

TRIDENT JUNCTURE; NATO SHIFTS BACK TO CORE BUSINESS IN THE 'FAR NORTH

Geopolitical changes, a military build up from other countries in the world or having been too long away from traditional large scale exercises. Whatever reasons their might be, NATO sees itself forced to show its potency. To reflect itself but surely also in a clear view to impress others with a high visibility Livex exercise. Trident Juncture 2018 has been the largest collective defense exercise of NATO forces since the end of the cold war period and saw the highest activity between 25 October and 7 November. Russian military observers were invited.

RESPONDING ON THREAT FROM ANY DIRECTION

The exercise with a joint character involved around 50.000 participants from 29 NATO countries plus Sweden and Finland deploying 150 aircraft, 65 vessels and up to 10.000 vehicles to main exercise locations in central and eastern Norway, surrounding areas of the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea including Iceland and the airspace of Finland and Sweden. NATO is eager to show its credibility but also tries to find its way in how to respond on an article 5 threat which stands for an attack on one is an attack on all. This implicates the participation of all NATO allies but more than this 'Partnership for peace' (PfP) countries such as Sweden and Finland are more and more embedded in NATO warfare and even allows troops and airplanes operating from their grounds.

The shifting of those countries to NATO is point of controversy to Russia who is criticizing NATO to expand to Russian borders. NATO from their point of view has concerns about the large scale Russian exercises of the Voshkod series as it said it resembles attacks on the West, in a same way as the Zapad war games in Belarusia as observed before but what NATO bothers the most is the character of those 'Snap' exercises showing an extremely short preparation time of only a few days involving ten- to hundred thousands of troops. NATO has to defend itself is the clear view and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg declared that Russia should not fear because the exercise is purely defensive.

NAVAL STRIKE GROUP

Commander of NATO's Allied Joint Force Command (JFC), Naples and commander of the 6th fleet Admiral James Foggo took up the responsibility of conducting the full spectrum of joint and naval operations of Trident Juncture and flew in one of the two to the exercise attached PS-8 Poseidon aircraft from Sigonella to Iceland (aircraft later relocated to RAF Lossiemouth) where in the prelude of TRJE18, operation Northern Screen started. Both Iceland and Norway were reinforced with U.S. Marines. In leading the exercise he aimed to travel throughout the region for key leader engagement and in the role of observer being back-upped by the Canadian Lieutenant General Christian Juneau who was overseeing the exercise from the NATO Joint Warfare Centre in Stavanger and commanding the land forces.

A main position for the commander was applied by the Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group including USS Harry S. Truman (CVN-75, Nimitz class), 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit with USS Iwo Jima (LDH7), USS Gunston Hall (LSD44) and USS New York (LPD21) amphibious assault force, command and control ship USS Mount Whitney (LCC20) assisted by a Ticonderoga class Aegis guided missile cruiser and five Arleigh Burke class destroyers adding another 6000 troops and some 100 aircraft to TRJE18. This Strike Group was in fairly short time activated and heading in a rapid return to Europe as part of a reinforce objective and to show quick alertness. From his

favorite ship the USS Mount Whitney, which is a communication centre, he was located in the heart of Trident Juncture.

TESTING RAPID DEPLOYMENT

Besides 24.000 navy personnel some 20.000 landforces, 3.500 air personnel and a further 1.000 logistic specialist also a 1.300 personnel from a range of NATO Commands were participating in the exercise. Logistics plays a tremendous important role and the ability of rapid deployment can be decisive. That's why he calls logistics 'the sixth domain of warfare'. Foggo noted that the objective on this was to test the 30/30/30 point with the move of 30 battalions, 30 aircraft squadrons or 30 ships in 30 days. In his opinion the memberstates did extremely well with 60 shiploads and 180 flights on 27 arriving points in Norway with several countries facilitating their transport aircraft and shipping facilities.

Some long lines were used like railroads or highways through the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark as was the case of the deployment of the 2.700 U.K. forces including Royal Irish Regiment, the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment and supporting units and 480 vehicles first arriving in Rotterdam harbour before going 'on the road' to Norway. Germany shipped their troops, including 20 heavy tanks and 200 armoured vehicles, from Northern Germany harbours and flew soldiers to Norway in totally up to 8.000 troops to underline German readiness in the contrary to recent rumours about shortfalls. Ships and aircraft from Canada and some 2.000 troops crossed the Atlantic to Norway including eight CF-188 Hornet Fighters, a Polaris tanker, two CP-140 MPA aircraft and helicopters and transport aircraft.

NORWEGIAN POINT OF VIEW

Norwegian Minister of Defense Franke Bakke-Jensen noted in the first week of TRJE 18 "being a responsible and credible ally is very important to us. We take our responsibility in NATO seriously and remain committed". Norway is a small country with a high strategic value. We remain depending for our defense on our allies and TRJE 18 gives us a great opportunity to receive and handle a great number of troops and operate collectively with allies and partners". "It will also test our total defense concept" This includes some 10.000 of Norwegian troops, logistic support, cooperation with civil authorities, all military air bases and a substantial part of Norwegian Air Force. Scenarios were scripted in warfare under extreme arctic conditions including land battle exercises and amphibious assault missions mainly in Norway and air-strike and defense missions above Norway, Sweden and Finland. Admiral Haakon Bruun-Hansen, Chief of Defence of Norway recalled the opinion why Norway invited NATO to exercise massive on their grounds as he mentioned that invoking Article 5 means to be able to receive Allied forces and reinforcements, to that we must have plans and we must rehearse the plans. Norway operated in all sections with equipment from all branches including the highly advanced F-35.

INTEGRATED SCANDINAVIAN PARTICIPATION

Sweden and Finland deployed troops in Norway which was remarkable. Comparing with previous participation the number of troops was significantly increased as were those of Finland and even a contribution of the Finnish Pori Brigade, a Jaeger brigade trained for Finnish Rapid Deployment was embedded in a Swedish brigade resembling the ongoing cooperation process. Swedish Gripen fighters and Finnish F-18's were located in Norway and both Sweden and Finland itself received American company in their country. Kallax Air base in Sweden became the operational ground for 18 F16 of 418th FS Sq/52nd wing USAF Spangdahlem. Rovaniemi Air base in Finland received some KC-135's to refuel the Belgian and Finnish aircraft.

Both deployments accompanied by KC-135 Stratotankers. The Commander of the deployed Finnish F-18 Squadron in Ørland said "We are not part of NATO but our training program rises to the same level and we have trained regularly with NATO as part of the EU. We are oftenly asked to play the role of 'bad guys' in exercises" "It is a kind of game to compromise NATO units and level our own capabilities" "Sure Russia is our neighbour but we consider NATO a defensive

organization and see no problem to cooperate as long as it is in our interest” Trident Juncture was a good opportunity to carry out complex air operations between allied forces in rough Norwegian weather conditions under NATO Allied Air Command in Ramstein in coordination with Norwegian National Air Operations Centre (NAOC). Besides the traditional offensive and defensive counter air operations (OCA and DCA), aircraft of 14 different countries practised reconnaissance, air-to-air refueling missions, special missions with JSTARS and AEW missions with AWACS air forces also supported land forces in the field exercise area and maritime forces off the coast of Western and Central Norway.

CONCEPT WITH MANY TACTICAL EXERCISES

In several land battles army units were tested with a main focus on tactical units such as an Italian-led brigade to counter an USMC attack on Oppdal with some 5.000 troops included. On two different axes in Tynset and Femundsmarka the same amount of troops consisting of Norwegian, British, German, Danish, Polish, Finnish and French troops fought there scenario, with tanks, artillery and armoured vehicles testing interoperability, all in JOINT settings. On another occasion helicopters from the Canadian Brigade conducted an airlift on terrain secured by the Italian Brigade with total participation of 1.000 troops. TRJE 18 was also a ‘stress test’ to the NATO Response Force (NRF), especially the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) would be certified.

The VJTF is a multinational task force with soldiers from Germany, the Netherlands and Norway which Norwegian Minister Bakke-Jensen assured; “They are really standing shoulder to shoulder” Germany is leading the VJTF Spearhead Force during 2018 and the Netherlands will adopt this position in 2019. VJTF includes a tank Brigade with mixed German and Dutch soldiers, is deployable in Baltic rotational missions and trained to act with ships and aircraft. Several Scenarios with changing elements and mixes of troops from many NATO countries were trained. And so was the variety of ships and aircraft. From Turkish F-16’s, Italian Typhoons and Tornados to British Hawks and Danish and Swedish frigates/Corvettes to French amphibious assault ship FS Dixmude it is in essence too much to describe it all. Harbours and air bases were occupied with assets from many countries when not at sea or in the air.

NORTH & SOUTH

One of the more important parts of Trident Juncture was the concept of a Northern Force and a Southern Force fighting each other. On the land northern forces led by NATO’s Allied Land Command comprising Norwegian Brigade Nord and brigades from Canada and Sweden versus southern force led by the German/Dutch Corps and comprising brigades from Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. In addition to land forces an amphibious force from U.S. Marine Corps assisted the attack on the southern force. This was followed some days later by a counter attack from the south Forces and a second amphibious force led by the Dutch including their amphibious ships Zr.Ms. Karel Doorman (A833) and Zr.Ms. Johan de Witt (L801) and the French Dixmude (L9015). A similar concept happened on the Atlantic Ocean with a northern force formed by Canada, Denmark Norway, Poland the USA & UK and a Southern force consisting of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 & 2 (SNMG1 & 2) including 15 countries. Interoperability was tested and threat was represented by surface ships, submarines and maritime patrol aircraft such as Orions. Aerial threats, anti-submarine warfare and mine sweeping missions were also exercised. Even Russia visited the maritime actions by an overflight of a Tupolev 142 aircraft off the coast of Norway. Other Russian influence were attempts to disturb GPS communication.

GAINING AMPHIBIOUS SKILLS

International press was invited on a media event at Byneset representing an amphibious assault mission being one of the Key-elements in Trident Juncture. The assault joined by 3.000 troops and the ships of the South Forces were supported by Dutch Cougar helicopters from the Zr.Ms. Karel Doorman and Zr.Ms. Johan de Witt, Osprey aircraft and Sea Hawk helicopters from the

Harry S. Truman Strike Group. Prior to this local air superiority was achieved by fighter jets and Combat Air Patrols (CAP) were started. While Trident Juncture was preparing the last phase, a commando exercise, Admiral Foggo visited the Zr.Ms. Johan de Witt and gave his compliments to the 2.200 Dutch troops who performed excellent, especially in assault missions. The Netherlands will be in the leading role of the multinational amphibious task group in the NATO Response Force in 2020 and Trident Juncture was a test for this. An interview with the Dutch Minister of Defense Mrs. Ank Bijleveld is probably typical for NATO cooperation:

“The test is to see how fast you can organize it and where to find our weak points. NATO must face reality and being prepared is our primary task. Coming of an era of defence cuts, the time has been arrived to build up again and to see if we can we fulfill NATO requests”, “Norway is an excellent and demanding training possibility and our ties with this country are tight, we even will fly the same F-35 airplane”. Statements from NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg and the Norwegian Minister of Defense Franke Bakke-Jensen gave more or less the same press statements. The last comment underlines the mutual brotherhood between the different countries, always there when working together in large scale defense drills like Trident Juncture.

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