

Chapter 17 : The monarchy's "ruin value"

The Torekov-compromise retained the king as a national symbol, weakened his ceremonial role in domestic politics, eliminated him from parliamentary politics, but allowed some "non-political" activity. The King's ceremonial role in foreign affairs remained. The diffuse expectations gave the regent an opportunity to put his own mark on the business. Carl Gustaf's activities are described in the annual report of the Royal Court (Appendix 1: Table 1) 1997-2011 Carl Gustaf had an average of 291 assignments annually: The missions mentioned can be subdivided as related to the Torekov-compromise 32 percent, patronage 17 percent and other representation 51 percent. Carl Gustaf's head of cabinet, Jan Mårtensson, introduced the distinction between "demand driven" and "target driven" program items. For the "demand-driven" program items - mainly attendance, inaugurations & parties - it was necessary to weed the offers. For the "targeted" agenda items, Carl Gustaf wished in a purposeful and structured way to familiarize and inform himself about various phenomena and events in Swedish society. All criticism of the monarchy's lack of social connection had thus, according to Mårtensson in any case, been nipped in the bud.

Unfortunately, the statistics are rather meaningless. Carl Gustaf meets politicians, sits in at meetings, travels & takes part in events. The benefits to the state are difficult to assess. Some elements of an older monarchic "style" remain, which seems to be appreciated. I describe some of Carl Gustaf's "missions":

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National symbol

The Republican version is that the Bernadotte dynasty is part of Sweden's 1,000-year history of autocratic and murderous monarchs. The actions of the former kings are certainly not Carl Gustaf's fault, but since he legitimises his position by being related to them, they still become his problem. Carl Gustaf has never taken a position on the issue. It seems to have partly been due to the generation gap between him & Gustaf VI - Carl Gustaf genuinely experienced himself as a new type of king - and partly due to the culture of silence. Such discussions were considered disloyal. Carl Gustaf was therefore completely & quite embarrassingly ignorant of both Swedish royal history in general & of family scandals. When he was asked about Gustaf V, his father, his mother and his Nazi grandfather, he only knew what the environment had found suitable to pass on and was perceived to have something to hide.

As a national symbol, Carl Gustaf appears on coins, banknotes and stamps. He every year opens the Parliament & invites the MPs to dinner, he makes county visits & invites the governors to dinner, he gives New Year's & 6 June's speech, he awards medals, scholarships & prizes, he officiates at national festivals & events. He is Sweden's best known person.

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Carl Gustaf's most concrete contribution as a national symbol is to enhance the value of medals, scholarships & prizes. 1973-2011, he presented the following medals (number in brackets):

- The Seraphim Medal, for humanitarian or community activities (12).
- H.M. The King's Medal, seven sizes, for "special merit" (1874).
- Litteris et Artibus, for outstanding artistic achievement (291).
- Jubilee and commemorative tokens
- The Prince Eugen Medal, for distinguished artistic activities (187).
- The Prince Carl Medal, for humanitarian activities (4).
- Tokens for long and faithful service (76).

The most famous medal is the H.M. King's Medal, formerly the Royal Medal, established in 1814 and available in seven sizes. It is awarded twice a year - the Charles Day January 28 and the Gustav Day June 6 - to Swedish and foreign citizens for "special merit" and to employees at the court for long and faithful service. The finest variant, the 12th size with chain, is given only to those who have held certain senior positions such as Prime Minister, President of the Supreme Court, Supreme Commander and the equivalent. 1973-2011, a total of 1,874 royal medals have been awarded, 79 percent to men, four percent to nobility. Most medals went to the royal court itself, universities and museums, cultural life, the state administration and private business. As for private business, the medals were mostly awarded to high-ranking industrial officials in the "spheres". Connoisseurs of the subject state that Carl Gustaf rewards "the neo-feudal director class in general and the Wallenberg sphere in particular". Candidates are selected by a specific review team. Carl Gustaf takes the final decision.¹

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Carl Gustaf meets many politicians, business people and public officials through his so-called "food and talk" strategy: invitations to lunch, supper and dinner, so-called networking or canapé politics. The talks seem to mainly consist of Carl Gustaf asking questions on different subjects and listening. Carl Gustaf claims to have become increasingly accepted as a member of these circles. These are roughly two or three thousand people, roughly the number that Honoré de Balzac considered a decent elite for a country. I exemplify through the guest list to Crown Princess Victoria's wedding, about 1200 people. Those who were not invited to the wedding party afterwards are in parentheses:

- The King's family
- The Queen's Family
- Daniel Westling's family
- The Heads of State of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway (two kings, two presidents).
- Remaining royal houses: Belgium, Japan, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom
- Dethroned royal houses: Bulgaria, Greece, former Yugoslavia, Romania, Germany
- The state: The Government, (leading MPs, Heads of agencies & County Governors)
- (Associations: Political parties, Svenskt Näringsliv, SACO, TCO, Nobelstiftelsen, Riksidrottsförbundet, Sametinget)
- Sth's & Gbg's Opera, the Concert Hall, SVT, TV4, Radio, Newspaper & ([court] journalists)
- Royal Academies & (Patronage)

¹ Anders Billing. Hovets makt. Fokus, 2010-04-29; Anders Billing. Alla kungens medaljer. Fokus, 2011-02-18; Lova Olsson. Kungen belönar nästan bara män. Svenska Dagbladet, 2007-09-22, s. 6.

- (Others: Employees, Officiants at the wedding & “the outer circle” among them Industrialists)
- (Personal friends: “the inner circle”)
- The wedding couple's personal friends
- (Religious societies)
- (Corps diplomatique)
- (Chargé d’affaire a.i.)

There is a 1978 Sifo study² on what Swedish people expect from Carl Gustaf in connection with networking & similar activities. First of all he would meet the political elite, then representatives of civil society, ultimately celebrities & nobility (Appendix 1: Table 3). This has not really happened. The Left Party and LO were invited to the wedding but refused to come. Lars Ohly, leader of the Left Party, had a webcam installed in the apartment where he the entire wedding could be seen solving sudoku and preparing callops. Purity of soul is important to the left.

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None, not even Vecko Journalen seems completely comfortable with Carl Gustaf as modern king & national symbol:

“Jörn Donner has followed the king on his tours through Småland in search of “the new royalism”. ... Someone shouts “down with royalism” and is removed from the scene by the Security Service, which always has something important to accomplish. Peace must not be disturbed.

...

There are people who say that a new royalism has emerged in Sweden. The mere fact of such an event has prompted some journalists to propose the abolition of these imperial tours, as if the king's journeys were to endanger democracy in the country. As far as the designation itself is concerned, I find it totally wrong. It is pointless to talk about a new royalism. The old royalism, on the other hand, is still alive in certain forms.

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In a society like Sweden, which has been subject to an extremely rapid transformation and a population movement [from the countryside into the cities] of huge dimensions, there will of course come a moment when people begin to feel nostalgia for old values, red cottages with white corners, pelargoniums, Carl Larsson motifs, oatmeal porridge, lake beaches with peaceful birches and Wasa crisp bread. These values may also include the royal house. It matters less that two hundred years ago the Bernadotte family hardly knew that Sweden existed.

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The king is supposed to hover over Sweden as if its spiritual essence has been instilled in him by birth. One can imagine that he represents all classes and all interests. ... It does not matter what one makes of the king as a person. The king is king, for better or for worse whether. ... People are interested in many things, in kings, in environmental protection, in biodynamic vegetables or the water content of Falu sausages. ...

² Sifo, 1978-04. I: Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter & Svenska Dagbladet, 1978-05-30.

Therefore, I see little cause for indignation. If people really like to sit in a dining room [in Småland] and converse by pecking order and rank, they are welcome.”³

The unofficial role of the Sovereign as upholder of tradition and unifying power plays a major role in modern monarchic mythology about his or her importance, but is difficult to assess. The Sovereign, as the target of scandal mongering, has rather divided the country.

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State visits

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs divides the countries of the world into three groups: First circle (neighbours), second circle (great powers) and others. Carl Gustaf makes state visits, official visits, unofficial visits, public relations and goodwill trips, incognito visits, private visits and holidays. What is what is often difficult to say. The idea is that every time a state changes head of state, other heads of state should confirm their friendly relations. Politics is no longer that personalized but state visits remain as courtesy call and political legitimization. They also have economic and cultural significance, but in the long term.

At Carl Gustaf's accession to the throne, there was strong pressure from the mass media to make the state visits more public-friendly than during Gustaf VI. Steps in that direction were that Carl Gustaf arrived in Finland and the Netherlands on the destroyer Halland escorted by two torpedo boats and a minelayer and, of course, Silvia's entry onto the stage. Carl Gustaf and Silvia also gave interviews which Gustaf VI never did. That said, the court bureaucracies of the various countries seem to have been difficult to manage. The program consisted of welcoming ceremonies, parades, exchanging gifts and Orders, visits to key venues, audiences, banquets, military honours, and concluded with a royal dinner. Own requests were unwelcome. In Norway, Denmark and the United Kingdom, after the state visit he was allowed to visit the Swedish colony, research institutes and industries. In the UK, Carl Gustaf wanted to include points in the program of agricultural and forestry character, but these environments were considered unsuitable for a royal. Both parties were interested in an audience for the ceremonial element. Carl Gustaf's visit to the UK therefore began in Edinburgh where they were not as blasé as in London. Carl Gustaf also wanted an audience for the other program items, much like at a Swedish national tour, but he did not get that.

After the UK, there were discussions on how to push through a modernized, public-friendly state visit with an emphasis on support for the export industry. The cultural component of the incoming state visits was curtailed under opposition from most. Likewise the military honours. The argument of the opposition was that Sweden could not unilaterally change an established practice. “The [visiting heads of state] may perceive the new Swedish style as somewhat frugal in relation to what other countries do.” Swedish culture (exhibitions, performances and memorials) was also struck off in the outgoing state visits on the grounds that it was better to devote yourself to the culture of the host country than the diaspora. The same discussion took place about the Swedish business abroad. Would Carl Gustaf visit Swedish-owned factories or devote himself to the host country even here? The disadvantage would be that by unilaterally concentrating on the host country, the visit would neither interest the home audience nor the country's Swedish colony.

³ Jörn Donner. ”Det finns ett behov att identifiera Sverige med någonting av kött och blod”. Vecko Journalen, 1975:25, ss. 4-7.

The discussions were summarized prior to the state visit to the Netherlands. What everyone felt lacking was a broader approach, with an increased exchange of people at all levels between the countries concerned.

At a dinner with Queen Juliana in mid-March [1976], both she herself and Foreign Minister van der Stoep raised the issue with me and they both emphasized the importance they attached to the forthcoming Swedish state visit, not least in the light of the above. While the socialist countries and the third world were sticklers for the old-style formal protocol – it was interpreted as a sign of respect – the protocol could be relaxed – become more media-friendly – when the Swedish king was visiting.

Later, Crown Princess Beatrix (via Princess Christina) also expressed hope that the Swedish royal visit would be significantly different [from the Danish state visit recently during Queen Margarethe II], and the same tones were heard not least from the government. Both Prime Minister Uyl and, as I said, the Foreign Minister have expressed their constitutional and political concerns about the lack of timeliness of state visits. Similar views have been expressed on the Swedish side, both by the royal family and within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from many other quarters. The wish was that there should now be a broader, more outward-looking state visit that would become a manifestation of Swedish-Dutch friendship and contribute to the peoples' increased knowledge of each other.

It was therefore decided to abandon the traditional approach whereby the host country unilaterally makes its mark on the program, while the visiting Head of State at most in secret has the opportunity to make contact with the activities of his own countrymen under some unofficial bracket.

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In the final stage of preparation, some friction arose between the embassy and the Trade Secretary's Office due to differences in the assessment ... of the way in which the state visit was to be used from a commercial point of view.⁴

The embassy was concerned that the state visits should not be overly commercial in character. Carl Gustaf was king and not a younger version of Prince Bertil. Hopefully the media could be so directed. The newly formed Export Council (prop 1972:31) with its Chambers of Commerce and Trade Secretary offices was also a direct competitor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with its embassies and consulates. Recognizing the importance of the Export Council during state visits would weaken the Foreign Office. Moreover, the Swedish model of state and business in cooperation was not uncontroversial abroad. Better to hide it.

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The second circle are the G5 countries, the countries which in the mid-1970s were the world's leading economies (Great Britain, the United States, France, West Germany and Japan), and the two major powers, the Soviet Union and China. Carl Gustaf first visited them in 1975-1981. The visits were followed by several. He usually pursued a combined political and cultural program. There is a lot of anecdotal information about these visits which is interesting, but which add nothing to Carl Gustaf's diplomatic role.

⁴ T Hagen. Några reflektioner kring statsbesöket [i Nederländerna]. Utrikesdepartementet, protokollet, 1976-11-02.

Over time, the program has turned into a rut. The number of press people has fallen from at most 20 to at least five (two from SVT; one each from Scanpix, TT & the press). The most important argument for still including Carl Gustaf seems to be that it increases attention. Kings as brands are better known, because they stay longer in office than, for example, trade ministers.⁵ The counter image is that Carl Gustaf is barely mentioned in the Swedish Institute's account of the Sweden image abroad. There is little information about his role. The Foreign Office is notorious for being tongue tied.

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Foreign policy

The royal house maintains contact with the remaining foreign dynasties. These are family meetings, courtesy visits, manifestations, state visits & the like. Carl Gustaf uses his position within the Scout Movement & World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to give the private visits a "semi-official" character. Some contacts have been much publicized:

- Persia 1971: Carl Gustaf has met Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi during his Swedish state visit in 1960 & at the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire in 1971 (as Gustav VI's replacement). The headlines about that visit were like, 'While people are tortured in Iran: The Crown Prince goes to the Shah's party to beat all the records in the gluttony' & "Unbelievable waste. The caviar alone costs what Denmark annually gives Iran in development aid'. The number of guests was 3000. The final bill was 250 million SEK. Carl Gustaf was met on his return by a host of upset journalists, whom he dismissed with: "I'm too tired to answer. But people have got the wrong idea. We all felt like one big family." Criticism of the celebrations is said to have contributed to the Mullah-led revolution of 1979.
- USSR & Yugoslavia 1978: In 1964 Nikita Khrushchev visited Sweden. The return visit did not take place until 1978. The same year Carl Gustaf also visited the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Both visits were controversial. The royalist society (a predecessor of the royalist association) even sent a letter of protest. The Soviet visit illustrated the fact that Carl Gustaf as Head of State, regardless of the Torekov-compromise, was expected to have a political role and to pretend otherwise only created difficulties. For example, prior to 1978, the Nobel Prize winner Andrei Sakharov wrote to him during the state visit to help an incarcerated dissident and the Swedish journalists tried to get Carl Gustaf to criticize his hosts during the state visit. Carl Gustaf could only answer:
 - They have invited us on this trip to show us their country. And we have accepted. This gives us the opportunity to show that Sweden is on the map. You meet and talk, you get along and you make new friends.
 - And at the same time you (journalists) are also involved and it gives you an opportunity to be participate and observe. There have also been journalists from the Soviet Union in Sweden. It is a mutual exchange.

⁵ Sommeliuss & Troedsson 2007; Exportrådet. Intervju med Helene Riise, informationschef. Odaterad. <business-sweden.se> (2010-06-30).

* What, then, is the king's attitude to the human rights he is constitutionally prevented from speaking about?

- Yes, of course I'm not completely blue-eyed. I know what's going on. However, I am not the one who has to deal with these discussions. It is the Minister for Foreign Affairs [Karin Söder] who has.⁶

Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko later wrote in his memoirs:

“Scandinavian kings do not take part in the practical affairs of state but somehow stand above them. Only the Swedes really understand how this works and foreigners have a hard time trying to fathom it. One thing is clear, however: the monarch is expected to carry out many duties aimed at maintaining foreign contacts.

In 1978 Moscow received the young King Charles Gustav XVI. His visit was to some extent a landmark in Soviet-Swedish affairs, as it showed that Sweden was genuinely interested in developing a businesslike relationship with her eastern neighbour.

When I spoke to the King again in January 1984, during my visit to Stockholm for the opening of the conference on strengthening confidence, security and disarmament in Europe, he was quite definite about this: 'I am in favour of businesslike relations between our countries and for their improvement.

He did not avoid discussing political matters either. When our side raised them, he responded eagerly. It seemed to me that the limitations placed on the Swedish monarch were becoming less rigid – if not constitutionally, then at least de facto.”⁷

Carl Gustaf's outspokenness extended as far as an official dinner in March 1987 with the wife of the Soviet ambassador as dinner partner, even criticizing his own role as king. She summarized the table conversation as: “All in all, he doesn't really understand what... kings still are good for. Are they simply a tribute to the traditions and habits of the nation and the people. He thinks so himself, but what will his children think? They are growing up in another world.”⁸

- Saudi Arabia 1981: On 21-24 February 1981, Carl Gustaf & Silvia was on a state visit to Saudi Arabia. The country was then ruled by King Kahlid, hardly enlightened but definitely despotic, misogynistic, filthy rich and supported flogging and the death penalty in all possible contexts. On a recent visit by King Juan Carlos of Spain, his wife Sophia had been completely neglected. It was assumed that the same would happen with Silvia. Carl Gustaf was received at the airport by Crown Prince Fahd with Silvia reverently a few steps behind. Silvia was muffled up according to custom and showed neither ankles, arms nor neckline. She had to travel in a separate car and eat with the women in the seraglio. Carl Gustaf had to eat with the men, which was memorable in the wrong manner. Fifteen dishes Saudian home cooking with mineral water. The Saudis had bowed to the Swedish demands as far as Silvia and Carl Gustaf having a common program. They visited various industries, etc. Silvia turned up the charm so far that King Kahlid actually recognized that she existed. Elisabeth Tarras-

⁶ Bo Kage Karlsson. Kungen summerar Sovjetresan. Svenska Dagbladet, 1978-06-15.

⁷ Gromyko 1989: ss. 218-220.

⁸ Pankin 2004.

Wahlberg remembered a tent dinner with the King and Crown Prince Aziz in the desert outside Riyadh with Silvia dressed up as in a thousand and one night. Wonderful is short though. They had a following of male journalists who devoted themselves to Carl Gustaf. There were also women journalists but they were assigned to Silvia. The last day in the flight hall she sat for herself. The photograph is more than revealing. This was Silvia at her grimmest. The general opinion seems to have been that the treatment of Silvia was an affront to the country and that everything was Carl Gustaf's fault. Carl Gustaf was intransigent: "The common people are completely alien to Western ways of life and culture. That is something we have to accept. Their religion is their law." Foreign Minister Ola Ullsten agreed. "You have to take the custom where you come. If the host demands the submission of woman, it becomes submission. That is how international relations work."

- Bhutan, 1993. In the autumn of 1993 Carl Gustaf and Silvia also made a private trip to Bhutan in the Himalayas following a state visit to India. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck campaigned for ethnic cleansing to preserve the country's Buddhist character. It was also forbidden to possess TV and radio sets, presumably so that the population would not be impressed by the democratic revolt in the neighbouring Kingdom of Nepal – Republic from 2008. Carl Gustaf refused to comment on these visits. A documentary of the visit to Bhutan was, however, shown the following on TV.⁹ It emerged that Carl Gustaf met King Jigme Singye Wangchuck during a trip to Japan and kept in touch. He and Silvia had intended backpacking with friends, something like Sarek, but the king's hospitality swelled the entourage to 60 people: caretakers, carriers and soldiers forming a two kilometre tail. As regards reports of human rights violations in the country, Carl Gustaf had spoken to the king himself and also to people he had met during the trip and could attest that the reporting was excessive. Be that as it may, King Jigme abdicated in 2006 in favour of his son, autocracy was abolished and, from 2008, the country is a parliamentary democracy. A royal reversal under the gallows.
- Brunei 2004: Carl Gustaf & Prince Philip had been on an informal visit in 2003 to the sultanate of Brunei, a mini-state located in northwestern Borneo. In 2004 Carl Gustaf & Silvia returned on an official state visit. Since Brunei had a bad reputation for human rights violations, Birgitta Ohlsson (fp) protested the state visit, but too late for it to be cancelled. Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg responded to the protests in such a provocative way that it ended in a press campaign. In particular, an interview sounded as if Carl Gustaf was praising the country's sovereign ruler, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. Carl Gustaf protested that he had answered a question about what he thought of the Sultan as a person, and had no idea that it would be perceived as a contribution to the debate about Brunei's system of government. The debate then devolved into interpretations of what Carl Gustaf had actually said. Ohlsson was at the end quite satisfied: "Everyone now knows that the Sultan of the country rules with unrestricted power. The Sultan is both head of state and prime minister, finance and defence. Since 1962 [when Brunei came into existence], there has been a state of emergency in Parliament. The Brunei Parliament is suspended. Civil political rights are restricted. Caning is carried out in 80 percent of criminal cases. Women are discriminated against. Homosexuality is forbidden. Christians are discriminated against; For

⁹ Kungaparet i Himalaya. SVT1, 1994-01-16, kl 19:15-20:00.

example, churches must not be built in the country. It is good that this now is common knowledge.”¹⁰ (See also next chapter 18.)

- Saudi Arabia 2011: The Islamic monarchies have continued to cause Carl Gustaf trouble. Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud made an official visit to Sweden in 2001. Ten years later, Abdulla was king and Carl Gustaf, as honorary president of the World Scout Foundation, would extend the bronze wolf award in recognition of all the money he had donated to the Scout movement, which caused criticism that Carl Gustaf supported a reactionary and blood-tainted regime. Abdulla had supported the project “Messengers of Peace” concerning human rights. The Swedish Scout Council responded: “In the Scouts, we believe in the power of change contained in the encounter between people. It must therefore be possible to interact with those forces that have the ability to change, even if this sometimes means that we have to take difficult decisions. However, this does not mean that we accept undemocratic governance. ... The Saudi Arabian Scout Movement has played an active role in the project and has a long-standing cooperation with the World Scout Movement on peace issues. The Messengers of Peace project represents dialogue, strengthening local scouts and peace. The international Scout movement, of which the Swedish Scout Council is a part, believes that dialogue is the right way to achieve understanding, tolerance and respect between countries, religions and cultures.”¹¹

Afterwards, it has emerged that Carl Gustaf actually consulted the Foreign Office in the usual way to get its approval. He did not award the bronze wolf on his own initiative but at the request of the international Scout movement. This has not impressed anyone, however, as Carl Gustaf, as Head of State, is expected to make his own political decisions. If you are a head of state, you cannot blame your advisers. This was discussed for the umpteenth time on TV4s morning program. The courts CIO, Bertil Ternert, refused to accept Carl Gustaf as an independent entity. The Torekov compromise in his interpretation was that the positions of Carl Gustaf and the government must coincide.¹²

- Other: Carl Gustaf's contacts with the European monarchies (Denmark, Norway, Great Britain, Belgium, Holland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Andorra, Spain, Vatican City) have not been so controversial. Nor his contacts with the passably Europeanized monarchies (Jordan, Morocco, Thailand, Japan).

In the beginning Carl Gustaf's relaxed style during the state visits collided with the Foreign Ministry's protocol. His reputation in diplomatic circles has improved, however, as he has learned diplomatic practice. In the beginning it was worse. A diplomat with experience from that time tells us that he could then ask questions ”that made your hair stand on his head”.¹³ However, judging by different episodes, it has continued. State visits are a breathing hole.

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These and other contacts have made Carl Gustaf sufficiently known & respected for his words to have a weight in diplomatic contexts:

¹⁰ Riksdagens protokoll 2003/04:79. Tisdagen den 9 mars. Kl. 14:00-15:54.

¹¹ Svenska scoutrådet, 2011-10-03.

¹² Nyhetsmorgon. TV4, 2011-10-04. [Intervju med Bertil Ternert & Lena Mellin.]

¹³ Ann-Marie Åsheden. Våran kung: del 2. Dagens Nyheter 1985-12-23, s. 9.

- Iraq 1993: In 1990, some 90 Swedish citizens were detained in Iraq. Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson wrote a personal letter reminding Saddam of Sweden's long-term peace work in the Middle East. The letter allegedly contributed to the release of the Swedes. In 1993, Saddam Hussein insisted on something similar: The former ambassador Hans Ewerlöf had just taken up his duties as First Marshal of the Court when he was assigned to go to Baghdad to deliver a letter from the King of Sweden to the President of Iraq. This in the hope of unlocking the three Swedish Ericsson technicians who, after straying into Iraqi territory, had been in prison for a year, sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for espionage. The letter was written by Prime Minister Carl Bildt and read:

”Mr. President, As you know, just over a year ago, the three Swedish citizens Christer Strömgren, Leif Westberg and Stefan Wihlborg happened, by mistake and without malice, to enter Iraqi territory. They were sentenced by Iraqi courts to seven years in prison unconditionally. They are serving their sentences in Abu-Ghraib prison. I know that they have been well treated during this period. But of course they suffer a lot from being separated from their relatives far away in Sweden and they want nothing but to return to their country. Traditionally, relations between our two countries and peoples are good. With that in mind, and with this letter, I would ask you, Mr. President, to pardon my compatriots so that they can be reunited with their relatives.”¹⁴

- Saudi Arabia 2015:

May 2014, Saudi Arabian blogger Raif Badawi was sentenced to 10 years in prison, 1,000 lashes and 1 million rials (double the money in Swedish currency) for insulting Islam. In reality, it was a death sentence because you do not survive that many lashes. The trigger seems to have been that Badawi not only criticized the clergy, but also was sarcastic.¹⁵ The lashings would be handed out 50 at a time weekly. The first 50 were awarded January 9, 2015. Since then, they have been postponed because of international protests and Badawi's state of health - he is supposed to suffer from high blood pressure. July 7, 2014, Badawi's lawyer was also sentenced. 15 years in prison for anti-state activities.

March 2015, Secretary of State Margot Wallström protested the treatment of Badawi. Saudi Arabia responded March 9 by blocking her speech at the Arab League meeting where she was expected to talk about human rights. On the same day, Sweden cancelled an arms deal. March 10, Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador. It was feared that Swedish trade would suffer.

March 20, Carl Gustaf, who felt he had a special relationship with Saudi Arabia, offered to mediate. The Court's Information Department: “The King is concerned about the events of recent days and thinks it is important to have a good dialogue and good relations between countries. As Sweden's Head of State, the King naturally wants to contribute to finding a solution to the situation that has arisen.”¹⁶ During a

¹⁴ TT, 1993-09-23; Monika Frime. Före detta ambassadören och hovmarskalken Hans Ewerlöf fyller 75 år. TT Spektra, 2004-06-18.

¹⁵ Raif Badawi. Om en saudisk vetenskap “Sharia-astronomi”. I: Dagens Nyheter, 2015-11-12.

¹⁶ Staffan Dickson. [Om Saudi-konflikten.] Aftonbladet, 2015-03-20.

meeting March 27 with the Saudi government leaders, Swedish Government envoy Björn von Sydow handed them two letters signed Prime Minister Löfven and King Carl Gustaf. Löfven's letter was a mild reversal: He apologized if Wallström's statements could somehow be perceived as an insult to Islam.¹⁷ Carl Gustaf's letter was a greeting one monarch to another with some lines about the countries' traditionally good relationship.¹⁸ The gesture was well received. "A Foreign Ministry source tells TT that the Swedish King had received a telephone call from King Salman yesterday evening [27 March] stating that his ambassador would be back in Stockholm today."¹⁹

Carl Gustav's good relations with Saudi Arabia seem to be related to the murder of his godfather Folke Bernadotte. Israel has repeatedly invited him to visit the country, but Carl Gustaf has refused. He has, however, visited Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

¹⁷ Björn von Sydow. [Om Saudi-konflikten.] Aftonbladet, 2015-03-28.

¹⁸ Jonas Gummesson. Inga ursäkter i kungens brev. Svenska Dagbladet, 2015-03-30.

¹⁹ TT. Göteborg-Posten, 2015-03-28.

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