
7. The impact of EU capability targets and operational demands on defence concepts and planning: the case of Sweden

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I. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the impact on Swedish defence planning of the European Union's capability targets and operational demands. There are several reasons for choosing the specific case of Sweden rather than trying to cover all the Nordic countries. One reason is that, when it comes to 'hard' security policy, the Nordic countries differ more than is generally believed: Denmark's opting out of the European Security and Defence Policy is an example of this. Although neither Sweden nor Finland is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Finnish security policy is generally seen as being based on *realpolitik*, while Sweden has tried to take a principled approach to the issue of collective defence. In this context, it should be remembered that Sweden is the only country in the EU that did not experience war in the 20th century.

Against this background, it is of interest that the Swedish Government recently formulated a new defence policy, in which the ESDP seems to be given highest priority.¹ This is a clear break with the past.

Another reason for focusing on Sweden is that the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) are in the midst of significant process of transformation. This has been presented as a bold move to transform the remnants of a passive, anti-invasion defence force dependent on mobilization of reserves into an active and mobile force ready for expeditionary warfare and peace-support operations under the auspices of the EU, NATO or the United Nations. However, the transformation seems to be severely underfunded, which could have potentially disastrous consequences.

The issue of the new defence policy is all the more interesting as the Swedish population is one of the most Euro-sceptical in the EU; the negative outcome of the September 2003 referendum on adopting the euro, the success of anti-EU

¹ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5: vårt framtida försvar [Government bill 2004/05:5: our future defence], 23 Sep. 2004, URL <<http://www.riksdagen.se/debatt/propositioner/>>. Summary in English: Government Offices of Sweden, 'Our future defence: the focus of Swedish defence policy 2005–2007', Swedish Ministry of Defence, Stockholm, Oct. 2004, URL <<http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/574/a/32119/>>. The bill was passed by the Swedish Parliament on 16 Dec. 2004.

* This chapter reflects the views of the author, not necessarily those of the Swedish Government, the Swedish Armed Forces or the Swedish National Defence College.

parties in the 2004 European elections and the debate about the Constitutional Treaty are examples of this fact.² In addition, the ruling Social Democratic Party is deeply divided regarding the EU and depends on the support in parliament of two parties—the Left Party and the Green Party—with explicitly negative policy on the EU.

In this domestic context of December 2004, this chapter analyses the new Swedish defence policy against the requirements spelled out in official EU documents, such as the European Security Strategy,³ and explained in chapter 6. This section continues with a description of the historical and political background to Sweden's defence policy. The effect on that policy of cuts in the defence budget are outlined in section II. Strategic and political implications are discussed in section III and the effect on capabilities in section IV. Conclusions are drawn in section V.

Background

During the cold war, Sweden followed a 'policy of military non-alignment', by which was meant 'non-participation in military alliances in peacetime in order to remain neutral in the event of war in its neighbourhood'.⁴ This policy was underpinned by armed forces designed to be strong enough to deter a potential assailant from attacking. In fact, at their peak, the SAF could—after mobilization—theoretically muster some 800 000 men and women.⁵ The relatively huge defence industrial sector formed a cornerstone of this policy. The idea was that the SAF would have weapon systems with a 'Swedish profile', adapted for use by soldiers with little training but also designed *not* to be interoperable with those of other countries, thereby underpinning the credibility of the 'policy of military non-alignment'. Sweden did take part in UN peacekeeping operations: this may have been important from a political point of view but was seen as a sideshow by the Swedish military.

Sweden's relationship with NATO has often been characterized as *Berührungsangst* (literally, a fear of contact). During the 1990s Sweden became increasingly active in NATO's Partnership for Peace, which has given much healthy input to the SAF. However, it remains politically unacceptable to suggest the possibility of Sweden joining the alliance.

Sweden has been an active player in the development of the ESDP in order to further at least two national interests. On the one hand, Sweden was genuinely interested in increasing the EU's crisis management capabilities. On the other hand, Sweden wanted to be able to stop all movement towards enlargement of the Petersberg Tasks or towards a common defence. However, the Swedish

² See also chapter 5 in this volume.

³ Council of the European Union, 'A secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy', Brussels, 12 Dec. 2003, URL <http://ue.eu.int/cms3_fo/showPage.ASP?id=266>.

⁴ The term 'military non-alignment' is used in this chapter as it is generally understood. The Swedish term translates directly as 'freedom from military alliances'.

⁵ See also chapter 9 in this volume.

Government has—albeit somewhat grudgingly—accepted the provisions of the EU's Constitutional Treaty regarding defence.⁶ The statement in the constitution that the obligation to assist a member state that is under attack 'shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States'⁷ is deemed to be an adequate safeguard of Sweden's position regarding collective defence.

The SAF have been undergoing a transformation, at least since 1999, with the aim of developing an international crisis management capability. However, there have not been any radical changes: the officer corps is relatively old (median age about 35 years), participation in crisis management operations is still voluntary even for officers, and a general obligation for national military service forms the basis for all training, including that for officers. The procurement budget is still taken up by orders made just after the end of the cold war, for equipment that is often of dubious relevance in today's environment.

In June 2004 the permanent, cross-party Swedish Defence Commission presented its proposals on 'defence for a new time'.⁸ Based on this, in September the government presented its White Paper on defence to parliament for approval.⁹ It should be noted that the budget for 2005 was decided on as part of a general agreement on Sweden's finances between the government and its two supporting parties, both of which are pacifistic and oppose the EU. This agreement means that the annual defence budget will be reduced in steps by 3 billion kronor (approximately €333 million) by the end of 2007 from its present level of about 40 billion kronor (€4.44 billion), that is, by 7.5 per cent.

II. The defence budget

Like most countries in Europe, Sweden has cashed in the so-called peace dividend following the ending of the cold war. The result has been a number of successive reductions of its armed forces. In comparison with other current EU member states, however, the Swedish Armed Forces have not done so badly: between 1985 and 2002 Sweden increased its relative standing in terms of defence spending, both per capita and as a percentage of gross domestic product.¹⁰ The impending reduction in spending of 7.5 per cent will reduce its relative standing, but not significantly.

There are two basic considerations regarding the budget. As most officers known to the author would admit, the problem is not the level of financial input

⁶ The Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe was signed on 19 Oct. 2004 but has not been ratified. The text of the treaty is available at URL <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/constitution/index_en.htm> and select articles are reproduced in the appendix in this volume.

⁷ Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (note 6), Article I-41.7.

⁸ Swedish Defence Commission, *Försvar för en ny tid* [Defence for a new time] (Försvarsberedningen: Stockholm, June 2004), URL <<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/108/a/24528/>>.

⁹ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1).

¹⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2003/2004* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003), table 33, pp. 335–36.

but the extremely poor output. Sweden presently has some 750 personnel in international crisis management missions, of whom only 70 were committed for the EU's EUFOR Althea operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina;¹¹ the reason for this very limited commitment is said to be financial. Taking into account the fact that the SAF have some 10 000 officers and each year train about 15 000 conscripts, this is hardly impressive.¹²

Second, through its acceptance of the European Security Strategy, Sweden has committed itself to a policy which states that 'to transform [the EU's] militaries into more flexible, mobile forces, and to enable them to address the new threats, more resources for defence and more effective use of resources are necessary'.¹³ The new defence policy takes account of this objective insofar as reductions in the present organization may be used—'partly'—for the enhancement of Swedish contributions to international crisis management.¹⁴ Given the present state of the SAF, it should be possible to obtain much more output. The real issue is whether this will happen.

III. Policy and strategy

From a European political point of view, the new Swedish defence policy is, on the whole, a very positive step forward. By and large, it is well in line with the European Security Strategy and the Constitutional Treaty. The overall objective is to strengthen the Swedish contribution to international cooperation and crisis management in order to further peace and security for Sweden, the EU and the world at large.

Most remarkable is the treatment of the issue of solidarity. It is now clearly stated that threats to peace and security need to be met in cooperation with other countries. The policy states that it is hard to imagine that Sweden would stay neutral in the event of an armed attack against another EU member.¹⁵ Conversely, other EU members are expected to help Sweden if it is attacked. The old paradigm that 'Sweden only defends Sweden and only Sweden defends Sweden' is dead. It is rather surprising, however, to see that 'military non-alignment' is said to constitute the best basis for this policy.¹⁶

In fact, the issue of Sweden's neutrality is not completely dead. It is stated that the Swedish policy of non-membership of military alliances 'has served us well' and that it offers 'the opportunity for neutrality during conflicts in our

¹¹ Holmström, M., 'Färre svenskar i utlandstjänst' [Fewer Swedes on service abroad], *Svenska Dagbladet*, 11 Oct. 2004, p. 7.

¹² In Dec. 2004 there were 11 622 officers. This is expected to fall to 9800 by Jan. 2008. There were 14 466 conscripts in 2004. From 2006 the average number of conscripts will be about 8500 per year. Swedish Armed Forces, 'The facts', Stockholm, 2005, URL <<http://www.mil.se/article.php?id=1672>>, pp. 39, 44–45.

¹³ Council of the European Union (note 3), p. 12.

¹⁴ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 32.

¹⁵ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 23.

¹⁶ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 23.

immediate region'.¹⁷ Furthermore, freedom of action is a political imperative: 'Sweden shall in each and every case be able to take decisions on its own analyses'.¹⁸ Even if solidarity is important, Sweden will neither accept nor offer security guarantees. It should be remembered that the Swedish agenda in the EU is to make the union as intergovernmental as possible; this applies in particular to the ESDP.

Against this background, it is possible to see the emphasis on taking part in crisis management operations as a kind of investment in solidarity. In any event, the new defence policy is completely in line with the emphasis placed by the European Security Strategy on the need to handle the risks of crisis and instability by means of cooperation, primarily through the EU: 'the EU is central to Swedish security'.¹⁹ Furthermore, such cooperation will also be advantageous for the development of the SAF.

International cooperation, which really started in the mid-1990s, has been of enormous benefit to the SAF. Through the Partnership for Peace, regulations, doctrines, procedures and equipment have been adapted to international—that is, NATO—standards. Through participation in international staffs such as the EU Military Staff, Swedish officers learn modern strategic and operational planning skills. This transformation was certainly necessary for being able to participate in ever more complex peace support operations, but it has also given the armed forces a new sense of professionalism. The requirements stemming from the decision to become a framework nation for the Nordic battle group will certainly add to this development.

In contrast to the European Security Strategy, the Swedish defence policy is surprisingly silent on two significant threats: international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Both issues are mentioned in the defence policy, and the Solidarity Clause in the Constitutional Treaty is seen as an expression of the solidarity between EU member states on these matters.²⁰ However, virtually nothing is said about the implications of these threats for the SAF. Regarding terrorism, there are two explanations. Terrorism directed against EU member states is not seen as being part of the ESDP, which, in Sweden's view, is about crisis management operations outside the territory of the EU.²¹ Second, Sweden traditionally has great difficulties handling civil–military coordination. A recently published study, however, has proposed that the SAF may support the police in certain circumstances.²² If accepted, this would constitute a break with the past.

¹⁷ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 23.

¹⁸ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 24.

¹⁹ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 27.

²⁰ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 27; and Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (note 6), Article I-43.

²¹ See chapters 15 and 16 in this volume.

²² Swedish Ministry of Justice, *Polisens behov av stöd i samband med terrorismbekämpning* [The police's need for support in the fight against terrorism], Report of the Support Commission, SOU 2005:70 (Regeringskansliet: Stockholm, 2005), URL <<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/5073/a/48806/>>.

Even if the main threats originate in distant regions, Sweden must be able to defend itself. The future of the SAF is hence said to be dependent on two sets of missions: the territorial defence of Sweden and development of related competences; and support for international peace and stability. Insiders see one reason for the continuing insistence on defence of the country's territorial integrity as being the political imperative of retaining conscription.²³

Here, however, the new defence policy makes a kind of logical somersault. As the political situation in Sweden's own region is very positive, it is possible to reduce the SAF significantly.²⁴ At the same time, the defence policy clearly states that Sweden should increase its contributions to international crisis management operations.²⁵ The big question is whether this is possible.

IV. Capabilities

The main issue from the perspective of the EU is whether Sweden will try to cover any of the identified shortfalls in the Helsinki Headline Goal and fulfil the Headline Goal 2010.²⁶ Given the central role of the ESDP stated in the new Swedish defence policy, some commitment to the goals would be expected.

There are two kinds of clear commitment in the defence policy, one positive and one negative. On the positive side, Sweden has a clear objective to increase its contributions to EU military missions. It will lead a Nordic battle group with participation from Estonia, Finland and Norway, and Sweden aims to be able to mount two concurrent operations at battalion level in addition to three smaller missions.²⁷ In comparison with the situation today, this amounts to a huge increase in the number of deployed personnel. Battle groups will also require a hitherto unheard of degree of readiness. Furthermore, the policy document makes rather general statements on the importance of flexibility, mobility and so on.

On the negative side are the reductions in operational capability. Here the policy is explicit. It states, for instance, that the number of surface warships will be reduced to seven, a ridiculously small number.²⁸ The policy goes on to express concern that the number is so low that it might be difficult for Sweden to take part in crisis management operations.

The policy is virtually silent on the procurement needed to fulfil the nation's political ambitions and the EU's Headline Goals. Information from sources in

²³ Engdahl, S. (Commodore), military adviser to the Minister for Defence, Interview with the author, Ministry of Defence, Stockholm, 20 Oct. 2004.

²⁴ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 32.

²⁵ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 41.

²⁶ Council of the European Union, Presidency conclusions, Helsinki, 10–11 Dec. 1999, reproduced in Rutten, M., 'From St. Malo to Nice: European defence, core documents', Chaillot Paper no. 47, Institute of Security Studies, Western European Union, Paris, May 2001, URL <<http://www.iss-eu.org/>>, pp. 89–91; and Council of the European Union, ESDP Presidency Report, Annex I, 'Headline Goal 2010', Brussels, 17–18 June 2004, URL <<http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/2010 Headline Goal.pdf>>.

²⁷ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 44.

²⁸ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 64.

SAF Headquarters and the Ministry of Defence, however, seems to make it clear that the commitments stemming from the Headline Goal have not been driving policy.

The policy is also more or less silent on future procurement. The Supreme Commander of the SAF has been directed to make proposals on this matter before the next financial year. At present, a relatively high proportion of Sweden's defence budget is allocated to procurement.²⁹ However, much of this expenditure is for orders placed in the 1990s. At present, there is virtually no money for new initiatives, adapted to present requirements; rather, it has been rumoured that there will be important cuts.

Nevertheless, there are also some positive signs. For instance, Sweden now accepts the idea of capabilities pooling, which is a major break with former policy. An interest is expressed in air-to-air refuelling capability and the requirement for strategic transport is at least alluded to. The analysis of and enthusiasm for network-based defence have been toned down to a more realistic level.

On personnel, the new defence policy is mixed. It gives, at last, a green light for a kind of long-term military service for conscripts volunteering to take part in operations abroad. It will also be possible to employ a limited number of rank-and-file soldiers on contract terms—a necessity for the battle group concept.

The number of conscripts called up is to be reduced, but conscription will continue to be the normal basis for recruitment. It is not even clear if the SAF will be able to find sufficient volunteers among conscripts for international operations; the training of those who do not so volunteer will constitute a waste of money and effort. Indeed, some also argue that the organization will be so reduced that it will not be able to train enough recruits.³⁰

The present level of Swedish participation in international crisis management operations is, as pointed out above, very low in proportion to the country's total defence forces and spending. The fact that Sweden's contributions are also small relative to other Nordic countries' is identified as a problem in the defence policy.³¹ It is surprising that EUFOR Althea, the biggest military operation undertaken so far by the EU, was not given priority, especially since it was planned for over a long period of time. Given that, the Swedish contribution of 70 personnel is derisory. The reason seems to be budgetary; Swedish participation in the UN Mission in Liberia has used up all the available money. This implies that Sweden has neither the ability nor the willingness to shift

²⁹ In 2004, 43.6% of the defence budget was devoted to procurement. Kingdom of Sweden, 'Vienna Document 1999: participating state annual exchange of information on defence planning 2004', Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters, Stockholm, 11 Mar. 2004, URL <<http://www.mil.se/article.php?id=10921>>, Annex 5, 'Expenditures in 2003, budgets for 2004–2008', pp. 5–7.

³⁰ Carell, A., 'Organisatoriska förutsättningar' [Organizational prerequisites], *Kungliga Krigsvetenskapsakademiens Handlingar och Tidskrift—The Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences Proceedings and Journal*, vol. 209, no. 2 (2005), pp. 31–37.

³¹ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 26.

funds to match priorities; and it may indicate that the ESDP is not so important when it really matters.

Regrettably, the low number of soldiers provided for EUFOR Althea fits into a pattern in which Sweden prefers to contribute small units to many operations, rather than making an impact by contributing larger units to a few operations. This approach puts many Swedish flags on the map but gives Sweden very little influence. From a military perspective it is well known that the deployment of battalion-sized units should be the norm. Participation with platoon-level units does not give Swedish officers the opportunity to hold command posts and certainly will not give them any opportunity to hold important international posts as the latter are in practice allocated in relation to the size of contributions. The defence policy states that Swedish officers should have the opportunity to command at battalion level and above during exercises,³² but in the present financial situation this will be hard to implement.

This issue raises another one. It is astonishing that the greater part of Sweden's contributions to international combat operations appears to be ground forces. Given the organization of the SAF and its dependence on conscripts, such forces may not be its main comparative advantage. Sweden could do more with its high-technology units in the navy and air force, leaving the army to concentrate on traditional international peacekeeping, where it has a good reputation. Establishing a battle group is an ambitious objective and might have important repercussions for Sweden's overall operating capability. As underlined in a recent report on European defence,³³ Europe needs expeditionary rapid-reaction forces as well as substantial, sustainable peacekeeping forces. Furthermore, a battle group will need combat support as well as support by air and maritime forces.

Regarding officers, the present situation is somewhat chaotic. The new defence policy states that, in future, taking part in international operations will be a natural part of an officer's career. Furthermore, the organization should have more warriors and fewer bureaucrats, thereby implying a reduction of the currently high median age of officers. On the other hand, the government, outside the context of the defence policy, wants to increase the already comparatively high retirement age from 60 to 61. More importantly, the sharp decline of the budget will have drastic consequences. As well as the closure of bases and disbanding of regiments, about 10 per cent of officers (there are no professional non-commissioned officers in Sweden) will be fired and recruitment will be stopped for several years. The government is silent on how this can be done, just saying that the 'parties' should handle it in the normal way—through an agreement, according to Swedish civil law, between the Supreme Commander and the officers' union. This will mean that it is primarily the young officers who will be obliged to leave. There are indications that the youngest officer in

³² Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5 (note 1), p. 149.

³³ Gnesotto, N., 'Preface', *European Defence: A Proposal for a White Paper* (EU Institute for Security Studies: Paris, 2004), URL <<http://www.iss-eu.org/>>, p. 7.

the navy will be around 33 years old. Operational capabilities in both the long and the short runs will obviously be severely affected.

V. Conclusions

Sweden's 2004 defence policy constitutes an important political step forward. Sweden fully embraces the ESDP and makes it and the related operations its priority. There are, however, still areas where old thinking prevails, such as 'non-participation in military alliances', neutrality and reluctance to engage in cooperation against terrorism.

While the rhetoric is laudable, the facts are less encouraging. It seems extremely dubious that the Swedish Armed Forces will succeed in carrying through a massive transformation and enhancement of operational capabilities within a budget that is very tight and which will require drastic cuts in both personnel and equipment. Aside from the battle group, it is open to question whether Sweden will be able on this showing to take its share of responsibility for the development of the military capabilities of the European Union. It is also doubtful whether the planned battle group will materialize, among other reasons because of a possible lack of trained personnel.

Postscript

There has been a lot of turbulence in the Swedish Armed Forces in 2005. On the one hand, the Swedish Government seems committed to the realization of the Nordic EU battle group. On the other hand, a number of officers have been fired; others have left voluntarily. The result is that a surplus of 1000 officers now has been turned into a deficit of 500.³⁴ The financial situation is still precarious in spite of the large-scale rationalizations and base closures. General Håkan Syrén, the Supreme Commander of the SAF, has stated that any further reductions will have serious consequences.³⁵ The risk that such reductions will take place is not negligible, in particular since the minority Social Democrat government seems to have given the Left and Green parties veto rights over issues regarding the defence budget.³⁶ It is difficult to understand how the good intentions in the White Paper will be realized. Mao's words about 'paper tigers' seem highly applicable to the Swedish defence policy: 'in appearance it is very powerful but in reality it is nothing to be afraid of'.

³⁴ *Försvarets forum*, no. 4, 2005, p. 1.

³⁵ Swedish Armed Forces, 'Försvarmaktens komplettering till budgetunderlaget för år 2006' [The Swedish Armed Forces addition to the basic budget for 2006], Stockholm, 4 May 2005, URL <<http://www.mil.se/article.php?id=13682>>, p. 2.

³⁶ Nilsson, D., 'Försvarsuppgörelse upprör oppositionen' [Defence settlement shocks the opposition], *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 Sep. 2005, p. 15.