



RIKSREVISIONEN

Summary:

The Nordic Battlegroup 2008 – a part of
the EU's rapid reaction capability

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Summary

The EU has battle groups with the capacity to be deployed to different conflict zones at very short notice. According to EU guidelines, a battle group must have the capacity to be in the conflict zone, ready to begin an operation, within ten days of a decision by the Council of Ministers. The battle group must be able to operate for 30 days, with the possibility of an extension up to 120 days, and must be deployable within a 6000-kilometre radius of Brussels. The EU's battle groups must be able to carry out operations across the entire scale of conflicts, from humanitarian to peace enforcement operations.

In a bill presented in the autumn of 2004 the Swedish government suggested expanding Sweden's international capacity by developing and running a rapid reaction force under the auspices of the EU. The government's assessment was that such a rapid reaction force would consist of about 1100 Swedish soldiers and that the cost of this would be about SEK 1 billion including training, preparedness, materiel and operation. The Riksdag (the Swedish parliament) passed the bill.¹

The soldiers in the Nordic Battlegroup (NGB08) were employed on 1 July 2007 and were trained during the autumn of 2007. NGB08 was at preparedness between 1 January and 30 June 2008. The EU has not yet decided to deploy any of its battle groups.

The Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) has audited the formation of the Swedish-led battle group, NGB08, as this is an important part of Sweden's new mission-based defence concept.

¹ The Riksdag passed the bill in its entirety, but according to the parliamentary resolution there was no specific proposal as to the size or cost of the battle group. However, this information emerged from the government's proposal in the bill.

NBG08 was not organised and run in an efficient way

A complicating factor during the formation of NBG08 was that neither the Armed Forces nor the government had defined any limit to the size of the force. This contributed to making the Swedish participation in NBG08 grow gradually from 1100 soldiers to the 2350 soldiers who were at preparedness.

During the formation phase, control functions were added which were not part of the Armed Forces' normal line organisation. The Ministry of Defence also established an "informal working group" to set up an agenda of new questions and needs for the battle group during the period from 2005 to 2008.

The Armed Forces dedicated a lot of time to interpreting the EU's battle group concept, and this had consequences for the production of the force. The operative requirements for the battle group were ready when only a year remained before the beginning of the training period and the soldiers were to be employed. In practice, however, the requirements continued to change further for a period of almost a year.

The delays meant that the Armed Forces left out important production and that incomplete force objectives in turn affected the conditions for the formation of the force. The production phase was begun without completed force objectives.

NBG08 lacked the correct materiel and did not have sufficient training when the preparedness period began

Headquarters relinquished control of materiel orders to force units, which meant that too much and in some cases completely incorrect materiel was ordered. A gap thus emerged between the desired materiel and what was realistic in view of time and resource limitations. In addition to this, different materiel types were mixed with each other, generating many different materiel systems.

In the end the Armed Forces set the final date for materiel orders for April 2007, which was eighteen months too late considering other steps in force formation. Important materiel was therefore missing when the training period began. This meant that soldiers in many cases did not train with the right materiel, and that exercises continued into the preparedness period. When the preparedness period began, essential equipment was still missing.

Insufficient control of personnel supply

The battle group lacked a set force objective with complete personnel lists, which made the control of personnel supply more difficult. SNAO notes that the responsibility for personnel was divided between many units. The employment contracts did not regulate participation in a possible operation, which meant that there was no guarantee that all personnel would be available in the event of a decision to deploy the battle group.

Insufficient coordination of exercises

The Armed Forces turned the four scenarios in the EU's battle group concept into six "principal tactical tasks" in the training plan for the force. Those tasks that corresponded to the higher conflict levels in the battle group concept were given a lower priority by the Armed Forces during the training period. The force therefore did not carry out a sufficient amount of coordinated exercises for tasks at the higher end of the conflict scale.

The manoeuvre battalion consisted of companies from three different battalion types, which requires a high degree of coordination. However, the battle group was organised from a large number of force units, which led to large geographical distances within the battle group. This made coordination and coordinated exercises more difficult to achieve.

NBG08 was put at preparedness without any reservations about its use being reported to the EU.

Unsatisfactory cost control during the formation phase

Neither the government nor the Armed Forces made any special demands on financial follow-ups or feedback from NBG08, which contributed to making it difficult to follow up the costs afterwards. The Riksdag has been unable to obtain an overall picture of the costs for producing NBG08.

The force objectives generally lacked information about finances, despite the fact that financial aspects are an essential part of setting objectives. This made satisfactory cost control harder to achieve. At the end of 2007 the Armed Forces were faced with serious deficits, of which a considerable part could be linked to NBG08. The unplanned

expenditure caused forced dismissals during the ongoing preparedness period.

Ability to transport the battle group

The issue of how the battle group was to be transported to the operation area, strategically and tactically, had not been resolved when the preparedness period began. Sweden would have needed to initiate force generation in the EU in order to get access to other countries' tactical transports and helicopters for medical evacuation. The outcome of such a process was not clear, either in terms of what resources could be supplied or the time it would take.

Late and insufficient reporting to the Riksdag

The government had accepted that the number of Swedish soldiers in NBG08 grew drastically during the autumn of 2005, but it did not inform the Riksdag of this during the autumn of 2006. The information that the number of Swedish soldiers had more than doubled against what had been proposed in the 2004 bill did not reach the Riksdag until the autumn of 2007, when the soldiers had already been employed and the battle group was involved in coordinated exercises.

The government presented the Armed Forces' expenditure prognosis for NBG08 in the autumn of 2005, when NBG08 was still made up of 1100 Swedes. By the autumn of 2006 the personnel volume of NBG08 had increased to twice that size, but the government did not pass this information on to the Riksdag. At this time, the Armed Forces' total cost prognoses for the entire production period stood at approximately SEK 4 billion.

The Armed Forces' estimates of operational costs were considerably higher than was stated in the government's report to the Riksdag. It is SNAO's assessment that the operational costs for NBG08 presented by the government to the Riksdag were not comprehensive, and that the Riksdag therefore did not get a comprehensive picture of the total costs that would have followed on an operation.

SNAO's assessment

In summary, SNAO's assessment is that the Armed Forces and the government did not organise and control their work on the battle group in

an effective manner. Personnel supply, materiel supply and coordinated exercises are three essential factors in producing a force capable of carrying out its future missions. The control of each individual production factor and the coordination of these are fundamental in creating a functioning force. During production of NBG08 there were insufficiencies in all these respects. Headquarters did not have sufficient control of materiel supply. The force therefore did not have access to the correct materiel, or sufficient training, until half of the preparedness period had elapsed. Personnel supply was not controlled in a coordinated way either. NBG08 had not done enough coordinated exercises, and the insufficiencies which have emerged in the audit lead SNAO to question whether the force was in a condition to carry out the tactical tasks included in the scenarios at the higher conflict level. However, the force improved its capabilities during the preparedness period.

The financial aspects of the production of NBG08 were not given priority in either planning or the governing force objectives. Cost control was therefore unsatisfactory during the production of NBG08. The government's reporting to the Riksdag was late and insufficient, with the result that the Riksdag has not received a true picture of the situation.

The battle group produced did not correspond to the government's proposal to the Riksdag. More than double the proposed number of soldiers were at preparedness, and NBG08 ended up costing several times the sum that had been presented to the Riksdag.

Instead of making recommendations, SNAO intends to audit the effects of the transformation brought about by NBG08 in a follow-up audit of NBG11.