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Land forces; the main enabler for operations – how to improve their capabilities

Necessary salutation ... dear colleagues

Introduction

Human Beings are in the centre of our operations. Tools are developed, but they never get better than the people that use them.

I believe it is crucial to maintain this focus through our discussions of Land Forces and its role as the main enabler for operations.

Land Forces, with boots on the ground and face-to-face communication, are the backbone of any successful operation.

In my opinion, there are **three factors** central to improve the capability of Land Forces, and they are tied closely together.

These factors are **Quality, Flexibility and Size**.

Firstly: **Quality**.

Equipment, the need to be contemporary and up-to-date facing relevant opponents goes without saying. To balance the acquisition of equipment for urgent operational needs against the long term investment plans is a challenge for most armies.

The second quality-component is **training**. We need both a higher training standard, as well as different training standards.

The basis for an army's training and combat preparations will change continuously as the operating environment develops. However, if the army does not cope with these changes and adapt its training and combat preparations, it will become irrelevant.

It is often said that the future threat is hybrid, meaning that the threat is a combination of irregular and conventional force-on-force scenarios.

Military experience from the last years point at **three conclusions** we should pay attention to.

Firstly, the experiences from the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006 show that combat preparations and **focus on combined arms** will not lose its importance in the future.

Secondly, lessons from the conflict in Georgia show that there is a need for a credible ability to **react fast** to a threat, and that a conventional conflict should not be ruled out. Even if some unofficial sources claim that the Russian build-up took place over as long time as a year, we know that one year is a very short time to build military capability if the capability has to be built from scratch. Hence, the demand for a credible ability to react fast in response of a crisis or unforeseen threat will remain for the foreseeable future.

Lastly, lessons observed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Lebanon, Gaza and Georgia – to mention some conflict areas – show that **Information Operations** must comprise a significant part of every military operation in the future in order to win the minds and the support of the people. Future wars will be as much a war of perceptions as anything else.

These lessons from recent experiences, and others, lead into **the second factor** to improve the capability of Land Forces. **Flexibility.**

Today, the land forces are the supported component and they are conducting combat operations. In this perspective, I think it is important to realize that the forces currently employed in Iraq and Afghanistan are conducting Full Spectrum Operations, meaning, they are conducting Offensive Operations, Defensive Operations and Stability Operations, simultaneously. It is only the weight and focus of the mixing of those three types of operations that vary.

We see a tendency to invent and establish new terminology to describe well known challenges. The term Full Spectrum Operation covers the contemporary operating` concept. There is a need to establish a common set of knowledge and competence among both military personnel and politicians, in order to address the need to understand the Contemporary Operating Environment. One example of this need for competence and understanding is the rapid ratification process of NATO's new doctrine on Counterinsurgency. Only by understanding the contemporary operating environment, it will be possible to meet the challenges of the future.

We must continue to focus on interoperability within the alliance and to include the ability to conduct full spectrum operations - **together.**

Then, the **third and final factor** for improving the capability of Land Forces. **Size.**

The German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is known for the motto: "Less is more". That principle **does not** apply for an army.

Size **matters** and is a quality of its own. "Boots on the ground" is imperative to clear, hold and build an area of conflict. Too few boots means a higher risk of collateral damage and own or civilian casualties. Face-to-face contact establishes trust and builds peace.

However, our armies tend to be smaller than desired these days. Sufficient size is required to sustain operations over time as well as to develop competence and capabilities. Clearly, some armies have reached sub-critical mass.

This development makes it even more important with a close international cooperation between our Armies. Our experience from training in Norway and operations abroad,

has shown that multinationally composed units even down to company level function well- provided that they are integrated and trained prior to deployment.

Cooperation at such a low tactical level works out excellent, provided that there is both political will for deployment and small cultural differences between the soldiers. Therefore, I was not surprised when training together with troops from the Royal Netherlands Army in Norway some weeks ago, was a success for both countries.

We can achieve more by cooperating both on the procurement side and at a low tactical level in training and operations. I see this clearly in our good cooperation with countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden and Latvia.

Decreased size within all Armies is therefore a strong incentive for closer international cooperation between our Armies.

To summarize:

Going forward we need to maintain and increase our focus on the three areas of Quality, Flexibility and Size to improve the capability of Land Forces.

Land Forces is the main enabler for almost any operation. Human beings, not platforms, are the backbone of the Land Forces, and therefore essential in all military activity.

The future is Human Centric and based on international cooperation.