Generals, Admirals, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a true honour to be here at the Finnish National Defence Course Association and to address such a distinguished audience. As newly appointed Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces, it gives me a timely opportunity to manifest the deep bilateral relation between our two countries and our armed forces. I have not yet concluded my first month on the job – and this is already my second visit to Helsinki!

No country is closer to Sweden than Finland. Our historical and cultural bonds are strongly intertwined. Tomorrow I will visit the Hietaniemi cemetery to honour the memory of the fallen Finnish and Swedish soldiers. It is with humility and gratitude we today remember how Finland at the time held off the westward expansion of the Soviet Union. Finland’s freedom was secured thanks to the Finnish army’s resilience at Iломantsi and other places, thus deciding the fate of Scandinavia. We commemorate and thank you for your sacrifice.

Our relationship is unique. It is built on mutual trust, formed and strengthened over decades of devoted cooperation. It is a relationship that enjoys exceptionally broad support not only from our elected leaders, but also among our respective populations. Our countries have a shared and distinct responsibility to contribute to the stability in the Baltic Sea Region, and our
respective security policy is firmly anchored in the principle that security is built together with other nations. At times of turmoil and uncertainty in our neighbourhood and beyond, it is natural for us to close ranks with Finland.

I will get back to our bilateral cooperation, but let me first outline the main features driving the Swedish Armed Forces today and the coming five years. I will explain our assessment of the security environment in our neighbourhood, and how it has motivated the political direction for the Swedish Armed Forces. Increased military capabilities and international cooperation are of certain importance, as well as the necessity to better understand and jointly respond to modern warfare threats.

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Our strategic context today is more unpredictable and challenging than in half a century. The conflicts in Syria and Iraq – driven by repressive governance and violent extremists groups such as ISIL - are causing immense human suffering and the largest wave of refugees since World War II. These are developments that affect also our societies at the core. At the same time, we approach the two year commemoration of Maidan. Russia’s subsequent and continuous illegal annexation of Crimea represents the greatest challenge to Europe’s security order since its creation. Indeed, Moscow’s disrespect for existing borders continues to bring uncertainty to our neighbourhood.

In our own vicinity, we are witnessing the return of geopolitics in the Baltic Sea area. Fundamentally, the driver is Russia’s political and military behaviour. It has been a brusque return from the “strategic timeout” that guided our actions the last couple of decades. We need to plan accordingly, and our responses
must be implemented with rigor and determination. The new reality will most likely be with us for a foreseeable future.

The Swedish Armed Forces’ reading of Russia is based on the following assumptions:

- Russia will continue its effort to gradually enhance its military capability – even if it requires substantial economic sacrifices - primarily through intensified and more complex exercises and the introduction of modern equipment;

- The on-going Russian defence reform goes hand in hand with a demonstrated political readiness to employ military means to achieve political objectives. In short, the threshold to unilaterally resort to military means has been lowered;

- Russia’s strategic objectives include expanding its reach as a global power, ensuring it has a decisive voice on events close to Russian borders, and preventing the further eastward expansion of NATO;

- While Russia’s strategic objectives seem clear enough, its day-to-day behaviour can be difficult to predict, and

- Hybrid warfare has become the preferred modus operandi of the Russian leadership. As theory of war dictates, it is designed to exploit the adversary’s weaknesses. In this case, it aims to do so by operating in grey
zones – between war and peace, between the military and civilian realms.

We should note that Russian posture is not limited to the Baltic Sea region. Similar behaviour has been demonstrated for example on the Asian border. Japanese fighters more frequently counter provocative Russian flight patterns the same way our Gripen fighters do in the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, the recent Russian military activities in Syria raise new questions about Russia’s intentions as they risk escalating and deteriorating an already dire and intensely complex conflict.

We do not assess that Sweden today is facing a direct threat of military aggression. However, the polarization between Russia and the Western countries has deepened. As the strategic importance of the Baltic Sea region has intensified, an increased number of actors – Russia, the United States, other NATO allies, NATO itself, Finland and Sweden - are also stepping up operations and exercises. This augments the risk for confrontation in one form or another. Moreover, foreign intelligence activities directed against Sweden, including the Armed Forces, have increased. The most troubling incident was the underwater activities deep into the Stockholm archipelago one year ago. Notably, the origin remains unidentified.

The security challenges in our neighbourhood are naturally the point of departure for the Swedish defence bill for the period 2016-2020. It was approved by parliament in June and significantly increases defence spending – some 10 percent by 2020 - after two decades of successive reductions. The agreement between the government and the centre-right opposition is
important in itself. It demonstrates the broad political support and understanding for the challenges we face, and the means we need to address them.

The budgetary increase is indeed welcome and necessary, but we also need to be more innovative. Our military profession is unique, and it is only us who can maintain and develop our operations. The current situation has added urgency to the comprehensive reform process that the Swedish Armed Forces are pressing ahead since 2009 and that aims at creating a robust, agile and deployable force which can respond effectively to security challenges at home, in the Baltic Sea area and beyond. High readiness forces will ensure timely responses in peace and war.

My number one priority is therefore to deliver the enhanced military capabilities that the governmental decision – and the security situation - calls for. This goes for all three services – both in terms of materiel and personnel. The recruitment and retention of qualified women and men is absolutely essential. Regarding materiel, investments will be made in updating individual equipment for soldiers, sailors and airmen, communication equipment and weapon systems. On the army side, tanks will be upgraded and new mortars acquired; the navy will receive additional personnel; continued investments will be made for air defence, including medium range surface-to-air missiles.

Training and exercises are top priorities. When we step up our exercises, nationally and together with others, we strengthen our preparedness and signal our resolve to keep our vicinity stable and secure. All three services of the armed forces have recently concluded their respective annual exercises. In
2017 a capstone exercise will be conducted to advance their joint capability. Together with Finland we conduct exercises with different services and different complexity levels almost on a day to day basis, making us more effective and efficient.

Another important dimension of the bill is the renewed total defence concept: relevant government agencies are to resume planning for civilian defence and civilian support to military defence. This was an integral part of the total defence concept applied during the Cold War, but was subsequently abandoned during the 1990s. Its resumption is most welcome, not least given the emergence of hybrid threats which will require close coordination between all relevant actors.

Modern warfare is conducted with many means and needs to be countered on several levels. It is key to achieve a multidimensional understanding of the hostile combination of political, economic, diplomatic and military means that an adversary can use to achieve its goal. We – as open and democratic societies - need to improve our awareness and readiness to manage these new conditions. We should foster quick decision making, based on solid intelligence and – maybe most importantly – seamless cooperation between all relevant actors, military as well as civilian.

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Our security policy is based on cooperation with partners. The practical implication is that we must have the ability to provide and receive military support. Therefore, we must fulfil our responsibility to strengthen our national capabilities, but the measures now being implemented in the Swedish Armed Forces should be understood in a broader context, reaching from the Baltic Sea
to wider Europe as well as globally. This is why we further enhance our already extensive international military cooperation, especially with our Nordic and Baltic partners. We also explore closer collaborations with other bilateral actors in Europe, the United States, in the European Union, as a close partner to NATO, and globally through the UN.

With Finland we are right now advancing our cooperation to an unprecedented level. This includes establishment of secure communications on all levels, mutual use of naval base infrastructure and air bases, and development of combined units such as a naval task group. We do this with the fundamental aim of being able to work together in times of crisis and conflict. Most notably, we intend to extend our partnership to include operational planning, also beyond peacetime if necessary and after political decisions in each country.

We also intensify our long standing bilateral defence cooperation with the United States. The transatlantic link is crucial to European security, even more so today, and the United States is naturally a key partner to both Sweden and Finland. The main areas for Swedish-US cooperation include interoperability, training and exercises, armament, research and development and multilateral operations. Our combined efforts will contribute to the overall ambition to meet current security challenges in Europe and beyond.

Our partnership with NATO remains essential, and we constantly seek to refine it. Joint efforts by Finland and Sweden have repeatedly proven successful in influencing the Alliance to enhance its partnership programs. The deteriorating situation in and around the Baltic Sea also impacts Sweden’s relationship with NATO. The policy framework is still that of partnership, but the content is likely
to change as the Alliance’s centre of gravity is shifting from crisis management operations to operations and exercises in the Baltic Sea.

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As we are readjusting our focus to national defence, Swedish commitments to global peace and security remain. Swedish forces are deployed in challenging missions, notably in Mali in MINUSMA and in Iraq for the international coalition against ISIL. It is not a zero-sum game. While our resources certainly need to be balanced geographically, military capability and interoperability are strengthened through international missions. The experience gained in Afghanistan, Mali, and Iraq and outside the Horn of Africa, feeds directly into stronger armed forces also at home.

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In closing: The unpredictable security environment requires both more robust military capabilities and a greater awareness of the nature of modern warfare. The Swedish Armed Forces thus need to strengthen both the means and the ways to apply them. And we need to advance quickly; our capabilities must be accessible at short notice. To effectively counter our common challenges, we build security in collaboration with others. In this effort, Finland is our most longstanding partner.

Thank you! Kiitos!