



“France and Sweden to further develop defence cooperation”

We live in uncertain times. The geopolitical challenges today are more acute and complex than in recent decades. Russia just concluded the military exercise Zapad, displaying its military capabilities with a substantial volume of forces, while highlighting in its National Security Strategy presented last July that “Russia is preparing for a long-term conflict with the West”.

In the Mediterranean unilateral actions jeopardise regional stability and undermine the unity of the West. China is using its economic might and expanding global military presence to shore up political influence and leverage in many parts of the world. International and domestic politics are marked by polarisation. Growing extremism and terrorism pose threats. International norms and rules are facing increasing pressure. Disinformation and hybrid activities sponsored by state actors such as China and Russia are part of a new normal.

Examples of this can be found in the Arctic, Northern Atlantic, Baltic and Black Sea regions, the South Caucasus, the ongoing war in Ukraine and in the policies of the regime in Belarus. In the Sahel, extremism, terrorism, human trafficking and the drug trade threaten not only the people of the region but also the security of Europe. This is a threat to both our internal and our external security. As global commons, such as space, cyber, sea and air domains, become more and more contested, European countries must jointly defend their interests and values, and international law. This is our duty if we are to maintain security, freedom of access and navigation. We must act together because no one will do so on our behalf.

European countries, together with our transatlantic partners, must meet these challenges together. In the aftermath of the events in Afghanistan we need to

have an open and frank political dialogue on the lessons learned on international engagements and global commitments. Our credibility is linked to a strong political will and military capacity to act, combined with our ability to coordinate with our allies and partners. In this context, we cannot afford to leave the scene to terrorist organisations or to state actors who contest the international rules-based order. The security of Europe is first and foremost the responsibility of Europeans themselves. Europe's security should strengthen European strategic autonomy in a way that directly benefits transatlantic and global security.

France and Sweden are partners with shared interests, values and history. When international institutions and norms are challenged, we emphasise our commitment to democracy, human rights, multilateralism and international law. Today, we will sign an agreement on defence cooperation. Our aim is to work together more efficiently, reinforce our interoperability, foster synergies in capabilities development and develop a common strategic culture in order to be able to deploy alongside each other in military operations when needed. By doing so, we honour our commitment to the European Union and solidarity as manifested in the Article 42(7) of the Treaty, an article that enabled Sweden to support France in 2015 after the terrorist attacks in Paris. We also honour our strong operational cooperation in the fight against terrorism, as demonstrated by the Swedish involvement in the Takuba Task force in the Sahel.

As close partners committed to trust, transparency and cooperation, France and Sweden are coordinating their upcoming presidencies of the Council of the EU in the areas of crisis management, resilience, capability development and partnerships. We firmly believe that the EU and NATO are complementary partners in a transatlantic security web that includes other forms of bilateral, multilateral, and regional cooperation that vary in purpose and geographic scope. We are prepared to consider how regional groups of Member States could assume regional responsibility and act on behalf of the EU in a more flexible and reactive manner, building on the model of the Takuba Task Force.

It is our firm belief that French-Swedish defence cooperation promotes stability in the Baltic Sea Region, in Europe as a whole and beyond. As part of the NATO enhanced Forward Presence, France has deployed 300 troops in Estonia, contributes regularly to Baltic Air Policing missions and takes part in numerous regional exercises (Arctic Challenge, Aurora, Northern Coasts). Another concrete example is in the Sahel region, where our joint forces are promoting human rights and restoring security. French and

Swedish Special Forces operate side by side in the most demanding environment in direct support of local armed forces fighting against terrorism. This joint effort is critical to maintaining the security and the stability of our neighbourhood, and thus contributes to our own security.

Today, we will meet with Defence Ministers from the European Intervention Initiative, EI2, in Stockholm. We will discuss how like-minded European partners can achieve more together and ways to improve cooperation and common efforts. EI2 is an effective incubator and catalyst for concrete efforts, gathering the political and military communities of our countries. In this regard, France and Sweden are firmly committed to promoting international law and upholding the European security, with Europe assuming its responsibilities as a security provider and through a strong, balanced and mutually beneficial transatlantic relationship.

Florence Parly
Minister for Defence, France

Peter Hultqvist
Minister for Defence, Sweden

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Finland, Norway and Sweden enhance their trilateral military operations cooperation

We are living in unpredictable times with new challenges and threats contributing to a sense of uncertainty in our societies. We are witnessing an increasingly challenging security situation both globally and in our neighborhood. In addition to the current Covid-19 pandemic and hybrid influencing, we should remember that other security threats persist. Together, we have a responsibility to maintain peace and stability in our region. In order to meet our common responsibility for the security in our region, we must continue to strengthen our capabilities to act together.

In 2018, a new vision for the Nordic defence cooperation (NORDEFECO) was signed. The guiding aim of the vision is that the Nordic countries will improve their defence capability and cooperation in peace, crisis and conflict. We, the defence ministers of Finland, Norway and Sweden, on the 23 September signed a trilateral Statement of Intent which aims to enhance our operational cooperation. This will also support the aim of the NORDEFECO vision.

The new Statement of Intent outlines our common ambition to be able and ready to conduct coordinated operations in crisis and conflict. In order to fulfil this ambition, we will have discussions based on common security concerns in the region. The aim is to be able to coordinate present and future national operations plans. To realize this aim we will establish a strategic planning group among the countries. Exercises and table top exercises will support this work. We will also explore possibilities for common operations planning in certain areas.

One possible outcome from this enhanced cooperation is coordinated operations planning in areas of common concern, for example the northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden. We foresee an improved interoperability between our armed forces that enable common military action, if separately so decided. In the spirit of Nordic cooperation, Denmark and Iceland will be informed on a regular basis as the cooperation proceeds.

We are also developing solutions for efficient security of supply in times of peace, crisis or war. Finland, Sweden and Norway have concluded an annex concerning security of supply to the Nordic Agreement concerning Cooperation in the Defence Materiel Area. The annex is a legally binding treaty and entered into force on 11 June.

In light of the security situation, cooperation and unity among likeminded nations is paramount. The Nordic region is one of the world's most integrated. The Nordic countries share a long history, similar economic and social models. We have well-functioning military cooperation among the Nordic countries. The geographic and military-strategic realities underscore the need for this cooperation to continue. Ultimately, the purpose of this cooperation is to jointly be able to meet security challenges also beyond peace-time. We have shared interests to defend.

We have over the years always found pragmatic and flexible ways to cooperate, allowing our defence cooperation to emerge and evolve despite our different security affiliations. We have cooperated successfully in exercises such as Arctic Challenge Exercise, Cold Response, Cross Border Training, Northern Wind and Trident Juncture. We will now build upon experiences gained from these exercises when enhancing our operational cooperation.

We believe in the strength of the Nordic defence cooperation. We must continue to stand together, confront the challenges and unite by the responsibility of maintaining peace and stability in our region. Our trilateral enhanced operational cooperation will be yet another important tool in fulfilling our common ambitions.

Antti Kaikkonen, Minister of Defence in Finland

Frank Bakke-Jensen, Minister of Defence in Norway

Peter Hultqvist, Minister for Defence in Sweden

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The need to up security cooperation in the EU

Opinion piece, published in Defense News, 11 December 2017, by Peter Hultqvist, Sweden's Minister of Defence.

Over the past few years, the security situation in Europe has deteriorated. Russian actions constitute a serious challenge to the European security order. Russia's conflict in Georgia in 2008 and the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, with the illegal annexation of Crimea, show that Russia is prepared to use military means to achieve political goals. Russian disinformation campaigns are a reality and something we take seriously.

We also see more Russian activity in the Arctic. We have seen an increase of military activity in the Murmansk region, near the Finnish border and about 300 kilometers from Sweden. Russia has demonstrated both the ability and willingness to act offensively, for example, by temporarily deploying Iskander systems to the Kaliningrad area, as well as conducting offensive exercises with strategic bombing over the Baltic Sea.

Unity in the European Union with the upholding of sanctions connected to international law against Russia is essential. The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to raise these concerns through diplomatic dialogue. Furthermore, the trans-Atlantic link is necessary for the stability in our part of Europe, and it must remain strong.

Sweden has reviewed and weighed these facts carefully. On the military side, the Swedish government has increased national defense spending, activated conscription, and refocused efforts on national and civilian defense. Sweden has stationed permanent troops on the strategic island of Gotland located in the Baltic Sea, implemented NATO's Host Nation Support agreement, agreed to develop active cyber capabilities, intensified cooperation with our Baltic Sea partners, and is acquiring next-generation submarines and fighter aircraft.

To exercise and improve defense readiness, the Swedish Armed Forces recently completed the largest military exercise in 26 years, Aurora 17. It had over 22,000 participants including units from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Lithuania, Norway and the United States. Their contributions were of great value. The exercise in itself, which included receiving and hosting friendly troops on Swedish territory, is a security signal.

At the same time Sweden continues to take responsibility for global security concerns through our substantive contributions to international peacekeeping efforts, including Afghanistan, in the coalition against Daesh and in Mali.

Several bilateral and multilateral efforts further demonstrate Sweden's role as a security provider to the region and the overall stability in Europe. The cooperation with Finland is a fundamental platform in our defense strategy. We have taken necessary steps, as two militarily nonaligned countries, to give our Armed Forces the tools to cooperate in case of crisis or war. The bilateral statement of intent with the United States is an important expression of common interest and mutual commitment. We have joined the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force and will continue to work closely with the U.K. NATO has recently renewed our partnership within the Enhanced Opportunities Program. NATO cooperation is a priority, especially on information sharing and military exercises.

Sweden's current surface-to-air Hawk missile (Robot system 97) is a system that will be replaced. The Swedish Defence Materiel Administration will now begin the analysis and process with regard to acquiring the Patriot air and missile defense system. Acquiring such a system with active defense measures and with the flexibility to meet today's wide range of challenges in the air-defense domain is in line with the Swedish defense bill and current needs.

We will continue to upgrade our military capabilities and tie close cooperation both bilaterally and multilaterally with the United Nations, NATO, Nordic Defence Cooperation and the EU.

Intensified defense and security cooperation in the European Union remains critical, and we welcome the Permanent Structured Cooperation. The European Union must work more closely on issues such as cyberthreats, hybrid warfare and international crisis management. Intergovernmental cooperation is vital to improve our mutual interests while respecting national sovereignty of all. Capability building must also continue through the

European Defence Industrial Development Programme aimed at fostering innovation and competitiveness for our defense industries.

Cooperation must, however, take into consideration the specific character of the security and defense policy of all member states. To ensure maximum competition and quality, it is important that such programs are open to third parties, including all European-based companies and even those that are not European-owned. The lack of such an arrangement would put member states like Sweden at an unfair disadvantage, in turn risking the trans-Atlantic link and regional cohesion.

As a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council, Sweden has broad engagement in the U.N. Safeguarding respect for international law and national sovereignty is an integral part of Swedish defense and security policy. Sweden's national defense strategy is strictly in line with international law, by means of the United Nations Charter, with a defensive character and with the right to self-protection.

These are times of uncertainty. The security challenges are more complex than ever, and our response must therefore be multifaceted.

Peter Hultqvist,
Minister of Defence

Published 11 December 2017



“Aurora has had a clear impact on our military capability”

Article in Svenska Dagbladet, 8 October 2017

The first exercise by the Swedish Armed Forces and the largest national exercise in more than 20 years – Aurora – is now over. Unlike other defence-related exercises, the collective capability of the Swedish Armed Forces was now put to the test by participation from all sections of the Armed Forces. Already now, we are able to state that Aurora has been seen as a distinct Swedish security policy signal indicating that Sweden contributes to the stability in our part of Europe, that the exercise has had a clear impact on Swedish military capability and that Sweden is serious in its preparation to provide assistance to and receive assistance from other countries in a crisis situation.

Aurora also signified a very distinct indication that Sweden is now focusing on increasing the capability of its national defence. This move in defence policy position has now been displayed with desired clarity. In practice, the Aurora exercise signified that the new focus of the Swedish defence policy decided upon by a Riksdag majority is now a reality. The exercise was based on the two strategic prerequisites resolved by the Riksdag, namely increased military capability combined with stronger cooperation with other countries. The Swedish unit I met on Gotland viewed itself as part of a larger entirety whereby the challenge was in the cooperation between the air force, the navy and the army. The meeting between the Swedish units and units from other countries provided the opportunity to train against other weapon systems and military tactics than the normal. This has had a direct positive impact on our own military capability.

The visit to Berga and Trosa with Prime Minister Stefan Löfven highlighted the security policy dimension. The exercise was part of a strategy to tackle the new security policy situation. The scenario is the defence of Sweden and our own sovereignty. The development of events over time in our surroundings, with the illegal annexation of the Crimea, the Russian

aggression against Ukraine, the pressure experienced by the Baltic States and the increase in military activities in the Baltic Sea area makes the upgrade of the national defence necessary. As Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven has paid several visits and had the opportunity to speak with personnel in conjunction with the Armed Forces exercises. This emphasises the fact that this government views the defence as a national interest – not a special interest. The cooperation with the Baltic and Nordic countries, France and the US that was manifested during the exercise is clearly significant to the security policy. Cooperation is what generates stability and provides desired clarity in the security policy landscape. The exercise collaboration creates interoperability, meaning the ability to act together, which will prevent crisis situations and generate the necessary thresholds. Combined with diplomacy, transparency and confidence-building measures, exercises such as Aurora act as a preventive measure against crises in our surroundings. Accordingly, the Aurora exercise involving 19,000 participants was also relevant to the situation in other surrounding countries. Following contact with minister colleagues in several countries, particularly Europe, I know that our exercise has strengthened the image that Sweden seriously wants to assume its share of the responsibility for security in our part of Europe.

Consequently, there is high intelligence value and reports have been received about activities in close proximity to the exercise indicating interest in our soldiers, equipment and exercise operations from 'interested parties' that wanted to remain anonymous. With respect to Sweden, we acted openly and invited other countries to the inspection pursuant to the Vienna Document. During the same period, the Zapad exercise was conducted in Russia and Belarus. Sweden was invited to participate with observers in Belarus but Russia did not invite any observers to the exercise. Sweden has represented openness and transparency and Russia should also have done so.

During the exercise, we were also able to note that a message had spread that this was a "war manoeuvre," had "escalating impact" and was organised by NATO. This is disinformation about the exercise. The exercise scenario, which was about the defence of Sweden's sovereignty, is in line with the right of self-defence as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations. This can hardly be considered as "escalating." The invitations to the exercise were from Sweden and NATO did not even participate in the exercise. However, we cooperated with countries with whom we usually train and with whom we are partners. Unfortunately, this rhetoric has also been used by the media, which is regrettable.

The evaluation of Aurora will now be extremely important. It will provide an

excellent basis for assessing the strengths and weaknesses in the Swedish Armed Forces. This applies, for example, to the planning for this type of large-scale exercises, the capability of joint operations of the armed forces, the role of the total defence and its capacity in crisis situations, logistics, command control, the capability for brigade combat, host nation support and mandatory refresher training for total defence personnel. This type of experience will be significant for future prioritisation and decisions about the future focus of the defence.

Between 2014 and 2020, defence expenditure will increase by 24.7 per cent, which is a major break in trend and a departure from previous prevailing conditions. This is based on three broad political agreements. The Armed Forces has one requirement to deliver against the background of the approximately SEK 26.5 billion that will be added to the defence finances up to 2020. It primarily involves increased exercise operations, investments in basic equipment needs for the defence and new weapon systems.

I regard the current cooperation between the Armed Forces and the government as good and this is important in order to achieve results. Building military capability takes time. The process is gradual and it is crucial that decisions and prioritisation are well thought out. For the government, content and results are more important than public bidding about who can invest the most money. Our line is to gradually strengthen the national defence through broad agreements. Aurora will be an important basis in this long-term work, as will the major total defence exercise planned for 2020.

Since Aurora 17 was conducted at several locations in the country and many people came in contact with the exercise, I would like to thank the general public for their positive and understanding approach.

Finally, I would like to thank all personnel, both military and civilian, who participated in the preparation and implementation of Aurora. Your efforts are important for Sweden!

Peter Hultqvist,
Minister of Defence

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The EU and NATO: Divided they fall

This article was published in the Summer 2016 issue of Europe's World.

More than two years have passed since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, and the peninsula has still not been returned to the sovereign state of Ukraine. Despite persistent Russian denials, regular Russian troops remain in Donbass, and Moscow continues to provide military equipment and training to the separatists in eastern Ukraine. The Russian aim is obviously to keep Crimea off the international agenda, let time pass and hope that this will simply become a fact of life. The intensity of the conflict in eastern Ukraine can be increased or decreased depending on what best serves the interests of the Kremlin at any given moment. The illegal annexation of Crimea cannot become the status quo. It cannot be written into our history books as something that just happened. The annexation and the Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine is the greatest challenge to the European security order. Russian actions against Ukraine go beyond aggression, they constitute a threat to the right of countries in Russia's neighbourhood to make policy choices of their own.

It is unacceptable that military force, deception and disinformation are being used to change borders in Europe in the 21st Century. Such behaviour is in direct contravention of the fundamental principles of the European security order laid down in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the Helsinki Final Act. Ukraine, as any other sovereign nation, has the right to make its own foreign and security policy, and to retain the integrity of its territory. We cannot accept that another country interferes with that right. Our European and transatlantic response should be united, firm and leave no doubt of our resolve to defend the European security order.

Tensions in the Baltic region have also increased in recent years. From the Russian side, we see large-scale military exercises and provocative behaviour around our borders. Snap exercises in our vicinity have become a

regular feature. From time to time, we hear Russian officials produce statements regarding nuclear capability. The question is why they continue to bring this up? It is a very real concern for us. We are in response reinforcing our military capability and deepening our ties with partners from the platform of non-military alignment. The cooperation between Sweden and Finland builds on the intention that we will have the possibility to act together in case of crisis or war.

Russia, in all this, is testing the unity and resolve of the EU and NATO. What must absolutely be avoided is to give in to these attempts to sow division. Sweden, as a NATO partner, welcomes the increased defence measures taken by NATO in the Baltic, where the alliance has a key role to play ensuring stability and deterring threats. The US role in the Baltic is of equal importance in its own right, and has a clear threshold effect. We in Sweden welcome the US ambition to increase its presence in Europe.

We must avoid a situation in which existing international norms and principles are allowed to be watered down. We should also withstand any attempts at new grand deals on European security. This is not the time to rebalance the concept of comprehensive security. Respect for the UN Charter, the Statute of the Council of Europe and the OSCE principles, norms and commitments, including democracy, human rights and the rule of law are at the core of a predictable, rules-based European security order. We cannot give up on these basic principles.

On Europe's southern flank, five years after our hopes that the Arab Spring would bring about a better future, conflicts and crises are tormenting the region and forcing thousands of people to flee their homes. Sweden has been hugely affected by the migration flows. We are the largest per capita receiver of refugees in the European Union. We need to tackle the causes of people fleeing, but the many challenges we face in the southern neighbourhood point towards long-term destabilisation. The most urgent threat is Daesh and likeminded terror groups. Their unparalleled brutality in Syria, as well as the atrocities committed in Europe most recently in Paris and Brussels, is against everything the transatlantic security community stands for.

From Sweden's perspective, the future of regional peace and stability depends on the EU, NATO and the US together defending our basic values. Only as a united transatlantic community, ready to stand up for our values and principles, will we be able to contribute to global peace and stability.

Peter Hultqvist, Minister for Defence

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Taking steps towards enhancing the cooperation on defence

Dagens Nyheter 10 april 2015 The Russian aggression against Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea are violations of international law and other international agreements. These actions represent the greatest challenge to the European security architecture. These developments have led to deterioration in the security situation in Northern Europe over the past year. The region is still considered to be stable, however, we must be prepared for the likelihood of crises and incidents. In the current security situation in Europe, our assessment is that there can be no 'business as usual' and that we are faced with a new normal.

We have to take account of the actions taken by Russia and not Kremlin's rhetoric. Russia is making substantial investments in her Armed forces, with the aim of enhancing its military capabilities, and has demonstrated a will to apply military means to achieve political goals, even when it violates principles of international law. Russia has increased her military exercises and intelligence operations in the Baltic Sea region and the High North. Russian military activities are occurring close to our national borders (and several violations of the territorial integrity of states around the Baltic Sea have taken place). Of particular concern are those activities, by Russian military aircraft, reducing the safety of civilian air traffic.

Russian military exercises and intelligence operations in our region have increased, particularly in the Baltic Sea region. The Russian propaganda and political manoeuvring is aiming to create a rift between states and within organisations such as EU and NATO. A great responsibility lies on Russia to reverse this negative development.

The Nordic countries meet the present situation through solidarity and enhanced cooperation. Our cooperation is built on shared values and a determination to address our challenges together. With differing organizational affiliations we cooperate closely within the framework of the EU and NATO. Our approach is defensive. We want to strengthen the stability in Northern Europe and distance ourselves from threats and the use of military force. Closer cooperation among the Nordic countries and our solidarity with the Baltic States contribute to enhanced security in our region, as well as raising the threshold for military incidents to take place. By acting together in a predictable and consistent way, we contribute to peace and security in our part of the world. At the same time we strengthen cohesion within the EU and NATO while also maintaining the transatlantic link.

The security situation in the Nordic region is also affected by several other issues, including our dependence on international trade, the threat of cyber-attacks and terrorism, as well as the effects of climate change. In Europe's southern and southeastern neighborhood states and institutions are pulled into a spiral of violence marked by civil war, which risks leading to interstate confrontations. Non-state actors, such as ISIL, challenge established states, borders and institutions and continue also to attract citizens from the Nordic countries.

At the Nordic Defence Ministerial meeting in Arvidsjaur on March 10th, we decided to enhance the possibilities to monitor the development in our region. This includes both air- and sea- surveillance. The aim is to share information on activities in our air space, improve pre-warning communication and reduce the risk of unexpected events and possible misunderstandings. Moreover, we decided to continue exchanging information and experiences on how to counter cyber-attacks.

In order to effectively act together in a possible future crisis, it is essential to be prepared through training, education and exercises. We have great opportunities utilizing a unique exercise and training environment in order to strengthen our military capabilities on land, in the air and at sea. Within the field of air training the already established Cross Border Training is a model to build on. The possibilities to organize a more complex air exercise, a Northern Flag, will also be explored. We are taking steps towards establishing possible alternative landing bases in case of difficult weather conditions.

Qualified exercises will ensure that other countries and organisations are offered opportunities to become familiar with our region and its specific conditions. In particular, this will be demonstrated through the NATO High Visibility Exercise in Norway 2018.

Through international operations, in Afghanistan, Mali and Iraq, we continue to develop our collaboration, ensuring cohesion and coordination, in an effort to improve the coordination of our civilian and military contributions. Nordic countries are actively involved in the discussions on how to further improve UN peacekeeping operations.

We have established a programme for defence capacity building, where we, together with the Baltic States, can offer contributions to the reform of the defence sector in participating countries.

The Nordic Defence Industry Agreement has undergone a process of revision and modernisation. The Agreement has now been signed, which constitutes an important milestone. It provides the framework for provisions on Security of Supply and specific measures that are important in case of a crisis or conflict, for provisions on certain simplifications concerning the application of defence industrial cooperation, and provisions aiming on facilitate trade in defence equipment between the Nordic countries.

In addition to Nordic defence cooperation, respective national defence capabilities are strengthened through bilateral cooperation, which enhances the overall capacity to handle incidents and threats. Bilateral cooperation complements and strengthens Nordic cooperation as a whole, as well as security in our part of the world.

We assume our part of the responsibility for our region during unpredictable times. The Nordic cooperation complements already existing cooperation within the EU and NATO aimed at increased security in our region. Our shared ambition is to increase predictability, contribute to a peaceful development and avoid military incidents and conflicts.

Nicolai Wammen, Denmark's Minister of Defence

Carl Haglund, Finland's Minister of Defence

Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, Iceland's Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ine Eriksen Søreide, Norway's Minister of Defence

Peter Hultqvist, Sweden's Minister for Defence

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Government proposes Swedish armed force in military training operation against ISIL

DN Debatt 9 april 2015

The terrorist organisation ISIL, also known as IS, has spread death, destruction and fear. We have all witnessed the way in which people have been murdered or forced to flee, and communities have been wiped out, as a result of its ravages in Syria and Iraq. We have seen out-and-out atrocities towards people with differing beliefs and large-scale abuses. And we are forced to note that ISIL is also attempting to extend its terrorism to other parts of the world, including Europe.

Sweden, along with all other EU Member States, is therefore among the countries participating in the international coalition of some 60 countries that has been formed to fight ISIL in various ways, stabilise Iraq and manage the consequences of this terrorist organisation's ravages.

So far, Sweden has chosen to focus its support on a two-pronged approach: dealing with the urgent crisis, which is a matter not least of humanitarian assistance, and seeking political means to achieve a long-term solution to the underlying political problems in the region that have allowed ISIL to gain a foothold.

We have provided extensive humanitarian assistance to those who have been forced to flee from their homes in Syria and Iraq and we also support the stabilisation measures planned in areas secured from ISIL. Like others, we are also taking steps to prevent possible sympathisers from travelling to the region to take part in terrorist actions or terrorist training.

In parallel with this, we are supporting political processes aimed in the long run at eliminating the breeding grounds of terrorist organisations such as ISIL. This support takes the form of backing UN efforts to find a solution to the violence and civil war in Syria, and promoting an inclusive and cohesive

Iraq, in which strengthened democratic institutions will enable the country's many different religious and ethnic groups to influence developments. The emergence of a society under the rule of law is necessary to fight terrorism in the long term.

Iraq is in a position where military support is also needed to stop ISIL. At the request of the Iraqi Government, the international coalition is therefore providing the Iraqi defence forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga units, with aerial support and training.

Thanks to this cooperation, it has been possible to check ISIL's offensive and areas that were formerly held by ISIL have been secured. One example is Tikrit, which was liberated from ISIL's violence last week. This proved once again that ISIL can be defeated. But that this requires joint efforts.

Since the winter, the Government has been investigating the possibility of Sweden participating in these joint military operations. Today, the Government is presenting a proposal for Sweden to participate in the military training operation in northern Iraq.

The Government proposes that the Riksdag allow a Swedish armed force consisting of 35 persons to be made available in 2015 to participate in the military training operation being carried out by the international coalition against ISIL in northern Iraq. The Swedish Armed Forces will put together an all-round, fit-for-purpose force to manage the tasks included in the operation. Should the security situation deteriorate, the Swedish Armed Forces will be able to make temporary reinforcements to a level of 120 persons for evacuation and reinforcement operations. The Government's decision is based on Iraq's request for assistance to stop ISIL, which also provides the basis for the operation in international law.

The main tasks of the planned Swedish contribution will be training and advice to the Iraqi security forces in northern parts of Iraq.

The Swedish force will be under Swedish national command and control during the operation. Necessary coordination will take place within the international coalition against ISIL, primarily with other actors in the area of operations, including the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Finland.

The Swedish operation in northern Iraq is part of a larger picture. The international coalition is actively working against ISIL in several parts of

Iraq, and the operation in northern Iraq is one part of this. Moreover, Sweden has long had a broad, long-term commitment to and involvement with Iraq. Our relations are very good and encompass cooperation in a range of areas based on large-scale international exchanges, mainly thanks to the substantial proportion of the Swedish population – close to two per cent – with roots in Iraq and the region. In addition, Sweden has engaged in close development cooperation with Iraq since 2004, focusing on democratic development, human rights, the situation of women and gender equality, anti-corruption and support to civil society.

ISIL's ravages are terrible. The violence and hatred appear limitless. Their objective is to inspire fear so that resistance gives way and violence can triumph. This must not be allowed to happen. That is why the efforts of the international coalition against ISIL are crucial. Cooperation against terrorism is the key to success. We, on Sweden's part, will continue to contribute to these common efforts.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Peter Hultqvist, Minister for Defence

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