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SIMULTANEOUS SESSIONS - SESSION 6

**COORDINATING GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN
OPERATIONS**

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DR PÅL JONSON

MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, SWEDEN

Dr Pål Jonson, Minister for Defence, Sweden

Well, thank you so much and thank you for IISS for arranging the conference and of course also for Singapore for hosting it. It is really a privilege to be here, and it is my second consecutive year where I am here. And I always stress, I come here to listen and I come here to get a deeper understanding of this region, and also to discuss what we jointly can do in order to provide also stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

I just want to say that as an approach for me, as a European, I will try to compare and contrast a little bit how we are grappling with the concept of humanitarian operations in Europe right now and other places. Let me just start off with, Sweden has a long tradition of participating in international peace support operations. Since the late 1940s, actually, we did our first peacekeeping operations, and we have a heritage and a legacy of doing that. Normally when we speak about humanitarian operations in Europe, we think of it as alleviating human suffering. And that could be, for example, disaster relief, when you use the armed forces for that object. And we are still doing that, because after the earthquake in Türkiye, for example, we contributed with civilian contingencies and some assets and resources from the Swedish Armed Forces on that.

But on balance, if you look at how much we are engaged into international peace support operations now and a decade ago, you will find that we now, because of resource limitations, are more focused on defence and deterrence back home due to Russia's illegal aggression against Ukraine. And also, we do training, but we do training of Ukrainian soldiers. So that also puts some limitations to our ability to participate in international peace support operations and humanitarian operations – even though, of course, we are going to be continuing doing them.

I guess if you would broaden the scope of challenges to humanitarian operations, you can take note, of course, that revisionist powers, malign state actors and terrorists challenge our way of life, and they challenge also what we like to refer to as the rules-based international order. And this is a challenge, and, of course, nowhere is that being felt more than in Ukraine now due to Russia's illegal and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine. And it forced Sweden also to rethink and revamp its approach to security by becoming a full-fledged member of NATO on 7 March this year. So, that was a big step for us to take.

We always say supporting Ukraine is about standing up for the rules-based international order, because we do not want an international order where might give right. But I also say that supporting Ukraine is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do, because for us, from a European perspective, it is seen also as an investment into our own security. Because we fear that if Russia would be successful in this war, it would increase the pressure on neighbouring states, and it would be a source of inspiration for Russia and a big setback for us. And therefore we are going to continue supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes, and it is about standing up for a rules-based international order. So I just want to stress that.

There are, of course, other factors which are going to have a major impact, of course, on the need for humanitarian operations. The most evident is, of course, thinking about climate change, and I am sure we are going to be hearing that from the Minister from Fiji as well, that this is a very serious threat to our common security as well that will put pressure on our societies.

In Sweden we have also a tradition of working on something we call the Total Defence concept as well, and working quite a lot on civil defence and also on resilience. And that makes you better able to handle a crisis or a wartime situation. So resilience is a big concept, and we have been collaborating also very closely with Singapore, actually, on this concept. It is really a whole-of-government endeavour. So that is some of the aspects that we are grappling with.

Just on another note, connecting the Euro-Atlantic area and the Indo-Pacific area, there is a strong interlinkage of this that we are very much cognisant and aware of. We have, of course, interest into this region as well. Being a small and trading country, being export-oriented, freedom of navigation and safe sea lines of communications is also extremely important. When that is being challenged, we try to rise to the occasion, and right now it is being challenged in the Red Sea, as you know. And therefore we have this EU mission called *Aspides*, where Sweden is engaged too in assuring that the Houthis are not able to hinder the transportation of commodities for civilian ships as well. So that is something we would stress.

Just a few words, then, on how to go about doing these kinds of operations. On humanitarian operations, I think there are three buzzwords which are really crucial. I think unity, about defending the rules-based international order. It is about building strong political and security partnerships and cooperation, and it is having the resolve to act as well.

And just on this note, just to underline that also for Sweden this region is very important and becoming even more important. That is, of course, due to trade patterns, but also due to the death of distance. In some technologies – such as, for example, in cyber – there is information that has global factors to it as well. And therefore we are right now in the work of drafting a new defence-policy strategy for the Indo-Pacific, and it is going to entail three cornerstones.

Firstly, it is going to be engagement on the defence-policy lines. This means coming to venues like this and having strong interaction and political dialogue with political leaders and military actors in this region. It is going to be about military engagement; that could be our footprint in this region. Of course, we – on the contrary to, for example, France – do not have a permanent presence here on the naval area, but it could be that we could contribute to having manning on various ships or command structures. And of course, another backbone of our collaboration into this region is also based on the defence industry, technology innovation and material acquisition, where we have long traditions, of course, of cooperating, predominantly with Singapore, Australia and Japan, to mention a few.

So that is a few of our introductory remarks, at least. Thank you.

Dr Irene Mia, Senior Fellow for Latin America, and Conflict, Security and Development; Editor, Armed Conflict Survey, IISS

Thanks, Minister. It was really a very good overview of Sweden's engagement in the region. And I think it was particularly interesting what you were saying about the Total Defence concept and the concept of resilience, which I think is really important also when we talk about really addressing humanitarian needs. And it is something we were discussing as well, the preparedness to really face these emergencies.