

Multinational Peace Support Operations: the Swedish experience.

Address at the National Defence University in Beijing Oct 16, 2008
by the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces,
General Håkan Syrén,

General, Distinguished Colleagues

It is indeed a great honour for me to have the opportunity to address this very distinguished audience.

I have visited this country once before, in 2002, but this it is my first visit to China as Chief of the Swedish Armed Forces.

It is indeed an impressive development that has taken place during these six years and the dynamics that I meet everywhere is astounding.

This is of course no complete surprise to me. During the last decade China has emerged as an economic world power and as a strong trading partner with Sweden and most other countries of our ever more globalised world. In our daily life far away from here we are seeing and enjoying the many concrete signs of the strong and very competitive Chinese industry everywhere. Recently we have all very much been part of the Olympic adventure. It is all truly impressive.

/Slide1: MAP of Europe and China with some simple comparisons; Population, geographic area/

Sweden, is a small country in the northern part of Europe and it is indeed difficult to make meaningful comparisons with China. Sweden has a population of some nine Million, i.e. less than one per cent of the population of China. Although the geographic size of Sweden in a European context is quite large, it is less than five per cent of China.

Also our histories, cultures and political systems are very different. Sweden has century long history as a parliamentary democracy, meaning that the government is lead by a party or a coalition of parties that have the support of a majority in the Parliament. General elections to the parliament are held every four years. We have a transparent governmental system. All political processes are open for public scrutiny with constitutionally founded rights of the individual as well as for the media. It is an established and functioning control system that today is an important integral part of our modern democratic society.

The Swedish political system provides the constitutional frame-work for the role and development of the Armed Forces. It is the Swedish Parliament and the Swedish

Government that decide on the defence budget and that also provide the tasking and guidelines for the future development of the Armed Forces.

With that broad background let me now turn the attention to the development of Swedish defence policy during the last decade, from a territorial defence with a clear national focus to a readily deployable defence with a strong focus on multinational peace support operations.

The map is once more a good starting point.

/SLIDE 2: European map during the cold war./

The European map some 20 years ago, at the end of the cold war, as most of you know or remember, looked very different from what we see today.

Europe was divided in a western part dominated by the Atlantic alliance, i.e. NATO, and the European Community (EC), and an eastern part dominated by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

NATO had sixteen members. The European Community, which has been transformed to the European Union, had twelve members. Eleven were also members of NATO.

On the eastern side we found the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact, which in addition to the Soviet Union included East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

The two Germanys, West Germany and East Germany, were in the centre of the political divided map and the staging area for a permanent military build-up counting around two Million soldiers, tens of thousands of tanks, thousands of fighter aircraft and so on. All in high readiness on each side of the dividing line.

/SLIDE 3: Europe 2008/

It was indeed a very different Europe from what we now can see. Today we have a European Union counting 27 member states with a total population of more than 500 Million and a total GNP that exceeds the United States. Twelve new members have joined NATO and two more are on their way in.

Sweden is a member of the European Union since 1995 and has a close partner relation with NATO in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC).

This historic background is important for understanding the fundamental transformation of the Swedish security perspective and the on-going transformation of our defence.

During the cold war Sweden was economically linked to the West and we shared its ideals in terms of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Militarily Sweden was non-aligned with the clear aim to be able to stay neutral in case of a war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This was an aim that was closely linked to our 20th century history as Sweden was in the lucky position to have been able to maintain neutrality during both the two devastating world wars.

The security-policy was supported by a very substantial national defence effort built on mobilization of about 10 per cent of the population to the Armed Forces and also built on a domestic defence industry that produced most of our equipment. It was a defence structure with a clear Swedish profile and with territorial defence as its overarching task.

Throughout this period Sweden contributed steadily to the United Nations' Peace-keeping operations. Since the 1950's more than 100 000 Swedish men and women have taken part in international peace missions all over the world. For long periods Swedish units were deployed to the Middle East, Cyprus and Congo.

During the cold war international peace keeping missions were always secondary to the national territorial defence task. The territorial defence task was foundation for our defence efforts. This meant that the international tasks were carried out by resources that could be extracted out of a capability structure that was trained, organized and equipped for territorial defence.

Today the situation is radically changed. For the foreseeable future we do not see any large scale territorial threats towards our country. The current national defence task is therefore much more limited, focused on upholding territorial integrity in the air and at sea. Sweden has a coastline of some 2.700 km and a land border of more than 2.000 km.

Instead we have seen a shift of focus in our defence policy to international crisis management tasks. In parallel, the international tasks after the cold war have become more complex and demanding. The earlier focus on peace-keeping with the consent of the conflicting parties has been succeeded by broader peace support tasks, which also could include peace enforcement.

In response to rising demand and ambitions to contribute to peace support missions mandated by the United Nations, the international requirements today have a clear guiding role in the design and development of our forces.

We are now transforming our force structure into a readily deployable structure, primarily designed to be able to meet the national and international tasks of today. In terms of personnel, today's structure is about ten per cent of what we could mobilize yesterday. The equipment is generally very modern and builds heavily on the earlier investments, as fourth generation fighter aircraft, new armoured vehicles and new generations of submarines and surface ships.

/SLIDE 4: Modern Swedish-built defence equipment/

On this slide you see some examples. All of them are produced by the defence industry in Sweden: The SAAB JAS 39 fighter aircraft, the airborne surveillance and control system ASC 890, the GOTLAND-class submarine, the VISBY-class corvette, the armoured fighting vehicle CV-90 and the artillery hunting radar ARTHUR.

The numbers of conscripts that are called in annually have likewise been radically reduced. We still maintain a compulsory conscription system for men, but since less

than fifteen per cent are called in for service the system is in reality gradually being transformed into a voluntary system for all. Today it is voluntary for women.

For the officers, participation in international missions is today a regular part of the career. Soldier participation in international missions, however, builds on decisions by the individual soldier. The increased emphasis put on international missions is also an argument for a future soldier recruitment built on voluntary decisions rather than compulsory duty.

We are now moving towards a structure in which most of our units will be trained, organized and prepared for international as well as national tasks. The following slide shows the units that at present are in different stages of preparedness for international missions. They cover the whole spectrum of capabilities.

/SLIDE 5: Swedish international force register/

The next slide presents the current Swedish contributions to international peace support missions.

/SLIDE 6: Swedish international military missions./

Just now over 800 Swedish soldiers are participating in missions in Africa, Asia and Europe. The three largest missions are in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Chad.

During the last years Sweden has also contributed to missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Liberia and in Lebanon.

All the peace support operations run by EU, NATO and the UN to which Sweden is committed, are contributing to the implementation of UN Security Council mandates.

In Afghanistan and Kosovo we are contributing to the multinational forces led by NATO. In Chad we have this year contributed to a force led by the European Union. In Liberia and Lebanon we have recently contributed to UN-led forces, while in Congo we have participated in UN-led as well as EU-led forces.

/SLIDE 8: Afghanistan and the Swedish PRT/

Our largest mission is currently in Afghanistan. Since 2005 we are responsible for one of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in the northern part of the country. It is a great challenge in which military and civilian efforts must work closely together. The military role is to provide stability and security, but the overarching objective is civilian: to assist in the reconstruction and development of a functioning and stable Afghan society.

This is a task, that is equally demanding for the international community and for the individual assisting countries. In Sweden we are now giving high priority to building efficient civil-military cooperation mechanisms.

Closer to Sweden, in the western Balkans in south east Europe, we have experience of a similar comprehensive process. The starting point in the early 1990's - after the intense civil wars fought along ethnic lines - was IFOR, a large military force led by

NATO. The military presence has gradually been reduced. Today the military part under EU-command is small, while the civilian reconstruction efforts are dominating. In Kosovo we are also slowly seeing a similar process.

The growing need for a comprehensive approach, bringing together military, legal, administrative and economical support to the construction and development of working societies is in fact one of the most important aspects of today's multinational peace support operations. Success of our overall effort is strongly linked to success in implementing a working comprehensive approach.

Sweden for more than ten years has made the development of international interoperability a top priority in its capability development. We have to be able to work and operate together in multinational formations and staffs. We have to speak the same language, we have to use the same procedures, we have to make sure that our equipment can work together, we have to be able to communicate efficiently and so on...

The interoperability challenge is even wider as it increasingly also includes the need to build efficient cooperation structures that also includes the civilian actors.

The political ambition to contribute to international peace-support and crisis management has gradually been increased the last years. The political goal is to raise the level of our permanent contribution in the coming years. On top of that we have the aim to continue to contribute in a substantial way to the rapid response capabilities of the European Union.

During the first six months of this year we were responsible for one of the EU Rapid Response Forces, the Nordic Battlegroup. As frame-work nation we were responsible for a self supporting unit counting in total 2800 soldiers, that should be ready for deployment to different part of the world in ten days. 2300 of these were Swedish, the rest coming from Finland, Norway, Estonia and Ireland. We will take on this role again in 2011.

The Nordic Battlegroup, NBG, was and is a major challenge in itself containing most of the different capabilities of the Swedish Armed Forces. As an important side-effect the NBG has acted as an efficient catalyst for the continued transformation.

Let me also say a few more words about the challenges ahead of the Swedish Armed Forces.

I have already mentioned the transformation that in itself represents a major challenge demanding a continuous adaptation of our entire capability building process. This challenge is further enhanced by the political aim to increase the Swedish military contributions to multinational operations

The implementation of the comprehensive approach is a second challenge.

/SLIDE 8: Map of northern Europe – Polar region/

Finally the north of Europe is currently a strategically very dynamic area which will affect all countries in the area and which will no doubt influence also the future

direction of the Armed Forces. In the north, in the Norwegian and Barents Sea region we find what is estimated to as much as a quarter of the world reserves of oil and natural gas. We also see a growing infrastructure connecting the production with the markets on the European continent. Climate change – the global warming - is also a factor that supposedly in a few years will open the northern sea-lanes between Europe and Asia. Finally we also see a stronger Russia that is pushing its interests in the region more visibly than we have seen for a long time.

Our answer to these challenges to a large extent can be spelled in three words – a cooperative approach. As a small country cooperation within international and regional organisations as well as with individual or groups of countries must always be the main avenue towards the meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow. We will continue to give high priority to the United Nations and to the European Union. Within the Armed Forces we are also very active in building more efficient cooperation between the Nordic countries.

Through The Swedish Armed Forces International Centre (SWEDINT) and through The Folke Bernadotte Academy Sweden is actively working to strengthen the cooperation in multinational formats. Our training courses are open to participation from all countries. Through the years we have had four participants from this country and we would of course very much welcome an increased Chinese participation in the future.

Thank you for your attention!