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The (S)wedish idea of security: idealism or realism?

– Exploring the construction of neutrality and non-alignment in the Swedish identity in Margot Wallström's and Ann Linde's discourse

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Abstract

Since regaining power in 2014, the Swedish Social Democratic party has pushed a security policy line combining increased spending on the Swedish armed forces and deepened international cooperation while at the same time maintaining the policy of military non-alignment. This tripartite strategy has been nicknamed the “Hultqvist Doctrine” after the current Swedish Minister for Defence. During this period, the support for Swedish NATO membership has increased both in parliament and among the general public. At the same time, the idea of remaining ‘neutral’ in foreign affairs is still prominent in the Swedish identity and particularly cherished by the political left. Legitimising the security and foreign policy can thus be described as a – arguably paradoxical – balancing act between upholding the idea and tradition of Sweden as a ‘neutral’ or non-aligned actor in foreign affairs while simultaneously seeking increased military security through deeper cooperation with NATO. Drawing on previous research on the development of Swedish foreign and security policy, this study aims to contribute to our understanding of the self-image and ideas that have formed the ambiguous character of the security doctrine pushed by the Social Democratic Party since regaining power in 2014. By conducting a Thematic Analysis of the discourse by Margot Wallström and Ann Linde – the Ministers of Foreign Affairs between 2014 and 2022 – this study identifies three themes that each capture a pattern of meaning across the dataset: ‘An independent force for good’, ‘Swedish Exceptionalism’, and ‘A democratic role model’. A key argument is that historical consciousness, dramaturgy, and a processual-relational approach to a large degree can help explain the dynamics of the Social Democratic Party’s ambiguous discourse around foreign and security policy and its development.

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Preface

On the 24th of February 2022, just a couple of weeks after I started writing this thesis, President Vladimir Putin ordered the Russian army to invade Ukraine. The event has already led to historical changes in the dynamics of the international system, beyond the fact that it is the first time in Europe since WWII that a great military power has invaded a democratic and sovereign country. The EU has thus far shown unprecedented effectiveness and unity with nearly unanimous isolation and condemnation of Russia through sanctions and closed air traffic (Europa.EU, 2022). In Sweden, the debate on security policy, military alliance, and NATO membership has for a long time not been as prominent in the public discussion as right after the invasion. The Swedish government's swift decision to send weapons to the Ukrainian army is one of the events that have sparked much attention, as the last time Sweden sent arms to a war zone was to Finland during the Winter War in 1939 (SVT Nyheter, 2022). Although there is a feeling that historical decisions are taken by the day, the cultural and historical base tends to become even more prominent and essential for individuals and collectives to navigate society when it is going through a lot of change and transformation. By providing the longer lines in how the mindset regarding Swedish security policy has developed up to this point, I hope that this study will contribute to an increased understanding of the events and actions taking place at this exact time and in the near future.

1. Introduction

“What was it that made it possible for Sweden to handle the situation in the 1930s and 40s? It was that we were extremely skilled in not picking any side right away. It is fundamental that we during this whole time have worked with neutrality and non-alignment.”

This comment by the Swedish Social Democratic EU MEP Heléne Fritzon sparked much controversy on social media and was met with heavy criticism from some of her political opponents (Jakob Hanke Vela & Lynch, 2022). Fritzon's quote is taken from a debate that took place in May 2019 but did not go viral until January 2022 in light of the increased tensions between the West and Russia, which had put Sweden's relationship with NATO at the top of the political agenda. A journalist from Sweden's biggest morning paper Dagens Nyheter (DN), was one of those who criticised Fritzon's statement. He argued that although there is nothing wrong in defending Sweden's previous neutrality policy, it is not necessarily something that Swedish political representatives should brag about, as it implies that the countries that were occupied or fought against Germany ended up in that situation because they were not as 'skilled' as Sweden (Helmerson, 2022). The controversy surrounding Fritzon's statement may be anecdotal. However, it does highlight a relatively unexplored phenomenon in Swedish political culture and the self-image of its role on the world stage. Sweden's legacy of neutrality is arguably a prominent factor that has shaped the Swedish identity and historical consciousness. In turn, the hypothesis is that this legacy plays a role in how Swedish politicians, particularly the Social Democratic Party, understand and decide foreign and security policy to this day. The taboo of questioning or even discussing the policy of military non-alignment; Sweden's late and hesitant decision to join the European cooperation in 1995; and the continued resistance to adopting the Euro, are just some examples of where the question of 'neutrality' has become central and showcased the Social Democrats ambivalent attitude towards formally 'picking sides'.

1.1 Background

The perception of Sweden as a country that remains on the sidelines when the world's superpowers are fighting is deep-rooted in the Swedish understanding of its history and identity. The phrase "our military non-alignment has served us well" is a mantra in the Swedish discourse and is recited almost automatically whenever the question of deciding Sweden's approach to different security issues is up for discussion (Olsson & Lindkvist, 2022). This perception comes from the idea that history proves that impartiality has been the key to Sweden's security and prosperity, and many Swedes are proud to point out that the country has not been to war for over 200 years. Sweden does indeed have a long history of using neutrality and non-alignment as a strategy, tracing back to the Thirty Years' war in the 17th century. The foundations for the modern 'neutrality' principle – characterised by peacekeeping and balance in the security politics – arguably dates back to when the Swedish king Charles XIV John proclaimed neutrality in 1834 out of fear of a potential war between the great powers at that time (Bring, 2008: 14-15). The neutrality and non-alignment policy has naturally changed shape and goals various times over the course of the past 200 years, both formally and the idea of it. Nevertheless, the 'myth' of an unbroken tradition of Swedish neutrality has been an essential part of the story of Sweden's past. As an example, this tradition was cited already by the Swedish Government in the 1950s to justify the neutrality principle that established Sweden's security and foreign policy strategy during the entire Cold War (Österberg, 13: 2020).

The neutrality principle was formally abandoned soon after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was replaced by a policy of military non-alignment in the official Swedish security doctrine in 1992. One main reason was that there no longer existed two great powers, the US and the Soviet Union, for Sweden to stand 'neutral' in-between. Another reason was that the government felt the need to adapt the security policy's compatibility with a potential EU membership, which Sweden eventually applied for two years later (Bring, 2008: 26). During the last two mandate periods, starting in 2014, the Social Democratic-led government has adopted a security doctrine that openly strives for more and deeper military cooperation with other military powers, where the most profound and frequent

cooperation is with Nato (DN.SE, 2015). At the same time, the government has been keen to insist that increased military cooperation does not, and should not, have any implications for the policy of military non-alignment. This security line has been nicknamed the ‘Hultqvist Doctrine’ after the Social Democratic defence minister Peter Hultqvist. The Hultqvist Doctrine has been the Social Democratic government’s approach to the new-old security situation that has emerged due to Putin’s increasingly aggressive efforts to reestablish Russia’s role as a global superpower. Russia’s escalation has transformed the Swedish political discourse on security. Following the Russian aggression toward Ukraine in 2014, the security policies and definition of security that dominated in the 1990s and the early 2000s have gradually been abandoned and put in a more critical light. There is now a broad consensus that the dismantling of the national military in the 1990s was wrong and a situation where the parties in the Swedish Riksdag – even the traditionally pacifist ones – compete for who can promise the most money to the military budget (Sveriges Radio, 2022).

As mentioned, the Social Democrats have continued to argue that they cherish the military non-alignment, despite the radically increased military cooperation with Nato. In a speech from November 2021, Hultqvist clearly expressed this position by stating, "There will be no applications for membership as long as we have a Social Democratic government. As long as I am Minister of Defence, I will certainly never participate in such a process. I can guarantee that to everyone" (Nilsson: 2021). The Hultqvist Doctrine has been criticised from different directions. Parts of the left argue that it moves Sweden closer and closer to a NATO membership, and opponents from the Right believe that the Social democrats are too rigorous and naive in their stance that Sweden has to remain military non-aligned. The basic idea that security is primarily built through soft power and cooperation in intergovernmental organisations, and the will to shift focus to non-military threats, is still vital for the Social Democratic party's rhetoric and identity. At the same time, the government is forced to address how its foreign and security policy will keep Sweden safe in a world where the increasing military threats in its neighbourhood are a reality. That area of conflict is the core of what this study aims to explore. The overarching issue is how the Social democrats have tried to frame the logic of the Hultqvist doctrine in relation to their traditional understanding of Sweden’s role in the world and how to build security.

1.2 Research questions and structure

As established above, the foreign and security policy of the Swedish Government in recent years has arguably been sort of a paradox. The hypothesis is that the legacy of neutrality in the Swedish identity and self-image can explain its ambiguous character, at the same time as the development of the security policy in itself continuously reshapes the interpretation of that legacy. In this essay, I will analyse the discourse of the two most recent Social Democratic Ministers of Foreign Affairs: Margot Wallström and Ann Linde. The aim is to explore the dominant themes in the Swedish and Social Democratic identity and understanding of the past that they relate to in order to justify their foreign and security policies. By weighing in the legacy of the Swedish post-war context and attitudes toward military alliances and other international cooperation, we can increase the understanding of how the Social Democratic government assesses the possibilities and importance of advocating for continued military non-alignment in the light of contemporary global and national developments.

The guiding research questions in this essay will be the following: How do Margot Wallström and Ann Linde justify the Hultqvist Doctrine? Are there any differences in how Margot Wallström and Ann Linde justify their foreign and security policies? If so, what are the main reasons behind that? How has the discourse and sense-making of foreign and security policy developed from 2014 to 2022? What central themes can explain developments of the approach to the 'Swedish' idea of neutrality, non-alignment, and security?

I will start by discussing previous research about the development of Sweden's security and foreign policy during the last decades. This discussion will provide the starting point for the following chapter, where I outline the theoretical and methodological framework used to guide the analysis. For the analysis, I use a Thematic Analysis method in combination with a theoretical framework based on theories related to security, neutrality, non-alignment, historical consciousness, dramaturgy, and Processual-Relationism.

1.3 Previous research

The relevant literature for the research topic of this study is not easily defined, as the topic itself could be approached from many different angles. Thus, I have tried to narrow it down to a few research areas that I believe are relevant for the background and analysis. The research mainly follows two different tracks. The first field is research about the development of Sweden's approach to security, neutrality and military non-alignment, discussed here in order to explore the unique characteristics of Swedish foreign and security policies. Sweden's security policy has first and foremost been studied within the fields of political science and international law, where the primary focus has been to look at how Sweden's formal foreign policy has developed in relation to different political contexts and events. The other main field where Sweden's role as 'neutral' has been studied is within historical research. In this case, the main research topics have been the Swedish government's activity or potential room for action over the course of history. The aim is to explore the context in which these policies have developed, mainly focusing on the periods around WWII, the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union when Sweden joined the EU and increased Russian aggression after 2014. The rest of this chapter aims to discuss further how the study conducted here adds to research on Swedish security policy and gives an overview of previous research in areas relating to this thesis that form the starting point for this essay. The discussion will discuss previous research regarding definitions and development of neutrality, non-alignment and Swedish security and foreign policy from a judicial and political science perspective, and the historical research on the Swedish society's relationship to its history of neutrality.

The place of neutrality in Swedish historical culture is quite complex to pin down. The perception of Sweden's place in the world is multi-layered. The top layer is the post-Soviet time, when Sweden formally became a part of Europe through the EU, endured economic crises, and embraced neoliberalism. During this time, criticism of Sweden's passivity in WWII emerged as a prominent topic for the first time. The idea that 'neutrality' helped Sweden stay out of the battles of WWII had been nearly uncontested up to that point and still lingers on in the Swedish collective memory (Bring, 2008: 12). Before that change in the discourse, there had been an academic consensus on the 'small state realism' perspective within historical research. The idea was that a small state like Sweden, with relatively non-existent military or economic powers, did not have any other option than to

make concessions to Nazi Germany, which in turn was what enabled Sweden to stay out of WWII and avoid occupation. It was not until the 1990s that the approach to Sweden's neutrality during WWII turned more critical. The small state realism perspective was gradually replaced by a 'moral counterstory' that has evolved as the dominant interpretation framework within academia, highlighting the Swedish government's appeasement and 'cowardness' during the war (Österberg, 2020: 10). However, the varying impact of these two perspectives of Sweden's history on the minds and identity of the Swedish politicians and the public is still relatively unexplored. Furthermore, I have not been able to find literature that specifically aims to study how the moral perspective has evolved in Swedish political culture. Therefore, this adds to the relevance of the approach in this study that the legacy of Sweden's neutrality politics is critical to address to better understand the characteristics of contemporary Swedish politics and politicians.

Various previous studies have studied the arguably paradoxical character and development of Sweden's foreign and security policy and practices after the Cold War. Aggestam and Hyde-Price argue that Sweden has pursued a policy of 'military activism' in the post-Cold War period. This policy has partly been driven by the more 'idealistic' internationalist tradition of Swedish politics. This tradition is showcased by the tendency to rhetorically justify increased participation in multinational military operations in terms of defending peace, security, and development (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015: 480). Moreover, they mean that the policy of 'military activism' also serves several instrumental functions as a means for the Swedish government to seek political leverage and diplomatic influence in multilateral organisations, shape the social and cultural environment of conflict regions through power projection, and improve the capacity and interoperability of Sweden's own armed forces (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015: 492). This transformed 'realist' approach towards the use of force as an instrument for foreign and security policy and the new types of military missions that the Swedish armed forces increasingly participate in has been much less visible in the public and political discourse compared to the 'idealistic' narrative (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015: 481). These findings relate to another idea that there is an elite-public gap in the relationship with NATO within states that historically have been neutral. Andrew Correy argues that neutrality can be seen as a deeply embedded institution in those countries' domestic politics and national identity, resistant to fundamental or formal change. At the same time, the top foreign and security policy-makers optimistically engage in deeper relations with NATO in a closed bubble, leading to the tensions and

contradictions that explain the ambiguous relationship with NATO outwardly (Correy, 2013: 468-9). The public opinion paradox in Sweden is a clear example of this ambiguous view on NATO. The paradox relates to the discrepancy in the trend where the public support for NATO membership has increased. At the same time, very few believe that Sweden should abandon its non-alignment policy. This incompatible view among the public is not arguably the fundamental explanation for the ambiguous approach to NATO. Instead, it is a reaction to the central paradox: the government's assurance that Sweden can and should remain military non-aligned while engaging deeper with NATO (Ydén, 2019: 16). While these studies provide valuable insights into the general political development of security policy in Sweden, little previous research has emphasised the dynamics of the social context to explain its contemporary character. For that reason, this study focuses on the discourse itself, both how it shapes and is shaped by the collective identity and self-image of Sweden's role in the world. There is also a lack of studies that connect the changing dynamics with the foreign ministers' discourses during the last decades. That period is relevant to look closer at to grasp the causes for the changes in policies and rhetoric, not the least due to the shifting security situation after Russia's increased aggression in the immediate area of Sweden.

2. Theory

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon a discussion of security, neutrality, and non-alignment concepts and theories from three different schools of thought: the use of history in the field of history didactics; dramaturgy as a sociological perspective on social interaction; and the processual-relational approach in international relations. Even though these theoretical approaches originate from three different fields, they all emphasise patterns of meaning in discourses, shaping our minds and actions, and social interaction and interdependence. These three approaches could arguably be categorised as constructivist. The common ground for constructivist approaches can be summarised as a shared understanding of the social construction of knowledge and the construction of social reality. The world is seen as a dynamic process, unlike the more static view of knowledge and reality within positivism and materialism. However, constructivism acknowledges some variations of epistemic value and the existence of a foundation for knowledge, unlike idealism and post-structuralism, which more rigorously don't accept any 'truths' of the world other than how it's imagined and talked about (Adler, 2002: 95). Using a constructivist approach, a theoretical assumption in this study is that Sweden's security policy, and what we can know about it, is essentially a social construct. The meaning of the Hultqvist Doctrine is mainly created by the influence of ideas, beliefs and norms coming from the social context. As these are changeable over time, the reality and meaning of the Swedish foreign and security policy are always under construction. Margot Wallström and Ann Linde become relevant in this sense, as they are powerful and influential actors who are shaped by the social context but simultaneously have the agency to shape reality through their actions and interactions.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the concepts of security, neutrality and non-alignment and their relevance for this study. Moving on, I will outline the three main theoretical approaches: the use of history, dramaturgy, and processual-relationalism. The discussion will finally culminate in this study's theoretical framework, based on a combination of these concepts and approaches.

2.1 Concepts: security, neutrality and non-alignment

As this study is related to an extensive subject, Sweden's historical culture, there is a need to discuss the central concepts and definitions for analysing contemporary political discourse. I will begin with a brief background of the development of the security concept and later move on to a discussion of the various definitions of neutrality and non-alignment and their differences to better understand them when they appear in the empirics of the analysis.

Security policy is a vast concept. The oldest and traditionally dominant definition of security is the realist approach to international relations, where the state's security is the central issue. As the state is also seen as the only actor that can be trusted to provide security for itself, security policy is thus the summary of all the measures that a government takes against an external threat, most often in the form of another state that poses a threat to the sovereignty (Walt, 2017). From this point of view, the main focus area in security policy is the national military capacity. However, the security concept has gradually developed over the past few decades to include a wide array of other areas as security threats and a different view on how they can be handled beyond the nation-state. In an effort to broaden and refine – but also challenge – the traditional security concept, the idea of human security emerged around the end of the Cold War. Simply put, human security aims to shift focus from the state to the individual or groups in society as the main subject of security and was more widely popularised as a concept through the UN's *Human Development Report* in 1994. The report aimed to widen the almost exclusive focus on the territorial security of states from external military threats through armament within the traditional security concept to instead put greater stress on increasing people's security through human development. The main threats were divided into seven categories: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (UNDP, 1994: 24-25). This reformed view on security influenced Swedish politics profoundly, and in 1995 the government proposed a reform of the Swedish Armed Forces' strategy that called for a shifted focus towards non-military threats and risks to steer the army's tasks. It concluded that Sweden should reduce its war organisation and civil defence and instead focus on peace-promoting and humanitarian operations through international cooperation (Lagen.nu, 2022: 1-3). The new approach led to massive disarmament of the national military capacity in the

following years. The Swedish army was transformed from a territorial defence army to a smaller peacekeeping force with the aim of assisting in international operations. The government's decision to formally replace Sweden's neutrality policy with military non-alignment in this period was a way to adapt to this new security era. As mentioned previously, Sweden's role as 'neutral' became redundant after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which contributed to the belief that the new security threats were global and required increased cooperation with international military alliances and intergovernmental organisations like the UN and the EU. Although the tide has turned in the last few years, it is important to note that Margot Wallström and Ann Linde were already prominent politicians when the understanding of security was reconceptualised and presumably influenced by those ideas.

Neutrality and non-alignment are concepts that often are used in the public discourse without further reflection or a deeper explanation of their true meaning. The concepts have different definitions depending on the context in which they are used, making it necessary to dissociate their significance in different situations. One definition is within international law and exclusively applies in times of war. In that case, neutrality is a policy chosen within the powers of a state's own sovereignty. However, it is then the duty of that state to defend its territory from the belligerents. The belligerents are, for their part, obliged to respect the territory and sovereignty of that state as long as the impartiality is authentic (Bring, 2008: 17). This definition entails one of the issues that arise concerning the Swedish self-image of a strong legacy of neutrality. Is it right to confidently state that Sweden was genuinely impartial during WWII and the Cold War and thus neutral according to international law? It is naturally a matter of judicial interpretation, which I will not go much deeper in. However, we know today that the Swedish government did some double-dealing that is controversial from a contemporary point of view. In later years, the actions that have gained attention are that Sweden allowed over two million German troops and material transfer through the country, exported essential iron-ore to the Nazis, and deported German Jewish refugees back to Germany. On the other side, Sweden did things that we now perceive as more morally justified. For example, Sweden assisted Finland with over 8 000 volunteers against the Soviet invasion in 1939, gave the Norwegian resistance movement shelter on Swedish territory between their attacks, and received Jewish refugees from Norway and Denmark (Nilsson, 2018: 26). Since around the 1990s, the academic consensus has generally been that Sweden was not as neutral as

portrayed by the government at the time and did, in reality, lean more towards supporting Germany. Regarding Sweden's position during the Cold War, recently declassified material shows that the cooperation with Nato and the West was much more extensive than the government and military wanted to showcase to the public.

Neutrality can also have a political significance parallel to the judicial one. This term is often referred to as the *politics of neutrality*. Neutrality is here a foreign policy in peacetime aiming to demonstrate impartiality between military blocs and alliances to build up trust internationally that the state will remain neutral in case of war. Military non-alignment is, in that case, a necessity (Bring, 2008: 17). As previously mentioned, the policy of neutrality dominated Sweden's official strategy for foreign affairs until the 1990s. One illustrative example of how the politics of neutrality came into practice was the development of Sweden's attitude towards European cooperation. Compared to most other countries in Europe, the topic of deeper European cooperation after WWII was almost absent in the Swedish debate and even counteracted and ridiculed by the Swedish political elite. On the few occasions when it did come into question, Swedish membership in the European Economic Cooperation (EEC) was dismissed by referring to its neutrality principle. However, the implication of the neutrality policy seems to have been quite flexible for the Swedish government. For example, it was not framed as an obstacle when joining organisations like the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Gatt), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or the United Nations (UN). In the end, the dire financial situation after the recession in the 1970s and 1980s and the fall of the Soviet Union formed the context where the economic arguments for joining the European Union trumped the idea that Sweden should remain an 'independent' actor in Europe. Some argued that Sweden's main goal to stay out of war could be better achieved within the Union than outside (Bring, 2008: 17), which is just another example of how neutrality recurringly is a central, but flexible, point of reference in the Swedish debate.

Many Swedes are unaware that the official security policy has been formulated as military non-alignment since 1992 and still believe they live in a neutral country. The difference between the two words might not look so drastic at first sight, but they entail different meanings and political aims. Non-alignment means that a state does not necessarily have to seek neutrality in a war as it opens up the possibility of declaring solidarity with one of

the warring parts. It is thus 'less neutral' than the absolute neutrality position. Bring argues that the intention of a state that adopts a military non-alignment position is not primarily to build international trust as a neutral actor. Instead, it primarily works to convince its home audience that the country possesses impartiality that will be beneficial in times of war (Bring, 2008: 17). The use of the concept in the Swedish debate supports this notion. The non-alignment policy is primarily revoked in domestic political discussions, usually to convince the citizens why Sweden should not join NATO, as demonstrated later in the analysis. However, many argue that it is incorrect to say that Sweden is military non-aligned as it is. The solidarity clause between EU member states that Sweden has committed to (Herlin-Karnell, 2022) and Sweden's military cooperation agreements with NATO and other actors (Göteborgs Universitet, 2019) make it difficult to claim that Sweden is free from any 'alliances'.

2.2 Three theoretical approaches

2.2.1 Historical Consciousness and the Use of History

Traditionally, history as an academic concept has been presented as two things: the past itself or the process of explaining or understanding the past. However, the subject has gone through a transformation since the 90s. Historians today are increasingly more interested in looking at how history is produced, communicated and consumed in the contemporary context of a particular society. These approaches are usually categorised under the theoretical approach of *history didactics*. History didactics is a field that aims to study how a society relates to its history. The field is interested in questions about how history is conveyed and the historical dimension's place in society and our consciousness. However, historical didactic literature traditionally focuses on education or cultural phenomena, and its methods and theories have not been extensively applied to the world of politics. There is generally a lack of literature exploring how specific Swedish history is interpreted, produced and conveyed in contemporary Swedish political culture. In this case, it is seemingly rare to use theories and methods from historiography to study topics related to foreign and security policy, as done in this study. One central concept within history didactics is *historical consciousness*. The assumption is that all humans have a historical consciousness – often subconscious – that orients us in our understanding of society and shapes our identity (Karlsson, 2009: 48). The same 'past' can be interpreted differently depending on the societal dynamics at a specific time and shapes our understanding of contemporary phenomena and our vision of the future. Historical consciousness is expressed in the *historical culture* and is thus where it can be studied. The historical culture is the cultural arena where a society communicates and assesses what history should be brought to attention, taught, learned, researched about, exhibited, archived, celebrated and debated (Karlsson, 2014: 65). Historical cultures are traditionally limited to the nation-state. Other geographical frameworks have challenged the national historical culture in recent times, which is a crucial aspect to consider in this study. *Genealogy* is one of the fundamental perspectives in the study of history. It is based on the idea that humans and societies have a need to, and are interested in, looking back at history to find meaning and orientation. People *make* and *use* history by individually and collectively mobilising and activating experiences, knowledge and memories (Karlsson, 2014: 48-53). This study adopts a structural approach to history. Structuralism can be

defined as “not concerned with isolated concepts or institutions, but rather the systems of relationships in which these elements came into being”, with an emphasis on “relationships between different elements within the social reality of a period” (Pace, 1978: 294).

Structuralism arguably moves away from the traditional study of history as continuity linked by empirical realities and helps reveal unconscious patterns (Pace, 1978: 296). That culture can be better understood when put in relation to a more extensive system or structure is a valuable insight to keep in mind for the analysis, as this study is more interested in the systems or structures underlying Wallström’s and Linde’s discourses rather than viewing them as being individually isolated and rational entities. By adopting a structural perspective on genealogy, we can see how history is preserved and passed on in legislation, language, traditions and habits. This notion is closely connected to Kosellec’s metaphorical concept *Zeitschichten*, translated as sediments of time. It is an idea that moves away from the traditional historical understanding of time as either linear or progressing from one period to another. Instead, time is seen as various but coexisting historical-cultural sediments, "repetition structures" affecting people's room for action, possibilities and restrictions to think freely, but without completely predetermining them (Karlsson, 2014: 67). The hypothesis is thus that the themes generated later in the analysis are essential layers in the historical culture of both Swedish society and the Social Democrats and, at the same time, present in Swedish individuals and collective's way of thinking, orienting themselves and acting. In this text, the aim is to increase the understanding of how this historical-cultural sediment in the historical consciousness is activated and developed over time by Swedish politicians today, which can explain their unique understanding and vision of Sweden's security and role in the world.

For the analysis, the aim is to explore how the historical consciousness surrounding neutrality is manifested in concrete materials or situations which take place in the historical culture of the Swedish society in general and of the Social Democrats in particular, and how it is activated or mobilised through the use of history. What is historical consciousness, and how can one recognise it? One classical definition of historical consciousness is "the connections between the interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and perspective on the future" (Jeismann, 1979: p. 42). History is thus a mental compass that helps us navigate ourselves in time and create meaning in our existence by relating ourselves to a timely context that is larger than our own restricted life (Karlsson, 2014: 58). The presence of neutrality as a factor in the

historical consciousness may not always be obvious or even intentionally communicated in the discourse. That is why I have discussed the concept of neutrality itself and its legacy in Swedish political history earlier in this text to show that it may not only be reflected in discourses with explicit reference to those exact concepts. The hypothesis is that the legacy of neutrality in the Swedish historical consciousness is activated in the Swedish government's more comprehensive approach to security and the role they believe Sweden should have in the world.

One way to distinguish the presence of a particular understanding of neutrality in the historical consciousness is to explore how it is manifested in the political discourse. For that purpose, I will use elements from Klas-Göran Karlsson's typology of the different uses of history as part of the analysis's theoretical framework. Karlsson's typology has identified seven different categories of history use: the existential use, the moral use, the ideological use, the non-use, the political-pedagogical use, and the scientific use. The different uses of history can coincide, but the categorisation aims to distinguish their individual needs, users, and functions.

The existential use of history (Karlsson, 2014: 73) addresses a need to remember or forget, and belong to a history that is greater than ourselves. The users could be anyone, but it is most often practised by "ordinary" people. It is especially active in communities and states that have been affected by traumatic events in the past. It mainly functions to find orientation and rootedness by strengthening an identity that creates a feeling of safety and stability, or sometimes the opposite. It is closely connected to memories and experiences. This history use emphasises historical continuity to clearly separate the "us" and "them" of the past. The past is either thought of as positive in itself (e.g. more solidarity, no stress, less consumerism) or seen as an opposite that indirectly shows how well we have it today (e.g. less welfare or affluence in the past). The existential use of history increases in times of uncertainty and swift changes. It is often manifested through public holidays, religious festivals, and commemorations when we ritually repeat certain practices and oppose every attempt to break tradition. Large wars, genocides and other catastrophes often engage the collective memory and national rituals but also create the need for everyday processing. Examples of practices are genealogical research, writing a diary, looking in photo albums, participating in the activities of local folklore/history associations, or other ways of engaging in the "little history". It is also often practised through everyday processes after

traumatic events in the past, e.g. when survivors or descendants care for graves and memories. The existential use of history is often hard to explore as it thrives on proximity and intimacy, which does not leave many traces in the traditional historical source material.

The need for a *moral use of history* (Karlsson, 2014: 73-74) is to rediscover. The most frequent users are the well-educated, committed, and engaged social classes, the affected group themselves, often ethnic groups, or someone who has taken on their historical cause. The aim is to create outrage and mobilise resistance against an actual or imagined injustice, often history perceived as unjustifiably forgotten or suppressed and has to recover its righteous place in the historical culture. It is often caused by historical discrimination or abuse that has negatively affected the victims or their descendants while benefiting those in power and their heirs. The function is thus rehabilitation or restoration, intending to give restitution or restore the situation that prevailed before the injustices committed. This use of history is sometimes triggered by a book, movie or other historical cultural artefacts that expose previously unknown or non-attended historical grievances. It is practised in the form of collectives that turn against an exercise of power that is perceived as historically culturally and politically insensitive or brutal. In the capacity of offended victims, it makes legal claims based on history. The accusations are often directed against a political power, party, or state. In the long run, it often leads to some sort of political response. One example is the historical-moral based demands by the Sami in Sweden in recent times, expressed by a historical legal claim to a specific territory that they believe a powerful Swedish state has refused them.

The ideological use of history (Karlsson, 2014: 74-75) relates to a need to invent, construct or convince. The typical users are intellectuals, political elites, or political power and are often well-educated, narratively skilled, and aggressively loud. Its primary function is legitimisation and rationalisation. More specifically, it can be used to legitimise a position of power by rationalising, that will say, make history more 'comfortable' in retrospect to explain or defend for example oppression or violence in the past. It can also have a more peaceful and constructive side if it is formulated to convey a meaning context that accomplishes to hold together and motivate large groups of people in a notion of shared heritage, destiny and goal. It is usually a process where the user develops a pedagogically convincing and persuasive historical meaning context that bears witness to a society's

development towards what is described as a contemporary ideal condition and an even more promising future, guaranteed by a political power. This is often done by singling out and stigmatising groups of “the other ” that form an “obstacle” and must be eliminated on the ideological path from a distant past towards an awaiting future paradise. It often entails a political power that uses history ideologically to portray its own power position as historically evolved, natural and righteous, and could be practised through the control of history textbooks, historical rituals and other things to have the same ideological message. In general, this history use can be found in all political ideologies.

Another category is *the non-use of history* (Karlsson, 2014: 75), addressing a need to forget or conceal and most often used by intellectuals or political elites. It is a type of, and often precondition for, ideological use of history as it also functions to legitimate or rationalise by eliminating elements that functionally do not fit in the ideological-historical story and threatens the entire construction of meaning to collapse. The practice of the non-use of history is silence, avoidance and concealing. It is easier to convince people about what is historically justified in a specific worldview and power structure if you keep away all those in history who have been critical or silenced with unjustified methods.

The political-pedagogical use of history (Karlsson, 2014: 75-78) concerns the need to illustrate, publicise or debate, and its users are most often politicians or educators. Its primary function is instrumentalisation and politicisation and could be explained with the formula 'A equals B', where A is a hot contemporary issue and B is a, often negative, historical comparison object useful for political purposes. Karlsson argues that there is a strong presence of moral and conscience issues in contemporary politics, where symbolic power issues have gained ground at the expense of realpolitik. The reason for using this is to give fuel to a political debate. Certain histories constitute burdens that are in the way of effective contemporary politics and social progress and need to be apologised, acknowledged, and compensated for to move on. It is thus used to come to terms with and demand responsibility for the darkest moments in history. This process could be explained by the ancient concept of *lustration*, a political purification process in which a society and its power structures aim to be freed from the traces of that evil history. The user shows analogies and similarities between contemporary and historical issues but reduces or suppresses their differences. Its use does not require any tremendous historical knowledge but rather an awareness of the value tensions of history and a well-developed historical-

political judgement. The goal is to attract attention and force people to take a political standpoint. It is often a response to the moral use of history. Apologies, recognitions and promises of penance and compensation by representatives of long-running collectives and institutions have become a more common practice in recent times through, for example, trials, amnesties, truth commissions, and information campaigns.

The last category is *the scientific use of history* (Karlsson, 2014: 78-79). Here, the need is to discover or reconstitute and is most often used by historians or history teachers. Its functions are verification and interpretation. It differs from other uses of history as it is deemed to require exclusive professional knowledge and skills by its users. It is introverted towards academia with its inner logic, compared to the other history uses that are extroverted towards the broader society. It has a robust genetic perspective, while there is a more genealogical perspective in the other uses of history. It cherishes the parts in the historical construction of meaning that emphasise the importance of verification, unlike, for example, the ideological history use that cares more about the big picture and its ability to persuade over the degree of empirical truth.

2.2.2 The Theatre Metaphor

In 1959, Erving Goffman introduced the idea of dramaturgical analysis in his book *The Presentation of Everyday Life*. It is a symbolic interactionist theory where he metaphorically compares life and how we present ourselves with the theatre. According to Goffman, all social interactions can be analysed as performance. Goffman defines (face-to-face) interaction in general as "the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence", and *an* interaction or encounter as "all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's immediate physical presence", and performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman 1959, 26). As Goffman's theory is from the time before modern mass communication, the element of immediate physical presence can be widened to include, for example, all the internet services that allow remote participation. Modern information technology has also made it more challenging to conduct security, foreign and military policy in secret, which has made all performances in that area more transparent and public (Ydén, 2019: 15).

The performer's objective is to sustain the definition of the situation that the performance fosters. The performers follow "scripts" that guide how to act and speak, what to say, and to who. Some scripts become highly institutionalised with marked expectations regarding appearance, language and action, and inconsistencies or deviations from these are typically not well received by the audience. Performers can, however, act "out of character", thus deviating from the script, when they are backstage, i.e. in areas to which members of the audience have no access. Goffman means that society can be divided into a front and backstage. In Goffman's theatre analogy, the front stage is wherever the performance is conducted. Backstage is where the performer expects that no audience members can observe or listen in (Goffman, 1959: 109-111). In this study, the front region is defined to be Wallström and Linde's public discourse on the NATO issue, i.e. the political discourse that is addressed in open fora and either directed at or available to the general public. Consequently, the back region includes the talks that are not aimed at the general public but rather take place within the party or government.

2.2.3 A Processual-Relational Approach

The core of this study is to explore the processes where actors begin to deal with or understand uncertainties. The central theoretical question is how the actors in this study 'go on' when their prevailing strategies no longer work due to new and uncertain contexts. Questions like these relate to assumptions about "the nature of the individuals, their relationship to the context of action, and how the ends of action themselves are constituted", as Sebastian Schmidt explains in his study about how actors deal with ongoing change in international relations (Schmidt, 2020: 18). Most international relations (IR) theories take the actors as given and mainly focus on their interactions when studying processes and relations. With a process-relational approach, the analysis does instead emphasise how structures, institutions and individuals emerge through a network of relations over time rather than being viewed as static 'things'. A central argument in the process-relational approach is that the actors' characteristics and capacity to act emerge solely through social relations (Schmidt, 2020: 19). The process-relational approach's relevance to the theoretical framework of this study is that it helps in the analysis of novelty and change, which arguably is of great importance for how the justification for the government's security policy has developed in the discourses of the foreign ministers. The approach also emphasises the interdependency and normativity of all actions, explained as "the various ways through which these entities are connected and disconnected and at the hierarchical relationships that develop from these multiple interactions" (Diphoorn & Grassiani, 2016: 431).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The idea of taking inspiration from all three theoretical approaches presented above is that they all individually and collectively contribute to a more rich and nuanced framework for the analysis. The hands-on character of Karlsson's typology makes it a practical tool for identifying and categorising manifestations of the interdependent shaping between agency and structure, which increases the understanding of the social and historical-cultural context of contemporary Swedish security policy. In other words, the way Wallström and Linde communicate and justify the security policy in their discourses shows not only how they exercise influence to achieve their goals and needs. It also increases the understanding of the social context and historical culture they are a part of and impacted by. The dramaturgical approach helps to understand further how Wallström and Linde balance their discourses to justify the arguably paradoxical character of the Hultqvist Doctrine. As security policy always includes secrecy and multi-level politics, the idea that there is a "front" and "back" stage that the actors have to adapt their social interactions for makes the discrepancy in the public discourse easier to grasp. As the data spans over a period of seven years, the inclusion of the processual-relational approach helps to capture the dynamic development of variables and contexts that shape the security policy process over that time

Map over theoretical framework

Theoretical approaches	<i>Use of history</i>	<i>Dramaturgy</i>	<i>Processual-relational</i>
Key concepts	Historical consciousness (HC)	Social interactions as performances	The impact of social relations as a dynamic process
Function	Analyse how HC is activated in the historical-cultural arena.	Analyse the context where meaning is constructed through interaction	Analyse novelty, change, interdependency and normativity
Strategy	Identify uses of history as manifestations of HC	Metaphorically compare social interactions with the theatre, with a front and backstage, roles, audience, scripts, props, etc.	Analyse the process through which the structure of interdependence is generated, reproduces itself, and changes.
Basic assumption	Humans both <i>are</i> and <i>have</i> history, and <i>make</i> and <i>use</i> history. Dynamic process.	The elements of human interactions depend on time, place, and audience.	Structures, institutions and individuals emerge through a network of relations over time.

3. Methods and sources

3.1 Methodological reflection

For the purpose of explaining the research design of this study, I stick to the short definition of ontology as the study concerned with the nature of reality (Staller & Chen, 2022: 73). As implied in the theory chapter, this study's ontological stance is that reality is our mutual understanding of the world shaped by the development of human interactions. As the ontological stance goes hand in hand with the epistemology – theory of knowledge – (Staller & Chen, 2022: 73), it reflects what I believe is the best way to gain knowledge about the nature of reality as I define it. The epistemological framework in this study is thus that knowledge about such reality is the product of conventions, constructed meanings, and interpretations of social interactions. It is often argued that the methodology – the entire package of particular combinations of methods – informs, responds to, and practically implements the researcher's ontological–epistemological framework (Staller & Chen, 2022: 73). Treating methodology as a comprehensive package is thus a way to ensure that the choice of methods is compatible with my ontological–epistemological framework.

However, Thematic Analysis which is the method used in this study is characterised by its independence from any particular epistemological-ontological base, making it flexible in the sense that it can be used within most theoretical frameworks (Terry, 2017: 7). The most crucial aspect to keep in mind when collecting data for a Thematic Analysis is the quality of the data, which should be rich and complex for the given research topic (Terry, 2017: 9). The primary source for the discourse in this study are transcripts from the eight annual foreign policy debates in the Swedish Parliament between 2015 and 2022. At the start of each of these events, the Foreign Minister presents the Government's Statement of Foreign Policy for that year, followed by a debate including the rest of the Swedish parties in parliament. I have also looked at secondary sources about the Foreign Policy debates in the media to make more sense of the contemporary context of each event. As explained further in the next chapter, the Social Democrats' two latest party documents from 2013 and 2017 were used as a starting point to understand the political fundamentals of the party. However, the discourse in them is not the primary source of interest for the analysis. The

decision to focus on Margot Wallström's and Ann Linde's discourses is based on the fact that security policy is seen as an integrated part of foreign affairs in Sweden (Regeringskansliet, 2015), meaning that the Foreign Minister is the leading representative of both of those policy areas

3.2 Thematic analysis

The methodological approach in this study is a Thematic Analysis (TA) guided by the theoretical frameworks presented earlier in this text. TA is a relatively recently popularised method to analyse qualitative data initially developed within psychology that now has been widely spread to other research areas. TA is, in general terms, used for "systematically identifying, organising and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" and fits well with the aim of this study to find patterns of meaning connected to neutrality in the Swedish political discourse. One of the more popular and well-developed approaches to thematic analysis is one by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. Their approach was introduced in 2006. The authors have since continued to expand the method and its applicability to other fields outside psychology, where it originally evolved. In their landmark article, Braun and Clarke describe how the method at that time was perceived as "a poorly demarcated and rarely-acknowledged, yet widely-used qualitative analytic method" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 4). The purpose of their article was to address the criticism that TA was not a legitimate research method by developing its accessibility and making it more user-friendly. To this day, the article has been cited more than 125 000 times according to Google Scholar and has recently been recognised as its own method. TA has significantly evolved since 2006, and the development has been particularly marked by the expansion of approaches and research fields. As mentioned, the great advantage of TA is its flexibility as it is not tied to a particular theoretical framework. The combination of TA and the theoretical concepts of historical consciousness, historical narrative, and the use of history go well hand in hand, as the aim of those theoretical approaches is to 'make sense' of how history shapes or is shaped in society. In this case, TA helps to conduct a more qualitative search for the often underlying or subconscious patterns that really matter, avoiding the risk of only focusing on the quantitative and outspoken meanings that may lead to superficial and descriptive analysis.

Braun and Clarke have presented TA as a process containing six phases: familiarisation, generating codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report. The six-step approach is not a linear process but somewhat recursive, and the authors metaphorically describe it as following a coiled hose through long grass. They mean that it is essential to always go back and forth between the steps when using TA to

ensure that the data, codes and themes are aligned, cohere to the same central organising concept and have relevance for the research topic and questions.

Familiarisation is the first phase of the TA process and is for the researcher to get familiar with his or her data and start identifying items of interest. In this study, the familiarisation phase started with the initial collection of data. The starting point was the Social Democrats' two main and most updated official documents that outline their policies and ideology: the party manifesto from 2013 and the political guidelines from 2021. The idea was to acquire an initial understanding of which fundamental values and ideas for Sweden they deem to be most important both for the orientation within the party and the external communication. The formulations of these documents are democratically decided at the party's congress by 350 Social Democratic delegates from all over the country. They are thus relevant for understanding the collective identity that presumably also influences the party elite. As this study is limited to exploring the development and differences in the discourse of only two top representatives from the party, there is an assumption that the individual's own sense-making and communication of meaning play a significant role. However, these party documents do contain specific straightforward policies and ideological approaches that the Social Democratic politicians are expected to follow, even though they at the same time have the agency to interpret and adapt them individually. Even though these documents do not constitute the primary data for the analysis, the familiarisation with them establishes a valuable foundation for the underlying values, ideology and policies of the selected discourses. As the primary purpose of the familiarisation step is to critically immerse with a seemingly endless mass of data in order to generate initial analytical ideas (Terry, 2017: 13), the approach in the reading of these documents was to particularly notice formulations related to areas like universal values, understanding of security, neutrality and military non-alignment, international engagement and priorities, descriptions of historical development, and both the self-image and vision for how Sweden is and should be perceived by the outside world. In practice, the familiarisation process entailed conscious reading and re-reading of the material while underlying relevant passages and making casual observational notes in margins. This was done with active engagement by keeping great attention to patterns and critically reflecting upon questions related to the research questions about what is truly going on in the text, but also a mindful reflection of my own assumptions and feelings concerning the content and context, in order to avoid the risk of passiveness in the familiarisation stage (Terry,

2017: 13) that could lead to a shallow understanding of the data and ultimately a poor analysis.

The first document, "Vi bygger landet" (We build the country) from 2021, contains the Social Democrats' political guidelines. The first and relatively unsurprising observation was that the majority of the chapters deal with national welfare policies, such as employment, healthcare, pensions and education. Those areas are not necessarily irrelevant for the study as they entail the most traditional aspects of Social Democratic ideology, values and identity. Nevertheless, what is interesting is how those aspects coincide with the patterns found in the areas of interest of this study. The foreign and security policies are outlined in the last chapter with the title "Vi bygger gemensam säkerhet tillsammans" (We build shared security together). Here it is described that international solidarity is the foundation of Social Democracy. The other document, "Ett program för förändring" (A program for change) from 2013, is the Social Democrats' latest ideological manifesto. As this document is intended to have a more visionary character, it is naturally not as concrete as the policy guidelines. However, it does deal more with the values and worldview of the party. As mentioned previously, the party documents work as a sort of entry to the primary data for the analysis. The second step of the familiarisation phase is to conduct the same procedure with the data that contains the primary discourses of interest. The starting point is all parliamentary debates on security policy from 2014 to 2022. The process was facilitated as there is only one main debate on that issue each year, and the parliament's website provides transcripts of the debates that often go on for over eight hours. There is a risk that nuances and other expressions are lost when relying solely on pre-made transcripts. However, the assessment was that manual transcription would be too time-consuming for this study and that the content is the actual primary interest. A few sample tests comparing the transcripts and actual video material were also made to secure the quality of the transcripts. They showed that the transcripts indeed were very detailed and reliable.

Here follows some examples of notes from the familiarisation phase:

Initial familiarisation notes

1. The idea of improving the world through increased international solidarity is framed as a bottom-up process coming from within associations, popular movements, democratic movements and actors, unions, civil society, and parliamentary work. This is a struggle that the Social Democrats say they should support and imply they are a part of.
2. They describe social democracy, therefore themselves, as a defender of democracy, international law, human rights and human security, and an actor against power abuse and dictatorial behaviour.
3. Describe themselves as an actor that should work for a strong global peace movement.
4. Continuously mention economic, social, and cultural obstacles as the main cause hindering justice and human liberation nationally and globally.
5. Strong belief in the increased representation of marginalised groups (women, LGBT community, etc) and more equal distribution of power and resources as the tool to achieve a “better” world.
6. Negative view of geopolitical development.
7. A belief that countries shouldn’t strengthen their global position through the power of arms, hybrid warfare or disinformation, but rather by dialogue and opportunities found in areas of trade, the environment and interpersonal contacts.
8. Emphasise sanctions and accountability as the preferred measures against crimes against international law and human rights.
9. Argue that the response to authoritarian trends is stronger international institutions, especially the UN, OSSE, the EU, and Nordic cooperations.
10. An idea that future global challenges can only be solved through cooperation, solidarity and systematically between countries.
11. A belief that Sweden can be a leader in the international work of certain areas: the climate, democracy, workers' rights, nuclear disarmament, gender equality, the rule of law, human rights, and children's rights.
12. Frame aid is a key to achieving international solidarity and global justice.
13. Withhold the military and civil defence as the utmost protection of our democracy, rights and fundamental values, which they mean is the democratic development of society through freedom of opinion and not by political, military or other pressure from others.
14. They justify a need for a strong, effective and popularly rooted Swedish military defence with their analysis that the security situation in Sweden’s immediate area has deteriorated.
15. Their vision for the defence is that it should have the capacity to refrain others from attempting to attack, control, or in other ways abuse Swedish territory.
16. Military non-alignment is described as a fundament in Swedish security policy that serves us well.
17. Argue that the non-alignment combined with increased national military capacity and deeper international cooperation results in: security and stability in Sweden's immediate area, freedom to independently decide what actions best lead to de-escalation and peace, and independence in foreign affairs. Nato membership would prevent that.

18. Explains that military non-alignment does not mean that Sweden would be passive if a catastrophe or attack hits another EU member state or Nordic country.
19. Expectation that those countries would act the same if it happened to Sweden.
20. Define this exchange as the possibility to give and receive military and civil support.
21. Means that Sweden should contribute with military measures in peacekeeping and peace-enforcing international operations within the frames of the UN, the EU, OSSE and Nato if they have a clear mandate in international law.
22. Perception of other non-military threats in the security concept: human rights breaches, poverty, gender inequality, unemployment, climate change, organised crime, terrorism, cyber-attacks, and disinformation.

Generating codes is the second phase of this approach to TA and the first systematic part of the data analysis process. The codes are the 'little things' that in clusters build up the themes in the next phase. Coding aims to develop labels that capture what is interesting and meaningful for specific segments of data in relation to the research question (Terry, 2017: 17). Generally speaking, codes can be divided into two categories: semantic and latent. Semantic codes are the ones that capture the obvious or surface meanings, while latent codes capture the more underlying ideas and implicit meanings (Terry, 2017: 10). A good TA process can include both semantic and latent codes, as long as it is done mindfully. In this study, a hypothetical example of a semantic code could be "more freedom to choose security policies outside military alliances". In contrast, a more latent code, in that case, could be "reluctance of being forced to take a stance in a potential conflict between the superpowers". Coding requires reflection on the cultural landscape within which oneself and the participants reside and the social values, norms, and assumptions that allow what people are saying to make sense (Braun & Clarke, 2018). The background and theoretical frameworks are there to guide this reflection, as they have provided the knowledge base for the values, ideals, history and contemporary context behind the discourses in this analysis. Braun and Clarke also suggest that codes should not be one-worded as the labels should be able to work independently from the data and that one should not rush into themes at this stage but instead note them and put them aside for later (Braun & Clarke, 2018). The process of coding requires constant "sweeping". In other words, constant re-reading and reconsidering of the material to scrutinise the initial and possibly more superficial data items through the lenses of the later ones, thus breaking them up, making them bigger or relabeling them if needed.

Reviewing themes is the fourth phase in this approach to TA and is a way to ensure that the themes are useful and accurately represent the data. In this step, it is important to go back to the whole data set and check if the themes are rich and extensive enough and relate to the central organising concept and each other. One wants to avoid too many levels and numbers of themes, as that could lead to an overly fragmented analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2018). A crucial step is to dare remove themes if they are not helpful or accurate, but one could also split up, combine, or create new themes as a part of this refinement process.

Defining and naming themes is the fifth phase of the TA and the continuation of the reviewing and refinement process. At this stage, the researcher should have moved on from a summative approach to the themes as codes and collated data and instead take on a more interpretative position to ensure the developing TA's clarity, cohesion, precision, and quality. To help make the themes more straightforward, it can be helpful to write definitions for each of them in the form of a short 'abstract' that summarises their core idea and meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2018).

Writing up and producing the report is the sixth and final step of the TA, where the whole process with the data and analysis is weaved together and connected to the bigger picture (Braun & Clarke, 2018). In practice, this step is where the material and results of the previous phases are structured, presented and discussed in the form of an academic text.

4. Results and analysis

A careful study of the data with guidance of the phases in the TA approach presented above generated three themes: 'An independent force for good', 'Swedish exceptionalism', and 'A democratic role model'. Each of these themes has a core idea that captures a meaning pattern found across the entire data set, as opposed to being summaries of what was said about a particular thing. These themes are organised around the central hypothesis of this study; that there is a process where ideas in the collective Swedish self-image shape the foreign and security policy at the same time as this identity is re-constructed by the discourse of the political elite.

(Note that all references to the parliamentary debates between 2015-2022 in the analysis are taken from the Swedish parliaments online archive: <https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/webb-tv/>. From which annual debate each reference is taken from is stated in parentheses containing only the year for that quote).

4.1 An independent force for good

The first theme generated from across the dataset is the vision of Sweden as an independent force for good in the world. The core idea of this theme is defined by the self-image of Sweden as a country fighting for global peace and nuclear disarmament, strengthened by its free role as military non-aligned. This idea of a 'proud' tradition of standing up against global injustices is a vital layer in Swedish historical culture. One of the most important 'stories' for this idea in Swedish historical culture is the time of Olof Palme – Sweden's Prime Minister during two periods between 1969 and 1987– with his loud criticism of the great powers and dictators and support of 'Third World' countries. Palme's foreign policy made Sweden internationally renowned as a 'moral superpower' at the time. The idea that Sweden still has this position, or at least the capacity to have it, prevails among Swedes (Nordberg, 2022). It is thus an effective idea to activate in the Swedish historical consciousness to legitimise contemporary ideas, although the contextualisation of that legacy changes depending on the contemporary goals and needs. In all of their statements, Wallström and Linde expressly frame Sweden as a strong and independent voice in foreign affairs. “A global peace policy”, “bridge-building”, (2015), “active, fearless and constructive” (2016), “value-based” (2017), “a democracy offensive” (2019), “diplomacy as the first line of defence”, “climate diplomacy”, “disarmament” and non-proliferation” (2020), "based on international law", "solidarity aid" (2021), "dialogic" (2022). These are just some of the labels that Margot Wallström and Ann Linde use to confirm that the government's foreign policy aims to make an impact globally. “A feminist foreign policy” – the self-appointed name of the government's foreign policy – is a much-debated strategy that Wallström launched when she stepped into office in 2014. In her words, the feminist foreign policy aims to “strengthen women's rights, increase women's access to resources and increase women's representation” and should inform all of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ work (2015). ‘A Feminist Foreign Policy’ is an example of how the idea of Sweden as a 'force for good' is reconstructed to legitimise contemporary issues better. While Wallström does not expressly relate this strategy to the Swedish self-imagined tradition of 'doing good in the world, it is constructed within that context. The headline "A continued active and fearless foreign policy" of Wallström's statement in 2016, where she outlined the feminist foreign policy, was perceived as a conscious attempt to link it to the legacy of Palme’s “active foreign policy”; a role in the world that

disappointed Social Democrats argued that Sweden gradually had been losing since the 1990s (Bjereld, 2016). In that sense, the Feminist Foreign Policy fits the Social Democrat's purpose to justify their security doctrine in two steps. First, it reactivates the idea of Sweden as a country that can and should have a significant impact on the world through soft power in foreign affairs. By accomplishing that, it is an alternative that appears to make more sense in the Swedish historical consciousness compared to joining NATO. Not everyone welcomed Wallström's reclaiming of Palme's foreign policy. In the following debate of her statement in 2015, Wallström's priorities received criticism for being too unfocused and global. In that case, Wallström's defence was that she had the same approach as Anna Lindh, in which political levels interact. Mentioning Lindh, a previously Swedish foreign minister who got brutally murdered in 2003, was arguably not a random choice. Like many other politicians murdered in service, Lindh's time as minister tends to be looked back at with indiscriminating eyes (Gemmel, 2022). From a more cynical perspective, one can thus see Wallström's reference to Lindh as effective ideological use of history, making the 'story' of Lindh more suitable to legitimise Wallström's own position on that specific issue.

These examples in the discourse show that the Social Democrats have a strong vision that Sweden is, and should continue to be, an influential global actor for peace, security and democracy. The foreign and security policy priorities aim to reflect that increased peace, security, and democracy in other countries is an intrinsic value, rather than necessarily placing Sweden's self-interest in the centre. However, there is a noticeable development where the foreign ministers seem to have felt an increasing need to justify the national benefits of Sweden's global commitment. A reason for that could be that Wallström's first statement, as mentioned, received criticism in the media for being too global, idealistic and vague (Omni, 2015). The statements in the following years include more arguments for how different international engagements are beneficial for Swedish interests. The general argument is that these policies help establish a "strong image of Sweden" that is important for building long-term relationships with other countries, which will improve Sweden's reputation as a legitimate partner for trade, security, and diplomacy. This vision of Sweden's role in the world is essential for understanding the importance of military non-alignment for the Social Democratic party. In their eyes, the capacity to continue the tradition of 'international solidarity' depends on maintaining Sweden's status as not being tied to a specific military alliance. The picture they try to establish is that formal

membership in NATO would restrict Sweden's self-determination over its foreign and security policy priorities.

This first theme also relates to the Foreign Ministers' discourses around the security concept. The assumption is that the shifting attention that Margot Wallström and Ann Linde decide to give to specific security threats in the discourse at different times is partly a conscious strategy of portraying an issue in a certain way that justifies their priorities. One shared meaning between the codes that support this theme is the idea that non-military threats are the main challenges and risks, and non-military measures are the best tools for increasing security. Wallström's framing of security is often an example of this, as the most recurring security threats she mentions are of a global and non-state-centric character. She mainly relates threats to the security of individuals and societies, like poverty, breaches of human rights, health, and other issues related to social, economic, or cultural inequality. For that reason, she repeatedly calls for a broader view of the security concept. As she describes these threats as global, her favoured solution is to build stronger and more effective international institutions that deal with these issues. This definition of security is very much in line with the previously mentioned transformed view of security that was developed in the post-Cold War period, emphasising human security over the security of states.

4.2 Swedish exceptionalism

This theme is organised around the idea of Sweden as a country that goes its own way to find unique political models and solutions, not seldom thought of as superior to those of other countries. With that in mind, it is no surprise that neither the foreign ministers nor a majority of the public sees the close partnership with NATO and the military non-alignment principle as incompatible. Swedish exceptionalism is manifested in the collective mind as an idea that Sweden can be the exception from needing any formalised membership in military alliances to be protected. This approach implies that there is a belief that Sweden has found a smarter strategy than the rest of the world, with a few exceptions, who see NATO as a club where you can be either in or out.

There are several ways in which the foreign ministers consolidate the idea of Sweden as a country excepted from having to follow the 'rules' of international politics. One frequent argument used by the Social Democrats against NATO is that the alliance is neither reliable nor trustworthy to protect Sweden if it was to become a member. The 'antagonist' in this argument changes depending on the current situation in world politics, but it is often the United States or Turkey who work as the usual suspects. As Wallström was the one in office when Donald Trump became president in 2017, the unreliableness of NATO during this period is often illustrated with reference to Trump's unconventional and controversial character. In 2017, Wallström started framing Nato as an organisation that's always been in the hands of the United States in order to rhetorically tie it to Trump, which strengthens her argument that Nato's future is shaky and would be risky for Sweden to join. One example that clearly illustrates this argument is her response to an MP from the Centre Party that questioned if Sweden still benefits from military non-alignment, where Wallström answered:

“Why does the Center Party, which has always stood up in the fight against nuclear weapons, want to join and be part of a nuclear umbrella in NATO? It is incomprehensible, especially with a new US commander in chief, that we do not know how he will use NATO. This is another unknown matter. What will President Trump want to do with NATO cooperation? I guess you have to be pretty nervous thinking that NATO is the answer to everything.”

As the Centre Party MP's question only mentions non-alignment and not NATO, Wallström cast suspicion on Trump and the US to justify the government's security line in its entirety and to discredit the opposition's criticism of it.

The Government's Statement of Foreign Policy in 2018 included a short, but for the security line, rhetorically important, addition. The continuation of the statement that "Sweden's security line remains firm" was changed from "Sweden is not part of any military alliance" to "our military non-alignment serves us well". This changed phrasing was pointed out and criticised by more Nato-positive political opponents, who argued that it went against the political consensus and latest parliamentary investigations on Swedish security policy. Wallström explained the new formulation that the situation in Nato and the world was fundamentally different compared to the previous year's security policy statement due to the election of Donald Trump. In other words, the election of a new head of state in one of Nato's 30 members was deemed sufficient to reformulate the fundamental security line and justify military non-alignment.

In Wallström's discourse about the United States under Trump, the negative picture she tries to establish of the country is predominantly based on references to its withdrawal from intergovernmental cooperation in areas like security, trade, and international agreements. This again illustrates Wallström's heavy emphasis on advocating for international and non-military cooperation as the favoured tools for solving contemporary security issues, which are shared and global in her eyes. However, Wallström occasionally includes that the relationship between Sweden and the US is strong and important, although in a toned-down and almost dutiful manner. The importance of the transatlantic link is most often brought up in relation to Sweden's military cooperation. It is evidently one sign of Wallström's struggle to justify the balance between deeper cooperation with Nato and remaining military non-aligned.

In Ann Linde's first statement of the foreign policy in 2020, the sceptical rhetoric about the US and Trump is much more restrained. The relationship with the US is framed as central for Sweden's security and prosperity and generally described with a carefully optimistic tone, apart from a short passage expressing regret over the US withdrawal from multilateral agreements. Furthermore, Ann Linde mentions neither the US, Nato, nor

military-non alignment in the debate that followed. In the following year's statement, right after the election of Joe Biden, the negative framing of the United States as unreliable is now completely absent in Linde's rhetoric. The transformed view of the US is so eagerly illustrated that Linde even chooses to end her statement with a quote from Biden's inauguration. From this point forward, the justification for military non-alignment based on the unreliability of specific Nato-members' leadership does not reappear in Linde's discourse. On the contrary, Ann Linde makes a great effort to downplay the importance of Wallström's addition that "military non-alignment serves us well" in the security policy line in 2018, arguing that it was only a rhetorical adjustment and meant no change of its substance.

These examples show how the script for the 'front stage' is adapted to fit the contemporary opinion of the audience, the Swedish public. However, this front stage performance was somewhat inconsistent with the development backstage. During the same period, the Swedish armed forces participated in NATO exercises like never before. As Trump was highly unpopular among Swedes, he could successfully be used as an argument for the unreliability of NATO that justified the logic of the Hultqvist Doctrine's 'no strings attached' model for Sweden's military cooperation.

4.3 A democratic role model

The third and last theme, 'A democratic role model', captures an idea of Sweden as a model for democracy around the world. The national democratic procedure is one aspect of that idea, in that important political decisions in Sweden are firmly rooted among the public and preceded by lengthy discussions. This is reflected in the Social Democratic Party's official vision of Sweden's armed forces, defined as a "strong and popularly rooted defence" (Socialdemokraterna, 2021: 38-29). There are many examples of how Wallström and Linde continuously try to enforce this perception. One explicit reference in the statements to this general idea is the following quote by Wallström in 2016: "The government will continue to shoulder its responsibility in maintaining international peace and security - in political consensus and with popular support" (2016).

When put to the test, the discourse shows that both Wallström and Linde, in reality, practice a rather one-sided interpretation of this idea and often construct the idea of consensus as not questioning the government's security doctrine. The aim to maintain control over the development of the security doctrine appears to be central in the foreign ministers' discourse. The construction of their ideal picture of this democratic procedure is sustained by framing security policy as long-term "predictability" and "stability" without "abrupt changes", especially in uncertain periods of time. This becomes particularly evident whenever the opposition brings up the non-alignment policy for discussion, although the two foreign ministers approach that criticism somewhat differently. A general tendency of both Wallström and Linde is to consistently dismiss the need or possibility of even initiating debates or negotiations on the subject of the military non-alignment policy. Their discourse entails various strategies aiming to divert the question of NATO membership away from becoming a central political issue. Wallström's strategy is to frame NATO as an irrelevant topic for security policy discussions by arguing that today's threats are more "complex" than so. Constructing such an image of security threats makes the conditions for one of her recurring arguments more effective; that the opposition's only solution is NATO. She portrays the opposition's analysis as narrow-minded, clearly illustrated by this quote where she describes her opponents' security policies: "If you only have one tool, namely a hammer, all problems will look like a nail. The answer from the Moderates is always NATO" (2016). In order to further dismiss NATO as a question for

politicians, she advocates for “bringing it out for debate and discussion among the entire Swedish people as one of the elements needed to be able to reason about security policy, both broadly and narrowly” (2015). This argument is arguably a way to adapt her narrative to fit this theme's central idea. Ann Linde, on her side, does not use the same narrative around NATO as a 'narrow-minded' solution to justify the democratic legitimacy of the security doctrine. However, she does at one point argue that initiating party deliberations on security policies would turn into another “charade” as she blames the opposition for having a track record of not going through with broad political agreements in other areas (2021).

Linde is generally more concerned with what the signals of national political division on the government's security doctrine would mean for the image of Sweden in the rest of the world. This became evident in the debate starting at the end of 2020 when a parliamentary majority of the opposition parties voted for a so-called NATO option, urging the government to clearly express in the security doctrine that Sweden remains open to NATO membership as an alternative. Linde's greater concern for avoiding political tensions at home can be seen from different angles. Just like Wallström, one of her reasons for sustaining the status quo image of the security doctrine is presumably also meant to justify it among the Swedish audience. However, as the reality of the security threat posed by Russia was dramatically increasing when she stepped into office, Linde's script presumably had to take more careful consideration of what was going on backstage. There is reason to believe that being confrontational in the NATO question at that time and risking an infected political conflict, clearly not in line with the self-image of Sweden as ‘a democratic role model’, was deemed to weaken Sweden’s position in the diplomacy that was taking place behind closed doors.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided a Thematic Analysis of how two Swedish Foreign Ministers – Margot Wallström and Ann Linde – legitimise the Social Democratic Government's security doctrine in the context of Sweden's historical culture and identity. A number of conclusions may be drawn from the analysis. The first theme – 'An autonomous force for good' – captures the idea or vision of Sweden as a powerful voice in the world for peace, disarmament and other 'idealistic' goals. For example, in the case of Wallström, the feminist foreign policy aims to reactivate this idea and works as an instrument to downplay the need to abandon the non-alignment policy. The theme of Swedish exceptionalism shows how the idea that Sweden does not have to follow international rules still prevails in the minds of Swedes. However, Wallström and Linde mainly address this idea at the front stage. The backstage, where Sweden has increasingly aligned with NATO, is not as evident in the discourse. Moving on to the idea of Sweden as a democratic role model, this study has shown how the foreign ministers interpret and frame this as not opposing their security line, which they portray as the most 'natural' approach for Sweden.

The main differences between Wallström and Linde, shown in this study, illustrate that there has been a specific transformation of the social context. The secretive nature of the dynamics in security policy makes it difficult to draw any confident conclusions. However, Wallström's and Linde's discourses hint that their experience of the backstage situation was not the same. In Wallström's discourse, she deliberately aims to widen the security concept to non-military threats, as that shaping of the security concept justifies why Sweden needs to remain a 'neutral' actor, at least in foreign affairs, in order to deal with what she believes are the main issues. Linde puts less emphasis on defining the security concept as non-military, implying a return to the more traditional realist approach to security. At the same time, Wallström's discourse represents a more liberal and constructivist perspective on international relations. Their individual characteristics could potentially explain these differences to some degree. However, as this study argues, novelty and change are better understood as emerging from a dynamic process of social interactions that continuously reshapes our perception of reality. Today, Sweden seems to have entered a new reality: 'The return to realism'.

Epilogue

As an irony of faith, the Swedish government handed in its NATO membership application just days before this study was submitted. However, I believe that the conclusions presented here will remain relevant further on. Not the least, it is a historical document of the discourse that preceded the end of Sweden's 200-year-old military non-alignment policy. Even more, it can hopefully contribute to the understanding of how Sweden will act in its role as a member of NATO. As the purpose of this study was to identify the essential ideas in the Swedish self-image, these will presumably continue to provide explanations for how Sweden will approach foreign and security policy in the future. In these first days after announcing the decision to join NATO, Sweden has already started to demand special treatment and proposed different changes of the alliance. In this case, a clear example of how the idea of Swedish exceptionalism prevails!

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