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Building national defence capabilities – central government efforts to strengthen army forces

Summary and recommendations

At the end of the 2016-2020 defence period, the Defence Commission, the Government and the Swedish Armed Forces stated that efforts to strengthen the operational capabilities of the armed forces had not reached as far as intended. Against this background, the Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has examined whether the Government and the Swedish Armed Forces have carried out effective work to increase the operational capacity of the army forces during the 2016-2020 defence period.

The audit was based on the following questions:

- To what extent have the objectives been achieved and the focus points followed with regard to the army forces?
- Has the Government's governance of the Swedish Armed Forces in relation to the development of army forces been expedient?
- Have the Armed Forces' efforts to strengthen the operational capabilities of the armed forces been efficient?

Audit findings

Overall conclusions

The Swedish NAO considers that the efforts of the Government and the Swedish Armed Forces to strengthen the operational capabilities of army forces during the defence period have not been efficient in all aspects. Weaknesses exist in planning, analysis, governance and implementation. As a result, army units have not developed effectively, their ability to carry out their wartime tasks has been limited, and there are still uncertainties as to how they should be designed in terms of personnel and equipment to meet a qualified adversary.

An important explanation lies in the reduction of the Swedish Armed Forces that accelerated in the early 2000s. At the same time, the main task of the Swedish

Armed Forces was shifted from defending Sweden towards armed attacks to sending units to international operations.

The Swedish NAO considers that the savings made at the Swedish Armed Forces and the change in focus implemented limited the Swedish Armed Forces' ability to adjust during the defence period. At the same time, the Swedish NAO considers that the Swedish Armed Forces should have ascertained the situation in the army earlier. The Swedish Armed Forces did not get a sufficiently good picture of the seriousness of the situation until several years into the defence period.

Internal and external governance

Brigades have not been prominent in the governance of the army's development, which is partly explained by the fact that there has been opposition to the creation of brigades as war units. Instead, the focus has been on developing the capability of the "building blocks" in the form of battalions and companies, despite the fact that the brigade is the most effective form of organisation for the army in battle. If the Government had clearly requested brigades, the Swedish Armed Forces' work would have been more effective, and costs associated with the fact that the battalions each need capabilities that would be shared within the brigade could have been avoided.

The Swedish NAO considers that the 2015 defence focus decision was underfunded in relation to what the Swedish Armed Forces were to achieve. The starting position of the army was very difficult in relation to the focus set. In addition, the costs of the essential security interests JAS 39 E and the new generation submarine (A26) have been difficult to make savings on and these projects have crowded out other equipment projects. The army was therefore in reality unable to achieve what the Riksdag and Government expected. At the same time, the audit shows that the consequences of the imbalance between funding and what was expected to be achieved were poorly described by the Swedish Armed Forces.

The Swedish Armed Forces' internal planning process is deficient and so complex that there is a risk that the Armed Forces will not make the most effective decisions for building increased capabilities. All in all, problems linked to the planning process have generated a great disjointedness that from time to time overturns existing planning. The Swedish NAO considers that the Swedish Armed Forces take balancing decisions at too high a level of detail at too high a level in the organisation.

During the 2016-2020 focus period, the Swedish Armed Forces implemented a number of organisational changes that have resulted in increased decentralisation and delegation of mandates, from central/national level to tactical/defence branch level. The Swedish National Audit Office considers that this facilitates

effectiveness within the framework of national defence. However, the fact that the army has not had authority over all the elements of the brigade system has made it difficult to create increased capacity in the military units.

Swedish Armed Forces' development work

There are deficiencies linked to the Swedish Armed Forces' control and overview of their equipment. The distribution of equipment in peacetime is poor and there are shortcomings in the work on wartime posting of equipment. Although the causes of the problems partly derive from the period before the audited focus period, the Swedish NAO considers that there are deficiencies in the efficiency of wartime deployment of equipment. The Swedish NAO has also identified shortcomings linked to the Swedish Armed Forces' work on transport and stockholding.

Creating national defence capabilities can be likened to a system where a variety of underlying parts of operations and processes are interlinked and interact in complex chains. The Swedish NAO considers that during the period of major cuts and focus on international efforts, the Swedish Armed Forces lost much knowledge of both the individual parts of the system and how the system works as a whole. This has delayed and hampered the transition that the Swedish Armed Forces started with the defence focus decision in 2015.

Recommendations

In the light of these conclusions the Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations to the Government and the Swedish Armed Forces.

The Swedish NAO's recommendations to the Government

- Set clear and monitorable objectives for the Swedish Armed Forces' operations.
- Ensure that the management of projects that constitute essential security interests does not force the Swedish Armed Forces to short-term reprogramming that has consequences for unit production.

The Swedish NAO's recommendations to the Swedish Armed Forces

- Continue to further develop efforts to ensure the army's ability to mobilise within the specified time limits, including wartime posting of equipment.
- Ensure that the Chief of Army has sufficient authority over the army's activities to plan and implement them effectively.
- Draw up clear impact assessments of the Government's governance.
- Draw up needs analyses early in the process regarding development or change projects.

