End of an Era: Sweden's changing geopolitical codes

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Sweden

Ben Johnson - Alongside their Swedish equivalents, United States Marines conducted military drills in the Baltic Sea several weeks ago. Including several firsts for both governments, these exercises are another critical installment in the ongoing war in Ukraine and the broader militarization among European states. The concept of geopolitical codes can assist us in better understanding why these exercises matter.

Geopolitical codes refer to how a country or entity positions itself within the international community. While seemingly simple, this concept encompasses a country's calculations in assessing current and future allies and enemies. Sweden has a long and famous history of pacifism, maintaining an impressive 208 years of neutrality. However, Russia's war in Ukraine, alongside increasingly aggressive threats from President Vladimir Putin, has prompted Sweden to reevaluate its security policy. Not only must a country determine how to defend against new threats, but it must be able to justify its actions and policy decisions to its public and the international community. Sweden's application to join NATO in May indicates that Swedish leaders have decided that the best way to guard against the growing Russian threat is to seek strength in numbers. This further signals to Russia the widespread international intolerance of their war. Increased military exercises with countries like the United States are another way Sweden has sought to

strengthen ties with allies and guard against current and emerging threats. In this case, these military exercises allowed the United States to train in conditions unfamiliar to most service members, as well as giving Swedish forces an opportunity to interact with a military well accustomed to war. Putin's intensifying threats of possible nuclear confrontation continue to be used as justification by Swedish officials for these policy changes.

Sweden's decision to dramatically change its geopolitical code can be further understood by considering the concept of territory. Territory refers to a space marked by boundaries where an entity has sovereignty or some degree of control. In this case, Sweden's territory is near Russia, separated only by Finland, another previously neutral country seeking admittance into NATO. Both countries feel the growing pressure and strain of Russia's invasion as they admit refugees from Ukraine and worry about Russia's possible aspirations concerning their own territory.