The Enemy of Russia is Sweden's Ally

A qualitative interview study about Swedish military officers' perceptions of collective defense via NATO

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Abstract

Following the Swedish NATO accession in 2024, this thesis aims to portray views of the shift in defense policy from within the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF). By conducting a qualitative research study comprising six interviews with senior officers from the Swedish Air Force, Navy, and Army, the aspiration has been to investigate to what extent the institutional changes of the Swedish NATO membership have been integrated into an individual identity level. By applying a framework from the identity salience approach derived from social psychology, the goal has been to determine if a shift in national defense policy automatically results in identification and commitment by those expected to perform the task. This thesis finds that NATO membership can be integrated into the officers' identity images if it does not challenge their most salient identities, such as their private or SAF identity. Their commitment to collective defense efforts is determined by several aspects, such as the regime time of the given country to defend, its geographic proximity to Sweden, a shared common enemy, strategic interest for Swedish security, and their balance between professional responsibility and private life. This thesis calls for an increased understanding of the relationship between individual identity construction and the process of national integration within regional alliances.

Keywords: SAF, NATO, social identity, collective defense, alliance integration
Words: 10,206

Preface

I want to thank the six Swedish military officers who participated in this study and dedicated their valuable time to discuss their changing professional lives with me. Additionally, I thank Bibi Imre-Millei for her helpful assistance in crafting the interview questions. Above all, I thank my supervisor, Roxanna Sjöstedt, whose invaluable guidance and encouragement helped shape this thesis.

"The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all /…/." (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949: §5)

"Sweden is ready to contribute to NATO's security in the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole." (Swedish Defence Commission, 2024, 239)

"Is it good for Sweden to join NATO? Yes, probably. Is it good for the Swedish Defence Force to join NATO? Yes, it will lead to further investments. Is it good for me, personally? Many of us are answering no to that one." (Interviewee D, 2024)

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1 Introduction

Moving the Swedish NATO delegation from one street to another in Brussels does not automatically lead to a willingness - amongst Swedish officers - to engage in Euro-Atlantic collective defense. On May 22, 2023, a majority of democratically elected politicians voted in favor of the proposition that Sweden should apply to become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Sveriges Riksdag, 2023). Swedish NATO membership is the case for a country with a long history of non-alignment that has now entered a military alliance based on mutual defense guarantees.

While politicians and academics continue to discuss the integration of Sweden into NATO, the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) personnel are expected to implement the changes in practice. As a NATO member, Sweden is expected to fulfill collective defense obligations, thus transitioning from defending national territory to NATO territory. Included in this integration is the contribution to the multi-national battle group units - in the Eastern Flank of NATO - during peace-time, to be able to deliver host country support in the occurrence of war (Försvarsberedningen 2023; Jarl et al., 2024; Regeringskansliet, 2024: A). Even though the NATO identity is now established institutionally in Sweden, this study investigates the level of identification that individuals working within the SAF feel with the newly entered alliance. Through conducting qualitative interviews with six officers from the SAF, this thesis builds on social identity theory to analyze the individuals' perceptions of Sweden and NATO. The militaries' identifications have been understood by conceptualizing the "willingness to defend" to estimate the level of commitment to a continued career within the SAF, with Sweden as a NATO member.

By centering the research on the military personnel's lived experiences within the SAF, this study aims to provide insight into the increasingly complex military roles evolving due to SAF's NATO integration. Intending to understand the Swedish NATO-memberships instrumental changes effect on individuals from the SAF from a social-psychological perspective, the research question follows:

"How do Swedish military officers perceive the transition from nation-state defense to regional collective defense as part of NATO?" with the added sub-question *"What challenges and opportunities does this shift present for their professional roles, identities, and willingness to defend?"*

1.1 Purpose

On May 20th, 2024, Radio Sweden (SR) reported on a current trend of officers aged 35 leaving their middle manager positions within the SAF for jobs in the civilian sector (SR Ekot, 2024: 9:43). Questions about the consequences of Sweden's significant shift in its foreign- and national defense strategy continue to consume the security debate. This thesis aims to understand the role of identity construction within changing military institutions from the viewpoint of individuals within the SAF.

In April, the Swedish Defence Commission wrote in their report that the Swedish ability to support allies - by host nation support - is crucial for the function of NATO (Swedish Defence Commission, 2024, 16). This thesis's case context focuses on NATO's collective defense through the presupposed defense guarantees encapsulated in Article 5 (The North Atlantic Treaty, 2023: §5). While the details of NATO membership are not set, it is evident that Sweden *will* contribute to foreign defense capabilities for land, sea, and air forces abroad in NATO countries. One of the early examples of this includes the ground combat unit in Latvia, as part of NATO Forward Land Forces (FLF) (Försvarsmakten, 2024).

Asking the militaries at an early stage about their thoughts and feelings about Swedish contributions to NATO's collective defense can provide helpful information for understanding the process of alliance integration. This thesis contributes to the bridge between social psychology and peace and conflict research. By viewing actors (the military, countries, and NATO) as social groups, the interviews with the Swedish militaries' have had a clear purpose: to increase the understanding of the military's perception of their professional purpose and willingness to defend. The level of commitment by these militaries is crucial knowledge for defense ministries, governments,

and military alliances worldwide. This thesis encourages a discussion that centers around the individuals behind complex and changing military commissions set by the governments. It aims to inspire further research on the relationship between identity and willingness to defend.

2 Social Identity Theory

This chapter will include a selection of literature on the creation of regional alliances and previous studies on the views of Swedish military personnel. The following section will cover the theories and concepts used in this thesis, including the identity salience approach derived from social identity theory and the conceptualization of willingness to defend.

2.1 Previous Research

Alliance Formation

The case of the Swedish NATO membership raises the broader question of why states engage in alliance construction. There have been attempts to explain this phenomenon in various branches of international relations studies; the first consisted of realists studying state security and survival (Schmitt, 1932; Deutsch, 1958; Walt, 1987). After the Cold War's end, constructivist research focused on alliances' ability to construct a 'we-feeling.' They studied beneficial conditions, practices, and benefits within regional security alliances, such as shared identities and values (Adler & Barnett, 1990; Neumann, 1992; Möller, 2003).

Concerning NATO, several researchers have problematized the alliance's ability to create a raison d'être (Sjursen, 2004 & Buzan et al., 2009). More optimistic researchers acknowledged NATO's ability to imagine itself as the agent of change post-Cold War (Rasmussen, 2001 & Webber & Hyde-Price, 2016). More recently, Sjöstedt and Noreen studied how Swedish soldiers' identity images were affected by combat in the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan from 2002-14. Their study suggests that the state identity - a peace identity in Sweden's case - conflicted with the NATO operation (Sjöstedt & Noreen, 2021). While the researchers mentioned above discuss explanations behind the success and failures of NATO - exploring state identity and NATO identity - the identity of individuals *within* NATO member states remains unexplored.

One indication of integration within the NATO alliance includes measuring the willingness to defend amongst member-states populations. In 2010, Díez-Nicolás argued that national pride is the main reason behind a solid will to defend. Despite having an

approximate 81% level of will to fight between 1981 and 2005, Sweden constitutes an exception regarding the latter variable, with 30-40% of the population feeling pride in being Swedish (Diez-Nicolas, 2010).

In 2020, before the Ukrainian invasion, a median of 53% of the NATO members expressed support for the alliance, with extremes reaching from Poland's 82% support to Turkey's 21%. When asked if they think their country should defend a fellow NATO ally against an attack from Russia, a median of 50% answered that their own country should *not* defend, and 38% said they should. Furthermore, 60% were convinced that the U.S. would use military force to defend an ally from Russia (Fagan & Poushter, 2020). Four years later, the annual NATO report tracked all member states (including Finland and Sweden) support for the alliance. They found a median of 61% supporting their own country assisting another ally if attacked, while 73% thought other allies should help defend their own country. 82% viewed NATO's transatlantic bond as necessary concerning security (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2024).

Voices from Sweden's Military

The guarantee for Swedish independence during the Cold War was a U.S.-dominated Western alliance, Kronvall and Peterson argue in their historical work about Swedish security policy. Still, according to the writers, the non-alignment approach can be considered the basis of Sweden's predictable identity that ensured credibility. While the SAF prepared for a military threat from the East rather than the West, Sweden balanced between shielding and military integration towards the West, including NATO. The authors argue that this calculation was political. However, leading figures within the SAF and the diplomatic branch believed Sweden should have had a clearer Western affiliation (Kronvall & Peterson, 2012: 44).

Altogether, a limited amount of research and material investigates the opinions and thoughts of those working within SAF, historically and in modern times. Some examples of contemporary research include one interview study that explored Swedish military personnel's view of international missions abroad. The interviewees described difficulty preparing for real-life scenarios on Swedish ground and for multinational missions. Some of their interviewees said that seeking employment in the SAF allowed them to participate

in foreign missions and feel a sense of responsibility that military education within Sweden failed to do (Adolfsson et al., 2012). Another interview study in 2021 also found that international missions were considered a motivator for military personnel at a time when the national defense was perceived as monotonous and low intensity. They also concluded that the decision to take employment in SAF was not well thought out by their interviewees but rather an easy opportunity and chance for a strong community at work (Österberg et al., 2020).

In 2021, the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) researched the will to defend within Sweden. The study suggests that those who had participated in military education for at least three months had a more extensive defense will than those without (FOI, 2021: 33). Another survey study - exploring people's attitudes to Swedish military defense - found that that the part of the sample that had a more positive view of the SAF, possessed less trust in the Swedish defense policy conducted by politicians (Wallenius et al., 2021).

Researchers studying the reasons behind Swedish and Finnish NATO membership applications argue that the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 showed the countries the dire consequences of not being protected by Article 5. While the authors expect a smooth integration into NATO - due to a highly sophisticated military, interoperability, and years of partnership - they emphasize a need for a changed mindset. After years of non-alignment, the Swedish identity is still interconnected with the word 'neutrality,' the populations of Sweden and Finland need to be part of the shift in foreign- and defense policy for the country to be fully integrated into the alliance (Tracz, 2022).

2.2 Identity Salience Approach

Defining Identity

Alexander Wendt describes identity as derived from interest. He argues that an actor cannot know what it wants, until it knows who it is (Wendt, 1999). Thus, to understand if Swedish military individuals have varying amounts of identification - concerning the defense of Sweden versus NATO - one has to ask, how do they know who they are?

According to Tajfel, the process of individuals creating a self-concept includes identifying one's shared values with others, leading to the creation of social identity.

Through this form of social categorization, individuals try to simplify their environment. Belonging to a family, military division, or nation-state helps individuals define their place in society (Tajfel, 1978). Military socialization is a clear example of such an identification process. A professional identity can be constructed within a social network, such as conscription or military education. Later on, the work environment - where individuals spend a lot of their time - plays a significant role in creating norms, roles, and a sense of belongingness during an individual's life (Haslam, 2004).

French's research on the U.K. military revolves around the struggle to create a common identity with the different factions. The problem was resolved during World War One since a collective and interoperational defense demanded a blending of the soldiers. French argues that the divide between the branches reoccurred after the war ended, suggesting the need for a shared goal and enemy to create a common identity within military institutions (French, 2007). When Franke studied military socialization within the US Army, he found that soldiers with potent national military identification were more skeptical of the UN peacekeeping missions. His findings suggest that individuals experienced separate parts of their social identity becoming salient during international operations, indicating varying levels of identification with their task despite socialization within the same organization (Franke, 2000).

Application

When a social identity is established, individuals engage in social comparison. Tajfel argues that one group's distinguishment from another's is the most efficient way of forming a group membership identification and protecting a social identity. From his research, he creates several assumptions: i) that individuals will tend to remain a group member if a group contributes to positive aspects of their social identity. If a group does not satisfy the identity image, ii) one can expect the individual to leave it unless it is impossible or if it conflicts with other important values that are part of the self-conception. If leaving the group presents difficulties, the individual can a) change interpretations of the group's attributes so that the unwelcomed features are either justified or made acceptable or b) accept the situation, and engaging in social action can change the individual's situation (Tajfel, 1978).

Tajfel's interpretation is shared with Turner's view of identity salience. It adds that if an individual firmly commits to a group, the norms and values associated with that social group will become a more significant part of their self-conception. Under conditions where a particular in-group category becomes salient, they employ attributes to decide the appropriate conduct in the given context (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social comparison was later used to understand how social identities can expand and coexist. Memberships can compete since an individual has multiple memberships in social groups. The prominence of a single one of these social identities is salient in a given context, which means that the most important one becomes an instrument to obtain their identity image and actions after that (Tajfel, 1982).

This study uses the identity salience approach to understand the SAF militaries' perceptions of the Swedish NATO membership to help explain to which extent the Swedish military personnel have received the new group membership (through expanded military roles due to NATO) and how this affects their self-conceptions. The thesis will use Stryker's view that each individual has a hierarchy of identities, which becomes viable when a situation creates competing identity images. The level of commitment determines the salience of a particular social identity. Stryker connects salience with role performance, arguing that a high-commitment identity will result in the individual taking opportunities to perform according to the most salient identity (Stryker, 1968). Finally, the analysis includes Reicher and Hopkins's view of identity concerning the future and the present (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). This idea is derived from French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who formulated: "That which we call ourselves is also that which we await and that which we are not yet" (Ricoeur, 1997: 407).

By applying the identity salience theory, one can understand the case of Swedish NATO membership from beyond an institutional level. The approach focuses on individuals' experiences and beliefs of their purpose in their group environments. It can help answer questions about their identifications and how they relate to their willingness to defend themselves and other nations' territories and populations. The theoretical framework has helped construct the themes in the analysis, including the military personnel's identification with SAF and NATO. More on this is described in section 3.4.

2.3 Conceptualizing Willingness to Defend

To estimate the SAF militaries' level of identification with SAF and NATO, this thesis will conceptualize the identity salience approach through 'willingness to defend.' A lack of unity and burden sharing within NATO has been described as threatening to the fundamental principles of collective defense on which the alliance is built: "Without increased willingness to defend the whole Alliance, the adaption process of deterrence and defense posture is useless" (Vargulis, 2021: 27). Research studying will-to-defend has measured the public perceptions of the national defense, on the civic duty and support of conscription-systems (Hadar & Häkkinen, 2020.), while others have investigated the impact of foreign descent on the will to defend (Andzans & Spruds, 2020). Little has been done to research Vargulis's request, namely, the will to defend *within* national armed forces, as well as the will to participate in defense efforts within - and for - other nations (such as implied by membership in NATO) (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). This thesis uses the will concept to defend and analyze the six interviewed officers' commitment levels to participate in collective defense obligations.

3 Research Design

The third chapter will describe this thesis's methodological selections and assumptions, including the choice of conducting qualitative interviews and the ethical risks that have been considered. Furthermore, the interview sample and the processing of the interview material will be clarified.

3.1 Qualitative Interviews

To answer how Swedish military personnel perceive the new NATO membership, this thesis consists of primary material derived from qualitative interviews with six senior militaries in the Swedish Armed Forces. The interviewing method is a prominent way of collecting information about people's lived experiences (Halperin & Health, 2020: 309). Due to time constraints and geographical distance, the interviews were conducted over the telephone. The interviews were recorded through the MacBook voice memo app and carried out through phone calls with a speaker in a private setting. The semi-structured interviews primarily contained open questions, allowing for elaborate responses with substantial data, while some structured questions were asked for factual information (Halperin & Health, 2020, pp. 311-313).

The questions range from the interviewee's background in the SAF, their view of the Swedish NATO accession, and their willingness to act under NATO Article 5 concerning collective defense. Inspired by the theoretical framework provided by the identity salience approach, the questions were formulated to have the interviewees describe their identification with Sweden contra the NATO states and their territory. The follow-up questions varied between each interview and were not included in the complete form of the interview questions (Appendix 2). The interview material is used as the empirical data to analyze the six individuals' understandings, identification, and willingness to defend; using the identity salience approach.

One of the main criticisms against the interview method is that the results cannot contribute to reliable generalized conclusions. However, the discoveries from the interviews allow for an in-depth understanding of how individuals within the military experience alliance integration. The detailed analysis of the Swedish military personnel's

thoughts, feelings, and experiences can contribute valuable information to the research on willingness to defend; thus, the strength of this research is in its validity (Halperin & Health, 2020: 310). This is relevant to both the peace and conflict field and for leading executives in military forces, governments, and alliances who wish to gain commitment to their policies with those hired in their institutions.

Ethical Considerations

When interviewing militaries, there is an evident risk of the 'interview effect,' in which the respondent answers the questions in a socially acceptable manner rather than honestly (Halpein & Health, 2020: 314). To ensure that the interviewees felt safe and comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences, I have adopted the ethical considerations in *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*, which functioned as a format for the written procedure and information sent to the interviewees (See Appendix 1) (Halperin & Health, 2020: 334-335). In addition, ethical guidelines have been inspired by the recommendations of The Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), which follows the guidelines from the *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (ALLEA, 2023).

The first principle concerns the information requirement and was adopted by establishing contact between the author and the participants. The interviewees were informed of the interview conditions through a text message sent one day before the interview; for the exact content, see Appendix 1. By responding to the text mentioned above, the participants agreed to the given conditions. They thus consented to participate in the interview, fulfilling the consensual requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The sensitive information shared by the interviewees - their first name, military experience, and rank - has been restricted to the tape recordings of the interviews. The selected quotations from the interviewees are referenced with "Interviewee A," and so on, in alphabetical order based on the timing of their interview in the sample. The only further information about the respondents includes their division and time spent in the armed services. However, their exact position is not specified to protect their privacy, with reference to the confidentiality requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2022). Given these precautions, the findings published in this thesis do not harm the interviewees' safety or interest, nor affect their professional role negatively (ALLEA, 2023).

3.2 Sample

The individuals interviewed in this thesis have been appointed using snowball sampling by two contact persons in the Swedish Armed Forces. This method relies on the judgment of the first interviewee, recommended by the contact persons, to suggest more qualified respondents who meet the sample criteria (senior experience (+10 years employment within the SAF) (Halperin & Health, 2020: 300). Moreover, there is a sample spread concerning the interviewee's service branch, with three participants from the air force, one from the navy, and two from the army.

In this thesis, the first interviewee recommended that some of his colleagues participate in the research, who then suggested more names until there was an appropriate sample size of respondents. A second contact person was used to include more respondents, and the same procedure was followed. The criticism against this form of sampling involves the issues of representativeness and selection bias. The representation of the Swedish Armed Forces is limited to two circles of acquainted colleagues, thereby creating a risk of having opinion exchanges before participating in the interview. This - and the possibility of like-mindedness amongst close colleagues - might have led to a sample with similar views. Thus, the opinions analyzed in this thesis should not be considered representative of the SAF organization.

Notwithstanding, snowballing is a valid form of sampling in qualitative research, particularly in social spheres where the respondents of interest are hard to reach, such as the military (Best et al., 2017, 86; Halperin & Heath, 2020, 300). Snowball sampling has been used in qualitative social research to enable insight into social groups that are hard to access and gives room for unheard voices in academic research (Becker, 1963; Woodley & Lockhard, 2016; Parker, 2020; Laumann & Knoke, 1987; Goldstein, 2002). Also, snowball samples are helpful when the respondents desire anonymity and require trust to participate, which is the case in these interviews (Parker et al., 2019). Atkinson and Flint argue these lines: "The real promise of snowball sampling lies in its ability to uncover aspects of social experience often hidden from both the researcher's and lay person's view of social life" (Atkinson et al., 2001).

Interviewee	Division	Years employed (c.)
A	Air Force	10
B	Air Force	15
C	Air Force	10
D	Navy	13
E	Army	10
F	Army	30

Table 1.

3.3 Processing

This thesis has sought to answer the research question concerning the SAF military's perception of the Swedish NATO membership by analyzing the interview data using a theoretical framework based on the identity salience approach. The interview material presented in this thesis has been selected through data reduction and coding using thematic analysis (TA) to recognize observable themes in the interviewee's responses. Data from the interviews have been chosen depending on relevance to the theoretical framework, including answers indicating signs of identity and willingness to defend (Halperin & Health, 2020). After the transcription of the interviews, a profile of each interviewee was created, and a summary of their most alluring opinions and experiences was provided. To verify patterns from the data by systematically interpreting and comparing the interviewee's responses to ensure validity in the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I adopted the strategy of constant comparison, meaning that the initial codes have been developed and changed during the process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 102).

During the processing of the interview material, the following codes were retrieved based on repetitiveness and particular importance to the interviewees: i) "Sense of Swedish Identification," ii) "Sense of regional identification," iii) "Lack of regional identification," iv) "Sense of professional responsibility" and v) "Valuation of private life.". These were used to categorize the interview material while applying the theory. The theoretical framework consists of assumptions based on the identity salience approach by Tajfel, Turner, and Stryker (explained in section 2.3, summarized in Table 2).

Theoretical assumptions	A. Tajfel & Turner	B. Stryker
i)	Individuals remain in social groups if the norms and stereotypes contribute to their identity-image	Individuals have a hierarchy of their identity images, which become viable when the interests overlap
ii)	If not contributing, the individual leaves the group	The placement of the hierarchy level depends on commitment
iii)	If it is not possible to leave, they a) either change their interpretation of the group or b) accept the situation and engage in social action	Individuals seek to perform in the role according to their most salient identity image.

Table 2.

4 Background

4.1 Good-bye Non-Alignment

The words "Non-alignment in peace, aiming at neutrality in case of war" dictated Swedish foreign and national security for several decades until the fall of the Berlin Wall (translation by author) (Bjereld et al., 2022). The prerequisite for this foreign and defense policy stance was a strong national defense that could deter enemies from a territorial attack (Sandelius, 1990).

After the end of the Cold War, the risk of war in Europe was considered low (Försvarsdepartementet, 1995). Sweden became more active in international organizations, e.g., by participating in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PFP) and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997, as well as contributing to international missions (Regeringskansliet, 2024: B). The Swedish foreign- and defense policies gradually shifted from neutrality to freedom of action. In 2003, Sweden erased the word 'neutrality' from the foreign policy doctrine (Bjereld et al., 2022: 323). Since 2006, the wording "non-alignment" has not been used in official documents (Engelbrekt, 2015: 125). Simultaneously, a significant reorganization of the SAF began in the millennial shift, which resulted in a halving of the intended task organization, and all units for national defense except the Home Guard were removed in 2004, considered the final step from invasion defense to intervention defense (Prop. 2004/05:5).

Not long after the historically reduced defense budget, the risk of war in Europe came to be considered higher. The Russian invasion of Georgian territory in 2008 marked the country's first aggression in the 21st century, followed by the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 (Dickinson, 2021). The year after the Ukraine Crisis, the Swedish Defense Department claimed that Sweden would not be passive during an attack on the EU- or Nordic Country (Engelbrekt, 2015, 14). Still, Sweden ruled out security collaboration based on defense guarantees. In December 2021, Russia communicated that Sweden and Finland were part of their "interest sphere" and wished to limit further integration in NATO (Regeringskansliet, 2024: A). Two months later, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in

February 2022 showed proof of an existential threat to Sweden, Edström and Westberg argue. The Swedish parliament reached a consensus that Sweden would be unable to defend itself against a Russian attack independently (underscoring membership with guarantees through NATO was necessary), which resulted in parliamentary unity for NATO application on May 16, 2022, two days before Finland (Edström & Westberg, 2023). The process after that was prolonged due to political disputes with Turkey and Hungary, resulting in the official membership on March 7, 2024 (Regeringskansliet, 2024: B).

4.2 Sweden as NATO-member

The defense guarantees that Sweden sought for national protection include that Sweden, on its behalf, contributes to the deterrence and defense ability of the whole alliance. (Regeringskansliet, 2024: A; Försvarsberedningen 2023; The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). As NATO is currently implementing the New Force Model (NFM) following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Sweden will be involved in the NATO capability planning process (Biscop, 2022). The NFM includes the plans for a new NATO Response Force (NRF), consisting of 300,000 pre-assigned high readiness and multinational units of military personnel in land, sea, air, and cyber in the alliance's eastern flank. The aim is to have all-time ready forces from the member states as part of the goals of burden-sharing and investments in collective defense planning (NATO, NFM, 2022). One example of how the increased deterrence efforts come into practice is through the air domain. As of 2022, the eastern flank aims to have 30 allied surveillance and fighter jets - as part of the air-policing project - in the air at any time (NATO Static, 2022).

In the most recent report by the Swedish Defence Commission, Sweden is said to be creating deployable units within the SAF for operations outside Swedish territory. As of right now, the plans are limited to the nearby area. The report states that the Nordic Countries, the Baltics, and Poland are the most likely scenarios for such deployments (Swedish Defence Commission, 2024). The first example of Swedish engagement is the battalion sent from a southern army regiment, P7, to Latvia as part of the Forward Land Forces (FLF) (Försvarsmakten, 2024). Concerning the Nordic collaboration, the report says that the Nordic states - particularly Sweden and Finland - share geographic values and

like-minded interests in foreign- and security policy (Swedish Defence Commission, 2024). While the nearby area is emphasized as the main area for the deployment of troops and international defense collaboration, "/…/ Sweden is ready to contribute to NATO's security in the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole" (translation by author) (Swedish Defence Commission, 2024, 239).

5 Findings & Analysis

This chapter will review the findings and analyze the compelling parts of the interviews related to Tajfel, Turner, and Stryker's assumptions of identity salience (Table 2). The analysis of the material resulted in the following sections: *5.1 Identity Images: SAF versus NATO* based on the framework of Tajfel and Turner, and *5.2 Hierarchical Identities* derived with inspiration from Stryker. Finally, an analysis of the findings will be summarized in section 5.3, *Chances of Identity Integration.*

5.1 Identity Images: SAF versus NATO

Assumption i. Tajfel & Turner

"Individuals remain in social groups if the norms and stereotypes contribute to their self-image."

The first assumption within Tajfel's identity salience approach includes an individual's decision to remain or leave a social group, depending on whether the group contributes to the self-image. Since all interviewees had remained within the military for over ten years, the SAF can be considered a social group that has successfully shaped the six individual's cognitive frames, as defined by Turner. All participants expressed that community, trust, collaboration, and leadership contributed to choosing careers within the SAF. The protection of Swedish territory and population is described as their profession's core purpose: "It's about defending Sweden. Be ready to meet whatever." (Interviewee B). The interviewees' strong identification and commitment can be considered the result of successful military socialization, which has created and maintained an image of the SAF identity.

As of March 2024, the newly institutionalized identity within Sweden has been NATO membership. Several interviewees had a favorable view of NATO being included in their Swedish and professional identity image. One of the aspects discussed was the perception of a shared goal between Sweden and NATO. The interviewees defined NATO's core purpose as preventing war and escalation, stabilizing, helping smaller nations, and

maintaining a robust Western alliance; "It is built on that our country's societies are very similar, based on the same values." (Interviewee C).

Another aspect contributing to the sense of NATO identification was the shared enemy; "Russia, Iran, and China wish to put down NATO and the US to increase their power and influence. This is our biggest threat, and it is obvious to me." (Interviewee E). One officer describes the unifying aspect of NATO as "support each other against the Russian occupying power." (Interviewee F). He also disapproves of the non-recognition of an active threat: "It's the usual Swedish rose-colored glasses and peace damagedness" (ibid). The unified response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 made one officer express, "I was happy to see how well Ukraine defended itself and that unity was kept intact between European leaders." (Interviewee E). According to these interviewees, NATO's member states share the same norms, values, goals, and enemies; thus, the sense of belonging to the alliance is natural.

The officers from the army and navy expressed the most positive opinions about the Swedish NATO membership; "When we practice with our ships, we are in the whole Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea is already a normal picture." (Interviewee D). One of the interviewees from the army explained, "I might even think that even if we had our old defense, the best thing would still be to join NATO. Because they are our friends." (Interviewee E). Altogether, this sample of the interviewees suggested that Sweden's nearby area and other NATO member states are already included within their identity image. Thus, the shift toward NATO membership does not require an identity shift for these individuals. Instead, the new alliance identity is described as strengthening the SAF's defense ability against a common enemy, resulting in harmony between the SAF and NATO identity images.

Assumption iii. Tajfel & Turner

"If it is impossible to leave, they either …"

a) change their interpretation of the group

Since all six interviewees expressed their intention to retain employment within the SAF despite the new NATO identity image, Tajfel and Turner's second assumption—including the individual's decision to leave—can not be analyzed. While the interviewees could leave

their positions, no one chose to. Despite this, not all officers described an easy identity transition toward NATO membership. Some interviewees expressed a lack of unity and efficiency within the alliance;

"Every country has its own opinion on who will be willing to help militarily. It might cost more than it is worth for individual countries. And if one or two countries do not support it, then the whole idea of NATO is gone. /…/ Is it worth defending two miles of border in Estonia against Russia and starting a big war? Maybe, maybe not!" (Interviewee C)

This citation confirms that some interviewees disbelieved NATO's unity and purpose. Supposing these officers do not consider NATO a contributor to their self-image, in that case, the Swedish membership in NATO would constitute a potential dissonance for identity and perhaps challenge their professional identity. One officer expressed skepticism about Sweden's application to NATO: "To shift opinion on such short notice, just because something happens in the world, perhaps wasn't fully thought through." Interviewee C). Furthermore, some interviewees lacked identification with the new NATO identity image; "I had the mindset that we were alliance-free." (Interviewee A). Thus, these individuals identified with the former professional identity image, in which Sweden and the SAF had partners but no allies.

As of March 2024, the previously socialized norms are no longer valid; they have been replaced with the NATO identity image. Tajfel and Turner acknowledge that such identity transformation processes can cause a disturbance if the individual cannot relate to the contributions that the new group membership brings. Yet, while several interviewees describe issues with how Sweden became a member, none have described the alliance as reason enough to quit their job in the SAF. Instead of leaving the SAF, some of the interviewees have tried to a) change their interpretation of the group;

"Concerning my main purpose in joining the Armed Forces… it was to defend Sweden. To do that indirectly by protecting other states, through NATO, is a self-image that needs internal adjustment." (Interviewee B)

Several officers describe that while they held an initial skepticism, they have come to terms with the shift with time; "I have always been an individual that has valued Swedish neutrality. When that changed fast, it took time to comprehend." (Interview D.) The most prominent critic, Interviewee C, explained that he had reflected on Swedens' options and concluded, "Since Finland wanted to join quickly, Sweden did not have a choice. I have realized afterward, and I understand that they wanted to join, due to their border to Russia, which we do not.". Thus, according to assumption iii a) by Tajfel and Turner, one can analyze how the interviewees describe an active process of re-adjusting their initial beliefs about their profession. These individuals remain in service, suggesting that the current integration of NATO's Identity Image contributes enough to make them wish to stay within the SAF.

b) accept the situation and engage in social action.

Another interview finding includes the description of the SAF as an understaffed and underfunded organization, as well as compliance with the significant cuts to the armed forces in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The interviewees expressed frustration about the political level's lack of defense spending; "It would have been a disaster just to let politicians decide for themselves." (Interviewee F). The perception of being unable to perform according to the ideals associated with one's identity can lead to feeling unrewarded from membership in the social group. Such experiences risk dismantling the officer's perceptions of the SAF as a social group contributing to their professional identity image. One of the officers from the army elaborated on the lack of personnel, material supply, and aging data systems, which led to such a heavy burden that he considered resigning; "Feeling paralyzed saps one's drive. I hope to continue, but it feels like swimming in syrup. It is very frustrating. Because the war is close, but the limitations are very real." (Interviewee E).

The interviewee also suggested that it remains unclear what Sweden is expected to do for NATO since the premises of the Swedish NATO membership are not yet set. If an individual does not know the expectations, norms, or ways of a new group, they might feel as if they are dissociated from their membership; "We fumble in the dark" (Interviewee B). When discussing NATO with their colleagues, the interviewees expressed that they felt isolated from the NATO debate at work, the very place where the implementation should be visible;

> "We talked about how it affects our everyday life, how many of us will be included in NATO staff, how they will lead us, and if we need to outsource. We are scared that there will be changes on our level." (Interviewee C).

Many describe that while they get sent on continued military exercises with other member-states, they are not updated about long-term integration plans;

> "We have focused on our ordinary job because it has been on such a NATO level that we have not been involved. /…/ It is a big vacuum, NATO membership, because of its high political level. On my level, there is no real anchorage right now." (Interviewee E)

If top-level decision-makers in defense policy lose support from the military personnel supposed to carry out the tasks, this complicates NATO integration efforts further; "If there is no support… You can try to force form above, but without support from the bottom, everything will take ten times the effort and get ten times worse." (Interviewee B). When asked about the practical efforts in sending troops abroad, the officers from the army described a practical inability to spare part of the SAF's material and personnel, which would prevent host-nation support efforts from happening in the coming years;

"In the next five years, I don't think the Swedish Armed Forces will
have the capacity to send troops abroad, like the one to Latvia. Even
the one for Lativa is more than we could. As long as we are in
NATO, we will have troops abroad. But now, I don't think it will be
a lot" (Interviewee E)

Theoretical assumptions	A. Tajfel & Turner	Interviewees Responses
i)	Individuals remain in social groups if the norms and stereotypes contribute to their self-image	All six stayed within the SAF, some convinced that NATO has contributed
ii)	If not contributing, the individual leaves the group	One of six have considered leaving SAF, but not because of NATO.
iii)	If it is not possible to leave, they either a) change their interpretation of the group or b) accept the situation and engage in social action	a) Recognize the need to change their mindset toward a NATO identity image b) Request further investments and policies that are communicated between SAF and Swedish politicians

Table 3.

In summary, despite fluctuations between the interviewees' identification with SAF and
NATO Identity Images, none considered the NATO identity image endangering their
continued career within SAF. However, several officers' explained that the shift to NATO
membership requires a re-interpretation of their professional identity. Lastly, concerning the
SAF as an organization and the policy implementation of the NATO membership, there is
distrust toward the Swedish politicians. This questions whether the NATO identity image
risks creating conflicting identity images or if SAF will integrate the new identity toward
the individuals on the bottom level. Concerning the interviewees who described a shared
threat image and values within the alliance, one can consider the possibility of alliance
integration based on these shared norms, based on Tajfel and Turner.

5.2 Hierarchical Identities

This section analyzes the officers' level of commitment to pursue the identity of their desire: SAF Identity Image, NATO Identity Image, or others. According to Stryker, individuals have a hierarchy of their identity images. If these overlap - due to conflicting interests - the identity that the individual is most committed to becomes salient. Thus, the placement of identities in the hierarchy depends on their level of commitment; individuals seek to perform by their most salient identity. One can determine the six officers' level of identification with the other NATO member-states by analyzing the officers' willingness to participate in collective defense efforts outside Sweden. Thus, the interviewees were asked to describe their responses to scenarios, including hypothetical collective defense efforts.

Willingness to Defend

Concerning the scenario where Finland would get attacked, there was a reoccurring certainty in the interviewees' will and expectation to fight; "Even before NATO, we would have come to protect them. It's only a matter of how, when, and where for my part." (Interviewee B). Yet, their answers draw the parallel back to Sweden; "We know that if Finland falls, we are next. If we can help Finland defend Finland, we are defending Sweden outside Swedish territory." (Interviewee E). Still, the idea of being included in a coalition with Finland during the war was integrated into the identity images of the interviewees, even before Swedish NATO membership. Because of this and the mentions of geographic, historical, and political closeness, the officers firmly commit to Finland as part of their identity hierarchy.

Some argue that there would be a difference concerning the Baltics: "You would think twice if it concerned the Baltics; unfortunately, that is the case." (Interviewee A). Regarding peace-time presence, one interviewee answers: "Preventively, I see that it will happen. I don't see any issues with that, I don't have a problem doing that." (Interviewee B). Another officer drew parallels between Finland and the Baltics, again regarding the likeliness of Sweden getting involved:

"In the situation where Finland and the Baltic fall, one after the other gets dragged in, and Russia gets more and more territory, it would only be a matter of time before Swedish territory gets attacked. So, my perspective is that the earlier you can stop it, the better. If that means fighting in the Baltics, then we do it. Finland, we do it. And Poland." (Interviewee E)

The reoccurring mention of the will to defend *in relation* to the closeness to Sweden raises the question of whether the interviewees' commitment solely depends on the calculated risk that Sweden, too, would get attacked if they did not support the host country's support. According to Stryker, this idea suggests that their Swedish identity image constitutes a solid base in the interviewee's hierarchies. However, one of the officers challenges this notion by expressing a commitment to defend beyond the nearby area; "It's just a question of which caliber to bring home from the gun safe. /…/ Obstacles are only in the head" (Interviewee F).

Another interest described as determining the will to defend is the notion of a common enemy that Sweden can relate to; "If it is an attack from Russia, our opponent, then it is easy to relate to that invasion. When Ukraine was invaded, we got ready. I felt in the beginning that I wanted to do something about it. I want to make a difference." (Interviewee A). One interviewee explained the collective defense principle as merely a duty of the profession and said:

"If it comes as an order, it does not matter if it is Finland or the Baltics /…/ If you have the job that we have, you have to put your political opinion aside. You have an employer, the Swedish State, which includes elected politicians. Not everyone can have an opinion, so you should not work here." (Interviewee C)

Interviewee C's statement suggests that individuals within the SAF are not *supposed* to identify themselves with their profession or the mission included. Despite this view, the social-psychological perspective does not consider social identification as voluntary but

rather a natural part of each individual's self-conception. One of the interviewees suggested that those who have opinions that do not align with the new NATO identity image integrated within SAF should consider leaving their position:

> "I understand those who cannot stand for joining NATO. In that case, one should leave the Swedish Armed Forces. If you work here, you must be ready to work in other countries and protect them. I hope that people will resonate this way. Because I'd rather see 10% quit than 10% continue to work, despite the fact that they are unwilling to do the work (these numbers are random)." (Interviewee B).

While resonating with those who could potentially struggle to adopt the NATO identity image, the officers interviewed for this study express a wish to maintain within SAF during a NATO integration, which includes demands of collective defense. In summary, they are motivated by strategic self-interest, the existence of a common enemy, the geographic proximity principle, and professional responsibility.

Unwillingness to Defend

While resonating about what motivates the interviewees to defend territory outside Sweden, the officers' also described a sense of unwillingness to defend caused by several factors. When asked about the general feelings of being part of a multinational battlegroup/response force, one answered: "You wonder how many will quit before a NATO coalition." and laughed afterward (Interviewee C). One of the reasons behind the skepticism is the geographical aspect;

"Honestly, the longer from the Nordic and Sweden where the battle is required, the more foreign it would feel. Less right. Not less because it would be wrong to assist these countries but because I feel connected to my nearby area and country. But as member states, it is included to help everyone, and I would never say no to going anywhere far because of the distance from the Baltic Sea. But my heart would still remain in the Baltic Sea and not as much further away on earth." (Interviewee D)

The proximity principle is thus considered a significant factor behind the individual's level of identification and dictates the officers' commitment to assist other NATO member states. With the hierarchy based on geographical location, the findings suggest that the longer from Sweden a coalition would be required, the less eager some of the officers to be included in a multinational response force; "My self-image as an officer and military, my mission is to defend Sweden, which means the nearby area." (Interviewee B) and "I don't think it will be as natural for many, to be stationed say in Romania, it would feel pretty distant from our region." (Interviewee A). Others expect that the scenario of being sent far away is small and that Article 5 considers assistance in broad terms;

"If you think about Turkey, it's like a desert. Big difference. It is not in our geographic area. So, I think we would contribute with something other than military units. And I don't expect Turkish units over here." (Interviewee C)

Another major factor that concerns the interviewees' will to defend themselves is the fear of being drawn into a conflict, which does not seem meaningful to them; "I do not want to go to war if it's not necessary. It will depend on how close I feel to that conflict. How much I can relate to it." (Interviewee A). Once again, the military socialization within SAF has prepared most interviewees for an attack against Swedish territory - alternatively, an international mission abroad - but has not shaped an identity image based on a sense of

moral duty of collective defense efforts. This becomes evident concerning the regimes and conflicts within the NATO alliance that the officers do not seem to relate to;

> "What I think is dumb with NATO is that if you are in a club where you can receive help, you are expected to help. The risk is getting involved in things we don't want to do. For example, in Turkey, what happens if they use Article 5 against the Kurds? Or as of lately, if the US got into a conflict with China, we are far away but might be expected to be involved." (Interviewee C).

Just as Ukraine was mentioned as a motivator to participate in collective defense, the findings also suggest that the lack of a common enemy diminishes commitment to defend; "A clear example is how NATO countries collectively have sanctioned Russia, while Turkey has acted middle-hand between NATO and Russia. They benefit economically from doing this. I can't claim that there is a common goal; some try to benefit from the situation." (Interviewee B). Furthermore, some interviewees experience the political divisions between Sweden and other member states as the main reason behind a lesser degree of will to defend. Hungary and Turkey are mentioned as those with the least common interests when asked how they would feel about coalitions with specific countries;

> "I think it's hard to overlook that relations have been bad. They [[Hungary]] made it hard for us and did what they did. Are we really going to help them fully? I don't think we would be happy to be the first to come to the rescue. And I think that's humane, and it's hard to overlook those feelings." (Interviewee A)

Thus, the interviewees portray a higher level of resistance to going abroad to assist countries they do not relate to. According to the theorists, the benefits of adopting an identity image, including Hungary or Turkey, are unclear. Thus, the commitment to uphold a NATO identity image that includes these member-states - with interests separate from their identity image - results in a limited willingness to defend. The interviewees had

different approaches to whether this attitude concerns the country itself or their regimes, which Interviewee B summarizes;

> "Hungary, the way they acted, they have painted a bad image of themselves. Of course, this affects my view of Hungary, which is about their politicians, but indirectly, the whole image of the country. /…/ But, if you look at the earthquakes in Turkey, we sent pilots, even though it was during a time when Turkey was behaving in the worst way during the NATO process because it is not about what the regime in the country does. You believe in your quest. In the end, that would be what I would fall back to. /…/ I don't have misbeliefs about different countries' defense forces. Look at Hungary; they even fly Gripen, and we collaborate with their pilots. I dont misbelief them, but their regime. /…/ Although, I don't think that Turkey would send everything they got to defend us. Our politicians are more willing to send us away to support." (Interviewee B)

While resonating about the reasons behind a limited will to defend, the officers mention the same factors that determine their will to do so, namely a lack of strategic self-interest for Sweden, different perceptions of the enemy, the proximity principle, and the interplay between the personal values of regime types and their professional responsibility to do their duty.

Despite not being included in the questions, all the officers brought up the topic of the interviewees' private lives. They describe one of the major obstacles to willingness to be included in multinational battlegroups is the balance between their private and work life. When discussing collective defense efforts - being sent away on missions in peacetime to prepare for a response coalition in wartime - five of the six interviewees did not show commitment; "To go abroad right now is not very appealing. If there is a tempting position, then maybe. But so much need to coincide. Private life and family. I would not be eager to go abroad if it does not match. "(Interviewee D). Several officers agree, suggesting, "The only problem would be to be away from family. That can be a big enough problem. /…/

During rotation for three months, one would be there for three weeks; that is doable."
(Interviewee C). Concerning periods, another officer suggests, "On rotation abroad for three to six months regularly, that would be hard on family life. I'm not keen on doing that." Interviewee A). Being the topic that all interviewees brought up by themselves and sounding like a non-negotiable, the factor of 'private life' is added to the list of the individuals conflicting interests. Finally, Interviewee D summarized his view of the Swedish NATO transition, representing a general view for most interviewees:

> "It is good for Sweden to join NATO? Yes, probably. Is it good for
> the Swedish Defence Force to join NATO? Yes, it will lead to further
> investments. Is it good for me personally? Many of us answer no to
> that one. Many are nervous about being sent abroad and being away
> for a long time, and how that will affect ones private life and close
> family. We don't know that yet." (Interviewee D)

Theoretical assumptions	B. Stryker	Interviewees Responses
i)	Individuals have a hierarchy of their identity images, which become visible when the interests overlap	Five of six describe interest based on conflicting interests
ii)	The placement of the hierarchy level depends on commitment	1. Strategic interest 2. Geography 3. Common enemy 4. Regime-type 5. Private life 6. Professional Responsibility
iii)	Individuals seek to perform in the role according to their most salient identity images.	Yet to be seen

Table 4.

The six interviewees' commitment to collective defense efforts outside Swedish territory can be considered moderate. Instead, the questions that aimed at measuring the interviewees' willingness to participate in the multinational battlegroups became discussions of the officer's personal beliefs and prioritizations within their self-concept. Thus, a pattern is visible regarding the unwillingness to participate in efforts far away from Sweden - a significant commitment outside their current identity frame - while all six interviewees prioritized the common factor of private life. This questions whether the collective defense mission's foreign nature causes identity interests to clash or merely the time spent away from home, within SAF or NATO. Yet, none of the interviewees describes a wish to disobey an order that requires participation in a collective defense effort, suggesting that the interests of SAF and NATO somehow align with their self-concept, perhaps their professional identity image.

5.3 Chances of Identity Integration

This analysis has aimed to understand the military roles currently evolving within the SAF. Focusing on the officers' SAF and NATO Identity frames and their willingness to participate in collective defense efforts, the goal was to understand how Swedish military officers perceive the shift from Swedish defense to NATO defense through a social-psychological perspective.
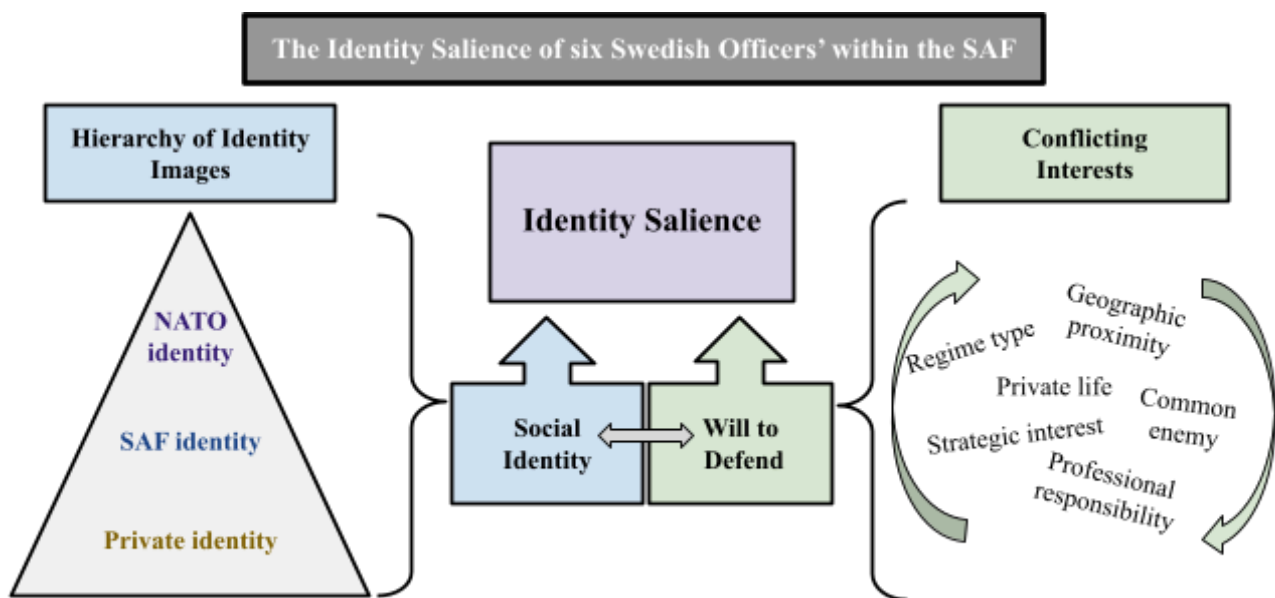

Figure 1.
Based on a combined theoretical framework by Tajfel, Turner and Stryker.

Figure 1. constitutes a model for the salience of the six officers' views on identity and willingness to defend. In the left triangle, the social identifications mentioned by the interviewed militaries are included. At the bottom, we see private identity as the most prominent, followed by their professional SAF Identity. At the top is the newly institutionalized identity concerning NATO. These are selected by the idea that they all contribute in some way to the interviewees' self-concepts to varying degrees. Together, they make the hierarchy of Identity Images and an individual's collected "Social identity." On the right, the different conflicting interests are displayed, ranging from common enemy to geographic proximity; these make up the "Will to Defend." In a given context, interaction with Social Identity and Will to Defend constitutes the most compelling combination of identity and commitment, which results in a particular identity salience. Thus, NATO membership can be integrated into the officers' identity images if it does not challenge their i) Private or ii) SAF Identities, as well as resonating with the competing interests in a given situation; aspects such as the regime time of the given country to defend, it's geographic proximity to Sweden, a shared common enemy, strategic interest for Swedish security, and their balance between professional responsibility and private life.

How individuals rank their identifications and will to defend themselves largely depends on how they perceive their mission. The construction of identity images is considered a process, "That which we call ourselves is also that which we await and that which we are not yet" (Ricoeur, 1997: 407). Suppose future identity integration into NATO is not successful. In that case, this could be explained by a lack of socialization within the group's norms and attributes, such as alliance integration efforts by SAF. Instead of NATO integration, a skeptical view of the NATO alliance's unity, purpose, and norms continues. If a professional identity lacks contributions that contribute to an officer's self-image, it might result in declining morale, motivation, and, thus, performance. If, on the other hand, the interviewees' profession confirms their self-conception, one can expect the officers' identification and commitment to their duties to be significant. Military socialization focused on presenting the common identifications and commitments between Sweden and NATO might be able to change the generations' professional identity;

"Conscription is focused on national defense. It may have to include an international perspective to introduce the idea of NATO defense. Perhaps practice with other NATO countries to build that base, to change the point of view of the personnel within the Swedish Armed Forces. From looking at media interviews with those currently conscripted, it seems as if they might not be ready to be sent to NATO coalitions." (Interviewee A)

6 Concluding Discussion

"How do Swedish military officers perceive the transition from nation-state defense to regional collective defense as part of NATO? What challenges and opportunities does this shift present for their professional roles, identities, and willingness to defend?"

With the Swedish NATO membership in place as of March 2024, this thesis aimed to grasp the experiences of those working within the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) and understand the role of identity construction within changing military institutions. Using the identity salience approach, based on social identity theory, the goal was to investigate how individuals were affected by the institutional shift. Six qualitative interviews with Air Force, Navy, and Army officers were conducted to study individual experiences from within the SAF. They were asked to share their identification with the SAF, their opinions on NATO, and to estimate their willingness to participate in collective defense efforts within their profession.

So, how did the officers perceive the transition? The first theme concerned the officers' identity images, which the interviewees identified to varying degrees, depending on how well they contributed to the individuals' self-image. None of the six officers' indicated a wish to leave their professional identity frame. Instead, they aimed to a) change their interpretations of their own identities (adapt to NATO's identity image). Furthermore, the interviewees also b) engaged in social action by expressing limitations within the SAF identity image and the lack of NATO integration, as well as directing criticism against the political governance and financing of the SAF.

Further findings gave insights into the interviewees' hierarchy of identities. The officers expressed a will to defend when they related to the conflict, e.g., due to geographic proximity, strategic interest, a sense of professional responsibility, or sharing the same enemy. On the other hand, in case scenarios concerning defending countries with dissimilar regime types, far away from Sweden, and with conflicts unrelated to their values, the interviewees' showed more negligible levels of identification and commitment. All interviewees described the importance of balancing their profession and private life.

Thus, as long as there is peace in the nearby area, there is limited interest in securing the territory and populations outside Sweden because that would mean time spent away from their own family (related to the individual's most fundamental identity and their most rewarding interest). Thus, the interviewees' professional identity image salience - either through the SAF or NATO - is determined by whether they overlap with their most salient identity in the given context (such as being close to family or not participating in an unrelated war far away).

The findings show that military institutions can be regarded as social groups that influence individuals' socialization. The SAF officers aim to fulfill the duties within their identity images. To respond to the expected new tasks - regarding collective defense as part of NATO - their professional identity must be integrated with the NATO identity image. If NATO membership is perceived as contributing to the military personnel's identity, the transition from national to collective defense can happen while the officers simultaneously maintain a strong sense of identity and willingness to defend their profession.

Future research may wish to track how the SAF will implement NATO membership within their organization and study whether an eventual attempt at alliance integration is considered successful. This thesis can also give implications for further research wishing to study the socio-psychological processes of military cultures, membership in alliances, and implementation of cross-identity policies. Both nation-states, like Sweden, and regional alliances like NATO, expect their military personnel to feel committed to their profession when needed. Thus, the views of individuals within military institutions - their identification and willingness to defend - are highly significant.

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7.1 Appendix

7.1.1 Appendix 1

Hello, here is some formality about the interview I am obliged to inform you about!

The bachelor thesis aims to explore how employees in the Armed Forces perceive the transition to Swedish NATO membership. Around ten interviews are conducted to gain insight into their thoughts on the current world situation and their expectations for the future.

Participants should know that:
- The interview is voluntary.
- The interview is confidential. The answers will be produced anonymously; instead of names, the participants will be referred to as "Interview subject A," and so on.
- The interview will be recorded with the participant's consent to facilitate transcription.
- Participation in the interview study can be interrupted if desired.
- Participants do not have to answer all questions.
- Participants are selected based on the relevance of their professional role.
- The interview is expected to take approximately one hour.

About 20 questions like these appear in the interview:
Tell us about what brought you to the Armed Forces.
How did you react to Sweden's membership application to NATO?
What is most important to you in a crisis or war?

Let me know if you have any questions; otherwise, feel free to call me at this time: ___ tomorrow!
/Victoria

7.1.2 Appendix 2

<u>Introduction:</u>
"Hi, it is so nice of you to participate in this interview! I intend to introduce myself briefly, go through the formalities, and then start with the questions."

- Is it okay for me to record this interview?
- Presentation of myself
- Framework for the interview
    - The purpose of the thesis
    - Voluntary
    - Confidential
    - No need to answer every question
    - One hour
- Interview structure

<u>Background</u>

1. Would you like to tell me how long you have been in the armed forces and what service branch you are in?
2. Tell me about what brought you to the Armed Forces.
    - What did your conscription experience mean to you?

<u>Experience from the Armed Forces</u>

3. Can you give some examples of essential experiences for you during your career in the Armed Forces?
4. What does it mean to be a Swedish (insert profession)?
5. What do you consider to be the most important tasks and goals of your work?
6. In the scenario where Sweden is under armed threat, how would you think, feel and act?

<u>View of Swedish NATO Application</u>

7. How did you react to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, respectively?
8. How did you react to Sweden's membership application to NATO in 2022?
9. Did you expect Sweden to join NATO when you were employed in the armed forces?
10. Do you think your colleagues share your view on the NATO process?
11. Does your employment in the armed forces affect your view of Sweden's membership in NATO?
    - Do you think your view differs from the average civilian Swede?

<u>Collective defense</u>

12. Do you feel that Sweden, NATO's member countries, or both, are under threat?
13. Regarding defense and security, do you feel that Sweden's and other NATO member countries' interests coincide, or do they differ?
14. In your opinion, what is NATO's primary purpose?
15. What does the idea of "collective defense" mean to you?

16. Scenarios: Country X (Russia) will attack Country Y (Finland, Baltics, Poland, Hungary, Turkey). Sweden must be part of a NATO coalition response. How do you feel about this concerning collective defense?

17. How do you feel about joining a coalition with another NATO country?

18. If you could go back in time, would you have applied for your current position today if you had known about the world situation and Sweden's NATO membership?

19. What is most important to you in a crisis or war?

<u>Cool down</u>

20. What are your expectations for your future in the armed forces in light of Swedish NATO membership? (Prompt: stationing and future employment.)

21. Do you have anything else to add? Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for your time!

7.1.3 Table 1

Interviewee	Division	Years hired (approx)
A	Air Force	10
B	Air Force	12
C	Air Force	10
D	Navy	15
E	Army	10
F	Army	30

7.1.4 Table 2

Theoretical assumptions	A. Tajfel & Turner	B. Stryker
i)	Individuals remain in social groups if the norms and stereotypes contribute to their identity-image	Individuals have a hierarchy of their identity images, which become viable when the interests overlap
ii)	If not contributing, the individual leaves the group	The placement of the hierarchy level depends on commitment
iii)	If it is not possible to leave, they a) either change their interpretation of the group or b) accept the situation and engage in social action	Individuals seek to perform in the role according to their most salient identity image.

7.1.5 Table 3

Theoretical assumptions	A. Tajfel & Turner	Interviewees Responses
i)	Individuals remain in social groups if the norms and stereotypes contribute to their self-image	All six stayed within the SAF, some convinced that NATO has contributed
ii)	If not contributing, the individual leaves the group	One of six have considered leaving SAF, but not because of NATO.
iii)	If it is not possible to leave, they either a) change their interpretation of the group or b) accept the situation and engage in social action	a) Recognize the need to change their mindset toward a NATO identity image b) Request further investments and policies that are communicated between SAF and Swedish politicians

7.1.6 Table 4

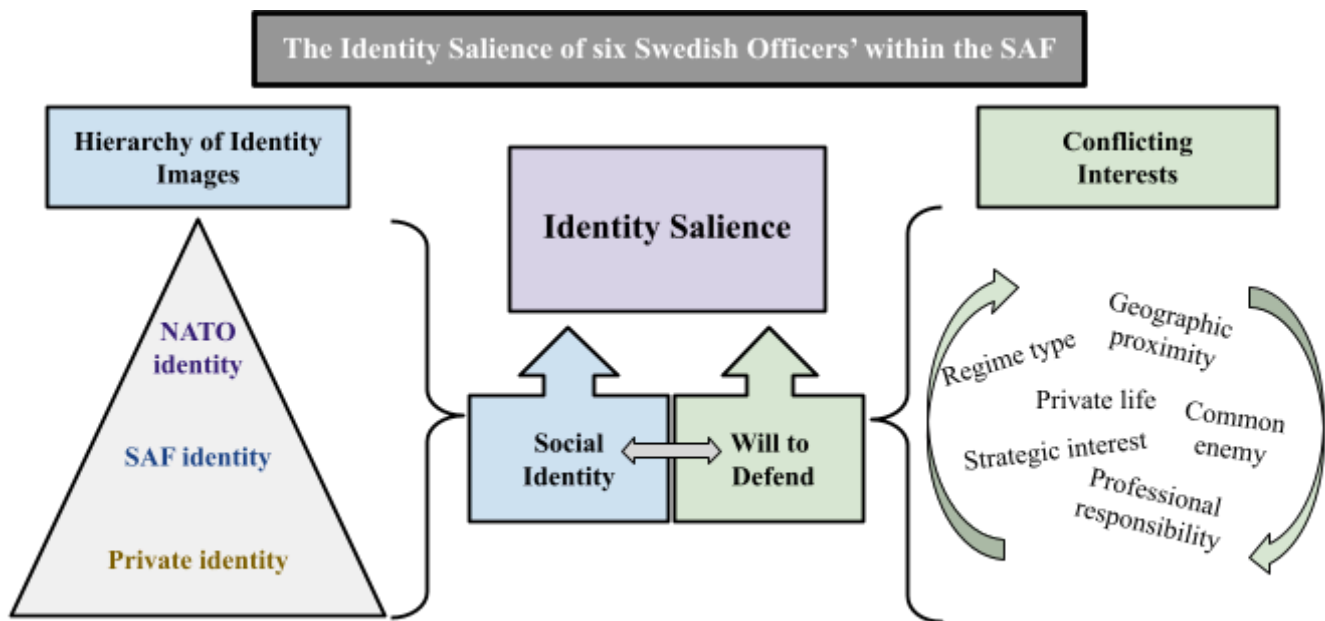| Theoretical assumptions	B. Stryker	Interviewees Responses
i)	Individuals have a hierarchy of their identity images, which become visible when the interests overlap	Five of six describe interest based on conflicting interests
ii)	The placement of the hierarchy level depends on commitment	7. Strategic interest 8. Geography 9. Common enemy 10. Regime-type 11. Private life 12. Professional Responsibility
iii)	Individuals seek to perform in the role according to their most salient identity images.	Yet to be seen

7.1.5 Figure 1

Figure 1.
Based on a combined theoretical framework by Tajfel, Turner and Stryker.