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Sweden's relationship to NATO

How the government legitimizes its foreign security policy

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to study how different political orientations in Swedish foreign security policy have been legitimized. After having pursued a policy of neutrality and non-alignment for 200 years, Sweden made a decision to apply for membership in the military alliance NATO. The investigated time periods are 2014 and 2022, during which Sweden has chosen completely different strategies in terms of NATO. To investigate how both a non-alignment and a NATO membership have been legitimized, the Copenhagen school and securitization theory will be applied. This theory contains securitization movements on how certain politics can be promoted when an event creates disruption in structures and brings forth actions. The thesis purpose is to gain knowledge on how narratives were used to legitimize policy changes, therefore a discourse analysis is the basis for the methodological structure of the paper. Using the theory and method, this thesis has examined how the Swedish government has used a clear purpose, consistency and a social construction in order to gain support for their foreign security policy. The main findings are that in 2014, non-alignment is justified for Sweden's independence, minimized threat and obligations. In 2022, NATO membership is justified because of a greater threat, values and safety guarantees. Furthermore, the current shift in the international power balance and the tension in Swedish security policy will be discussed.

Keywords: *NATO, securitization, legitimization, non-alignment, NATO-membership, speech acts.*

Word count: 9183

Abbreviations:

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

C - Center Party

KD - The Christian Democrats

FP- The People's Party

M - The Moderates

MP - The Green Party

S - The Social Democrats

SD - Sweden Democrats

V- The Left Party

L- The Liberals

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem definition

On May 18, 2022, a major change took place in Sweden's approach to foreign policy. The country applied for membership in NATO, which stands for North Atlantic Treaty Organization that is a political and military alliance. Sweden then left several years of neutrality and non-alignment. Sweden's and NATO's relationship goes back a long way. During 1994, Sweden joined, among other things, the NATO project PFF, partnership for peace. Since then, Sweden has had close cooperation with NATO and has participated in several military operations (Government office, 2023).

Despite close cooperation with, for example, NATO and the Nordic countries, Sweden is after 200 years of neutrality now applying for membership in Nato which is historical. The decision of a membership was made during the prevailing security policy situation in 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine and initiated a full-scale war. This will be one of the events that is relevant to this study. The second is the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula in Ukraine in February 2014 (Styrman, 2023). The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how these events have been used to legitimize a non-alignment or Nato membership and perhaps explain why Sweden goes from neutrality to Nato now.

During the years 2014 and 2022, Sweden has had a social democratic government. The year 2014 is a bit more complex as the first half of the year, during the crime annexation, had a right-wing government. Throughout history, the Social Democrats have advocated a Sweden without NATO membership. In connection with the annexation of Crimea, the then Prime Minister Stefan Löfven spoke out with the words, in translation: "Swedish military non-alignment serves our country well, Sweden should not seek membership in NATO" (Gummesson, 2015). Despite this, the social democratic government chose to vote for membership in NATO a few years later, in 2022. After Russia invaded Ukraine, Swedish security and the need for defense were called into question. The then Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson used the words, in translation from Dagens industri: "There is much in Sweden that is worth defending and Sweden is best defended in NATO" (Dagens Industri, 2022).

The study aims to investigate this process of legitimization. How it can be that the Swedish government suddenly changed its position regarding NATO. Of course, there can be an explanation in that situations with low risk and high risk for a country determine how the policy can be designed. What is interesting to investigate, however, is how Sweden goes from 200 years of neutrality to NATO and how that is justified. As the dates are not far apart, it is also interesting to analyze how the various events were used to promote and legitimize different security policy orientations.

1.2 Purpose and research question

In 2022, a major change took place in Sweden's approach to foreign security policy. The country applied for membership in NATO and then left several years of neutrality and non-alignment. In times of uncertainty, there are many reasonable explanations for a state's actions. The purpose of this study is to be able to explain how Sweden has promoted both non-alignment politics and then a NATO-membership. By analyzing speech acts and documents by the political elite there will hopefully be an answer on how they have legitimized different political approaches.

This thesis will be highlighting two different events, where Russia was a central actor in both and hopefully it should serve as a smoother comparison. The purpose is not to study why Sweden did not apply for membership in 2014 in comparison to 2022, but rather how the security policy was designed and legitimized from each time. The thesis purpose is instead to gain knowledge on how narratives were used to legitimize policy changes and how different events have been used to justify a foreign security policy. The thesis aims to investigate how the government creates securitization of politics and how the international power balance can affect Swedish politics. The Swedish government promoted different political orientations at different times, and this thesis aims to contribute with research on how that is done.

The research question:

How has Swedish security policy in terms of NATO been legitimized in 2014 and 2022?

2. Setting the stage

To comprehend the problematizations of legitimization of politics it is crucial to gain a profound understanding of NATO and Swedens relation. This section is thereby going to introduce the history between them, followed by a clearer understanding of the different situations that is relevant for this thesis.

2.1 Nato and Sweden

The organization NATO, with all member states promotes democratic values and enables cooperation on security-related issues. If diplomacy fails, NATO can use military force to implement crisis management. The organization therefore constitutes a system of collective defense where its member states agree to mutually defend each other against an external attack. NATO offers military assistance to a member state that is attacked but also requires all member states to assist militarily in the event of a crisis. However, the organization promotes working for peace and public order (Nato, 2023).

The neutral Sweden has for a long time pursued a policy of non-alignment. In 1939, when the Second World War began, Sweden declared itself completely neutral and was also the only country in the Nordics that was not involved in the war (The National Archives, 2023). In 1994, NATO also presented the Partnership for Peace program, which would build relationships and cooperation between countries that were not members. Sweden became part of this in 1994, and since then the national defense has also increased cooperation with NATO by trying to maintain the same standards. Since 2013, Sweden has participated in exercises with the member countries of NATO, and in 2014 further cooperation was initiated. This collaboration meant closer communication between Sweden, Finland and NATO due to security threats to the Baltic Sea area. In 2016, Sweden also signed an agreement with NATO that will make it easier to get support from NATO if a conflict arises between a member state and Sweden (Sweden Abroad, 2022).

2.2 Conditions and circumstances during 2014 and 2022

2014

In 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula, resulting in a conflict with Ukraine. The Crimean peninsula has a majority population that is Russian-speaking and the incident mainly

started with two pro-Russian protesters raising the Russian flag after storming government buildings. After this, Russia began to initiate a preparedness near the border with Ukraine, which Ukraine said several times would be seen as a military aggression (Hjort, 2014).

The airports in Crimea were taken over and Russian President Vladimir Putin then received permission from the Russian parliament to enter the country militarily. Russia was also strengthening its grip on Crimea by sending soldiers and military aircraft there to intimidate the resistance. Russia sees Ukraine as its own and does not want Ukraine to move away from Russia by entering into agreements and negotiations with other countries, such as in the EU. Among other things, NATO condemned Russia's actions and called on Putin to withdraw his military force from the Crimean peninsula. The Crimean Peninsula has been occupied by Russia since then (Hjort, 2014)

2022

In 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russian President Putin held one to the nation and soon after Russian troops entered Ukraine from different directions. Attacks have been carried out with ground troops, aircraft and robots. Russia has several times threatened with nuclear weapons and the war has led to the death and forced displacement of many people. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyi has, among other things, called on civilians to arm themselves (Ibrahim & Wicklén, 2022).

Russia's actions have received reactions from all over the world. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has also condemned Russia and expressed NATO's support for Ukraine. This with more than 50 nations providing support and supplies and 140 nations that stood up for Ukraine's sovereignty in the United Nations. Russia has also gotten a response because of the war by being cut off from international markets and removed from international summits. This war is believed to be a threat not only to Ukraine, but to peace, freedom and democracy (Nato, 2023).

2.3 Previous research

As this essay intends to examine how security policy is legitimized and accepted during two different times, it is extremely interesting to understand the complexity in creating and

receiving politics. It is noted that the media has a large role in how not only international relations are created, but also how citizens receive the country's politics. When it comes to how countries respond to threats, it has been divided into two different categories, trust-issues and emotional responses. It has been shown that trust issues influence a country's reaction based on destruction and control, which can increase frustration and become more easily triggered. When it comes to emotional responses, this is harder to predict. When civilians or states feel, for example, anger, the actions become more unpredictable and uncontrolled. The idea is that politics stimulate, rearrange emotions and trust variables into a temporal sequence which creates faith in the nation (Hoyle & Wagnsson etc. 2023).

There is not only complexity in how to receive and create politics, but also in the limitations that exist for politics. It is meant that when the design and creation of policy takes place, the actions of a political elite will be critically decisive for how far the nation will let the policy go. A specific limitation is time, as when a decision comes during an emergency or for a shorter amount of time, it will be questioned by the citizens. This gives political parties less flexibility to be able to shift their views, as the voters will question and limit the work. In summary, there are limitations with politics in decision-making, such as the inconsistency of time which leads to division among citizens (Vermeule, 2014).

The connection between citizens and policy-making it is clear that the media has a large role in national and international relations. When the media perceives a situation, it is passed on to those who take part in it. In this way, for example, security threats can be noticed and create greater concern. The impact of media affects people's behavior against politics, for example: When various media is presented with security threats, terrorism or another, some will try to cover them while some will try to pay attention to them. So how much focus a certain policy or event gets depends on the content that is presented and how the media portray it (Oates, 2008).

The legitimization of politics is a process where words are becoming action. When politicians speak they are often referring to something that affects us, so that the politics will be influenceable. The process of legitimization can be done in various ways as, through emotions: where actors have the possibility to make people feel emotions that justify a behavior. Through a hypothetical future: when politicians display something as a threat and address that as something threatening to justify actions or politics. Through rationality: when

perhaps a political elite refers to their ideas as evaluated and secure. Through expertise: When a political proposal is backed up by expertise and knowledge from an area. Through altruism: When a political proposal is not only driven by personal interests but presented as a common good. These are ways to legitimize politics in an effective way which then goes from words to actions. Legitimization is the process of justifying social behavior (Reyes, 2011).

When you justify a policy or a behavior, it is done through a narrative, which is a human discourse. It is then up to each person to socially construct how a narrative is interpreted and how to find meaning in it. Arguably, everything in text and speech contributes to its impact and our interpretation of it, and so everything has some rhetorical function. Narrative is an instrument of power, because in almost every narrative there is a conflict in which power is at stake. A narrative provides a way for a problem to resolve, discuss, develop and contradict (Porter Abbott, 2008).

3. Theoretical framework

When studying the various Swedish security policy strategies and their legitimization, the following theory will be used. The theory of the Copenhagen school and securitization theory is divided into three parts, the securitization process, speech acts and desecuritization.

3.1 Copenhagen school and the securitization theory

The Securitization theory, developed by Ole Wæver, is probably the most prominent concept of the Copenhagen School. The theory has a strong anchoring in social constructivism, suggesting that security threats are the products of social interaction. Actors are said to be creators of structures in society, but these structures in turn create actions. More precisely, all people will act based on their own preferences and interpretations of reality, while structures shape the social sphere in which everyone lives (Wæver, 2011).

When it comes to securitization, it is a process where an issue goes from being a political issue to a security issue. Most often, it is the state that securitizes an issue, but in some cases it can be done by other actors. In securing an issue, it is not necessarily because there is an external threat, but because it is framed as such (Rychnovská, 2014). Securitization is therefore the process of moving from a non-politicized issue to a security issue. The process is formulated through different phases that the question goes through which are as follows:

1. The non-politicized phase, where an issue is limited to the societal level and does not have a role in political debates.
2. The politicized phase, where the issue has gained increased focus and is beginning to become a political matter.
3. The securitization, where an issue is formulated as more important than the rest in politics. The question then concerns society's survival and commitment in general, where clear political measures may be needed for safety

A securitization can be seen as a discursive process where a state constructs a threat but also enables ways to deal with the threat. The population must also accept the threat and its actions for this process to be valid. It is important to point out that when a question is moved between the spheres, this is only a movement of securitization (Wæver, 2011).

In order for an issue to be securitized, it is required that different actors control or indirectly lead these securitization movements. In addition to this process, the theory also states that it is possible to distinguish three types of actors, which are as follows:

- The reference objects, which are perceived to be existentially threatened, for example a state, government or territory. Most often, a reference object can legitimize its security policy in defense of its own survival (Buzan etc, 1998).
- Security actors, is the actor who declares that the reference object is existentially threatened. It is usually those who perform speech acts and consists of the government, interest groups, political leaders, etc. They are not arguing for their own survival but rather for the situation, the nation and the international system (Buzan etc, 1998).
- Functional actors, those who influence the security dynamics within a sector. Examples of this type of actor are companies in environmental matters, where they are neither the reference object nor securitization actors. Most of the time, these actors can influence issues by having great influence in a specific area (Buzan etc, 1998).

These actors can then influence the securitization process by different sectors. An important point made according to the Copenhagen School is that different threats can be divided into different sectors. These sectors should provide an overview of international systems and interactions that may arise when securitization is done. The sectors are divided into military, environmental, economic, social and political, of which an important point is that the same actor can be in different sectors. Relevant for this thesis are the following 3 out of 5 sectors. 1 - Military, armed conflicts and war as a threat image, 2 - Social, emigration and immigration and a threatened identity, 3 - Political, threats to internal legitimacy (Buzan etc, 1998).

3.2 Speech acts

When a securitization is created, it is ultimately formulated as a "speech act", which is verbal actions that accomplish something. It is then the creation of discourse to pose something as a threat and make an issue into security issues. Whoever has the power to formulate this is an elite, who then influence the political agenda. By lifting questions about security, people will react based on fear and unsafety. It is through this way that politicians can legitimize their

politics, to promote it as necessary for survival. This also requires that the problem is accepted by the people (Wæver, 2011).

There are different types of "speech acts" that elites can use to legitimize politics. This may include to greet, insult, plead or supply information by using a specific language. Politicians can be representative, commissive, direct and expressive in writing and speech. This by making statements, claims, promises, requests or affecting a psychological state. The Copenhagen school suggests that it is only existential threats that the securitization actors want to securitize. The purpose of speech acts is that it becomes a central power factor for how states and societies function (Schiffman, 1996).

3.3 Desecuritization

This is a concept that is basically the opposite of securitization. This means that a security issue goes backwards in the process and becomes politicized or non-politicized again, to the steps mentioned above. Desecuritization is therefore a development, where problems are no longer dealt with within an existential fear outside of a regular political process, but return to the regular agenda (Wæver, 2011).

The danger that comes from a securitization process is that it justifies an elites action, which can lead to abuse of power. De-securing issues is therefore somewhat desirable in some cases, as it moves issues back to the political agenda and reduces the possibility of misusing power. It nevertheless also provides an opportunity to avert panic and concern from the population, by making the issue smaller (Collins, 2019).

In contrast to the securitization of issues, de-securitization becomes a means of annihilating a policy, which is done by changing internal perceptions of a threat. The difficulty with de-securing societal problems is that beliefs are self-reinforcing. That said, when individuals or states perceive something as a threat, they tend to arm themselves against the threat. This in turn creates security dilemmas that escalate due to fear and then become difficult to handle. This can happen both through states, where a lack of communication and clarity leads to states arming up more than the counterparty. It can just as well happen between societal security dilemmas where an escalating dynamic of fear and insecurity between the people, means that an identity is growing which is then difficult to de-secure (Collins, 2019).

4. Method

4.1 Research design and Methodological considerations

This thesis aims to investigate how different security policy guidelines regarding NATO are legitimized in politics during 2 different time periods. Hence, this thesis will use a discourse analysis. Our perceived reality is shaped by the language we use and social interactions underpin perceptions of social problems. Discourse analysis can be said to suggest a focus on issues of power and identity and is therefore a good method for analyzing debates, with the aim of either highlighting contradictions or similarities. The term discourse encompasses various meaning-making concepts based on the analytical approach. A discourse analysis can therefore be regarded as a comprehensive framework that includes theory and method (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

A discourse analysis involves a closer examination of the case, which will then take place through a qualitative method. A qualitative method involves an in-depth examination of texts and, in this case, public documents and debates. The study also has relevant points of comparison as Russia has an involvement as an external threat from both time periods. Since the method involves interpreting continuous texts, it is a partially unstructured method that should help answer the question of "why" and "how" (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

The main purpose of using a qualitative text analysis is to bring out the essential content of the material through careful reading of the entirety and the context in which the material is part of (Badersten, 2006). It is extremely fundamental for a discourse analysis to see connections with the language. The language we use is shaped in a social context, but at the same time also shapes the social context itself, it is said to be both constitutive and constituted. Language gains meaning within a structural network that is influenced and created by the context of its use. This method is therefore suitable together with the chosen theory as it emphasizes the importance of language in social and political contexts, which is necessary to be able to analyze a legitimization process of politics (Esaiasson etc, 2017)

4.2 Definitions and Operationalization

When a qualitative text analysis is to be carried out, it is carried out through a systematic examination of the material. In order to find out how both NATO membership and

non-alignment are promoted in politics, the various steps in the process need to be operationalized. To be able to analyze how different strategies regarding NATO are legitimized, politics needs a clear purpose, prospects for success and to be able to identify conflicts around it. Therefore, this needs to be operationalized into the following categories:

1. The purpose of standing behind non-alignment or NATO membership
2. Sweden's strategy and response to the current situation
3. The social construction of the security threat and strategy

This is to be able to better understand how politics is formed, legitimized and has a position. The outside world also has a big role in this thesis, which is the basis for the choices of the years 2014 and 2022. The purpose is to be able to understand the choice of language and politics in relation to the world situation. The primary goal then is to achieve an understanding of how different acts legitimates politics (Halperin & Heath, 2020).

4.3 Material and Delimitation

When it comes to the timing of the decision on Swedish NATO membership, it is still very new and relevant. Since the membership is not official yet, certain information can be classified and makes access to a certain part of the material difficult. As a result of this, different reports on security situations from the Ministry of Defense and Foreign Affairs will be used. These reports provide an understanding and insight into the security policy and threats at the different times. The reports explain the security-critical situation that Sweden finds itself in, the positions of the political elite during the different time periods and the choice to promote either neutrality or alliance. This choice of material is then from existing sources, which provides information that is open and for everyone to take part in. This increases both the validity and reliability (Esaiasson etc, 2017).

The study then aims to analyze the material based on an unstructured observation. This means that, as a rule, you have not clarified which factors you are looking for, but are testing yourself for a result. The partly unstructured method that the materials go through means that it can become very descriptive, which is where theory comes in to be able to explain what is described. Some material is also taken from the debates of the parliament and the Swedish parties. Every year, the foreign minister presents a report on Sweden's foreign policy, which the parties in the country then debate about. Here, NATO and its approach from different

times are debated, which becomes extremely relevant because of the argumentation of politics (Teorell & Svensson, 2007).

The chosen time period of 2014 and 2022 is to be able to analyze differences and similarities in the modern, late 2000s. In the various years, despite being close in time, it has highlighted different security policies and approaches to NATO, both non-alignment and NATO membership. During the periods, Russia carried out two different aggressions, which had effects for the rest of Europe. The purpose of this essay is therefore to understand Sweden's view of NATO during the first and second aggression. The delineation takes place by focusing on Swedish politics and how it is legitimized in order to create greater understanding and be able to go deeper into the subject. This is so that the study can be sustainable and also manageable based on time and resources.

5. Result and Analysis

During this section, reports and debates will be presented and analyzed based on the theory. This is to find a connection in how the security policy legitimizes the different orientations by adopting a securitization approach. The episode will begin with a review of the ministry of defense report, followed by speech acts regarding security strategic approaches. Then finally the social construction of policy and what contradictions there are.

5.1 The event of 2014

The Russian aggression against Ukraine created a great deal of uncertainty as a result of challenges to crisis management and yet security policy measures. Russia sought a center of power and considered itself entitled to claim Crimea. The Swedish Ministry of Defense believes that this could lead to unforeseen events and security threats to Sweden, when countries such as Russia believe they are entitled to something (Ministry of defense, 2014).

NATO member states have shown solidarity within the alliance and acted against Russia by increasing military support to allies. That NATO maintains confidence in the collective security guarantees is of great importance. In contrast, the Nordic region and the Baltic Sea region are dynamic regions that are of interest for political, economic, cultural and social purposes. Sweden's immediate area has a military presence from NATO in regions that are attractive to Russia, which poses a military challenge. However, the countries in our region face similar challenges and Sweden shares several policies and interests with them. It was therefore decided that Sweden would work for closer political and military integration between the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as Germany and Poland, to face future threats. The security policy therefore promotes cooperation but with flexibility by not being in an alliance. Based on the time period, an armed attack directly against Sweden is considered to have an increased risk but is still considered unlikely (Ministry of defense, 2014).

The Swedish defense emphasizes that several threats and risks can result in disasters without threatening a country's sovereignty. The main security goals are to be able to protect the life and health of the population, the functionality of society and to maintain values such as democracy and human rights. Sweden's security policy must be characterized by the

flexibility between non-military and military means. Politics must also have a great weight in international values, as individual conflicts are a matter for the entire international community. Sweden's main method for dealing with challenges will be through diplomacy, trade and aid in partnership with other countries and organizations. Sweden is not part of NATO, but neither does it see a military conflict that would only affect our immediate area. On the other hand, the Swedish security policy will promote civil and military support in the event of attacks against other countries, in the hope of receiving that help themselves should something happen. The military defense consists of the Armed Forces and must work for a solidary security policy by guaranteeing Sweden's political independence (Ministry of defense, 2014).

Based on the security report, it is clear that Sweden is promoting their independence. Based on the theory of securitization, an issue should be securitized when gaining increased focus and political actions are needed for survival. Based on this report, it can almost be seen as the opposite, a desecuritization. The Crimean annexation is seen as a threat to international values and also increases the chance of armed conflicts with Sweden. Despite this, the conflict is reduced by minimizing its impact on Sweden's independence and need for NATO membership. This is a process of desecuritization, where the theory nevertheless explains how security policy develops into a smaller issue. By referring to Sweden's cooperation and small chance of being in a conflict, the political framing of the security threat from Russia is weakened (Collins, 2019).

As shown in the report, the year 2014 is characterized by a security policy of solidarity, where it rather shows how Sweden takes a stand in a conflict when the risk of being exposed itself is considered low. So by de-securing a question, according to the theory, is a way of legitimizing a security policy of political independence and non-alignment (Wæver, 2011).

5.1.1 Security policy

In order to legitimize a policy, it needs to be done through statements in various forms, such as writing or speech. In 2014, a comprehensive picture of Sweden's freedom of alliance was presented as a successful security strategy. Likewise, it is also presented how Sweden, despite the non-alignment, has strong connections and collaborations with other countries.

In 2014, an interpellation debate took place regarding Sweden's security policy and relationship with NATO. It is clear that the Crimea annexation has created a shift in the environment of security policy. In light of the new situation in the immediate area, it is considered important to continue the development of various defense policy collaborations. However, NATO membership is not something that is preferred for Sweden as a result of the flexibility that disappears (Sweden's Government, interpellation debate 2014). Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist (S) said this in translation:

- There has been a security policy balance with priorities and both the Moderates and the Social Democrats were involved and considered that the limit for Swedish NATO membership is the collective defense obligations (Sweden's Government, interpellation debate 2014).

The security policy strategy that this adheres to is criticized from the opposition as well, as a result of a weak defense. Member of Parliament Jeff Ahl (SD) said this in translation:

- Sweden's defense capability has been downgraded from bad to nothing (...) These collaborations with the Nordic countries and NATO reinforce that we have already abandoned part of our freedom of alliance. We should take a step forward and enter into a defense alliance with Finland, as there are clear defensive intentions from both that would not provoke a Russian aggression (Sweden's Government, interpellation debate 2014).

A close Swedish-Finnish cooperation in security policy and defense can be considered quite natural given geography, history and the fact that both countries are without NATO membership. After the annexation of Crimea, it became clear that Russia considered itself able to attack countries outside NATO. Instead of NATO membership, the Swedish security strategy instead became a Swedish-Finnish alliance, in order to preserve its independence and avoid obligations that come with NATO. Cooperation with Finland would instead mean opportunities for joint action, but no commitments. The aim is to eliminate a military action against just one of the countries alone (Rydell & Forss, 2019).

The Crimean annexation shows that debates were characterized by a willingness to discuss NATO. In the 2015 foreign policy debate, member of parliament Kenneth G Forslund (S) said

that the Social Democrats do not support Swedish membership in NATO (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2015). The reasoning comes from the negativity it would entail in the international balance of power with Russia and in translation it was said:

- I belong to a party that thinks that we should not become a member of NATO either (...) It would increase the tension and I think that the best way to deal with the aggressive Russian policy is through sanctions instruments such as political and economic, not military (Sweden's government , foreign policy debate 2015).

Within this speech, a clear reasoning for the security policy strategy Sweden has chosen, through diplomacy and international collaborations, can be seen. The balance of power between NATO and Russia is considered to be something that could risk the nation's security if there is too much interference. Therefore, non-alignment is a strategy for Sweden to position itself internationally based on the security situation (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2015).

The various debates and speeches show Sweden's choice of security strategy. It is clear that there is an agreement between many politicians that a freedom of alliance would serve Sweden the best and also provide flexibility in partnerships between other countries, as the country is still independent and without certain obligations. According to the theory, there are different actors who can secure a problem, of which security actors are one of them. The statements of these politicians are an example, according to the theory, of this type of actor. By commenting on the balance of power as above, it points out the importance of neutrality and how NATO could be a security risk. By commenting on the collective defense obligations as above, a NATO membership becomes a threat to internal legitimacy and independence. In this way, the statements relate to different sectors according to the theory, which is necessary for creating securitization movements and then legitimize the chosen security policy (Buzan etc, 1998).

5.1.2 Social construction

During both the debates and the security report, a clear narrative was presented that Sweden would remain outside an alliance with NATO. However, what was common was that Sweden would be a state whose foreign policy would be based on solidarity and values. In order to be

able to secure an issue, according to the theory, it needs to be done through confirmation from the people. By emphasizing values within politics, a national identity is created, which in turn creates a social sphere where policy is made and accepted by social interaction (Sweden's government, debate on security policy direction 2015). Member of Parliament Stig Henriksson (V) said as follows in translation:

- The nuclear weapons strategy is central to NATO and goes completely against Sweden's stated desire to work for nuclear disarmament. Swedish membership in NATO would make it more difficult for us to conduct our own foreign policy with credibility (Sweden's government, debate on security policy direction 2015).

It is clear that the security policy emphasizes what values Sweden should have as a country. An identity is being constructed by Sweden which, with NATO membership, would have a questionable role internationally. It also shows that Swedish identity wants to be based on, as mentioned in the strategy above, diplomatic and peaceful conflict management. This instead of violence, military and nuclear weapons (Sweden's government, debate on security policy direction 2015).

At the same time, there has been opposition where NATO membership could be seen as beneficial and portrayed as a good role for Sweden. Karin Enström (M) said this in translation:

- We want to deepen Sweden's cooperation with NATO, and we want to work for a Swedish accession. We believe that it would give Sweden a greater opportunity to take responsibility for and influence an organization which today is absolutely central to both our own and Europe's security (Sweden's government, debate on security policy direction 2015)

The construction of what role and identity Sweden should have in its security policy is a central question. However, it is clear after all the debates that non-alignment is the best way to promote Sweden's ability to decide for themselves in their defense. Foreign Minister Margot Wallström (S) said during this time in translation:

- The answer to all security policy challenges is not NATO. But we cooperate with NATO, and we will continue to do so. Our foreign policy has over the decades been adapted and continues to be adapted to the situation we have. We stand strong, and we do not waver when it comes to security policy (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2014).

By constructing a safe Sweden with values in solidarity and peace, according to the theory, through speech acts, a policy is legitimized. By painting a picture of how different NATO is, for example with nuclear weapons, it creates reactions from the people that refer to uncertainty. As neutrality is something that has existed for large parts of Sweden's history, it is a social structure that shapes the sphere we live in (Schiffman, 1996).

5.2 The event of 2022

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 demonstrates Russia's denial of the Ukrainian state and the nation's right to exist. The Russian state leadership is based on values that differ from the West, and which include an authoritarian view of society with military means. It is thus a conflict between an authoritarian state of society and the free democratic world, which must be taken into account for a security policy management of the country (Ministry of foreign affairs, 2022).

Nuclear weapons are a central element for Russia in strategic attempts at deterrence. Russian nuclear weapons are located in Sweden's immediate vicinity, including the Baltic Sea area. Russian President Vladimir Putin has made several threats about the use of nuclear weapons, should the country feel threatened, which is worrying for Swedish security. Russia has strengthened its military capabilities in the Arctic and along its western border, which also increases Gotland's vulnerability. It is in Russia's interest that Sweden's freedom of military alliance is preserved, and it has been pointed out several times that Swedish NATO membership would be met with retaliatory measures. The government made decisions about supporting Ukraine with weapons and to highlight the importance of partnership with NATO. This can therefore be seen as triggering factors for Russian action (Ministry of foreign affairs, 2022).

The Swedish defense emphasizes that an armed attack against Sweden cannot be ruled out. Challenges and threats must be met in cooperation with other countries, and Sweden has had in-depth cooperation with others before. As a country without military alliances, Sweden has had no binding defense obligations with other countries. But given the security policy situation throughout Europe, Sweden needs to review how the country's security can be strengthened, also by taking a position on Swedish NATO membership. Russia (or the Soviet Union) has never attacked a NATO ally, but has recently attacked states that are outside the alliance. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and NATO's actions demonstrate the disparity between the countries covered by NATO's defense guarantees and those that are not. It is therefore an interest to be covered by these guarantees as Russia has increased as a security threat. As a member, Sweden also has the ability to assert Swedish interests and values in order to participate in decision-making and the development of the organization NATO. With Sweden as a member, security in northern Europe would be higher on the agenda in NATO. NATO membership should not affect Sweden's promotion of basic values such as democracy, human rights and the principles of the rule of law (Ministry of foreign affairs, 2022).

Based on this report, the external threat is much greater, which affects the Swedish perception of security commitments. When it comes to the theory and securitization process, it is a process where an issue goes from being a political issue to a security issue. Since Russia has been active in security conflicts before such as in 2014, this security threat has already gone from a non-politicized phase to a politicized phase, according to the theory because of its gained focus. The securitization of the issue, according to the theory, takes place through the policy. Russia's sudden actions together with NATO's protection of member states only put Sweden in a unique position. This conflict therefore creates concerns for Sweden's survival with no guarantees from Nato and then clear political measures may be needed for safety, according to the theory. A securitization process can be seen as a discursive process where a state constructs a threat but also enables ways to deal with the threat. This is done by highlighting the danger of Russia and constructing a threat, as well as the importance of having safety guarantees from an alliance as a solution to deal with this threat (Wæver, 2011).

5.2.1 Security policy

It is clear that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created tensions throughout Europe. In 2022, a comprehensive picture of a need for NATO membership for Sweden was presented as a successful strategy. In terms of the purpose of the security policy, the debates were clear that the threat from the East was the most prominent. How Sweden should continue its security strategic choices is therefore a major discussion (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2022). Member of Parliament Lars Adaktusson (KD) said this in translation:

- We have on several occasions welcomed Sweden's bilateral defense cooperation, with, for example, Finland, the USA and Great Britain. At the same time, we have emphasized that guarantees of outside help in the event of a military attack can only be obtained through full membership in NATO. For this and other reasons, Sweden should long ago have been a member of the alliance (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2022).

The situation in Ukraine has shown a concern for Sweden in the event of a conflict. Hence, the discussion about partnership or membership is an important point during this time. Sweden can join NATO despite Russia's marking of consequences for membership, or Sweden stands in a non-alignment where cooperation and partnership do not provide a guaranteed defense (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2022). Member of Parliament Hans Wallmark (M) said this in translation:

- The Russian ambassador made a threatening statement, that it is not possible for Sweden and Finland to become NATO members. It is extremely important to mark with both Swedish and Cyrillic letters against the type of threats that are uttered against our country (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2022).

This is a clear distinction that Sweden's sovereignty should not be threatened, and that the nation should stand up for this. Sweden later took the step and applied for membership in NATO. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tobias Billström (M), expressed himself in the meantime, in translation:

- Sweden becomes stronger with NATO, and NATO becomes stronger with Sweden (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2023).

The Swedish security strategy takes into account the security situation with Russia and the Swedish immediate area. It is also important to point out that the closest partner is Finland, with geographical, historical and cultural intertwinings (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2023). Morgan Johansson (S) said this in translation:

- If it were to happen that Finland joins NATO before Sweden - it would have very serious consequences. We have in-depth military cooperation with Finland that we have built up over a very long time, and if Finland were to join NATO but not us, it is clear that it will be important (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2023).

That there were different acceptance for Sweden and Finland was clear especially in Turkey. The Turkish President Erdogan is said to say no to Swedish NATO membership as long as the burning of the Quran is allowed. The view of Finland is therefore better than that of Sweden as a result of the freedom of expression that the country maintains. In order for Sweden to be able to legitimize a membership, these requirements are something to take into consideration as well (Jönsson, 2023).

There is a clear change in how the purpose of a membership is presented. However, the left-wing party was still critical of Swedish membership in NATO. Member of Parliament Håkan Svenneling (V) expressed himself as follows in translation:

- What I demand is that we go back to the Swedish hallmark of credible diplomacy, that we are credible in our foreign policy and conduct it in a calm and composed manner (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2023).

However, it is clear that the majority presents the alliance as Sweden's safest choice going forward. It is also possible to see the support for the narrative and NATO membership in public opinion. Among other things, the percentage of the population that is positive for NATO membership changed from 29 to 64 percentage points just between the years 2021 and 2022. It is therefore clear that NATO membership is a security policy strategy, of which it is seen as protection from the security threat (Bjereld & Oscarsson, 2023).

The various debates and speeches show Sweden's choice of security strategy. According to the theory, there are different actors who can secure a problem, of which security actors and the reference objects are two of them. The reference object is something which is perceived to be existentially threatened. Both the threat from Russia about consequences if Sweden joins NATO and Turkey's demand for changes to the Swedish constitution means that both the government and the state are threatened. Hence, the government can more easily legitimize its security policy based on the need to protect its values and areas, according to the theory. The different statements from politicians form the security actors. It is this actor who declares the reference object to be threatened. They are not arguing for their own survival but rather for the nation and its place in the international system, according to the theory (Buzan etc, 1998).

5.2.2 Social construction

During both the debates and reports, a clear narrative was presented that Sweden would apply for membership in NATO. In order to be able to secure an issue, according to the theory, it needs to be done through confirmation from the people. This is done by emphasizing values within politics which then creates a social sphere. Magdalena Andersson (S) said this in translation:

- Sweden's main foreign and security policy arena is the European Union, and Swedish NATO membership does not change that. But for collective security in Europe, NATO is the leading actor. The EU and NATO complement each other (Sweden's government, debate on security policy deliberations 2022).

For Sweden to leave a non-alignment and take the step into NATO is a reversal in the security policy construction that has existed. The threat from Russia is great and the social sphere is rather built on how safe the country is in relation to NATO or alone. Member of Parliament Lars Adaktusson (KD) said this in translation:

- If the security policy line is as clear as the foreign minister says, then how can Moscow include Sweden in a Russian sphere of interest? Sweden is counted there, but

not Norway and not Denmark - they are namely members of NATO (Sweden's government, foreign policy debate 2022).

It is clear in the discussions that NATO is associated with security and protection. Building community and sharing values with neighboring countries is specifically central, as it belongs to the immediate area and shares security issues. In 2014, there was great questioning about NATO as a result of nuclear weapons and the non-shared value basis for it. In contrast, steering the country's security policy together with well-founded democratic neighboring countries emphasizes certain values together with others (Sweden's government, debate on security policy deliberations 2022). Ulf Kristensson (M) said this in translation:

- NATO's nuclear doctrine is an important cornerstone for working towards strategic deterrence in our immediate area. On the Swedish side, however, there is no reason to have nuclear weapons or permanent basing of foreign troops on our territory in peacetime. Sweden should do as Finland, and as Norway and Denmark already do, and declare that position nationally (Sweden's government, debate on security policy deliberations 2022).

A narrative is used that Sweden's integration into NATO will take place based on Sweden's preferences. Sweden wants to construct a role and identity that promotes democracy, solidarity and peace where they have the opportunity to influence the alliance. Party leader Jimmie Åkesson (SD) said this in translation:

- We must review what role Sweden can and should have in NATO. As a full NATO member, Sweden will be able to contribute to putting our imprint on the defense alliance (Sweden's government, debate on security policy deliberations 2022).

By constructing a Sweden that's safer with NATO and being able to spread and hold their values, according to theory, is a legitimization process. By constructing a need for NATO as a result of the current security threat and likewise sharing the foundations with neighboring countries, the policy is more easily accepted in a social structure. This is done through speech acts that the theory names, where one refers to security, the combating of contradictions that NATO brings, for example, nuclear weapons. This is how social construction shapes the way politics is legitimized (Schiffman, 1996).

6. Discussion

The work presented above has the question: "How has Swedish security policy in terms of NATO been legitimized in 2014 and 2022?". The purpose has been to investigate how the government consisting of parties and politicians legitimizes their security policy based on 2 different times and events. This has been done through a discourse analysis and qualitative method together with the Copenhagen school and securitization theory. The relationship between the result and the theory was close, of which the following discussion is based on the question and other possible reasoning for the various securitization processes.

6.1 Non-alignment and NATO-membership

A clear securitization can be observed in the various events for 2014 and 2022. During the debates and reports, Russia is presented as a threat to international security and fundamental values such as democracy. Security is presented in a way that makes Russia an existential threat, even for Sweden. The various chosen security strategies, NATO membership and non-alignment were thereby secured within the studied periods.

In 2014, there was a strong counter-narrative against NATO and joining the alliance was presented as a way to increase instability in the world. Membership in NATO was meant to increase tensions and is also not covered by a Swedish value base. The external threat from Russia does not pose as great a risk in this year as in 2022, which means that the security policy direction the country has always had remains. However, Sweden opens up close collaborations with Finland as they share similar views in their foreign policy and are neighboring countries whose histories and areas are shared.

Finland, on the other hand, perhaps has a different position than Sweden when it comes to the threat from Russia, as they share a geographical border. When Ukraine was later invaded, it may have led to greater pressure for action on Finland's part, and as a result of the nations' close cooperation, Sweden followed along in the process. During the studied foreign debates, Nordic cooperation was presented as particularly important for Swedish security policy. Finland is described as Sweden's closest partner country and the joint decision to apply for NATO membership was presented as favorable.

Although the parties have shown a great deal of respect for the long-term periods of non-alignment that Sweden has held, the year 2022 differs when the safest alternative would be NATO membership. In order to implement drastic changes, support from the people is required to accept the securitization process according to the theory. As the membership process was fast-tracked in 2022, no referendum was held. However, the opinion figures were still on the side of the membership during this year. An important point is that both 2014 and 2022 were election years, which can also explain the parties' approach in politics from what's favorable in receiving votes.

In order to legitimize a policy, politicians and the government need to gain acceptance from the population. It is clear how the annexation of Crimea is made visible as a factor to lift the NATO debate, but that the situation still has a significantly low risk for Sweden. Through the theory's speech acts, it refers to the low risk and a non-need for change. The basic values in the politics that characterized the country are retained and a shift is not supported because the security issue with Crimea is not securitized to a greater risk, but rather desecuritized to the regular agenda. Therefore, a non-alignment strategy is legitimized by the fact that the issue is not as great and Sweden can manage without a full commitment to NATO.

During the legitimization of NATO membership, when Russia made a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the conditions changed completely. This has created concern and is a high risk situation that will shape the strategic development for Sweden. The speech acts performed during this period rather refer to how Russia tries to limit Sweden's independence in the form of consequences for their NATO choice. With indirect and direct threats, NATO membership is legitimized in how it brings security and in how Sweden can become a leading example where Swedish values can characterize the alliance. A NATO membership is thus legitimized through a continuous debate about an international balance of power and defense possibilities in an uncertain world.

6.1.1 Future research

This thesis has been delineated through a selection of debates and reports based on specific time frames. This study has provided an understanding of how different political orientations have been legitimized in Swedish foreign security policy. There is still much more material to

study as a whole, as individual parties also shape Swedish foreign policy together. Possibilities for future research therefore include studies for a possible individual party or to compare different countries' path to NATO. One alternative was to compare Sweden with Finland, which now during the same period chose the same guidelines as Sweden when it comes to NATO membership. Due to issues such as time and depth it needed to be delineated, but it is of interest to be able to create understanding on a more international level.

6.2 Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to investigate the legitimization process of different security policy approaches to NATO. This has been investigated through reports, debates and speeches from the government from 2 different times, 2014 and 2022. Several conclusions can be drawn based on the results. First, there was no need for membership in 2014 because the majority of politicians presented non-alignment as the best strategy. There was also a strong opposition to membership as a result of a social construction of values that did not fit together. Sweden is presented as a diplomatic state that wants to cooperate and show solidarity but without obligations.

For 2022, Sweden is now presented as an ally to trust. There have been several discussions about NATO membership and during this period the international balance of power has been a central point. Sweden's legitimization process for membership is rather now based on being able to spread its values and that the alliance coincides with Sweden's national values. Securitization is much more evident in 2022, when the national threat perception is greater.

So the question is:

How has Swedish security policy in terms of NATO been legitimized in 2014 and 2022?

The answer is based on different narratives and the ability to create securitization movements of an event. Non-alignment has been legitimized in 2014 as a result of a minimization of threats, significant differences between NATO and Sweden and that it is the best strategy for the country's independence. NATO membership has been legitimized in 2022 as a result of an increased threat, Sweden as a good ally and guaranteed protection within the alliance. Furthermore, the legitimization of politics compliments and helps comprehend the relationship between Sweden and NATO.

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