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CHALLENGES FACING FUTURE MILITARY STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP – VIEWS REFLECTING A SMALL-STATE PERSPECTIVE

Initial remarks

This article will cover three issues with deep-ranging consequences for military strategic leadership. The first one concerns certain mega-trends which have global and transnational effects and recognise no borders, the second, closely knitted to these mega-trends, concerns societal development, and the third focuses on the development of military capabilities designed for the future. To be able to handle these factors efficiently, military leaders at the executive level need wider perspectives than purely military ones. In other words, to be able to give good advice to political decision-makers, top military leaders must be competent to draw defence-related conclusions from ongoing global mega-trends and societal development and be capable of fruitful interaction with their political masters and the public. What military capabilities will be needed tomorrow, and what measures should be taken to avoid bureaucratisation, are questions that will be covered in this article. It should be underlined that the three factors considered here form only a nucleus of the future challenges facing individuals who rise to top military positions.

Our starting point is western countries in general, with Sweden in particular focus when discussing the challenges that will most probably occupy future military leaders at the strategic level. The small-state perspective is estimated to be relevant because of the challenges that derive from specific political conditions and the general scarcity of resources.

1. Mega-trends to be considered

By its very nature, politics is about matters that have to create an effect at short notice, where a week could be looked upon as a substantial period and a month as a very long time. Very much in contradiction to this view of politics is the fact that studies related to our future security environment have to be based on a far longer perspective. The same could be said about the output of these studies as far as the development and implementation of military capabilities suited for one or more specific environments is concerned.

Even though history has clearly indicated over and over again that it is almost impossible to predict the future, at least when it comes to specifics, there are trends and tendencies derived from our past that have implications for tomorrow. These implications are the only true intellectual platform from which our military capabilities can be developed in order to have adequate tools available for tomorrow.

Colin Gray emphasises the multidimensional negative consequences of climate change. There exists a convincing scientific consensus that global warming is a reality and that it is too late to arrest or reverse that process. There seems to be no consensus, however, about the consequences: whether that change will be gradual or fast. Gray emphasises that the effects of rapid global warming would almost certainly lead to economic, social and political chaos, in other words a human catastrophe. The problem of sustaining the population would result in competition for scarce resources such as fresh water and arable land, where present western liberal and idealistic views might turn out to be illusions as existential wars once again become a reality. In other words, Gray is talking about a situation where vital interests such as national survival are at stake and have to be fought for, with every available tool[1].

In line with Gray, Tomas Ries emphasizes two critical security concerns which fit very well with the definition of mega-trends. The first one has to do with the fact that a shrinking world creates a situation in which the rich part has intimate contact with the poor part. The security consequence of that fact in our time is that wealthy societies are directly threatened by poor state and non-state actors. Transnational strategic terror is in focus anyway at present, representing in essence a classical revolutionary war. The difference from previous ones is that it covers a global range[2].

The second challenge that Ries highlights is global ecological degradation, which presents an existential threat to many of the world's poorest societies. But the magnitude of the environmental problems is increasing, with the consequence that they will reach the western world, including the "peaceful Nordic corner". In fact environmental decline already is a reality in the Nordic region, represented by the danger of catastrophic events among the Russian nuclear facilities on the Kola Peninsula, the regional sources of pollution affecting the Baltic Sea and the damaging of North Atlantic fish stocks. Does this have any military implications when talking about Sweden? Most probably it will have at least a naval implication as far as the protection of fish stocks and pollution of the Baltic Sea are concerned. The use of military tools in these contexts is a sensitive matter. A widening threat scenario likely to emerge with tight budgets, however, will most probably be a booster for increased cooperation and interaction between all the power tools possessed by a state.

These predictions from two well-known scholars might be looked upon as too speculative to be considered feasible or to be used as a platform from which to de-

velop military hardware. For example, stating that the consequence of global warming might reflect a total change in the political context is tantamount to admitting that the same argument could be used once again by top military leaders to dig into the implications and consequences of existential wars. At the same time, climate change may turn out to be gradual, with no catastrophic effects on human life. We simply do not know what will happen, which is very much in line with the fact that military planning is in essence about being ready to meet worst-case scenarios, and that military leaders on the strategic level must have the ability to translate an unpredictable future into military hardware.

The talent for visionary thinking concerns the ability to translate ongoing trends into military consequences and to envisage how these consequences will affect the future design of military instruments. To say that the ability for visionary thinking is of paramount importance for top military personnel is to state the obvious, but history has more than once given mankind a very gloomy picture indeed of this quality. In other words, military leaders at the strategic level tend to focus on what is going on at present while neglecting the possibly far greater challenges of the future.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that military leaders at the strategic level should also be able to detect looming threats which we are not able at present to define exactly. I am talking about a possible return to threats to national survival, which need a close focus on the territorial dimension and at the same time a readiness to counter these threats whenever and wherever they may occur. The significance of this view is that it may be needed to redevelop a territorial defence capability while at the same time regarding expeditionary capabilities as critical. Negative budgetary implications are obvious!

Explaining budgetary matters to politicians and to the public and possessing the skills to argue for budgetary implications are certainly part of the job for top military personnel, bearing in mind the general short time-frame of their political masters. Therefore, military leaders on the strategic level needs intellectual skills which make them capable of formulating a credible picture of future military needs, while they also need a certain robustness to be able to argue for resources in a situation characterized by economic scarcity, which is a reality in all small western welfare states, not least in Sweden.

2. Societal development

In highlighting the increasing risk of serious instability in the European welfare states, Tomas Ries argues that there have for more than a decade been indicators that Europe

is facing domestic economic and social decline. Frustration and alienation inside welfare states may reduce the influence of political institutions and promote the rise of populist political movements. Ries estimates that the Nordic states will be especially hard hit by this problem[3].

More specifically, globalisation may not only have positive effects. Production, for instance, has a tendency to move where manufacturing is cheapest. Ries gives a rather pessimistic view about the effects that globalisation will have on western welfare states, arguing that the first consequence of the fact that technology is making communication, travel and transport increasingly easy is that the resources necessary for production are no longer bound to be located inside the borders of national states. The second consequence is that economic actors are free to operate globally, so that the state gradually loses control over where production takes place. Each and every company has the freedom to move its production and find markets wherever it likes. This means increased competition between countries for the location of companies, including a very clear tendency to favour countries where labour costs are low. When the resources for production move, the working middle class is threatened with becoming a proletarian class, which creates a situation in which the state has to create non-productive jobs and/or provide social aid. Together with a tendency for highly educated young people to move to places where they can find attractive jobs, this leads to a drain of national competence, which could lead to a situation in the future in which states like Sweden will become poorer. Economic growth in Western Europe and North America has declined over the last 50 years from about 8% a year to 1–2%. Altogether this creates a situation of growing social tension, economic polarization and political radicalization[4]. This is another factor that is likely to lead logically to political ambitions to spend less money on security and defence. It therefore seems fairly safe to estimate that provided the welfare-state nations do not face any major challenges to their security environment, the following three factors will affect the way in which security and defence issues are handled.

First, all western states face increasing demands on their welfare systems. An ageing population means more and more pressure on the social budget which, dependent on the overall security situation, might indicate tighter restrictions on the resources spent on security and defence. For obvious reasons, top military officials must be skilled in selling arguments to their political masters that will allow the state to maintain reliable military capabilities. The same military officials must be able to cope with other consequences of the demographic change. The shrinking numbers of the young population will affect recruitment to the security organisations, especially to the armed forces. Competition with other branches of society will most probably force the military to employ a higher percentage of older people, women and immigrants.

Second, other socio-economic effects of globalisation such as refugees, terrorism and well organized crime seem to be leading to cooperation between the police, the coastguard service and the armed forces, and also to competition between them. As a result of its development towards a multi-cultural and multi-ethnical society, Sweden will probably face a widening welfare barrier. In other words, a polarisation into those who have and those who have not. This might change the overall domestic situation from a state of order to one involving more tension and violence between different groups in society. This could be reflected in needs to increase domestic security tools while maintaining credible military capabilities, a tricky balance indeed without the allocation of extra funding! In addition to being able to argue for resources and for increased cooperation between the providers of state security, top military officials, as representatives of the ultimate repressive instrument, should take a leading role in promoting broader cooperation and a deeper understanding between the instruments of power within society.

Third, the present tendencies in European societies to view security and defence as "non-existent subjects" have to be considered. A terrorist blow on Swedish soil might steer priorities towards the security sectors. At the same time, a prolonged situation in which there seemed to be no need to focus on security might end up with additional reductions, especially in the armed forces. Communicating arguments for why the nation needs its defence capabilities and what should be the role of the defence forces could become critical in such an environment, and this process should be inspired and directed by the nation's top military leaders.

On the issue of preventing defence matters from becoming a non-existent subject, a historical lesson learned in Finland might be of interest. Field-Marshal Gustaf Mannerheim saw very clear indications in the early 1930s that ongoing trends and tendencies would lead to war in the space of a few years. His good international and domestic connections with politics, diplomacy, industry and of course the military sphere allowed him to make realistic predictions and to take concrete action in order to prepare Finland for war, in spite of the fact that the general optimism regarding the prospects for peace and the difficult financial situation made this task an enormously challenging one. Nevertheless, Finland was the only Nordic country which was reasonably prepared for war in 1939, having relatively well-trained armed forces and, most important of all, a powerful spirit of resistance among its citizens[5].

3. Development of military capabilities designed for the future

Two aspects will be covered here concerning the development of future military capa-
bilities: firstly some overarching aspects influencing future structural and operational
concepts and secondly some critical remarks about bureaucratisation of attitudes to-
wards warfare. These thoughts are closely related to the concept of Network-Centric
Warfare.

To start with the overarching aspects, it is obvious that technological development
seems to be opening up new options for the defence of sparsely populated areas. At
the same time, the prices of modern technology for military purposes have risen, im-
plying increased costs for each and every unit. As Sverre Diesen states, a constant am-
bition will need more resources, while a constant budget will automatically result in
a process of continuous restructuring and lowered ambitions, so that the operational
volume will be reduced[6]. The immediate conclusion to be drawn from this is that the
ability of small nations like Sweden to maintain a broad variety of military capabili-
ties will be reduced in the future. Consequently, they will have to come to terms with
the twin problems of the costs of a credible defence, partly a consequence of military
non-alignment, and the amount that a small country can afford to spend on defence.
These challenges must receive the fullest attention from the top military leaders.

As an example, existing army structures still very much mirror the innovations
of the Napoleonic era, with army corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions
and companies. The main characteristics of these structures have shown remarkable
survival potential even at the beginning of the information era, and still form part of
the cultural dimension of many western military forces after an existence of about
200 years. It remains to be seen in the years to come whether or not there is enough
willingness to make substantial changes and adapt these structures to the possibili-
ties created by modern information systems.

Next, some remarks concerning Network-Centric Warfare. When Alfred Kaufman
talks about the "bureaucratisation of warfare", he warns of a tendency character-
ized by the simplistic expectation that if a military organisation is superior to that
of its opponent, the enemy will just "go away". He emphasises that a tendency has
been very clear for more than a decade for technological supremacy to drives the en-
emy towards an asymmetric response, focused on striking at perceived weaknesses.
Kaufman states that an enemy cannot be deterred from using weapons of mass de-
struction by technological supremacy, and emphasizes the need to develop military
capabilities which help us to identify and eliminate our exploitable vulnerabilities.
The essential thing, he observes, is that we should employ our military forces not to
maximize the destruction of the opponent but to gain maximal political influence[7].

Kaufman's criticism of the network-centric concept can be summed up as follows. Situational awareness of the enemy is focused on intelligence collection, surveillance and reconnaissance. Resilience has become merely a matter of logistics, engagement with the enemy is a question of long-range strike capability, and force cohesion has become almost synonymous with networking. In sum, our processes and procedures tend to develop into a bureaucratisation of the western way of waging war and lead us away from viewing war as essentially an intensely dynamic process[8].

Jan Henningsson comes close to Kaufman's view when he stresses that staff numbers have grown and the numbers of field-grade officers have increased. To give one example, the British 7th Armoured Brigade fielded 96 staff officers during the 2003 Iraqi war, compared with 45 staff officers during the 1991 Iraqi war. Staffs have doubled four times over since WW II. The reasons for this lie in new functions such as NBC protection, CIMIC, Media and better endurance. At the same time, larger staffs manned by more high-ranking officers have a tendency to make coordination more difficult, exceeding any benefit that comes from the increased numbers. There is also a tendency to focus on planning rather than current operations, with a risk that plans will lag behind execution[9].

Three examples may be quoted concerning moderate staffing. In the establishment of a general staff system, Sweden was one of those countries that were very much influenced by the system of Sharnhorst and Moltke in Prussia. When the general staff was established in Sweden in 1873 it consisted of 40 officers[10], covering the whole army. Second, in 1864, during the North American civil war, General Ulysses S. Grant commanded five armies operating in an area half the size of Europe and his staff consisted of fourteen officers[11]. Third, the staff of a WW II German armoured division consisted of roughly 50 people, including staff officers, non-commissioned officers, radio operators and clerks[12].

Where Sweden is concerned, the increasing bureaucratisation from the 1960s onwards seems to have its roots in the system of planning that was developed in the USA by Robert McNamara when he was Secretary of Defence and was adopted by most western nations. Wilhelm Agrell has argued that the Swedish defence forces have gradually moved towards more technocracy and bureaucracy for reasons that originate in a desire at the political level to exercise tight economic control[13].

From a broader perspective, bureaucratisation reflects processes in organisations connected with governance of the state, corporations, industry and the military. This is just another way of describing a tendency that influences highly developed western nations as a whole. The fact that Sweden belongs to that group of states gives a very clear indication that our society is interwoven in the same processes. From a military point of view, the tendency to adopt overarching managerial trends, not least

American ones, has to be viewed in connection with the absence of major conflicts. Another way of expressing Agrell's view is to state that less attention is paid to the intellectual dimensions of warfare. As a result, processes and procedures are in focus. The practical results are very similar to those expressed above by Alfred Kauffman and Jan Henningson. Effectiveness has been closely connected with processes such as organisational changes, new routines and the presence of budgetary considerations, rather irrelevant processes compared with the core military competences that legitimise the organisation. The effects of these processes inside an organisation can sometimes be described as deception directed towards an enemy. On the other hand, when the deception is directed towards oneself, severe problems can easily be expected to occur[14].

Since the 1990s, however, the military instrument has increasingly become an instrument for crisis management, with the result that forces are constantly being deployed for such purposes. From a Swedish point of view, the consequence is increased professionalism among officers, soldiers and units. At the same time there is a tendency looming at the executive level to focus command and control of the armed forces on the strategic level, and also to increase the focus on a broad variety of investigations and analyses in order to serve one's political masters[15].

Concluding remarks

Keeping military capabilities up to date – which means combat-ready – in an environment characterized by a widened threat scenario is the bottom line of military leadership at the strategic level. This self-evident statement has some very specific implications concerning where to focus our attention. I will concentrate on aspects connected with the information era.

Referring to the potential of the information society, it seems logical that the strategic leadership of western militaries should put more effort into creating structures and concepts that first of all can cope more effectively both with the network of non-state actors and also with regular armed forces representing state-level aggressors.

We are facing two parallel patterns at present. On the one hand, information technology offers a general possibility to reduce numbers in staff positions at every level. On the other hand, we can observe a very clear tendency to retain existing organizational structures and routines in a situation where new technology offers possibilities for reducing the number of command levels, organising staffs with fewer positions and creating more effective routines. One reflection made from a small-state perspective might be that the 40 general staff officers' positions available in the Swedish

organisational schedule of 1873 may perhaps have reflected the percentage of highly qualified officers that a small country could produce as a result of a very keen selection process[16].

There are certainly other major challenges for our top military personnel, such as the ever-present media pressure, the never-ending interaction with political masters and, especially when it comes to ongoing operations, the provision of information to the public, but these are things that have to be faced on a day-to-day basis. The overarching challenge is to appoint military leaders at the strategic level with enough vision to be able to break a tendency that has been repeated over and over again: the tendency to meet the threats of tomorrow with tools designed for yesterday's warfare.

Notes

[1]   Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century, Future Warfare* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), pp. 82–83.
[2]   Tomas Ries, "The New Nordic Security Agenda", in Bo Huldt, Tomas Ries, Jan Mörtberg, Elisabeth Davidsson (eds), *The New Northern Security Agenda* (Stockholm: Swedish National Defence College, 2003), p. 22.
[3]   Tomas Ries, "The New Nordic Security Agenda", in Bo Huldt, Tomas Ries, Jan Mörtberg, Elisabeth Davidsson (eds), *The New Northern Security Agenda* (Stockholm: Swedish National Defence College, 2003), p. 23.
[4]   Interview with Tomas Ries 2004-11-04. Notes in the author's possession.
[5]   Hugo Österman, Frihet och försvar (Helsingfors: Schildts, 1967), pp. 76–90.
[6]   Sverre Diesen, "A constant budget is the same as ongoing restructuring", in Norwegian Defence, 1:2006, p. 10.
[7]   Alfred Kaufman, *Curbing Innovation: How Command Technology Limits Network Centric Warfare* (Canberra: Argos Press, 2004), p. 69–70.
[8]   Kaufman, (2004), p. 73.
[9]   Jan Henningsson, "Network-Centric Warfare Command and Control System in the Iraq War", in The Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences, Proceedings and Journal, 5:2005, pp. 105–106.
[10] Tommy Jeppsson and Inge Tjöstheim, *Military Strategic Thinking From A Small State Perspective, A Nordic view on the role of military strategy* (Stockholm: National Defence College, 2005), p. 226.
[11] Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, *The Path To Leadership* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 27.
[12] Ray Merriam (ed.), General Herrman Balck, An Interview (Bennington, Vermont: Merriam Press, 2000), p. 52.
[13] Wilhelm Agrell, *The well-organised defeat* (Stockholm: Ordfront Publishing, 1990), pp. 206–207.
[14] Round-table discussion held at the Finnish National Defence College, Department of Strategic and Defence Studies, 2006-03-29, chaired by Doctor Stefan Forss.
[15] Jeppsson and Tjöstheim (2005), pp. 226–227.
[16] Jeppsson and Tjöstheim (2005), p. 227.