a Baltic naval power. Yet, the Muscovites proved uninterested in mounting a massive offensive against the Swedes as they had against the Lithuanians. The siege of Riga, for example, was a half hearted affair compared to the the Muscovite assaults against

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<sup>513</sup> Renato Corbetta, "Fatal Attraction? Rivalries and Third Party Intervention" (reading, International Studies Association, March 1, 2007), 3.

<sup>514</sup> Robert Rauchhaus, "Morale Hazards and Hazardous Morals: The Principal Agent Problem in Third Party Interventions" (reading, Annual Meeting of American Political Science Association, September 2, 2004), 3.



Smolensk and Vilno. It is unclear whether the partisan war the Muscovites were fighting against Tartars, Cossacks, Lithuanian and Polish horse-lords in Lithuania had a depleting effect on the Muscovite army. What is clear is that after some easy victories against undermanned Swedish border cities the Muscovites made no serious gains in the Baltic provinces nor made attempts at serious inroads into the provinces after their siege of Riga was broken by Swedish counterattacks.

Denmark intervened for much the same reason as Muscovy: to gain lands previously lost (Halland, Holstein, perhaps even Småland) and to gain new territories (Bremen, Wismar, perhaps Mecklenberg) by exploiting Charles X's problems in Poland. Had other states not already intervened in the conflict it is unlikely the Danes would have been willing to fight the Swedes alone. Fredrick III's intervention was directly influenced by Austria's decision to pour troops into Poland. During the entire seventeenth century Denmark had not fought Sweden by itself and it is doubtful, given the decisive Swedish victories of 1645 and 1657, that Denmark could compete with Sweden as a military power. Thus the very indecision of the Polish war allowed for other states to intervene. This increased the duration of the war which allowed even more states, who would not otherwise have fought Sweden, to intervene in the conflict. Patrick Gordon turned out to be prescient in early 1656 when he linked Sweden's military and diplomatic problems. Sweden could not win the war, Gordon wrote, because she had too many enemies to have much chance of success.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Gordon, 29.

## **Danzig and the Dutch**

Danzig, with a population of 50,000 people, was the richest and largest city in Poland. It was the destination of export for much of the Polish hinterlands. The city was the most lucrative city on the Baltic Coast. It was the prize of every Swedish war in Poland and Prussia. Control of the city “was indispensable to the warchest” but taking the city, with its modern fortifications and three hundred guns was incredibly hard.<sup>516</sup> The inability to take the city had turned the Gustavus Adolphus’s Prussian War into one resembling Charles X’s: raids, counter-raids, and no clear means to end the war victoriously. Axel Oxenstierna believed “Danzig had done [Gustavus Adolphus] the most damage.”<sup>517</sup>

Capturing Danzig, and with it the rest of Royal Prussia, would have solved Charles’s financial troubles. John Thurloe wrote “if [Charles X] masters [Danzig and Royal Prussia] it will be worth more to him than all his kingdom of Sweden.”<sup>518</sup> Additionally, the possession of Danzig would have given Sweden control of every large port and estuary in the Baltic. All ship borne trade would pass through Swedish customs houses and no other state would have a harbor for a naval fleet in the Baltic, save the Danes at Copenhagen.

Royal Prussia was the predominant supplier of grain to western Europe. 82 percent of *all* Polish grain passed through Danzig’s custom house. Danzig’s trade with the west was an order of magnitude greater than the other cities in Prussia. In 1646, Danzig shipped 32,000 lasts of wheat. Königsberg and Elbing shipped only 6,000

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<sup>516</sup> Roberts, *SIE*, 39. SPJT, 18 December 1656, vol. 4, 323.

<sup>517</sup> Roberts, *Rise of Sweden*, 63.

<sup>518</sup> SPJT, 15 May 1655, vol. 3, 440.

and 500 lasts respectively.<sup>519</sup> Those 32,000 lasts generated 917,000 rixdollars in profit. Charles X's 1654 income, for all of his realms, was 1.6 million riksdallars.<sup>520</sup> Even in areas where Danzig was "comparatively weak" like hemp rope, flax and other naval stores Elbing only shipped about one-third of Danzig's annual levels.<sup>521</sup> Elbing, Charles X's war capital in Poland, generated only 1.5% of Danzig's income from trade. The vast majority of Danzig's goods headed west in Dutch ships.<sup>522</sup> For the Dutch the Baltic represented the "mother trade" of which Danzig was the crown jewel. By 1600, nearly half of all the Port of Amsterdam's trade was with Danzig alone.<sup>523</sup> Which, according to C.R. Boxer, explained why the Dutch always "took a hard line when [Danzig] was threatened."<sup>524</sup> In 1655 the Dutch searched for proxies to defend Danzig from the Swedes. Finding none, the Dutch directly intervened in 1656 with a forty ship fleet (larger than either the Swedish or Danish fleets) and thousands of marines.

For the Dutch the entire Polish War was tied up in their global contest with England. The Dutch had just concluded the First Anglo-Dutch War against Cromwell's Protectorate which had been disastrous for Dutch merchant shipping. During the war the Dutch had concluded an alliance with Denmark to close off the

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<sup>519</sup> Michael North, *From North Sea to Baltic* (London: Ashgate Variorum, 1996), 125 and North, 384.

<sup>520</sup> North, 385.

<sup>521</sup> North, 388-389.

<sup>522</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade* puts the percentages between 70% of the total volume before 1650 to between 50-60% afterwards but a lack of data (see, North, "The Baltic Trade and the Decline of the Dutch Economy in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century", Table III, 276.) explains the fluctuations and impreciseness. Jonathan Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1989)

<sup>523</sup> Kirby, 9.

<sup>524</sup> C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire: 1600-1800* (Boston: Penguin, 1991), 101.

Baltic to English shipping. While Sweden did not participate in the naval war on England's side it was clear that Sweden held a most favored nation status with Cromwell. The letters from Swedish envoys, Peter Coyet and Christer Bonde, innumerate the jealousies of Dutch diplomats at the special treatment the Swedes receive in England.<sup>525</sup> Two things were thus clear to the Dutch when Charles began his war in Poland: (1) England and Sweden were great friends and (2) Sweden and Denmark were great enemies. It was easy for the Dutch to conclude that Charles X's territorial gains in the Baltic would be economic gains for England. "[The Dutch] believe that the design of Sweden is to give all the commerce [in the Baltic] to England, and their belief or unbelief is incurable. It is the love of commerce that doth make [Amsterdam] blind to [Sweden's] intentions and understandings."<sup>526</sup> The Dutch feared that "Sweden, being master of Prussia, will furiously charge the [Dutch] commerce."<sup>527</sup> There was little incentive for Charles X cripple Dutch economics in the Baltic. The Peace of Altmark in 1629 proved both the value of controlling Royal Prussia but also allowing trade to thrive.

The Peace of Altmark was negotiated by the French and the Dutch in order to allow Gustavus Adolphus to end his desultory war in Prussia and enter the German War. The Swedish economy was in no condition to support another large scale invasion of the continent and so Altmark gave Sweden control of the Prussian export tolls until 1636. In that time Royal Prussia produced revenues of between six and seven hundred thousand riksdallars a year. It was significantly more money than

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<sup>525</sup> see Roberts, *Swedish Diplomats at Cromwell's Court*.

<sup>526</sup> SPJT, 24 December 1655, vol. 4, 312.

<sup>527</sup> SPJT, 4 June 1655, vol. 3, 474.

Gustavus Adolphus was able to get from the Swedish *riksdag*.<sup>528</sup> Altmark reflected that the best course for Sweden was to skim off the top of the Dutch-Prussian trade. Ruining Dutch trade in the Baltic, a level of trade the English were in no position to carry, had little appeal for Swedish leaders.

The Dutch, though, became consumed by a great “pannick fear” and that a Swedish victory would be “to the great prejudice of [the Dutch].”<sup>529</sup> Coyet reported a popular rumor among Dutch merchants that Charles was besieging Danzig with 140 ships and 15,000 men. If true, it would have represented a Swedish fleet 500 percent larger than actually existed and an army composed of *half* the Swedish troops in Poland. In September 1655, a day after Charles X received the surrender of Warsaw, the first Swedish naval ships arrived off the Danzig port. “Sixteen ships can be seen from the walls,” wrote one westerner, “the Swedes have taken the suburbs and make landings along the coast.”<sup>530</sup> Within a week Swedish naval ships were charging tolls on the commerce coming into and out of the port: 4.25 riksdallars per last for wheat, 4.5 rds for herring and 3.5 rds for rye. One Dutch ship paid 201 rds to pass through this toll-blockade.<sup>531</sup> The point was not to ruin Baltic trade or even blockade Danzig but to skim money for the Swedish treasury.

Danzig, to put pressure on the Dutch for help, closed its customs house and shut up trade for the winter. The few weeks of interdiction brought in little money but caused a great stir back in western Europe. In England, Christer Bonde

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<sup>528</sup> Roberts, *Rise of Sweden*, 123 and 65.

<sup>529</sup> SPJT, 28 May 1655, vol. 3, 450. and SPJT, 25 June 1655, vol. 3, 551.

<sup>530</sup> SPJT, 9 September 1655, vol. 3, 741.

<sup>531</sup> SPJT, 14 September 1655, vol. 4, 9.

reported, “things have turned out as [the Dutch] predicted and feared; so that I shall have the greater difficulty in justifying that action and in controverting their arguments.”<sup>532</sup> Charles’s response was to recommend that the English and the Dutch simply go to any other Baltic port – Riga, Revel or Narva, for example - to get their goods.<sup>533</sup>

As the Swedish army invaded Royal Prussia in October 1655 Danzig sent out envoys “begging for help” from the Danes, who “dare not help,” to England, who was “too busy,” and to the Dutch, who seemed to hesitate as “no one knows” what they would do. The only offer of help they received was from Brandenburg which they quickly rejected as “Brandenburg cannot protect them against the Swede.”<sup>534</sup> And it was feared that the fox, once let into the hen house, would not likely leave.

Danzig’s suburbs “paid contributions to the Swedish troops” after being “threatened...with fire and destruction.” In response the Danzigers sallied forth to burn their own suburbs to deny the Swedes contributions and quarter.<sup>535</sup> But Charles X was never able to bring the power of his royal army to bear against the city because he was fighting the Polish insurgency far to the south. Field Marshal Stenbock, with about 5,000 troops, was given the job to take the city and Danzig fought his ability to dig in. Stenbock wrote of a Danzig raid on their camps by 500 men. “We broke them,” Stenbock reported, “and made them flee.”<sup>536</sup> Charles X wrote to Stenbock

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<sup>532</sup> Roberts, *Swedish Diplomats in Cromwell's Court*, 121.

<sup>533</sup> Roberts, *Swedish Diplomats in Cromwell's Court*, 24 and 117-118.

<sup>534</sup> SPJT, 4 December 1655, vol. 4, 278. and SPJT, 12 November 1655, vol. 4, 145.

<sup>535</sup> SPJT, 12 February 1656, vol. 4, 496. and SPJT, 4 February 1656, vol. 4, 461.

<sup>536</sup> RA, Skrivelser till Konungen, box 09, vol. 55. 18 May 1656.

saying that he could not come to Danzig nor provide aid since he was dealing with other problems “everywhere.”<sup>537</sup> Stenbock, Charles X told him in March 1656, should concentrate on taking the surrounding cities, such as Dirschau, “without which the city could not long subsist.”<sup>538</sup> Several times Charles X informed the Field Marshal that Swedish troops could not come to his aid because “I and the army are giving action to the enemy against us here, in Greater Poland” and “Swedish and Finnish troops are necessary to secure the [Polish] provinces in order to keep Prussia safe.”<sup>539</sup> The campaign against Danzig was being starved for resources due to the insurgency. But, only the capture of Danzig, could have ended the war victoriously for Sweden.

In May 1656, as Stenbock battered the city and fought for control of key suburbs, that the Dutch actually began to prepare for an intervention in the Baltic. On 12 May 1656 Lord Jacob Wassenaer was given orders by the States General to sail to Copenhagen and discuss defense issues with the Danes. He was also to “keep a watchful eye upon the trade and ships of [the Netherlands].” Item #6 in his instructions authorized him to “destroy [the Swedish] fleet, attack their merchants and make the Baltic safe” for Dutch merchantmen *if* the Swedes interfered with his navigation.<sup>540</sup> Wassenaer was given forty military ships immediately making him the most powerful naval commander in the Baltic. Charles X complained that the Dutch

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<sup>537</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol 306. 10 May 1656.

<sup>538</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol 305. 8 March 1656.

<sup>539</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol 305. 10 April 1656.

<sup>540</sup> SPJT, 12 May 1656, vol. 4, 756.

were interfering with his designs and emboldened his enemies to continue fighting.<sup>541</sup> Which is exactly what the Dutch were doing.

Yet there was little he could do to stop the Dutch. Sweden's imperial system depended on the fleet - a relatively large fleet composed of about 35 ships of the line, armed merchantmen and assorted other small military vessels - to bring supplies and reinforcements from the home provinces. Sweden, a respectable naval power given its relative poverty, was no match for the Dutch in either skill or equipment. Moreover, Charles's war was already a logistical nightmare as the army was completely unable to support itself from Polish and Prussian resources. The insurgency and peasant insurrection meant that Charles's army was still heavily dependent on logistical support from Sweden and Finland. This logistical dependency was even more acute with the beginning of the Muscovite invasion of Livonia in the summer 1656 since Livonia had to be reinforced and supplied completely by sea. In the summer of 1656 Charles was simply in no position to fight a naval war with the Dutch over Danzig especially since Cromwell offered nothing but kind words.<sup>542</sup> Charles was in little position to do more than negotiate without the threat of English intervention to scare the Dutch. In September 1656 Charles X signed the Treaty of Elbing with the Dutch promising not to hinder the Dutch commerce in the Baltic.

What ensued though was a strange form of kabuki theater. Charles X had promised not to interfere with Dutch commerce - and the Dutch receive most

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<sup>541</sup> SPJT, 13 December 1656, vol., 5, 675.

<sup>542</sup> Roberts, *Swedish Diplomats in Cromwell's Court*, 28.



favored nation status at Swedish ports in the Baltic – and the Dutch promised not to sink the Swedish fleet. Yet, Danzig was a city in the Polish Commonwealth which was still at war with Sweden. Danzig continued to “make war on the Swedes without retribution as subject of the King of Poland.”<sup>543</sup> Thus Charles continued to wage war against the city – though not blockading the port – and the Dutch continued to garrison the city with marines and fiscally support Danzig’s resistance. But since the Dutch were technically in Danzig to protect Dutch commerce – and not the city itself - this led to strange events during the war. At one point the Danzig citizens arrested the Dutch garrison troops and confiscated their arms for not participating in sallies against the Swedish besiegers. Danzig also demanded 12,000 rds per month from the Dutch, a loan of 500,000 guilders and 1,500 men to garrison the city or they might turn the city over.<sup>544</sup>

Danzig did not find much help from the Poles. No Polish force came to relieve the city until John Casimir’s defeated army arrived after the Battle of Warsaw. One westerner observed “the Swedes must be in a low position to suffer so small an army...to lye so long so near their great army and dare not come out to fight them.”<sup>545</sup> Casimir’s battle hardened but ragged force then plundered much of Danzig’s countryside and much of the city leaving the entire area destitute.<sup>546</sup>

In the end, the inability to take Danzig meant that the war was always unsuccessful. Charles X had marched up the Vistula in 1655 in order to smash

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<sup>543</sup> SPJT, 17 November 1656, vol. 5, 601.

<sup>544</sup> SPJT, vol. 5, 355.

<sup>545</sup> SPJT, 15 November 1656, vol. 5, 557.

<sup>546</sup> SPJT, 23 December 1656, vol. 5, 705. and SPJT, 3 November 1656, vol. 5, 518.

Casimir's army and bring the Polish nobility to heel. He had not really succeeded in either. The rise of the insurgency meant Charles was never able to concentrate the necessary resources against Danzig. As the war progressed this became even harder to do as the Swedish royal army dissolved away from disease and exhaustion. Charles was never able to capture the only part of Poland that really mattered; the one that could have ended the war.

### **Brandenburg**

Brandenburg really won the Swedish-Polish war. When the war began Brandenburg's territories – widely scattered between western Germany and eastern Prussia were weak, poor and disparate. When the Swedes descended into Poland Brandenburg had a quickly raised mercenary force of perhaps 6,000 mercenaries and levied serfs scrapped together but “represented the worst scum of the earth”<sup>547</sup> Moreover, the Elector had responded to the crises in Poland with a crash course of coercion and extraction. Fredrick William extorted 1.5 million thalers between 1654 and 1660 alone additional revenue from his subjects. By 1657 the army itself became the instrument of tax collection from the more reluctant parts of society.<sup>548</sup> Revenue from direct taxation increased nearly five-fold during the course of the Swedish-Polish War.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> S.B. Fay, “Beginnings of the Prussian Army” 770-771, 766.

<sup>548</sup> Carsten, 229. and Downing, “Constitutionalism, Warfare and Political Change in Early Modern Europe,” 16.

<sup>549</sup> William Hagen, “Seventeenth Century Crises in Brandenburg,” Table 1, 321.

When the war began Charles had confided that he worried about Brandenburg – that the Elector might act to hinder his designs.<sup>550</sup> From the beginning of the war there was this push and pull between the two would be dominators of Prussia. The Elector began by trying to spread his protection over the important Royal Prussian cities before Charles arrived but the Elector’s reputation proceeded him and none of the cities of Royal Prussia allowed Brandenburg garrisons. Which did not stop the Elector from transferring his army to Royal Prussia to live off the land and confiscate the resources of small towns. As Brandenburg’s troops fell back they “destroy everything” and increasingly took Swedish foragers prisoners – as proof they could hurt the Swedes – and then released them.<sup>551</sup> One report put the number at “30, 40 or 50 Swedish prisoners every day.”<sup>552</sup> When Charles X arrived in October he was very much annoyed that Brandenburg had spoiled the province and wished to end the Elector’s meddling. The result was the December march on Königsberg because the truth was that the Elector was playing a game out of his league. Little faith was put into Brandenburg’s ability to defend itself from the Swedes. “I fear [Brandenburg’s] weakness” wrote one observer.<sup>553</sup> “Brandenburg will have enough to do to defend himself so that their resistance will be vain and fruitless” wrote another.<sup>554</sup> Samuel Pufendorf described

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<sup>550</sup> RA, RR. vol. 300, Charles X to Gustaf Stenbock, 23 June 1655.

<sup>551</sup> *SPJT*, 1 January 1656, vol. 4, 336.

<sup>552</sup> *SPJT*, 7 January 1656, vol. 4, 356.

<sup>553</sup> *SPJT*, 7 January 1656, vol. 4, 355.

<sup>554</sup> *SPJT*, 19 November 1655, vol. 4, 176.

Charles's arrival in Königsberg as having "brought [the Elector] to reason."<sup>555</sup> The Treaty of Königsberg reflected the imbalance of power between the Elector and the King and Charles forced Fredrick William not only to swear loyalty to Charles as his sovereign but to transfer a large percentage of the port tolls for Ducal Prussia to Sweden's treasury.

Brandenburg was largely absent from the Swedish campaigns of early 1656 but early 1656 building a respectable force.<sup>556</sup> The insurrection, insurgency, plague, garrisoning and constant campaigning during the winter and spring of 1656 had melted the Swedish army away. The siege of Warsaw and the new of coming hostilities with the Muscovites forced Charles to buy himself a very expensive mercenary force. The Treaty of Marienburg, June 1656, gave Charles access to the Brandenburg army, or so he must have thought, since he spent June negotiating the treaty rather than rushing to personally save Wittenberg in Warsaw. In exchange for the Elector's military alliance Charles traded four conquered Polish provinces south and west of Royal Prussia which would connect Brandenburg to Ducal Prussia. It was the fruition of a line of reasoning which Charles expressed in his letters to Stenbock back before the war began.

The victorious Battle of Warsaw was the result of this alliance. Brandenburg's forces made up less than half of the total army but actually had more infantry present at the battle. At Warsaw Brandenburg's forces, according to Fay, received their

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<sup>555</sup> Pufendorf, 563.

<sup>556</sup> Fay writes it was 10,000; Frost writes it was 22,000.

“baptism of fire.”<sup>557</sup> The Battle of Warsaw was the first and last time the Swedish and Brandenburg armies collaborated in Poland.

After the Battle of Warsaw Brandenburg forces retired from Poland to Ducal Prussia because Polish-Lithuanian-Tartar forces had invaded the undefended land to plunder it and confiscate the province’s wealth. In late October Brandenburg and Radzivil’s Lithuanian force suffered a dramatic defeat. One analysis stated “[Brandenburg] have not taken a greater loss in the whole of this war.” Radzivil was captured and turned over to the Poles who demanded 36,000 riksdallars ransom for the former Grand Duke of Lithuania.<sup>558</sup> Two weeks later Swedish General Robert Douglas with Count Waldek, the Elector’s field marshal in the East, won a victory against the Lithuanians and freed Radzivil.

This increasing frustration threatened to boil over at several points but Erik Oxenstierna continuously argued against such a break. Pro Brandenburg writers commented that the Swedes “have begun to deal very scurvily [sic] with [the Elector] of late and it will not be tolerated” and they spoke of a “falling out over the sovereignty of Prussia” with Charles X sending a Germanic Swede, Count Schillenbach, to negotiate in order to get the Elector to move.<sup>559</sup> The result was the Treaty of Labiau in November 1656 in which Fredrick William gave up the four

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<sup>557</sup> Fay, 771. While many Prussian historians look at this battle as both the beginning of Prussian military greatness and a sign of Fredrick Williams leadership, generalship and general greatness. Frost points out the Battle of Warsaw really hinged on a daring flank maneuver, led by Charles, which wheeled the entire allied army from the Polish front to its side. For Frost, the Battle of Warsaw was the Swedish counterpoint to the disastrous Battle of Kirholm in 1605. Fredrick William is not mentioned in Frost’s account until he decides his troops will no longer aid the Swedes in their pursuit of John Casimir’s remaining force which is a reason why the battle was not decisive. (see Frost, *Northern Wars*, 173-174.)

<sup>558</sup> *SPJT*, 24 October 1656, vol. 5, 492.

<sup>559</sup> *SPJT*, 9 November 1656, vol. 5, 535.

Polish provinces, which he neither *de jure* nor *de facto* controlled, and gained sovereignty over Ducal Prussia – thus replacing the humiliating Treaty of Königsberg. By keeping an army in being but never really using it the Elector had created an item others were willing to pay for and, to his credit, he turned the diplomatic game – and Sweden’s continuous reinforcement troubles – to his advantage.

Even as Brandenburg worked for a closer alliance with Sweden and control over Ducal Prussia the Elector was negotiating with John Casimir for the same territorial gains. The Elector also did not wish to get involved in Sweden’s war with Muscovy. The “Great Duke” threatened Fredrick Wilhelm that if he helped Sweden against Muscovy, then Alexis would descend into Brandenburg’s “country with fire and sword and do all that an enraged and powerful enemy can do.”<sup>560</sup> Conveniently, Fredrick Wilhelm forgot his June alliance with Charles and lent little aid to the Swedish forces in Livonia. By November the course of the war had so turned against the Swedes that one report expressed the melancholy news of the day in biblical reference: “In short, the Swede get s daily Job’s news to try him.”<sup>561</sup> Charles’s army was raised to 12,000 but the Poles and Lithuanians refused to stand and fight another pitched battle. Consequently the war dragged on with raid and counter raid in Poland as the Swedes now had to transfer men and resources to Livonia to hold off the Muscovite invasion.

In January 1657 Transylvania entered the war with promises of control of southern Poland and perhaps even a kingship. Rakoczy acted boldly and was

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<sup>560</sup> *SPJT*, 23 September 1656 vol. 5, 468.

<sup>561</sup> *SPJT*, 8 November 1656, vol. 5, 531.

completely the opposite of Fredrick William in regards to his alliance with Charles X. At best it appeared that the treaties of Marienburg and Labiau at least kept Brandenburg from being anti-Swedish. The Spring of 1657 seemed to be a reinvigorated Swedish army –bolstered by an aggressive and large, if low quality, ally army –Charles went on the offensive again.

The Danish attack on Sweden changed everything. Charles picked up his force and left for Jutland leaving garrison troops in Royal Prussia. Without Swedish troops in Poland, Fredrick William changed course. By July 1657 there was an agreement between the Poles and Brandenburg. There was some thought that Charles, suddenly occupied with a war with Denmark, “gave leave to the Elector to procure his security.”<sup>562</sup> From Königsberg, this change was explained as a fear of Polish armies with their new Austrian backing. “The Polanders,” wrote one man in Königsberg, “threaten us very much.”<sup>563</sup> The Elector gained full sovereignty over Ducal Prussia in Treaty of Wehlau (September 1657) and his domains were expanded by the Treaty of Bromberg two months later. It was a total reversal of fortune from January 1656 when a Swedish army camped outside of Königsberg and Charles accepted the Elector’s fealty with an accompanying large percentage of the export tolls. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Ducal Prussia became East Prussia and a cornerstone of a whole new kingdom.

By December 1657, as the Swedish army garrisoned Marienburg, Thorn and Elbing, it was becoming clear that the Elector, who had once sided with the King of

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<sup>562</sup> *SPJT*, 27 July 1657, vol. 6, 411.

<sup>563</sup> *SPJT*, 20 August 1657, vol. 6, 455.

Sweden, was equally willing to throw his dice in with the King of Poland. “The Duke of Brandenburg has done a schrewed mischief to the Swedish affairs.”<sup>564</sup> As Polish forces, with their Austrian allied, increasing tightened the screws on the Swedish garrisons in Royal Prussia it became increasingly clear the Elector would join the Poles in the field to claim his own piece of the territory.

Charles X wished one day to have the free hand to crush the Duke and there is little doubt that his legions whether emboldened by their conquest of Poland or their overrunning of Denmark would have been able to overrun the small, poor german principality. “[The Elector’s] panic stricken letters after [the Danish-Swedish peace at] Roskilde indicated how much he feared Swedish revenge.”<sup>565</sup> Charles remained distracted by Danzig, the Dutch, the guerilla war in Southern Poland, then the Danes in the West and the Russians in the East. After Roskilde Charles talked of reinvading Prussia to save the garrisons at besieged Thorn, but wondered “if it should seem to be better to take some other place [ie. Farther Pomerania] from the Elector of Brandenburg.”<sup>566</sup> Again, fate intervened to help Brandenburg. The Emperor died in 1657 and the coming election was contested between a Habsburg and a French-supported claimant. As one of the seven electors of the Imperial Crown, Brandenburg was able to parlay it vote into military assistance from Austria. A Swedish attack on Farther Pomerania with a subsequent descent upon Berlin might very well start a wider German war which the Swedes had no interest or support in beginning. Stuck between unpopular untenable choices, Charles decided “on a war

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<sup>564</sup> *SPJT*, 14 December 1657, vol. 6, 656.

<sup>565</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 199.

<sup>566</sup> *RRP*, vol. xvii, 170.



he might win” and attack Denmark, this time to annex the whole country and claim the Sound allowing Brandenburg a free hand to operate in Pomerania and then enter Jutland with the Austrians. Though, Mazarin wrote to the Elector in December 1659 that France would attack Brandenburg to get Pomerania back for Sweden.<sup>567</sup> At the Peace treaties following the war Brandenburg received Ducal Prussia but made no advances against Swedish territory in Germany. For Fredrick William his army-in-being was more important as a promise than on the battlefield; if it was destroyed the illusion of importance would have disappeared. So his army was the ultimate bluff that depended more on the Swedish-Polish lack of manpower than on military skill and power. While Fredrick William was able to sincerely say “I have become convinced that I owe the preservation of my position and my territory to God, and next to God, to my army” if he replaced either with luck he would have been far closer to the truth.<sup>568</sup> Luck saved Fredrick far more than his army. His success at getting what he wanted is in stark contrast to the results Gyorgy Rakoczi II received for his bold intervention in the war.

### **The Bold Catastrophe of Transylvanian Intervention**

When Transylvania entered the war intent on carving out a fief an observer wrote “Poland is the stage whereupon the sad tragedy of the north-east part of the world is acted.”<sup>569</sup> Transylvania’s intervention set off a cascade effect as Austria also entered the war on Poland’s side. Following an Austrian-Polish treaty in May 1657

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<sup>567</sup> McKay, *Small Power Diplomacy in the Age of Louis XIV*, 190-191.

<sup>568</sup> Fay, 772.

<sup>569</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 5, 409

12,000 Austrian troops were sent to Poland to fight in the war – first to expulse Transylvania but later to fight against the Swedes.<sup>570</sup>

Three consecutive dukes attempted to make Transylvania into a power in Southeastern Europe. These attempts by Gabor Bethlen, Gyorgy Rakoczi I and Gyorgy Rakoczi II ended with the collapse of an autonomous state and its disappearance forever from the map of Europe. Sweden was able to become a regional Great Power despite its meager resources because of its representative constitutional society which enabled it to command those resources efficiently. Transylvania, like Poland and much of Ottoman Europe, was based on not the freedom of peasants but their serfdom to the point that “the Szekely [ethnic Hungarian] privileged class considered it an affront if their serfs were as much as registered.”<sup>571</sup> Without adequate access to the talents and involvement of the people, the Transylvania government was ill equipped for the role Rakoczi II desired her to play. When the tides of war turned against Rakoczi II, after Charles took his army to defend Holstein and Sweden from the Danes, it was to lead to Turkish invasion and civil war and the subjugation of a people for another 200 years.

The Transylvanian alliance was a failure with long reaching consequences. The collapse of the southern front following Sweden’s withdrawal from Poland, allowed John Casimir to recover and rebuild both a Polish army and a Polish State. Undistracted by a multiple front war for the first time since 1655, Casimir was able to make a deal with Fredrick William over the sovereignty of Ducal Prussia, unite with

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<sup>570</sup> Charles Firth, *The Last Years of the Protectorate*, vol. I. 314.

<sup>571</sup> Ștefan Pascu, *A History of Transylvania* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 335

the armies of Emperor Leopold sent “to stop Transylvanian independence”<sup>572</sup> and, for the first time, go on a sustained offensive against Swedish garrisons in Prussia effectively ending any chance of an advantageous treaty for Sweden.

Throughout the seventeenth century “Transylvanian princes built ever closer links with western protestant powers.”<sup>573</sup> Two different times Transylvanian princes entered the Thirty Years War on the Protestant side with the goal of claiming parts of Hungary and creating a hinterland from which to gain the resources to break free of the Turks. “Caught between the Emperor and the Turks” Gabor Bethlen led Transylvanian involvement in every stage of the Thirty Years War from supporting the Bohemian revolt in 1618, to campaigning in Hungary in 1624 and 1626 to support the Danish invasion.<sup>574</sup> Bethlen died childless in 1630 and Gyorgy Rakoczi I was elected and tried to maintain a “quasi-sovereign,” Transylvania, “somewhat autonomous from Turkish suzerainty.”<sup>575</sup> To do so, he attempted an alliance with Gustavus Adolphus in 1632 and Axel Oxenstierna in 1638 but negotiations collapsed over funding the Transylvanian war. An alliance between Sweden and Transylvania was finally made in 1643 when France agreed to finance Rakoczi’s invasion.<sup>576</sup> Rakoczi I planned to absorb much of Hungary and planned to link up with Torstenson’s army invading Bohemia. But, just like in Charles X’s time, a Danish

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<sup>572</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 179.

<sup>573</sup> Murdock, Graeme. *Calvinism on the Frontier: 1600-1660 : International Calvinism and the Reformed Church in Hungary and Transylvania*. Oxford: Clarendon press, 2000, 270.

<sup>574</sup> Murdock, 271-273.

<sup>575</sup> Oliver Cromwell. "The Milton/Cromwell Letter to Transylvania." *Notes and Queries* 36, no. 4, 234th ser. (December 1989), 435.

<sup>576</sup> Murdock, 274.

invasion forced the withdrawal of Swedish armies from central Europe back to Scandinavia. The withdrawal of Swedish armies in 1643 (as it would from Poland in 1657) spelled the doom for Transylvanian autonomous action. Rakoczi I found little support for a Protestant revolution in Hungary, a Catholic nation since the Early Middle Ages, and signed the a peace treaty with the Emperor, who needed to time to prepare for the eventual Swedish return to Germany, at Linz which recognized Transylvanian control of the seven counties of “Upper Hungary [present day Slovakia].” Doing so allowed Rakoczi to get out of the war with some gains but also denied Rakoczi the victor’s gains at the Treaty of Westphalia.<sup>577</sup>

Transylvania’s wiggle room in the seventeenth century came from its geography. it rested between the domains of Poland, Turkey and the Empire none of which had the ability to assert influence there. Technically in the recognized Turkish sphere of interest Transylvanian princes were able to exert independent action because of the perpetual “chaos reported in Constantinople” which made the Turks “unlikely to intervene” unless Transylvanian actions brought about an invasion from one of the other powers.<sup>578</sup> Transylvania princes were able to act as middle weight actors as long as one of the larger powers was disinterested in South Eastern Europe. The Thirty Years War and the Second Northern War seemed to be perfect avenues for that growth. At court strong alliances were advocated with the Protestant Powers and consequently “Transylvanian princes built ever closer links with western

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<sup>577</sup> Gábor Barta, and Béla Köpeczi. *History of Transylvania*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1994, 331. and Murdock, 275.

<sup>578</sup> Murdock, 283.

protestant powers.”<sup>579</sup> Moreover, the connection between Transylvanian princes and Charles X was more than just geo-political anti-Polish like-mindedness. Rakoczi I met Charles X during the Thirty Years War and commented “he never met a more understanding prince or more wise; and if he ever came to be a King he would be the happiness of his people and the terror of his enemies.”<sup>580</sup>

In March 1655 as Charles X was preparing for his Polish campaign, Transylvanian ambassador Schaum met with Charles X twice. No alliance offer came out of the meetings and Schaum went on to London to meet with Cromwell. It was clear that Rakoczi II wanted to join Charles’s assault on Poland.<sup>581</sup> But the spectacular advances by the Swedes and the utter collapse of Poland’s armed forces lessened the need for a Transylvanian alliance and intervention. This changed with the failure to take Danzig, the beginning of a Polish guerilla war against the thin Swedish garrisons, the reconstitution of John Casimir’s army and the beginning of the Russian war in Livonia.

Throughout 1656 Sweden tried to motivate the more traditional power in the region, Brandenburg, to act as an ally. By December 1656, despite treaties and promises, Charles X had had enough of Brandenburg’s sloth. At Radnot Swedish and Transylvanian ambassadors signed a formal alliance. Rakoczi invaded a month later. Radnot clearly expressed the designs of Charles, not for Poland as a whole, but for Royal Prussia, and Danzig specifically. Transylvania would be given Little Poland (counties in the South, including Cracow and Warsaw) and the southern parts of

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<sup>579</sup> Murdock, 270.

<sup>580</sup> Prade, 2.

<sup>581</sup> Murdock, 281.

Lithuania subsequently, Rakoczi would become the next King of Poland, Brandenburg would get Ducal Prussia and Great Poland (the counties bordering Brandenburg) and Sweden would only claim Royal Prussia centered at Danzig.<sup>582</sup> Radnot seemed to hold all the potential to make Transylvania into a middle weight power independent of Turkey and Austria. With the addition of such a large chunk of Poland and Lithuania, Transylvania would gain access to the Vistula and thus have a trading window to the West. With fellow Protestant powers controlling the lands up the river, aid in the case of a Habsburg attack could be forthcoming resulting in the defacto absorption of Upper Hungary, which were theoretically gained in the Thirty Years War. With this new hinterland, Rakoczi would then also be able to wrest the long coveted Romanian states of Wallachia and Moldavia who were stuck between as a borderland between the equally undesirable Turks and Ukrainian Cossacks and already sought Transylvania as a protector-ally.

Despite the example of Sweden's problems in Poland the Treaty of Radnot was approved by the Transylvanian Noble Council and the Diet because, as one councilor put it, "nothing was more certain that the fall of Poland."<sup>583</sup> This alliance with Sweden was against the wishes of Constantinople but the feeling was that the Turks would be of little trouble. That Rakoczi II, his Council and the Diet were so wrong, in their analysis of the Polish situation and in their evaluation of Turkish politics proved to be their undoing.

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<sup>582</sup> Murdock, 287.

<sup>583</sup> Barta, 355.

In January 1657 Transylvania entered the war by invading lower Poland with a “very puissant army” of about 30,000 men (though reports put the army as large as 60,000<sup>584</sup>) most of which were cavalry.<sup>585</sup> This was a hodgepodge army of Hungarians, Cossacks, and Wallachians. This alliance immediately paid dividends as the Transylvanians relieved Cracow from its irregular besiegement. Reports came from Poland of “the nobility of Poland in great numbers submit to his protection.”<sup>586</sup> Charles headed south with his army from Thorn to link with Duke Rakoczi.

In May the Swedes and Transylvanians linked up at Cracow and Charles abandoned the city to the Transylvanians. The two states were dividing Poland between them but Sweden was also retrenching their defenses. Increasingly the Swedes were to pull out of Poland and small towns in order to hold onto the large citadels of Royal Prussia.

Czarniecki initiated a battle at this point in order to break the alliance and gain the Royal capital. It turned into a total defeat for the Poles. The Poles “seeing above half their army destroyed and that the Swedes like tigers rushed in upon the rest” fled the field “together with the whole spoil of the army left an entire victory to their conquerors.” Czarniecki was erroneously reported as mortally wounded.<sup>587</sup>

Together, the Swedes and Transylvanians swept northeast, crossed over the Bug River and captured Brest without a fight. The result was to spilt Lithuania from

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<sup>584</sup> *SPJT*, 27 March 1657, vol. 6, 120 and *SPJT*, vol. 6, 73.

<sup>585</sup> *SPJT*, 20 January 1657, vol. 6, 6.

<sup>586</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 6 73.

<sup>587</sup> *SPJT*, 5 May 1657, vol. 6, 260.

Poland. Again the Transylvanians garrisoned the city. The King of Poland was again without control over any important city.

This period – January to June 1657 – was the most successful moment for Sweden since the initial invasion. A dramatic spring offensive pushed the Poles to the brink of dissolution. Polish-Lithuanian “was fighting for its very existence” but seemed incapable of withstanding Swedish-Transylvanian momentum.<sup>588</sup> There were calls for a surrender of Prussia to the Swedes and calls to have a Muscovite king who would save Poland from the Swedes.<sup>589</sup> The Austrian alliance changed this pessimism.

Sweden-Transylvanian success brought outside intervention. “The Court of Vienna stands in great fear of the Transylvanian duke and suspect the duke and the King of Sweden have designs” on the hereditary lands inside Germany, an opinion of which the Austrians “will not otherwise be persuaded.”<sup>590</sup> Hungary, a large territory in the Middle Ages, was divided between Austria, Transylvania and the Turks. During the Thirty Years War the Transylvanians had invaded Germany to absorb parts of Hungary. They had allied with the Swedes to do so. This alliance, even though it ultimately resulted in little territorial gain for Transylvania was not forgotten in Austria. Duke Leopold of Hungary was elected Emperor in 1657. Leopold did not wish for a sweeping and victorious Transylvanian-Swedish axis transforming his eastern borders. In the spring the Leopold sent an army into Poland composed of Hungarians and German mercenaries. From this point on

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<sup>588</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 85.

<sup>589</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 94.

<sup>590</sup> *SPJT*, 27 January 1657, vol. 6, 23.



Austria was now a overt actor in the Polish War. The Treaty of Vienna in June 1657 provided 12,000 Austrian-Hungarian troops to help drive out the Transylvanians and aid the Poles against the Swedes. Once the troops entered Poland they were at once accused of both delaying their help and occupying territory without intending to return it to Poland.<sup>591</sup> The Austrian intervention turned out to be an aid to Poland, a problem for Transylvania but ultimately of little direct consequence on the battlefield against Sweden.

This was because the news of the Treaty of Austria inspired Fredrick III of Denmark to turn his simmering cold war with Sweden into a fully declared conflict. Denmark made an alliance with Poland and immediately set about attacking Swedish shipping and preparing for an invasion of Halland and southern Swedish territories. Robert Frost called this “the most useful consequence of the Treaty of Vienna.”<sup>592</sup> The intervention of Denmark into the Polish war changed the dynamic of the entire campaign. Charles X immediately withdrew his field from Poland-Prussia-Lithuania. Most of the garrisons were also withdrawn and concentrated in Royal Prussia axis (Thorn, Elbing, Marienburg) with some garrisons protecting a landward communication axis through Pomerania. Rakoczi was left on his own to hold lower Poland and western Lithuania.

By August the war turned against the Transylvanians. John Casimir, propped up by the influx of 20,000 of Leopold’s mercenaries, delivered a crushing defeat of the Transylvanians then besieged Cracow which was “reduced to extremity.”<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>591</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 118.

<sup>592</sup> Frost, *Deluge*, 95.

<sup>593</sup> *SPJT*, 24 August 1657, vol. 6, 461 and *SPJT*, 14 July 1657, vol. 6, 382.

Without the steel rod of Swedish infantry and artillery supporting the Transylvanian horsemen, the entire southern front collapsed. Then Cracow fell to the Poles and for the first time since October 1655, John Casimir sat in his royal capital.

This collapse of the Transylvanians in Poland was compounded by the fate of the Transylvanians and Duke Rakoczi. Much like for the Swedes, victory caused jealousy in Transylvanian's neighbors. The Austrians entered the war to support Casimir and would remain in an anti-Swedish activity until 1660. Transylvanian success also riled the Turks who feared the sudden independence of a vassal. Transylvania was a border region of the Ottoman Empire and the Racokzi's had been able to wriggle a fair amount of independence from the Turks over the previous century.

Racokzi's involvement with Sweden and its sudden success in Poland threatened its status as a weak border vassal. The Turks responded to this grab for independence by invading the Duchy. Rakoczi was forced to abandon Poland and Lithuania altogether and was smashed by a far superior Turkish army when then returned home. By December there was a civil war among the nobility and Rakoczi was deposed. A year which had begun with much promise and success, which seemed to aid the Swedes need for manpower and mobility had resulted in a historic disaster. Transylvania was locked behind the Turkish veil for the next 250 years disappearing as an independent country and becoming a western archetype for the mysterious and backward parts of Europe.

## **The War with Muscovy**

While Charles X and his Royal army were marching down the Vistula toward the Battle of Warsaw, the Muscovite army was beginning to march into Livonia and Ingria. The Muscovite aim was to recapture Ingria and Estonia which had been lost in 1617. The Muscovites also wanted to get Riga, the largest port on the eastern shore of the Baltic. With Riga, Muscovy would have a port equally capable of exporting Muscovite trade. Riga was also capable of harboring a large national navy.

The Livonian army had been trying to hold down some of the most restless and violent areas occupied by Sweden in 1655. The Livonian army participated in the initial invasion of Poland in 1655 and occupied a corridor of Lithuanian cities connecting Livonia to Prussia. The Livonian army wintered in Ducal Prussia, 400 miles from Riga, before retuning, minus thousands of troops left in garrisons, to Riga in the Spring of 1656.

With the bulk of Swedish forces in the west, the eastern provinces were woefully undermanned. The Livonian army had to garrison Lithuania, fight an extremely violent insurgency there, and defend Livonia with only 5,090 soldiers. Ingria, where Narva was located, was defended by only 1,300 men. Only 828 men defended Revel.<sup>594</sup> Meanwhile, nearly 10,000 men were garrisoning Thorn, Elbing, Warsaw and Cracow. By the spring of 1656 “the [Livonian] army in the field was worn out.” The Lithuanian insurgency had erupted out of control and reached a violence unmatched in Poland. Magnus de la Gardie was being portrayed as

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<sup>594</sup> CXGS, vol. 7. 97, 99.

incompetent but some historians believe “he did everything possible” to stabilize an impossible situation.<sup>595</sup>

Czar Alexis’s official reason to attack Sweden was Charles’s alliance with the Cossacks.<sup>596</sup> Charles’s alliance was meant to give the Swedes a mobile cavalry capable of matching the Polish insurgents. Cossack leaders might use that alliance to pry themselves loose from Muscovite authority which had been imposed upon them since 1653. Alexis was also angry that Charles had gobbled up much of Muscovy’s hard won prize absorbing Poland, Prussia and northern Lithuania while he toiled in hard fought battles in southern Lithuania and Ukraine. In August 1655 Vilno fell to Muscovite forces just as Charles’s army was entering Poland from the west. Radzivil’s treaties with Charles (Kiejdany on 17 August and another on 20 October) were signed in the expectation that Sweden would rescue Lithuania from the Muscovites. Sooner or later there would be a reckoning between the Swedes and the Muscovites and Alexis’s chances in the east had never been better with Charles bogged down in Poland, Lithuania afire, and the Baltic provinces undermanned and badly defended.

Alexis’s army in Lithuania was estimated to be composed of 30 regiments of infantry (about 60,000 men) with all the officers being western mercenaries.<sup>597</sup> Though other estimates put the Muscovite army well over 100,000 men.<sup>598</sup> Despite these numbers the Muscovite army did not meet easy victory. Smolensk was a

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<sup>595</sup> CXSG, vol. 7, 218.

<sup>596</sup> Kirby, 187.

<sup>597</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 3, 426.

<sup>598</sup> *SPJT*, 22 October 1655, vol. 4, 78.

desperate siege and Burcene and Vilno experienced similar repulses before eventual conquest. One estimate calculated that the six failed assaults on Burcene cost the Muscovite army 20,000 casualties.<sup>599</sup> The Lithuanians were actually able to recapture Dunaberg back from the Muscovites.

There were additional problems in the Muscovite army. The western mercenaries were discontented with Alexis's inability to fulfill his large promises. "[Western officers] would depart the country if they could..." wrote an English diplomat. By 1656 they were being paid in "worthless new money" which could not be exchanged outside of Muscovy.<sup>600</sup> Western mercenaries were sucked into Muscovy but once there were unable to leave given the large distances, rural countryside and lack of connectivity to Europe.<sup>601</sup> This discontent spread as Muscovite armies were whittled away by partisan attacks from Cossack, Tartar and Lithuanian forces. The Muscovite garrisons in both Vilno and Smolensk were reported to be diseased and starving. Much like the Swedes were finding out in Poland; it was far easier to capture a city in the Commonwealth than to hold onto one.

The collapse of the Swedish army after the Jaroslaw expedition provided an opportunity to deal with the Swedish eastern provinces in isolation – without the possibility of Charles's royal army arriving to save the cities. Before the Jaroslaw campaign there are few letters from Charles X regarding the Muscovites. In March 1656 he wrote to Magnus de la Gardie, governor general of Livonia, "I see enough of your letters to understand how lonely it is protecting Livonia from the

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<sup>599</sup> *SPJT*, 5 November 1655, vol. 4, 150,

<sup>600</sup> *SPJT*, 3 May 1656, vol. 4, 762.

<sup>601</sup> *SPJT*, 26 December 1654, vol. 3, 431.

Muscovites. . .I know you wonder how you will win favor.”<sup>602</sup> Meanwhile through the Spring of 1656 Alexis negotiated with John Casimir. Casimir, as he had been in 1655, was willing to sell both his crown and all of Lithuania for Muscovite help to eject the Swedes from Poland.<sup>603</sup> By May it was becoming clear that there would be a war between Muscovy and Sweden. The English ambassador in Moscow reported “Muscovites brag they will overrun the Swede as they do the Pole.”<sup>604</sup> By Mid May there were reports from Riga of a “great army” on the frontiers of Livonia.<sup>605</sup> By June, the scene had change. “I need you,” he wrote to de la Gardie, “to watch Estonia and Ingria. . . almost all of Lithuania has surrendered to the Muscovites and he eyes our lands.” Charles X concluded by ordering de la Gardie to send a list of all the regiments in Livonia and Ingria.<sup>606</sup> On 15 June 1656 Charles wrote to de la Gardie “you and the army will have to defend Riga in case you are attacked.”<sup>607</sup> The situation in the east continued to disintegrate. In early July, Charles wrote to Stenbock about the situation in the Baltic, “people are leaving Klexholm and heading for the protection of Viborg and Narva. Gustav Horn [governor general of Ingria] is sending some troops to reinforce Finland.”<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>602</sup> RA, RHB, box. I, vol. 20, folder 7, 6 March 1656.

<sup>603</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 176-177.

<sup>604</sup> *SPJT*, 3 May 1656, vol. 4, 762.

<sup>605</sup> *SPJT*, 19 May 1656, vol. 5, 5.

<sup>606</sup> RA, RHB, box. I, vol. 20, folder 7, 2 June 1656.

<sup>607</sup> RA, RHB, box. I, vol. 20, folder 7, 15 June 1656.

<sup>608</sup> RA, RHB, box. I, vol. 20, folder 34, 7 July 1656.

In July Stockholm received reports from Finland of Muscovite soldiers near Viborg and all over Ingria.<sup>609</sup> Even the Duke of Courland, who did not have a great love for Swedish, warned both Charles and Fredrick of Brandenburg that Muscovy would “assault Livonia with five armies.”<sup>610</sup> Courland, a protestant frontier zone between Livonia, Ducal Prussia and Muscovite controlled Lithuania, clearly disliked the idea of the Muscovites doing to Mittau what they did to Vilno. By September Courland surrendered to Alexis and “accepted the protection from the Muscovite” to avoid destruction.<sup>611</sup> The *råd* worried about the strength of Muscovy. They hoped “in case of a break with the Muscovite” Charles would united with Poland against the Muscovites.<sup>612</sup>

In Ingria the Swedes were finding success and winning small battles and then pursuing “the flying army of the Muscovites.”<sup>613</sup> The garrison in Riga sunk large ships in the Dvina River to prevent the Muscovites from using the river. It was reported that there was “a great fear among them.”<sup>614</sup> In August Dunaberg , a Swedish controlled city since July 1655, was taken by the Muscovites. Control of Dunaberg allowed for an assault on Livonia. Pessimists began writing that “the Swede may not keep this country for he hath many enemies that do envy his greatness...”<sup>615</sup> It

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<sup>609</sup> RRP, vol. xvi, 321.

<sup>610</sup> *SPJT*, 4 July 1656, vol. 5, 149. .

<sup>611</sup> *SPJT*, 23 September 1656, vol. 5, 410.

<sup>612</sup> RRP, xvi, 304.

<sup>613</sup> *SPJT*, 12 September 1656, vol. 5, 373.

<sup>614</sup> *SPJT*, 18 July 1656, vol. 5, 195.

<sup>615</sup> *SPJT*, 29 August 1656, vol. 5, 321.

appeared certain that there were simply not enough Swedish troops to put out all the fires which were erupting in Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, Warsaw had fallen to John Casimir and Charles X was readying his counterattack which would lead to the Battle of Warsaw.

The summer of 1656 witnessed a strange sense of potential energy in the east. Alexis had declared war in late May but his troops continued to battle in Lithuania and consolidate their holdings. Meanwhile troops from Novgorod and Pskov harassed the borderlands of the Swedish Baltic. The Swedes were preparing their defenses, the Muscovites assembling for an assault down the Dvina River, but all was yet potential. This is in marked contrast to the frenetic movements crisscrossing Poland and Prussia by various armies and militias. Following the Battle of Warsaw and the recapture of the city, Charles was able to send some reinforcements to Livonia. Robert Douglas, who commanded cavalry at Warsaw, was finally sent with a cavalry force of a few thousand to strengthen the defenses of Riga.

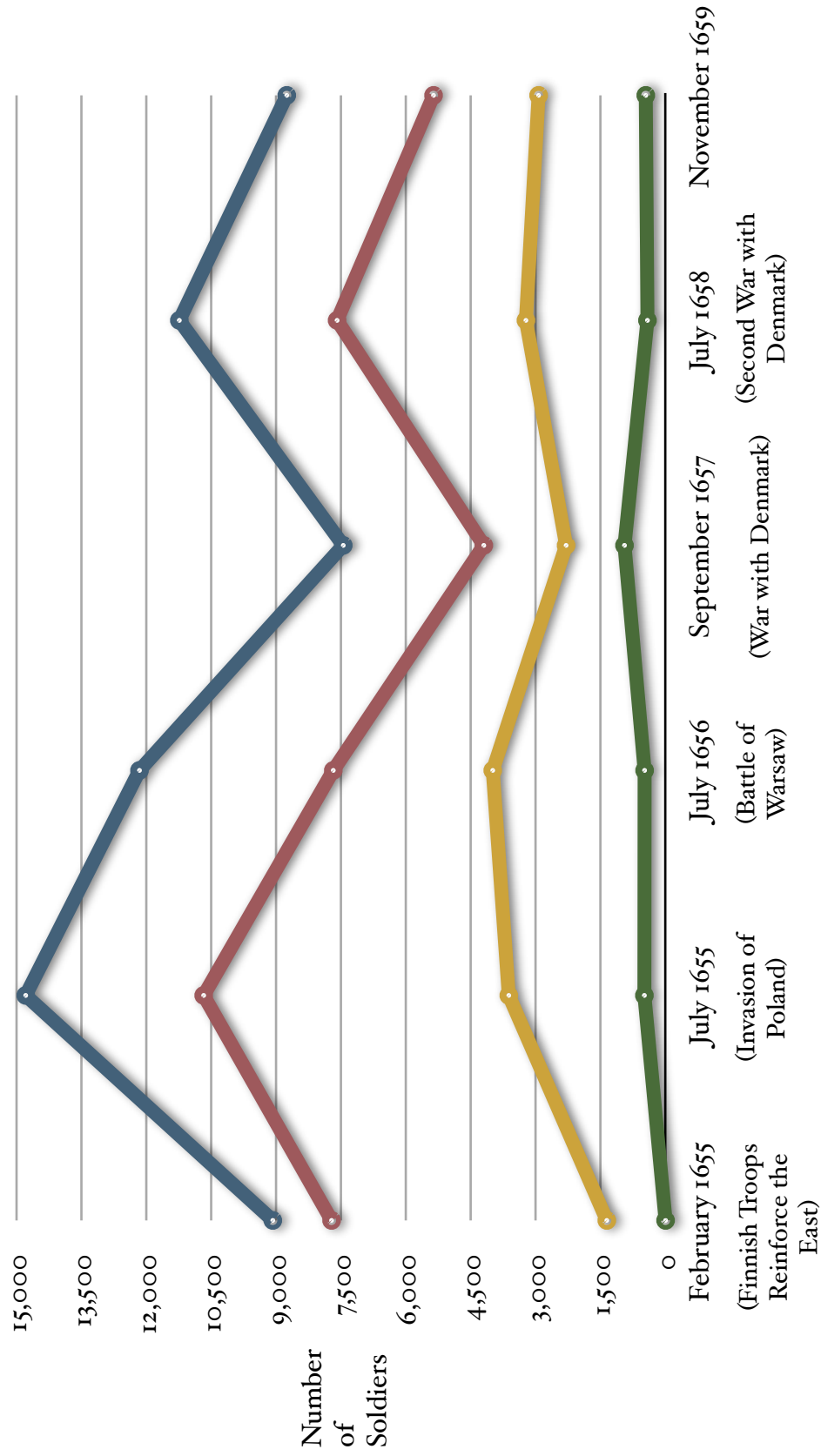
In late August the Muscovite invaded the Swedish provinces in detail. By September the Muscovites had laid siege to Dorpat, the cultural center of the Swedish Baltic with the only university and Supreme Court in the east, and to Riga. Another force invaded Ingria to try to capture Narva. The Czar led the march on Riga personally. Increasingly word came that all the defenders of cities taken by Muscovite troops were “put to the sword.”<sup>616</sup>

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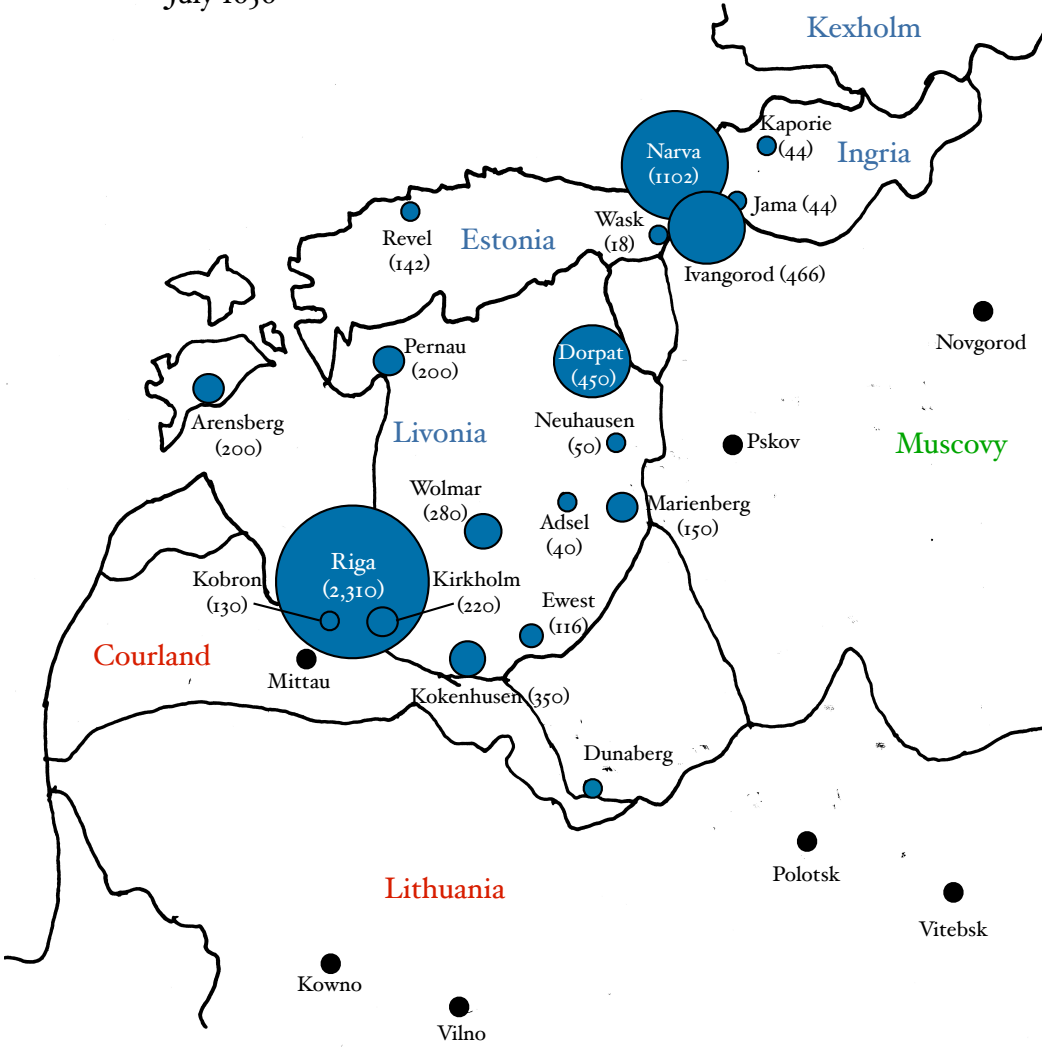
<sup>616</sup> *SPJT*, 19 September 1656, vol. 5. 394.



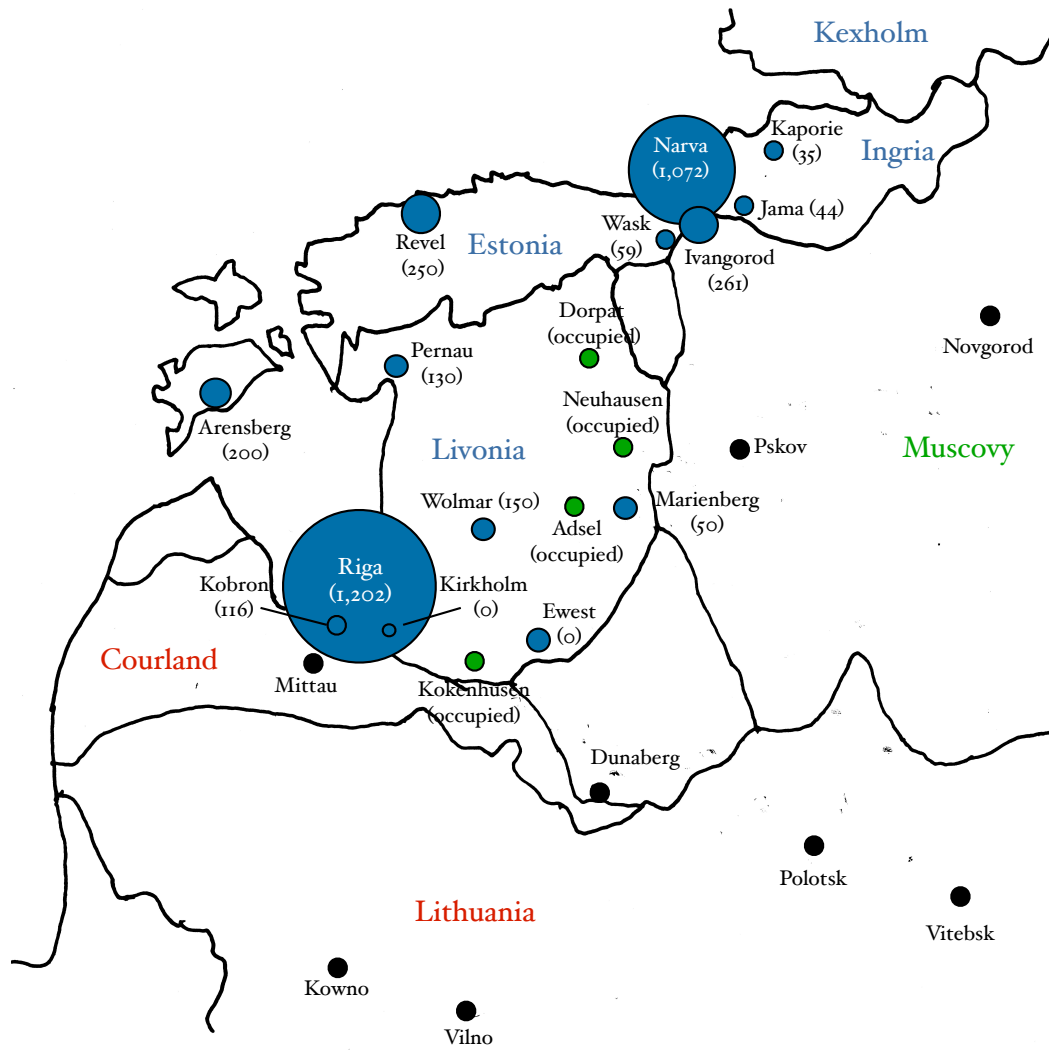
Swedish Field Army in the Baltic Provinces: 1655 - 1659



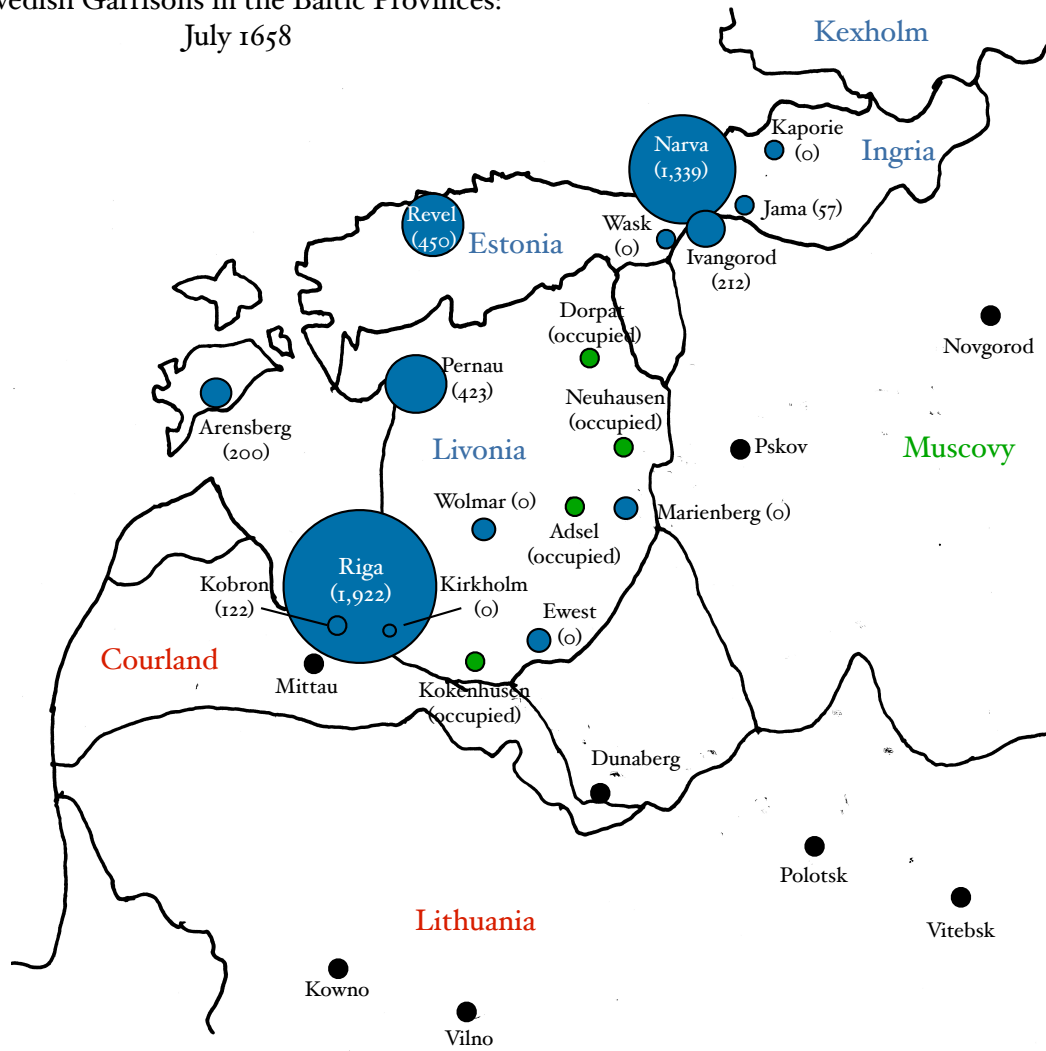
Swedish Garrisons in the Baltic Provinces:  
 July 1656



Swedish Garrisons in the Baltic Provinces:  
September 1657



Swedish Garrisons in the Baltic Provinces:  
July 1658



Meanwhile refugees flooded into Livonian cities fleeing the Muscovite armies. With so many people crowded into rank cities plague broke out all along the coast. Plague killed so many troops that most garrisons were only at fifty percent of their normal strength during the Muscovite war; the population of the field regiments collapsed altogether. 13,000 men died from either disease or battle during the Muscovite War but the eastern provinces were only able to add 10,400 recruits from Finland and the Baltic (each provided half the soldiers).<sup>617</sup> The Swedish army in the east declined from June 1655 to June 1657 by half (14,800 to 7,400 men) with the vast majority concentrated in Riga.<sup>618</sup>

The Swedish situation was made worse by the methodology of command. Charles X remained in command and tried to direct the war – in vague ways – by letter. He told Magnus de la Gardie to go on the attack as soon as Douglas's reinforcements arrived.<sup>619</sup> By the time Douglas arrived in August the entire situation had changed. But the distance, problems of communication, and the Lithuanian horsemen who preyed on the mail system made keeping in active touch with the front nearly impossible. Moreover, Charles was also general-in-chief of the Polish War and was trying to bring John Casimir to battle, convince Fredrick William to act as an ally, and try to keep the Dutch from smashing the Swedish fleet off of Danzig.

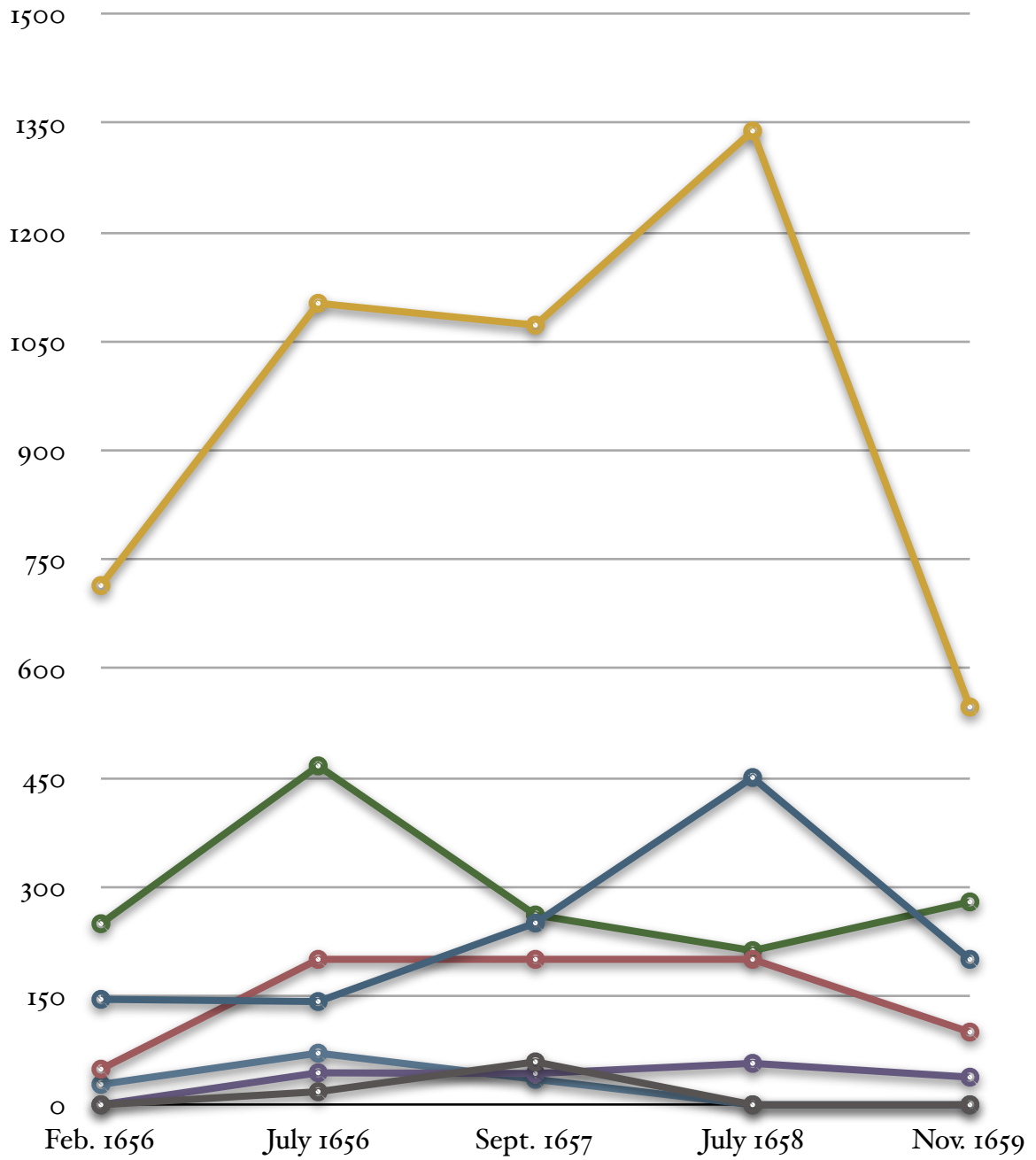
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<sup>617</sup> CXGS, vol. 7, 222.

<sup>618</sup> CXGS, vol. 7, 222.

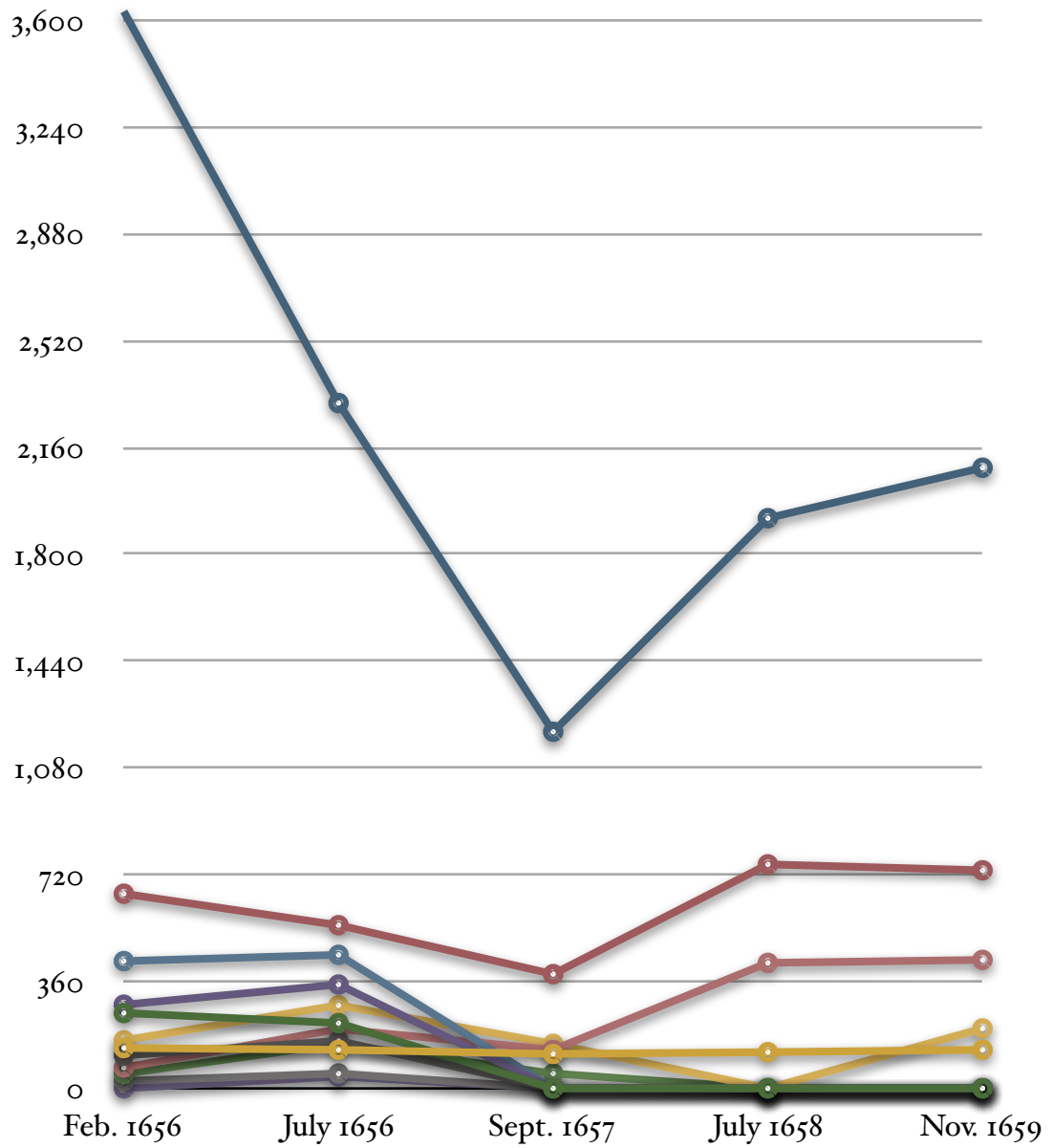
<sup>619</sup> RA, RHB, box. I, vol. 20, folder 7, Charles X to Magnus de la Gardie, 11 July 1656.

Rates of Decline of Garrisons in Estonia and Ingria: 1656 - 1659



- Revel, Estonia: -56%
- Arensburg, Osel: -50%
- Narva: -59%
- Ivangorod: -40%
- Wask: -100%
- Jama: -13%
- Kaporie: -100%

Rates of Decline of Garrisons in Livonia: 1656 - 1659



- Riga: -42%
- Kirkholm: -100%
- Dorpat: -100%
- Marienberg: -100%
- Neumude: +12%
- Ewest: -100%
- Pernau: +500%
- Neuhausen: -100%
- Kobron: -4%
- Kokenhusen: -100%
- Wolmar: -100%
- Adsel: -100%

The situation was made worse by the diplomatic problems Charles was facing in Poland. On 15 August he wrote to de la Gardie declaratively and in obvious agitation, “I will send 15 companies of foot but that is all I can spare. I can not come to Livonia. I have not come to an end with Poland and I must have troops to face the Kaiser in Pomerania and Denmark in Bremen. . . You must defend the people and the city. . . ”<sup>620</sup> The Swedish army was being stretched too thin. Just like the diversion of troops from Danzig to the east impeded any advance in taking the city, so was Charles similarly hamstrung to protect his other exposed possessions. He also disliked the idea of Magnus, his brother in law, vacillating on action. It is not a surprise therefore that General Horn maintained his independence in defending Estonia while General Lewenhaupt likewise remained in command of the defenses of Ingria. This was an inefficient manner in which to defend the provinces as the Swedes fought on three different fronts separately instead of using their advantages of interior lines and sea transportation to work as a unit. De la Gardie commanded 4,700 troops, Horn commanded 3,420 men and Lewenhaupt commanded 4,500 Finns but none of them could work together to organize a unified resistance. Instead “antagonism at a purely personal level” affected the decision-making process of defending the eastern provinces.<sup>621</sup> That would change in 1657 as Robert Douglas was raised to Field Marshal and made generalissimo of the eastern provinces. Douglas’s ascendancy, contemporaneous to Charles X’s victories against Denmark,

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<sup>620</sup> RA, RHB, box. I, vol. 20, folder 7, Charles X to Magnus de la Gardie, 15 August 1656.

<sup>621</sup> CXGS, vol. 7, 220. The text is worth noting. The authors note that this “purely personal” factor has not yet been analyzed and “should be more closely examined” since it had an effect on Sweden’s war-making ability and was completely at odds with the command and control evident in Charles X’s theater.



marked a renewed vigor in the east as the Swedes not only fought the Muscovites in 1658 through 1660 but also liberate Courland and pressed into Lithuania retaking Dunaberg. Yet, Charles X did not try to micro-manage the war. To Horn, he wrote “You are always justified to to use your force how you see fit if proportional to the situation.”<sup>622</sup>

The siege of Riga wore on from 22 August until 5 October. Western observers equated the loss of Riga with the disintegration of the Swedish kingdom. One writer analyzed that the Sweden’s neglect of protecting the East was “inexcusable” and evidence of a Crown’s “diseases” adding that the “providence of God is unsearchable.”<sup>623</sup> Dorpat, with its 500 man garrison and decrepit walls, fell while Riga was under siege.<sup>624</sup> Yet the Swedes did not wait passively behind their walls. “This day the inhabitants, citizens, and soldiers [of Riga] made a sally out and beat up the quarters of the Muscovite on one side of the city taking from them seventeen colors, their cannon, their mortar pieces, and filled the trenches with their dead bodies.”<sup>625</sup> Three of the colors taken read “Fear God, honor the Emperor.”<sup>626</sup> Even on the defensive the Swedes remained active and tried to hold onto the initiative which brought small victories and kept Riga from falling. Charles did not believe, or at least did not let on in his letters, that Riga was ever in any real trouble. In September 1656 he wrote to Stenbock saying “I believe the Muscovite will quit Riga

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<sup>622</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 16. Charles X to Gustav Horn, 2 September 1656.

<sup>623</sup> *SPJT*, 25 September 1656, vol. 5, 413.

<sup>624</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 177.

<sup>625</sup> *SPJT*, 2 October 1656, vol. 5, 438.

<sup>626</sup> *SPJT*, 2 October 1656, vol. 5, 438.

before long” and that afterwards Charles could send Stenbock some reinforcements to continue the siege of Danzig.<sup>627</sup>

In October Alexis withdrew his army from the outskirts of Riga. The end of the siege of Riga was seen as a gift and providence from God and while the resistance of Riga and Livonia had a lot to do with the Muscovites repulse a Cossack invasion of Muscovite territory probably contributed even more to Alexis’s desire to leave the exhausted territories of Livonia, Estonia and Ingria. There were even rumors of a Boyar revolt in Moscow since the Czar had been away for so long.<sup>628</sup> Another observer wrote that the sheer losses of the sustained in the siege caused “discontent” and “division” in the army and people back in the capital.<sup>629</sup> One estimate put Muscovite losses at 20,000 men with the last Swedish sally from the city smashing several regiments in their trenches and killing about 3,000 men.<sup>630</sup> More likely it was the coming winter, the poor logistical infrastructure of Eastern Europe and “the strain of mounting three major campaigns in three years.”<sup>631</sup> Alexis remained at war with Sweden and left a large garrison in Dorpat. Yet Alexis did not assault Riga again before making peace in 1658.

The winter of 1656-1657 saw a hiatus of conflict in the east (in the west the war continued to churn through raids and marches and Transylvania’s invasion). By March the Swedes were on the attack again and raiding into Lithuania. Charles X,

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<sup>627</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 308, Charles X to Stenbock, 22 September 1656.

<sup>628</sup> *SPJT*, 8 November 1656, vol. 5, 538.

<sup>629</sup> *SPJT*, 10 November 1656, vol. 5, 568.

<sup>630</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 5, 507.

<sup>631</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 177.

almost as soon as he heard the siege of Riga had been lifted, order de la Gardie to go onto the attack in Samotia and “bring them to my devotion in order to stop their incursions into Prussia” and, Charles X noted, “to keep Brandenburg from claiming the province as their winter quarters and ruining the land for us.”<sup>632</sup>

Meanwhile Germanic Lutheran peasants in Livonia were rebelling against the Muscovite occupiers. In June 1657 the Swedish General Löwe crushed a reinforcing Muscovite force at Walk thereby winning the only large field battle of the war.<sup>633</sup> De la Gardie was able to clear the Muscovites out of Ingria and then pushed the war into Muscovy by capturing the Monastery of the Caves near Pskov. But de la Gardie’s assault on Angdov, near present day St. Petersburg, in September 1657, was such a “fiasco” that he was forced to retreat all the way to Estonia. Charles turned over command of all regiments in the east to Douglas.<sup>634</sup>

By October 1657 the eastern front had stabilized. The Swedes had pushed the Muscovites out of much of their provinces, though the Muscovites still held Dorpat. The Swedes were newly occupied with a war against Denmark which began in June 1657. Riga increasingly suffered problems not from muscovite incursions but from Lithuanian raiders who fanned out across the hinterland plundering and murdering people and soldiers.

This situation continued until early 1658. Swedish success in Denmark convinced Alexis that the Swedes were again a powerful force. The need for peace with Sweden was reinforced by the new alliance between the Poles, Brandenburg,

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<sup>632</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 309. Charles X to Gustav Horn, 19 October 1656.

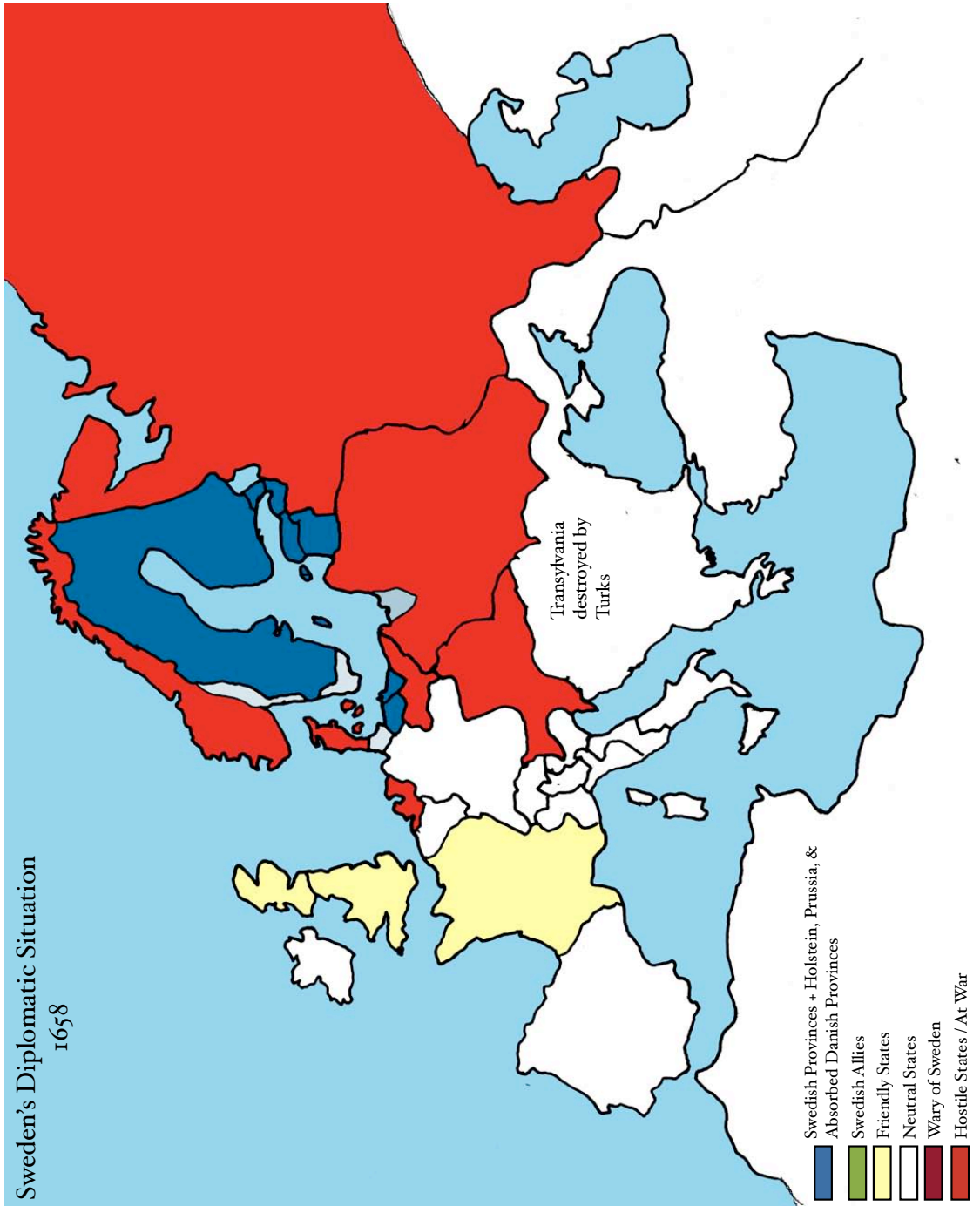
<sup>633</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 177 and CXGS, vol. 7, 219-220.

<sup>634</sup> CXGS, vol. 7, 219.

Austria and the Cossacks. Such a force might begin against Swedish control of Prussia but could easily be transferred to warring against Muscovite control of Lithuania and Ukraine - areas the allies would like to reclaim or expand their territorial holdings.

In December 1658 Sweden and Muscovy agreed at the peace treaty at Valiesar, near Narva. Muscovy was allowed to keep the conquered territories including Dorpat, Dunaberg, and Kokenhusen for three years. In 1661, Muscovy and Sweden signed the Treaty of Kardis which reinforced the borders of Gustavus Adolphus's treaty of 1617. This was the last Swedish-Russian war until 1700.

Chapter 8. Danish Intervention in the Swedish-Polish War  
and Sweden's Invasion of Denmark: 1657 - 1658



The intervention of Denmark, in June 1657, into the Polish war fundamentally changed the dynamic of the conflict. It caused the collapse of the Swedish war in southern and eastern Poland. To deal with the Danish attack on Swedish possession in Germany, Charles X transferred the bulk of his field army from Poland to Jutland. Exposed garrisons in far off parts of Poland were abandoned and concentrated in Prussia. The infantry in the garrisons, now devoid of the mobile protection of the field armies, were transformed into dragoons to give them mobility. The garrisons, now concentrated close together and gaining some mobility, were now expected to defend each other from raids or sieges. It gave Prussia a defense in depth before it had not possessed. But Prussia was also abandoned to its own devices. Without Charles X's army riding from one end of Poland to another battling insurgent armies, the Poles gained the initiative. The Transylvanians, without Charles and the Swedes to provide the spine to the wobbly enterprise, collapsed. John Casimir retook Warsaw, bombarded Transylvanian occupied Cracow until it surrendered. A half a dozen other cities garrisoned by Transylvanian troops likewise surrendered or were given up. Finally, the Elector of Brandenburg smelling the winds of change about him - as Lithuanian troops ransacked their way across Ducal Prussia and Polish troops even attacked some border towns in Brandenburg itself, negotiated a return to the Polish fold. By mid summer 1657 Charles X was at war with Denmark, Poland, Brandenburg, Austria and Muscovy.

Yet, the Danish war did not come without advantages. The Danish war was a war Charles X could win. Denmark was much smaller and more densely populated than the vast expanse of Poland. Charles's royal army got stronger as it progressed as

it absorbed fresh troops from Bremen and Pomerania. The Danish troops were mostly raw recruits or inexperienced hired mercenaries while the Swedes troops had already waged war successfully for three years. Swedish troops also carried with them the tradition of victory against Denmark. Most of the leading generals and officers, including Charles X, had taken part in the 1643 invasion of Denmark which had smashed the country. The Swedes could also press the Danes from two fronts (from Pomerania and from Sweden itself) instead of being forced to spread their forces out as they did in Poland. Finally, a war with Denmark brought the psychological advantage of bringing the troops and officers closer to home. Poland was both physically and culturally distant to the Swedish farm-boys who fought there. Denmark, on the other hand, had a similar language, religion, architecture and geography to Sweden.

The war between Sweden and Denmark was a slow burning affair long before it broke into open hostilities. Danish complaints about Swedish hubris predated the war with Poland and concentrated on the 1653 war with Bremen which lay at the base of Jutland. No Danish king could suffer having Swedish garrisons straddling their southern border. When the Swedish-Polish war began Fredrick III began hiring troops, mobilizing conscripts, and conducting on-again-off-again negotiations with John Casimir, various Polish insurgent groups, the Dutch, Brandenburg and Austria. Yet for all the possibilities of a Grand Alliance Fredrick III hesitated. The last time Denmark attacked a seemingly bogged down Sweden the Swedes left the front of their war, invaded Denmark from the south, and completely overran the country. The 1643-1645 war was a complete disaster for the Danes and reinvigorated the



Swedish war effort in Germany. Both Fredrick III and Charles X were officer-princes during the war which clearly left a stamp on their attitudes toward their oppositional kingdom.

By October 1656, Charles X was complaining about the Danes to Magnus de la Gardie. “I do not stand well with how Denmark is working to our prejudice,” he wrote at the end of a letter concerning de la Gardie’s negotiations with the Muscovites, “[the Dane’s] work with the Dutch. We must watch the Danes who work to hinder me.”<sup>635</sup> The intervention of Transylvania, in late 1656, was supposed to not only relieve the Swedish position in the southern Poland but “will make the Dane mild and wary of how to engage the Swedes.”<sup>636</sup> The Swedish and Transylvanian victories in the winter and spring of 1657 only seemed to deteriorate relations with Sweden. In January 1657 the Danes began to make “a good deal of noise in the world of a design they are said to have against the Swede.” In February 1657, Charles wrote to Gustav Wrangel, governor general of Pomerania, “it is apparent and certain that Denmark will be an enemy of ours. I have already informed the råd that we need troops available to work against the King of Denmark.”<sup>637</sup>

Diplomats and spies debated Danish goals in any upcoming war. “Some believe they aim at Bremen” while others thought trying to take the city was unlikely given Sweden’s “extraordinary watchfulness” concerning Bremen. Others thought the Danes aimed at recovery of the provinces lost in 1645.<sup>638</sup> Charles X felt that a Danish

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<sup>635</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 309, Charles X Gustav to Magnus de la Gardie, 31 October 1656.

<sup>636</sup> *SPJT*, 24 February 1657, vol. 6, 73.

<sup>637</sup> RA, RR, vol. 310, Charles X Gustav to Gustav Wrangel, 6 February 1657.

<sup>638</sup> *SPJT*, 20 January 1657, vol. 6, 6.

attack several Swedish domains simultaneously. In a long letter to both Gustav Wrangel and Per Brahe (head of the *råd* in Stockholm) Charles X explained that Sweden had to be prepared for three Danish attacks: one attack against Sweden's provinces in Scandinavia, another against Bremen and a third against Charles's father-in-law, the Duke of Holstein.<sup>639</sup> None one of those attacks, Charles X made clear in his letters, could be allowed to make any headway.

The King of Denmark's pronouncements were accompanied by increased action. Even in January there were reports that "the Danes equipage continues in an extra ordinary manner....against the Swede."<sup>640</sup> Another observer reported "the levies [of Denmark] do begin to be advanced in all parts...[the Swedes] do all that they can to hasten the same."<sup>641</sup> Defending Sweden's Western territories sucked resources away the wars in Poland, Prussia and Livonia as the Swedish provinces "most threatened do provide themselves against the worst in case they should be assaulted."<sup>642</sup> By March, it was clear "...Denmark will attack [Sweden] at one point or another shortly though the defensive is only pretended."<sup>643</sup> The kingdom appeared to have created a strong enough host to threaten the Swedes and it was reported "[the Danes] are said to have 10,000 men in Holstein, 12,000 in Norway and a great army in Skåne."<sup>644</sup> The coming war seemed to be welcomed by "the great

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<sup>639</sup> RA, RR, vol. 310, Charles X Gustav to Gustav Wrangel, 6 February 1657.

<sup>640</sup> *SPJT*, 27 January 1657, vol. 6, 23.

<sup>641</sup> *SPJT*, 31 January 1657, vol. 6, 38.

<sup>642</sup> *SPJT*, 20 January 1657, vol. 6, 6.

<sup>643</sup> *SPJT*, 17 March 1657, vol. 6, 120.

<sup>644</sup> *SPJT*, 14 April 1657, vol. 6, 200.

men of the realm so possessed of great zeal...to revenge themselves of their natural enemy.”<sup>645</sup> There was even the expectation of significant aid from anti-Swedish kingdoms since “the King of Denmark depends upon the great forces of the Roman Emperor. . .” to eliminate Swedish forces in Pomerania and Prussia.<sup>646</sup> The King of Denmark seemed to have lost “part of the panic, terror and fear” he had exhibited at the beginning of the Swedish-Polish war in 1655.<sup>647</sup>

Yet, there were some serious weaknesses in the preparations. The Danish mobilization, while impressive on paper, lacked the professionalism and panache of their northern foes. One spy reported “all [the Danes] have at present is a reasonable number of inexpert silly people.” Less than ten percent “ever carry arms” and the soldiers were “without either officer or commander....that understand anything or is able to command a regiment much less an army.”<sup>648</sup> Charles X dismissed the Danish army as well. “Our national force,” he wrote, “will be able to best any Danish army coming out of Holstein.” To Wrangel he wrote “you are to hold out until my brother or Field Marshal Stenbock arrives with troops. . . you are to fight the enemy and achieve the enemy’s complete ruin. Enter Jutland and free Holstein. . . Where you find the enemy in the field you are to break him there.”<sup>649</sup> To Per Brahe, Charles X expected the Swedish army to meet any invasion near the

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<sup>645</sup> *SPJT*, 17 March 1657, vol. 6, 121.

<sup>646</sup> *SPJT*, 7 April 1657, vol. 6, 180.

<sup>647</sup> *SPJT*, 5 May 1657, vol. 6, 260.

<sup>648</sup> *SPJT*, 5 May 1657, vol. 6, 260.

<sup>649</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 310, Charles X Gustav to Gustav Wrangel, 6 February 1657.

border and then to invade into Skåne and push any attack from Norway back across the border.”<sup>650</sup>

The flashpoint of conflict was Sweden’s control of Bremen and Pomerania and Charles X’s personal union with Duke Fredrick of Holstein. Charles X, in a letter to Stenbock, explained how the King of Denmark’s demands were not only unrealistic but also a threat to the well balanced order of the region. “Both the peace of Germania [Westphalia] and Bromesbro [ending the 1643-1645 war] explained how Holstein is separate from the King of Denmark’s lands.” Denmark’s demands for restitution of the land flew in the face of treaties they had signed. Bremen, Charles explained, had been given to Sweden in the Westphalian treaties and it was “our right to hold what we have rightfully won.”<sup>651</sup>

Charles’ one true friend in the Baltic was his father in law; the Duke of Holstein-Gottorp. Holstein was a series of germanic duchies and counties on the southern end of Jutland, linking Scandinavia to the continent. In the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century King Christian III of Denmark gave Holstein as a gift to his brother. The brother promptly declared his autonomy from Copenhagen, refused to pay taxes or contribute to the militia and set up his own independent state within a state. The policy of every subsequent Danish king was to regain control over Holstein.

The Swedes, long adversaries with the Danes, found a natural ally in Holstein. It was Swedish policy to maintain Holstein’s independence. The treaty of Westphalia gave Sweden the Imperial duchies of Pomerania, Bremen, Verden and the city of

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<sup>650</sup> RA, RHB, box I, vol. 20, folder 4. Charles X Gustav to Per Brahe, 6 February 1657.

<sup>651</sup> RA, Kungliga Brev i Koncept, vol. 167, Charles X Gustav to Stenbock, 26 February 1657.

Wismar; duchies right at the base of Jutland. Charles's marriage, in 1654, to the Duke of Holstein's daughter, Hedvig Elenora, dynastically linked Sweden's empire with Holstein's independence. This dynastic connection meant Holstein was *of* the Swedish empire without actually being *in* the Swedish empire. Danish kings saw this encirclement as an imminent threat.<sup>652</sup> Robert Frost points out "every Swedish – Danish Treaty since 1645 concerned Holstein's sovereignty."<sup>653</sup> As diplomatic conditions between the states worsened in 1656 it became clear, at least to some, that "the King of Denmark will wage war on Holstein" and the Swedes "will come out of Poland" to protect it.<sup>654</sup>

Bulstrode Whitelocke, the English ambassador to Queen Christina, described Holstein as "pleasant and fruitful. Stored with groves and fields of corn. . . much like Champaign counties of England, only more woody."<sup>655</sup> It was a perfect country for armies to march through with plenty of grains for soldiers to eat and "not so full of towns" to block, delay or deny an army's movement. Imperial armies under Tilly and Wallerstein camped there in the 1620s, Swedish General Lennart Torstensson occupied it in the 1640s. Holstein was the military highway linking Sweden's home provinces and its possessions in Northern Europe.<sup>656</sup> Holstein also represented an important non-Swedish recruiting ground. The *råd* noted that the Duke assisted

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<sup>652</sup> 1654 – 1721, the reigns of the three Charles' (Charles X, Charles XI, Charles XII) and was dynastically descended from the Pfalz-Zweibruken family which married into the Vasa family through Gustavus Adolphus's older sister and ascended with the abdication of Christina in June 1654.

<sup>653</sup> Robert Frost, *Northern Wars*, 227.

<sup>654</sup> *SPJT*, 24 February 1657, vol. 6, 73.

<sup>655</sup> Bulstrode Whitelocke, *A Journal of the Swedish Embassy in the Years 1653 and 1654*, vol. 2, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, 1885) 337.

<sup>656</sup> Bulstrode Whitelocke, *A Journal of the Swedish Embassy in the Years 1653 and 1654*, vol. 2., 352.

Charles's war in Poland with 6,000 men.<sup>657</sup> Charles wrote letters in September 1656 asking for the recruitment of a regiment of horse and a regiment of infantry which could then be led by the sons of the Duke of Holstein.<sup>658</sup> In March 1657 the Duke promised to recruit three sorely needed cavalry regiments.<sup>659</sup> To Wrangel, Charles X noted that the Swedish forces fighting the Danes could count on the assistance of 2,000 Holstein cavalry soldiers.<sup>660</sup> A Danish occupation of the duchy would end Charles's access to these reinforcements and Fredrick III began transferring his troops there in 1656 to lessen the logistical burden on his personal Danish territories.

In May 1657 Charles responded that Danish demands to change the 1645 treaty "do not stand with reason." Charles accused the Danes as breaking their peace treaties since he had endeavored to keep a "friendly and neighborly" relationship.<sup>661</sup> During the spring of 1657 tough rhetoric turned to overt action as the Danes began seizing Swedish ships passing through the Sound. Free passage of the Sound – the waterway which linked not only the Baltic to the North Sea but also the two shores of Sweden, had been guaranteed by the 1645 treaties. It was also increasingly clear that the King of Denmark not only coveted Holstein but wished to clear the Swedes out of Bremen, at the base of Jutland, and regain control of the Scandinavian provinces lost in 1645. Fredrick portrayed the Swedes as both dangerous and

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<sup>657</sup> RRP, vol xvi, 500.

<sup>658</sup> RRP, vol xvi, 500.

<sup>659</sup> Johan Carlbom, *Karl X Gustav, Från Weichseln till Bält, 1657*. 290.

<sup>660</sup> RA, RR, Huvudserie, vol. 310, Charles X Gustav to Gustav Wrangel, 6 February 1657.

<sup>661</sup> *SPJT*, 13 May 1657, vol. 6, 252.

stubbornly “unwilling to satisfy” his demands.<sup>662</sup> News of the Treaty of Vienna – which brought Austria into the war - galvanized Fredrick to action and without any discussion in his parliament declared war on the Swedes. Officially, the Danes rationale was that Bremen had been taken from them, Norwegian towns taken in 1645 had not been returned, the Swedes allowed other merchants to smuggle goods through the Sound and the Swedes had blocked up Danzig threatening Danish trade.<sup>663</sup>

Fredrick believing himself part of a grand anti-Swedish alliance – and perhaps believing the war already won - sailed for Danzig with nineteen ships and 2,000 men. Roger Manley, Cromwell’s man in Prussia, was stunned when the King arrived in Danzig. “We cannot imagine his design being here in person...It may be that the Danes will take islands lost in the last war but that the king should be there in person is our wonder.”<sup>664</sup> Danish troops immediately garrisoned Holstein “which the Danes ravaged with great cruelty” and assaulted the Swedish possession of Bremen.<sup>665</sup> Problematically for the King of Denmark there was little support for the war in Denmark. Roger Manley commented “the states of Denmark will by no means suffer their sovereign to hazard his person in war; that is they *dare not trust him the cudgel*. This may explain why he is said to be with the fleet.”<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>662</sup> *SPJT*, 13 May 1657, vol. 6, 254.

<sup>663</sup> *SPJT*, 27 June 1657, vol. 6, 353.

<sup>664</sup> *SPJT*, 12 July, 1657, vol. 6, 379.

<sup>665</sup> Prade, 109. and *SPJT*, 12 July 1657, vol. 6, 379.

<sup>666</sup> *SPJT*, 12 July 1657, vol. 6, 379.

In Poland and Prussia talk turned to Charles's possible actions. Manley thought it clear "[Charles] will go in person against the Dane..."<sup>667</sup> In Elbing they wrote that the King of Denmark was unprepared for the response he was to get from the Swedes. "[Charles] had took with him the best soldiers," Douglas and Stenbock, both now Field Marshals, were freed from the grueling back and forth guerilla skirmishes in Poland and Danzig and returned to Sweden to take the fight to the Danes. Despite all the problems of plague and insurrection and the withering war in Poland. The Swedish military still possessed a dangerous reputation. "[The Swedes] will give work enough to the Dane that he will long repent of."<sup>668</sup> The Swedish army, leaving Poland, "destroyed and burnt all behind him in the enemy country; the better to hinder their descent into Prussia in his absence."<sup>669</sup>

Charles took 12,500 troops out of Prussia, nearly all of his royal army, leaving 8,500 troops to defend the major citadels of Prussia and a string of cities in northern Poland connecting the communication paths of Swedish Pomerania to Thorn. Charles's army remained a cavalry heavy force. Only 2,500 troops of 12,500 were infantry but the purpose of the army was to move quickly. They left Poland, marched through Brandenburg's Pomerania back into Sweden's Pomerania in a matter of about two weeks, taking Denmark completely by surprised. The King of Denmark fled Danzig in a haste to return to Copenhagen. Seeing the spires of Stettin marked

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<sup>667</sup> *SPJT*, 6 June 1657, vol. 6, 314.

<sup>668</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 6, 401. 24 July 1657.

<sup>669</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 6, 379. 12 July 1657.



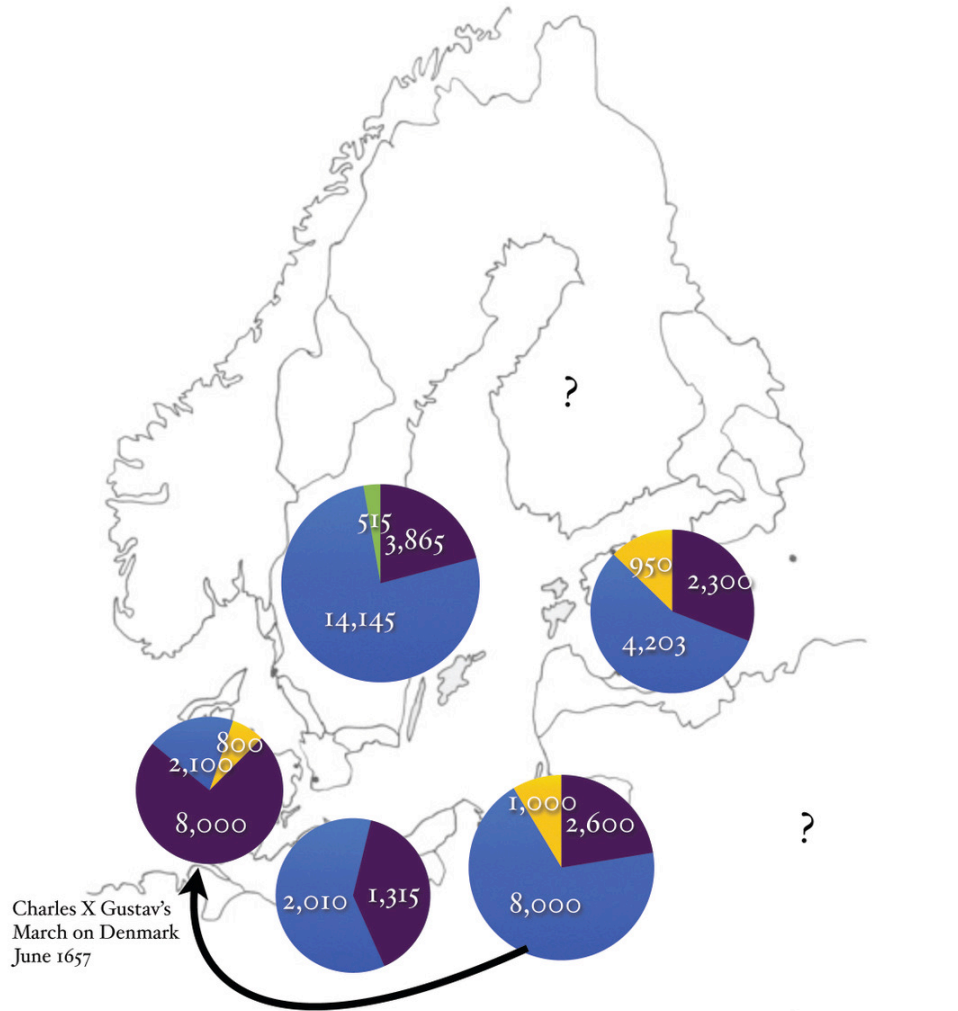
the first time in years that Charles X, his officers, and many of his soldiers had touched Swedish soil.

Picking up infantry troops and artillery from Pomerania this experienced, victorious but haggard army showed how much they had learned fighting the horselords of Poland and Lithuania. They broke the Danish siege of Bremen and “ruined 2,000 Danes and taken all the forts and places possessed by the Dane.” Charles’s army, leaving General Wrangel to finish up in Bremen, headed into Jutland and hitting a citadel defended by a Danish garrison “made his approaches; advanced his works; placed his cannon in battery; and plaid his thunder continually upon the walls of the beleaguered” when the Swedes blasted a whole through the walls they assaulted the town “and having sacked it reduced it into ashes.”<sup>670</sup> The Swedes, always imitators more of Alexander than Cyrus, brought the speed and intense violence of the Polish war to the west and the Danes appeared completely unprepared for it.

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<sup>670</sup> *SPJT*, 24 August 1657, vol.6, 460 and Prade, 109-110.

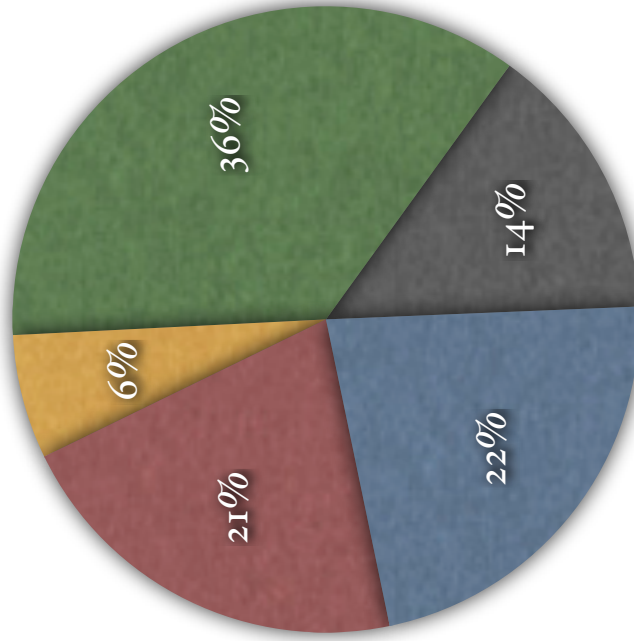
### Distribution of Swedish Troops: July 1657



Region	Total Troops	Percentage of Total
Sweden:	18,525	15%
Baltic:	7,453	14%
Pomerania:	3,325	6%
Poland / Prussia:	11,600	22%
Denmark:	10,900	21%

Total: 51,803      59% Infantry      35% Cavalry      6% Dragons

## Strength Distribution of Swedish Forces: July- September 1657



● in Poland+Prussia: 11,600

● in Denmark: 10,900

● in Germany: 3,325

● in Sweden: 18,525

● in Finland, Baltic, Lithuania: 7,453

Total Forces: 51,803

By August the actions of the two kings were in stark relief. Charles sought battle, led from the front, and pushed further into enemy country despite a numerically weaker force. The king of Denmark, like the Poles in 1655, seemed unable or unwilling to defend his kingdom. Observers reported “the Dane will not stand.”<sup>671</sup> Another writer reported “the Danes can hardly be persuaded to defend a pass, much less stand for an encounter.”<sup>672</sup> Charles was “magnificently” received by his grateful Father-in-Law when the Swedes entered Holstein. Meanwhile, the Swedes began hiring any mercenary in Danish service willing to switch sides.<sup>673</sup> Rather than back a loser, the Danish mercenary regiments melted away.

The Swedish diplomatic offensive took the form of getting the Dutch to stay out of the war. Swedish diplomats portrayed the Danes as a loser state. The Danes, the Swedes argues, had lost every military endeavor they began since 1615; the King of Denmark’s control of the sound could hurt Dutch trade far more than Swedish control of Danzig; the Danes wanted to undo the Swedish-Dutch Elbing treaty which created an understanding in the Baltic and, most damning of all, the King of Denmark went personally to Danzig to offer it Danish protection. If the Danes controlled the Sound *and* Danzig, the Dutch would be powerless to stop the King of Denmark from taxing both ends of Dutch commerce.<sup>674</sup> The Dutch, despite their alliance with Denmark, stayed out of the war allowing the Swedish navy to reinforce and resupply Sweden’s forces on the continent.

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<sup>671</sup> *SPJT*, 18 August 1657, vol. 6, 454.

<sup>672</sup> *SPJT*, 24 August 1657, vol.6, 460.

<sup>673</sup> *SPJT*, 24 August 1657, vol.6, 460 and Prade, 109-110.

<sup>674</sup> *SPJT*, 15 September 1657, vol. 6, 500.

Meanwhile, the war in Poland all but ceased. The Swedes had pulled out of southern and eastern Poland and concentrated their remaining forces in the cities of Prussia, especially Thorn, Marienburg and Elbing. The Polish armies were busy reclaiming Warsaw, Cracow and other cities from the isolated, frightened and defeated Transylvanians. Then John Casimir turned to the politically sensitive work of cementing his royal claims against the previously independent insurgent armies who were as oppositional to his power as they were to Charles X. John Casimir also worked on moving the Elector of Brandenburg from his stalwart neutrality - or do nothingness - into active opposition to Sweden. Without access to Brandenburg's infantry or artillery traine it was unlikely the Polish army would be able to do much more than hurl indecipherable insults at the Swedish troops ensconced in Prussia.

By the end of August, two months since the Danish war began, the King of Denmark had abandoned Holstein and Jutland to the Swedes. The lone Danish holdout on the European continent was the citadel of Fredrickstod which General Wrangle, with a force of 5,000, began battering with artillery. Charles sojourned to Stralsund to deal with military preparations for an assault of the Danish islands. He dealt with troops arriving from Sweden, dealt with correspondence with Riga and even spent time with the Queen, who came from Stockholm, to tour his victories.

The swift smashing of Denmark reinvigorated the Swedish army. His men began to carry a self assured bravado they had not possessed since the original invasion of Poland and Prussia. "Whatever the King of Sweden undertakes," reported an english admirer, "*his men* look upon as more than half done and both think all things possible to them." Having fought, and won, most of his battles at a

numerical disadvantage Charles “laughingly said he waits for a fair fight.”<sup>675</sup> Phillip Meadow, Cromwell’s pro-Danish ambassador in Copenhagen, compared the King of Denmark’s tactics against Charles X with Fabius’s reluctance to engage Hannibal; trying “to beat him by not fighting.”<sup>676</sup> But no one else thought the Danes, almost ejected from the continent and driven back in Skåne, had any real resistance left in them. Meadowe acknowledged that the Swedes had overthrown the balance of power in the North. “Neither of these princes [Denmark and Poland],” he wrote to Cromwell, “divided can maintain a war against the Swede.”<sup>677</sup> Meadowe began to believe the King of Denmark as personally unworthy of English mediation. He wrote “even though the Swedes own half his country and all of Jutland I found the King of Denmark’s propositions so extravagant [as to not accept reality].” The King of Denmark refused to meet with Meadowe.<sup>678</sup> Fredrick III was “short on money, bereft of allies and with ill trained troops.”<sup>679</sup>

The siege of Fredrickstad continued through the autumn of 1657 as the Swedes battering the citadel with heavy artillery. In November, Friedrickstad fell. William Jephson, Cromwell’s diplomat connected to Charles X’s royal army, called the victory “as advantageous if less glorious than that of Warsaw.”<sup>680</sup> The Danes,

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<sup>675</sup> *SPJT*, 14 September 1657, vol. 6, 514.

<sup>676</sup> *SPJT*, 26 September 1657, vol. 6, 533.

<sup>677</sup> *SPJT*, vol. 6, 626.

<sup>678</sup> *SPJT*, 6 December 1657, vol. 6, 662.

<sup>679</sup> Kirby, 187.

<sup>680</sup> *SPJT*, 2 November 1657, vol. 6, 598. .

Jephson reported, had “quit possession of the whole country.”<sup>681</sup> Charles X prepared to take the war to sea in order to invade the Danish islands when the weather turned extraordinarily cold.

Meanwhile, the alliance between Poland, Brandenburg and Austria was tearing itself apart. The Austrians were at “daggers drawing” with the Poles. All three kingdoms worried that with the Danes vanquished they would be the Swedes next target. The Austrians increasingly wanted territorial gains in Poland to offset a possible disaster in Germany should the Swedes descend into central Germany. The Polish nobility disliked substituting an overthrown Swedish master for a new Austrian one.<sup>682</sup>

1658 opened with Sweden at the height of its powers. It occupied half of Denmark, controlled the waters of the Baltic, had an uneasy balance with Muscovites who still lounged on Swedish territory, and controlled the wealthiest province in Poland. The Austrians, Brandenburgers and Poles could offer no organized threat to Sweden’s garrisons in Prussia and the Danish army was dispirited, dispersed and in a general state of disordered malaise. Meadowe reported the Danes “were willing to make peace but would have it on honorable terms” reported Meadow from Copenhagen, “but if [Charles X] fly higher and make demands of satisfaction he must get it by the sword for he will never get it by treatie [sic].”<sup>683</sup>

Yet Charles X remained certain of victory and was determined to fight battles against his multiple enemies. Jephson wrote that Charles “is resolved, even if they be

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<sup>681</sup> *SPJT*, 10 November 1657, vol. 6, 604.

<sup>682</sup> *SPJT*, 19 November 1657, vol. 6, 605.

<sup>683</sup> *SPJT*, 29 November 1657, vol. 6, 640.

three times the number, to give them battle for he said himself to have ten thousand horse and four thousand foot he will not scruple to fight them if they be thirty thousand nor do I find it improbable for him to defeat such an army composed of diverse nations.”<sup>684</sup> Ominously, Jephson made a note of the “bitter weather” surrounding Denmark that winter. “The cold here is so vehement that many people and cattle are starved.”<sup>685</sup>

The weather turned so cold the Belts which separated the Danish islands from the European continent froze over. In the middle of the night of 4 February Charles X’s army of 12,000 men (9,000 cavalrymen and 3,000 infantry plus a full complement of artillery), led by a group of engineers coring the ice for safety, began an island hopping campaign across one of the busiest sea lanes in the world. *Tåget över Bält*, the March over the Baltic, was so audacious as to enter the realm of legend; a Xerxes crossing the Hellespont or Hannibal across the Alps. In front of Stockholm’s Nordiska Museet resides a statue, made in 1917, dedicated to the actions of Charles X and his men. Charles X is presented astride his horse pointing the way forward to his men. On one part of the base is a map of the route the army took over the Belts and lists the names, a venerable who’s who of Swedish military elites, who took part in the expedition. This feat is made even more impressive knowing that the Belts were so wide that they were not bridged until the end of the twentieth century.

By the end of the night the army had crossed from the continent to the island of Fyn. In a dawn battle they overran the startled garrisons of the island. They

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<sup>684</sup> *SPJT*, 4 January 1658, vol. 6, 728.

<sup>685</sup> *SPJT*, 4 February 1658, vol. 6, 758.



camped for the day hoping the ice would hold. In the middle of the night of 5 February the army, taking a safer but longer route across the Langeland and Lolland Belts, arrived in Zealand. An army of 12,000 men, horses, guns and materials had walked over water to end up at the outskirts of Copenhagen. On 7 February a spy letter from Stettin wrote “it is believed here that his majesty of Sweden is entered into the island of Fuenen to attack there the Danes.”<sup>686</sup> Charles X, in a moment of levity, told a dumbfounded Meadow “God had shown him the way. . .and had built a bridge [across the Belts] and he could do no less than go over.”<sup>687</sup> Charles later commemorated the success by coining a new motto: *Reverntem Habere Fortunam*; Revere He who has Fortune.

Copenhagen, like Singapore, was not designed to defend itself from an impracticable attack from an impossible direction. The Danish mercenaries “run away with their monies” and General Sulzbach wrote of the pacifying of Fuenen was a complete and total victory. The Commander and Chief of the defenses of the island, “the bastard son of the King,” was also taken prisoner.<sup>688</sup> As the Swedish army prepared their works to bombard Copenhagen to dust Meadowe reported “the Swedish demands are very high but their advantages are likewise very great . . .they were demanding Belking, Skåne, Bornholm and hinter Norway.”<sup>689</sup>

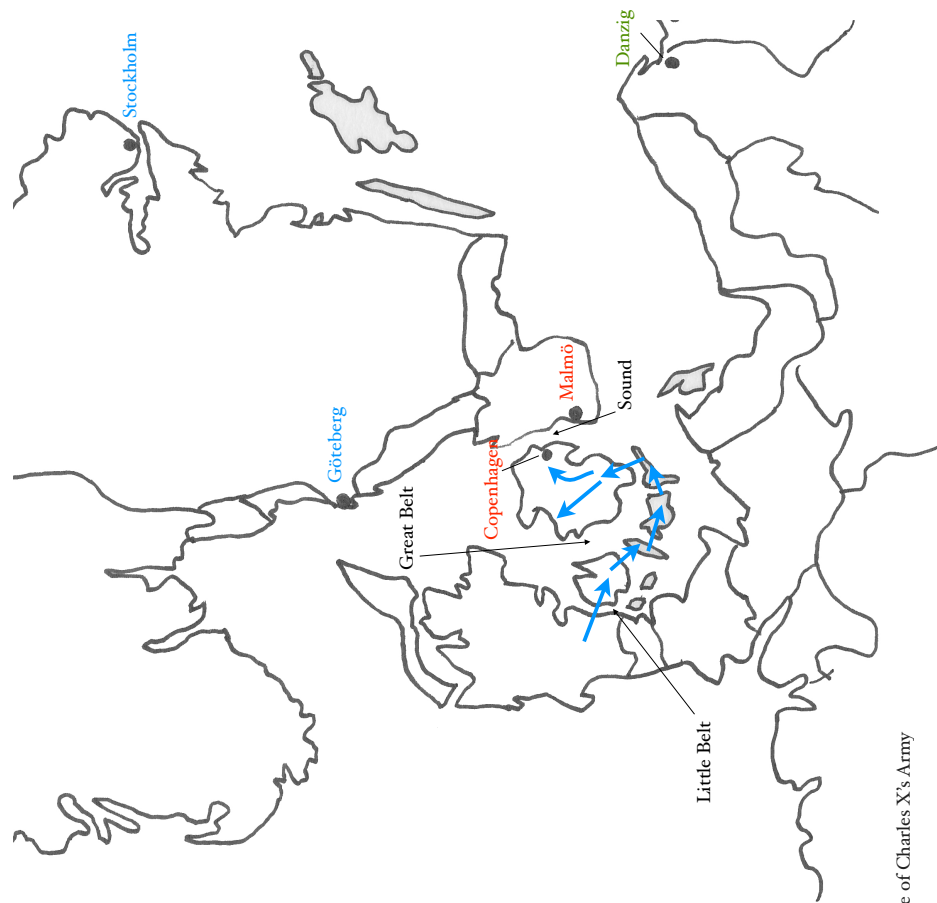
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<sup>686</sup> *SPJT*, 7 February 1658, vol. 6, 759. .

<sup>687</sup> *SPJT*, 14 February 1658, vol. 6, 802. .

<sup>688</sup> *SPJT*, 21 February 1658, vol. 6, 791. .

<sup>689</sup> *SPJT*, 14 February 1658, vol. 6, 802. .



Tåget över Bält:  
4-5 February 1658

Fredrick III fled across the Sound to Malmö. Charles was the master “of all Denmark save Elsenor.”<sup>690</sup> Fredrick III surrendered a week later and his negotiators quickly signed the Treaty of Roskilde. Sweden won everything. They took half of Denmark as they absorbed Belking, Skåne, and Bornholm on the Scandinavian peninsula. They took central Norwegian provinces which jutted into Sweden and the Swedes claimed the Norwegian coast of Trondheim (and with it, presumably, the isolated Norwegian Arctic as well). Plus, Denmark had to supply the Swedes with 4,000 mercenary troops. It protected Holstein’s sovereignty (and even gave it the Danish province of Sledgwick<sup>691</sup>), guaranteed Sweden’s german possessions, and symbolized the complete eclipse of Denmark as a major power. The Treaty of Roskilde was also the high water mark of Sweden’s Imperial Age. Jephson wrote “never has there been such a war and such a peace.” Never again would Swedish arms win so complete and permanent a victory. The provinces absorbed from Denmark and Norway, save Trondheim, continue to be part of the Swedish heartland.

The Danish war was proof of all the advantages inherent in the Swedish way of war. The army moved faster, with more concentrated force, and acted in more united purpose than its enemies. Led by the king, the Swedes won victory after bloody victory and, except when pushed into a corner from which they could not flee, the Danes (like the Poles in 1655) refused to fight. When they did, the Swedes smashed them with a combination of weight, firepower and combined arms even though they possessed less infantry - as a percentage of the army - than they did in

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<sup>690</sup> *SPJT*, 8 March 1658, vol. 6. 825. .

<sup>691</sup> *SPJT*, 16 March 1658, vol. 6, 849..

1655. The bravado of king and army created a force capable of audacious acts. The rest of Europe was at once amazed and frightened that the Swedes had regained so much power from their Polish collapse.

Meadowe, a mediator at Roskilde, presented Charles X with a “great sword I brought out of England.” Charles responded “he would like to use the sword against the House of Austria.” Meadowe believed that Charles X’s next campaign would be to punish the duplicity of the Duke of Brandenburg. “I am sure I find him in ready disposition to give that Prince the revenge and will do it.”<sup>692</sup>

Charles returned to Sweden and called a *riksdag* and a *råd*. He had assembled councils in the field throughout the war and the *råd* in Stockholm had been at the forefront of leading the country while the king was away. The major question facing the parties in 1658 was the same one of the *decemberrådslagen*: what do we do now? Denmark had been defeated; the Baltic was at a strange status quo; Swedish troops still occupied Prussia.

No one seemed eager to return to Prussia. The long desultory war – with its raids and insurgency and no clear means of victory – did not appeal to the fiscally minded nor the newly victorious. An assault on Berlin appealed to many’s sense of revenge and balance. Fredrick William, far away in Königsberg, worried about Swedish hatred. “[The Elector’s] panic stricken letters after Roskilde indicated how much he feared Swedish revenge.”<sup>693</sup> To Cromwell, the Elector wrote letters pleading for intervention and mediation for a likeminded Christian brother. Brandenburg’s

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<sup>692</sup> *SPJT*, 2 March 1658, vol. 6. 838.

<sup>693</sup> Frost, *Northern Wars*, 199.

forces were in no position to withstand an assault from a resurgent, resupplied and replenished Swedish royal army. But an assault into Brandenburg proper, while deeply satisfying, might also erupt into a new German War which no one in Europe, save the French, really wanted either.

In the end they decided, and unlike in December Charles's opinion on this war is quite clear, to attack Denmark by sea with the goal of annexing the whole country and dominating both sides of the Sound. The profits from controlling the Sound, which had supported the Danish power since the Middle Ages, would more than offset the loss of Prussia. For the war to pay for itself Sweden had to grab either Prussia, which was nigh impossible now, or the Sound. In 1658 Sweden still occupied much of Denmark and would never have such an advantageous position to extinguish its ancient rival.

The decision stunned Europe. As the Swedes laid siege to Copenhagen the Dutch, who had sat out the First Danish War, quickly sent a fleet which pushed the Swedish fleet out into the Baltic. Neither England nor France – both of whom relied on trade through the Sound to supply their navies – wished to see Sweden gain a monopoly on the Sound dues. For the Maritime powers a weak Denmark or a divided toll system (Denmark and Sweden both controlling the Sound and thus competing for commerce dues) was more appealing than a Scandinavian super-kingdom uniting Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, northern Germany and the eastern Baltic coast.

The Maritime states, including the Dutch, immediately began pressing for negotiations and an end to hostilities. The public opinion in Denmark quickly

shifted from one of hatred for their king to one of patriotic fervor to save themselves from their enemy. The Austrian-Brandenburg-Poles launched an assault into Pomerania knowing that the vast majority of Swedish troops were in the Danish islands. Even Muscovy restarted its war in Livonia knowing that few reinforcements from Sweden or Finland would arrive to save Riga.

Ultimately, the immense audacity of the attempt – just like the thought of conquering all of Poland in 1655 - led to its failure. The future of the Baltic was decided not in Stockholm, Warsaw or Copenhagen but in Amsterdam, Paris and London. Sweden had lost its chance to remake the balance of power in the Baltic in 1655. Since then one state after another had intervened to secure their own ambitions in the region and to maintain a plurality of kingdoms in the region. This also meant that Poland-Lithuania was a prize waiting to be carved up long before the partitions of the eighteenth century finalized the situation.

The Swedish army, which was a magnificent force in 1655, was withered and broken by 1660 when the wars finally came to an end after the death of Charles X. It possessed great strengths, won most of the battles it fought, occupied entire countries and still held foreign territory in Denmark and Prussia when the peace treaties were signed. But it was a great machine whose gears had been stripped from heavy overuse. Charles X died in February 1660 in Göteborg waiting for a new *riksdag* and *råd* to assemble. The assemblies' job was to do what Swedish assemblies had done since before Gustav Vasa won the country's independence; what proved to be the great engine binding the society and generating so much of Sweden's kinetic energy; to answer the same question the bodies had debated in 1655 and 1658 and

before every other previous great enterprise of the last century and a half: what are we to do now?

## Chapter 9: In Conclusion.



Sweden's decision making during the war was both rational and practical. The invasion of Poland had the two fold advantage of acquiring a resource rich area, while keeping it out of the hands of a potential future enemy, and eliminating a traditional dynastic and political rival. The quick collapse of Polish resistance in the fall of 1655 combined with a willingness of Polish and Lithuanian nobles to accept Swedish lordship seemed to vindicate the choices of the *decemberrådslagen*. The dispersion of troops into garrisons made political and economic sense. With the army dispersed it was more capable of being supported by local resources and with more citizens occupied Charles X should have found himself in a superior negotiating position.

An unintended consequence of this decision was that such a dispersion made the Swedish army both weaker and more vulnerable while simultaneously upsetting the Polish peasants into active resistance. Swedish actions begat Polish responses and propaganda which begat further and more violent Swedish responses; creating a vicious downward spiral of violence and destruction. Swedish soldiers, still superior in quality and strength to the insurgent enemies, found themselves isolated, exposed and friendless in a country they occupied but did not control. Swedish troops continuously found themselves outnumbered and incapable of killing enough insurgents to force an end to the war. Polish, Lithuanian, and Tartar horsemen simply disappeared into the vastness of the southern and eastern provinces of the Commonwealth where they found succor and reinforcement.

By spreading out their troops into localized garrisons the Swedes also forfeited their military advantages. The field armies evolved from well balanced,

combined-arms forces, into mobile cavalry armies. This played into the strengths of the Poles and Lithuanian insurgents. The insurgents had the support of the people and expert knowledge of the terrain. The Swedes spoke a different language, were of an adversarial religion and culture, and knew little of the people, culture or terrain of Poland-Lithuania. The Swedes found support only in the Prussias where the people were more urbanized, Protestant, and Germanic. But Sweden's armies found themselves having to defend these new friends and allies. The insurgents, by contrast, were free and unhindered from defending anything since they owned little of the population or economic centers of the country. The roles of 1655 when the Swedes could force battles and strike the Poles with impunity were gone. They were now forced to respond to Polish actions.

The need to catch up with Polish horsemen and the need to defend settled areas forced the Swedes to transform their field armies. In 1654, the Swedish field armies were well balanced combined arms based machines which were designed to fight battles, kill enormous numbers of people, and roll over enemy territories. The purpose of the army was to force a quick and decisive end to a war by achieving the complete destruction of an opposing nation's defensive institutions. Dispersing the infantry and artillery of the field armies into garrisons made sense in 1655. The dispersion would simultaneously maintain Swedish possession of a city or citadel, since the Poles lacked both the necessary artillery and infantry required for besieging a city, while limiting the logistical costs and impact of high numbers of troops on a local population. But the new field armies, mostly fast moving cavalry, now lacked the necessary firepower and weight in order to win decisive battles. The result was

that the Swedes fought many battles in 1656 but none of them changed the political situation within Poland. Even the Battle of Warsaw, the longest and largest battle of the war, did nothing to change the dynamic of the war. The Swedes had given away their qualitative advantages and lost the ability to win the war.

The Swedes did not provide protection to the Catholic or Orthodox populations and thus lost their support. The Swedes, having occupied much of northern Lithuania did not begin a war against the Muscovites to protect Poland or Lithuania. Nor was Sweden able to provide protection, from their own plundering, for the Catholic peasants it absorbed through the conquests of 1655. Had the Polish nobility delivered on their promises of support in 1655 Charles might have pacified the country without sparking either an insurgency or foreign intervention into the war.

When the Swedish army entered Poland Charles X was adamant that it maintain “good order.” He was quite aware of trying to maintain the “good humor” of the peasantry. But the Polish lords who made peace treaties with Charles in the fall of 1655 were incapable of controlling their own lands. The devolution of Polish order and organization left the Swedes in control of urban and economic centers but without access to the resources of the hinterland. The Swedish army, lacking food and pay provided by local allies, resorted to plunder of the peasantry and the Catholic Church which possessed a great deal of the country’s latent wealth. The loss of the Church’s neutrality foresaw the partisanship of the peasantry and with the loss of the neutrality of the Church and peasantry the Swedes also lost the

milquetoast support of Polish nobles who, wanting to maintain some authority over their peasantry, changed sides and fought the Swedes.

The notion of protection as a root cause and problem in the war is born out by the different history of Protestant Prussia during the war. The urban cities of Prussia were the one area which actively supported Swedish occupation. Swedish troops continued to occupy most of the Prussian cities until the peace treaties of 1660. Prussia also provided the Swedish troops with resources and contributions so that Swedish troops never plundered Prussian cities. Instead, the Swedish garrisons were charged with providing the Prussian cities with protection from Polish, Lithuanian, Tartar, Cossack, Muscovite, and Brandenburg advances. Catholic and Lithuanian horsemen plundered Prussia as if it was a foreign land.

The inability to end the war quickly and victoriously gave opportunity to hesitant powers to intervene in the conflict. The inability to take Danzig allowed the Dutch to send a fleet and annex the city. The inability to force the Polish King, John Casimir, to negotiate allowed Austria to furnish him with a continuous supply of men, money, and guns. The Habsburgs also provided a safe haven, arguably their most important contribution, where Swedish armies could not go without sparking a far larger conflict. The inability of the Poles to eject the Swedes led Austria to ever more direct intervention in order to keep the Swedes from winning. For Austrian intervention achieved two goals: it kept the Swedish armies occupied so they could not intervene in Germany; and it continuously bled the Swedes of men and treasure at a low cost to the Kaiser.

The quagmire the Swedes found themselves in also inspired Muscovy and Denmark to bold actions in order to redress previous losses to the Swedes. The Muscovites invaded Sweden's Baltic provinces and Denmark invaded Sweden's possessions in Germany and on the Scandinavian peninsula. Neither action would have happened had the vast bulk of Swedish forces not been tied down across the width and breadth of the Polish Commonwealth.

The Swedes were able to fight off the Muscovites and make substantial, and permanent, gains against the Danes. But every foreign intervention had the affect of limiting the ability of Sweden to achieve the original goals of the war - the annexation of the Prussian cities. When Charles X, giving up on gains in Poland, decided to try to annex Denmark in June of 1658 (the Second Danish War); foreign intervention again kept Sweden from making any permanent gains. The Dutch sent a fleet to aid Denmark, the Poles and Austrians invaded Swedish Pomerania, the Muscovites restarted a thrust towards Riga and Narva and the Swedes again had to fight multiple enemies, on multiple fronts, across great distances.

The Swedish experience in Poland-Lithuania reflects that the people, not territory, were the prize of the war. With the support of the Prussian populace the Swedes were able to maintain themselves in Prussia throughout the war. In Poland and Lithuania where the peasants were badly treated or feared poor treatment (or feared attacks on their traditional culture) the people rose up in revolt and supported organized insurgent groups. Foreign states, with their own agendas, did not immediately enter the fray but, smelling indecision and weakness, entered the fray to limit Sweden's gains and to promote their own causes.

Many of the causes of the insurgency and intervention were caused by outside forces beyond the control of Swedish policy makers. But many of the problems were self inflicted. The Swedish army, like every other army of the time, had to live off the land for food and pay. Garrisoning cities and towns allowed the Swedes to maintain control of an area without destroying the economic viability of the province. But every time a Swedish soldier (or their Germanic contractors) ransacked a home or a church; they made enemies for all Swedish soldiers who were seen as murderous crusading heretics. Every time a Swedish officer summarily hung suspected guerrillas and partisans; the Swedes created more guerillas and partisans. Every action that lengthened the war also increased the certitude that foreigners would intervene *in order to* lengthen the war even longer.

The Swedes *should have* won the war in Poland. They possessed a stupendous military power and the will to use it. The Swedes found local allies happy to have a new powerful protector. Poland was there for the taking and the early days of conquest were so easy. Swedish actions, decisions and mistakes ultimately cost them a chance to change the Baltic to their advantage. They might have found security in the humbling of Poland, the infantilism of Brandenburg, the new physical separation from Denmark (or the strength of its incorporation), and the respect of a latently powerful Muscovy. Instead, over the next half century the Swedes fought Denmark, Brandenburg, Poland and Muscovy repeatedly in order just to hold on to their previous gains.

The consequences of Sweden's inability to radically transform its power in the 1650s played out in the *Götterdämmerung* of the Great Northern War (1700-1721). For ten years the Swedes continued as masters of the North under Charles X Gustav's grandson, Charles XII. They conquered Denmark, smashed Poland, obliterated several Muscovite armies, captured Prussia and Danzig, and even invaded German Saxony. The climax of the war was the invasion of Muscovy, a battle in the Ukraine, and the destruction of the Swedish royal army something the Poles, Lithuanians, Austrians, Cossacks, Danes, Brandenburger, Tartars and disease could not do to Charles X's army. From 1709 - 1721 the Swedes collapsed under the weight of too many foes with too much combined power. By 1710 Muscovy, whose vast potential power had so worried the Swedish councilors in 1654, had turned its potential into actual power.

No one envisioned the end of the Swedish Empire during the glories of 1655 nor in the darkest despair of 1656. The Swedes remained *the* kinetic power in northern and eastern Europe in the seventeenth century. Twenty thousand Swedes on the march, led by a ferocious Gothic warrior king, marveled and frightened observers from one end of Europe to the other. Yet, Charles X's wars remained the last chance for Sweden to remake the north, to create a powerful northern counter balance to Germany or Russia. The inability to accomplish so radical a change, a change that was not really discussed until the decision to annex Denmark in 1658, doomed Sweden to being a middle power in a Europe increasingly dominated by larger, wealthier, and more populous states. The Swedish world Charles X nearly made was very different from the violent denouement beyond Poltava.

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