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Sten Tolgfors, Minister for Defence

Speech by the Minister for Defence Sten Tolgfors at the Swedish Presidency Conference on Environment, Climate Change and Security

(Check against delivery)

MINISTERIAL ADDRESS
STEN TOLGFORS, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE

The European Union and the rest of the world must increasingly take into account and respond to new and a wider range of potential security threats and challenges. Environment, climate change and energy. These issues are no longer only national issues but cross-border and global. As pointed out in the latest Swedish Parliamentary Defence Report, they are becoming elements of a wider definition of security.

Let me give a few examples as a starting point.

Firstly, Sudan and Darfur. There seem to be an increased number of indications that the impact of climate change, in particular of the past 20 years of the Sahelian drought, has resulted in less land for both farming and herding. Growing tensions were exploited by the Sudanese Government, who used tribal militias as a means of keeping the rebels at bay in Darfur. Instability in Darfur spilled over into Chad. Eventually, the world reacted with massive humanitarian aid and mediation efforts. The EU contributed with forces, including a Swedish contingent, to UN's peacekeeping operation. That helped stabilize the situation, but the country remains at risk.

Secondly, for SIDS, Small Island Developing States and other low lying coastal regions, climate change is a question of sheer survival. A rise in sea level of one metre or more - a future reality given current trends - will bring grave consequences. In the Caribbean and Pacific Islands, more than 50 per cent of the population lives in low-lying areas within 1.5 kilometres of the coast.

Thirdly, the melting of the sea cap in the Arctic Ocean may open up new areas for international shipping and for exploitation of natural resources. In our part of the world, this has been an often-cited example of a 'tipping point' in the relationship between climate change and security.

If we allow the current trends continue to unfold, they have consequences that affect us all. Let me mention a few:

- Large-scale migration as drought and flooding make it difficult for people to support themselves. A recent study has shown that some crop yields in 2050 will be only half of the 2000 levels as a result of drought and changing weather patterns.
- The deterioration of living conditions can be expected to lead to competition for remaining renewable natural resources. That would increase the pressure on the environment.
- More food insecurity would fan existing tensions in vulnerable parts of the world, such as Sudan, Afghanistan and Somalia. Conflicts increase the stress on the environment even further.

There is consensus that environmental problems are rarely the sole cause of a conflict. But they are often a contributing factor, a threat multiplier that worsens already existing threats caused by poverty, weak institutions for resource management and conflict resolution. We need to know more about the linkage between climate change and conflict dynamics.

We must also realize that the extent and consequences of natural disasters are partly in human control, even though climate change increases the stakes. In the 1980s, Oxfam and the Red Cross published a book called "Natural disasters, the result of man" ("Naturkatastrofer människans verk"). They argue that the problem is not that volcanoes erupt or that river floods. They tend to do so regularly. The problem arises because people due to poverty have to live in areas repeatedly affected. This book was published in the 1980:s. Its ideas can be reviewed and used in other parts of the world and not just developing countries. We need to look into social and economic development, fight poverty and strengthen the social dimension to handle crises.

I believe that the ingenuity of man is a counterbalancing factor. Faced with overwhelming problems, human beings tend to cooperate, because we have to. The sharing of common water resources, such as the Nile River Basin and the Okavango River Basin are examples of this.

New sea-routes and access to new natural resources in the Arctic will contribute to economic growth and regional integration, provided that the fragile Arctic environment can be protected from damage. The Arctic Council provides a forum for policy discussion and makes cooperation possible among the Arctic states. We need to build on that example and create more institutions that can function as tools to turn the so called 'threat multipliers' into 'threat minimisers'. Such a turn-around would also lead us away from national or regional zero-sum game thinking.

To achieve this, we need to build more knowledge. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in the first ever UN report on climate change and security, to the special climate summit in New York has underscored this need.

Therefore, I today task the Swedish Defence Research Board, FOI, to study and assess, jointly with the scientific community in Sweden and in the EU, the linkage between climate change and security.

I want FOI to provide us with policy recommendations on, for example:

- how to improve our watch list of potential functional and geographic hot spots to improve our preparedness for prevention and response;
- how civilian and military missions can be planned and executed in ways that reduce, rather than enhance, the negative linkage between climate change and security;
- how to best create transparency, awareness and preparedness through the linking of local, regional and global surveillance and monitoring systems;
- how our search and rescue functions can be improved and used if disaster strikes in, for example, the Arctic.
- how military resources can assist civilian agencies in case of natural or human induced catastrophes.

These are only a few issues and I am confident that the study will be able to identify many more.

While improving our knowledge we should also look into a number of issues of a more practical and immediate kind.

- We can sharpen our crisis management capabilities and instruments to deal with possible security implications of climate change;
- national and regional early warning systems could include data and analysis of societies and regions at risk from climate change. We must support and cooperate with similar endeavours elsewhere, not least with the UN.
- The concepts and plans for our missions, both civilian and military, should be shaped by our increasing understanding of the linkage between climate change and security. This is in line with the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis management.
- We are already looking into the effects of carrying out civilian missions and military operations in climate-stressed environments. For example, we are bringing in teams that can assess the environmental situation on the ground and ensure that we ourselves do not cause any harm or damage as we move into fragile areas.

I am also here today as a representative of the Swedish EU Presidency. I am very pleased that the EU is taking on this challenge. The EU pioneered a report to the European Council in March 2008 by the High Representative and the Commission. Under the Swedish Presidency, a report with council conclusions on the implementation of the EU's work on climate change and security will be presented to the Council. Recommendations will be made for EU's future work. FOI's study will make a valuable contribution in this context.

This conference will provide stimulus and input to EU's report to the Council and help us stake out the future course. That's why your presence here in Stockholm is so important - and greatly appreciated.

Thank you.



Speech
Almedalen, Visby 03 July 2009
Sten Tolgfors, Minister for Defence

Speech by the Minister for Defence Sten Tolgfors at Almedalen on the Baltic Sea Co-operation

(Check against delivery)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Baltic Sea region has lived through two decades of fundamental strategic shifts. Today, the Baltic Sea is lined by EU and NATO countries. The only exceptions being Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg.

The fact that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are members of the EU and of Nato benefits their own security, and that of Sweden as well.

When I worked at the Ministry of Defence in 1992-93, this could not be taken for granted. The old order had fallen; a new order had yet to be established.

Like Poland and East Germany, the Baltic States had freed themselves. Germany had been reunited, but what was to happen next?

It was a time when the Western European Union (WEU) was proposed as a European alternative to NATO. A time when pessimists claimed that the Baltic States would never meet the requirements of the EU or NATO. The pessimists were completely wrong.

A new European security order was the result of solid determination on the part of the Baltic States and forward-looking policy by the EU and NATO, encouraged by Sweden.

Sweden cooperated closely with the US on Baltic Sea issues. We were able to act as a bridge for them in the unification of this part of Europe.

The Baltic States carried out extensive economic and political reforms. Sweden paved the way to the EU through unilateral free trade agreements, which we later brought with us into the EU. We provided support to their security structures, establishing cooperation projects that are still running.

Almost two decades later, we greatly benefit from these joint efforts. The Baltic Sea region is completely integrated into the European security order. This is a fundamental difference compared to the Caucasus, where questions still remain concerning those countries future relation to Nato and EU. The area continues to be vulnerable to Russian interference and pressure.

If anyone were to act against a Baltic State - the way Russia acted against Georgia - that would have fundamental security policy implications. EU membership matters. Nato membership counts.

A number of countries in the Baltic Sea region are going through difficult economic times and political challenges. These challenges, are best handled within the framework of the European and Euro-Atlantic security order.

Solidarity

For the last 15 years, our countries have not faced any threat of invasion. An armed attack directed directly against Sweden is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

This does not mean that we can rule out the risk of military conflicts, or incidents, in the Baltic Sea region.

However, it is not possible to envisage a military threat that would affect only Sweden or any other single country in our region, without at the same time affecting the other countries. Sweden builds security together with other countries, with the Nordic countries and the EU.

Sweden shares values and interests with the EU and the Nordic and Baltic countries. One expression of this is our declaration of solidarity.

Sweden would not stand passive if a neighbour is threatened or attacked. We expect others not to stand passive if Sweden is threatened. We must be able both to provide and receive support, with relevant capabilities, also of a military nature.

This is a clear statement of political will. Sweden will decide how to act in each individual situation.

This is new challenge for the armed forces, which affects its structure and planning.

Orientation of the armed forces

Sweden is not defended only within its borders. Incidents, conflicts and war, must be prevented from reaching our borders. Sweden has a clear Baltic Sea perspective in our security policy and military capability priorities.

Previously, the idea was that the Swedish Forces should be able to conduct operations either within the country, or very far away, such as in Chad or Afghanistan. That policy contained a considerable uncertainty - what applied to our own neighbourhood, the Baltic Sea region?

That uncertainty has now been done away with through the new Baltic Sea perspective in the Defence Bill.

Since the present concept system is only applicable within the country's borders - unless Sweden is directly threatened - the new regional perspective adds importance to a shift to recruitment on a voluntary basis. We are building units with high availability, usable within Sweden, in our region and outside our region.

Russia is concentrating on rapidly mobile operational units. These are available within hours or days, and are intended for operations in Russia or very near Russia. Russia makes it clear that it sees its greatest threats stemming from its southern borders.

The international trend is towards rapidly accessible and mobile units. It is precisely on this point that Sweden lacks the right capability at present.

The threats of the future might materialize very quickly, regardless of their geographical origin or their nature. It is not the old, large-scale invasion that we should be most concerned about. Rapid reaction units and cooperation with others will be necessary if a situation similar to that in Georgia were ever to arise in our region.

It's not primarily a question of having large numbers of soldiers available some time in the future, but rather of having units with a high degree of availability, functionality and quality. It is a question of how quickly we can extend military capabilities to safeguard our country's territorial integrity, sovereignty and uphold security in our region.

We are building a battle group based defence structure, with highly available and usable standing and contracted units. The entire force structure will be usable within a week to defend our country. Our capacity for international operations will be doubled. All units will be trained, exercised and well equipped. Many will be experienced. Our defence capability will be significantly increased.

The structure of Sweden's armed forces will be among the most modern in Europe.

Baltic Sea perspective

The Nordic countries are part of the same region, but due to geographical considerations, we face somewhat different challenges. This has an

impact on how we chose our capabilities.

The fact that the Swedish defence policy has a clear Baltic Sea perspective influences our choice of capabilities. The Swedish air force is almost twice the size of that of our neighbours and we have a world-class submarine force.

Finland has a clear land border perspective. The perspective in Norway is focused on the Barents Sea region, and Denmark has a clear focus on international operations. Finland therefore gives priority to the size of its army. Unlike Sweden it has no corvettes or submarines. Norway gives priority to an Arctic Ocean fleet and ground strike air capability. Denmark does not have any submarines or tanks for national use. It is only natural that the Nordic countries give priority to somewhat different capabilities.

It is equally natural with deeper Nordic and regional defence cooperation to achieve greater efficiency as well as increased capability and quality. We complement each other well. Just comparing individual capabilities in the different countries doesn't say much, unless the overall priorities are included.

Civilian threats and risks

The Baltic Sea countries face similar civilian threats and risks. A natural disaster knows no borders, nor do the effects of climate change.

The Baltic Sea has been transformed into a sea energy, with the accompanying risks of accidents and environmental hazards. Oil transports have doubled during the last 10 years and will probably double again. Harbour capacity for energy exports is greatly being expanded. Each year, some 70 000 ships pass Bornholm. At any given time there are 2 000 ships sailing the Baltic Sea - a shallow, secluded inland sea.

In a broad perspective, this is a very positive development. It is a result of increased integration and interaction among the countries of the Baltic Sea region. At the same time, increased traffic poses new challenges for the maritime supervisory authorities and emergency preparedness organisations.

In 2008 there were 135 ship accidents in the Baltic Sea which resulted in pollution. About half of these were due to the human factor.

A few years ago, a series of multinational mine clearance operations in the approaches to Estonian, Lithuanian and Latvian harbours revealed a large number of mines, which were cleared. Still, thousands of mines remain in our waters.

We need international cooperation and the capacity of several countries in order to handle major oil spills in the Baltic Sea.

The Swedish Coast Guard has received new state-of-the-art maritime surveillance aircraft and will receive additional capability in form of new large oil recovery vessels. But co-operation will still be very much needed.

When we build civil emergency preparedness, we have the same perspective as in our defence policy. We build security together with others. There is a lot to be gained from deeper Nordic and regional cooperation in education, training, preparedness and measures to meet civilian threats and risks. Our capability will be available for use nationally, regionally and internationally.

It should be possible to combine modular-based capabilities from the Nordic and EU countries for rapid operations. Sweden is already building modules for such matters as water purification.

This spring, I hosted the first Nordic ministerial meeting on civilian security. The meeting resulted in the Haga Declaration, which lays a foundation for establishing deeper Nordic cooperation.

Maritime surveillance

In September 1994, M/S Estonia capsized in a heavy storm and claimed over 850 lives. The accident shocked everyone. It became a starting point for an increased co-operation on maritime surveillance. First between Sweden and Finland, now much more widely.

Sea surveillance is carried out by states, but most of the activities and threats that they address are transnational in nature. Within most Member States, surveillance activities fall under the responsibility of several different authorities operating independently from one another. Maritime security systems are fragmented and rarely compatible across agencies, sectors and states.

There is no lack of systems in the region and in the EU. The obstacle is lack of co-ordination and sharing of information.

Sweden has initiated SUCBAS cooperation -Sea Surveillance in the Baltic Sea. It stems from the Swedish and Finnish cooperation SUCFIS, going back to what we learned in 1994.

SUCBAS ensures that authorities in the participating countries can exchange maritime surveillance information and pass it on to other relevant authorities. For example, a suspect vessel detected by Finland in the Gulf of Finland can be handed over to the Swedish surveillance system and later be intercepted by Danish authorities in Danish waters.

At present, there are six countries participating in SUCBAS: Finland, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany and Sweden. I hope that SUCBAS will soon be enlarged with Latvia and Poland.

Regional cooperation on air surveillance is equally important. Military air situation data exchange between Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Baltic States, which are NATO members, is accessible through NATO's system, ASDE (Air Situation Data Exchange).

Civilian-military cooperation

Military and civilian maritime surveillance complement each other. It therefore makes sense to create possibilities to exchange information between the two.

For some time, navies have conducted common exercises in the Baltic Sea. The US-led exercise, BALTOPS, has been conducted since 1971, the Loviisa-Series exercises between Sweden and Finland and a number of exercise initiatives between the German, Danish and Swedish navies are some examples.

A new step for cooperation and exercises could be between the region's coast guards and customs authorities. Ideally, the level of cooperation should extend into coordination and sharing of responsibilities.

Conclusion

Approximately 100 out of 500 million EU citizens live and work in the Baltic Sea region. Eight out of nine Baltic Sea countries are members of the EU. Six Baltic Sea countries are part of NATO, and all nine are parties to the Helsinki Commission. This makes the Baltic Sea's state of health a matter of concern for the entire EU.

The Baltic Sea region is one of the more stable regions in the world. However, the importance of natural resources and energy transfer affect the security policy and military development of Europe.

A necessary way forward is a policy for enhanced cooperation and integration, and one that also includes Russia. This can not be handled by the Baltic Sea countries alone, but should be coordinated via the EU.

In the beginning of the 1990's, we did not know what direction developments in our region would take. What we have seen since that time has largely surpassed our expectations. Through integration and cooperation, security for all the countries of the Baltic Sea region has been strengthened. Russia benefits from a prosperous and stable neighbourhood.

The new direction of Swedish security and defence policy underlines that we are deepening the Baltic Sea perspective. As do our priorities for our EU presidency.



Speech
Brussels 18 May 2009
Sten Tolgfors, Minister for Defence

Speech by the Minister for Defence Sten Tolgfors during the lunch of Defence Ministers at the GAERC on 18 May 2009

(Check against delivery)

Since it is the last time we all gather for the first half of the year let me first take this opportunity to commend the Czech Presidency for its great efforts promoting the development of ESDP. It is now our turn to take this work forward.

In the field of ESDP, the overall objective of the Swedish Presidency is to strengthen the European Union as a global and more effective actor.

The Swedish presidency will revolve around three themes:

- Increase usability
- Develop capabilities
- Secure on-going operations and be prepared for the unforeseen

Let me start to explain what I mean with usability. The EU Battlegroups provide the Union with a robust and rapid ability to respond to crises globally. Member States have invested time, money and resources to make this a reality. By doing so, we have taken an important step towards making the Union a credible global actor. At the same time, no battlegroup has ever been deployed. I think it is safe to say that there have been situations where a battle-group could have been used. I would like us to have a political discussion in order to find a common ground on the use of the battlegroup as an instrument for the ESDP. If resources are committed, but never used, the European tax-payer will start to raise questions. The willingness of Member States to commit resources might then decrease, not least when EU struggles to generate sufficient capabilities to other ESDP missions.

My second theme is developing capabilities. I would like us to closely look into maritime surveillance. There is great potential for increased interoperability between military and civilian systems in order to establish common Recognized Maritime Pictures.

I would also like to discuss how the civilian and military capability development processes can be more coherent. We have gained experiences from past and on-going ESDP operations and missions. We must make use of these lessons identified and identify civ-mil requirements and create synergies.

In the area of capabilities, let me also say that the French and Czech Presidencies have put a number of new important issues on the table and we intend to continue to pursue this within the framework of the European Defence Agency (EDA).

Next, let me also assure you that during our Presidency, we will attach great importance to our on-going operations. Regarding ATALANTA, the aim is to follow-up on the six-month review and a possible continuation of EU:s engagement in combating piracy.

The possible transformation of Operation Althea will require us to think constructively in order to find a flexible way forward.

Above all, and this leads me to conclude on my three themes, I think we recognize the importance being ready for the unforeseen.

Finally, one common denominator for all the themes is how we can strengthen the cooperation with partner organisations. The EU is already working side by side with both UN and NATO in missions in Africa, Afghanistan and Western Balkan. As has been done by France and the Czech Republic, I like to encourage further dialogue, in particular with NATO, where we must try and find a more pragmatic and constructive relationship. We also want to develop the support provided by both the the EU and the UN to the African Union.

Again, I look forward to working with you and will come back in more detail with our priorities. I would already now want to welcome you all to the informal meeting in Göteborg 28-29 of September.

Thank you.



Speech
Karlberg Palace, Stockholm 09 November 2007
Sten Tolgfors, Minister for Defence

Speech by Sten Tolgfors, Swedish Minister for Defence, at the Swedish Atlantic Council conference

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Enhanced Nordic Cooperation in a Euro-Atlantic context" - is not only the title of this speech. It is also - in one sentence - the core of my policy. The Nordic countries and peoples have a lot in common. History records both quarrels and cooperation between our peoples. But the quarrels have since long been reduced to the occasional case of sibling rivalry, as we consider ourselves as close as siblings. The fact is that our relations are as good as bilateral relations between countries possibly can be. We are economically and politically interdependent.

We have all, in slightly more than a hundred years, developed from poor agricultural societies to modern ones based on industry, trade, services and natural resources.

As to our world outlooks, we share values such as support for international law and for the UN system, for international poverty reduction, for human rights and gender equality. We are all taking part international peace support operations, and are thereby net exporters of security, peace and stability and democratic values. And we all share a dependency on, and support for, a well-functioning Euro-Atlantic security system.

During the 20th century democracy prevailed due to the transatlantic link. In many ways the transatlantic link remains just as important today, and my Government has clearly pointed out the importance of strengthening our political relations with the US.

Despite all our similarities the Nordic countries are a mixed group when it comes to how we have arranged for our countries' national security. Sweden, just like Finland, is a militarily non-aligned EU Member State. Iceland and Norway are both NATO allies but not members of the EU. Denmark belongs to both the EU and NATO, but does not participate in the European Security and Defence Policy. Our Baltic neighbours Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - with whom we cooperate closely - are all members of both NATO and the EU. In that sense, they are the only three in our group being fully integrated in the European security system, without exception. How is that for historical change?

Let me point out that the fact that Sweden is a militarily non-aligned country means just that and precisely that. We neither give nor take binding security guarantees. We are politically aligned in the EU. We do cooperate extensively with others under the umbrella of the UN, the EU and NATO in international peace support missions. We also cooperate increasingly in defence policy with our neighbours, with no restrictions other than Article 5 commitments.

The Nordic countries today face a number of common security challenges. Old threats have been replaced by new challenges and new political ambitions. To transform old structures and develop new capacities in order to have relevant and sufficient military capabilities for a new, complex and constantly evolving reality is a great task.

We need to broaden and deepen the Nordic defence cooperation. International cooperation is a prerequisite both for handling most conflicts around the globe and for us upholding the operational capabilities needed for our national defences. This development should not be seen as a substitute for, but instead as complementary to cooperation within the EU and NATO framework.

I have been in office for about two months now but my interest in security policy goes back to the beginning of the 1990s, when I worked at the Ministry of Defence the first time. Before joining the Government I served on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, a short time as its Chair. Let me just point out that my Government's aims for international operations are clear:

1. We want to double our capacity to contribute in international operations.
2. We want to be a responsible and active partner in the development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).
3. We want to further develop our good relations with NATO and the UN.

Cooperation with our Nordic neighbours is the key to accomplish this.

Experience from international operations clearly states the need for a comprehensive approach and in particular cooperation between the UN, the EU and NATO. The UN is depending on help from others - states and organisations - to perform international missions and the need for contribution seems to be constant. At the same time the EU is raising its ambitions in the field of foreign policy and crisis management capability, and has in this respect identified a need to cooperate with the US and NATO, for example regarding strategic transport.

Over the years the Nordic nations have developed broad, flexible, transparent and well functioning cooperation in the defence realm, with close bonds between all the Nordic nations.

The flexible format of the Nordic defence cooperation is an advantage. Various fields of cooperation can be developed either on a Nordic basis or - just as well - on a bi- or trilateral basis, given the needs identified by each nation. Everything, of course, is done in full transparency. No Nordic country should feel left out. We have an institutionalised cooperation in the so called Nordic-Baltic format with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Apart from regular bilateral meetings we hold two Nordic and one Nordic-Baltic meeting at ministerial level each year. We just concluded constructive and forward-looking meetings this week in Sweden. For example, we decided on a new Swedish initiative to cooperate on the issue of Medevac assistance in Afghanistan.

To support cooperation between the Nordic nations we have well established structures within NORDCAPS - regarding peace support operations - and within NORDAC - regarding defence materiel cooperation.

There is a strong and mutual political will to look for new forms of cooperation and common solutions within new areas. So much is happening that perhaps the scope of Nordic defence cooperation has not been bigger since the post World War II discussions.

In principle there are no limits to what could be done as long as the national right of decision and freedom to act is preserved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Almost any conceivable substantial international peace support operation we might participate in will be a good example of "Enhanced Nordic Defence Cooperation in a Euro-Atlantic Context".

* Sweden cooperates closely with the other Nordic nations in the NATO-led operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Which I have discussed with the Secretary-General today.

* Regarding the planned EU-led operation in Chad we are looking into the possibility of deploying together with Finland.

* In Darfur the plan is to participate in a UN-led mission with a Swedish-Norwegian contingent.

* In the field of Security Sector Reform (SSR) the Nordic-Baltic countries coordinate Security Sector Reform activities in the Ukraine and in the Western Balkans.

* But maybe the Nordic Battle Group - which I will come back to - is the ultimate example of enhanced Nordic cooperation in a Euro-Atlantic context.

International peace support operations are always conducted with others, and the scope for Nordic cooperation in international operations is obvious for the future. To develop our common capability to conduct peace support operations has become a key aspect of our cooperation. And it does deserve to be mentioned that we all have gained important capabilities, primarily interoperability, through NATO - either as partners or as allies.

In this context, let me underline the importance Sweden puts on civil emergency planning within the NATO/PfP framework that has been carried out through the cooperation among the Nordic countries. It is Sweden's ambition to broaden and deepen this cooperation and I would be glad if this could continue to be done together with our Nordic friends.

Over the last 50 years 100 000 Swedish men and women have served in altogether 120 international operations in 60 different countries in support of peace, security and development. Some of these missions are long term - we've been in Korea for more than 50 years. I had the opportunity to visit them last June. Some of them have been short term, such as the recent deployment to Lebanon.

Our participation in international operations contributes not only to the security of others, but also to our own. We gain valuable experience for the development of our Armed Forces. We also gain influence in international organisations and in conflict resolution processes. Our participation strengthens Sweden's voice abroad.

I would like to point out how much we appreciate our Swedish soldiers and personnel for their efforts and their willingness to accept missions that may include personal risk and surely means being separated from friends and family for a period of time. We will try to do more to show this appreciation.

With our troop contributions comes a significant political responsibility. It is of utmost importance to us that men and women will not be deployed without proper equipment and training, and without the most sincere political decision making process. In no other political field is broad political consensus and support so necessary.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Making significant contributions to international crisis management is a priority for Sweden. Indeed, our contributions to international crisis management operations will increase. Currently we have a little less than 850 soldiers serving abroad, most of them in NATO-led operations - ISAF in Afghanistan and KFOR in Kosovo. On top of this we are preparing to deploy 200 soldiers to an ESDP-mission to Chad and 150 to a UN-led mission in Darfur, Sudan.

If the Nordic Battle Group deploys next year, that could mean an additional 2350 troops from Sweden and another 500 from Norway, Finland, Estonia and Ireland engaged in defending peace, security and development.

The Nordic Battle Group is one of Sweden's main undertakings. Its establishment adds credibility to the political actions of the EU. The European Union is the leading soft power in the world but it has lacked military capabilities to back up its foreign policy. The Battle Group concept will help us to ameliorate this imbalance of capabilities.

It is also an important catalyst for the transformation of our armed forces, and for increased cooperation among Nordic nations. The fact that this is done together with Ireland and Estonia only illustrates the high relevance of the headline I have been given - an enhanced Nordic cooperation in a Euro-Atlantic context.

The NBG illustrates how the division between members and non-members of EU and NATO is becoming less obvious in ongoing international cooperation and operations, where both organisations are engaged militarily and/or in civil activities.

This is one reason why the Nordic nations stress the need for closer cooperation between EU and NATO. We also support each other when it comes to the right of a non-member nation participating in international operations led by one of the organisations. It is important to have timely access to information and the right to participate in relevant planning- and decision making. I am very glad to see the personal engagement of the Secretary-General.

During this year we have continued to prepare for the Nordic Battle Group's readiness period, January-June next year. We have held political consultations on a regular basis. Joint training activities have been organised on both military and political levels.

The day before yesterday I visited the Nordic Battle Group-exercise in Luleå, together with my Irish and Estonian colleagues. The fact that all five nations involved in the BG of 2008 already have expressed interest in participating again in 2011 is a sign of good cooperation. My BG colleagues told me that, in their opinion, our BG might be the best prepared BG ever in the EU. We will evaluate the preparatory work, as well as the lessons of any deployment, in order to be even better prepared next time.

However, international crisis management is not the only field of Nordic cooperation. Capability development, training and education, joint sea surveillance and joint initiatives within international organisations are already a fact.

Let me elaborate a little on a few significant areas of cooperation:

The Nordic countries share a commitment to promote civil-military coordination to maximise output from international operations. Acting together we can better promote our views within international organisations. In this regard the enhanced coordination between security and development efforts are particularly important. Without security there will be no development and without development there will be no security.

Sea surveillance is another very interesting and useful area of cooperation. After the disaster when the passenger ship Estonia went down in the Baltic Sea in 1994, with more than 850 lives lost, bilateral Swedish-Finnish discussions started on the creation of a mechanism for shared sea surveillance information. Today the so-called SUCFIS cooperation is operative, with real time exchange of radar information 24-hours a day. The result is a shared situational awareness for most of the Baltic Sea that helps us improve maritime security, for example regarding emergencies at sea, border control, crime prevention and environmental protection. Denmark, Norway and Iceland have been invited as observers. In the long run there is also the possibility of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joining.

A similar form of cooperation regarding sharing of air surveillance information is currently being developed by Sweden and Finland.

Let me just mention a few more areas where we already interact:

* We have just started to discuss how best to support the African Union and its regional partner organisations in the field of capacity building for crisis management.

* We are, together with the Baltic nations, discussing the possibilities for cooperation within the framework of the NATO Response Force (NRF). Perhaps there will be a decision before the Bucharest meeting in April 2008.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As mentioned, one important point of the Nordic defence cooperation is its flexible format. When an opportunity is identified, those of us who so wish can engage in bi- or trilateral cooperation projects without the others feeling excluded.

Let me elaborate a bit on an initiative that I find very interesting - the joint Swedish-Norwegian feasibility study, recently presented by our two armed forces. The aim of the study was to find common solutions to shared challenges and shortages, and to strengthen the operational and economic balance within the armed forces. The study was made by the armed forces and presented to the political level in Oslo and Stockholm. The ideas brought forward in the study will now be evaluated, in a positive manner, and assessed by the respective country's MoD.

The report has been produced with full openness towards our Finnish friends, and in fact a similar report will be produced with Finland during next spring. The suggested cooperation brings with it possibilities of increasing economic efficiency, but primarily capability development and operational advantages.

The primary result of the study is 18 case studies where bilateral cooperation or integration could provide substantial effects. Some of these are: shared use of shooting and exercise ranges; coordinated procurement and logistic solutions; management education; advanced distributed learning, common staff officer education; and common female/gender military observation teams in international operations. The Armed Forces also see a potential for a continued close cooperation within the area of defence planning.

Additional nations - Nordic or maybe Baltic - could possibly be included in various suitable cooperation projects in the future. In my view this Nordic cooperation is key to the future Swedish defence policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While most of the countries occupied by Hitler or Stalin in 1939 and 1940 regained their independence in 1944/45, the Baltic States had to wait almost another half century for their liberation. Sympathy for the Baltic States' struggle for independence ran wide and deep in the Nordic countries in the 1990s - I myself wrote a booklet concerning increased Baltic Sea cooperation - and after independence there was a desire to support them in rebuilding their societies.

There was also a will to help them assert their sovereignty, which was in our interest too. Cautiously at first, but then with increasing boldness, including armed forces. Nordic cooperation turned out to be very useful in this endeavour, and the common interest in the Baltic States helped to deepen and expand Nordic cooperation in the defence field. Projects such as BALTBAT and the Baltic Defence College served not only to build capacity, but also to increase Nordic, Baltic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation.

Sweden early negotiated free trade agreements with the reborn states, and helped expand them to the entire EU. We supported their EU and NATO memberships. For my generation this was defining for political engagement.

Now, some ten to fifteen years later, the Baltic States are solid members of the Euro-Atlantic security structures, members of both the EU and NATO, and with booming economies. They can now serve as an example for others and even offer the same sort of security assistance they once received by helping other states undergo the transition to western standards. Few things have been more important than this during the last decades.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, the Nordic countries have developed an institutionalised flexible and transparent, well functioning defence cooperation.

I see few limitations for the Nordic defence cooperation. Maybe we could see something like truly joint Nordic units in international peace support missions. Transparent and more integrated defence planning processes will be the way to create these capabilities. A more joint "defence production line", if you like. This may include, for example, joint staff officers training, joint procurement and development projects, and shared use of infrastructure and logistics. And maybe we will get to see a broader and deeper cooperation as regards sea and air surveillance, enhancing security in the Baltic region from both a military and a civilian perspective.

However, all of the above should be done without infringing on the respective nations' right of self-determination and freedom of action.

Nordic defence cooperation is not to be seen as a substitute for cooperation within the EU or the NATO framework. On the contrary, the idea is to strengthen the Nordic countries' defence capabilities and thereby enable us to be active, significant and efficient members, allies or partners within the Euro-Atlantic structures, as well as in other contexts.

Moreover, the Nordic countries could be instrumental in bridging the gap between EU and NATO as we have proved to be close partners although we have chosen different organisational arrangements for our national security.

The Nordic nations themselves, the European Union, the NATO Alliance, the UN and others all stand to gain from an enhanced Nordic cooperation in the Euro-Atlantic context.

Thank you.

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