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**SWEDEN'S
GRAND STRATEGY**

*Predicaments of a Small Liberal
State in a Hostile World*

Douglas Brommesson
Ann-Marie Ekengren
Anna Michalski

OXFORD STUDIES IN GRAND STRATEGY

Sweden's Grand Strategy

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The *Oxford Studies in Grand Strategy* is a major new series of cutting-edge monographs that examine the grand strategies of states, and those intergovernmental organizations and nonstate actors who credibly aspire to sovereignty. Books concentrate on the contemporary aspects of grand strategy, while paying due respect to the historical antecedents of a nation's grand strategy and their relevance for a leadership's current choices. The series is pluralistic in terms of theory and method, and maintains a broad view of the ways, means, and ends that undergird a grand strategy. Analytical and explanatory in contribution, books in the series feature a rigorous analysis of the interaction between domestic factors and global forces and provide a clear understanding of how that interaction shapes a grand strategy's formulation, codification, and implementation.

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vi
<i>List of Tables</i>	vii
<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	viii
<i>Preface</i>	x
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xii
<i>List of Authors</i>	xiv
1. Sweden and the Variety of Small State Strategies	1
2. Role Theory and the Study of Small State Grand Strategy: Concepts and Analytical Tools	17
3. Exploring and Tracing Swedish Grand Strategy	39
4. The Evolution of Sweden's Grand Strategy: Autonomy, Activism, and Europeanization	59
5. Shaping Swedish Grand Strategy in a New Era: A Normative European Aligned with NATO	123
6. Sweden's Grand Strategy: Between Autonomy and Integration	188
<i>Appendix 1: List of Interviews</i>	200
<i>Appendix 2: Interview Guide</i>	202
<i>Bibliography</i>	204
<i>Index</i>	220

List of Figures

Figure 3.1	Role action strategies along vertical and horizontal dimensions of role contestation	55
Figure 4.1	Swedish foreign aid and public opinion on foreign aid 1960–2022	88
Figure 4.2	Support for membership in the European Union	111
Figure 5.1	Support for NATO Membership in Finland and Sweden	141

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Framework based on the dimensions of autonomy and integration	42
Table 4.1 Role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy 1945–2007	119
Table 5.1 Swedish Defence Commission	130
Table 5.2 Swedish participation in international missions	149
Table 5.3 Role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy 2008–2024	185
Table 6.1 Role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy	193

Series Editors' Preface

The purpose of 'The Oxford Studies in Grand Strategy' series is to challenge some of the shibboleths that dominate the field of grand strategy.

Succinctly, the field of grand strategy is notable for four characteristics. First, there is an overwhelming propensity to focus exclusively on historic and contemporary great powers,¹ justified by the assumption that only they have both the centralized bureaucracy able to formulate a grand strategy and the military capacity to implement one. This inevitably excludes from study the overwhelming percentage of states and credible actors that aspire to some form of sovereignty. It also encourages scholars to focus exclusively on militarized threats,² despite those truly existential threats posed by climate change and pandemics, on the grounds that this represents 'conceptual overstretch'. Second, by extension, it limits the pool of candidates for any comparative analysis and tends instead to encourage a temporal comparative analysis, rather than across space. Historians may therefore compare the grand strategies of empires,³ but not, for example, the comparative grand strategies of Scandinavian states. Third, relatedly, in contemporary practice, the empirical focus of the literature is now overwhelmingly American-centric, with an additional limited study of China and Russia. The occasional study of other states is considered marginal to the field and, at least for those employing realist assumptions, it is inconceivable that the study of organizations such as the European Union would have any utility. Finally, largely as a product of these three factors, the study of grand strategy is dominated by American-based scholars, even when they examine other countries. This risks a narrowing of perspective, and of 'strategic narcissism' as domestically oriented debates take root.

For the editors, aware of these propensities, the purpose of this series is to begin to redress these assumptions, thereby expanding the contours of the field of grand strategy.

First, we explicitly reject the assumption that only great powers can formulate and implement a grand strategy. Indeed, conversely, in a bifurcating world order, where China and the United States must compete for influence,

¹ P. Kennedy, ed. *Grand Strategy in War and Peace* (Yale University Press, 1991).

² B. R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

³ E. N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

a growing welter of evidence supports the supposition that many large, middle, and small powers have a greater latitude to act autonomously than during the rigid contours of the Cold War or its aftermath. Size does not determine agency, although it can condition its exercise, both in kind and scale. Forthcoming volumes will reflect that premise, examining large, middle, and small states.

Second, the editors are committed to the notion that the study of grand strategy lies at the intersection of international relations and area studies. Thus, books in the series will selectively acknowledge the respective impacts of history, tradition, culture, language, religion, or geography on grand strategies. We believe that to understand a state's grand strategy requires as much a comprehension of a nation's pathologies, as Henry Kissinger characterized them,⁴ and the biases they generate, as to any objective understanding of the threats and opportunities they face. The series reflects that belief in at least two dimensions: the authors, wherever possible, are scholars who live and work in the countries that they analyse; and while they have varied theoretical and methodological approaches, the series is not wedded to the rationalist assumptions that dominate the field of grand strategy.

Third, the field of grand strategy is undertheorized. The focus is often on prescription rather than explanation, making progress towards a unified research programme challenging. Theorization can, of course, take many forms. In this instance the authors in the series try to use existing theories and frameworks to explain why grand strategies persist or change in their countries of analysis. In this first volume, for example, Douglas Brommeson, Ann-Marie Ekengren, and Anna Michalski employ role theory to a study of the evolution of Sweden's grand strategy, thus innovatively expanding the breadth of theory applied to the study of the grand strategy.

The forthcoming contributors to this series reflect our predilections. These volumes will therefore employ a variety of descriptive, explanatory, and normative theories. A diverse set of scholars in every sense, they examine the interaction between historical factors, domestic politics, and the threats and opportunities that provide the foundation for grand strategies in application to cases across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, and Simon Reich

⁴ W. Lord, *Kissinger on Kissinger: Reflections on Diplomacy, Grand Strategy, and Leadership* (St. Martin's Press, 2019), 101.

Preface

Six years ago, when we started this project on the evolving foreign and security policy of Sweden, we had little reason to expect that we would be studying such profound policy change. During our work, we have witnessed how the liberal world order has been put under increasing strain from the lack of willingness of great powers to protect the multilateral rules-based order, to the detriment of small liberal states like Sweden. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to a drastically worsened security situation in Europe and heightened the mistrust among states in the international system. This book on Sweden's grand strategy therefore comes as a timely contribution to the literature on grand strategies of small states. It traces the dramatic change in Sweden's foreign and security policy as the two-hundred-year-old policy of neutrality and non-alignment was abandoned in favour of NATO membership.

Writing a book is a collaborative effort that involves the support of a large group of people. First of all, we express our deepest gratitude to the politicians, diplomats, and senior officials who enthusiastically shared their knowledge regarding the political processes and decisions on various aspects of Sweden's foreign and security policy and how it evolved during the period covered by this study. Their first-hand accounts were essential in order to decipher on a deeper level the reasoning behind official doctrines expressed in state documents, speeches, and other material of varying kinds.

We are also most grateful for the support and guidance received from a number of people involved in the publication process. First and foremost, we are indebted to the series editors Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, and Simon Reich for encouraging us to write this monograph and their support for adopting a novel take on Grand Strategy by combining it with role theory. For us, this book constitutes the pinnacle of many years' research on Sweden's foreign and security policy.

Further, we thank the staff at Oxford University Press who tirelessly directed us in the right direction and responded to our queries. This includes our editor Dominic Byatt and our title manager Karen Bunn who, with combined efficiency and attention, made the production process a pleasant experience. We have also been fortunate to have a very meticulous proof-reader, John Jennings, who worked hard to improve the manuscript. We

are also grateful to our research assistant, Ellen Rahm, for collecting and compiling data for the analyses contained in the book.

We have presented various parts of the work of this book at international and national conferences and seminars. A warm and collective thank you for the comments and support we received at the following occasions: the annual meeting of the International Studies Association (ISA) 2022 and 2023; the annual meeting of the Swedish Political Science Association (SWEPSA) 2022 and 2023; the annual Conference of the Swedish Network for European Studies 2021; the workshop NATO, Nuclear Disarmament, Arms Control at Uppsala University 2024; and at presentations at our home departments at Linnaeus University, University of Gothenburg, and Uppsala University.

We also express our gratitude to *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* for funding of the research project, *New Roles in a Hostile World? How Liberal States Are Changing Their Foreign Policy in a New Security Environment* (grant no. P19-0285:1), of which this book is a part.

Finally, a sincere thank you to all our colleagues in Göteborg, Uppsala, and Växjö for support and encouragement. It is very inspirational to be part of such vibrant academic environments.

Göteborg, Uppsala, and Växjö
28 June 2024

List of Abbreviations

ACI	Anti-Coercion Instrument
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CBAM	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EC	European Community
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDF	European Defence Fund
EDIDP	European Defence Industrial Development Programme
EDU	European Defence Union
EEA	European Economic Area
EEC	European Economic Community
EES	European Security Strategy
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EI2	European Intervention Initiative
EOP	Enhanced Opportunities Partner
EPF	European Peace Facility
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
EU	European Union
EUNAVFOR	European Union Naval Force Somalia
EUTM	European Union Training Mission Somalia
EUTM Mali	European Union Training Mission Mali
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
FISM	Foreign Investment Screening Mechanism
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDI	Gross Domestic Income
GNP	Gross National Product
HR/VP	High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission
ICISS	International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
IR	International Relations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JEF	Joint Expeditionary Force
KFOR	Kosovo Force
LoI	Letter of Intent

MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MINURSO	United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MONUC	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
MONUSC	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
MoU	Memoranda of Understanding
MPCC	Military Planning and Conduct Capability
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NNSC	Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission
NORDEFECO	Nordic Defence Cooperation
NRC	National Role Conception
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PAIGC	Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PF	Peace Facility, EU
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan
RSM	NATO's Resolute Support Mission
RtoP	Responsibility to Protect
SAF	Swedish Armed Forces
SoI	Statement of Intent
SWAPO	South-West Africa People's Organisation
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNMHA	UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement, Yemen
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan
UNMOGIP	United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision for the Middle East
US	United States
WEOG	West European and Other Group
WEU	West European Union
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

List of Authors

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1

Sweden and the Variety of Small State Strategies

Great powers have grand strategies. During the Cold War, the United States and its allied partners pursued a strategy of containing communism to protect themselves from perceived danger.¹ At the end of the Cold War, their strategy shifted to spreading democracy and free trade in order to make the world more interdependent and peaceful.² After many years of introspection, China started to engage with the world in the 1990s. Its global rise was followed in 2013 by the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative—a strategy to forge privileged relations based on trade and foreign aid with states around the world—with the objective of securing access to raw materials and markets.³ Russia, a self-proclaimed great power, has, since at least 2007, pursued a strategy based on regaining control of the former territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, thus claiming a distinctive sphere of interest. It has disregarded the European security order from the 1990s onwards, with many observers believing that domestic problems have pushed the country in a revisionist direction.⁴ These are only some examples of the grand strategies of great powers.

But what about small states? As evident in this book, we contend that small states also have strategies, and sometimes even grand strategies. While great powers may, to a large extent but never completely, control their own circumstances, small states often form strategies based on circumstances created by the greater powers, the more demanding structural preconditions set by the international system, and their limitations in terms of devising strategies in accordance with their own unique national culture.⁵ The grand strategies of

¹ B. R. Posen, and A. L. Ross, “Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996): 5–53.

² J. L. Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy of Transformation,” *Foreign Policy*, 133 (2002): 50–7.

³ A. Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁴ A. Monaghan, “Putin's Russia: Shaping a ‘Grand Strategy’?” *International Affairs*, 89, no. 5 (2013): 1221–36.

⁵ A. I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton University Press, 1998).

2 Sweden's Grand Strategy

small states are therefore different from those of great powers. Even so, small states have a certain degree of actorness and can choose varying strategies in different situations. Hence, not all small states display grand strategies, and among those who do, not all display a single, unitary grand strategy over time.

The case of Sweden is illustrative in this regard. This book shows how the fundamental aim of Sweden's grand strategy—to promote peace in the neighbourhood and to keep the country out of great power conflicts—has been reached through different strategies and policies. We show how the grand strategies of Sweden have been manifested in a set of foreign policy roles—roles that have been negotiated in a social dynamic between the self-understanding of Sweden and the understanding of others.

We return later to the concept of foreign policy roles, but for now we start by providing three snapshots of Swedish security policy to illustrate roles Sweden has played and reflect on different aspects of its grand strategy: the role of an autonomous security seeker from 1945 to the mid-1960s; the role of an autonomous activist from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s; and the role of an integrated European from the early 1990s onwards.

From the early 1800s onwards, Sweden took its first steps towards a policy of neutrality. During the first one hundred years of this period, it was not so much a policy but rather a collection of pragmatic choices in relation to different conflicts. Still, Sweden started to act more passively relative to the role of regional power that it had played during the 1600s and 1700s. During the 1900s, the practice of neutrality developed into a more explicit policy of neutrality, and this was later manifested during the First World War and then again during the Second World War.⁶ Our first snapshot concerns the policy of neutrality in the aftermath of the Second World War.

After 1945, Sweden once again declared its intention to remain non-aligned and to stay neutral in the event of a new war. Sweden's priority was to establish a Scandinavian defence union together with Denmark and Norway—a union that would remain non-aligned in relation to the great powers. Marked by the hardships of Nazi occupation during the Second World War and the failure of the declared neutrality at the outset of the war, both Denmark and Norway turned down the idea of a Scandinavian defence union and instead, as founding members in 1949, joined the Atlantic pact later known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The year before, in 1948, Finland had been forced into the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union, a treaty that was based on anything but friendship. Sweden therefore found

⁶ D. Brommesson, A-M. Ekengren, and A. Michalski, "Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: The Success of a Flexible Policy?" in *Policy Successes in the Nordic Countries*, ed. C. de La Porte, J. Kauko, D. Nohrstedt, D. 't Hart, and B. S. Tranøy (Oxford University Press, 2022).

itself in between the spheres of influence of the great powers, sharing geographical borders to the west with NATO members and to the east with Finland, now under heavy Soviet influence. In this precarious situation, Sweden maintained a strict interpretation of what the policy of neutrality demanded of the country, that is, a policy of passivity in relation to the great powers.

There were different reasons for this strict interpretation of the policy of neutrality.⁷ When Swedish decision makers drew up plans for Sweden's place in the post-war security order, they noted early signs of a strict division between two blocs (later to be known as NATO and the Warsaw Pact) that were based on different ideological and military centres. According to Swedish decision makers, this division provided a certain degree of stability in Europe, and Sweden should therefore refrain from any kind of action or policy that could jeopardize this stability and the overall political structure of the continent. Consequently, Sweden should not express strong opinions on matters that could be seen as sensitive. Thus, according to professor in international law and Swedish Foreign Minister (1945–62) Östen Undén, Swedish security interests were not to be found by choosing between right and wrong, and Sweden should not engage in moral matters based on ideological conviction. Swedish security interests were not to be found between right and wrong. Instead, Swedish policymakers believed that it was essential to consider how its intentions were perceived by other states, since this was seen as a determinant of the credibility and success of the policy of neutrality. One important line of defence for a small state like Sweden was the existence of broad support for international law and the United Nations (UN), since common rules for all states would contribute to a stable world order, beyond differing ideological positions.⁸

The 'Finland argument' was a third reason for Sweden to act cautiously. If the Western powers were seen to be expanding eastward through an alliance with Sweden, either formally or through informal cooperation, Swedish decision makers were afraid that this would put more pressure on Finland. In this scenario, as a response to increased NATO influence over Sweden, the Soviet Union would expand westward through increasing control over Finland, or even through an invasion of the country. Finland would then find itself behind the Iron Curtain, and Sweden would essentially end up with a border to the Soviet Union and therefore situated along the line of confrontation in the event of a new war.⁹ According to Swedish decision makers at the time,

⁷ Brommesson et al., "Sweden's Policy."

⁸ U. Bjereld, A. W. Johansson, and K. Molin, *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred: svensk utrikespolitik under kalla kriget* (Santérus förlag, 2008).

⁹ O. Kronvall and M. Petersson, *Svensk säkerhetspolitik i supermakternas skugga 1945–1991* (Santérus förlag, 2005).

4 Sweden's Grand Strategy

the only way to counter this risk was to build a strict policy of neutrality that would be seen by Moscow as credible.¹⁰

The arguments for a continued policy of neutrality can, accordingly, be seen as mainly pragmatic. Ideologically, a strong majority among the foreign policy elite and public were in favour of the West, but in line with Undén's argument, the policy of neutrality was situated beyond such ideological considerations.¹¹ Additionally, the policy of neutrality received increasing support from the United States. While still strong in the belief that Sweden belonged to the West ideologically, the great powers began to perceive Sweden as an important buffer against the East.¹²

This widespread understanding of what the policy of neutrality required of Sweden resembles characteristics associated with the small-state strategy of hiding.¹³ According to this strategy, a small state should stay out of the searchlight of the great powers so as to counter the risk of being dragged into great power conflicts. This strategy can be successful if the great powers see no interest in the territory of or need to support the smaller state. Switzerland's case is illustrative of the potential success of such a strategy. Nevertheless, there is a risk that the great powers start to take an interest in the small state, thereby making hiding impossible.

One way to counter this risk is to combine the hiding strategy with a military capacity that is strong enough to make it too costly for the great powers to take military action against the small state, but which is, at the same time, not strong enough to destabilize the security order. Sweden used this combination of hiding and a strong national defence in the early part of the Cold War. As Sweden had managed to increase its military strength during the Second World War while staying out of the war, it had a strong military capacity in place when the Cold War started and could use its defensive capacity to make the policy of neutrality even more credible.

Moving on to the second snapshot, the bipolar security structure that came into place with the onset of the Cold War enabled Swedish decision makers to perceive of the possibility of an expanded action space with greater room for manoeuvre. Consequently, the foreign policy elite in Sweden began to reinterpret the requirements of the policy of neutrality. Instead

¹⁰ A. Kähönen, *The Soviet Union, Finland and the Cold War: The Finnish Card in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1956–1959* (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006); Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred*.

¹¹ D. Brommesson, *Från Hanoi till Bryssel: moralsyn i deklarerad svensk utrikespolitik 1969–1996* (Santérus förlag, 2007).

¹² O. Kronvall and M. Petersson, *Svensk säkerhetspolitik i supermakternas skugga 1945–1991* (Santérus förlag, 2005).

¹³ A. Wivel, "The Grand Strategies of Small States," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021).

of a passive foreign policy, based on a strict interpretation of the policy of neutrality, Sweden started to develop a role as an autonomous activist. This role was predicated on an interpretation of the policy of neutrality that allowed for a more active and independent foreign policy. According to this interpretation, acting as an outspoken critic of great power behaviour also made Sweden more credible as a mediator in various conflicts around the world.¹⁴

With a background in the international student movement and ideological beliefs in favour of decolonization and self-determination for smaller states, Olof Palme and other younger Social Democrats promoted a new active foreign policy during the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁵ The opportunity for Sweden to speak up and take moral positions on global issues was a clear policy change compared to its previous more passive role as an autonomous security seeker, and this new role also alleviated the moral burden arising from Swedish neutrality during the Second World War, when Sweden did not take a clear position against Nazi Germany.

Regardless of its role as an autonomous activist, Sweden remained non-aligned due to its policy of neutrality. Nevertheless, Sweden developed a new foreign policy profile as a country taking on a prominent role on the international stage, exerting influence beyond its neighbourhood. In addition to criticizing the superpowers and initiating efforts at mediation, Sweden also increased foreign aid to developing countries, which further raised Sweden's profile as internationalist.¹⁶

Strong Swedish foreign policy activity on the global stage was combined with a more careful approach to its neighbourhood. Sweden maintained a strong national defence and tried to stay out of great power confrontations in Northern Europe. Behind the scenes, covert security cooperation was developed with the United States and other NATO countries, thus maintaining a lifeline in case national military capacity was not strong enough in the event of a Soviet invasion.¹⁷ This cooperation was obviously in conflict with the policy of neutrality, but the benefits of such actions were seen to outweigh

¹⁴ U. Bjereld, "Critic or Mediator? Sweden in World Politics, 1945–90," *Journal of Peace Research*, 32, no. 1 (1995): 23–35.

¹⁵ A-M. Ekengren, "How Ideas Influence Decision-Making: Olof Palme and Swedish Foreign Policy, 1965–1975," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 36, no. 2 (2011): 117–34.

¹⁶ N. Glover, "Sweden, Foreign Aid and the Rise of the Non-Aligned Third World," in *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War*, ed. S. Bott, J. M. Hanhimäki, J. M. Schaufelbuehl, and M. Wyss (Routledge, 2015).

¹⁷ R. Dalsjö, *Life-Line Lost: The Rise and Fall of "Neutral" Sweden's Secret Reserve Option of Wartime Help from the West* (Santérus Academic Press, 2006); M. Holmström, December 30, 2012, "Försvar med tidsgräns," Svenska Dagbladet, <https://www.svd.se/a/b159e181-3974-35b4-a472-f279cafcd159/forsvar-med-tidsgrans>.

the potentially negative consequences of cooperation being discovered by the Soviet Union.

Sweden's role as an autonomous activist, combined with strong national defence and covert cooperation with NATO countries, is illustrative of the small-state strategy of hedging, according to which the small state evades certain issues, not least those that are sensitive to national security. Kuik describes hedging as a strategy aimed at 'keeping a fallback position when situations are uncertain but stakes are high'.¹⁸ This fallback position can be upheld by an unbiased approach to rival great powers, according to which the small state avoids taking sides, or, as in the Swedish case, criticizes both parties to an equal degree.

The hedging strategy does, however, differ from hiding since hedging is selective and the small state only needs to hedge when faced with sensitive issues. Other issues, without any direct relation to national security, can still be open to more active engagement. Accordingly, during the autonomous activist era, Sweden displayed a cautious foreign and security policy on issues relating to its neighbourhood but a more direct involvement in geographically more distant issues.

Moving to our third snapshot, at the end of the Cold War the need to hide or hedge seemed to disappear almost overnight. With German reunification in 1990 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Europe witnessed the birth of a new and more advantageous security situation, devoid of any clear great power rivalry. The need for Sweden to take a balanced approach between the United States and the Soviet Union was gone, and Sweden could embark on a journey in which it was possible to take a clearer position on ideological issues in its neighbourhood also. This led wide sections of the political elite to conclude that it was now possible for Sweden to apply for membership of the European Union (EU).

During the 1970s, Palme opened up to potential membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), but when the EEC began to develop foreign policy cooperation and strengthened its supranational ambitions, the then government drew the conclusion that membership was incompatible with the policy of neutrality. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union the situation became entirely different. In 1991 Social Democratic Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson (1986–1991, 1994–96) handed in Sweden's application for membership of the European Community (EC), which by the time of the Swedish accession had become the European Union. After the accession

¹⁸ C.-C. Kuik, "Getting Hedging Right: A Small-State Perspective," *China International Strategy Review*, 3, no. 2 (2021): 300–15.

agreement was signed by Carl Bildt, Prime Minister (1991–94) representing the Moderate Party, in 1994 and approved in a referendum later the same year, Sweden became a member of the European Union on 1 January 1995.

Accession to the European Union reflected a shifting definition of neutrality that encompassed a stronger emphasis on freedom of alliance, which in turn was based on an understanding of the European Union as a political, but not military, alliance.¹⁹ Even if the European Union's foreign and security policy did not amount to a military alliance, it contained a commitment to provide military resources in peacekeeping and peace building interventions abroad.

Although Sweden had been a devoted contributor to UN peacekeeping missions around the world during the Cold War, support for peace-enforcing missions was a new step. Gradually, this led to the development of more standing forces, deployable for international missions, the abandonment of large territorial defence, and the abolition of conscription in 2010.²⁰ In 1994, Sweden joined the NATO framework Partnership for Peace (PfP), thereby making Sweden's armed forces more compatible with NATO standards. According to its underlying defence doctrine, Sweden was to build security together with others, and Swedish security was to be defended far afield, often within NATO or EU operations such as that in Afghanistan.²¹ Despite this, Sweden maintained its policy of non-alignment.

When the security situation in its neighbourhood began to deteriorate with Russia's aggressive stances vis-à-vis Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine, including its occupation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, Sweden started to re-emphasize the territorial defence of Sweden in its foreign and security policy. Cooperation with other countries on security matters had an effect on Swedish foreign and security policy, and Sweden was, therefore, set on a path of deepening cooperation with NATO. It soon also developed extensive bilateral military cooperation with countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Finland, among others. This extensive web of security policy cooperation, developed while still maintaining a formal non-aligned status, has been labelled the Hultqvist doctrine after Social Democratic defence

¹⁹ Brommesson, *Från Hanoi till Bryssel*; D. Brommesson, "Normative Europeanization: The Case of Swedish Foreign Policy Reorientation." *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45, no. 2 (2010): 224–44; A. Michalski, "Europeanization of National Foreign Policy: The Case of Denmark's and Sweden's Relations to China." *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51, no. 5 (2013b): 884–900; A. Michalski, "Sweden: Shedding Exceptionalism in the Face of Europeanization," in *The Member States in the European Union*, ed. S. Bulmer S. and C. Lequense, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2020).

²⁰ M. Lindberg, "Why Sweden Suspended Military Service: The Policy Process from 1990 to 2009" (PhD diss., Lund University, 2019).

²¹ W. Agrell, *Ett krig här och nu. Sveriges väg till väpnad konflikt i Afghanistan* (Atlantis, 2013).

minister Peter Hultqvist (2014–22).²² Cooperation with Finland was particularly extensive and included military operational planning beyond peace time.

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Sweden was already integrated into NATO in most aspects, apart from article 5 of the Washington treaty, with its assurances on mutual defence. Sweden had, therefore, reached the status of an informal ally.²³ Finland signalled its willingness to join NATO soon after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, and Sweden found itself in a situation where its only perceived option was to also apply for membership. We return to these processes in more detail later, but for our purpose here this short exposé illustrates a third grand strategy of small states, that of sheltering, which refers to how small states seek protection through external relations.²⁴

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Sweden has taken step after step towards deeper security policy integration, be it within the European Union and NATO, through greater Nordic cooperation such as Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), and by engaging in different forms of bilateral cooperation. Although there was no clearly expressed intention that the integration process would culminate in an application for membership of NATO, Sweden has sought different ways to earn the protection of others. In other words, Sweden sought shelter under the umbrella of the military strength provided by other, often more powerful, countries.

These three snapshots illustrate how the overarching goal of Swedish grand strategy has been rather consistent over time. While great powers may have had expansionist ambitions, Sweden has, as a small state, aimed at keeping the peace, especially in its Nordic neighbourhood, and to stay out of disputes that could evolve into military conflicts involving the superpowers.

However, even though the overarching goal has been consistent over time, these snapshots show how Sweden's means of reaching this goal have varied. Support for a multilateral world order, free trade, and support for international law have been important parts of the Swedish strategy. But exactly how these considerations have played out in practice and how they have been combined with other important values differ over time, as has the balance between autonomy and integration. We return to this variation throughout the book.

²² A. Wieslander, "The Hultqvist doctrine'—Swedish Security and Defence Policy after the Russian Annexation of Crimea," *Defence Studies*, 22, no. 1 (2022): 35–59.

²³ A. Wieslander, "What Makes an Ally? Sweden and Finland as NATO's Closest Partners." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 17, no. 2 (2019): 194–222.

²⁴ B. Thorhallsson and S. Steinsson, "A Theory of Shelter," in *Small States and Shelter Theory: Iceland's External Affairs*, ed. B. Thorhallsson (Routledge, 2019).

While the grand strategies literature provides us with important perspectives on how small states behave in international politics, they tend to black box the small state. Accordingly, the domestic political process through which a small state's strategy takes shape is largely absent, as is the social dynamic between politics at the domestic and international levels. Such observations motivate a turn towards role theory for a more fine-grained understanding of what small-state grand strategies look like and how they take shape in a social dynamic negotiated both within and between states.

1.1 Describing and Explaining Swedish Grand Strategy Using Role Theory

This book aims to both describe and explain Swedish grand strategy over time with the help of role theory. This ambition is supported by an empirical description of the main changes that have taken place in Swedish grand strategy since the Second World War: first, reinterpretation of the policy of neutrality, resulting in a shift towards an active foreign policy, including strong criticism of the superpowers; second, overcoming prior reluctance to become an EU member and joining in 1995, together with the events leading up to this decision and the interests, including both commercial and security considerations, underlying this turn-around; and third, responding to a more hostile context from 2008 onwards, when the core values of liberal democracy were challenged by Russia's actions and when Sweden finally decided to apply for NATO membership in 2022.

This book argues that one way to understand Sweden's grand strategy is by using role theory—a theoretical approach from the field of foreign policy analysis—as a lens to focus on dominant parts of the self-understanding, policies, and actions of Sweden's role in the world, that is, its master roles. Here we start from a conception of role theory that is based on a social understanding of international relations, that is, as a social order in which states play roles and act according to meanings grounded in their self-conception (ego dimension) and those of other states (alter dimension). The perception of one's role is described as national role conceptions (NRCs).

A state can play multiple roles, and we argue that the repertoire of different roles, and their prioritization, with a dominant role taking the position of master role, reflects an overarching grand strategy. [Chapter 2](#) elaborates this combination of two different strands of research—role theory and grand strategy. For now, let us point out that the combination of grand strategy and role theory provides us with a stronger social dimension that helps

to explain how foreign policy roles, and ultimately grand strategies, are not only influenced by rational calculations of self-interest—the traditional focus in the grand strategy literature—but also by self-understanding and the understanding of the Self through others.

1.2 Why Study Swedish Grand Strategy?

This book contends that it is relevant to study Sweden as a case of a small-state grand strategy, and that a focus on small-state grand strategy makes a novel contribution to the grand strategy literature. According to this argument, a focus on a small state, rather than a major power, reveals important differences (and in some cases similarities) in the processes, including both military security and other foreign policy goals, which lead up to the formulation of the grand strategy. Moreover, our approach also contributes to the grand strategy literature by analysing not only the international but also the domestic determinants of Sweden's grand strategy.

In the grand strategy literature, the focus has been on major powers, both historical empires, such as the Roman, the Russian, or the Byzantine Empires,²⁵ and modern superpowers, such as the United States, China, or the Soviet Union.²⁶ In some cases, researchers have adopted a normative standpoint: only great powers can realize grand strategies²⁷ and consequently small states are held to lack the capacity to formulate grand strategy.²⁸ A middle position would be to assume that small states never move beyond reactive strategies and focus instead on how to cope with the political and diplomatic environment in which they exist.²⁹

However, renewed interest in the study of grand strategies suggests that we should not limit ourselves to the study of only one group of states.³⁰ Following this broader research agenda, we advocate also considering small- and medium-sized states to evaluate whether the general models of how and why states form grand strategies are applicable to a

²⁵ J. LeDonne, "The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650–1831," in *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450–1917*, ed. E. Lohr and M. Poe (Brill, 2002); E. N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2009); E. N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century CE to the Third* (JHU Press, 2016).

²⁶ Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions"; Gaddis, "A Grand Strategy"; Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*.

²⁷ S. D. Krasner, "An Orienting Principle for Foreign Policy," *Policy Review* 163, no. 3 (2010): 3–12.

²⁸ W. Murray, R. H. Sinnreich, and J. Lacey, *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²⁹ H. Briffa, "Small States and COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities for Multilateralism," *Global Perspectives*, 4, no. 1 (2023): 57708.

³⁰ T. Balzacq, P. Dombrowski, and S. Reich, "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay," *Security Studies*, 28, no. 1 (2019b): 58–86; A. Wivel, "The Grand Strategies of Small States," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021).

wider range of actors. This book contributes to this broader theoretical aim by describing and explaining Sweden's grand strategy as the case of a small liberal state in a challenging geopolitical environment, which is at times seeking recognition as an actor of importance disproportionate to its size.³¹

The need to investigate grand strategies beyond major powers is illustrated by the framework provided by Barry Posen and Andrew Ross in their seminal work on US grand strategy.³² Their framework does indeed include components applicable to analysing a small state's grand strategy, such as their 'cooperative security strategy' with interdependence as a preferred world order, liberalism as an analytical anchor, and a partly transnational conception of national interest. Nevertheless, other parts of their framework are off the mark for a small state such as Sweden, which has not used aggressive force since the 1800s and has no nuclear arms.

With few exceptions, earlier research on grand strategies displays the same singular focus on the grand strategies of major powers, ignoring small states altogether.³³ Still, the literature on grand strategy includes a couple of exceptions. Hillary Briffa's 2020 dissertation asks whether small states can pursue a grand strategy and uses Malta as a case study to answer this question. Today there is increased interest around how small states have dealt with their security challenges and Briffa sees the combination of grand strategy thinking and small state research as rewarding, since it contributes to our understanding of how (all kinds of) states pursue long-term interests.³⁴ According to Briffa, a grand strategy must reflect a conscious process, point towards a comprehensive use of many different tools of statecraft, continue over time, and aim to construct a favourable external environment.³⁵

The results of this study indicate that a small state (e.g., Malta) can pursue a grand strategy under certain circumstances. As one would presume, a small-state grand strategy is not about dominating or changing the international order; rather, it is about using different small-state tools to carve out a specific place within the existing structure. According to Briffa's analysis, neutrality, or small-state strategies for influence, such as honest brokering and the presence of technical expertise, are important parts of Malta's grand strategy.

³¹ B. De Carvalho, and I. B. Neumann, *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing* (Routledge, 2014).

³² Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions."

³³ R. F. Lissner, "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *Texas National Security Review*, 2, no. 1 (2018): 52–73; T. Balzacq, P. Dombrowski, and S. Reich, *Comparative Grand Strategy: A Framework and Cases* (Oxford University Press, 2019a).

³⁴ H. Briffa, "Can Small States Have a Grand Strategy?" (PhD diss., Kings College London, 2020).

³⁵ Briffa, "Small States," 23.

Effective leadership, domestic consensus, and a certain environment of acceptance at the United Nations and the European Union have all been important preconditions for the existence of Malta's grand strategy.³⁶ While we agree with Briffa's recognition of the fruitful intersection between the literatures on grand strategy and small state theory, throughout this book we highlight how long-term interests are often formed in a social dynamic, negotiated both within and between states.

The rarity of examples of studies with a focus on actors other than great powers means that studying a small state can nuance our understanding of grand strategies by considering a type of state that is usually disregarded in the grand strategy literature. Given that the structural preconditions and capacity to pursue certain strategies to achieve security differ between small and large states, small-state grand strategies deviate from those of major powers. This is in line with Anders Wivel, who argues that small-state grand strategies have historically been closely tied to national security and 'formulated in the shadow of great power interests.'³⁷ This also supports our understanding of Sweden as a small state. Although much smaller states than Sweden exist in the international system, Swedish grand strategy has been closely tied to security seeking and indeed is 'formulated in the shadow of great power interests', as well as other regional powers. From this follows a relational understanding of the small-state status, rather than an understanding based on absolute numbers in terms of citizens, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or military resources.³⁸ Accordingly, the regional security environment is of importance where some security environments can allow small states to 'use their weakness instrumentally for maximizing interests', leading to a reduced focus on national security.³⁹ This further reinforces our argument that small-state strategies can be found in the dynamic between a specific small state and its greater neighbours.

As Richard Betts acknowledges, for a '[grand] strategy to be meaningful, it should [...] have a modicum of coherence and consistency.'⁴⁰ He also claims that grand strategy, especially in democracies, is affected by political compromises, which means that in practice it can display a combination of quite divergent ideas. Betts's acknowledgments make us convinced that a focus on the domestic determinants of Sweden's grand strategy is an important

³⁶ Briffa, "Small States," 288.

³⁷ Wivel, "The Grand Strategies," 490.

³⁸ G. Baldacchino, and A. Wivel, "Small States: Concepts and Theories," in *Handbook on the Politics of Small States*, ed. G. Baldacchino and A. Wivel (Edward Elgar, 2020), 2–19; see also T. Long, *A Small State's Guide to Influence in World Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

³⁹ Wivel, "The Grand Strategies," 490.

⁴⁰ R. K. Betts, "The Grandiosity of Grand Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly*, 42, no. 4 (2019), 9.

contribution to our knowledge of how grand strategies are negotiated and delineated, and an important factor if we want to understand how Sweden's grand strategy has evolved.

Historically, Swedish foreign and security policy has, to a considerable degree, been characterized by a consensus culture, which makes it important to understand the boundaries surrounding each of the roles that were accepted during different time frames. This consensus culture was especially salient during the Cold War, when many party-political differences over foreign and security issues were not politicized or played out in the political arena. Still, there exist important exceptions from the period: should Sweden become an EU and/or NATO member? How should the balance between the European Union and the United Nations be defined in Swedish foreign policy? And to what extent should Sweden speak with an autonomous voice in world politics? Both the consensus and aforementioned political controversies are addressed in the ensuing empirical chapters.

1.3 Structure of the Book

Following this introductory chapter, [Chapter 2](#) conducts a review of the grand strategy literature. We draw on this literature to define grand strategy and to situate our book in relation to the broader grand strategy literature. The literature on small states, with a particular focus on small-state strategies, is discussed in greater detail. We also problematize Sweden as a small state, considering the extent to which Sweden also has the characteristics of a medium-sized state.

We then move on to role theory and present the major concepts of role theory that are used in the analysis. In particular, we focus on the relationship between grand strategies and foreign policy roles, and on how foreign policy roles can be seen as a reflection of grand strategies. By doing so, we adhere to a rather novel approach in the grand strategy literature, using role theory as a tool to study grand strategies.⁴¹ Based on previous research of Swedish foreign policy, we introduce two concepts that help us to pin-point small state foreign policy roles: autonomy and integration. These two concepts provide us with analytical guidance, directing our empirical chapters when describing Swedish foreign policy roles.

⁴¹ C. Demirduzen and C. G. Thies, "A Role Theory Approach to Grand Strategy: Horizontal Role Contestation and Consensus in the Case of China," *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 7, no. 1 (2022): ogab018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogab018>.

Moving from the discussion of role theory, [Chapter 3](#) presents our second analytical framework. While the first analytical framework is descriptive and helps to describe certain roles at certain times, this second framework is explanatory and consists of four action strategies that help explicate the outcome of processes arising when old roles are challenged by external threats and new, or adjusted, roles are adopted domestically.

The chapter continues by presenting the methodological tools used in the study. Here, process tracing is used to follow the process from the initial contestation of an established role, through the conflict between the old role and a potential new role, to the adoption of a new role. We also present our approach to pin-pointing grand strategy, which is based on the sum of the adopted roles. The chapter also provides the reader with a critical discussion of the sources used.

[Chapter 4](#) traces the evolution of Swedish grand strategy from the Second World War to more current events. The first section presents the historical background to Swedish non-alignment starting from the early 1800s, with its increasingly passive autonomous role in relation to neighbouring states. The analysis then turns to Sweden's confirmation of its role as an autonomous security seeker, which rests on non-alignment after the end of the Second World War with a strict policy of neutrality, at least officially.

The chapter next analyses the reinterpretation of the policy of non-alignment in favour of an autonomous activist role. To do so, we study the dichotomous nature of Sweden during the Cold War, with its public image of a humanitarian giant, critical of colonialism and militarism, and a more covert image, based on cooperation with the United States and NATO, as well as heavy investment in national defence. Sweden's endorsement of free trade is an important aspect of the funding of national welfare programmes.

We then examine the European dimension of Sweden's strategic thinking, initially throughout the Cold War and later after it became a member of the European Union from 1995. Departing from the role as a rather hesitant European during the Cold War, Sweden incorporated a more elaborated European dimension in its strategic thinking at the end of the Cold War. After 1995, Sweden had to consider how to fit under the larger European umbrella as well as which aspects of its traditional national character and outlook it could maintain (and even develop) after membership.

Gradually, we can see how the role of an integrated European state develops. This was based on the fact that Sweden, as an EU member state, participated in European policymaking while promoting its specific national interests and worldview. We consider whether some of Sweden's post-Second

World War exceptionalism has had to give way to a less-autonomous stance in international affairs.

The chapter analyses the interplay between changes on the international stage and how these changes were interpreted domestically and negotiated between different domestic actors. For example, Swedish public opinion has consistently been in favour of non-alignment, and politicians have framed the non-alignment policy as a way to promote Swedish autonomy, which has been looked upon favourably by the public.

Chapter 5 turns to the development of the more recent Swedish grand strategy. Here, we trace the processes by which Swedish foreign policy roles have been contested, often due to changes in the surrounding international environment, and how new roles have been negotiated and adopted domestically. The first section studies Sweden's journey towards its role as an integrated security provider. Based on a web of different forms of security cooperation, Sweden became increasingly integrated into Western security structures, while initially not abandoning the policy of non-alignment.

As a consequence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Sweden initiated the process towards NATO membership, and subsequently both Finland and Sweden reached the historic decision to apply for membership in the military alliance. For Sweden (and Finland) this was the final step in a process whereby Sweden moved from building foreign and security policy on a combination of autonomy and a web of bilateral forms of security cooperation to seeking security under NATO's umbrella.

We trace in detail how this process played out by examining how the war in Ukraine put the role conflict between integration and autonomy in the spotlight and the way in which this role conflict was subsequently handled. We also explore why it eventually led to an application for NATO membership and, accordingly, a historic shift in Swedish grand strategy towards an integrationist role within all the major Western security arrangements.

The second section of the chapter studies how Sweden, particularly leading Social Democrats, in parallel with the ambition to seek security with others, rediscovered its Cold War role as an autonomous activist. From 2014 onwards examples exist in terms of a feminist foreign policy, the unilateral recognition of Palestine, and a return to regular criticism within the United Nations of the deployment of nuclear armaments. These issue areas became important themes in Sweden's strategic outlook and self-identification but also acquired a truly global dimension. We discuss the renaissance of the role as an autonomous activist and its transformation into a role as a normative internationalist but also the tension between this role and the pressing need to integrate within Western security cooperation.

Thirdly, we study how Sweden's role in Europe affected national foreign policy and how Sweden positioned itself in the development of the normative turn of EU foreign and security policy. In this section, we also assess how, and with what effect, Sweden has aligned itself with European norms and values, while also shaping these in the process.

Finally, [Chapter 6](#) returns to the question of whether Sweden's grand strategy differs from those of other states described in the literature and, if so, how. It analyses the similarities and differences between Sweden's and other states' grand strategies to contribute to the wider grand strategy literature. This analysis also enables us to trace the evolution of the major characteristics of Swedish grand strategy over time and to discuss possible avenues of development for Sweden's future grand strategy.

It is within this context that we are also able to evaluate the use of role theory, and the analysis of roles highlights the interplay between contextual and structural changes and how these changes are interpreted by decision makers at the domestic level. The ensuing changes in grand strategy are negotiated between different domestic actors, considering the current setting in parliament and reigning public attitudes.

2

Role Theory and the Study of Small State Grand Strategy

Concepts and Analytical Tools

The principal rationale for our study is the preoccupation with great powers in the grand strategy literature and the (near) absence of small states. A focus on a small state, such as Sweden, will contribute to the understanding of how grand strategies are formulated and in what aspects grand strategies of small states diverge from those of the great power states. Hence, our study makes a theoretical contribution on small states and grand strategies, as well as an empirical contribution to the development of Sweden's grand strategy over time.

This chapter (1) defines grand strategy and how we apply the concept in our study; (2) presents earlier research on grand strategy and discuss the possible implications for the study of small states; and (3) outlines our theoretical contribution, which combines grand strategy with role theory. After presenting our theoretical framework, we return to how we analyse the different dimensions of Sweden's grand strategy.

2.1 The Grand Strategies of Small States

While the grand strategy literature has long lacked nuance regarding different types of actors, it has simultaneously been overly pluralistic in terms of its definition of grand strategy as a concept. Repeated appeals for a more unified theory and definition of grand strategy have not been heeded.¹ Even though we see a renewed interest in the grand strategy concept as such, more recent research has not yet filled this conceptual gap. We return to this point later, but at this stage, we align with Thierry Balzacq and Donald Krebs's definition

¹ N. Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" *Security Studies*, 27, no. 1 (2018): 27–57; R. K. Betts, "The Grandiosity of Grand Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly*, 42, no. 4 (2019): 7–22.

that grand strategy is 'the highest form of statecraft' as a valid starting point for empirical studies.²

Balzacq and Krebs describe the research field and the commonly used definition of grand strategy as encapsulating an overarching idea of how the state will achieve the desired national objectives. They assume the state will act more efficiently when national foreign policies are in line with grand strategy.³ However, they also conclude that 'a unified concept and theory of grand strategy continue to elude us'.⁴

In Balzacq and Krebs' overview of the definitions used in the grand strategy literature, they show that, for some scholars, grand strategy has been seen as a (narrow) military strategy, while others have broadened the concept until it has been of little use in demarcating overall foreign policy. In the earlier attempts to define and study grand strategy, they suggest that research had combined a functionalist and normative view; a grand strategy was believed to guide the state towards peace while at the same time having peace as its aim.⁵

In the more recent literature, the core grand strategy definitions are summarized in the statement '[g]rand strategy is thus a theory, whose chief virtue, according to its proponents, is bringing coherence to and rationalizing state policy'.⁶ This summary offers conceptual clarity to the field and indicates that a grand strategy can be seen as an organizing principle for a state, guiding its behaviour. Grand strategies are often believed to have long-term repercussions, and foreign and security policies are believed to reflect, or at least have the ambition to reflect, a particular grand strategy.

Acknowledging the challenge of agreeing on a common definition of grand strategy, we still see the need for a clear understanding of the concept. For the purpose of this book, we recognize the usefulness in Hal Brands claim that a grand strategy is a 'theory or logic that guides leaders seeking security'.⁷ What we take from his definition is that a grand strategy rests on an ideational foundation, and we acknowledge the need to widen the definition beyond security. We therefore agree that a grand strategy can be expressed in terms of a guiding principle for a state's relations with other actors that shapes its long-term security and foreign policies.⁸

² T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal of Grand Strategy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021), 1.

³ Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal."

⁴ Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal," 5.

⁵ Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal."

⁶ Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal," 4.

⁷ H. Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 4.

⁸ L. K. Danner, *China's Grand Strategy: Contradictory Foreign Policy?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 27; Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword"; Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal," 5.

What is important here is that a grand strategy is not only about traditional security policy. In this vein, we argue for the need to adjust existing grand strategy frameworks to permit a broader analysis, considering not only military security but also other elements of foreign policy. Recent studies have applied such a broader view of states' grand strategies, also encompassing ideational aspects.⁹ Such aspects will be important to our case study of Sweden as they provide tools for analysing Sweden's grand strategy more comprehensively.

We therefore agree with Avery Goldstein's statement that a grand strategy 'refers to the guiding logic or overarching vision about how a country's leaders combine a broad range of capabilities linked with military, economic, and diplomatic strategies to pursue international goals.'¹⁰ This means that we are interested not only in the foreign policies themselves but in the overarching logic behind the coordination of many different strands of policy beyond security related issues.

We also acknowledge the literature's earlier empirical preoccupation with great powers and their grand strategies. We are fully in line with Balzacq and Krebs's argument that small states are probably in greater need of a grand strategy than many great powers. When resources are (relatively) scarce and diplomatic capacity limited, a grand strategy may be even more significant, as it acts as a beacon for how to organize state policies.¹¹

According to Anders Wivel, in essence small states' grand strategies do not differ from great powers' grand strategies. A grand strategy needs to harness state capacities in a coherent direction, otherwise it will not be efficient and probably not even acknowledged as a grand strategy. Our broad understanding of grand strategies is in line with Wivel's acknowledgement that a grand strategy prescribes how a certain end will be achieved, and that it often takes a number of different instruments of power, such as military, diplomatic, and economic policies, to reach it.¹²

Wivel claims that small state grand strategies 'may not be codified in official documents' but may nonetheless reflect 'the calculated relationships of means to large ends.'¹³ This should be understood as indicating that we cannot

⁹ T. Balzacq, P. Dombrowski, and S. Reich, *Comparative Grand Strategy: A Framework and Cases* (Oxford University Press, 2019a); T. Balzacq, P. Dombrowski, and S. Reich, "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay," *Security Studies*, 28, no. 1 (2019b): 58–86.

¹⁰ A. Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford University Press, 2005), 19.

¹¹ Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal," 9–10.

¹² A. Wivel, "The Grand Strategies of Small States," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹³ Wivel, "The Grand Strategies," 490.

always expect grand strategies to be discussed in a single government document or in a particular national strategy, but that we rather need to lay out the puzzle ourselves, using many different sources in order to describe the small state grand strategy. Common to small states is that they do not articulate grand strategy in a way that allows us to capture its essence through the study of a particular document. Therefore, it is important to look for a 'consistent pattern of behaviour over time,' which will reflect the presence of a grand strategy.¹⁴

Historically, small state grand strategies were believed to reflect their limited capabilities and were therefore geared towards survival and the avoidance of defeat.¹⁵ Two grand strategies, firmly rooted in the realist theoretical tradition, are held to be more common among small states: hiding and shelter seeking.

Hiding is mainly a grand strategy aiming at 'signalling disinterests in great power politics and committing to impartiality,' but it has increasingly been used as 'a platform for status-seeking and influence on great power politics.'¹⁶ Shelter seeking on the other hand is about allying with other stronger parties. The smaller state obtains security from the stronger party but gives the stronger party influence over its foreign policy in return. Hence, the small state's room for manoeuvre is diminished and its autonomy is traded against security. Earlier empirical research on small state membership in NATO confirms the theoretical expectation on diminished autonomy during the processes leading up to membership of the alliance, and increased autonomy once inside the alliance.¹⁷

The literature on small state grand strategies emphasizes that these states are severely affected by their limited military and other resources. Earlier structural changes in the international system, such as globalization during the 1990s, have made small states' grand strategies less predictable over time. Hiding and shelter seeking are held to be common in contemporary small state grand strategies, but the two strategies are also believed to have become more complementary over time, and variety beyond these two forms of strategy is believed to have increased. Earlier research on small state grand strategies expected them to combine their grand strategies in new ways. Hiding is believed to be less common as a result of increasing security interdependence and a stronger focus on non-territorial security problems. Shelter seeking is believed to remain a salient strategy, but the protection needed by

¹⁴ Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword," 34.

¹⁵ Wivel, "The Grand Strategies," 492.

¹⁶ Wivel, "The Grand Strategies," 494–5.

¹⁷ H. Mouritzen and A. Wivel, eds. *The Geopolitics of Euro-Atlantic Integration* (Routledge, 2005).

small states has extended beyond military assistance into, for example, police and intelligence cooperation, and border protection.¹⁸

Shelter seeking can also be combined with hedging. Hedging is about interacting with many different strong states but stopping before participating in ‘forums or alliances balancing the shelter state.’¹⁹ In a way, small state grand strategies today are believed to take ‘advantage of material weaknesses to mediate, promote norms, hedge and seek status.’²⁰

However, developments in Europe after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, with the corresponding turn towards an emphasis on military security, may once again affect small states’ grand strategies, perhaps in a direction whereby states enjoy fewer options and less variation in strategy occurs. This is something we return to in the empirical sections of this book. [Section 2.2](#) introduces role theory and the way in which we believe it brings structure to the analysis of small state grand strategy.

2.2 Foreign Policy Roles as Expressions of Grand Strategy

There is a long-standing conceptual link between grand strategy and foreign policy roles that is brought out in empirically oriented case studies of national foreign policy, as well as in theoretically oriented security studies. Apart from their dissimilar ontological starting points, the classical grand strategy scholarship’s singular focus on great powers, encompassing only a select group of countries, contributed to a reluctance to build bridges to role theory, which focuses on the social order of states in a hierarchical system in which most states have a role to play.

However, in recent theoretical developments, grand strategy and role theory have been brought together by prominent role theory scholars, while at the same time, scholarship on grand strategy is adopting a wider understanding of what grand strategizing entails and which actors engage in it. While still in their early days, these efforts point towards a productive relationship between grand strategy and role theory, as both are committed to understanding and explaining the foreign policy choices of international actors.

¹⁸ Wivel, “The Grand Strategies,” 497.

¹⁹ Wivel, “The Grand Strategies,” 499.

²⁰ Wivel, “The Grand Strategies,” 501.

In particular, role theory's versatility has been shown to be useful in understanding the construction of grand strategies, grand strategy performance in the international system, as well as the domestic processes of foreign policy role change. Furthermore, role theory, being less constrained regarding the unit of analysis than grand strategy within international relations (IR) realism, allows for the recognition that small states and atypical actors may conduct foreign policy that can be conceived as grand strategy.

2.2.1 The Promise of a Bridge between Grand Strategy and Role Theory

Scholars have been attracted to role theory's ability to bring underexplored aspects of grand strategy into the open. In this context, two dimensions in particular are brought to the fore. The first concerns the connection between state identity and the domestic elite's formulation of grand strategy. For David McCourt, identity is part of the 'essential components of any realistic account of grand strategy' and becomes accessible through domestic elite stories that 'form the basis of foreign policy.'²¹

The second aspect is linked to the performative dimension of grand strategy, in the sense that strategies shape the world in the instance that they are played out in reality. From a performative perspective, the nature of the interaction among states in the international order reveals the boundaries set for a state's international roles through the manner in which they are enacted in concrete displays of foreign policy and diplomatic conduct. The space granted to a state by other states to fulfil its international roles is indicative of the attribution of status and prestige to the state in question.

These two dimensions tend to be taken for granted in accounts of grand strategy, probably for the simple reason that great powers do not need to reflect on their identity as a powerful actor, nor doubt other states' acknowledgement of their status and ability to act at the international level. However, without these dimensions, it is difficult to fully assess the strategies pursued by great powers, largely because domestic political processes, including analyses of the elite's perceptions of state resources, remain black boxed.

In this vein, Blagden's 2021 study of the grand strategies of the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan is situated at

²¹ D. McCourt, "Culture, Identity, and Grand Strategy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021), 303, 308.

the intersection between states' quest for survival and the convictions held by domestic elites about the roles that their state ought to play in international politics. For Blagden, social ideas about what the state should do and how it should behave in the international arena may actually complicate, perhaps even scupper, the neo-realist primary state objective of keeping the state safe by ensuring its security.

Through this perspective, Blagden shows that '... roleplay and realpolitik pull in *different* directions' and 'the desire to fulfil a set of social-behavioural expectations instead *diminishes* national security ...'.²² The warning that value-based grand strategy can, instead of fulfilling a social role, lead to '... confused, conflicted and sometimes self-defeating directions' is pertinent for our account of Sweden's grand strategy.²³

Demirduzen and Thies take a different perspective on what role theory can bring to the understanding of grand strategy by analysing domestic role contestation and consensus in China.²⁴ They argue that role theory can contribute with 'means of measurement of the grand strategies' by assessing the level of agreement among domestic elites as evidence of the presence of national role conceptions (NRCs), which constitute a state's grand strategy, often expressed in terms of a master role.²⁵ Their aim, therefore, is to use the central concept of NRCs to identify a state's grand strategy as the master role among a number of possible roles and, based on the level of domestic elite contestation, assess its coherence.

Opening up to the existence of several roles and the possibility of contestation between them brings new insights into state behaviour beyond the material, realist-oriented approach that traditionally surrounds grand strategy. This is significant for two reasons: first, actors other than great powers, for instance small states or political unions such as the European Union (EU), may be considered to have grand strategies that are 'detectable via roles',²⁶ 'independent of short-term pragmatic or temporary policy agendas'.²⁷

Second, contestation among roles can be considered a natural phenomenon that gives rise to a dynamic process of role change. This is particularly the case for small states, which are more vulnerable to shifts in

²² D. Blagden, "Roleplay, Realpolitik and 'Great Powerness': The Logical Distinction between Survival and Social Performance in Grand Strategy," *European Journal of International Relations*, 27, no. 4 (2021): 1163.

²³ Blagden, "Roleplay," 1180.

²⁴ C. Demirduzen and C. G. Thies, "A Role Theory Approach to Grand Strategy: Horizontal Role Contestation and Consensus in the Case of China," *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 7, no. 1 (2022): ogab018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogab018>

²⁵ Demirduzen and Thies, "A Role Theory," 2.

²⁶ Demirduzen and Thies, "A Role Theory," 16.

²⁷ Demirduzen and Thies, "A Role Theory," 5.

the international system and need to change and adapt their roles to new conditions. It becomes an empirical question as to whether this adjustment will be effectuated in the international social order through role play, leaving the expression of the master role intact at the domestic level, or if the master role will undergo a process of change with or without changing the complementary roles.

Demirduzen and Thies make an important methodological point by examining which roles have an enduring support among the wider Chinese elite and which roles are more likely to be contested. They note that long-term roles linked to perceptions of China's identity tend to endure and be backed up by stronger elite consensus than (newer) roles associated with Xi Jinping's more policy-oriented objectives. Long-standing roles can then be identified as components of China's grand strategy with greater certainty.

2.2.2 Bridging Grand Strategy and Role Theory: Conceptual and Analytical Premises

Role theory's conceptual apparatus has compelled scholars to seek a bridge to grand strategy, largely because of its ability to shed light on the link between actors' self-understanding and foreign policy conduct.²⁸ For this reason, the discovery of role theory's usefulness in relation to grand strategy often centres on a state's self-understanding. According to Elgström and Smith, scholars ought to make better use of role theory's extensive conceptual apparatus in order to elucidate the perennial question of the relationship between structure and agency in dynamic analyses of studies of national foreign policy.²⁹

In this book, we heed the advice of Elgström and Smith and analyse the waxing and waning of Sweden's grand strategy by tracing changing foreign policy roles through the conduct of diplomacy and expressions of identity. First, however, we need to develop specific bridges between concepts in role theory and grand strategy. In the following, we seek to bring analytical precision to grand strategy by linking it to specific concepts in the following three dimensions: (1) state identity and non-tangible aspects of grand strategy;

²⁸ L. E. Wehner and C. G. Thies, "Role Theory, Narratives, and Interpretation: The Domestic Contestation of Roles," *International Studies Review*, 16, no. 3 (2014): 411–36.

²⁹ O. Elgström and M. Smith, *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis* (Routledge, 2006).

(2) state interaction in a hierarchical international order; and (3) the construction and re-construction of grand strategy in a domestic process through the articulation of roles.

2.2.2.1 Non-Tangible Dimension of Grand Strategy

Grand strategy, as a theoretical concept firmly embedded in international relations (IR)-realism, has been characterized as ‘the highest form of statecraft’ and ‘a state’s theory of victory.’³⁰ Traditionally of concern to scholars of war studies, grand strategy was brought under the umbrella of security studies and linked to central concepts of classical realism, such as statecraft, security dilemma, and the act of strategizing of pre-eminent leaders.³¹

In earlier works, grand strategy’s theoretical premises were either not problematized, or they departed from a realistic point of view, mainly because the concept was approached from an empirical angle, simply asking the question in what kind of strategy are great powers, such as the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Russia, engaged? What are the goals and what are the means by which these strategies are implemented? At the same time, it is possible to problematize how states end up with certain grand strategies, to unpack the ideas behind the grand strategies, and analyse how state actors organize in order to reach them. In this vein, Hal Brands describes grand strategy as ‘a purposeful set of ideas that a nation seeks to accomplish in the world and how it should go about doing so.’³²

This definition brings two aspects to our attention: first, that ideas about Self and others are central to the construction of a state’s grand strategy; second, that the state’s agency in the implementation of the strategy is of the essence. With that, the state’s perceptions of its own ability and resources, along with previous experience from carrying out foreign policy, become productive avenues for further strategy.

On a similar note, Balzacq and Krebs highlight the utility of the interpretative approaches of role theory, which, in line with constructivism, ‘relies on perception and a subjective definition of interest’ in the analysis of ‘how policy makers understand the external environment, and the threats and opportunities it presents.’³³ The state’s interests (as perceived by the national

³⁰ Posen 1984, cited in Balzacq and Krebs, “The Enduring Appeal,” 1.

³¹ Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy*; N. M. Ripsman, J. W. Taliaferro, and S. E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2016); S. M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of US Primacy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018); Blagden, “Roleplay.”

³² Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy*, 3.

³³ Balzacq and Krebs, “The Enduring Appeal,” 11.

elite) and identity (as in the ideas that the state holds about Self and its place in the world) are significant components in grand strategies. According to David McCourt, this is because '[g]rand strategy reflects a state's strategic culture' and national security doctrines 'tell a story of who' the state in question is.³⁴ Hence, the concept of grand strategy is possible to combine with a middle-range constructivist position focusing on identity and self-perceptions.

Role theory builds on a constructivist ontology through its conception of the international system as a social order in which states play out their roles and seek to achieve an international role position commensurate with their self-identity. Pre-eminent constructivist scholar Alexander Wendt contends that states 'act on the basis of meanings' grounded in their conception of themselves and other states.³⁵ Consequently, foreign policy roles constitute the very fabric of the social order as they encompass a state's self-understanding and identity, as well as its standing in the international system as accorded by other states.³⁶ In a similar manner, Holsti depicts the social system of states as hierarchical, based on an ordering of states according to their status (great powers, major powers, small powers, and even rogue states).³⁷

NRCs are a key concept in role theory, and are grounded in domestic values, culture, tradition, and historical legacies closely related to the concepts of national identity and the perceptions of both the domestic elite and public about the state's position in the world.³⁸ Being linked to the elite's self-understanding, NRCs act as cognitive frames that stake out the boundaries of national foreign policy through 'the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions, suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in a subordinate regional system.³⁹

Role theory contends, therefore, that the state's social identity is premised on policymakers' beliefs about the world, their state's position in the larger

³⁴ McCourt, "Culture," 303.

³⁵ A. Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization*, 46, no. 2 (1992): 397.

³⁶ A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); M. Breuning, "Role Theory Research in International Relations: State of the Art and Blind Spots," in *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. S. Harnisch, C. Frank, and H. W. Maull (Routledge, 2011); C. G. Thies, *The United States, Israel, and the Search for International Order: Socializing States* (Routledge, 2013).

³⁷ K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*, 14, no. 3 (1970): 233–309.

³⁸ Breuning, "Role Theory Research."

³⁹ Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 245–6.

community, along with foreign policy traditions, societal principles and norms. Despite this seemingly unambiguous definition of NRCs, the precise relationship between roles and identities remains a matter of disagreement.⁴⁰

For some, it is the enactment of roles, leading to certain patterns of behaviour, that gives meaning to identities, thus making the state, as ‘the role-beholder,’ ontologically prior to any social interaction.⁴¹ For others, identity consists of actors’ ideas about their position in society and can therefore only exist in relation to social structures, implying that identities and roles are co-constitutive and that their relationship is a two-way process. In this sense, identity gives meaning to roles, which in turn inform and shape the conduct of foreign policy and hence the behaviour of policymakers and elites.

2.2.2.2 Interaction on the International Level, the Enactment of Roles, and Grand Strategy

As mentioned, there is no universally agreed definition of grand strategy. Here, we concur with many scholars before us who contend that grand strategy links to a state’s ‘ways, means and ends’ to fulfil its interests.⁴² In other words, grand strategy is a plan, doctrine, or tactic deployed by a state’s political and bureaucratic elite to keep the state safe and advance its interests. These interests can be of a varying kind but, given the ‘high politics’ characteristic of grand strategy, they are linked to the survival of the state in its material (security, economic, digital, etc.) as well as non-material (ontological, normative, status-derived, etc.) dimensions.

Mere survival of a great power might appear as a rather low bar to existentiality, but in a historical perspective, great empires have certainly become defunct,⁴³ while in the perspective of small states, adaptation to the vagaries of international politics is a constant concern, especially for states with an uncertain feeling of Self.⁴⁴ In various self-descriptions, states tend to depict themselves according to attributes of perceived power in the international system—great powers, middle powers, or small states—adhering to a definition of power as relational, that is, a state’s power, whether material or non-material, is dependent on that of other states.

Grand strategy’s implicit understanding of power as relational accords with role theory’s understanding of the international system as a system in which

⁴⁰ D. Nabers, “Identity and Role Change in International Politics,” in *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. S. Harnisch, C. Frank, and H. W. Maull (Routledge, 2011).

⁴¹ Nabers, “Identity and Role Change,” 48.

⁴² Balzacq and Krebs, “The Enduring Appeal,” 5.

⁴³ See, for instance, A. Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴⁴ J. Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 12, no. 3 (2006): 341–70.

states, through interaction, form a social order based on hierarchy, where tangible state assets (e.g., territory, population, military resources, raw materials, economic infrastructure) are important features alongside intangibles and behavioural characteristics (e.g., reputation, normative/altruistic inclination, trustworthiness). On the basis of these attributes, a state seeks to achieve its intended role in the international arena, giving rise to specific patterns of foreign policy conduct and diplomacy.

Role theory's take on state interaction is dynamic and complex. Seen from the perspective of the individual state, the ego part of the NRC forms the basis of national foreign policy. However, a role also contains an alter part, which reflects other states' recognition of the roles that a state plays. Therefore, due to the relational characteristic of the order, only when a state's foreign policy role is recognized by other states in both its ego and alter parts can this role be considered as fully achieved.⁴⁵ A state that has the capacity to enact its role in a recognized and adequate manner may attain a satisfactory role performance and a stable position in the social hierarchy of states.⁴⁶

Role expectations hold a similar function to national role conceptions. Just as with NRCs, role expectations have an ego and an alter dimension, denoting on the one hand the expectations that the actor has towards its own behaviour given the norms, beliefs, and preferences built into the role identity, and, on the other hand, the expectations of others vis-à-vis the same actor's role behaviour. As states are collective actors and international roles are constituted by the national elites' beliefs, norms, and preferences, role expectations vary according to domestic and international pressure.

A too-strong variation in the actor's role expectations, whether in the ego or alter dimensions, points to the likelihood of an intra-role conflict (incongruity within a specific role), while competing expectations among two or more roles signal a potential inter-role conflict.⁴⁷ Both give rise to role dissonance, upon which the role inhabitants (i.e., the national elite) feel compelled to act. In many ways, role expectations resemble role demands, the difference being that role expectations have a direct link to the Self and role identity, while role demands are situational in the sense that they exert a certain role enactment in a specific situation.

Role location, obtained through role play, has implications for a state's capacity to conduct foreign policy. States tend to resort to signalling in the

⁴⁵ M. Breuning and A. Pechenina. "Role Dissonance in Foreign Policy: Russia, Power, and Intercountry Adoption," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 16, no. 1 (2020): 21–40.

⁴⁶ S. Harnisch, "Role Theory: Operationalization of Key Concepts," in *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. S. Harnisch, C. Frank, and H. W. Maull (Routledge, 2011).

⁴⁷ Harnisch, "Role Theory," 7.

form of cues (sending signals to others about one's role) and altercasting (forcing a new or modified role upon others). The assumption has long been that dominant states are less dependent on the acknowledgement of other states to validate their role locations and master roles as great powers, whereas smaller states have to accommodate the perceptions of others to a higher degree. Great powers, especially hegemonic powers, have the ability to shape the social order according to their liking through a milieu-shaping process, while smaller states have to adapt to the prevailing conditions and therefore tend to develop multiple roles.⁴⁸

Until recently, the role taking of new states (novices) or that of smaller states adapting to the prevailing conditions, was conceived of as a unidirectional socialization process. However, as the international order is challenged by powers that do not accept the prevailing norms and principles of the international order, the socialization process becomes competitive and role play takes on a new character.⁴⁹ Uncertainty about the prevailing order changes the premises of role play as altered expectations uproot the existing roles of the role occupiers, and this can lead to a reappraisal of foreign policy doctrine and strategy.⁵⁰

2.2.2.3 Grand Strategy as a Domestic Elite Process

The literature on grand strategy underlines the important role played by the civil service and bureaucratic agents (whose presence and loyalty are often taken for granted) in devising and implementing a state's grand strategy.⁵¹ In conceptual terms, even if the bureaucratic dimension is recognized in the grand strategy perspective, the action taken by the national civil service to conduct diplomacy and implement grand strategies is seen through the prism of the policy process dimension, which obfuscates the national bureaucratic elites as actors in their own right.

Therefore, the actions taken by the civil service and considerations about what directs its way of working when drawing up and implementing states' international roles are often implicit in accounts of grand strategy.⁵² Although political leaders and foreign and military elites are the authors and conceivers of grand strategy, as case studies of foreign policy and/or military doctrine reveal, much less attention has been accorded to the specific role of

⁴⁸ Thies, *The United States*.

⁴⁹ A. Michalski and Z. Pan, "Role Dynamics in a Structured Relationship: The EU-China Strategic Partnership," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55, no. 3 (2017): 611–27.

⁵⁰ A. Michalski and N. Nilsson, "Resistant to Change? The European Union and Its Troubled Relations to Russia and China," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 15, no. 3 (2019): 432–49.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal."

⁵² Wivel, "The Grand Strategies."

the civil service. Similarly, the public's role in legitimizing and giving support to various grand strategies tends to be underdeveloped in grand strategy.⁵³

On the other hand, in more recent developments role theory has put more emphasis on the domestic processes of role change, even including domestic contestation, and in doing so has shed light on the role of different domestic groups and public opinion in the process of domestic role change. Earlier role theoretical accounts tended to emphasize the structures of the international order and the role played among states jostling to achieve their preferred role positions.

Despite Walker's emphasis on the significance of NRCs in providing policymakers with norms, guidelines, and standards that guide decisions⁵⁴ and Holsti's attention to policymakers' prescriptions for appropriate policy and behavioural codes in the enactment of roles,⁵⁵ study of the dynamic of role formulation and role-taking remained underdeveloped. This changed with the renewed emphasis on domestic settings as an arena in which elites construct and reconstruct NRCs and the legitimization of foreign policy conduct and roles.⁵⁶ Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo introduce a domestic perspective on foreign policy roles in order to open the black box of domestic foreign policy decision making.⁵⁷

Their contribution to role theory is important in three ways. First, it clarifies the role of various domestic elite actors in the process of formulating NRCs, which may lead to contestation about appropriate roles and specifies scope conditions. This widens the role of domestic elites and the importance of their agreement on foreign policy roles as domestic elite consensus was previously often taken for granted, not only in role theory but also in foreign policy analysis and grand strategy scholarship.

Second, introducing the domestic level as a central arena for devising foreign policy and grand strategizing makes it possible to trace the foreign policy conduct of individual states across four levels of analysis: international, national, bureaucratic, and individual. Third, opening up the domestic setting allows for the analysis of role contestation, which can lead to role adjustment and even role change. As any empirical case study will detect, there is seldom perfect consensus on the formulation and enactment of roles.

⁵³ For an exception, see S. E. Goddard, "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁵⁴ S. G. Walker, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis* (Duke University Press, 1987).

⁵⁵ Holsti, "National Role Conceptions."

⁵⁶ Goddard, "Rhetoric."

⁵⁷ C. Cantir and J. Kaarbo, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8, no. 1 (2012): 5–24.

Instead, domestic actors have contending ideas about appropriate foreign roles and their implementation, that is, the strategy for fulfilling national interests at the international level.

In addition, attention to the domestic setting also highlights the role played by public opinion, sometimes as an actor in instances of social mobilization, at other times a contextual factor in foreign policy decision-making, which is particularly salient in democracies. Taken together, properly accounting for domestic actors in the processes of foreign policy making allows us to make sense of foreign policy developments in individual states and understand the conditions that influence the construction of NRCs.

Cantir and Kaarbo point to contestation in two different dimensions: the horizontal dimension, which implies that disagreement among national elites about the content and orientation of foreign policy gives rise to horizontally contested roles; and the vertical dimension, which indicates a disagreement between the elite and the public 'on their country's proper roles in the international system.'⁵⁸ Both these dimensions are pertinent for grand strategy as they offer much needed insights into the process of formulating and implementing grand strategy doctrines.

2.3 Role Theory, Grand Strategy, and the Action Strategies of Small States

Security studies, under which grand strategy falls, and IR realism in general, are commonly dismissive of small states' influence on the international system. Early system-orientated realism ordered states according to their ability to influence the system: great powers are those whose leaders can have a decisive impact on the international system; middle powers are those whose leaders can have an impact together with others in a group or in an international organization; small powers are states whose leaders will never have an impact on the system, whether acting alone or in a group.⁵⁹

In this view, grand strategy is a mark of the agency of great powers and, subsequently, small states do not need to strategize as they have no, or little, agency.⁶⁰ These kinds of categorical views, typical for neo-realist writings on grand strategy, take little heed of the fact that small states' activity can be

⁵⁸ Cantir and Kaarbo, "Contested Roles," 11–12.

⁵⁹ Rothstein, cited in R. O. Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization*, 23, no. 2 (1969): 296.

⁶⁰ Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal," 9.

traced in international organizations in various arenas of international politics, where they seek not only to pursue milieu-shaping strategies to improve the chances of fulfilling their national interests, but also to enhance their status.⁶¹

Instead, we align with Nina Silove's argument that small states

can hold organizing principles . . . that govern their decisions across the spheres of statecraft with the view to achieve long-term goals . . . and that small states' patterns of behaviour can be detected in the output of their foreign policy in the same way as that of great powers.⁶²

This position aligns with those scholars who put less emphasis on 'great' and more on 'strategy', that is, the process of taking roles and performing foreign policy strategies at the international level, thereby refuting the classical take on grand strategy, which gives no autonomous role to small states.⁶³

Nevertheless, because of their limited resources (whether military, diplomatic or other), small states are more exposed to pressure from the international system and the vagaries of great power politics and therefore need to be prepared to adapt and adjust their foreign policy to changing circumstances. Moreover, should they engage in milieu-shaping activity, the likelihood that it would be as part of a group or within an international organization is greater than for a great power, which sheds light on small states' preponderance to promote international cooperation.⁶⁴

Two expectations follow from this argument. First, small states tend to prefer a multilateral system in that it offers them institutionalized opportunities to act and raise their voice. Second, different configurations of the international system will impact small states differently. Small states will, therefore, prefer a stable system rather than one in flux, and a system in which norms and principles are adhered to rather than one where sheer might reigns.

Although small state foreign policy tends to rely on a wide range of foreign policy instruments, their overriding concern is national security, for the simple reason that they are unable to defend themselves against military attack

⁶¹ I. B. Neumann and B. de Carvalho, "Introduction: Small States and Status 1," in *Small State Status Seeking*, ed. B. de Carvalho and I. B. Neumann (Routledge, 2015).

⁶² Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword," 51.

⁶³ Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal," 10.

⁶⁴ L. Goetschel, "The Foreign and Security Policy Interests of Small States in Today's Europe," in *Small States Inside and Outside the European Union*, ed. L. Goetschel (Kluwer Academic, 1998); I. B. Neumann and S. Gstöhl, "Introduction. Lilliputians in Gulliver's World?" in *Small States in International Relations*, ed. C. Ingebritsen, I. B. Neumann, S. Gstöhl, and J. Beyer (University of Washington Press, 2006).

on their territory.⁶⁵ From a realist perspective, this overriding concern for security has given rise to three types of small state grand strategies: hiding, sheltering, and hedging.⁶⁶

A hiding strategy, in its original understanding, is based on military neutrality on the one hand and economic political autonomy on the other hand. Neutrality was endowed with legal status and definition at the 1907 Hague Conventions, along with rules about how neutrality is to be declared and implemented.⁶⁷ In the traditional understanding, neutrality is premised on staying out of great power politics and not taking sides in the event of conflict. It implies a host of practical measures, especially in times of war when a neutral state should not favour any of the warring factions—a stance that sometimes led to considerable predicament and pressure.

Remaining outside great power rivalry and conflict is predicated on great powers respecting the neutrality of a small state, which in itself gives rise to uncertainty and feelings of vulnerability. Neutral small states have, therefore, sought to increase their trustworthiness by staying outside alliances and persuaded great powers of their steadfastness by strongly defending their reputation and status as neutral.

The opposing small state grand strategy is that of sheltering, which implies that a small state seeks protection behind the shield of a great power or joins an alliance dominated by a great power.⁶⁸ Wivel contends that in return for sheltering a small state, the great power acquires influence over the former's foreign policy and expects and receives loyalty in return.

The subordinate role of small states in an alliance with a great power is prominent in so-called asymmetric alliances, whereas mixed, multilateral, or small state alliances are preferable for small states as they retain a higher degree of autonomy and influence over foreign policy.⁶⁹ On these grounds, it is often held that small states face a dilemma—a kind of trade-off between security (sheltering) and autonomy (hiding).

Such a system-oriented perspective, however, overlooks the agency of small states in staking out ways to enhance their room for manoeuvre, both

⁶⁵ O. F. Knudsen, "Analysing Small-State Security: The Role of External Factors," in *Small States and the Security Challenge in the New Europe*, ed. W. Bauwens, A. Clesse, and O. F. Knudsen (Brassey's, 1996).

⁶⁶ C.-C. Kuik, "Getting Hedging Right: A Small-State Perspective," *China International Strategy Review*, 3, no. 2 (2021): 300–15; Y. M. Lai and C.-C. Kuik, "Structural Sources of Malaysia's South China Sea Policy: Power Uncertainties and Small-State Hedging," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 75, no. 3 (2021): 277–304; Wivel, "The Grand Strategies."

⁶⁷ Wivel, "The Grand Strategies," 494.

⁶⁸ Wivel, "The Grand Strategies," 494.

⁶⁹ Vital and Rothstein, cited in R. O. Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas."

in a position of neutrality, theoretically predicated on passivity and subordination, and autonomy, which admittedly allows for independent action, but also contains a degree of outsidedness and irrelevance, as the independent action of a small state will not influence the system. Hedging, which is a strategy of pursuing multiple options, is a variation on small state strategy that is often referred to by realist scholars.⁷⁰

Hedging accords more autonomy to small states, as they are believed to pursue multiple options to receive the highest return on security, including secretive behaviour, that is, reacting strongly on some issues while choosing to disregard others despite these being objectively more concerning or threatening than the former. Hedging also builds on a wider understanding of which dimensions of international politics may produce security, for instance, by including milieu-shaping strategies through the spread of norms and values, partnerships, and other kinds of varieties of alliance seeking.

In view of these small state strategies, we contend that small states have independent agency above and beyond that depicted by hedging, albeit not at the level of great powers. Therefore, it matters what foreign policy strategy they pursue and how they position themselves in the social order of states. Moreover, in order to influence the international scene, they need to consider the variety of alliances and other forms of institutional international cooperation available to small states as locations for realizing their foreign policy objectives.

It is in this context that role theory's ability to bridge the structure/agency divide opens up to a non-deterministic, dynamic understanding of a state's foreign policy role in the international system. This dual perspective, the agency of the state, more precisely the domestic elite, and the positioning of the state in the international system in hierarchical structures, constitutes a frame of analysis of national foreign policy on two levels: the domestic setting and the state's foreign policy conduct (bottom-up); and the state's role enactment at the international level (top-down).

In this dynamic process of role playing, the national (domestic) level is linked to the international level in an ongoing realization of international roles. Before developing an analytical framework in [Chapter 3](#), we first discuss the premises of small state action in the grand strategy literature in conjunction with role theory in more detail.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, A. Wivel and B. Thorhallsson, "Brexit and Small States in Europe. Hedging, Hiding or Seeking Shelter?" in *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*, ed. P. Diamond, P. Nedergaard, and Ben Rosamond (Routledge, 2018).

2.3.1 Premises of Grand Strategy and Small State Foreign Policy Action

Scholars have seen small state action as essentially a choice between integration and autonomy, which is reminiscent of the sheltering/alliance-seeking versus hiding strategies discussed earlier.⁷¹ Analysing the strategies deployed by small states in Europe in regard to their relationship to the European Union, Haugevik and Rieker contend that the integration/autonomy dialectic is essential for these states to face the challenge of finding a balance between pursuing an autonomous foreign policy or integrating and committing to the obligations of EU membership.⁷²

Although the European Union is more reminiscent of a small state alliance than an asymmetric alliance, they consider it an alliance with important political and economic ramifications. On the other hand, NATO, which Haugevik and Rieker do not discuss, is an alliance with clear asymmetric security/military characteristics, as membership thereof restricts member states' autonomy in the security domain in exchange for safety under the umbrella of a hegemon. Foreign policy choices, such as integration and autonomy, contain distinct elements of strategy that can amount to the proper grand strategies of small states.

A position based on full autonomy indicates that a state has control of the orientation and conduct of foreign policy. From a role theoretical perspective, such a position is an anomaly and a departure from the strong interactionist assumption of the international system as a social order. Full autonomy implies also a measure of isolation, and for a small state whose ability to influence international relations relies on interaction with other states, it also signifies a position at the margins—perhaps even outside the social order.

Theoretically, the ego dimension of the role should be constructed on an identity of uniqueness, maybe of a religious or ideological kind if the role is self-imposed, or, if forced upon the state by others (the alter dimension), the role would be that of an outcast—a pariah—state. It is therefore unlikely that any state, with the possible exceptions of North Korea, Iran, or Afghanistan, would either choose or be forced into a role based on full autonomy.

At the other end of the spectrum lies the position of zero autonomy, or rather full renunciation of any attempt to get involved or taking sides, to the point of being at the mercy of warring factions. Neutrality, in the classical

⁷¹ K. Haugevik and P. Rieker, "Autonomy or Integration? Small-State Responses to a Changing European Security Landscape," *Global Affairs*, 3, no. 3 (2017): 211–21; Wivel, "The Grand Strategies."

⁷² Haugevik and Rieker, "Autonomy."

understanding of the concept, binds the neutral state to an absolutist position, curtailing and restricting possible courses of action.

Another dimension of the lack of autonomy is tied to subjugation, in which the state's sovereignty would be at risk, either under the pressure of an aggressive hegemon or because of the lack of material, political, or economic resources to uphold the state. This position points towards a weak, incoherent, or non-existent role conception in the ego dimension.

For these reasons, there is little indication that zero autonomy is likely to occur for a functioning state, regardless of its size. For small states, the autonomy component indicates that states will try to find a balance between full and zero autonomy, as the polar positions are neither achievable nor desirable.

Sometimes integration is seen as the opposite pole to autonomy.⁷³ It may well be that small states, in practical politics, see involvement in alliances and international/regional organizations in terms of a trade-off between independence and entrapment, but in concrete politics the issue is more nuanced. To start with, this reasoning is based on a logical fallacy, in that full autonomy cannot be non-integration, in the same way as a lack of autonomy is not the consequence of full integration. Moreover, autonomy is a state of being while integration is a course of action or a strategy.

Essentially, integration, in the sense of membership of an alliance, should be regarded as the outcome of a choice (albeit with role implications) and analytically be kept separate from autonomy. It is also important to heed the advice of early scholars, such as Robert Keohane referenced above, who suggest that alliances are different—being asymmetrical, multilateral, or small state alliances—and therefore have different types of impact on the autonomy and independence of small states.

Nevertheless, integration has implications for how a state defines its room for manoeuvre and therefore its role enactment. Integration, in the sense of membership of an alliance, whether political, economic, or military, is formally a binary choice⁷⁴—either you are or you are not a member—and therefore has strong implications for a small state's role conception. But in reality, states that are hesitant towards the implications of full integration seek compromise solutions. This point should be kept separate from the argument that membership of an alliance often endows small states with additional room for manoeuvre, or at least a better position to influence the

⁷³ Haugevik and Rieker, "Autonomy."

⁷⁴ This concerns formal membership of an international or regional organization. This does not refute the existence of arrangements that have accorded a form of partial membership to states, such as the European Economic Area or NATO's Partnership for Peace.

international system. The latter argument is a variation on the autonomy argument but in a different context as, here, the small state perceives its ability to influence international politics from the platform of the alliance, thus increasing the likelihood of pursuing foreign policy goals or interests.

The lack of agreement between a state's ego role conceptions and the principle mission of the alliance has three kinds of non-exclusive implications: (1) there is role dissonance within the master role, possibly leading to intra-role conflict, or a misalignment between several roles, leading to inter-role conflict; (2) the elite will try to mitigate role conflict in the domestic arena, for instance, by reducing the significance of alliance membership on the NRCs; and (3) the state's role enactment risks becoming erratic and out of character, reducing the trust between it and its partners.

In the case of a misalignment between a state's international role and alter expectations regarding the state's role performance vis-à-vis the alliance, implications for its reputation and status may follow and affect its room for manoeuvre. If there is strong agreement between a state's roles and the mission of the alliance, membership (integration) will strengthen the NRCs and presumably also their enactment. For instance, a strong accord between a state's identity and the normative foundation of its roles and the norms and principles underpinning the alliance will enhance a state's ability to promote its norms and values and influence the international system.

Such an outcome would indicate the existence of a grand strategy that goes beyond the hiding and sheltering depiction of small state grand strategy. In conclusion, membership of multilateral and small state alliances will generally increase a small state's room for manoeuvre, whereas membership of an asymmetrical alliance will decrease its room for manoeuvre. Asymmetrical alliances, often military in nature, contain a trade-off between shelter and autonomy, which, in the case a state seeks membership, is deemed acceptable.

Autonomy and integration as foreign policy strategies can be conducted in a more or less active/passive manner which in itself also carries implications for a state's roles, albeit in a subordinate way. In role-theoretical terminology, foreign policy conduct relates to states' behaviour on the international scene and is rendered analytically significant by concepts such as role enactment, role performance and role play. Drawing on Silove's argument that the presence of grand strategy can be detected through small states' patterns of behaviour,⁷⁵ it follows that an active and purposeful enactment of roles must be present in order to determine whether a state does indeed deploy grand-strategy thinking.

⁷⁵ Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword."

Conversely, passive foreign policy and passive role enactment signals the absence of grand strategy. Conceptually, this makes sense, but for the analyst, the problem lies in knowing how to differentiate the passive from the active behaviour of small states, not least because, as we saw before, small states will tend to act within multilateral and international/regional organizations or in a group of other countries. We return to this problem in [Chapter 3](#).

Finally, as concerns the link between role conceptions and role enactment, coherent role sets and/or a strong master role are assumed to correlate with an active role performance, which in turn forms the basis for a strong role enactment, as the role's alter dimension has a higher chance of being accepted by significant others.

3

Exploring and Tracing Swedish Grand Strategy

In analysing Swedish grand strategy, this book takes as a point of departure Demirduzen and Thies's understanding of coherence among national role conceptions (NRCs) as the basis for what constitutes a grand strategy.¹ We acknowledge that states, great or small, are likely to play several roles on the international stage, and that a grand strategy is more likely to provide decision makers with clearer guidance if there is coherence among the roles or if a master role is prioritized. To identify and characterize a state's grand strategy, it is essential to identify role conceptions and trace changes in those role conceptions as they occur. This leaves the analysis with two methodological tasks: first, to identify and describe the content of the NRCs at specific times, and second, to analyse what happens when role conceptions are contested and new role conceptions emerge, or when old ones are renegotiated.

This chapter introduces an ideal-type analysis of roles that is based on the two dimensions introduced in chapter two: autonomy/no autonomy and integration/no integration. These dimensions form the basis for the analytical tools needed to identify the beliefs underlying the roles Sweden has sought to play at certain times. These dimensions do not, however, prescribe a specific policy content since different positions on these dimensions can be manifested in various ways. Later, in the empirical analysis in chapters four and five, the combination of these dimensions will reveal the foreign policy choices that were made or imposed by/on Swedish elites at specific times and expressed through different roles. The strength of the internal cohesion of the foreign policy actions undertaken through the enactment of a master role will point towards the emergence of grand strategy.

The chapter proceeds by introducing an analytical framework that specifies the action strategies of a state when exposed to external threats, leading to a process of role adaptation. Process tracing is then presented as the

¹ C. Demirduzen and C. G. Thies, "A Role Theory Approach to Grand Strategy: Horizontal Role Contestation and Consensus in the Case of China," *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 7, no. 1 (2022): ogab018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogab018>.

methodological tool for identifying the domestic process of role adjustment, and this includes a discussion on the sources used. This chapter presents the methodological tasks in two different steps, which are based on the different methods employed, while the results will be presented in an integrated setting in chapters four and five.

3.1 Small state foreign policy and ideal typical role repertoires

In chapter two, an ideational understanding of grand strategy was outlined, an understanding that moved beyond purely material conceptions by putting emphasis on grand strategy as a 'theory or logic that guides leaders seeking security'.² This is expressed in terms of a guiding principle, understood as an idea held by decision makers on how the state should act that shapes the long-term security and foreign policy orientation of a state, conveyed through the state's role conceptions.³ Ideal type analysis is introduced as a method that helps to capture the foundation of roles.

According to Goldstein and Keohane, ideas can be understood as coherent sets of beliefs on three levels: worldviews, principled beliefs and causal beliefs.⁴ Worldviews concern actors' understanding of the world and what constitutes the present world order. Principled beliefs consist of ideas on how a state should ideally act, given the worldview. Finally, causal beliefs consist of notions of cause and effect and outline the preferred action.

The empirical analysis in chapters four and five relates to all three levels but, given an understanding of NRCs as founded in the norms, beliefs, and preferences of the foreign policy elite, roles are located on the mid-level of principled beliefs, which speaks to the self-image and understanding of what kind of state is desired and what principles one wants to defend. However, ideas about worldviews motivate principles and hence roles, and these will in turn motivate certain actions at the policy level, guided by causal beliefs.

Using ideal-type analysis, the examination of beliefs is structured according to two dimensions: the degree of autonomy and the degree of integration. The endpoints of these dimensions are treated in accordance with a Weberian

² H. Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 4.

³ L. K. Danner, *China's Grand Strategy: Contradictory Foreign Policy?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 27.

⁴ J. Goldstein and R. O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 8–10.

ideal typical understanding.⁵ This means that the ideal-type model will develop extreme versions of the endpoints, that is, no/full autonomy or no/full integration, in the full knowledge that the extreme versions of the dimensions will never exist in reality. These ideal typical understandings of the endpoints of the two dimensions serve as theoretical constructs that reflect a ‘pure’ version of the ideas behind a particular type of foreign policy, for example, an autonomous foreign and security policy.

The role conceptions observed in the empirical analysis can only come more or less close to the theoretically constructed ideal types. How close to the ideal types a role conception is situated is determined by the dominant characteristics of the foreign and security policy, which is based on a holistic understanding of the said policy. This latter point reflects an understanding of foreign and security policy as including a wide range of instruments of power, such as military, diplomatic, and economic instruments.⁶ Here, the ideal-type analysis is used to fulfil the first methodological task: to identify and describe the content of NRCs at a certain time.

Following the discussion in [Chapter 2](#), it is hard to conceive of a foreign and security policy characterized by full autonomy. Still, the tendency in such a policy is towards an identity founded on uniqueness, and the role can be assumed to prioritize the ability to choose one’s own path, without being restricted by alliances or other forms of binding agreements, and to speak up and act on the issues one prefers. The opposite position, with no autonomy, is equally hard to conceive, but, as discussed, a strict form of a policy of neutrality, according to which a state restricts itself and/or is restricted by international agreements and avoids any clear position, may be the closest example.

However, in the empirical analysis it will not be possible to observe examples of the ideal typical versions of any of the dimensions. Instead, the foreign and security policy action that comes closest to full or no autonomy is observed. Examples in relation to this dimension include: the degree of unilateral action, vocal criticism in the international arena, emphasis on economic self-sufficiency, or ability to militarily defend the territory.

A role based on full integration can result in a similar outcome to a role based on no autonomy, albeit for different reasons. In an asymmetrical alliance, small states adopt the role of a subordinate who gives up autonomy in exchange for protection. This may come at a high cost if the alliance

⁵ M. Weber, “Die ‘Objektivität’ sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis,” *Archiv für sozialwissenschaft und sozialpolitik*, 19, no. 1 (1904): 22–87.

⁶ A. Wivel, “The Grand Strategies of Small States,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021).

pursues norms and values different to those of the small state, but the cost may be more limited if there is agreement on such norms and values.

In symmetrical, multilateral and small states alliances, the small state is more likely to influence alliance policies and can therefore win both room for manoeuvre, that is, autonomy and protection. Here, we can observe both membership and policy promotion within international organizations and alliances, but also the degree to which the national economy is dependent on international trade, and the degree to which national defence is coordinated with that of other states. The latter example relates to voluntary membership of a military alliance or a situation in which a state is forced into an alliance. Still, it is possible to observe certain degrees of integration without membership, just as membership in an alliance is possible even with a limited degree of integration.

When taken together, the positions on these two dimensions form possible roles. Together, the roles constitute what the literature presents as a role repertoire, i.e. a set of roles that are combined within the foreign and security policy.⁷ Table 3.1 presents the potential roles so as to illustrate how a combination of positions on the different dimensions can be manifested in specific roles.

However, it is important to say that the table do not reflect an exhaustive list. Varying combinations of positions may result in different roles at different times in history. In other words, the context and the actors involved will influence the political processes and thus result in different outcomes. Nevertheless, the potential roles presented here do at least point in a plausible direction and therefore provide a way forward for the analysis in the ensuing chapters.

Table 3.1 Framework based on the dimensions of autonomy and integration

Integration \ Autonomy	Low	High
Low		
High		

Note: The dimensions of autonomy and integration are inspired by K. Haugevik and P. Rieker "Autonomy or Integration? Small-State Responses to a Changing European Security Landscape," *Global Affairs* 3 no. 3 (2017): 211–21; see also E. Hedling and D. Brommesson "Security through European Integration or Flexible Autonomy: Ambivalence in Sweden's Position on the Eastern Partnership?" *Global Affairs* 3 no. 3 (2017): 237–50.

⁷ L. Aggestam, "Role Theory and European Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis," in *The European Union's Roles in International Politics*, ed. O. Elgström and M. Smith (Routledge, 2006).

A low level of autonomy combined with a low level of integration is a position few states would actively pursue. It is more likely a position that is enforced upon the small state due to challenging conditions. Such conditions circumscribe foreign and security policy, and the small state has no control over fundamental choices. At the same time, the state is still not integrated into meaningful structures and other, more dominant powers, are able to control the actions of the state. An example of such a position may be a state existing under treaty-based neutrality and treaty-based restrictions on the size of its armed forces in combination with limited levels of integration into world markets.

Even if it is unlikely that a state would seek such a position voluntarily, some small states still find themselves in this position and may have to relate to such harsh realities. Such a state would potentially face the need to respect the position enforced upon it by, for example, not challenging a greater power because of the underlying threat of intervention.

If the equation instead combines low levels of autonomy with high levels of integration, the position of the small state looks quite different. It may be, or have been, in a vulnerable situation and have sought protection in an alliance with one or several greater powers and come to rely on this arrangement for security, economic exchange and diplomatic support. In these circumstances, the state is thus well integrated into the alliance and relies on the greater power(s) for its very existence. It combines this deep integration with an absence of political will, or, more likely, the absence of opportunity for the pursuit of autonomous politics.

Since the small state is vulnerable without the protection of the greater power(s), it may calculate that signs of an autonomous path may undermine the protection offered. Such a role position is easily associated with membership of an asymmetric alliance, as the shelter given by the hegemon provides the security that the small state seeks. In a multilateral alliance, the role position would be synonymous with seeking to move to the core of the alliance but not pursuing independent policy initiatives.

Moving to the position that combines low integration and high autonomy, we find small states that are not seeking integration into alliances, be they military or economic alliances. Obviously, in a globalized world it is impossible to be totally unconnected to other states, but again, the argument here concerns degrees of connectedness. Integration, for example, may be seen as a step away from a self-declared policy of neutrality, a position the small state may see as worth protecting, or the small state may choose not to be part of efforts aimed at regional economic integration, such as common markets.

Rather than prioritizing integration, the small state seeks a high degree of autonomy, through means of a strong national defence, an economy with a high degree of self-sufficiency, and an independent voice in international diplomacy. The latter may also be a goal in itself, whereby a high degree of autonomy may grant the small state with a platform to speak up for normative goals from an independent position.

Finally, in the case of a high degree of integration and a high degree of autonomy, the small state voluntarily seeks security, but also economic and diplomatic power, through integration into military and/or political alliances. Integration thus strengthens the small state and provides it with fertile ground to secure autonomy within the alliance.

Autonomy is further strengthened through a position within the alliance(s) that is based on a more independent role, as compared to that of the loyal ally. This places a stronger emphasis on activism inside the alliance, which is, therefore, indicative that the state may aim for leadership in certain areas. Rather than seeking integration to become subordinate in relation to the greater powers, the small state here seeks integration in order to win autonomy. Such a role position is premised on the type of alliance and the conditions of alliance membership, that is, a hegemonic (asymmetric) alliance would provide much less room for manoeuvre for a small state than a collective (multilateral) alliance.

Based on the dimensions and the ideal-type roles developed here, it is possible to take the first analytical step, that is, to position roles at fixed times according to [Table 3.1](#). However, it is important to stress that states are likely to play several roles at the same time. Within one policy area, the small state may be trying to play a role approximate to that of an autonomous activist, while in another policy area it may be playing a role closer to that of an adjusting state. These combinations of roles make up the role repertoire of the small state. The internal and external context makes certain combinations of roles more feasible and other combinations less feasible. When the external and/or internal conditions change, the risk of a conflict between roles increases. When there is coherence among the roles within the role repertoire, or when one master role is prioritized, a stringent grand strategy can develop.

The discussion on role conflict is developed in [Section 3.2](#), which covers the second analytical step, that is, how states adapt new (or changed) roles in a domestic process of role adaptation during situations of external threat. To reiterate, these two distinct analytical steps are carried out in an integrated analysis in [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#).

3.2 External Threats and the Domestic Process of Role Adaptation

In line with scholars who equate a small state's master role with the existence of grand strategy, the argument so far implies that when small states have the resources to devise, organize, and conduct foreign policy, this also indicates the presence of grand strategy thinking and a sense of agency. Small states need to use all the resources and tools at their disposal in an efficient manner, which will encourage them to be flexible in behaviour and creative in devising policy.

Grand strategizing for small states will, therefore, be of a different kind than that of great powers. As discussed earlier, because small states lack the material resources to guarantee their own security, they face a more complex task in managing the pressures emanating from the international environment to secure a safe position in the international order, whether safety entails balancing between great powers or entering into an alliance with one of them or a group of states.

Therefore, small states have a strong incentive to try to shape the international environment, or at least their immediate neighbourhood. Shaping strategies involve both material and non-material aspects, but being relatively poor on material assets, it is more likely that small states will attempt to shape the non-material conditions, such as international norms and the principles and rules for state interaction. From a grand strategy perspective, this implies that small states will prefer a rules-based international system and/or alliances built on norms and principles rather than alliances based on power and dominance.

As the non-material dimension of foreign policy is crucial for small states, their ability to persuade, convince, mediate, balance, and promote from a position of relative safety, or hedge, shelter and hide when in a position of relative insecurity, means that the force of their performance in the international arena is dependent on the coherence of their foreign policy roles. This concerns both single roles, especially a master role, as well as inter-role coherence and the coherence of sets of roles (see [Chapter 2](#)).

Along these lines, Thies contends that because small states are more vulnerable to rejection regarding their role position, they tend to develop multiple internationally enacted roles in accordance with the strategy adopted by the domestic elite, thereby providing flexibility and room for manoeuvre.⁸ It is

⁸ C. G. Thies, *The United States, Israel, and the Search for International Order: Socializing States* (Routledge, 2013).

assumed that flexibility is sought for both role content and for how the role is performed, that is, role enactment, pointing to two different processes: one involving the international system, including the opportunities and obstacles facing small states' role performance; and one internal, concerning domestic role construction.

3.2.1 External Threats

Robert Rothstein, who pointed to the narrow margin of safety within which small states must navigate, acknowledges the vulnerability of these states and their limited room for manoeuvre due to their size and restricted resources.⁹ It follows from this that small liberal states are vulnerable to changes in the structure of the social order, such as the erosion of existing alliances and breaches of international conventions and agreements, as they will have to internalize the consequences of these changes and adapt their international roles in accordance.

Likewise, the threat of erosion of non-material characteristics of the international system, for instance when norms and rules are no longer upheld, triggers a deep-seated uncertainty in small states about system stability, which destabilizes their sense of security. Uncertainty surrounding the constitutive elements of the social order poses national elites with a dilemma that is based not only on physical insecurity but also insecurity in the identity dimension.¹⁰ A disconnect between an actor's self-perception and its international role constitutes an important source of ontological insecurity that generates considerable pressure on an actor 'to re-establish coherence between their self-image and societal role-play' through the adaptation of their international roles.¹¹

As argued herein, in a stable international context, it is possible for these states to maintain a degree of autonomy that they may use to promote norms and values in line with their deep-rooted identity, and which are directly linked to their role conceptions. Small liberal states, for example, will therefore advocate in favour of liberal values and norms as part of their milieu-shaping strategy.

⁹ R. L. Rothstein, "Alignment, Nonalignment, and Small Powers: 1945–1965," *International Organization*, 20, no. 3 (1966): 397–418.

¹⁰ J. Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations*, 12, no. 3 (2006): 341–70.

¹¹ S. Klose, "Interactionist Role Theory Meets Ontological Security Studies: An Exploration of Synergies between Socio-Psychological Approaches to the Study of International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, 26, no. 3 (2020): 868.

However, in contexts of system instability, small liberal states will experience difficulties in upholding liberal norms without sacrificing security; thereby leaving them vulnerable and exposed to the vagaries of the international system. In such a situation, these states will experience heightened role stress that will prompt them to try to reconcile existing roles with external challenges. The range of action strategies open to small liberal states will, in the words of Wehner and Thies, amount to a dilemma that ‘may provoke dissonance and role inconsistency’ but also engender a measure of ‘creativity’ when national foreign policy elites have to engage with the challenges emanating from deep-seated changes in the international system.¹²

The nature of the external environment, that is, the characteristics of the international system, has a direct impact on the ability of small states to exercise agency. For small liberal states, such as Sweden, a stable international order, built on recognized rules and principles, allows them more room for manoeuvre to achieve their international roles, while a system in flux, with a high degree of instability, reduces their room for manoeuvre and puts NRCs under pressure. In a stable international context, when safety seems relatively certain, they will try to promote the principles and norms that are in line with NRCs and strengthen their role position; whereas in an unstable context, when safety and position are not ensured, they will seek to adjust role enactments to regain an acceptable role position or even adjust NRCs to respond to perceived threats and challenges.

In both contexts, a small liberal state strategizes to achieve the highest security, both in the material and non-material (identity) dimensions. Consequently, strategies of autonomy and/or integration will follow, depending on the nature of the security threat, the conditions of alliance membership, as well as the degree of elite consensus and public support. It is unlikely that a small liberal state, which must act within the boundaries of norms as well as domestic democratic institutions and processes, will opt for either full autonomy or full integration. Rather, the strategies of small states will balance between relative autonomy and integration. Adjustments to NRCs will be indicators of how the elite perceive a reasonable trade-off between preserving national identity and the roles’ ego dimension on the one hand, and the necessary adjustment of foreign policy roles on the other. We now turn to the domestic arena, where the process of role adjustment and change takes place.

¹² L. E. Wehner and C. G. Thies, “Role Theory, Narratives, and Interpretation: The Domestic Contestation of Roles,” *International Studies Review*, 16, no. 3 (2014): 417.

3.2.2 Internal Processes

The domestic scene becomes the focus for small liberal states' ability to exert situated agency in order to handle the role stress generated by an unstable international system that threatens security. In the domestic setting, the process of reassessing, adjusting and even reforming established foreign policy roles is complex. In small liberal states, this process needs to take a number of actors into account and go through a series of formal and informal procedures. Even if the foreign policy elite would like to keep the processes of readjustment to a small, quite isolated number of officials, groupthink risks eroding the trust between the elite and public, and new or adjusted roles would be met with less legitimacy.¹³

Political elites in small liberal states must balance domestic expectations and attachment to the national self-image with beliefs about external threats and the necessity of facing strategic imperatives. When external pressure leads to role contestation, it will most likely be caused by a mismatch between either the multiple roles held simultaneously by a state (i.e., inter-role conflict), which may lead a state to behave in an unpredictable manner, or by the irreconcilable expectations held by the state or other states regarding a single role (i.e., intra-role conflict).¹⁴

Role conflict is associated with role contestation, which occurs within the state as long-standing roles become misaligned with prevailing norms or as a result of changes in the internal or external conditions for the conduct of foreign policy.¹⁵ Brummer and Thies note the importance of the national political setting for understanding the selection of roles and the possible contestation of NRCs—domestic processes in which parliaments, coalition governments, and the state bureaucracy are simultaneously actors and arenas for elite-oriented role conflict.¹⁶ They also note conflict resolution mechanisms, such as the use of instrumental or ritual acts and attempts to change beliefs, but concluded that, overall, the executive (i.e., the sitting government) will steer the process of role adaptation.¹⁷

As discussed earlier, the public's role in domestic contestation concerning foreign policy roles is important but often underspecified. A contributing factor is that the public seldom has either a unified or very articulated view on

¹³ I. L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Houghton Mifflin, 1972); S. E. Goddard, "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹⁴ K. Brummer and C. G. Thies, "The Contested Selection of National Role Conceptions," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 11, no. 3 (2015): 273–93.

¹⁵ C. Cantir and J. Kaarbo, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8, no. 1 (2012): 5–24.

¹⁶ Brummer and Thies, "The Contested Selection."

¹⁷ Brummer and Thies, "The Contested Selection," 274.

foreign policy. For this reason, the public's view is often taken for granted by political leaders, whose alleged public support is based on an electoral programme or officially expressed positions.

Additionally, the bureaucratic elite may ascribe certain views to the public. From the researcher's point of view, it is difficult to disentangle the extent to which the views of the public are genuine or rather attributed by elites. Therefore, the outcome of general elections, when citizens have the opportunity to choose between the incumbent government or the opposition, is an important indication of public support. Therefore, in the domestic setting, primary agency is placed with the political and bureaucratic elites.

Vertical contestation of roles occurs when the elite and the public are at odds regarding the state's general foreign policy orientation, that is, the role-conceptions proposed by the elite. Horizontal contestation involves disputes among the domestic political elite over the state's foreign policy orientation or conduct.¹⁸ Depicting role contestation in these two dimensions makes it possible to track the process of domestic role change, resulting in a number of different outcomes, ranging from little or no role change, to complete role change, or even the abandonment of a specific role.

3.2.3 Action Strategies

Tracing the domestic process of role change, we start from the assumption that the trigger is an international crisis or a marked shift in the international order that causes misalignment insofar as the state can no longer uphold the foreign policy that its roles prescribe. Under such conditions, the domestic elite will internalize and react to the changed circumstances. The strength of the reaction will depend on whether the crisis or shift causes a threat to the state's existence in the material dimension (i.e., a security crisis) or the ideational dimension (i.e., a crisis of values and norms). Either threat may cause role dissonance.

A number of possible action strategies follows:¹⁹

1. Contested foreign policy based on disagreement, with little consensus on the course of action to take. Little or no change of roles ensues.
2. Role adjustment based on agreement among the elite while the public is disinterested, and, therefore, some impact on concrete policy but little impact on national identity.

¹⁸ Cantir and Kaarbo, "Contested Roles."

¹⁹ A. Michalski, D. Brommesson, and A.-M. Ekengren. "Small States and the Dilemma of Geopolitics: Role Change in Finland and Sweden," *International Affairs*, 100, no. 1 (2024): 139–57.

3. Weak role adaptation and little change in foreign policy due to a divided elite and shallow public endorsement.
4. Strong role adaptation/change, accompanied by a significant change of policy due to strong elite consensus and public support.

When these theoretically derived action strategies to deal with role change are linked to the small state strategies of no autonomy/full autonomy, no integration/full integration and active/passive foreign policy enactment, the following configurations are possible.

1. Disunity. An action strategy premised on elite disagreement is more likely if the shift in the international system is moderate. It can occur both if the state has the desire to conduct an autonomous foreign policy and if it wishes to integrate into an alliance. However, in either case the enactment of roles tends to be rather weak, and the state will be able to shape neither the international environment nor the alliance of which it is a member. The reason for this can be found at the domestic level, where dissention resides within the political elite.

If the international environment deteriorates and the state's security is at stake, the elite will probably pull together and seek shelter in an asymmetric alliance. If the change in the international environment affects the state's identity, the elite disagreement is likely to persist, and its role enactment becomes increasingly unpredictable. Existing roles will most likely remain, as little role change or new roles are likely to emerge.

2. Role change. An action strategy based on elite agreement and a lack of support or disinterest on behalf of the public is likely in an environment in which the trigger is quite strong, and an active foreign policy is expected. Apropos alliance membership, it is likely that the state will join an alliance or if it is already a member of the said alliance, it will seek a more active involvement. However, if alliance membership runs counter to the state's traditional role conception, especially in the identity dimension, public disagreement, possibly even discontent, may ensue. The small state strategy of hiding is less likely unless the security situation deteriorates considerably, and alliance membership is ruled out because of public resistance. Existing roles will be adjusted and strengthened, but it is unlikely that new roles emerge.
3. Muddle-through. In the action strategy based on elite disagreement and lack of public support/public dissention, foreign policy will be passive, and the state's role enactment will be weak. The most likely outcome is

a loss of autonomy, regardless of whether or not the state is a member of an alliance. For these reasons, both hiding and sheltering are possible outcomes in a situation of security threats. NRCs are likely to become incoherent and concerted action to strengthen these roles or develop new roles is unlikely.

4. Domestically driven role adaptation. The action strategy based on elite agreement and public support is linked to an active foreign policy and strong role enactment. This strategy is premised on coherence in new and/or existing roles. Autonomy may drive the state's strategy, but coherent roles and strong role enactment are more likely to lead to integration, coupled with an active policy conduct within the alliance. The state is also likely to actively try to shape the international order either from inside the alliance, which will act as a platform, or by becoming an independent norm entrepreneur. The strong identity dimension of the role points towards role coherence and strong role performance.

By testing the various factors that influence a state's foreign policy and role enactment—external pressure, role coherence, small state strategies, role change strategies, and active/passive foreign policy—we deduce that role action strategies 2 and 4 are most likely to produce grand strategy.

3.3 Tracing Roles and Grand Strategy

We now present the methodological tools used in order to study the process of role adaptation: from the initial contestation of an established role, through the conflict between the old role and potential new roles, and finally, to the adoption of a new role. We also provide the reader with a critical discussion of the sources used.

3.3.1 Process Tracing as a Tool for Causal Inference

We start with an examination of process tracing as a tool for causal inference. While the ideal-type analysis helps to describe the content of roles at fixed moments (snapshots if one likes), another method is needed to study the process leading up to a changed role. Such a method should allow for the analysis of a moving target and the different actors and conditions influencing the outcome of the process. Process tracing is a method that helps to

achieve precisely this. With ideal-type analysis it is possible to study a specific role at two particular times and, given changed role content at time 2 (T2) compared to time 1 (T1), draw the conclusion that the role has changed. By employing process tracing it is possible to say what happened in between T1 and T2.

Process tracing is used in different sub-disciplines of political science, and it comes in many forms. In their seminal textbook on case study methods, George and Bennett (2005, chap. 10; but see also Bennett 2010) argue that process tracing is indispensable in helping the researcher to reach answers on questions of how one should decide between competing explanatory claims.²⁰ Bennett presents the ambition to decide between explanatory claims as ‘inferences about which alternative explanations are more convincing, in what ways, and to what degree.’²¹ Such inferences point towards claims of generalization, where causal mechanisms are identified in order to make inferences about a causal process in which x leads to y .

Beach and Brun-Pedersen suggest that studying such causal mechanisms using the method of process tracing ‘enables the researcher to make strong within-case inferences about the causal process whereby outcomes are produced.’²² In turn this will enable us ‘. . . to update the degree of confidence we hold in the validity of a theorized causal mechanism.’ Although other proponents of process tracing maintain that this method does not come with a specific ontology,²³ it is still clear that parts of the mainstream process-tracing literature see it as possible to isolate causal mechanisms in political processes, helping us to draw general theoretical conclusions. To put it another way, ‘actors, under a given set of conditions, will, by and large, act in similar ways bringing about similar outcomes.’²⁴

While not denying the possibility to do so in certain policy areas, within-case specific conditions should be emphasized when applying process tracing in foreign policy analysis. One reason for this is the actor-centred approach associated with this area of analysis. The assumption that actors will act in similar ways under similar conditions does neglect the specificities involved in a certain type of foreign policy case. In such cases, decision makers act according to cognitive biases based on previous experiences, to the

²⁰ A. L. George and A. Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (MIT Press, 2005), chapter 10; but see also A. Bennett, “Process Tracing and Causal Inference,” in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, ed. H. Brady and D. Collier (Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).

²¹ Bennett, “Process Tracing.”

²² D. Beach and R. Brun-Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (University of Michigan Press, 2013), 2.

²³ H. van Meegdenburg, “Process Tracing: An Analyticist Approach,” in *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods*, ed. P. A. Mello and F. Ostermann (Taylor & Francis, 2023), 405.

²⁴ van Meegdenburg, “Process Tracing” 408.

operational code founded in their individual beliefs, or according to cognitive signals influenced by mental illness,²⁵ to mention a few examples.

The decision makers are, in addition to this, embedded in specific bureaucratic structures, with routines organized according to previous events experienced by this bureaucracy. In foreign policy decision making, bureaucracies often work secretly and behind closed doors, making it even more likely that specific routines will develop. This is by no means an exhaustive list of conditions influencing the decisions taken by foreign policy decision makers. Nevertheless, these examples serve as an argument for why process tracing within foreign policy analysis needs to emphasize within-case specific conditions, and, therefore, must also be more hesitant regarding ambitions of far-reaching generalization.

3.3.2 Process Tracing and the Mechanism of Role Contestation

During the 1990s, foreign policy analysis (FPA) moved from a comparative, often positivist oriented, approach to more interpretivist approaches with a focus on the role of actors and the factors affecting decision makers.²⁶ This actor-centred approach to FPA, with an openness to at least moderate constructivism, has continued to develop, and the renaissance of role theory in FPA is one example of this.²⁷ Actor-centred studies, using theories emphasizing country-specific roles and case-specific processes, have called for interpretivist methodology, allowing for an analysis of ‘situated actors’.²⁸

A response to this call for a more interpretivist methodology is a version of process tracing that has turned away from an understanding of regularity. Such process tracing, in a within-case setting, with more modest ambitions regarding generalization, and with an actor-centred approach, has made it possible to devote more attention to agency and contingency.²⁹ In Hilde van Meegdenburg’s account of process tracing, an approach emphasizing agency and contingency is developed that is based on an appreciation that

²⁵ R. McDermott, *Presidential Leadership, Illness, and Decision Making* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁶ L. Neack, J. A. K. Hey, and P. J. Haney, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in its Second Generation* (Prentice Hall, 1995).

²⁷ D. P. Houghton, “Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach,” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 3, no. 1 (2007): 24–45; C. G. Thies and M. Breuning, “Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory,” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8, no. 1 (2012): 1–4.

²⁸ M. Bevir and O. Daddow, “Interpreting Foreign Policy: National, Comparative and Regional Studies,” *International Relations*, 29, no. 3 (2015): 273–87.

²⁹ van Meegdenburg, “Process Tracing.”

the 'assumptions of generalizability that underlay [the dominant regularity understanding of process tracing is held] to be too rigid'.³⁰

Moving away from such 'dominant regularity understandings', van Meegdenburg turns instead to the same Weberian inspiration regarding ideal types as previously discussed in this chapter. However, van Meegdenburg uses ideal types to develop an understanding of mechanisms as 'abstract constructs that are adduced from multiple concrete, contextually embedded, and largely *idiosyncratic instantiations* . . .'.³¹ This 'analyticist approach' to process tracing allows us to study processes within idiosyncratic cases, and within these processes to identify mechanisms leading to a certain outcome, in a given context, without neglecting the possibility that the specific instances can reveal 'general propositions about foreign policy making'.³²

Following the agent-centred approach outlined in [Chapter 2](#), an openness to contingency is maintained here. Since actors are unique, with different identities, processing information in different ways, and working in different contexts, it can be expected that decision makers will act differently despite similar structural conditions.³³ In other words, 'our understanding of mechanisms should support "multifinality"—the idea that the same mechanism can produce different outcomes even under the same structural conditions'.³⁴

When [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#) turn to the empirical analysis of role conceptions and the associated grand strategy in Swedish foreign and security policy, we study the way in which roles are formulated under increasing structural pressure. The analysis starts from an assumption that, under such structural pressure, small states in particular are likely to face a situation in which different actors may see a need for old roles to be abandoned or renegotiated, that is, the roles are contested.

[Figure 3.1](#) shows how this argument emerges from a two-dimensional understanding of contestation, with horizontal contestation within the elite, and vertical contestation between the elite and public. The degree of contestation of a specific old or new role works as a mechanism affecting the likelihood of role change. However, even if high degrees of role contestation on both levels can be assumed to block the development of new roles in general, following the discussion on agent-centred approaches to process tracing, this mechanism can still be assumed to produce different outcomes in terms

³⁰ van Meegdenburg, "Process Tracing," 405.

³¹ van Meegdenburg, "Process Tracing," 405.

³² van Meegdenburg, "Process Tracing," 405.

³³ S. Guzzini, "Militarizing Politics, Essentializing Identities: Interpretivist Process Tracing and the Power of Geopolitics," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52, no. 3 (2017): 423–45.

³⁴ van Meegdenburg, "Process Tracing," 408.

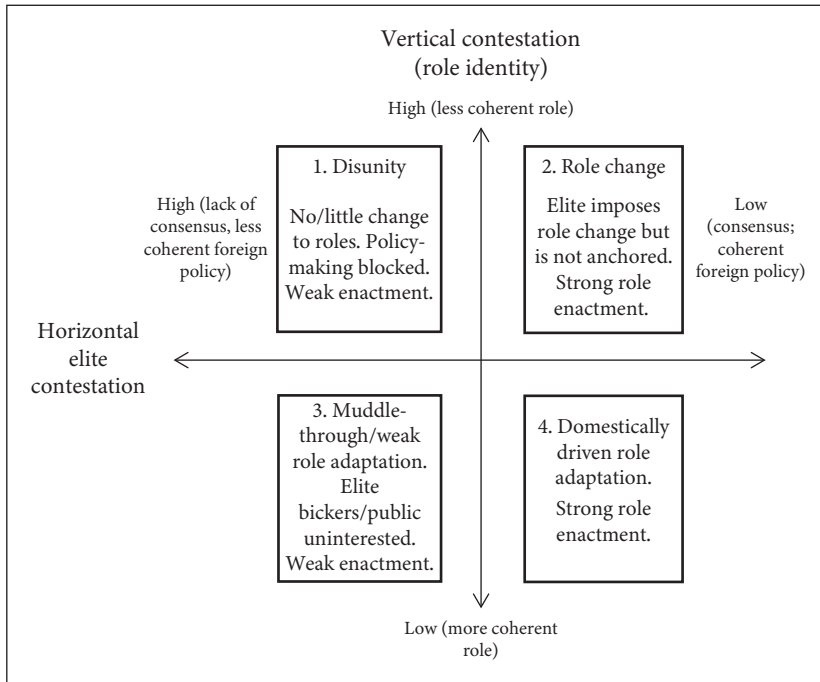


Figure 3.1 Role action strategies along vertical and horizontal dimensions of role contestation.

Note: The figure presents four role action strategies (Michalski, Brommesson, and Ekengren 2024).

of the substance of new or renegotiated roles. This substance is dependent on case-specific characteristics.

The central role of case-specific characteristics is also the reason why within-case approaches to process tracing require a high degree of scholarly expertise regarding the particular case. When proceeding with the empirical analysis in the following chapters, this analysis is informed by decades of previous work on Swedish foreign and security policy, in addition to the wide-ranging data collected for this book.

3.4 Sources

When tracing the processes of role change, both during and after degrees of role contestation, a wide range of sources is used. The expertise needed to carry out thorough process tracing also reflects the need to give scholars access to both public and disclosed perspectives and to multiple sources that

allow for the tracing of decision making. The following sections describe the sources used and discusses the benefits and potential pitfalls of each.

3.4.1 Written Sources

Different forms of written sources (including written speeches) form the basis for our analysis. Written documents help to track formal decisions, statements, and agreements, but also the process through the political or bureaucratic machinery leading up to a decision. Some written sources used are published annually, or at least with regularity. Such sources include the annual foreign policy declaration presented in parliament by the foreign minister in February or early March, the annual speech in the general debate of the UN General Assembly, and the Government declaration presented at the opening of parliament. These sources make it possible to trace changes in foreign policy priorities over time.

Also of some value are other key speeches given with less regularity, including, for example, speeches by newly appointed foreign ministers at the Swedish Institute for International Affairs. From time to time, the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister also give speeches that may be of relevance. Since these different types of speeches are given in front of both domestic and international audiences, they also reflect how the Swedish government presents national foreign and security policy, both at home and abroad.

Other important written sources include public inquiries, government bills, memorandums preceding such bills, parliamentary reports, as well as motions presented in parliament, and the national security strategy. A couple of public inquiries are worth mentioning. One major inquiry (the so-called Bertelman inquiry) was published in 2014 and dealt with the effects of the different forms of defence cooperation that Sweden was involved in at that time.³⁵ Another inquiry (the so-called Bringéus inquiry) was published in 2016 and dealt with a similar topic, but this inquiry also covered potential forms of cooperation in the future, including the possible consequence of NATO membership.³⁶

The Swedish defence committee, made up of representatives from the parties in the Swedish parliament, presents regular reports that analyse the country's defence needs up until the publication of its final report, with recommendations to the government. These reports are important sources that

³⁵ Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitiskt samarbete - effektivitet, solidaritet, suveränitet*. Fö 2013:B. D. o. *Defence* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014b).

³⁶ Swedish Government, *Säkerhet i ny tid*, SOU 2016: 57 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016).

can help trace changes in threat perception and policy recommendations from parliament.

The rapid changes in the security environment in 2022, after Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, resulted in a reorientation of Swedish security policy. Part of this reorientation was the work of a parliamentary working group that presented a highly relevant source, in the form of a report in April 2022 recommending membership of NATO.³⁷ The government followed this recommendation and applied for membership, together with Finland, in May 2022.

In addition to public written sources, autobiographies written by leading politicians and diplomats active in key processes are used. While it is advisable to treat these sources in a critical manner, they provide the researcher with important empirical details concerning specific events.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The analysis for the more recent period covered in [Chapter 5](#) is based on interviews with key foreign and security policy decision makers in Sweden and neighbouring states. The interviews, carried out in 2022 and 2023, offered an opportunity to discuss Swedish foreign and security policy from both a historical perspective and from the situation arising from Russia's war on Ukraine and the Swedish application for NATO membership that followed. As such, the interviews also captured the Swedish understanding of the perspectives of great powers and regional powers, such as China, France, Germany, the United States, and Russia. This unique set of elite interviews makes it possible to go beyond official statements and to ask more in-depth questions about the process leading up to new policy positions and roles.

Twenty-four interviews (twelve Finnish and twelve Swedish) were conducted (see Appendix 1). These interviewees are part of the foreign and security policy elites in their countries; more precisely, they are members of parliament and of political parties with extensive experience in foreign or security policy, as well as senior diplomats and civil servants.³⁸

³⁷ Swedish Government, *Deterioration of the security environment—implications for Sweden*, M. f. F. Affairs, Ds 2022:8 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022).

³⁸ All interviews were semi-structured and based on an interview guide organized around world views and changes in the international order (see Appendix 2), role conceptions, threat perceptions, and role change. The guide included open-ended questions. The interviewees gave their consent to participate in the interviews and were promised full anonymity. They can, therefore, not be quoted by name. However, for the purpose of transparency, their nationality and occupation are indicated in general terms.

The analysis also makes use of other kinds of data that reflect important patterns in Swedish foreign and security policy. One example is public data already published, such as Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data on foreign trade and data published in previous research on voting behaviour in international organizations, not least the European Union, which are also used in different parts of the analysis.

4

The Evolution of Sweden's Grand Strategy

Autonomy, Activism, and Europeanization

For the past two centuries, Sweden's grand strategy has not been about winning wars or being at the centre of power politics. As witnessed during more than two hundred years of peace, it has instead been about being able to preserve national independence as a small, liberal, and welfare-oriented state whose economic fortune and cultural self-understanding grew out of its ability to trade freely around the world. At a later stage, the country was able to promote values in line with its overall foreign policy. Extensive experience has cemented a strong belief, central to Sweden's grand strategy, that a small state can stay out of conflicts by avoiding entanglement with existing military alliances.

Denmark and Norway, Sweden's neighbours, had different experiences than Sweden of neutrality during the Second World War. The 1940 German invasion laid down the preconditions for both countries to later become founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. Unlike its neighbours, large parts of the Swedish politico-military elite tended to regard military alliances as power structures that were detrimental to the interests of small states, and the policy of neutrality was seen as an important factor in keeping Sweden safe (Noreen 1994).¹

Free trade, non-alignment, and frequently active diplomacy were central elements in Sweden's strategic toolbox during the 1900s and were used to emphasize principles, such as self-determination, multilateralism, and disarmament. At the end of the Cold War, the promotion of principles such as democracy and human rights were given a more prominent place. Sweden has promoted these principles in many foreign policy areas, such as foreign aid and peace negotiations, in arenas such as the

¹ O. Kronvall and M. Petersson, *Svensk säkerhetspolitik i supermakternas skugga 1945–1991* (Santérus förlag, 2005); U. Bjereld, A. W. Johansson, and K. Molin, *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred: svensk utrikespolitik under kalla kriget* (Santérus förlag, 2008).

United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and later in the European Union (EU) and other regional organizations.² Still, Sweden has, after the Second World War, combined this outward outlook, grounded in a strong belief in multilateralism and the values of the liberal world order, with a strong national military defence to act as a deterrent, should it be necessary.

This chapter begins by describing the historical background from the early 1800s, when Sweden turned away from regional power ambitions towards an increasingly passive autonomous role, institutionalized by the time of the outbreak of the First World War. This overview sets the scene for a further three sections in the chapter. Here we pinpoint three competing roles in Swedish foreign and security policy from the Second World War to around 2007, with the more recent return of an assertive Russia: the role of autonomous security seeker; the role of autonomous activist; and the role of hesitant European. To some extent, these roles overlap chronologically, although the different roles take a dominant position in Swedish foreign and security policy at different times.

The role of autonomous security seeker is dominant before, during, and right after the Second World War, but for obvious reasons, the role re-emerges when the security environment deteriorates. The role of autonomous activist takes over as Sweden's dominant role from around 1960. Finally, the role of hesitant integrationist coloured relations with the burgeoning political integration on the European continent from the early 1950s onwards. From the end of the Cold War and Sweden's EU membership in 1995, the role changed somewhat as Sweden accepted the European Union as an actor with the capacity to bring economic prosperity, but also for its ability to stabilize Eastern Europe.

From the Swedish perspective, the European Union not only provided Sweden with access to the European market, but it gradually evolved into a strong proponent for multilateralism and human rights, and it anchored the Central and Eastern European countries' transition to democracy and the market economy during the 1990s and early 2000s. As a consequence of joining the European Union, which was regarded as part of the Western alliance structure, Sweden's role as an autonomous security seeker started to lose validity, although references to military non-alignment lived on for almost another two decades.

² D. Brommesson, *Från Hanoi till Bryssel: moralsyn i deklarerad svensk utrikespolitik 1969–1996* (Santérus förlag, 2007).

The final section of the chapter addresses the balance between the foreign policy roles identified. Here, we identify situations in which the roles, founded on different degrees of autonomy and integration, conflict with each other, and in which role change has been witnessed. This is discussed along the horizontal and vertical dimensions, based on the degree of contestation, presented in [Chapter 3](#).

4.1 Consolidating the Path of Non-Alignment

Looking back at Sweden's modern history, one observation is often repeated: the importance of the long period of peace.³ Sweden has experienced an almost unprecedented era of peace, stretching over 200 years from 1814 until the present day, resulting in a world view according to which the risk of war in Sweden has seemed very distant.

One should, however, acknowledge that Sweden was anything but peaceful in the time preceding this period of absence of war. Sweden, as a sovereign state, was consolidated in the early sixteenth century with the election in Strängnäs of King Gustav Vasa on 6 June 1523. The election of Gustav Vasa brought an end to the 'Swedish liberation war', leading to the political and economic reformation of Sweden and the forced introduction of the Lutheran state church. It also brought an end to the Kalmar Union of the Nordic states. Although Gustav Vasa focused on trade during his first decades as king, Sweden would eventually, and repeatedly, be caught up in conflicts with different neighbouring states. Sweden's regional power ambitions motivated several subsequent kings to go to war, and Russia was often identified as the enemy.

Key to the ability to wage war was the development of Sweden's capacity to govern with the central organization of a fiscal-military state that had an apparatus to 'extract resources and a capability to use armed force independently of the local power structures in society' from the early 1500s to the early 1800s.⁴ This made it possible for the Vasa kings to impose taxes, and thereby to uphold a powerful army, including the ability to build a strong navy to protect its territorial integrity, thereby winning horizontal legitimacy within the elite and also increased their influence outside of Sweden's borders.

³ Parts of this section are based on D. Brommesson, A-M. Ekengren, and A. Michalski, "Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: The Success of a Flexible Policy?" in *Policy Successes in the Nordic Countries*, ed. C. de La Porte, J. Kauko, D. Nohrstedt, D. 't Hart, and B. S. Tranøy (Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁴ J. Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe—Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as Fiscal-Military States, 1500–1660* (Routledge, 2002), 179–181.

It is fair to say that Sweden was a war-torn country in the early 1800s when the Napoleonic Wars finally ended in 1815, and for Sweden, the outcome was mixed: Sweden won control over Norway but lost other parts of its territory when Russia won control over Finland. Consequently, the loss of Finland motivated the foreign policy elite to seek revenge through a new war against Russia, and there was a strong horizontal unity within Swedish elite circles regarding the need to restore Swedish prestige by reconquering Finland.

These were the conditions when the new Crown Prince Charles John arrived in Sweden from France in 1810. The then monarch, King Charles XIII, had no children of his own and therefore Sweden needed an heir to the throne. Due to his battlefield merits and his potential to restore national prestige, members of the Swedish aristocracy expected that French field marshal Jean Baptist Bernadotte would be a strong future king. Further, selecting a French heir to the throne advertised the intention of strengthening the relationship with France after the Franco–Swedish war (1805–10).

However, instead of restoring national prestige through renewed war efforts, Charles John, his adopted name as Crown Prince, took steps that would establish the preconditions for the future Swedish policy of neutrality. He did so by moving towards a foreign and security policy based on non-interference and a much more cautious approach towards Russia. This new approach did not prevent Charles John, or Charles XIV John as king from 1818, from acting as an intermediary or giving advice to other rulers. Sweden was, thus, still active on the international stage.⁵

In 1814, when Sweden was on the winning side in the Russian-led coalition against Napoleon, Sweden forced Denmark (in alliance with France and subsequently on the losing side) to give up Norway to Sweden in exchange for Swedish Pomerania and Rügen. Sweden thereby won control over the Scandinavian Peninsula, while at the same time stabilizing its relationship with Russia. Charles XIV John's long-term objective was to keep Sweden out of great power conflicts, even at the cost of not being able to bring Finland back under Swedish control. While this was a clear departure from established foreign and security policy, the consequences of this strategy would prove to be even more ground-breaking over time. With some exceptions, Sweden's foreign and security policy would be developed along a consistent path that was founded on an increasingly institutionalized policy of neutrality for at least 170 years, up until the end of the Cold War.⁶

⁵ R. Czarny, *Sweden: From Neutrality to International Solidarity* (Springer, 2018), 24.

⁶ Brommesson et al. "Sweden's Policy," 285–289; but cf. J. Glete, *Swedish Naval Administration, 1521–1721* (Brill, 2010).

Due to the more stable relationship with Russia and control over the Scandinavian Peninsula, Charles XIV John had a strong credibility in military affairs as a high-positioned general in Napoleon's army when he ascended to the Swedish throne in 1818.⁷ Charles XIV John's reign would come to be characterized by a strong will to 'avoid being drawn into a war between Great Britain and Russia [...] the self-image was one of Sweden being a status quo power'.⁸ Even if Swedish foreign policy during the first half of the nineteenth century did include examples that deviated from a strict policy of neutrality by favouring a particular side in various conflicts, Charles XIV John would still take the first step towards an institutionalized policy of neutrality with a declaration of neutrality between the two rivalry great powers of Russia and Great Britain in 1834.⁹

Declarations of neutrality were not very common at the time and Sweden had, instead, from around 1810 up until the declaration in 1834, pursued a policy of non-interference.¹⁰ But with the declaration of neutrality in 1834, Sweden initiated a formalization of a policy of neutrality. Great Britain and Russia were the great rivals of the time, and Sweden's neutral stance meant that the country deliberately became a buffer between the two, indicating the adoption of an autonomous role with the aim of decreasing the risk of a major war (af Malmberg 2001, 69ff).¹¹

The formalization of a policy of non-interference and the determination to avoid getting drawn into the conflicts of the great powers through declarations of neutrality continued during the reign of Charles XIV John's son, Oscar I (1844–53), particularly in relation to the Crimean War. With these declarations of neutrality, it is fair to say that a practice emerged that would lay the foundations of a future institutionalized identity based on a policy of neutrality.

However, in the mid-1800s, declarations of neutrality were merely seen by the elite as the best available course of action. In other words, it was a practical alternative that would make it possible to maintain flexibility, but not yet a fully-fledged strategy. Ole Elgström argues that the route chosen was 'not [...] an end in itself', which was further illustrated by the consideration

⁷ S. Carlsson and T. Höjer, *Den Svenska utrikespolitikens historia Del III:1 och 2, 1792–1844* (Norstedt och söners förlag, 1954), 230.

⁸ O. Elgström, *Images and Strategies for Autonomy: Explaining Swedish Security Policy Strategies in the 19th Century* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 90.

⁹ Carlsson and Höjer, *Den Svenska*; A. Jansson, *Den Svenska utrikespolitikens historia del III: 3 1844–1872* (Norstedt och söners förlag, 1961); J. Westberg, "Säkerhet utan alliansfrihet. Svenska alliansstrategiers teori och praktik," *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 118, no. 4 (2016): 411–44.

¹⁰ Czarny, *Sweden*, 24.

¹¹ P. Lindgren, "Svensk linje i brytningstid: Säkerhetspolitisk orientering efter första världskriget" (Licentiate diss., Linnaeus University, 2012), 43.

King Oscar I gave to joining the alliance against Russia, which was motivated by ideas of winning back Finland, or separating Finland from Russia, and by the strong anti-Russian sentiment among the public that affected the King.¹²

There were thus movements, both vertically (between public and elite) and horizontally (within the elite), in favour of a direct involvement in great power politics. However, when Sweden was unable to elicit guarantees from Great Britain and the alliance that the Finnish cause would be included in the war against Russia, Sweden decided to maintain its position of neutrality. Sweden was thus, to some extent, involved in power politics and the shaping of alliances in this period. Still, in the aftermath of the Crimean War, support for neutrality within the foreign policy elite grew stronger. Hence, horizontal unity within the elite evolved over time in the direction of a more institutionalized policy of neutrality.¹³ This development was also enabled by a more peaceful neighbourhood after the Crimean war and by the evolution of Sweden's status as a small state in comparison to a united Germany and a stronger Russian empire.¹⁴

By the time of the outbreak of the First World War, the self-imposed and increasingly institutionalized policy of neutrality had reached a point where it was an integrated part of the self-understanding of Swedish foreign and security policy elite, based on both horizontal and vertical support.¹⁵ From the First World War, and even more clearly during and after the Second World War, Swedish foreign and security policy was clearly expressing a predictable role, based on a policy of neutrality that was cherished domestically and more firmly based on international law. Even if the flexible interpretation of this policy was to reappear from time to time, the institutionalization of the policy of neutrality and self-identity as an independent small state now made Sweden's strategic position predictable.¹⁶

The long period of peace during the nineteenth century provided Sweden with favourable economic conditions and the opportunity to invest in sectors other than the military. Even if Sweden was still a relatively poor country, with a large section of the population emigrating to America, the absence

¹² Elgström, *Images and Strategies*, 98, 92. King Oscar I also supported Denmark in the war between Denmark and Prussia over Schleswig and Holstein in 1848–49 and even sent troops to Denmark in order to defend Denmark proper if Prussia would expand the war (see Czarny, *Sweden*, 24). Examples like this underline that in the mid-nineteenth century there was no real *policy* of neutrality, but a number of steps that eventually would lead up to such a policy.

¹³ Jansson, *Den Svenska*, 95–97; Elgström, *Images and Strategies*, 98–99.

¹⁴ Lindgren, "Svensk linje i brytningstid," 49; E. D. Graeme, *Swedish Foreign Policy 1809–2019* (Peter Lang, 2020), 33, 37.

¹⁵ J. Westberg, *Svenska säkerhetsstrategier* (Studentlitteratur, 2015).

¹⁶ W. Carlsnaes, *Energy Vulnerability and National Security: The Energy Crisis, Domestic Policy Responses and the Logic of Swedish Neutrality* (Pinter Publishers, 1988); Westberg, *Svenska säkerhetsstrategier*.

of war, together with a swift industrialization, a rapidly increasing urbanization, and public investments—including policy initiatives, such as free public schooling, and an extensive expansion of rail roads—would eventually contribute to strong economic growth.¹⁷

Sweden had been a maritime trading country since ancient times, and the stable international conditions during the nineteenth century, together with the expansion of the industry of forestry, combined with the historically strong mining industry, made it possible for Sweden to build up a growing export-oriented economy. Once trade restrictions were lifted in 1866, Sweden joined the developing international system of free trade and the tremendous expansion of the export of iron ore would eventually become a very important part of the Swedish export economy.¹⁸ During the 1800s, Swedish export of iron would also become increasingly internationalized,¹⁹ and around the mid-1800s Sweden started to see an increase in economic growth, even if real economic expansion had still not occurred.²⁰

Although Sweden had started to implement a foreign and security policy based on the preservation of the status quo, which meant the country would not interfere in great power conflicts, Sweden was integrated into European politics as an intermediary to a significant degree. The level of integration was further strengthened by the role Sweden played in the European economy. It is even fair to say that the absence of war and unwillingness to interfere in European conflicts contributed to export opportunities and economic growth. This blend of the autonomous policies of non-interference regarding military conflicts and a high level of integration in international trade would be a recurring and increasingly important characteristic of Sweden's role on the international stage during the 1900s.

4.2 An Autonomous Security Seeker

With one hundred years of peace, a growing export-oriented economy, more widespread welfare, and gradual steps towards democracy (albeit not without contestation), Sweden's situation was, if not without challenges, relatively

¹⁷ Czarny, *Sweden*; however, cf. P. Hansson and L. Jonung, "Finance and Economic Growth: The Case of Sweden 1834–1991," *Research in Economics*, 51, no. 3 (1997): 275–301.

¹⁸ SCB. *Historical Statistics of Sweden. Part 3. Foreign Trade 1732–1970* (Bureau of Statistics, 1972), 43–44; Y. Axelsson, 2022. Svenska järn- och stålindustrins historia. *Jernkontoret*. <https://www.jernkontoret.se/sv/stalindustrin/stalindustrins-historia/>.

¹⁹ For data on Swedish trading patterns during the 1700s and the first half of the 1800s, see L. Ångholm, *Svensk handel under 1700–1850. Ett merkantilistiskt perspektiv* (Department of Economic History, 2023).

²⁰ R. Edvinsson, *Svensk ekonomisk tillväxt: utveckling och fördelning*. Ratio Working Paper No. 26 (Ratio, 2003).

stable at the outbreak of the First World War. A few years before the outbreak of the war, Norway left the union with Sweden and declared its independence. Even if there was, for a short time, a risk of an inter-Nordic war, based on the Swedish will to keep the union together, Sweden soon reconciled with the Norwegian desire for independence and solved the issue through negotiations.²¹

4.2.1 From One World War to Another

During the early 1900s, Sweden participated in the negotiations on general disarmament and in those on the establishment of principles for the settlement of international disputes. Examples of this were the Hague Peace Conference in 1899 with the signing of the Convention of the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, as well as the Swedish–Russian arbitration agreement in 1905.²² In 1904, Sweden issued its basic principles of neutrality in the event of war, founded on the gradually more established practice of international law, followed in 1912 by a joint Scandinavian declaration of neutrality.²³

Russia was then still seen as a potential threat, not least because of Sweden's support for Finnish independence. However, Sweden was nonetheless in a rather favourable situation, particularly in comparison with many other states. This was not least due to its geographical location far from the real threats to international peace in continental Europe, which, at the time, was characterized by a multipolar division between the great powers: Russia, Great Britain, France, and Germany. At the same time, the existing power structure was rigid, which added to the difficulties of establishing a balance between the two alliances through gradual adjustments. Still, since the problems were geographically distant enough to keep Sweden out of harm's way,²⁴ and Russia would soon be preoccupied with the internal turmoil that eventually also made it possible for Finland to declare independence in 1917, Sweden could resort to a by-now familiar strategy to maintain an independent foreign and security policy through the policy of neutrality.

²¹ Czarny, *Sweden*, 28; but see also H. A. Barton, "The Norwegian–Swedish Union and Its Dissolution 1814–1905," *Scandinavian Studies*, 77, no. 4 (2005): 501–6.

²² Czarny, *Sweden*, 28.

²³ Czarny, *Sweden*, 28–31.

²⁴ Westberg, *Svenska säkerhetsstrategier*, 108–16.

The Scandinavian declaration on neutrality revealed the flexibility inherent in the Swedish policy of neutrality, and as such, the implications of the neutral position were presented in different ways to the opposing sides in the war.²⁵ Germany was informed about a 'benevolent neutrality', while the allies within the Triple Entente were told that Sweden would apply neutrality in a strict manner.²⁶ An important reason for these shifting signals was the anti-Russian opinion among Swedish conservative political movements driven by fear of potential Russian aggression.

Sweden managed to stay neutral throughout the First World War and came out of the conflict period with a largely intact economy and a more favourable geopolitical situation. Germany was now much weaker; Russia had gone through the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which led to widespread conflict within the former Russian Empire and the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922; and Finland, together with the three small Baltic states, had declared independence, all of which decreased the perceived threat levels even further.

Based on an overly optimistic world view, Sweden followed the fashion of the time and developed an idealistic foreign and security policy, with strong principled beliefs in multilateralism and legalism within the newly formed League of Nations (League) in 1920. The support of the Liberal-Social Democratic government for the creation of the League reflected a causal belief in the importance of international institutions, based on the principle of legalism, as a tool for the settlement of international disputes. Support for these positions was strong enough to accept possible negative consequences for the policy of neutrality, with the need for Sweden, as a member, to take a position on different issues.

A further consideration was that the position of the Swedish majority, in favour of joining the League, could be seen as siding with France and Great Britain. Swedish Liberals and Social Democrats shared the same support for liberal democracy that characterized the political systems of France and Great Britain. However, Sweden's decision to join the League did not come without domestic debate, during which members of parliament to both the left and right of the centre voted against the proposal from the Nils Edén government to join the League, which revealed a degree of horizontal disagreement.²⁷ According to critics within the Moderate Party and some within

²⁵ D. Brommesson, A-M. Ekengren, and A. Michalski, "Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: The Success of a Flexible Policy?" in *Policy Successes in the Nordic Countries*, ed. C. de La Porte, J. Kauko, D. Nohrstedt, D. 't Hart, and B. S. Tranøy (Oxford University Press, 2022).

²⁶ Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred*, 26.

²⁷ M. Bergquist, "Sverige och Nationernas förbund," *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 70, no. 2 (1970): 130–52.

the Farmers League (later the Centre Party), membership would imply taking sides in international disputes, since Germany, Russia, and the United States were not members from the beginning (the United States never became a member) and it could thus be seen as a step away from the policy of neutrality.

To some extent, these critics were right, as after joining the League, Sweden for some time refrained from explicitly referring to the concept of neutrality, even if the policy of neutrality had not officially been abolished. As the leading Swedish delegate to the League, then Prime Minister Hjalmar Branting (1920–1925) argued that small states, including Sweden, ought to be involved and not leave decisions to the great powers, and that Sweden should do so on the basis of its own legalistic perspective.²⁸ The balance between passive non-interference and active involvement in the international debate had for the time being tilted in favour of the latter.

However, this balance would soon revert; with the ineffective attempts to unite the members behind sanctions against Italian aggression against Abyssinia, the League proved incapable of dealing with international disputes involving small states. Sweden therefore returned to a stricter interpretation of neutrality. Another reason for this was the growing threat from Nazi Germany. In May 1938, Sweden, together with the other Nordic states, made a declaration advocating the principles of neutrality, according to which they would do everything possible to remain outside of a future conflict between the great powers.²⁹

The neutrality of Sweden's Nordic neighbours was not respected. Germany invaded Denmark and Norway, and the Soviet Union invaded Finland. Sweden remained, however, outside of the war, and the policy of neutrality remained in place during and after the war, even after the German occupation of their Nordic neighbours. However, alignment with the principles of neutrality would come at a high moral cost as Sweden had to make concessions in order to avoid being invaded by Germany. Some of the most well-known examples include: export of the iron ore essential for the German weapons industry; acceptance of the transportation of German troops on leave from Norway to Germany through Sweden; and Sweden allowing the fully armed German division, Engelbrecht, to be transported from Norway to the Finnish–Soviet front in 1941.³⁰

At the same time, there were rational reasons for the adjustment to Germany. During the interwar period, Sweden had conducted a more or less

²⁸ K. Wahlbäck, "Den Svenska neutralitetens rötter": *UD informerar 1984:3* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government Offices of Sweden, 1984).

²⁹ Czarny, *Sweden*, 34–35.

³⁰ W. M. Carlgren, *Svensk utrikespolitik 1939–1945* (Allmänna förlaget, 1974); V. Edman, *Statsråd i krigstider: KG Westman—bröderna, vännen och välgöraren* (Atremi, 2020); Brommesson et al. "Sweden's Policy."

idealistic foreign and security policy, with insufficient investment in defence. It was not until the mid-1930s that Sweden realized the threat of another world war and decided to increase military spending. When war broke out in 1939, Swedish defence forces were not strong enough or prepared well enough to defend the country against a powerful enemy like Germany.

Maintaining neutrality was therefore the only viable option according to the Swedish government at the time, led by Social Democrat Per Albin Hansson (1932–1946). Even if there were divergent voices, including Foreign Minister Richard Sandler, who left office after pleading in favour of direct Swedish military support for Finland, the Swedish leadership stood rather united behind the policy of neutrality and the degrees of horizontal as well as vertical contestation of the developing role of an autonomous security seeker were rather low. One manifestation of the strong vertical support of this role was the grand coalition government (formed in December 1939 and dissolved in late July 1945), between the Social Democrats, the Right Party (which became the Moderate Party), the Farmers League (Centre Party), and the Liberal Party. However, acceptance of German demands changed as the tide of war shifted, and Sweden then started to cooperate with the allies by, for instance, training Danish and Norwegian soldiers.³¹

It may be fair to say that Sweden maintained a policy of neutrality that was as strict as possible so as to avoid upsetting the belligerent parties to the extent that they could consider Sweden to be an active participant in the war. By keeping export markets open and gradually strengthening military defence, Sweden tried to navigate outside of existing alliances. When Sweden's defence was strengthened and the tide of war changed, Sweden reunited with its Nordic neighbours and expanded its capacity to export. Essentially, it increased not only its will to seek autonomy but also its actual autonomy, based on its capacity to act independently. Even if Sweden never became a formal ally of the Western powers, much of Sweden's actions during the latter part of the war pointed in the direction of an integrated role in the regional economy and a cultural proximity to the Nordic countries.

4.2.2 Facing the Cold War: Between Autonomy and Covert Cooperation

After the war, Sweden was in a strong position. While many countries in Europe and elsewhere faced destroyed cities, collapsed economies, and high levels of humanitarian suffering, the Swedish economy was up and running,

³¹ Westberg, *Svenska säkerhetsstrategier*, 155.

relatively few Swedes had faced the harsh realities of war, and Swedish defence was stronger than ever because of rearmament during the war. The Swedish economy had maintained high growth from 1870, and did so throughout the two World Wars, reaching even higher levels in the 1950s.³² Europe was to be rebuilt, and the Swedish export industry stood ready to contribute. Swedish defence reached unprecedented strength during the 1950s, with 400,000 troops ready to be mobilized by the end of that decade. The Swedish company Saab AB had developed three modern fighter jets; J 29 *Tunnan*, A 32 *Lansen*, and J 35 *Draken*, which meant that Sweden was now self-sufficient in terms of military air power. At this point, the Swedish air force comprised around 1,000 aeroplanes and was at that time the 5th largest in the world.³³

The autonomous security-seeking role, rooted in a combination of the policy of neutrality and strong national defence, was now credible and enjoyed strong support. As such, it was the dominant role in Swedish foreign and security policy. Still, Sweden did not use its position to become an activist in the international arena. Rather, it returned to its historical ambitions to stay out of controversial foreign policy issues, with a role based on a legalistic foreign policy.³⁴

In the early post-war years, Sweden became the driving force behind plans for a Scandinavian defence union consisting of itself, Denmark, and Norway, but excluding Finland, which was preoccupied with—and forced into—the so-called Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance of 1948. From the Swedish perspective, a Scandinavian defence union would solve the issue of security in Northern Europe while permitting Sweden to remain neutral in the event of war in the region. However, the 1948 Czechoslovakia *coup d'état* by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), and the advances of Communism generally in eastern Europe, rattled the Western powers; as a result, negotiations on a defence alliance under the umbrella of the United States were accelerated. This effectively led to a breakdown of the negotiations on the formation of the Scandinavian defence union in January 1948, with Denmark and Norway signing the treaty that created NATO in April of the same year.³⁵ Sweden instead resorted to a policy of neutrality.

³² O. Krantz, "Svensk ekonomisk tillväxt under 1900-talet—en problematisk historia," *Ekonomisk Debatt*, 28, no. 1 (2000): 7–15.

³³ B. Wennerholm, *Fjärde flygvapnet i världen?* (Försvarshögskolan, 2006), 145–7; G. Åselius, "Swedish Strategic Culture after 1945," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 40, no. 1 (2005): 25–44.

³⁴ Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred*, 22.

³⁵ N. Andréén, "Nordic Integration," *Cooperation and Conflict*, III (1967): 1–25; B. Stråth, "The Illusory Nordic Alternative to Europe," *Cooperation and Conflict*, XV (1980): 103–14; Kronvall and Petersson, *Svensk säkerhetspolitik*.

At the outset of the Cold War, the ambition to uphold a strict interpretation of the policy of neutrality was reflected in the intense Swedish debate on membership of the United Nations. Sweden eventually became a member of the United Nations, but not until 1946. It was not allowed founding member status (which included only the members of the winning coalition) due to its neutrality during the Second World War. Foreign Minister Östen Undén (1945–62) had initially hoped that Sweden would give up neutrality and fully embrace the idea of solidarity within the emerging international system of collective security, while others, such as former Foreign Minister Christian Günther (1939–45), found this to be a difficult position to accept.

If Undén's position had received wide support, Sweden clearly would have departed from its long-established non-aligned position. It became obvious in the discussions among the UN member states that the newly founded organization would not be functioning strictly according to the principles of collective security. The initial hesitation in Sweden regarding the consequences of membership revolved around the open question as to whether the United Nations would become a tool for powerful states. However, the institutional setting, with veto powers for the five permanent members of the Security Council (i.e., China, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States) would probably make the United Nations a less powerful tool in conflicts involving any of these actors. Still, in less-sensitive cases, when the veto power was not used, the organization would function well. With expectations on a strict collective security arrangement reduced, the debate on whether Sweden should join the United Nations or not became less intense, and the decision to apply for membership of the United Nations was finally embraced with relative political unity. It was evident that membership would not demand a departure from the existing position of neutrality. After some initial hesitation, Sweden embraced the United Nations and ideas on multilateralism and cooperation (Götz 2016). The election in 1953 of Swedish diplomat Dag Hammarskjöld as Tryggve Lie's successor as UN Secretary General further reinforced Swedish rallying around UN principles.³⁶ Accordingly, after some initial signs of horizontal contestation, the Swedish understanding of the United Nations changed in accordance with Sweden's autonomous security-seeking role.

Although the institutional arrangements in the United Nations made it possible to combine membership with the policy of neutrality, Swedish decision makers decided to maintain a strict interpretation of the policy during the

³⁶ S. Engh, "The Conscience of the World? Swedish and Norwegian Provision of Development Aid," *Itinerario*, 33, no. 2 (2009): 65–82.

1950s. One reason for this was the need to maintain the integrity of the role as an autonomous security seeker with other significant international partners. If Sweden started to interfere and take sides, non-alignment with the intention of staying neutral in the event of war would not be considered credible, and Sweden would risk being drawn into a future great power conflict. The situation with Finland was also part of the argument. If the Soviets saw Sweden as a member of NATO in all but name, then the fear was that the Soviet Union could seek to balance this development by expanding into Finland.³⁷ The 'Finland argument' suggested a second argument for a strict interpretation of the policy of neutrality: the need to avoid jeopardizing the stability between the two great powers. As a non-aligned state, Sweden acted as a sort of buffer between West and East, and any move that might undermine this balance was inherently dangerous.

Of no less importance, the 'Finland argument' contributed to a strong unity within the Swedish foreign and security policy elite and also between the elite and the public.³⁸ This unity provided additional support for a truly autonomous role based on a strong economy with a global outlook, strong defence, and strenuous efforts to refrain from taking sides in the growing great power tension during the Cold War. Sweden was integrated into the world economy and acted actively to support small states, but strictly on legal grounds within the UN system.

Yet, from the outset of the Cold War, there was already strong hesitation within the Swedish political leadership concerning whether the policy of neutrality, combined with a strong national territorial defence, would be enough to provide Sweden with the necessary security.³⁹ It had become increasingly clear to the Swedish foreign and security policy elite that the Soviets could not be trusted to refrain from expansionist ambitions, and that the growing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, together with their respective allies, was about to result in a deteriorating security situation. During the 1950s and the 1960s, two important episodes illustrate how Sweden saw the need for fall-back positions if the policy of neutrality and a strong conventional defence proved not to be enough: covert cooperation with the United States, including military adjustment to NATO standards; and the Swedish nuclear programme, with the aim of developing nuclear weapons.

³⁷ Kronvall and Petersson, *Svensk säkerhetspolitik*, 36–7; Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred*; see also A. Kähönen, *The Soviet Union, Finland and the Cold War: The Finnish Card in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1956–1959* (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006).

³⁸ cf. Kronvall and Petersson, *Svensk säkerhetspolitik*, 36–7.

³⁹ M. Petersson, "The Allied Partner": Sweden and NATO Through the Realist–Idealist Lens," in *The European Neutrals and NATO: New Security Challenges*, ed. A. Cottey (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

The integrity of the neutrality policy was based on the Soviet belief in Sweden's intention to stay neutral in the event of a war. Hence, in order maintain the credibility of the policy, it was crucial for Sweden to refrain from any steps favouring one of the two sides in the Cold War. On the public stage, Sweden did exactly this. According to Undén, Sweden did not participate in 'anti-Sovietism', and he argued strongly for a foreign policy based on legalism, rather than ideologically driven statements.⁴⁰

However, at the same time that Sweden was careful not to publicly take sides on the diplomatic stage, Sweden sent signals of a Western belonging behind the scene. Hammarskjöld's appointment as a member of government in 1951 was one such signal, as he was seen as more West-leaning compared to Undén.⁴¹ Sweden also quietly developed security cooperation with the United States, which included procurement of the components necessary for the Swedish defence industry, not least for Saab AB and its development of fighter jets.⁴² Still, this was not enough. Sweden developed close bi- and trilateral cooperation with the United States and some NATO members—especially Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom (UK)—with an informal but structured integration into Western defence structures.⁴³ This integration included, among other things, the adjustment of Swedish air force bases to NATO standards; installation of communication equipment in Swedish command posts to make it possible to communicate with NATO commands; cooperation with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on the establishment of a Swedish stay-behind organization; and regular cooperation between intelligence organizations.⁴⁴

In addition, Sweden had significant defence resources in the western part of the country. This was not because an attack from the West was expected. Rather, it was to keep open western ports, particularly in Gothenburg, Sweden's second-largest city, as well as road and railroads to and from Norway so as to be able to receive help from NATO in the event of an attack from the Soviet Union and countries of the Warsaw Pact. It was also a matter of a division of labour, whereby Norway could focus on the northern part of the country, knowing that Sweden would cover the southern areas.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ P. Lindgren, "Småstat i brytningstid. Sveriges säkerhetspolitiska orientering efter tre världskonflikter under 1900-talet" (PhD diss., Linnaeus University, 2019), 142–6, 191.

⁴¹ S. Carlsson, *Helgon och maktspelare. Dag Hammarskjöld som politiker* (Albert Bonniers förlag, 2023), 27.

⁴² I. Dörfer, *System 37 Viggen: Arms, Technology and the Domestication of Glory* (Universitetsförlaget, 1973).

⁴³ Petersson, "The Allied Partner."

⁴⁴ R. Dalsjö, *Life-Line Lost: The Rise and Fall of "Neutral" Sweden's Secret Reserve Option of Wartime Help from the West* (Santérus Academic Press, 2006); M. Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen—Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser* (Atlantis, 2011).

⁴⁵ Petersson, "The Allied Partner."

After the end of the Cold War, when the matter became public, a heated debate took place in Sweden about how to understand this covert cooperation. Some argue that it was a plan B in case the policy of neutrality failed, and Sweden had to seek help from the outside. Others argue that covert cooperation and integration into Western structures and defence planning was the main strategy.⁴⁶ As indicated in Section 4.2.3, Sweden maintained the will to seek an autonomous position throughout most of the Cold War, which offers support for the former position. Still, covert cooperation was an important fallback position, and, as such, inseparable from the Swedish strategy of non-alignment.

If the covert cooperation with different NATO members illustrates the perceived need for a fallback position of security within western defence structures, the Swedish nuclear programme illustrates the desire to build a strong national defence as the primary strategy. Until recently it may seem unthinkable that a small liberal democracy in Europe would aim to develop nuclear weapons, but, in the 1950s, the nuclear bomb was a new technology without any international legal restrictions. Even if the experiences from the Second World War, with the disastrous humanitarian consequences of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, made the use of nuclear weapons highly controversial, it was still an open question as to whether the new technology could form an important part of national defence.

With Swedish industry more or less intact at the end of the Second World War, the presence of a group of highly qualified nuclear physicists and access to natural resources, such as uranium, meant that Sweden had a unique opportunity. Social Democratic Prime Minister Erlander (1946–69) and his closest confidant group were clearly in favour of Sweden developing its own nuclear weapons. This was, not in the least, based on the perception of an invasion from the Soviet Union as a realistic threat, and also the belief that most developed states would go in the same direction and develop their own nuclear weapons as soon as they had the capacity to do so. The government gave the Swedish defence research agency the task of developing the programme, which included major investments in the production of plutonium, heavy water, test range facilities, and tests with conventional explosives. Small reactors were built in tandem with the development of nuclear energy for civilian use.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ cf. Dalsjö, *Life-Line Lost*; Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred*; Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen*; Petersson, "The Allied Partner."

⁴⁷ K. Dahlberg and J. J. Jerdén, 2019, "Foajaure: Den stora smällen." *Försvarsmakten*. <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/information-och-fakta/var-historia/artiklar/foajaure-den-stora-smallen/>; see also W. Agrell, *Svenska förintelsevapen: Utvecklingen av kemiska och nukleära stridsmedel 1928–1970* (Historiska Media, 2002).

Even if the nuclear programme was not formally abandoned until 1972, it had already lost momentum in the early 1960s as Swedish public opinion started to move against nuclear weapons. The international debate became more heated, which contributed to the development of the international peace and anti-nuclear movement. As the great powers developed new and extremely expensive strategic nuclear weapons, the small bombs that Sweden had planned for became obsolete. Simultaneously, Sweden started to develop a new role as an active proponent for disarmament, illustrated by appointing well-known Social Democrat Inga Thorson as special ambassador for disarmament. All of these developments, both on the vertical and the horizontal levels, worked in favour of the abandonment of the nuclear programme, and the first nuclear tests, planned for 1964 and 1965, were never carried out.⁴⁸ Yet, the programme illustrates the steps Sweden was ready to take to build an exceptionally strong defence to maintain its autonomy in the new hostile security situation.

Both the nuclear programme and covert cooperation with the United States and other NATO members lost important momentum during the 1960s (Dalsjö 2006).⁴⁹ Sweden maintained a strong national defence, but the autonomous role based on military force was gradually complemented with an active role on the international stage, which often included criticism of the great powers, including the United States. While research shows how Swedish governments tried to continue covert cooperation activities, and there is no evidence of any formal end to the cooperation, not even when the United States was criticized publicly by Sweden,⁵⁰ there is other evidence that this 'lifeline' was, in practice, lost (Dalsjö 2006). However, the development of a less intense cooperation coincided in time with détente and the perception of a less serious security situation.

Strong national defence, as the backbone of the autonomous security-seeking role, remained in place during the 1970s and 1980s. With a second phase of the Cold War in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the more assertive policy of the Reagan administration, the great power stand-off again came closer to Sweden, demonstrated not least by foreign submarines intruding into Swedish territorial waters, including the Soviet U-137 that ran aground outside the southeastern naval base of Karlskrona in October 1981. Territorial defence was again combined with strong advocacy for the protection of small states under international law, as the return of a hostile security environment led to a strengthened role for legalism as

⁴⁸ Dahlberg and Jerdén, "Fojaure."

⁴⁹ Dalsjö, *Life-Line Lost*.

⁵⁰ L. Leifland, *Frostens år: Om USAs diplomatiska utfrysning av Sverige* (Nerenius & Santérus, 1997).

an instrument to build a secure Sweden.⁵¹ Simultaneously, Sweden tried to strengthen its lifeline to the West by coordinating its defence planning with its Nordic neighbours, which took place during secret meetings between top generals in distant mountain huts in the Swedish wilderness.⁵²

4.2.3 Seeking Security Together with Others

With the end of the Cold War, the need for an autonomous security-seeking role was less pressing and soon started to crumble. We later discuss how Sweden reconsidered its position regarding EU membership, which had an effect on its security strategy. From an autonomous position based on a strong territorial defence, Sweden started to downsize and move from a territorial defence based on conscripts to a smaller defence force based on professional soldiers who were ready to be deployed around the world in out-of-area missions. Threat perceptions in the reports of the Swedish defence commission from the late 1990s and early 2002 clearly stated that there were no visible military threats to Swedish security, which motivated not only the abandonment of conscription and the notion of total defence with civil preparedness, but also the downsizing of territorial defence.⁵³ Instead, the new deployable reaction forces were used to build security together with trusted EU and NATO partners in operations in places like the former Yugoslavia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and, later on, extensively in Afghanistan.⁵⁴

This journey towards seeking security together with others had consequences for how the security doctrine was formulated. During the Cold War, Sweden was 'non-aligned, with the intention to remain neutral in the event of war.'⁵⁵ After the end of the Cold War, Sweden was non-aligned with the aim to 'preserve the possibility of neutrality in the event of war.'⁵⁶ Military non-alignment remained in place during the years to come, with broad support among the public as well as within the major political parties, although this support was stronger within the parties to the left. Referring to the past policy

⁵¹ Brommesson, *Från Hanoi till Bryssel*.

⁵² Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen*.

⁵³ K. Engberg, *När totalförsvaret föll samman: Dokumentation och analys av tankegodset bakom nedmonteringen av det svenska totalförsvaret 1999–2005* (Royal Swedish Academy of Military Sciences, 2004); M. Lindberg, "Why Sweden Suspended Military Service: The Policy Process from 1990 to 2009" (PhD diss., Lund University, 2019).

⁵⁴ W. Agrell, *Ett krig här och nu. Sveriges väg till väpnad konflikt i Afghanistan* (Atlantis, 2013).

⁵⁵ K. Söder, "Utrikesminister Karin Söders anförande om Sverige och Europa på Utrikespolitiska institutet den 23 februari," *Utrikesfrågor*, 1977 (1977): 17; see also A. Makko, "Small States, Alliances and the Margins for Manoeuvre in the Cold War: Sweden, Norway and CSCE," in *Margins for Manoeuvre in Cold War Europe*, ed. L. Crump and S. Erlandsson (Routledge, 2019).

⁵⁶ R. H. Lindholm, "Missuppfattningar om neutralitetspolitiken," *Svensk Juristtidning*, 7 (1997): 576.

of neutrality, the centre-right government declared that ‘this was a policy that in all essentials served us well—a point we must not disregard when we now discuss more openly the manner in which it was conducted or presented.’⁵⁷

With the development of open security cooperation within the European Union, and also with Nordic non-EU members, Sweden took further steps to integrate in Western alliances. In 2010, Foreign Minister Carl Bildt (2006–14) declared that

... [m]embership of the European Union means that Sweden is part of a political alliance and takes its share of responsibility, in the spirit of solidarity, for Europe's security. Sweden will not remain passive if another EU Member State or Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is similarly affected.⁵⁸

In reality, the policy of neutrality was now gone. Sweden was ‘post-neutral,’⁵⁹ but the legacy of the policy of neutrality was still affecting the self-identity of Swedish foreign policy. At the same time, the country now sought ever closer cooperation with its security partners.

4.3 Playing the Role of the Autonomous Activist

In the later 1950s, Sweden started to reinterpret what its policy of non-alignment demanded in terms of commitment to other values. Leading Social Democrats believed that it was possible to combine a strict interpretation of non-alignment with advocacy in favour of national independence in the Third World⁶⁰ and increasing global justice. During the 1960s and 1970s, Swedish decision makers kept referring to Sweden's commitment to non-alignment in all central political statements on Swedish foreign policy but added that a position between the superpowers also made it a credible actor in international settings.⁶¹ For example, Social Democratic Foreign

⁵⁷ C. Bildt, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, 14 February* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2007).

⁵⁸ C. Bildt, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, 17 February* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2010).

⁵⁹ U. Möller and U. Bjereld, “From Nordic Neutrals to Post-Neutral Europeans: Differences in Finnish and Swedish Policy Transformation,” *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45, no. 4 (2010): 363–86.

⁶⁰ In this section we use the term the Third World to name poor and developing states in the southern parts of the world. The Third World was used at the time, while we today more often speak about the Global South.

⁶¹ Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred*; D. Brommesson, A-M. Ekengren, and A. Michal-ski (forthcoming), “Small States within the East–West Divide: Sweden's Foreign Policy Roles during the 1970s.”

Minister Sven Andersson (1973–76) stated in the yearly foreign policy declaration from 1975 that 'Sweden's position outside the power blocs gives increased weight to our actions in the international community'.⁶² Sometimes the new position was seen as beneficial for Sweden's support of small states in general, while at other times for the non-aligned movement or for economic and social development on a global level. It is not difficult to understand why this new Swedish activist role was interpreted by its critics as a moral position from which Sweden tried to berate other states (Nilsson 1991), indicating some degrees of vertical contestation regarding the new position.

The new role had several practical implications. One of them was an increasing interest in and support for the Third World in general, and support for the liberation movements in the former colonies in Africa and against the military dictatorships in Latin America in particular. Sweden was the first western country to vote for Algeria's independence in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 14 December 1959 and according to Marie Demker, this was the first example of when Sweden took a clear stance on a de-colonization issue.⁶³ Sweden's position in the United Nations on issues relating to the Third World and development suddenly came to the foreground, making foreign aid and support for radical demands from the developing world for a new economic world order important agenda setting issues.

At the United Nations, Sweden represented the group of neutral states and countries in the developing world and was also outspoken against different abuses by, for example, the apartheid regime in South Africa, military dictatorships in South America and Asia, and by great powers such as the Soviet Union and the United States. At times, Sweden attracted harsh criticism from the great powers, especially when it criticized what it considered to be wrongdoings in terms of using power politics and military intervention instead of negotiations.⁶⁴ Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme (1969–1976, 1982–1986) was strongly associated with this active foreign policy, which is sometimes described as the Palme line.⁶⁵ Still, Sweden acted according to dual roles during the Cold War, with a public image of a humanitarian giant critical of colonialism and militarism, and a more covert image based

⁶² S. Andersson, *Statement on Foreign Policy 1975, 19 March* (Government Offices of Sweden, 1975).

⁶³ M. Demker, *Sverige och Algeriets frigörelse 1954–1962. Kriget som förändrade Svensk utrikespolitik* (Nerenius & Santérus förlag, 1996).

⁶⁴ U. Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare? Sveriges utrikespolitiska roller 1945–1990* (Santérus förlag, 1992); Leifland, *Frostens år*.

⁶⁵ A-M. Ekengren, *Olof Palme och utrikespolitiken. Europa och Tredje världen* (Boréa, 2005); A. Berg, U. Lundberg, and M. Tydén, *En svindlande uppgift: Sverige och biståndet 1945–1975* (Ordfront, 2021).

on cooperation with the United States and NATO, as well as heavy investment in national defence.

A look at Sweden's international trade patterns shows that it had a clear geographic pattern, mostly taking place with neighbouring areas organized in trade organizations such as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) or the European Community (EC). Between 1960 and 1970, Sweden's international trade (calculated as per cent of total exports and imports) with other EFTA countries increased from 29 to 42 per cent. During the same time period, Sweden's international trade with the EC member states decreased from 36 to 31 per cent. This means that in total, trade with EFTA and the EC increased from 65 to 73 per cent. Efforts to become a 'partner' with countries in the Third World did not affect the trade statistics, and Sweden's international trade with 'other' countries was even reduced between 1960 and 1970, from 25 to 19 per cent. Hence, trade patterns show that Sweden's activist foreign policy role did not embrace all areas of foreign policy. Rather, heavy economic dependence on its Nordic and European neighbours preceded what would later become an interest in developing a greater role in Europe.⁶⁶ Sweden's endorsement of free trade was also, notably, an important aspect of the funding of its domestic welfare programmes. Sweden, as a small, industrialized country without a large domestic market, was dependent on being able to export its goods to other countries for national wealth creation. The major Swedish political parties were overall in agreement on the need to maintain free trade and to get access to the neighbouring markets, indicating low degrees of vertical contestation with regard to Sweden's trade policy.

Sweden was not only interested in exporting material goods. Exporting its welfare state model to other countries was seen by some as an underlying reason for a more activist position (Stokke 1989). The domestic debate regarding the strong state and the welfare state also related to the overall relationship between the Social Democratic government and some parts of the opposition. Horizontal disunity was expressed when the opposition criticized that Sweden was disparaging of both superpowers and did not acknowledge the United States as the leading defender of the free world. For example, Herbert Tingsten, a professor of political science and Sweden's most influential publicist during the Cold War as editor-in-chief of *Dagens Nyheter* (1946–1959) Sweden's largest daily newspaper, voiced opposition to non-alignment as well as the lack of criticism of communism (Ottosson 2000). According to the

⁶⁶ J. Gustavsson, "The Politics of Foreign Policy Change: Explaining the Swedish Reorientation on EC Membership" (PhD diss., Lund University, 1998), 81.

domestic opposition, Sweden ought to be more critical of the oppressive system in the Soviet Union on moral grounds and refrain from implying that the American and Soviet systems were equally bad.⁶⁷ This horizontal contestation can be seen as an expression of different views on some parts of the new autonomous activist role, regardless of whether or not Sweden expressed a stronger sense of belonging to the West.

Hence, the new active foreign policy was evolving in tandem with simultaneous important ideational changes taking place at both the domestic and international levels. At the domestic level, the Social Democratic Party led the government between 1945 and 1976. The term *Folkhemmet* (People's home) was used to set a vision of a strong state that would take care of its citizens. Equality was an important ideational foundation for many reforms in Sweden during the period between the 1950s and 1970s. According to the Social Democratic vision, all people were entitled to equal social, economic, and political rights, and in Sweden, the focus had turned towards social and the economic rights. Several ambitious welfare programmes were initiated, including: a universal national public pension system (1948), three weeks of paid holiday (1951), and general health insurance (1955). The Social Democratic government benefitted from the vertical support for the reforms.

It was not too farfetched to embrace a belief in extending such equality to all people in the world, not only to Swedish citizens (Stokke 1989).⁶⁸ Even though many social and economic reforms were devised and executed domestically, Palme and the Social Democrats expressed the need to stay in touch with a vocal and dedicated public who were interested in global issues. Young people and university students exhibited a distinctive left-leaning tendency and were more outward looking than the older generations and were often critical towards the United States and its imperialistic tendencies, which were visible in conflicts evolving around the globe. Fearing the loss of the younger generation to the communists, the Social Democrats wanted to appear in tune with the times.⁶⁹ Hence, important aspects of the activist role evolved despite some vertical and horizontal disunity regarding the pace and extent of the activism.

At the international level, the end of the Second World War introduced new ideas, such as de-colonization, national independence and social and economic development, to the international agenda. Several colonies had actively contributed to the victory over Nazi Germany and its allies, and it

⁶⁷ U. Bjereld, *Hjalmarsonaffären* (Nerenius & Santérus förlag, 1997); Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred*, 232.

⁶⁸ Ekengren, *Olof Palme*.

⁶⁹ Bjereld et al., *Sveriges säkerhet och världens fred*, 230–1.

was difficult to argue for their continued dominion by the imperial powers. Within the newly established United Nations, the anti-colonial movement had a given platform and when it gained momentum during the 1950s and 1960s, the global focus turned to the Third World. It was quite easy for Swedish decision makers from the Social Democratic government to embrace the ideal of equality also on a global level; why should people who were able to collectively organize and explain their ambition to gather around a national conviction be denied their right to independence?

Hence, discussions on equality not only revolved around individuals on the national level, but also around states on the global level and concerned both individual and collective rights to be free and equal. In the Swedish political discourse, greater equality between individuals, as well as between nations, was believed to lead to less tension, both within and between societies. Swedish support for the liberation of states was, accordingly, believed to improve possibilities for peace and development (Olof Palme's archive).⁷⁰

The increasing focus on development issues within the UN framework was met with growing awareness in the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) that Sweden needed to engage in the ongoing discussions and contribute with substantial resources. According to internal memos at the MFA, Sweden's neutral position during the Second World War, and its decision to not join the Atlantic Pact afterwards, was characterized by other states as Sweden profiting from the economic, military, and human efforts of others. According to this narrative, neutrality and non-alignment were seen as self-serving positions implying isolation from the rest of the world. Active participation in development issues were considered a statement of Sweden's desire to contribute to peaceful development in other parts of the world and not only to serve itself, even if it wanted to stay out of military and political commitments.⁷¹ Historical experiences, such as the challenges Sweden faced due to its neutrality and flexible interpretation of its situation during the Second World War, are important considerations in understanding the birth of the active foreign policy. A flexible interpretation of neutrality had contributed to keeping Sweden safe during the Second World War, but at the cost of refraining from clearly taking sides for what was believed to be right.

In sum, Sweden's new role as an autonomous activist with an interest in reducing tension and spreading development across the globe was built on

⁷⁰ Olof Palme's archive, Speech, Public, 1953–1957, Volume 2.4.0:005, Palme's speech at 'Broderskarnas kongress' in Gävle, 1965.08.12; Olof Palme's archive, Speech, Public, 1965, Volume 2.4.0:006, 'Speech at the UN day' in Linköping; Olof Palme's archive, Ordered by subject, Volume 4.2:76, Liberation Movements in South Africa, 1971.08.24; Olof Palme's archive, Articles, 1967, Volume 2.3:005, Aftonbladet, 1967.09.17, Olof Palme's archive, Speech, Volume 2.7:004, Speech in Storlien, 1970.02.02.

⁷¹ Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*, 60–1.

a number of concurrent ideas. The Third World's quest for de-colonization corresponded with a political ambition to export a Swedish model of equality to other people. Sweden also became increasingly convinced about the importance that the United Nations had for governing state relations and supporting the rights of small states. It was also seen as beneficial for Swedish security interests if the United Nations became a key actor in development issues. The Swedish public and political sphere became increasingly aware that to remain relevant and to be listened to, Sweden needed to contribute to the global agenda, to help the poor, and to alleviate inequality.

The aim was to continue non-alignment but to use the new foreign policy role as a way to carve out larger room for manoeuvres. By highlighting wrongdoings by other states, by supporting the United Nations as a force for peace and development, and by contributing with financial and humanitarian means, the intention was to make Sweden a force for good. If others perceived Sweden in those terms, it would be more difficult to criticize Swedish non-alignment as a passive policy or portray Sweden as a bystander. On the contrary, non-alignment would then be associated with an active state that was interested in the well-being of others.

The following sections introduce the most relevant changes to Swedish foreign policy that followed on from these new ideas and which eventually led to the reformulation of Sweden's main foreign policy roles. They discuss the external environment as well as highlight vertical and horizontal disunity/unity.

4.3.1 Sweden as a Partner of the Third World

Once Sweden had become a member of the United Nations in 1946, membership soon became a central part of Sweden's foreign and security policies. The United Nations constituted both a political arena to discuss and handle global challenges and a channel for humanitarian and other support to the South. By active participation in most aspects of UN daily life and the channelling of humanitarian support through the United Nations, Sweden accepted the premise that the United Nations was the central body for promoting peace and security in the world. The United Nations was believed to play a vital role in contributing to a normative order that supported the safety of small states. Consequently, providing the United Nations with monetary and political support was a priority for Sweden.⁷² Earlier studies show how

⁷² Engh, "The Conscience of the World?"

Sweden's engagement in the United Nations was expressed through an extensive diplomatic representation there, through generous economic support, and an ongoing presence in UN peacekeeping operations. The importance of the United Nations in these regards was not a thorny issue in the discussions between political parties. Most often, general UN issues were dealt with in horizontal unity.⁷³

Sweden's changing behaviour, from a passive to an active approach, can be illustrated through two indicators relating to UN policy: firstly, Sweden's voting behaviour in the UNGA, and secondly, how Sweden acted when elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (1957–1958 and 1975–1976). Once the UN agenda changed to focus more on de-colonization and perspectives from the Third World, Sweden started to change its voting behaviour in the UNGA. Earlier studies on bloc voting behaviour in the United Nations have shown that a Scandinavian bloc existed in the United Nations regarding issues related to North–South relations as well as East–West dimensions during the early 1960s. This group was closer to the West and South leanings of these underlying dimensions. The Nordic states tended to vote in a similar way, defended the same principles in debates, and raised similar concerns regarding peace and development.⁷⁴

However, with the foundation of the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) major changes were brought to Third World voting within the UNGA. From the mid-1970s, and up until the mid-1980s, Sweden situated itself more often with the West than the East, although the Western bloc also lacked the same cohesion as some of the other blocs. Sweden was close to a mid-position on the East–West dimension and much closer to the developing world compared to many other European states. Sweden's voting behaviour in the UNGA was explicitly described during this time period as 'bridging the Northwest and South.'⁷⁵

By siding more explicitly with the UN majority and taking a position closer to the Third World against the colonial powers, Sweden's active foreign policy worked as a coherent framework for Sweden's foreign policy towards the Third World. Note that Sweden tried to emphasize cooperation and consensus in the anti-colonial debates and to frame them more positively by discussing foreign aid.⁷⁶

⁷³ B. Huldt, "Sweden, the United Nations, and Decolonization. A Study of Swedish Participation in the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly, 1946–69" (PhD diss., Lund University, 1974); U. Mörth, *Sverige i FN:s säkerhetsråd*. FOA-rapport, C 10334-1.2, September 1991 (FOA, 1991).

⁷⁴ H. R. Alker, Jr. and B. Russett, *World Politics in the General Assembly* (Yale University Press, 1965); Huldt, "Sweden, the United Nations, and Decolonization."

⁷⁵ S. Holloway, "Forty Years of United Nations General Assembly Voting," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 23, no. 2 (1990): 296.

⁷⁶ Huldt, "Sweden, the United Nations, and Decolonization."

Moving to the second illustration, experts and scholars commonly characterize the UN Security Council as a 'vetocracy' controlled by the five permanent members.⁷⁷ However, interest in being elected as a non-permanent member for a two-year term has still been high, attesting to the many benefits states expect from a term on the Security Council. Non-permanent membership offers a small state the potential to gain influence in matters of special concern, to raise its status by being more visible, and to be involved in important issues and network with the great powers holding the permanent positions.

Sweden managed to be elected for the term 1957–8, and again for the term 1975–6.⁷⁸ According to earlier studies, Sweden's first term on the Security Council was illustrated by a more cautious position and few Swedish initiatives were taken. It was even with some hesitation that Sweden took on the assignment as a non-permanent member. With Undén as the Foreign Minister in charge until the early 1960s, Sweden tended to argue for its position within the United Nations from a legal/juridical position.⁷⁹ During Sweden's first term on the Security Council, this was especially visible in the Lebanon crisis in 1958. Overall, consensual reasoning and compromise were seen as valuable.⁸⁰

This more passive position in the mid-1950s, focusing on legal arguments, can be contrasted to the second term when Sweden, in advance, announced a willingness to bring questions regarding South Africa and apartheid to the agenda. Once on the Security Council, Sweden took a number of initiatives, some of them rather bold, in relation to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Immediately after Sweden's new autonomous activist role had become more accentuated, Sweden's position in UN debates was more often argued for from a certain value perspective, for example, for the United Nations to be able to contribute to a new world order and thereby show solidarity or to defend other important principles.⁸¹

Simultaneously with Sweden's second term on the Security Council, reforms adopted in its working procedures and thematic debates became more important. Hence, the Security Council's role as an arena for opinion

⁷⁷ S. von Einsiedel and D. Malone, "Security Council," in *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, ed. T. G. Weiss and S. Daws. 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2018), 19.

⁷⁸ On even calendar years, there are elections for one seat from the African group, one from the Asia-Pacific group, one from the Latin America and Caribbean group, and two from the Western European and Others Group (WEOG). On odd calendar years, there are elections for two seats from the African group, one from the Asia-Pacific group, one from the Latin America and Caribbean group, and one from the Eastern European group.

⁷⁹ M. Bergquist, *Östen Undén, Tage Erlander och det kalla kriget* (Santérus förlag, 2023).

⁸⁰ Mörth, *Sverige*, 54–5.

⁸¹ Mörth, *Sverige*, 80.

formation increased, which was used by Sweden to highlight issues that were in line with its more autonomous activist role conception.⁸² Overall, UN-related issues were dealt with in the absence of strong public opinion. Swedish voting behaviour in the UNGA, as well as in the Security Council, were often dealt with in relative horizontal and vertical unity. The absence of disunity made the autonomous activist role an important part of Swedish UN behaviour.

4.3.2 The New Foreign Aid Programme

When discussions in the United Nations began in the late 1940s and early 1950s on how much and in what way the rich world could contribute to poor countries in the Third World, Swedish decision makers realized that Swedish material support was on a low level, compared to similar states in Europe. Given that Sweden is a small state, the decision makers and the diplomats involved in the discussions did not expect Sweden to compete in terms of absolute figures with greater states and their potential to give support to the Third World. However, politicians also understood that a high figure in relative numbers could be perceived as an important ideological statement and have symbolic importance.

Following discussions in the United Nations, more states wanted to establish their own bilateral development programmes. The so-called Mohn plan⁸³ from the early 1950s indicated that Swedish security independence was manifested in non-alignment and its non-colonial heritage, and these were two vital prerequisites for Sweden's role on the international stage. According to the plan, Sweden projected a favourable identity by highlighting the importance of increasing support to the Third World, and it needed to do so with credibility.⁸⁴ Additionally, from the 1880s missionaries from Swedish churches had already gained experience with development work and became an important influence on later aid, not least regarding the selection of recipient countries.⁸⁵

The way in which actors, nations, and later-formed states were able to organize and formulate political demands that were raised on the UN agenda was fundamental. Anti-colonialism and demands for freedom and independence were values that Western leaders had difficulty in denying. The number of

⁸² Mörth, *Sverige*.

⁸³ Named after the diplomat Paul Mohn.

⁸⁴ Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*, 44–5, 53–7.

⁸⁵ Engh, "The Conscience of the World?"

member states, many of them recently independent, increased quickly and reinforced the ongoing anti-colonial process. The UN agenda became more and more a reflection of the increasing number of member states, many from the Third World. Top politicians globally, but also people with an interest in political issues, were affected by this anti-colonial movement.

The vibrant ideological discussions taking place in the student movement also added to the increasing political awareness that Sweden needed to develop a policy regarding support for the Third World. The student movement had international connections, and the Swedish part of the network had an outward vision and was concerned with international affairs from the 1950s onwards. Being a passionate student activist at the time, Palme was one of the more dominant individuals in the foreign aid debate in Sweden from an early stage. The student movement was clearly anti-colonial in their statements, which contributed to the framing of the foreign aid debate in general, and to support for liberation movements in particular.⁸⁶

Hence, what we see in the middle of the 1950s is the belief that Sweden could contribute to development in the Third World but at the same time increase Sweden's overall room for manoeuvre in foreign-policy-related issues. According to this line of thinking, activity regarding issues related to the Third World (e.g., development and equality) would not jeopardize, but rather enforce, an existing perception of Sweden as an engaged force for good. Still, it is important to realize that the student movement was an elite group, in many regards. The whole population was not equally interested in, or informed about, the United Nations's work or the needs that existed in poorer parts of the world.

Much effort was therefore made to increase awareness among Swedes in general regarding the importance of a global perspective and the need for Sweden to get involved in world affairs. Public education programmes, committees and lectures were organized to educate and increase public support for future commitments.⁸⁷ Simultaneously, among the churches and among Swedish trade and industry organizations, efforts were made to increase and raise awareness of need in the Third World. These efforts were grounded in different visions about what should be done and how, but they also illustrated that many actors were working in the same direction, thereby building vertical support for the policy. Nevertheless, some sort of aggregation of interests was needed to make future Swedish support coherent and efficient in the long run.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ekengren, *Olof Palme*, 156–65.

⁸⁷ Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*, 66–8.

⁸⁸ Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*, 103.

In 1962, the Swedish government presented a far-reaching programme addressing most aspects of Swedish foreign aid for the coming decades. In line with this proposition, Swedish foreign aid started to increase in both absolute and relative figures. When the new bill on Swedish foreign aid was launched in 1962 by the Social Democratic Party and Minister for Foreign Aid Ulla Lindström (1954–1966), it can, to some extent, be seen as the state's attempt to direct all efforts in one direction and to give it a generous framing by launching the 'one per cent target', according to which, Sweden should direct one per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to foreign aid. Palme chaired a working group that designed the building blocks of the new bill and was therefore able to have a decisive influence over the new foreign aid policy.

It should once again be underlined that the motives for this new programme were a mix of both altruism and egoism; it was based both on a genuine willingness to contribute something positive, but also to receive good will for Sweden and acceptance of Sweden's non-alignment.⁸⁹ The Social Democratic Party realized that the time had come for more generous foreign aid, so as to meet international and national demands. Opinion in favour of more generous Swedish aid had increased with the help of conscious measures, and, within the Social Democratic Party, several actors demanded a more generous state-funded foreign aid programme. Most importantly, with the launch of the new bill, opinion and political ambitions began to move forward in tandem. The horizontal and vertical agreement increased over time.

Figure 4.1 shows how, and to what extent, the actual size of foreign aid corresponded with the 'one per cent target'. It also shows how public opinion developed in tandem with the increase in foreign aid.

Figure 4.1 displays how Sweden started its foreign aid programme from very low levels in the late 1950s and early 1960s. During the whole 1960s, foreign aid, as a percentage of GDP, increased rapidly, from just above 0 to over 0.4 in 1969. The increase continued during the 1970s, but foreign aid stabilized at just under 1 per cent of GDP. The attempts to reach the 'one per cent target' coincided in time with strong economic development in Sweden. The robust economy was probably a necessity for the strong support for the target, but it also made it more difficult to reach it quickly. It was difficult to develop good projects in recipient countries to match the quick expansion of foreign aid.

In the early 1980s, the 'one per cent target' was met for the first time. Foreign aid remained close to 1 per cent until 1992, when it once again exceeded

⁸⁹ Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*, 275–8.

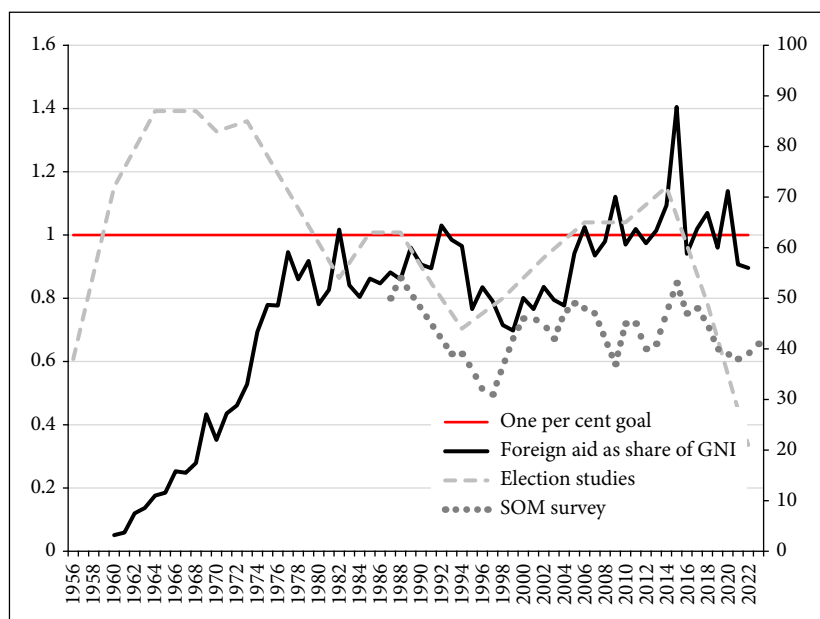


Figure 4.1 Swedish foreign aid and public opinion on foreign aid 1960–2022.

Note: Data on Swedish foreign aid from OECD (<https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm>). Data on public opinion on foreign aid spending from the SOM institute (Göteborgs Universitet 2023) and the Swedish election studies (Oscarsson et al. 2024). The data on public opinion concerns the percentage of respondents who agree or somewhat agree that ‘it is a bad proposal to decrease spending on foreign aid.’

the target. After 1992, simultaneous with an economic crisis in Sweden, foreign aid decreased and remained on a somewhat lower level until 2004. Between 2005 and 2021, Swedish foreign aid was close to or above the ‘one per cent target’. During the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015, foreign aid as a percentage of GDP peaked at around 1.4 per cent, since many of the efforts made to help refugees were also categorized as foreign aid. As illustrated in the table, increases and decreases took place mainly according to economic circumstances. Horizontal unity regarding the ‘one per cent target’ has been strong, and as seen in the figure, has been reached during both liberal-right governments and Social Democratic–Green governments.

It is worth noting that support for development aid in the Swedish public opinion started from a low level in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but opinion in support of generous foreign aid increased rapidly and possibly acted as a push for more support, raising the saliency of international issues for politicians. In the early 1970s, we see a decline in support among the public, probably as a result of the rapid increase in actual economic support to

the Third World, but also reflecting a tougher economic climate during and after the oil crisis in 1973. During the mid-1980s, opinion stabilized, and we see a peak in 1988 before a downward turn again during the early 1990s, most likely as a reflection of overall economic turmoil. The lowest support for Swedish foreign aid among the public is found in 1997. After that, we see an increase again, but during the period 1998 to 2015 there are some fluctuations in public opinion before the trend turned downward again.

In sum, public opinion regarding foreign aid during the period of most interest here, the 1960s–1980s, confirmed the politicians' intentions to act in favour of increasing foreign aid, even though public opinion decreased slightly once the one per cent policy was in place. Some research indicates that support among the public was deliberately awakened by elite actors, but the rapid and strong movement in favour of increasing foreign aid among the public opinion was not possible to ignore without serious political cost.

Initially, vertical unity was broken in the late 1950s and early 1960s and restored once the more ambitious foreign aid programme was in place in 1962. Once in place in 1962, the foreign aid programme became institutionalized, and no major changes were made until 2006, when the number of recipient countries was reduced. Hence, an activist foreign policy role, through which Sweden became a relatively generous foreign aid donor, was largely accepted by the Swedish population and the horizontal and vertical agreement increased. Both public opinion and politicians accepted the new foreign aid programme, and it became an institutionalized part of Swedish foreign policy and an explicit expression of Sweden's autonomous activist role.

While the Swedish foreign aid programme was developed in relative political harmony, support for the liberation movements produced more horizontal disunity. Swedish support was criticized from the parties on the right for financing dictators who had no intention of opening their newly independent country to a democratic transition. Swedish governments were accused of being unaware of how the funds were used. From the proponents of continued support from within the government, the need to get rid of the colonial heritage once and for all was a strong argument. The actual political developments, not least in Southern Africa and Asia, also spoke in favour of Swedish support. Since several colonial regimes used large-scale violence against the populations of the colonies, support for independence was seen as a way to actually do something that benefited those actors and organizations that articulated a longing after freedom.

In a speech delivered in 1968, Swedish Foreign Minister Torsten Nilsson (1962–71) launched the idea of giving Swedish state-funded foreign aid

directly to liberation movements.⁹⁰ In 1969, the plan was executed; Sweden began providing aid to different liberation movements in Africa with the aim of strengthening the liberation movements and providing people with the tools for regime change. During the early 1970s, the list of recipients grew longer and included Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde, (PAIGC) in Guinea-Bissau, Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) in Angola, Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) in Mozambique, South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia, and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in Zimbabwe. Ideologically, these movements were rooted in a socialist tradition and supported extended land reforms and state ownership in the agricultural sphere.⁹¹ The Liberal Party in Sweden tried, from time to time, to influence Sweden's choice of recipients in the early 1970s, but without any definite results. Political unity regarding support for the liberation movements was, for a long time, on a very low level, but it increased during the 1980s when the focus turned towards South Africa.⁹²

Sweden's decision to support liberation movements did not go unnoticed by the former and present colonizers. They criticized the decision for being ideologically motivated and for intruding in the colonialists' right to govern their territories. Palme rejected the criticism, as he considered the aid a direct means for helping the Africans oust the colonial powers.⁹³ It was possible to criticize the decision to support the liberation movements from other angles. Sweden had, as a member of the United Nations, accepted the fundamental principle, formulated within international law, not to interfere in the domestic politics of other countries. This was a major concern for Swedish decision makers, but they attempted to deal with this problem by justifying the decision to support the liberation movements with reference to UN resolutions and humanitarian aid.⁹⁴

In sum, Swedish support for the liberation movements was seen as a more ideological decision compared to other aspects of Swedish support for Third-World countries. To some extent, it contributed to the Swedish wish to play the role of activist, especially in relation to South Africa. Yet, it raised domestic criticism, showing clear signs of horizontal contestation, and was, as such, also a greater risk for the decision makers. The idea that it gave more room

⁹⁰ Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*, 478.

⁹¹ A.-M. Ekengren, "How Ideas Influence Decision-Making: Olof Palme and Swedish Foreign Policy, 1965–1975," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 36, no. 2 (2011): 117–34.

⁹² Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*, 485.

⁹³ Ekengren, "Ideas."

⁹⁴ Berg et al., *En svindlande uppgift*, 480–2.

for manoeuvre could also be questioned since Sweden's choice of liberation movements could be interpreted as if Sweden had taken sides with socialist movements in whatever shape they appeared.

4.3.3 International Opinion Formation through Critique of Others

Sweden's new autonomous activist role was also characterized by its critique of other states. By taking part in international opinion building against state abuses, the ambition was to raise the stakes by putting pressure on states before they acted in an oppressive way. Sweden, as a small state, believed itself to be better off if states respected others' sovereignty and acted less abusively against each other and against their own population. By raising Sweden's voice, Sweden became more visible in international opinion formation and was seen as an advocate in favour of small states. Hence, the criticism was believed to be a way to increase Sweden's room for manoeuvre.

Not everyone agreed with this. Undén was concerned that Swedish efforts to take part in the international opinion building would be used by either side in the superpower conflict and lead to an increase in security tensions.⁹⁵ Palme had a completely different view on the possibilities of increasing Sweden's room for manoeuvre through opinion formation. He believed it was vital for Sweden to express its views, to allocate blame where it belonged and to express moral judgments on other states if weaker parties needed support.⁹⁶

Ulf Bjereld's earlier work on Sweden's criticism of other states gives us a good picture of which states Sweden criticized, to what extent they did it and on what grounds. Bjereld's conclusion is that Sweden's criticism of other states did not have negative implications for Sweden's ambition to act as a mediator in different conflicts.⁹⁷ In that respect, the room for manoeuvre was not challenged, and Sweden's activist role was rather enhanced by the harshness of its criticism.

In a comparative study on three European non-aligned states at the time (Austria, Finland, and Sweden), Finnish political scientist Harto Hakovirta shows that the Swedish criticism of the Soviet Union was harshest in relation to three critical events: Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and

⁹⁵ U. Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare? Sveriges utrikespolitiska roller 1945–1990* (Santérus förlag, 1992), 71.

⁹⁶ Ekengren, *Olof Palme*.

⁹⁷ Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?*

Afghanistan 1979–1980.⁹⁸ Hakovirta's study illustrates that it was not only on moral issues that Sweden raised its voice, but also in security matters of high relevance for Sweden. The moral aspects of the Swedish criticism might have been more highlighted in political debates, sometimes with the intention of implying that the Swedish critique was problematic and had negative political implications. The US reaction to Palme's critique of the war in Vietnam was an example of how the critique damaged Sweden's relations with other states.⁹⁹

Bjereld's empirical analysis shows that Sweden's criticism against other states was at a low level between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1960s. Between 0–5 critical statements/year were spelled out in the annual Foreign Policy declarations, most often presented by the Foreign Minister or the Prime Minister in the Swedish parliament. By the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s, with new foreign policy actors on the scene, criticism was believed to help Sweden raise awareness of certain issues, to put pressure on actors to improve and thereby give Sweden increasing room for manoeuvre, and the number increased to 7–12 critical statements/year.¹⁰⁰

The number of critical statements remained on a higher level during the late 1970s and early 1980s, with a dramatic increase in 1982 to 28 critical statements.¹⁰¹ This means that Sweden's critical profile began in the late 1960s and was, at that time, very much personified by Palme. But the results also show that once the Social Democratic government was replaced in 1976, the activist role continued and was even accentuated during the various liberal-right governments between 1976 and 1982. When a Social Democratic government was reinstated in 1982, the number of critical statements for the period 1982–1990 returned to the lower levels during the final Social Democratic government of the early 1970s.¹⁰² This attests to the low level of horizontal contestation on the use of criticism as a foreign policy tool and that important parts of the new autonomous activist role were accepted by parties on different sides of the political spectrum.

During the first period, 1947–1965, the Soviet Union and South Africa were the two countries most often criticized. It might be surprising that Sweden raised any criticism at all against one of the superpowers, but

⁹⁸ H. Hakovirta, *East–West Conflict and European Neutrality* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁹⁹ M. Jerneck, "Kritik som utrikespolitiskt medel: En studie av de amerikanska reaktionerna på den svenska Vietnamkritiken" (PhD diss., Lund University, 1983).

¹⁰⁰ Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?*

¹⁰¹ Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?*, 40.

¹⁰² Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?*, 41.

such criticism should be seen as a way to use one of the few means available to a small state, and failure to object could be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Once criticism became a more recurring theme in Swedish foreign policy statements, the recipients of the criticism changed somewhat.

During the second period, 1966–76, South Africa, Portugal, Rhodesia, and the United States were the main targets of Swedish criticism, which obviously reflected Sweden's concern about abuse and violence across the globe. One famous example during this time period is Palme's Christmas speech decrying the US bombing of Hanoi in late 1972. Palme emphasized that the US warfare was oppressing the people and nation of Vietnam in order to make them obedient to the United States. The bombings of Hanoi were then compared to atrocities committed in 'Guernica, Oradour, Babi Jar, Katyn, Lidice, Sharpeville, Treblinka.'¹⁰³ His speech was heavily criticized by the United States for comparing the bombings to the atrocities committed by, for example, the Nazi regime, and it was a direct reason why diplomatic relations were suspended until spring of 1974.¹⁰⁴

The late 1970s and early 1980s is a third period for consideration, coinciding as it did with Swedish concerns with the apartheid system in South Africa and the tensions following from human rights abuses in the country. Sweden's critique of South Africa was something that united the political spectrum in Sweden and formed part of the horizontal unity among the political parties on how to use critique as a foreign policy tool. Security concerns and human rights concerns were sometimes linked to each other in Swedish statements against South Africa. After South Africa, Israel, the Soviet Union, the United States, Rhodesia and the Palestinians/the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were the most heavily criticized.¹⁰⁵

Interestingly, in tandem with the three periods, the content of the criticism changed over time. During the early period, 1945–65, Sweden mainly used arguments from international law (41 per cent) or security arguments (37 per cent). For example, the Soviet Union was believed to undermine stability and hence European security through their actions in, for example, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. During the second period, 1966–76, the arguments were mainly ideologically or morally loaded (43 per cent). Palme's stringent criticism of US warfare in Vietnam is a striking example of statements with a moral address. Still, security arguments were also used quite extensively

¹⁰³ Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?*, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Leifland, *Frostens år*.

¹⁰⁵ Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?*, 46–58.

(33 per cent). During the third period, 1976–82, security arguments were once again to the foreground (37 per cent), followed by moral and ideological arguments (28 per cent). Human rights abuses were a common example of morally grounded arguments against other states.¹⁰⁶

Sweden's criticism of other states was internalized in the Swedish foreign policy repertoire. This is clearly illustrated by the heavy criticism Sweden raised against other states during the liberal/centre/right governments during the period from 1976 to 1982. The Moderate Party had, from time to time, revealed a sceptical position against Palme's critique of, for example, the United States. Such criticism might be seen as a reaction against the choice of wording, the themes of Swedish criticism and maybe even as a way to discredit Palme in the domestic discussions, where he, from time to time, was criticized for his style and manner during debates. All in all, the Swedish critique of other states contributed to changing Swedish foreign policy from a passive to a more active foreign policy stance. Horizontal unity was extended to the more 'usual' use of critique as a foreign policy tool, but not to the extent of the use of very harsh critique of, for example, the United States. Vertical unity was, overall, not challenged by the use of critique as a foreign policy tool.

4.3.4 Towards a Normative Internationalist Role after the Cold War

Improved relations between the great powers at the end of the 1980s, and ultimately the end of the Cold War, brought entirely new preconditions for the global security architecture and for small states such as Sweden. The end of the Cold War resulted in optimism regarding the possibilities for peaceful development and cooperation in the world, and at first many factors pointed in the right direction. For almost two decades, the United Nations, the European Union, and other global and regional organizations could focus on enhancing a positive global development: more states became democracies, the number of poor states diminished and people in very poor countries were benefitting from human development, such as vaccination programmes, more education, and lower mortality rates among infants and children.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Bjereld, *Kritiker eller medlare?*, 46, 53, 58.

¹⁰⁷ H. Rosling, A. Rosling Rönnlund, and O. Rosling, *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World—and Why Things Are Better Than You Think* (Flatiron Books, 2018).

In Sweden, a vertical and horizontal unity on the permanence of the peaceful order established at the end of the Cold War dominated the political and public discourse in the period from 1998 to 2004.¹⁰⁸ With such an understanding of the international environment, it would have been easy for Sweden to reconnect to several aspects of its role as an autonomous activist. But given the end of the Cold War and a new liberal-right government in Sweden, the role was reinterpreted and focused more on the normative internationalist part than on the activist part of the role. One example of when Sweden's role as an internationalist became important was in relation to its Baltic neighbours (see more in [Section 4.4.5](#)). Earlier research interpreted Sweden's recurring support, through bilateral assistance programmes, for the Baltic states after their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 as an expression of continued internationalism. Extensive financial and political support was seen as a way to strengthen democracy, human rights, and peace, but also as a means to maintain security and order in Sweden's vicinity. Sweden assisted the Baltic states in the adjustment process vis-à-vis the international community and promoted their membership of the European Union.¹⁰⁹

In addition, this international role also emerged with regard to the further EU enlargement process ([Bergman 2006](#)). However, this could rather be understood as an example of how the more dominant role as an integrationist European included aspects of the role as a normative internationalist (see [Section 4.4](#)). An example of when the more traditional autonomous activist role was important, also during the 1990s, was in the UN context, when Sweden tried to act more autonomously vis-à-vis the greater powers by emphasizing the need for conflict prevention overall.¹¹⁰

Apart from these examples, in many respects Sweden had become like other European states. EU membership in 1995 made the policy of neutrality obsolete, and the position as non-aligned was renegotiated. Hence, Sweden's ongoing integration within the European Union made Sweden's role as an autonomous activist less relevant over time once its role as a hesitant European was replaced by an active role in European affairs. Sweden's term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (1997–8) illustrated this point. Sweden's statements and initiatives indicated a state that was well integrated within the European security architecture and acting in the

¹⁰⁸ W. Agrell, *Fredens illusioner. Det nationella försvarets nedgång och fall 1988–2009* (Atlantis, 2010), 243.

¹⁰⁹ R. Bengtsson, "Sweden and the Baltic Sea Region," in *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics*, ed. J. Pierre (Oxford University Press, 2016), 451–2.

¹¹⁰ A. Björkdahl, "Swedish Norm Entrepreneurship in the UN," *International Peacekeeping*, 14, no. 4 (2007): 538–52.

United Nations much like other EU member states. The wish to act with an autonomous voice was replaced by a wish to talk with one well-integrated European voice (Laatikainen 2003).

4.4 The Road to EU Membership: Implications for Swedish Foreign Policy Roles

From the aftermath of the Second World War up until the beginning of the Georgian war in 2008, Swedish foreign and security policy went through considerable change, which demanded adjustment to its role as an autonomous security seeker, seeking membership of the European Union while performing a balancing act between autonomous foreign policy and complying with the requirements of membership in a political alliance. This evolution started with the consolidation of its role as a neutral, non-aligned state in northern Europe, followed by adjustment to the rights and obligations of membership of the European Union in 1995, through a process of Europeanization that demanded further adjustment to its position as a militarily non-aligned state and hence its role as autonomous security seeker. Overall, the process involved a degree of horizontal and vertical contestation. Interestingly, the long contentious adjustment to European integration and membership of the European Union could not be resolved before the huge geopolitical shift in Europe caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

Becoming part of the political and economic alliance on the European continent was a difficult choice for the Swedish foreign policy elite, and it was, in fact, one that they tried to avoid for thirty years, thereby earning Sweden the epithet of a 'reluctant European,' aloof from the European integration process.¹¹¹ The balance between the perceived need for autonomy, as a non-aligned state, while still being part of political and economic regional integration in Europe, became the hallmark of Sweden's foreign policy and coloured its position within the European Union for at least a decade after it had become a member in 1995. The balancing act between autonomy and integration put strain on the credibility of the role as an autonomous security seeker, but which, overall, was managed by the political elite.

Sweden's protracted rapprochement with the efforts of European integration epitomizes the perceived choice between autonomy and integration, which, up until the late 1980s, was seen in terms of an either-or choice

¹¹¹ S. Gstöhl, *Reluctant Europeans: Norway, Sweden and Switzerland in the Process of Integration* (Lynne Rienner, 2002).

regarding membership of the European Union, an action that was seen as synonymous with a loss of sovereignty and antithetical to its dominant role as autonomous security seeker. However, as internal and external conditions changed, important sections of the political elite, along with private business, changed their view on the autonomy–integration nexus. Influence within the European Union was perceived as more important for the country's economic wellbeing, and its ability to shape its own destiny, than remaining on the outside. This mind shift did not reach across the entirety of the political spectrum, and parts of civil society also remained reluctant to give up on Sweden's perceived 'exceptionalism'. On the whole, Sweden's foreign policy remained rather reactive, although once a member of the European Union, the country's political elite slowly woke up to the opportunities that the European Union offered to pursue a normatively oriented foreign policy in general, as well as certain foreign policy interests in particular, thus adjusting its role as hesitant European.

At the core of Sweden's reluctance towards European integration lay a long-standing suspicion to the left of the political centre. This was in part characterized by the Social Democratic Party's unease with a perceived cultural gap with many of the countries on the European continent, whose Catholicism, along with the right-leaning market-orientation of the Christian Democratic Party was seen as contrary to the self-image Swedish society and its values. In addition, the continental trade unions were seen as legalistic, militant, and devoid of real power, residing on very different principles to the all-powerful Swedish trade union movement. Perceptions of the political cleavages on the continent compared unfavourably with the superior achievements of the Social Democrats' *Folkhem*, which therefore justified keeping a certain distance from the European movement's aspiration of a united (federal) Europe.

On the right of the political spectrum, represented by the Liberal Party and Moderate Party (and sometimes also the Centre Party), the efforts to integrate the economies on the European continent in a common market were viewed with much more favourable eyes. Integration was also seen as an opportunity for powerful Swedish industry, undamaged by the Second World War, to solidify its position in western-European markets and therefore the threat to deep-seated values, norms, and traditions of the Swedish self-conception as much less pronounced.

This split remained intact in Sweden until the late 1980s, when the geopolitical shift in favour of the liberal Western world changed the calculus of Swedish policymakers towards seeking economic and political integration over maintaining the security balance in northern Europe. Importantly,

when a small core of the Social Democratic Party decided in the early 1990s that the time had come to join the European Union, the country was in the midst of the deepest economic recession since the 1930s. EU membership was suggested as a solution to the problems of a lack of economic growth and faltering competitiveness, rather than with the aim of being a constructive force in the European Union, although that was not explicitly excluded, and was therefore more a response to economic problems than the result of a deep-seated political re-orientation.

The following section focuses on the influence that integration efforts among countries on the European continent had on Sweden's policy of neutrality and non-alignment in the first three decades after the Second World War. We also explore the consequences of the economic and geopolitical shifts at the end of the 1980s that lead to a rapprochement with the European Union, and how Sweden settled in the European Union in its first decade as a member from 1995 onwards, transforming, but not giving up, its policy of non-alignment, thus adjusting its dominant role conception as an autonomous security seeker but without changing any of its fundamental components.

4.4.1 Early Post-World War Period: Hesitation and Hedging

As described earlier in this chapter, Sweden exited the Second World War with a very different experience than its Nordic neighbours. The psychological impact of these experiences cannot be overstated. For Denmark and Norway, Nazi occupation and the subsequent liberation by the allies served to show that small states cannot withstand the force of a much larger enemy and that only by allying with a friendly great power can security be achieved. Finland, having fought off both German and Russian forces, was left with no other choice than to accept the terms of the 1948 Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, which led to a policy of accommodation to a powerful neighbouring great power. For Sweden, having escaped unscathed from the war, the experience proved instead that a small country can stay out of hostilities if its position as neutral is perceived as consistent and credible.

These experiences gave rise to predispositions among the elite that influenced the central aspect of Sweden's foreign and security policy in the post-war period: namely, the policy of neutrality and non-alliance, undergirding the dominant role as autonomous security seeker. Nevertheless, the position of Sweden as an industrial country, dependent on access to international markets, primarily in Europe, also predisposed it towards a favourable

stance towards free trade and economic openness. These two, potentially contradictory, aims had to be contained and handled by the Swedish foreign policy elite within the existing role conceptions.

On the economic front, the moves by the United States pertaining to the reconstruction of Europe through the Marshall Plan in the aftermath of the war galvanized the Nordic countries to investigate the possibility of a Nordic customs union. This would have offered the Nordics a number of advantages vis-à-vis the Americans.¹¹² Consultations among the Nordic states started in 1947 and were followed by intermittent negotiations during the 1950s, finally ending inconclusively in 1959 as they had by then been superseded by the negotiations on the EFTA.

Another important reason for the unsuccessful negotiations was the very different economic interests of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. The former two looked favourably on integrating markets and the compatibility of their different, but competitive, economic sectors, while Norway saw far fewer advantages for its economy in a Nordic customs union.¹¹³ For Sweden, Nordic integration continued to offer the most favourable solution to the twin challenges of upholding its military neutrality and non-alignment to the West, which would have provoked the Soviet Union, while strengthening economic cooperation with its neighbours.

However, strategic outlook and interests were quite dissimilar between Denmark, Norway and Iceland on the one side, and Sweden and Finland on the other side. Economically, the Nordic countries did not share common interests sufficiently strong enough to provide a counterweight to the strategic considerations of this period. They had, therefore, to settle on cooperation on cultural and social issues, decided on an ad-hoc basis, and supported by a non-constraining institutional framework that was based on intergovernmental cooperation in the guise of the Nordic Council.

4.4.2 Facing the Conundrum: Sweden and the Early Steps towards Regional Integration in Europe

The years following the end of the Second World War were not only dominated by security concerns. Another very important concern that the policy-makers at the time had to deal with was the reconstruction of the countries in Europe ravaged by war, thereby laying the foundations for Europe's economic recovery. The aim was to avoid making the same mistake as in the aftermath

¹¹² Andrén, "Nordic Integration"; Stråth, "Illusory"; M. af Malmberg, "Den ståndaktiga nationalstaten: Sverige och den västeuropeiska integrationen 1945–1959" (PhD diss., Lund University, 1994).

¹¹³ Stråth, "Illusory."

of the First World War when war retributions demanded of Germany led to a severe economic crisis, paving the way for radical political (revisionist) forces to come to power. The steps taken in the years following the end of the Second World War laid the foundation for the creation of a security community in western Europe, an area in which economic, political, social, and cultural ties would irrevocably bring Europeans together and so make future wars impossible.¹¹⁴

Plans to set up economic structures were initially driven by the Americans through the Marshall Plan of 1948. These plans, which initially included all European countries, were geared towards coupling European reconstruction with the principles of free trade. During these deliberations, different attitudes soon emerged on how European economic relations ought to be organized. This is often described as a cleavage between the states that promoted free trade, organized through a loosely-held-together framework, mainly consisting of the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries, including Sweden, and the states that sought to create deeper social and economic integration, largely regrouping the western European continental states.¹¹⁵

Sweden joined the first grouping as the more ambitious plans of political integration among the continental European countries were perceived as detrimental to its policy of non-alignment and ability to pursue credible neutrality in the event of war.¹¹⁶ For these reasons, Sweden stayed away from the Schuman negotiations to set up a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the early 1950s and took scant interest in the Messina Conference and the negotiations led by Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak to set up the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1955.¹¹⁷

True to their conviction of pursuing free trade outside the framework of the EEC, which was seen as carrying the risk of centralization and loss of autonomy, the Swedish Social Democratic government preferred to find a solution to European economic relations in the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC). Here, the British had taken the lead in the Maudling negotiations (1957–8) to set up a wider Western European

¹¹⁴ K. W. Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1957).

¹¹⁵ C. Archer, "Britain and Scandinavia: Their Relations within EFTA, 1960–1968," *Cooperation and Conflict*, XI (1976): 1–23; af Malmborg, "Den ständaktiga nationalstaten"; D. Dinan, *Europe Recast: A History of European Union* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹¹⁶ N. André, "Sweden and Europe," *Cooperation and Conflict*, X (1975): 51–64.

¹¹⁷ André, "Sweden and Europe." In 1968, the institutions of the founding three communities, the ECSC, Euratom, and the EEC, were merged into the European Community (EC). The text reflects this change and refers to the EC from when appropriate. The EEC/EC was also sometimes referred to as the Common Market.

Free Trade Association.¹¹⁸ Eventually, negotiations between the original Six (EEC founders) and the United Kingdom and the Nordic states failed to find a durable structure for free trade in western Europe. In this context of uncertainty, Sweden was instrumental in setting up the negotiations in Saltsjöbaden in 1959 that founded the EFTA, long regarded as a competing organization to the EEC despite its very different set-up and mission.¹¹⁹

From the Swedish perspective, EFTA provided a solution to the conundrum of access to its main export markets in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the Nordic region while not threatening its policy of neutrality or the perceived necessity of autonomy to pursue concrete policies to bolster its claim of neutrality.¹²⁰ EFTA was not regarded as a political alliance and therefore did not challenge Sweden's policy of non-alignment and role as autonomous security seeker. In addition, its intergovernmental character and lack of political commitments would not restrain Sweden's autonomy and room for manoeuvre to actively devise and conduct independent foreign policy in line with its principles and deep-seated beliefs.

During the early 1960s, it is true that the Swedish political elite, particularly linked to the centrists in the Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party, discussed the options concerning the efforts on the continent to achieve closer economic integration. In the end, however, the majority preferred to seek alternatives to membership of the EC that could satisfy the perceived need for autonomy. In this quest, Sweden was reactive in that it followed what happened on the continent without being able to influence it. At the same time, it was rather active when pursuing specific arrangements that suited its need for market access to continental Europe in line with the self-imposed prerequisites of non-alignment.

4.4.3 Facing a Conundrum: Sweden and Closer Economic Relations in Western Europe while Maintaining the Policy of Neutrality

The setting up of EFTA as a solution to the tension concerning the model for economic integration in Europe proved to be temporary.¹²¹ In 1961, the United Kingdom applied for membership of the EEC mostly on the grounds

¹¹⁸ Archer, "Britain and Scandinavia."

¹¹⁹ Archer, "Britain and Scandinavia"; C. Archer, *Organizing Western Europe* (Edward Arnold, 1990).

¹²⁰ C.-E. Stålvant, "Neutrality and European Integrations: A Comparison of Finland's and Sweden's EEC Policies," *Scandinavian Studies*, 46, no. 4 (1974): 405–28.

¹²¹ C.-E. Stålvant and C. Hamilton, "Sweden," in *The Wider Western Europe: Reshaping the EC/EFTA Relationship*, ed. H. Wallace (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991); M. Broad and R. Griffiths, "Paying the Price for Allies: Britain, the Seven and the EFTA Negotiations in Stockholm," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 34, no. 3 (2023): 516–42.

of improved access to the all-important common market that was in the offing on the continent, only a year after it had signed the Stockholm Convention of 1960 with Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland. For Sweden, the shifting position of the United Kingdom posed a real conundrum as it implied the loss of one of its most important foreign export markets, and the likelihood that Denmark would feel compelled to follow suit raised the specter of a fragmented Nordic market.¹²² Therefore, in 1961 and 1962, a debate on economic integration and market access took place, which, according to contemporary observers, qualified as the most intense debate on foreign policy in post-war Sweden. It was qualified as much more open and lively than that which took place on the subject of Sweden's policy of neutrality and non-alignment, considered an axiom which was rarely questioned.¹²³ The articulation of various components of this debate and the way in which the differences of views were understood and handled dominated Swedish politics until Sweden became an EU member in 1995. Long after joining the European Union, such considerations continued to shape the Swedish elites' understanding of the deep-seated implications of EU membership, both in terms of strategic implications and self-identity. It is, therefore, worthwhile to look a little closer at some of the central aspects of the debate and how a consensus (however uneasy) was eventually reached paving the way for an adjustment of Sweden's foreign policy roles.

The gist of the conundrum was how to reconcile the policy of neutrality, which the whole of the Swedish elite supported, with a rapprochement to the efforts of creating a political community with a large common market, on the continent. Other aspects, such as culture and political integration, played a role, but the essence of the challenge was connected to the room for manoeuvre for Swedish foreign policy, which was considered necessary in order to conduct a credible policy of non-alignment and the all-important access to European markets. The balance of opinion on a reasonable solution for Sweden, given the restrictions of non-alignment, was, to a large measure, influenced by the view on whether or not the EC was a political alliance. Generally speaking, the majority of the Swedish elite believed that international free trade through GATT or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was preferable to limited regional

¹²² M. Bergquist, "Sweden and the European Economic Community," *Cooperation and Conflict*, V (1969): 1–12.

¹²³ M. Bergquist, "Sweden and the EEC: A Study of Four Schools of Thought and Their Views on Swedish Common Market Policy in 1961–1962," *Cooperation and Conflict*, VII (1971): 39–56; Andrén, "Sweden and Europe."

integration through a customs union or other more demanding forms of integration with western Europe, which was rejected both on strategic and ideological grounds. This strategic choice, often perceived as a conundrum, was expressed in terms of functionalism versus federalism where the first signified continued autonomy and the latter a subjugation to the requirement of a political alliance.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, the British application set in motion a debate on what form of relationship Sweden should seek with the EEC, membership or association.¹²⁵ The Moderate Party and Liberal Party, supported by a host of industry associations, advocated membership with 'escape-clauses' that would be activated if the country's policy of neutrality was threatened by deepening integration within the EEC. The Social Democratic Party, in government in the early 1960s and dominant during most of the post-war period, was hesitant because of an internal division between factions, one of which advocated an association agreement with the EEC, which, in its view, was compatible with Sweden's neutrality and non-alignment. The more sceptical faction, deeply critical of the political intensions of the EEC, held a belief in the superiority of the Swedish socio-economic model. When they compared the Swedish model to those of the countries on the continent, they regarded the latter as too conservative, both politically and socially. To the left of the Social Democrats, a number of left-leaning parties regrouped for ideological reasons, grounded in a strong preference for universalism over regionalism, were strongly against any association with the EEC as they believed it would impede the enactment of the role of autonomous activist.¹²⁶

The government's position in favour of seeking an association agreement with the EEC rather than membership, was laid out by Erlander in a speech to the steel and metal workers' trade union in July 1961—the *Metalltalet*. Noting that the Swedish socio-economic model was not a good fit with the outline of the Common Market, the decision not to apply for membership of the EEC was strongly motivated by foreign policy concerns. More specifically, Erlander stated that 'the Treaty of Rome, in its present form, would not be compatible with the Swedish policy of neutrality', and that the freedom of action that was required to fulfil Sweden's foreign policy interests prompted it to 'avoid any commitment even outside the sphere of military policy which

¹²⁴ Bergquist, "Sweden and the European Economic Community"; Bergquist, "Four Schools of Thought."

¹²⁵ Bergquist, "Four Schools of Thought"; D. Hancock, "Swedish Elites and the EEC: Models of the Future," *Cooperation and Conflict*, IX (1974): 225–42; Andrén, "Sweden and Europe."

¹²⁶ Bergquist, "Four Schools of Thought."

would make it difficult or impossible for Sweden, in the event of a conflict, to choose a neutral course . . .'.¹²⁷

Subsequently, Sweden handed in an application for an economic association with the EEC in December 1961. However, where the boundaries of Sweden's economic entanglement with the common market, vis-a-vis the freedom of non-alignment, lay, was never put to the test due to the refusal of French President Charles de Gaulle to allow Britain to enter the EEC in December 1963, putting an effective halt to the enlargement negotiations.¹²⁸

The second British attempt to restart negotiations with the EEC in 1967 was also thwarted single-handedly by de Gaulle and never got off the ground. At the time, Sweden formulated an open-ended application without specifying the form of association, which was not formally considered by the EEC given the French veto.¹²⁹ However, after de Gaulle's death in 1970, negotiations for EC membership between the original Six and the United Kingdom were resumed in earnest in 1971, this time with new French President Georges Pompidou, who was favourably inclined to Britain joining the Common Market.

The resumption of negotiations with Britain prompted the resumption also of negotiations between the EC and Ireland, Denmark, and Norway, whose negotiations for membership were much less problematic than those of the United Kingdom. The biggest fear of these states was that they would be admitted to the Common Market without Britain in the event that the negotiations with Britain failed yet again.¹³⁰ This third round of membership negotiations prompted the Social Democratic government in Sweden to once again explore the possibilities for membership or some other kind of association with the EC.

This time, however, European leaders had decided, in view of the accession of the United Kingdom at the summit of The Hague in 1969, to deepen integration along the triptych of 'completion, enlargement, deepening'. Faced with a pending British accession, Palme undertook a tour of European capitals. Despite this effort, he proved unable to convince European leaders to keep the door open for Sweden regarding a specific form of association with the EC that could be decided during the course of the enlargement negotiations. This was Sweden's preferred option as it offered maximum flexibility

¹²⁷ Erlander, quoted in Andrén, "Sweden and Europe", 53; see also U. Dinkelspiel, *Sverige—den motvillige Europén. Sveriges väg till Europa* (Atlantis, 2009).

¹²⁸ Andrén, "Sweden and Europe", 54.

¹²⁹ Dinkelspiel, *Sverige*.

¹³⁰ U. Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion. How Britain Joined the Common Market* (Thames and Hudson, 1973).

and the possibility to decide at a later stage what specific form of association to conclude with the EC.

In a speech in 1971, Palme announced that Sweden still sought close economic relations with the EC but that developments had led the government to conclude that 'in view of our policy of neutrality membership in the EEC [*sic*] is not a realistic possibility'.¹³¹ The developments alluded to by Palme were the publication of two reports in view of the impending enlargement, in 1970, on the future of the EC. The first of the two, the Davignon report, proposed plans to strengthen the foreign policy consultations of the EC among the member states, while the second, the Werner report, drew up proposals for an economic and monetary union. Even if these two reports only expressed possible future avenues for European integration, their publication was interpreted as a strengthening of the political integration of the EC, and for this reason they were considered not compatible with either the Swedish policy of neutrality or its non-alignment.

In addition, deeper political integration implied a stronger commitment to the EC on behalf of its members, which was, therefore, likely to restrain Sweden's freedom of action in foreign and security policy.¹³² In the end, Sweden opted to conclude a free-trade agreement with the EC in 1972, and this provided satisfactory economic relations with the enlarged EC for the time being.¹³³ This option also provided a solution to the possible role conflict as membership of the EC would have entailed at this moment of time for the role of autonomous security seeker.

Summarizing the view held by Swedish elites at the time, Nils Andrén argued that a free-trade agreement with the EC,¹³⁴ continued free trade and cooperation within EFTA, and (intensified) Nordic cooperation, constituted the best-case scenario for Sweden given its policy of neutrality, position of non-alignment and quest for maximum room for manoeuvre to realize security. However, Sweden's dependency on west European export markets, which after 1973 were mainly regrouped within the EC, constituted a very difficult dilemma for the credibility of the policy of neutrality in two principal ways. First, without the ability to export, Swedish industry would suffer, possibly resulting in economic decline, which would undermine at least one of the pillars of a credible neutrality, namely the ability to maintain strong armed forces. This demonstrates that economic autarchy was definitely not

¹³¹ Andrén, "Sweden and Europe." According to Dinkelspiel (*Sverige*, 32–34), Palme was more open to membership of the EC than his predecessor Erlander.

¹³² Dinkelspiel, *Sverige*, 49–59.

¹³³ C-E. Stålvant, "Sweden: The Swedish Negotiations with the EEC," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 8 (1973): 236–45.

¹³⁴ Andrén, "Sweden and Europe."

an option for Sweden. Even intensified Nordic trade, especially without Denmark after its accession to the EC, could not make up for the loss of markets in Europe. Second, economic dependence therefore had to be strategically managed by Swedish policymakers who insisted that the various agreements on free trade and association did not impede on the policy of non-alignment, thus attempting to define where the border between autonomy and integration lay in regard to role of autonomous security seeker. In the coming years, as holding up the appearance of full autonomy grew more tenuous, this dilemma became increasingly difficult to handle.

4.4.4 Economic Crisis and Geopolitical Shift Open the Door for EU Membership

After roughly a decade of relative calm regarding Sweden's relationship with the EC, the issue took on a new significance in the mid-1980s, largely as a result of the new dynamism within the EC initiated to a large part by President of the European Commission Jacques Delors (1985–95). One of Delors's aims when he came to power in 1985 was to consolidate the European internal market through an extensive legislative programme, published in 1985 in the form of a white paper, the so-called 1992 Programme.¹³⁵ The completion of the internal market was dependent on solving a host of other disputes that had plagued the EC for some time. This was achieved through a package deal consisting of institutional reform and the move to qualified majority voting in legislation pertaining to the internal market, an agreement on enlargement to include Spain and Portugal, strengthened provisions for foreign policy coordination, and a new financial framework, including a programme for economic and social cohesion. Agreement on these issues was sealed in the first revision of the EC treaties in the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, which, together with the completion of the internal market, led to a considerable boost for European integration.¹³⁶

The renewed dynamism of European integration was noticed by those in the Swedish elites, particularly the private sector and the Moderate Party, but also among important parts of the Social Democratic Party, who favoured

¹³⁵ European Commission, 1985, 14 June, "Completing the Internal Market: White Paper from the Commission to the European Council," COM(85) 310 final, Brussels. https://europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/pdf/com1985_0310_f_en.pdf; J. Delors, 1989, 17 October, *Speech by President Delors at the Opening Session of the 40th Academic Year of the College of Europe*, Bruges. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_89_73.

¹³⁶ A. Moravcsik, "Negotiating the Single European Act: National Interests and Conventional Statecraft in the European Community," *International Organization*, 45, no. 1 (1991): 19–56.

closer relations with the EC.¹³⁷ By 1987, the leadership of the Social Democratic Party had, despite internal opposition, decided to seek closer ties with the EC. This took the form of a declaration presented to parliament in December 1987 with the aim of defining Sweden's future relations with the EC. This was no small feat, as the Social Democratic Party continued to be divided between those who sought closer ties to the EC as the most realistic option for the Swedish economy and those who saw the EC as too restricted an organization to satisfy Sweden's role as autonomous activist, which, in their view, ought to be pursued through the United Nations (see Section 4.3).

The universalist wing of the Social Democratic Party had the support of the Left Party and the Green Party, both of which were firmly against any deeper association with the EC than a free-trade agreement. At the time, therefore, the precise form of rapprochement with the EC was left open, but membership at some point in the future was not ruled out. This was in line with the so-called Luxembourg Declaration of 1984 between the EC and the EFTA member states—a process in which Sweden had been a driving force—which called for the setting up of a European Economic Area (EEA).¹³⁸

It can therefore be said that it was the ruling elite in the Social Democratic Party, allied informally with the parties to the right, at least the Liberal Party and the Moderate Party, that made certain diplomatic moves possible. The consequence, however, was that the party leadership subsequently had a hard time handling its own internal division regarding EC membership.¹³⁹

The negotiations between EFTA and the EC on the creation of the EEA started in 1989. However, by January 1989, Delors had already signalled to the EFTA countries that the EEA had the potential to develop into a more structured and politically significant cooperation.¹⁴⁰ Delors's EEA declaration served two objectives: first, to preclude a series of membership applications from the EFTA countries, which risked slowing down the EC's internal reforms; second, to strengthen the role of western Europe in international affairs in the context of deep political upheaval in Europe.

From the Swedish perspective, the prospect of structured relations with the EC was welcomed as it seemed to square the circle between economic cooperation and maintaining the traditional foreign and security policy based on neutrality and non-alignment, thus maintaining the dominance of the autonomous security seeker in the role repertoire.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Delors's

¹³⁷ M. Hellström, *Politiskt liv* (Hjalmarson & Högberg Bokförlag AB, 1999).

¹³⁸ Dinkelspiel, *Sverige*.

¹³⁹ A. Larsson, 2019, 13 November, "Så blev Sverige medlem i EU," *Dagens Arena*. <https://www.dagensarena.se/essa/sa-blev-sverige-medlem-eu/>.

¹⁴⁰ Delors, *Speech*.

¹⁴¹ Dinkelspiel, *Sverige*.

vision of the parallel structures of the EC and EFTA seamlessly working together to uphold the 'homogeneity' of the extended European internal market through 'osmosis', that is, continuous consultation and regulatory alignment, was struck down by the European Court of Justice in a ruling in 1991 brought by the European Parliament, as an infringement of the EC's institutional integrity (Michalski 2014).¹⁴² The revised text of the agreement accorded much less influence to the EFTA countries on subsequent internal market legislation.

In 1989, the most significant geopolitical shift since the Second World War got under way, as the central and eastern European states broke loose from the Soviet Union and challenged the Communist regimes in power. This geopolitical shift, confirmed by the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991, had huge implications for the EC. It fell upon the EC to anchor the transition of the Central and Eastern European countries to liberal democracy and a market economy as the newly democratically elected regimes turned to the EC with requests for membership (Michalski 2014). In view of this challenge, European political leaders undertook to strengthen the political foundations of the EC by reforming the institutional structures and widening its policy scope through the Maastricht Treaty of 1993 that created the European Union.

The aforementioned geopolitical shift ended the existing bipolar antagonism in Europe and created a new European security architecture. This had a profound impact on Sweden's policy of neutrality as its special position as a bulwark between the East and West lost its meaning.¹⁴³ Subsequently, the requirement that non-alignment had implied for neutrality could now be interpreted with much more flexibility. At the same time, the official adherence to 'neutrality' in the annual statement on Sweden's foreign and security policy was reformulated in the early 1990s. In 1993, at a time when Sweden was negotiating for EU membership, then Foreign Minister Margaretha af Ugglas insisted that 'the military non-alliance persisted at the same time as we participate in the construction of a new European peace- and security order'.¹⁴⁴ The speech signalled an openness in the Swedish elite to reconsider its foreign policy roles by moving closer to the European Union.

The single reference to freedom of military alliance directly linked to peace and stability in Europe heralded a new way of thinking about security among

¹⁴² A. Michalski and H. Wallace, *The European Community: The Challenge of Enlargement*, 2nd ed. (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1992).

¹⁴³ Hellström, *Politiskt liv; Dinkelspiel, Sverige*.

¹⁴⁴ M. af Ugglas, *Regeringens deklaration vid 1993 års utrikespolitiska debatt i Riksdagen* (Government Offices of Sweden, 1993).

the Swedish political elite. Three other aspects played an important role in Swedish considerations. First, the enlargement to include the EFTA countries, followed by enlargement to include the countries in central and eastern Europe, was thought to change the character of the European Union considerably by weakening political integration and diminishing the cultural dominance of the original member states. This, it was believed, would make supranational reforms of the institutions less likely. Second, the outcome of the EEA negotiations was, on the whole, unfavourable for the EFTA countries as they were, contrary to that expected at the outset, not granted real influence over future legislation. This entailed a loss of autonomy even larger than if Sweden had been a full member of the European Union. Third, the European Union was gearing up to negotiate reform of its institutions and decision-making structures in view of a future eastern enlargement, which made it urgent for Sweden to become a member in order to have a say over the future shape of the European Union.¹⁴⁵

All these considerations contributed to making membership stand out as the better option at the same time as the geopolitical shift opened up for more flexibility in the enactment of Sweden's foreign policy roles. In addition, Sweden was going through a deep economic crisis, with the Swedish currency under severe pressure. In this atmosphere of frantic decision making, the Social Democratic government announced in October 1990 its decision to seek membership of the European Union, followed by a formal application in July 1991 presented by Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson.¹⁴⁶ These short announcements were followed by a declaration by the government in parliament, in October 1990, that stipulated that it was in Sweden's interest to obtain EU membership while preserving its policy of neutrality.¹⁴⁷ The motivation behind the decision was an assessment by the Social Democratic leadership on the consequences of the geopolitical shift, the severe downturn in the domestic economy, and the personal contacts between the central Social Democratic Party elite and their European counterparts.¹⁴⁸ The maintenance of the policy of neutrality prevented domestic dissention regarding the role of autonomous security seeker which otherwise would have been perceived as undermined by EU membership.

Nevertheless, whether a retained policy of neutrality was compatible with EU membership continued to shape the debate among the political parties

¹⁴⁵ A. Michalski, "Sweden: From Scepticism to Pragmatic Support," in *The Member States in the European Union*, ed. S. Bulmer and C. Lequense, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2013a).

¹⁴⁶ J. Gustavsson, "Välstånd och autonomi: Ett historiskt dilemma," in *Sverige i EU*, ed. K-M. Johansson (SNS förlag, 1999).

¹⁴⁷ Dinkelspiel, *Sverige*, 166.

¹⁴⁸ Gustavsson, "Foreign Policy Change"; Larsson, "Så blev Sverige."

during the accession negotiations and in the campaign ahead of the referendum on membership in 1994. In comparison to the situation at the time of the debate in the early 1960s, however, Sweden's economy had weakened considerably, and the country's dependence on securing favourable trading conditions with the European Union's internal market had grown. Among important groups of the political and business elites, there was a strong appreciation that international free trade was no longer a viable alternative to unrestricted access to European markets.

The accession negotiations that started in February 1993 and which drew to a close in March 1994, were held in parallel with the negotiations of Austria, Finland, and Norway. It was the candidate countries' wish to conclude the negotiations in record speed in order to participate in further reforms of the European Union. The swift negotiations were also made possible by the agreements on the European Union's internal market legislation (*acquis*), reached during the previous negotiations to set up the EEA.

In the case of Sweden, few policy issues were problematic, and in those cases (the alcohol monopoly, the sales of Swedish wet snuff, and adaptation to the European Union's agricultural regime) solutions in terms of temporary or permanent derogations were found. On more fundamental issues, regarding for instance the compatibility of Sweden's policy of neutrality with the European Union's burgeoning Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) or its future adoption of the euro, no negotiations were conducted as Sweden had accepted adjustments to existing frameworks and declarations in the future, thus pushing possible domestic dissention into the future (Michalski 2014).¹⁴⁹

For Swedish policymakers, the intergovernmental character of the CFSP was crucial as it meant that becoming an EU member involved no formal transfer of competences in the area of foreign and security policy. Common action was to be decided on the basis of unanimity and carried out through coordination among member states. This implied that Sweden could in essence keep its room for manoeuvre in the field of foreign and security policy—an argument also put forward in the public debate—and that due to the diverging strategic cultures of the EU member states, the prospects of a genuine European foreign policy were small.

Sweden became an EU member in January 1995 after a hotly contested referendum that pitted different groups in society who were for or against membership against each other, thereby pointing to a lack of horizontal and

¹⁴⁹ Dinkelspiel, *Sverige*; A. Michalski, "Sweden: Shedding Exceptionalism in the Face of Europeanization," in *The Member States in the European Union*, ed. S. Bulmer S. and C. Lequense, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2020).

vertical agreement on EU membership.¹⁵⁰ Most tellingly, the Social Democratic Party decided not to have a unified line, and the party subsequently divided into for and against EU membership. Apart from more particularistic issues or issues pertaining to public health, such as the ban on wet snuff and the alcohol monopoly, the debate concerned three more deep-seated matters touching on Swedish self-understanding: its status as militarily non-aligned; the ability to uphold its extensive welfare state; and its autonomy and self-determination in domestic and international affairs.

The November 1994 referendum produced a result with a slim margin in favour of EU membership, with 52.3 per cent of the population voting in favour and 46.8 per cent voting against. The turnout of 83.3 per cent was high but in line with the traditional strong participation rate in general elections.¹⁵¹ EU membership was, therefore, secured on the back of the two largest parties, the Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party, being able to convince enough of their supporter to vote in favour of Sweden joining the European Union (Figure 4.2).

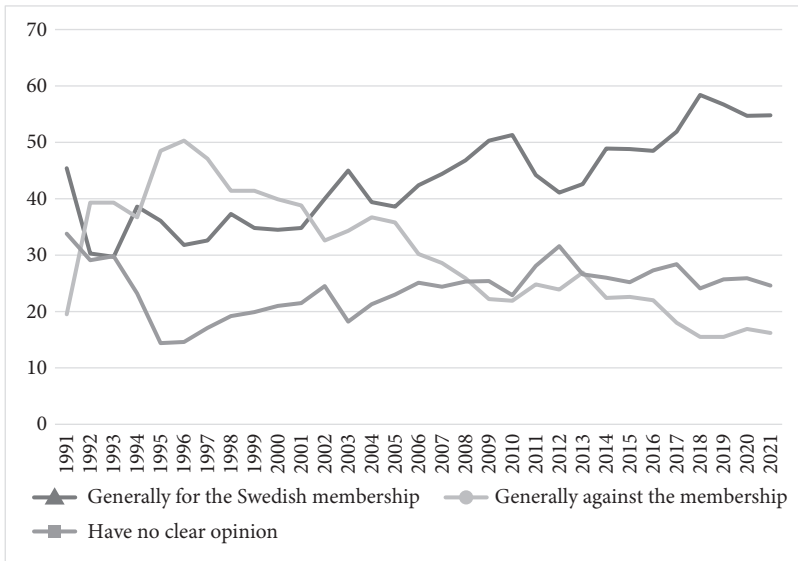


Figure 4.2 Support for membership in the European Union.

Note: Data from the SOM cumulative dataset 1991–2021 (Göteborgs Universitet 2023).

¹⁵⁰ J. Tallberg and G. von Sydow, “EU-medlemskapet och EU:s framtid. En ytterligare arena för demokratin,” in *Rösträttens århundrade*, ed. U. Holgersson and L. Wängnerud (Makadam Förlag, 2018); Michalski, “Shedding Exceptionalism.”

¹⁵¹ Michalski, “Shedding Exceptionalism.”

4.4.5 Europeanization of Sweden's Foreign Policy Roles: Adjustment and Change in a New Context

In its first decade as an EU member, Sweden's experience in the field of foreign and security policy was characterized by the need for adjustment and adaptation by the civil service and political elite. From the perspective of practical politics, it also included learning new ways of working and adjusting to more numerous arenas of action. The adjustment also affected Sweden's self-perception but in a slower and non-linear fashion.

This period of adaptation impacted on diplomats and the civil service at large, but in different ways, as some parts of the civil service adjusted with more ease than had been initially expected.¹⁵² Members of government, who as representatives of Sweden in EU institutions—chiefly the European Council and the Council of Ministers—also became deeply involved in EU policymaking in the search for compromise and alliances. A trend towards the centralization of power in the hands of the executive has been observed in all member states, including Sweden, as membership leads the prime minister and central government offices to take the lead in the national coordination of EU policy, often to the detriment of foreign ministries.¹⁵³

In their domestic role, however, the political elite, both in government and in opposition, maintained that Sweden was retaining its policy of neutrality and non-alignment despite its involvement in the EU foreign and security policy.¹⁵⁴ The image of Sweden's international role as non-aligned remained vivid among the public, and this explains why deeper integration in the area of foreign and security policy remained unpopular until the early 2000s. This was despite Sweden's EU membership becoming increasingly popular, with positive views of its membership outnumbering negative views as of 2005 (Berg and Bové 2016).

Generally, Sweden's elites have taken a pragmatic view on the necessary adaptations and changes that ensured its EU membership.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, the extent of the Europeanization that Swedish foreign policy went through, in terms of content and conduct, created a distance between the political elite and the perceptions held by the Swedish public, as well as

¹⁵² B. Jacobsson and G. Sundström, *Från hemvävd till invävd: europeiseringen av svensk förvaltning och politik* (Liber, 2006).

¹⁵³ K. M. Johansson and J. Tallberg, "Explaining Chief Executive Empowerment: EU Summitry and Domestic Institutional Change," *West European Politics*, 33, no. 2 (2010): 208–36.

¹⁵⁴ M. Strömviik, "Sverige och EU:s utrikes- och säkerhetspolitik: ett intensivt men hemligt förhållande?" in *Sverige i EU*, ed. K-M. Johansson (SNS förlag, 1999); J. Hallenberg, "Swedish Foreign and Security Policy," in *Sweden and the European Union Evaluated*, ed. L. Miles (Continuum, 2000).

¹⁵⁵ Michalski, "From Scepticism."

views within certain parties that, by tradition, were strongly wedded to non-alignment or active internationalism.¹⁵⁶

The Europeanization of Swedish foreign policy in the early years of EU membership concerned the integration of policymaking into the EU structures and new platforms to advance Swedish interests and objectives. However, it also highlighted the obligations imposed by the EU *acquis*, its political agenda, and the loyalty to other EU member states that nuanced Sweden's freedom of action. This raises the question of where the balance fell between losing autonomy and gaining in influence, and whether EU membership provided a means to advance Swedish interests.¹⁵⁷

In the area of foreign and security policy, the adaptation of the foreign service meant becoming an integral part of EU foreign policymaking by participating in the highly structured coordination of dossiers conceived in specialized bodies in Brussels. By partaking in EU foreign policy coordination, national civil servants, as well as government representatives, received access to a wealth of information and to the foreign services of EU member states.¹⁵⁸

It also offered opportunities to convince other EU member states and institutions of a specific course of action and the possibility of using the dominant position, and resources, of the European Union in regional and international organizations to forward certain policies. Conversely, it entailed the expectation that Sweden conform to established practices, such as EU member states voting in concert in the UNGA, a practice with which Sweden had begun to comply by 1991 after a decree by the then Moderate Party-led government under Bildt.¹⁵⁹

Although becoming an EU member implied quite considerable adjustment to the practices of devising and conducting foreign policy, governments and the foreign service found that in terms of concrete foreign policy, the direction of the European Union's foreign policy was close to Swedish interests. It concerned areas in which Sweden had prior ambitions, which it now could forward through the platforms provided by the European Union.¹⁶⁰

This was particularly significant in three areas. The first concerned the eastern enlargement of the European Union, where Sweden, together with the

¹⁵⁶ Strömrvik, "Sverige"; Hallenberg, "Swedish Foreign and Security Policy."

¹⁵⁷ D. Brommesson, "Normative Europeanization: The Case of Swedish Foreign Policy Reorientation," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45, no. 2 (2010): 224–44.

¹⁵⁸ A. J. K. Bailes, G. Herolf, and B. Sundelius, eds. *The Nordic Countries and the European Security and Defence Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁹ Strömrvik, "Sverige," 256–7.

¹⁶⁰ Tallberg and von Sydow, "EU-medlemskapet"; Hallenberg, "Swedish Foreign and Security Policy"; Michalski, "Shedding Exceptionalism"; Strömrvik, "Sverige."

other Nordic EU member states, promoted and achieved the inclusion of the three Baltic States alongside the frontrunners Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland in the first wave of accession in 2004. Eastern enlargement of the European Union was seen from the Swedish perspective as an all-important step towards peace and security in Europe, and inclusion of the Baltic States in the European security architecture consolidated security in northern Europe and around the Baltic Sea.

The second aim, closely related to the first, concerned the continued stabilization and democratization of the eastern neighbourhood after enlargement in 2004. Using the platform of the European Union, Sweden, together with Poland, put forward a plan to shore up support for the former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia by establishing an Eastern Partnership with the European Union in 2008.¹⁶¹ In a similar way, Sweden was instrumental in placing the wide-reaching challenges around the Baltic Sea onto the EU foreign policy agenda and promoted the Northern Dimension of the European Union originally proposed by Finland.¹⁶²

The third area concerned the strengthening of the European Union's CFSP, especially its security dimension, which was envisioned in the intergovernmental conference of 1996–7, resulting in the Amsterdam Treaty. The prospect of a stronger EU role in security and defence by, for instance, integrating the Western European Union (WEU) into the European Union, and allowing more decisions to be taken by qualified majority, was anathema to the Swedish political elites. Particularly on the left of the political centre, they resisted the development of the European Union as a security alliance and maintained that Sweden must stay militarily non-aligned. Nonetheless, the strengthening of the European Union's capacity in foreign and security policy opened a new platform for Swedish diplomats and an arena to realize important aspects of Sweden's European role, partly replacing the role of international activism exercised through the United Nations.

In the negotiations on the Amsterdam Treaty, Swedish diplomats achieved a number of objectives in this regard, slowing down, or at least modifying, the development of the CFSP, but also actively working to strengthen

¹⁶¹ A. Michalski, "The Eastern Partnership: Time for an Eastern Policy of the EU?" *European Policy Analysis*, 14 (2009): 1–12; E. Hedling and D. Brommesson, "Security through European Integration or Flexible Autonomy: Ambivalence in Sweden's Position on the Eastern Partnership?" *Global Affairs*, 3, no. 3 (2017): 237–50.

¹⁶² L. Miles and B. Sundelius. "EU Icing on a Baltic Cake': Swedish Policy towards the Baltic Sea and EU Northern Dimensions," in *Sweden and the European Union Evaluated*, ed. L. Miles (Continuum, 2000).

the European Union's peacekeeping abilities.¹⁶³ For instance, the European Union adopted the so-called Petersberg tasks, enhancing the European Union's capacity for peacebuilding based on a proposal by Finland and Sweden.¹⁶⁴ The European Union's engagement in peacebuilding was seen as entirely in line with Swedish non-alignment, not least because individual member states' participation in specific missions was decided on an ad-hoc basis. Sweden, together with like-minded member states, prevented proposals to introduce majority-voting in the CFSP, which was seen as incompatible with the policy of non-alignment and contrary to traditional foreign policy roles.

Finally, although the formal inclusion of the WEU into the EU Treaties was prevented, article J.7 stipulates that 'The Western European Union (WEU) is an integral part of the development of the Union . . . It supports the Union in framing the defence aspects of the common foreign and security policy'. On the other hand, the militarily non-aligned member states obtained a provision specifying that the CFSP 'shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain member states' (art. 42 in the TEU).¹⁶⁵ In the years following, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) became increasingly supportive of the European Security and Defence Policy's (ESDP) concept of battle groups and out-of-area missions.¹⁶⁶

With regard to the European Union's battle groups, the political and military elite saw them as a concrete means of realizing the European Union's peacekeeping ambition, included in the Petersberg tasks. They also provided an opportunity to further align military capabilities with Finland and the Baltic states, as well as with Norway, which also participated in the Baltic battlegroup.¹⁶⁷ The out-of-area missions of the European Union proved to an initially sceptical Social Democratic government that the European Union's military capabilities were not geared towards building a common defence, but rather served to sustain international peacekeeping missions under the

¹⁶³ L. Miles, "Sweden and the Intergovernmental Conference: Testing the 'Membership Diamond'" *Cooperation and Conflict*, 33, no. 4 (1998): 339–66.

¹⁶⁴ A. Holmberg, "Swedish Security Strategy in the Twenty-First Century: What Role for Human Security?" in *National, European and Human Security: From Co-Existence to Convergence*, ed. M. Kaldor, M. Martin, and N. Serra (Routledge, 2012).

¹⁶⁵ See also Miles, "Sweden and the Intergovernmental Conference," 357.

¹⁶⁶ F. Lee-Ohlsson, "Sweden and Development of the European Security and Defence Policy. A Bi-Directional Process of Europeanization," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 44, no. 2 (2009): 123–42.

¹⁶⁷ P. Rieker, "Europeanization of Nordic Security. The European Union and the Changing Security Identities of the Nordic States," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 39, no. 4 (2004): 369–92; Lee-Ohlsson, "Sweden and Development."

auspices of the United Nations or as otherwise accorded under international law.

The first mission, Concordia, under the ESDP, took European forces to Macedonia in 2003, taking over after NATO to supervise the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The European Union's Operation Artemis mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the same year, proved even more consequential for Swedish Armed Forces as Swedish military personnel participated alongside France on the invitation of the UN General Secretary.

These missions convinced then Foreign Minister Anna Lindh (1998–2003) of the legitimacy of EU peacekeeping, and, according to an official, she 'started to love the ESDP and Sweden became the most ESDP-friendly of countries.'¹⁶⁸ Lee-Ohlsson has argued that the ESDP's flexible approach to peacekeeping demonstrated that Sweden could be influential, even taking the lead (e.g., Artemis), while showing off its military capabilities, which had hitherto been doubted by other member states.¹⁶⁹ Above all, Sweden was able to associate EU missions with the United Nations, which was important for a number of Swedish political parties, not least the Social Democrats. The wars in the former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2001 further convinced the Swedish foreign policy establishment on both sides of the political spectrum that concerted European peacekeeping action was necessary and desirable.

Overall, Sweden's ability to exercise influence in the European Union during the first years of its membership was considered by representatives of the then governments as satisfactory. Holding the European Union's rotating presidency in 2001 and 2009 helped to show a rather sceptical public that Sweden's actions in the European Union mattered.¹⁷⁰ However, the challenge to Sweden's policy of neutrality and non-alignment persisted despite a declaratory shift from 'non-alignment' to the more precise 'military non-alignment'. Despite the intergovernmental character of the CFSP, Sweden, as an EU member, had entered commitments that would make it difficult not to come to the defence of other member states in the event of an attack. Moreover, EU membership strengthened Sweden's economic and political interdependence with other member states to a degree that its self-sufficiency could be questioned.¹⁷¹ On balance, Sweden

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Lee-Ohlsson, "Sweden and Development," 131.

¹⁶⁹ Lee-Ohlsson, "Sweden and Development."

¹⁷⁰ See, for instance, Hjelm-Wallén (1997), quoted in Hallenberg, "Swedish Foreign and Security Policy."

¹⁷¹ Strömviik, "Sverige."

took a position in the European Union on a par with other middle-sized member states, reflecting the dependence on its export-oriented economy to sustain a generous welfare state, but still wedded to the idea of an autonomous foreign policy as enshrined in established foreign policy roles.¹⁷²

4.5 Role Contestation: Between Autonomy and Integration

In this chapter, we have identified Sweden's four major foreign policy roles from the Second World War until 2007: the autonomous security seeker; the autonomous activist; and the hesitant European, all of which were eventually replaced by the integrationist European. The importance of the respective roles varied in Swedish foreign and security policy throughout the period, but they also complemented each other. The roles have been surrounded by different degrees of vertical and horizontal unity.

The role of the autonomous security seeker clearly dominated before, during and right after the Second World War. We have also seen how this role returned to the centre of Swedish foreign and security policy when the security environment deteriorated, for example, in the 1980s. Sweden's role as an autonomous security seeker has a long historical heritage, as seen in the first part of the chapter, and its flexibility and contribution to keeping Sweden outside the Second World War increased support for this role. The role as an autonomous security seeker was strengthened in the period after the Second World War because of the desire to stay out of great power conflict, but also because of the will to contribute to de-escalation of the ongoing tension between the great powers. In practice, this meant that Sweden explored the possibility of a Scandinavian defence union, but as soon as Denmark and Norway abandoned this idea the role was again manifested in the policy of neutrality and non-alignment.

Moving to the role of the autonomous activist, this role became an important role for Sweden from around 1960 and during the 1970s, but it is vital to point out that this role built on the continued importance of the role of the autonomous security seeker. The autonomous activist was defined as a complement to the role as an autonomous security seeker, with the intention of showing that an autonomous role should not be interpreted as a free-riding,

¹⁷² Tallberg and von Sydow, "EU-medlemskapet," 400.

passive position in the international system. Instead, the role made it possible to combine the policy of non-alignment with engagement for peace and development.

The role of hesitant European described Sweden's position vis-à-vis political and economic integration in Europe from the early 1950s to the end of the Cold War. For a long time, inclusion in the European integration project was seen as a threat to Swedish autonomy and positioning as a buffer zone between the great powers. The Social Democratic Party framed Swedish integration into the EC as a threat to its role as an autonomous security seeker and received support for this interpretation. Hence, a more active integrationist role was not seen as compatible with the role as an autonomous security seeker for as long as the Cold War continued.

With the end of the Cold War, however, Sweden's EU membership became a top priority. The European role changed, and Sweden became favourable towards active political and economic integration. Still, it was important to show that integration did not entail a complete loss of autonomy. The major role of integrationist European has been in place since the end of the Cold War, but has nevertheless been complemented from time to time with the autonomous security seeker role and the normative internationalist role. The dominance of the integrationist European role has made the role as an autonomous security seeker more challenging as integration in the European structures has deepened over time. The role as an autonomous activist was gradually replaced by a role as a normative internationalist, which made it more reconcilable with the European role. Some parts of the normative internationalist role have been possible to play within the European arena emphasizing the importance of contributing to democratization and the spread of human rights in the former Eastern Europe.

Given our analytical categories of autonomy and integration, [Table 4.1](#) is used to categorize the empirical foreign policy roles used by Sweden from the Second World War to 2007.

[Table 4.1](#) shows how the three roles (the autonomous security seeker, the autonomous activist and the hesitant European) are categorized similarly; they score rather low on the integration axis and high on the autonomy axis. Role strain between the autonomous security seeker and the autonomous activist could, therefore, be avoided since these roles are related to the underlying dimensions of autonomy and integration in a similar way. Role strain between the autonomous security seeker and the autonomous activist on the one hand, and the role as a hesitant European on the other, was, to a large extent, possible to avoid for the same reasons. Here, the role of the hesitant European was a subordinate role, which for a long time made a more

Table 4.1 Role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy 1945–2007

Integration \ Autonomy	Low	High
Low		The integrationist European
High	The autonomous security seeker The autonomous activist The hesitant European	

Note: The identified role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy from World War II to 2007.

active involvement in the European integration process impossible. But the role of the hesitant European still displayed lower levels of autonomy, compared to the other two roles, not least because of an orientation towards trade agreements within western Europe.

When the Cold War ended, the hesitant European role started to transform towards the integrationist European role and the strain became more obvious. It was difficult from time to time to combine the roles of autonomous security seeker with integrationist European. This role strain never really settled during the period covered in this chapter, but we see how Sweden started to develop an integrationist role, not least with EU membership in 1995. The role as an autonomous activist was simultaneously and slowly transforming into a role as a normative internationalist, which made it possible to combine with the evolving role as an integrationist European.

In sum, the analysis reveals that Sweden's master role during the time period studied here is the role as an autonomous security seeker, although all these major roles are important to fully understand how Sweden has tried to fulfil its grand strategy. The roles of the autonomous activist and the hesitant European are complementary roles to the role as an autonomous security seeker in times of *détente* or after the end of the Cold War. In times of a colder international climate, Sweden returns to its underlying role as the autonomous security seeker.

As theorized in [Chapter 3](#), role change is believed to be initiated by some sort of external crises. The role as an autonomous security seeker was already institutionalized before the Second World War. With an advantageous outcome for Sweden after the war, the role also remained dominant when the Cold War had replaced the sense of crisis arising from the war. Not long after the Second World War, an increasing pressure on the West to acknowledge the political and economic rights of the Third World started to grow. The decolonization movement had the strength to re-model North–South relationships. The role as an autonomous activist was both a way to meet that pressure from the South, but also to lower the moral pressure associated with the role as an autonomous security seeker.

Once the Cold War was cemented, the moral cost of staying in the middle between the East and the West increased. The Soviet Union and the East represented an oppressive political system with little interest in supporting liberal human rights. Given Sweden's need to support its own industry and opportunities to access European export markets, the orientation towards Europe developed, expressed in the role as a hesitant European. There was an interest in approaching Europe since it entailed an important market for Sweden and doing so made it easier to uphold the economic strength necessary for the Swedish welfare state and a significant defence capability. The end of the Cold War and a severe economic crisis in Sweden cleared the path for Swedish EU membership. The role as a hesitant European could slowly transform into the role of an integrationist European (see [Chapter 5](#)). Hence, the foreign policy roles played by Sweden since the Second World War have been a response to international changes, even though the sense of crisis has varied.

We also know that domestic elites have to balance beliefs about external threats and the necessity of facing strategic imperatives with domestic expectations and attachment to the national self-image. The role as autonomous security seeker was most often formulated in strong vertical and horizontal unity, which was based on positive historical experiences that had shaped the self-image. Strong vertical unity made it difficult to question the role conception, but horizontal unity was occasionally challenged when autonomy was framed as contributing to a passive position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and human rights abuses. Still, horizontal disunity happened only on rare occasions and did not alter the sense of an overarching consensus. The action strategy behind Sweden's role as an autonomous security seeker therefore falls into the category of domestically driven consensual role change.

The complementary role as an autonomous activist made it possible for dominant parts of the elite to challenge the occasional critique of the

role as an autonomous security seeker. Significant public support for the autonomous activist role was secured through educational programmes, as well as from active support from the student movement. Overall, national unity, both vertical and horizontal, were strong when it came to the more 'positive' parts of the activist foreign policy, such as supporting the United Nations and providing a general programme for foreign aid.

The ideas that Sweden should be an active state with regard to peace-keeping operations, take its own initiatives at different levels in the United Nations, and provide support to poor parts of the world were not in dispute between the political parties and had strong public support. But there were also some parts of the autonomous activist role that were developed despite a certain horizontal disunity. Swedish disapproval of other states and more harsh versions of critique against other countries were met with horizontal disunity. For example, the Moderate Party criticized the Social Democratic government for overemphasizing its critique of the United States, and thereby jeopardizing the relationship. Nevertheless, the foreign policy instrument of using critique of other states was integrated into the Swedish foreign-policy repertoire and was also used when new governments of a liberal-right leaning entered the government in the latter part of the 1970s.

Support for liberation movements was another example of horizontal disunity and was a reason for why the role as an autonomous activist was not fully embraced by the whole political spectrum. The liberal-right parties were concerned that Swedish support for some of the socialist liberation movements was, in fact, direct support for dictators and anti-democratic movements. The Social Democratic Party more fully embraced all parts of the activist role. Although the action strategy behind Sweden's foreign policy reorientation towards an activist foreign policy role in general falls into the category of domestically driven consensual role change, we can see how steps towards the more controversial elements associated with this role were characterized by a weaker 'muddle-through' role enactment.

Moving to the role of the hesitant European, the chapter has revealed examples of horizontal and vertical dissonance. The Moderate Party and Liberal Party held more positive views on the ability of Sweden to integrate with the emerging political and economic structures in Europe. The Social Democratic resistance against membership of EEC/EC was accepted by the parties to the right of the political centre but not fully embraced. The role of the hesitant European, up until the early 1990s, therefore displays a form of 'muddle-through' strategy, premised on the idea that endangering the credibility of non-alignment was unthinkable, while at the same time taking steps to ensure access to vital export markets.

While the role of the hesitant European began to morph into the role as an integrationist European at the end of the Cold War, it did so in a rather hesitant way, hampered by quite high degrees of both vertical and horizontal disunity regarding EU membership. Nevertheless, because of a number of external and internal developments, chiefly the geopolitical shift in Europe and an economic crisis in Sweden, the political elite decided to pursue full integration as an EU member.

The accession negotiations were extremely swift and demonstrated the good fit between Sweden's socio-economic development and status as a liberal democracy and the European Union's *acquis*. While the referendum campaign on EU membership revealed disunity within the elite and a strong division within several parties, the unity in favour of membership within the leaderships of the two major parties—the Social Democrat Party and the Moderate Party—made it possible to convince enough voters and to move Sweden towards the role of an integrationist European. This clearly reveals that EU membership was essentially an elite-driven process of role change, which probably explains the limited enthusiasm and hesitancy with which Sweden moved towards Europe. With time, however, political and public support for EU membership grew, and the role of an integrationist European has become anchored in political culture and public awareness.

As we discuss in [Chapter 5](#), the signs of elite-imposed role change have been replaced by a domestically driven, consensual role change, although acceptance of the European Union's foreign and security capacities took longer to be fully accepted by parts of the political elite. As the security situation in Europe deteriorated and the situation in the world became more ominous, the quest for security also returned to the political agenda, but initially it was an open question as to whether the autonomous security-seeking role or the integrationist role would become the master role.

5

Shaping Swedish Grand Strategy in a New Era

A Normative European Aligned with NATO

In 2007, Sweden, for the first time, issued a statement of solidarity signalling its intention to not remain passive if a European Union (EU) member state or Nordic neighbour was hit by war or disaster. The expectation, albeit never fully explicitly formulated, was that its Nordic and European neighbours would respond in kind in the event that Sweden needed rescue. The solidarity clause was introduced into EU treaties around the time of Sweden's accession in 1995, when the Union was in the midst of a process of fundamental reform to deepen its institutional structures, expand the scope of its competences, and make its decision-making more effective to prepare for the enlargement to include ten countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Malta, and Cyprus (see [Chapter 4](#)). The treaty reform process spanned a period of almost twenty years, starting in 1991 and concluding in 2009 with the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, which institutionalized solidarity in the area of security among member states in times of crisis. The Swedish solidarity statement was, therefore, in line with what was expected of a good EU member.¹

Sweden's post-neutral position evolved gradually during the 1990s and early 2000s after the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless, despite the development of the post-neutral position, Sweden continued to refer to its militarily non-aligned position, chiefly expressed in the annual foreign policy declarations in 2007 and 2008, and again between 2015 and 2022. Retention of the policy of non-alignment received considerable popular (vertical) support. Between 2007 and 2012, the share of the population who wanted to maintain the policy of non-alignment remained more or less constant, with almost twice as much support for non-alignment (around 40 per cent) compared to

¹ Swedish Government, *Säkerhet i samverkan: Försvarsberedningens omvärldsanalys*, Ds 2007:46 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2007), 14; J. Westberg, "Säkerhet utan alliansfrihet. Svenska alliansstrategiers teori och praktik," *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 118, no. 4 (2016): 434.

those who wanted to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (around 20 per cent).² The share of Swedish citizens supporting a NATO membership grew to around 30–40 per cent between 2013 and 2023 and was equal to the share who dismissed the idea of a NATO membership.³ The opinion then remained more or less constant until early 2022, which marked the beginning of a dramatic period for European security, when the support for NATO membership increased dramatically.

This chapter analyses the development of Sweden's foreign policy roles as they manifested themselves in the period between 2008 and 2023. These roles developed against the dark background of a worsening security climate.⁴ Mounting tension in great power relations, the erosion of multilateral cooperation, and increasing support for populist parties around the world clouded the horizon for Sweden and many other small liberal states. Given Sweden's geographical proximity to Russia, increasing Russian assertiveness was awarded the highest consideration by the Swedish political and military elite, even though developments in China and the United States were not in any way neglected.

In a context of growing global turbulence, and with several crises besetting the European integration process, Sweden rediscovered some aspects of its Cold War role of active internationalism by expressing normative concerns regarding specific issues, for example, the wellbeing of women and children. At the same time, it transformed its autonomous security seeking role into a role as an integrated security provider contributing to multilateral security cooperation.⁵

Despite of a drastically downsized territorial defence, Sweden began to build small standing reaction forces, ready to be deployed around the world. Historian Wilhelm Agrell notes that Sweden's security was believed to be strengthened by taking part in international missions in Afghanistan.⁶ A further reason for developing small reaction forces was the desire to be seen as a trustworthy partner for major Western countries, with an ability to contribute at short notice to demanding out-of-area missions. Participation in different

² K. Ydén, K. Berndtsson, and M. Petersson, "Sweden and the Issue of NATO Membership: Exploring a Public Opinion Paradox," *Defence Studies*, 19, no. 1 (2019): 1–18.

³ U. Bjereld and H. Oscarsson, "Jordskred i svensk Nato-opinion efter Rysslands invasion av Ukraina," in *Ovisshetens tid*, ed. U. Andersson, P. Öhberg, A. Carlander, J. Martinsson, and N. Theorin (Göteborgs Universitet, 2023).

⁴ H. Edström, D. Gyllensporre, and J. Westberg, *Military Strategy of Small States: Responding to External Shocks of the 21st Century* (Routledge, 2018).

⁵ S. Lundqvist, "A Convincing Finnish Move: Implications for State Identity of Persuading Sweden to Jointly Bid for NATO Membership," *Studia Europejskie*, 26, no. 4 (2022): 73–110.

⁶ W. Agrell, *Ett krig här och nu. Sveriges väg till väpnad konflikt i Afghanistan* (Atlantis, 2013).

international missions illustrated the will to play a role both as a normative internationalist and as a security provider.

Still, significant developments in Sweden's neighbourhood drew the attention of Swedish policymakers. In his so-called Munich speech in 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed disappointment with NATO's enlargement and the prospects of the admission of additional NATO members, especially from among the former members of the Warsaw Pact. The Western powers and NATO took the position that all states have the right to independently decide their security policy and saw Russia's critique of the West as a poorly camouflaged attempt to aspire, once again, to the role of a great power with geopolitical ambitions.

Russia's increasing assertiveness became manifest in political and military support for the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, leading to the Russo–Georgian war in August 2008. This conflict became an indication of Russia's reluctance to let any of the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus lean towards the West and of its will to tie all bordering regions to its own sphere of influence.⁷

Further Russian criticism of a West-leaning policy was directed towards Ukraine. In the early 2010s, the European Union had been negotiating association agreements with Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia. At the Eastern Partnership meeting in 2013, Russia 'launched an aggressive effort' to stop these countries from signing a free trade agreement, the so-called Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, with the European Union.⁸ This led to the unfolding of a series of dramatic events that were set off by the refusal of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich to sign an association agreement with the European Union.

This decision sparked public uprisings—Euromaidan—in the winter of 2013/2014, and the ousting of the president, who subsequently fled the country to safety in Russia. However, the strong show of public support in Ukraine for closer relations with the European Union provoked Putin into annexing the Crimean Peninsula and staging a pro-Russian uprising in the secessionist regions of Luhansk and Donetsk. The annexation of Crimea and de facto occupation of parts of the eastern regions of Ukraine since 2014 brought relations between the European Union and Russia to a new low. The European Union strongly condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine and imposed

⁷ Swedish Institute of International Affairs, *Konflikten i Georgien—fördjupning* (Landguiden, 2022); Swedish Institute of International Affairs, *Konflikten i Ukraina—fördjupning* (Landguiden, 2024).

⁸ C. Bildt, "Russia, EU and Eastern Partnership," *Riga Papers* (European Council of Foreign Relations, 2015), 7, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russia_eu_and_eastern_partnership3029/.

sanctions on Russia and several Russian citizens in March 2014. The European Union's Strategic Partnership with Russia was immediately suspended. As discussed later in the chapter, Sweden showed an increasing willingness to play the role of an integrationist European with regard to the European Union's eastern neighbours.

Sweden adjusted to the deteriorating security situation at a rather slow pace. However, in the Defence Bill adopted by the Swedish parliament in June 2015, the new and degraded security situation was finally accepted by the political elite.⁹ Relatedly, the previously strong public support for non-alignment started to decline.¹⁰

With Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Sweden and the rest of Europe was appalled by the use of brute force on European soil once again. As a result, Sweden applied for NATO membership in May 2022. Swedish public opinion embraced the rapid change of policy and supported the application, with more than 60 per cent in favour of NATO membership and just over 10 per cent in favour of continued non-alignment. This shift in public opinion was the largest recorded in Swedish opinion research.¹¹

The following sections describe Sweden's security providing role in the early 2000s, a role that gradually transformed into an integrated security seeking role through NATO application in 2022. We then give an account of the role as a normative internationalist, which was important during the start of the time period investigated and which was revived around 2014. We also elaborate on Sweden's European role, which at times was consistent with its role as a normative internationalist, but which later developed in line with the role as an integrationist European. In the conclusion, we return to the balancing of the different foreign policy roles, when they have been consistent with each other, when they have conflicted, and when a certain role has taken position as a master role.

5.1 An Integrated Security Seeker

With President Putin's speech at the Munich conference in 2007, Sweden and others could observe one of the first explicit signs of a more assertive Russia. After almost two decades of *détente* in the Swedish neighbourhood, Sweden and other European states gradually started to reorient and build up

⁹ Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitisk inriktning – Sveriges försvar 2016–2020* (Prop. 1014715: 109) (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015).

¹⁰ Bjereld and Oscarsson, "Jordskred i svensk Nato-opinion."

¹¹ Bjereld and Oscarsson, "Jordskred i svensk Nato-opinion."

the capacities necessary to face a colder security environment. The objective of this process, ‘to build security together with others’, had already been established during the years when Swedish security policy was dominated by building security in the far abroad, through international peacekeeping and peace-enforcing missions. Chapter 4 discusses how Swedish security policy turned increasingly international at the beginning of the 1990s. Starting with the peace-enforcing missions in the Balkans in the mid-1990s, Sweden began to contribute to more high-risk military missions abroad.

Initially based on the conviction that there were no military threats in the Swedish neighbourhood, Swedish defence policy was transformed. This change included the dismantlement of the existing territorial and civil defence and the abolition of conscription in 2009; the military process took place without any additional funding. In practice, the transformation was handled by shutting down military units and employing fewer staff.¹² Sweden’s military expenditure diminished from 2.6 per cent of the Gross National Product (GNP) at the end of the Cold War to 1.6 per cent in the mid-2000s.¹³

The transformation of the Swedish military services took place in relative political unity, both vertically and horizontally. All the political parties were interested in minimizing the funding of Sweden’s armed forces in order to use the resources for alternative priorities, and public opinion was mostly uninterested.¹⁴ Several studies indicate that the transformation of Sweden’s defence had severe negative consequences for the armed forces’ capacity to protect Sweden in the case of an attack.¹⁵ In the aftermath of the deterioration of the international situation and an increase in Russian aggression, Sweden’s Commander-in-Chief famously said in an interview that Sweden would not be able to defend itself for longer than seven days.¹⁶ This statement was a clear signal to the political elite of the actual consequences of the military transformation that had taken place.

However, Sweden simultaneously raised its ambitions within other areas of the military. With the aim of strengthening Swedish security through contributions to missions far abroad, but also of becoming a trusted security partner that could contribute to out-of-areas missions led by major partners,

¹² M. Britz and J. Westberg, “Sveriges återtag till närområdet,” *Internasjonal Politikk*, 73, no. 3 (2015): 423–31; Westberg, “Säkerhet utan alliansfrihet.”

¹³ U. Möller and U. Bjereld, “From Nordic Neutrals to Post-Neutral Europeans: Differences in Finnish and Swedish Policy Transformation,” *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45, no. 4 (2010): 375.

¹⁴ A. Holmberg, “Swedish Security Strategy in the Twenty-First Century: What Role for Human Security?” in *National, European and Human Security: From Co-Existence to Convergence*, ed. M. Kaldor, M. Martin, and N. Serra (Routledge, 2012), 115.

¹⁵ W. Agrell, *Fredens illusioner. Det nationella försvarets nedgång och fall 1988–2009* (Atlantis, 2010), 243–5.

¹⁶ M. Holmström, 2012, 30 December, “Försvar med tidsgräns,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, <https://www.svd.se/a/b159e181-3974-35b4-a472-f279cafcd159/forsvar-med-tidsgrans>.

a new special forces concept was developed from the beginning of the 1990s, and this became more publicly known from the 2000s onwards. This concept was especially important to contribute to an image of Sweden as a country providing high-quality contributions to joint missions around the world.¹⁷ According to a leading Swedish politician, it was important for Sweden to 'show that we were reliable in practice' (SWEBE1).

Having been a strong part of the United Nation's (UN) blue beret missions with peacekeeping mandates during the Cold War, Sweden was now participating in peace-enforcing missions with high stakes and offensive military tasks. This included Swedish forces being involved in combat—a very different kind of international mission compared to the role of Swedish UN soldiers in Cyprus during the Cold War, who were deployed in patrolling a more or less fixed border. Although Nordbat 2 (1993–1995), the Swedish-led contribution to United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, was based on conscripted soldiers, thereby showing how Swedish forces took significant responsibility in a peace-enforcing mission in a highly hostile environment,¹⁸ it was the EU-led mission Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2003) that became the true eye-opener for many Swedes. In Artemis, Swedish special forces operatives fought alongside soldiers from the French green berets in intense combat.¹⁹

Such a mission stood in strong contrast to a Swedish self-image based on peace, disarmament, and mediation efforts. Moreover, twenty years of active involvement in Afghanistan changed Swedish military doctrine profoundly. The participation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, with the most significant troop contributions being deployed from 2002 to 2014, became the central mission for the Swedish armed forces, and consequently the concept of smaller rapid reaction forces became fully integrated into Swedish military doctrine.²⁰ The role as an autonomous security *seeker* had tilted towards the role of a security *provider* integrated into multilateral security cooperation centred around out-of-area-missions.

¹⁷ G. Eriksson and U. Pettersson, eds. *Special Operations from a Small State Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁸ T. Ingesson, "The Politics of Combat. The Political and Strategic Impact of Tactical-Level Subcultures, 1939–1995" (PhD diss., Lund University, 2016).

¹⁹ R. C. Hendrickson, J. R. Strand, and K. L. Raney, "Operation Artemis and Javier Solana: EU Prospects for a Stronger Common Foreign and Security Policy," *Canadian Military Journal*, 8, no. 1 (2007): 35–42.

²⁰ M. Johnsson, "Strategic Colonels: The Discretion of Swedish Force Commanders in Afghanistan 2006–2013" (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2017). Sweden did, however, not succeed in reaching the intended number of soldiers withing these standing forces. The concept of rapid reaction forces was therefore not fully implemented in practical terms; see also Riksrevisionen, *Försvarmaktens förmåga till uthålliga insatser*, RIR 2013:22 (Riksrevisionen, 2013).

5.1.1 A Changing World View

Starting around 2007, with Putin's Munich speech and signs of a more aggressive Russia, things were about to change. In that year, the Swedish Defence Commission, a parliamentary working group with representatives from all parties, issued its final report before the decision on the defence bill for the years to come. This report was one of the first clear public sign of a change in perceptions of the threat to Swedish security. The Defence Commission argued in broad unity that the litmus test of Russia's choice of security path would be how it behaved towards former members of the Soviet Union over the coming years.²¹ Not long after, Russia put heavy pressure on Georgia, leading to the Russo–Georgian war.

The themes of the Defence Commission reports constitute illustrative snapshots of the changing world view of the Swedish foreign and security policy elite. Final reports are published approximately every four to five years and are preceded by less extensive reports published within more limited areas. Table 5.1 presents the titles of these different Defence Commission reports—titles that are indicative of the worldview and principal direction of the proposals offered by the commission.

In the 1990s, the Defence Commission was formed with the aim of coordinating defence policy and offering input into government. The commission included members from both the governing and opposition parties and resulted in agreement across the political spectrum. Hence, the task of the Defence Commission was to coordinate the reduction of Swedish military and civil defence.

The words 'development and renewal' in the title of one of the 1995 reports should therefore be understood as input recommending a downsized defence. This was one of the recurring themes throughout the 1990s and 2000s. A second theme was that of a changing and more interconnected globalized world in which there is less direct threat against Sweden and defence can be 'reshaped'. A further shift appeared in 2001 with the Al-Qaida attack against the United States. At this point the threat was understood in terms of 'cross-border vulnerability' (2001), and while the neighbourhood was seen as safer (2003), the world was perceived as more unstable. This unstable world motivated Swedish involvement in out-of-area missions, building 'security in cooperation' (2007), with smaller deployable forces ready to be used in combat (2008). These expressions of a worldview based on an interconnected

²¹ Swedish Government, *Säkerhet i samverkan: Försvarsberedningens omvärldsanalys*, Ds 2007:46 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2007), 36.

Table 5.1 Swedish Defence Commission

Year	Title of the Report
1995	Sweden in Europe and the World (Sverige i Europa och världen)
1995	The Evolution and Renewal of Sweden's Total Defence (Totalförsvarets utveckling och förnyelse)
1996	Swedish Security Policy in a Changing World (Omvärldsförändringar och svensk säkerhetspolitik)
1998	Swedish Security Policy in the Light of New International Conditions (Svensk säkerhetspolitik i ny omvärldsbelysning)
1999	Altered World—Redesigned Defence (Förändrad omvärld—omdanat försvar)
1999	European Security—Swedish Defence (Europas säkerhet—Sveriges försvar)
2001	Cross-Border Vulnerability—Joint Security (Gränsöverskridande sårbarhet—gemensam säkerhet)
2003	More Secure Neighbourhood—Uncertain World (Säkrare grannskap—osäker värld)
2004	Defence for a New Era (Försvar för en ny tid)
2007	Security in Cooperation (Säkerhet i samverkan)
2008	Defence in Operation (Försvar i användning)
2013	At a Crossroads in a Globalised World (Vägval i en globaliserad värld)
2014	The Defence of Sweden—A Stronger Defence for Uncertain Times (Försvaret av Sverige—Starkare försvar för en osäker tid)
2017	Resistance (Motståndskraft)
2019	Defensive Capability (Värnkraft)
2023	A Serious Time (Allvarstid)

Note: Titles of reports from the Swedish Defence Commission 1995–2023 (our translation the original Swedish title within parenthesis).

world and cross-border vulnerability were shared across the political spectrum, which formed a high degree of horizontal unity within the elite. At the same time there was no strong public interest in these issues and nor was there vertical contestation.²²

Although the report from 2007 included discussion of the litmus test of Russian intentions, acknowledgement of this did not lead to a clear reorientation of defence policy. Sweden continued to build security in Afghanistan and paid little attention to territorial defence, as illustrated by the abolition of conscription in 2009. The decision to abolish conscription was taken by a slim centre-right majority. Even if the Social Democrats did vote against abolition, it is fair to say that there had been cross-party unity on the downsizing of territorial defence and, therefore, also on the low number of conscripts being called to serve.

²² SOM-Institute. *Svenska trender 1986–2023* (University of Gothenburg, SOM-Institute, 2024), 51.

While the Russo–Georgian war did not result in an immediate reorientation towards a strengthened national defence (as seen in the Defence Commission’s reports), such a change would instead emerge a few years later. The tide changed with Russia’s and China’s recourse to more confrontational security policies. In 2014, more clear signs appeared of a changed worldview with the recognition of a more hostile world and neighbourhood, and the need for a clear prioritization of national defence was acknowledged. The reports that follow identify an increasingly hostile environment, with a focus on Swedish capacity to resist and defend threats directed against Swedish territory. This is also a recurring theme in our interviews with members of the Swedish foreign policy elite; politicians and diplomats recognized the weakening of the rules-based international order around 2014 as a key change in the international context (SWEB3, SWEB4, SWEM1, SWEM2, SWEE1, SWEE2 2022). These developments eventually changed the Swedish foreign policy elite’s understanding of the nature of the international order from stable to confrontational.²³

From a closer geographical perspective, the major change for Sweden came after ‘little green men’ (Russian soldiers without Russian military insignia) appeared in Crimea on 27 February 2014, and with them Russia’s annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula. As a result, Sweden re-activated conscription and started planning for a modern civil defence, deciding on an expansion of the armed forces through the reintroduction of territorial defence. Sweden also started to cooperate more closely on an operational level with different partners, not least with Finland and the United States.

During the same time period, tension levels in Sweden’s neighbourhood started to rise even more. This included observations of potential violations of Swedish territorial waters by a foreign power(s), confrontational behaviour in the airspace over the Baltic Sea, and also reports of higher levels of espionage in Sweden. As a result, Swedish security policy gradually refocused and defence of Swedish territory once again became the top priority. Military spending increased, various types of bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the area of defence gained momentum, and a more lively discussion on what Sweden’s future security policy should look like began.²⁴ This discussion, both within the elite and among the public, started to show signs of contestation of the remaining parts of the autonomous security-seeking

²³ D. Brommesson, A-M. Ekengren, and A. Michalski, “From Variation to Convergence in Turbulent Times—Foreign and Security Policy Choices among the Nordics 2014–2023,” *European Security*, 33, no. 1 (2024): 21–43.

²⁴ D. Brommesson, “Non-Allied States in a Changing Europe: Sweden and its Bilateral Relationship with Finland in a New Security Context,” *NUPI Policy Brief 31/2016* (Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI), 2016).

role, with increasing polarization between those who did and did not favour membership in NATO.

5.1.2 Building Security with Others

With a more challenging security environment, a natural step for Sweden was to use the by then established bilateral and multilateral relationships formed in cooperation around out-of-area missions to build a new stronger national defence in cooperation with partners.²⁵ Essentially, although the threat was rising to levels not seen for decades, Sweden did not have enough resources for a quick increase in national defence capabilities. At the same time, Sweden was still a non-aligned country. According to the Social Democrat–Green Party coalition government, ‘non-participation in military alliances serves us well, and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe. It requires an active, broad and responsible foreign and security policy combined with [...] credible national defence capabilities.’²⁶

Alongside a build-up of national defence capabilities, we can observe two fundamental principled beliefs that form the basis for Swedish foreign and security policy in this new hostile world. First, we see the need to cooperate with others, taking steps towards a role as an integrated security seeker. Swedish security could not be built purely on national merits but required instead cooperation with others. Second, we perceive the recognition of Swedish non-alignment and the importance of maintaining a policy of non-alignment in order to not destabilize the security environment any further, predicated on the maintenance of parts of the autonomous security seeking role.

While there was broad consensus around the first belief, support for maintaining a policy of non-alignment received decreasing support from the centre-right parties during the 2010s. Still, while principally in favour of NATO membership, the Moderate Party (the major party of the opposition) shaped a policy stating that changes to the Swedish policy of non-alignment would not be possible unless there was unity among the major parties (i.e., the Social Democrats and Moderates) and strong support among the public.²⁷ NATO membership was therefore blocked until the Social Democrats

²⁵ K. Engelbrekt, A. Holmberg, and J. Ångström, *Svensk säkerhetspolitik i Europa och världen* (Norstedts Juridik AB, 2015).

²⁶ M. Wallström, 2016, 24 February, *Statement on Foreign Policy 2016*, Riksdagen.

²⁷ SVT, 2015, 10 November, “NATO – Så tycker partierna,” <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/nato-sa-tycker-partierna>.

changed their stance. As a consequence, the policy of non-alignment also received (at least passive) support from the two major parties.

Instead of NATO membership, Sweden began to build a web of bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral defence agreements, but also initiated different forms of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), Letters of Intent (LoI), or Statements of Intent (SoI). These agreements displayed Sweden's willingness to build security with others, but to do so without NATO membership (i.e., the government thought that this would potentially risk destabilization in Sweden's neighbourhood). This doctrine was named after Minister of Defence Peter Hultqvist (2014–2022), and is accordingly known as the Hultqvist doctrine.²⁸

The government argued that this web of defence agreements was of 'great importance for the security and stability in our close neighbourhood and therefore also for Sweden. It is vital that Sweden can receive and give military and civilian support. In that way, a real possibility to act together and coordinate in the event of a crisis of war is created.'²⁹ The importance of cooperation and stability is a constant recurrence in the report sent from the Government to Parliament in 2020, as is the more causal belief that cooperation and stability are promoted by the ability to receive and give support (Swedish Government 2020).

The same report lists around twenty different bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral forms of defence cooperation. Nordic cooperation is accorded great significance, both within Nordic institutions like the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF), but also with different Nordic neighbours bilaterally or trilaterally (see below for more on the Nordic dimension). Other prominent forms of cooperation concerned agreements with the United States, the United Kingdom (UK), and France (SWEBE1). [Chapter 4](#) explains how covert defence cooperation with the United States was vital for Swedish security during the Cold War. History repeated itself, with a highly prominent role given to US–Swedish cooperation throughout the 2010s and 2020s.

The big difference was that this cooperation was public rather than hidden. Cooperation with the United States was ambitious, and an SoI from 2016 lists five key areas: interoperability; education and exercises; procurement; research and development; and multilateral missions. This cooperation with the United States took concrete forms, with extensive participation in joint or

²⁸ A. Wieslander, "'The Hultqvist doctrine'—Swedish Security and Defence Policy after the Russian Annexation of Crimea," *Defence Studies*, 22, no. 1 (2022): 35–59.

²⁹ Swedish Government, *Regeringens skrivelse 2020/21:56. Internationella försvarssamarbeten* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020), 3 (author's translation SWEBE1).

national air force, army, and navy exercises.³⁰ In 2020, the Swedish government highlighted the need for further steps in cooperation with the United States through adjustments to infrastructure and operative planning. Such steps followed on from the Swedish application to join NATO in 2022.

As regards the United Kingdom, Swedish–British cooperation can also be described as extensive.³¹ A 2014 SoI initiated cooperation, which was extended with the signing of an appendix in 2016 that included a programme involving: a wide range of exercises; agreement on joint doctrines; participation in joint international missions; research and development; and strengthened bilateral cooperation within the defence industry.³² Other vital parts of cooperation between Sweden and the United Kingdom highlighted by the government included Swedish active participation in the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), which was a framework for a rapid reaction force with members from Northern Europe, and in the Northern Group, a forum for defence policy, also with members from Northern Europe.

Cooperation with France included joint participation in international missions, for example, Task Force Takuba in Mali in 2020 and 2021, and EU operations in Sahel and in the Central African Republic. Other initiatives included cooperation within defence procurement and Swedish participation in the French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2).³³ Other important bilateral relations mentioned by the government report in 2020 were cooperation with Germany, including the German initiative Framework Nation Concept, and with Poland, including exchanges of experience and joint exercises.³⁴

In the multilateral arena, cooperation within the European Union and with NATO stood out. Within the European Union this was based on the aforementioned solidarity clause and included Swedish participation in a wide range of different forms of cooperation, such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Agency (EDA), Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), European Peace Facility (EPF), the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP), and the European Defence Fund (EDF) (see also [Section 5.3](#)). Within NATO, Sweden was described as a 'gold-card partner', with the status of an Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP) agreed at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014. Sweden started to

³⁰ Swedish Government, *Regeringens skrivelse*, 15.

³¹ J. E. Møller and M. Petersson, 'Sweden, Finland, and the Defence of the Nordic–Baltic Region—Ways of British Leadership,' in *The United Kingdom's Defence After Brexit. Britain's Alliances, Coalitions, and Partnerships*, ed R. Johnson and J. H. Matlary (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

³² Swedish Government, *Regeringens skrivelse*, 11.

³³ Swedish Government, *Regeringens skrivelse*, 9–10.

³⁴ Swedish Government, *Regeringens skrivelse*, 10–11, 13–14.

cooperate with NATO in all possible ways, except for full membership and article five with its mutual defence obligations. Sweden participated in NATO exercises, adjusted Swedish standards to build interoperability with NATO forces, and shared information.³⁵

These examples of defence and security cooperation highlighted the Swedish response to a deteriorating security situation after 2014. For the social democratic government the strategy was clear: Sweden should pursue as deep integration into Western forms of security cooperation as possible without sacrificing the ultimate expression of autonomy, that is, the decision as to when one should go to war. The Swedish government was thereby hoping to build security while maintaining autonomy, as well as stability in its neighbourhood. [Section 5.1.4](#) explains how the decision to stay out of NATO was increasingly contested horizontally by minor parties at the centre of the political spectrum, and vertically by a gradual movement in public opinion. Still, the Hultqvist doctrine was upheld by the active support from the Social Democrat–Green Party coalition government, as well as by the passive support from the Moderate Party.

5.1.3 A Return to Norden

Another prominent part of the Hultqvist doctrine was the deepening of bilateral cooperation with Finland, a cooperation formed in a Nordic context. In much of the literature on Swedish foreign policy, Sweden was placed among the ‘exceptionally internationalist’ Nordic states, and sometimes even recognized as the most exceptional of the exceptional Nordics. Expressions of this exceptionalism have included ‘the relative prominence of the value of solidarity in political discourse,’³⁶ and high degrees of internationalism.³⁷ These characteristics overlapped to a high degree with a normative internationalist role (see [Section 5.2](#)).

Even if one can debate how exceptional the Nordics have been, a partly shared identity during the post-Second World War period formed a basis for close cooperation, including passport and customs unions. While official Nordic cooperation during the Cold War did not include foreign and security

³⁵ Swedish Government, *Regeringens skrivelse*, 18: M. Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen—Sveriges hemliga NATO-förbindelser*, 5th ed. (Natur & Kultur, 2023).

³⁶ P. Lawler, “Scandinavian Exceptionalism and European Union,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 35, no. 4 (1997): 569, doi:10.1111/1468-5965.00089.

³⁷ H. Mouritzen, “The Nordic Model as a Foreign Policy Instrument: Its Rise and Fall,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 32, no. 1 (1995): 9–21, doi:10.1177/0022343395032001002; L. Schouenborg, *The Scandinavian International Society* (Routledge, 2013).

policy (due to the different security policy paths chosen by the Nordics), the post-Cold War period was different. Finland and Sweden were no longer constrained by the demands of their different forms of policy of neutrality.³⁸

When the European Union developed its crisis management capacity, which was based on standing battle groups ready to be deployed to conflict zones around the world, Sweden formed one such battle group with Finland, Norway, the three Baltic states, and Ireland. Since these countries lacked sufficient capacity to form a battle group on their own, the European Union's initiative motivated cooperation between these North European countries. Norwegian political scientist Pernille Rieker demonstrates how this cooperation spilled over into higher ambitions within security policy cooperation among at least some of the Nordics.³⁹

Alongside the already existing forms of Nordic defence cooperation, the Nordics formed a sort of umbrella organization in 2009, NORDEFECO. From around this time, the Nordic dimension gained a more prominent position in Swedish foreign and security policy. One can speak of a renaissance of Nordicness during the 2010s.⁴⁰ In his memoirs, Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt (2006–2014) from the Moderate Party confirms this development with increasing Nordic cooperation during his tenure.⁴¹

With the more demanding security environment in 2008, and more clearly from 2014, it was natural for Sweden to seek to strengthen cooperation with its Nordic neighbours in line with elements of an integrated security-seeking role. Cooperation between the Nordics also received strong support among the public due to shared identity and values. Hence, it was not hard to see how Nordic cooperation within security policy could be combined with a more value-driven foreign policy, in terms of a normative internationalist role. By developing Nordic cooperation, Sweden could increase its defence capacity through cooperation with others, while still maintaining stability, since cooperation with other Nordic states could not be seen as a threat to a country like Russia. Nordic cooperation was, accordingly, an arena in which different roles could be combined without causing role conflict.

However, it soon became clear that a renaissance of Nordicness was not the top priority in all of the Nordic capitals. In Copenhagen, the Nordic

³⁸ M. Petersson, "Finland and Sweden: From Neutrality to Solidarity," *H-Diplo*, Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum Policy Roundtable II-4, 7 July 2023.

³⁹ P. Rieker, "Europeanization of Nordic Security. The European Union and the Changing Security Identities of the Nordic States," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 39, no. 4 (2004): 369–92.

⁴⁰ D. Brommesson, "'Nordicness' in Swedish Foreign Policy—from Mid-Power Internationalism to Small State Balancing?" *Global Affairs*, 4, no. 4–5 (2018): 391–404.

⁴¹ F. Reinfeldt, *Halvvägs* (Albert Bonniers förlag, 2015), 330–6.

dimension was considered nice to have, but was seen at best as a third-order priority, positioned after the transatlantic link and NATO membership.⁴² In Oslo, the Nordic dimension was somewhat more highly prioritized when compared with that of Copenhagen, but it was still subordinated to NATO membership.⁴³

For Finland and Sweden, the situation looked different. The need for closer cooperation became more pressing as the security situation deteriorated. Still, in both countries there was a need to act in a prudent way by not taking steps that could be seen by the Russians as destabilizing. This was a crucial point, especially for Finland, with its long border to Russia and its special role as a trusted communicator with Russia.

Based on these considerations, a closer form of cooperation between Finland and Sweden started to develop during the years from 2006 to 2010, when Reinfeldt was Swedish Prime Minister and Matti Vanhanen held the same position in Finland. The initiative came from the Finnish side.⁴⁴ Following these early discussions, an ambitious agreement that included operational measures was reached in 2015 during the left-leaning Social Democratic–Green coalition government.⁴⁵ These operational measures included steps that were seen as far-reaching for two non-aligned countries, that is, preparations for a joint Swedish–Finnish Naval Task Force in the Baltic Sea, increased interoperability between the air forces in order to prepare for joint operations, and the development of a concept for deploying a joint army force the size of a brigade.

This was clearly a form of cooperation that neither of the two post-neutral countries had been involved in before, and the measures blurred the national borders in the Baltic Sea and on land in the north. It was made clear by the Social Democratic Foreign Minister and the Minister of Defence that this was planning with a horizon reaching beyond peace time.⁴⁶ It is fair to say that cooperation between Finland and Sweden reached as far as possible without forming a defence alliance (although some decision makers in Finland understood the form of cooperation as an alliance, even if, for political reasons, it was not labelled as such; see Interview FIN2).

⁴² A. Wivel, “Forerunner, Follower, Exceptionalist or Bridge Builder? Mapping Nordicness in Danish Foreign Policy,” *Global Affairs*, 4, no. 4–5 (2018): 419–34.

⁴³ N. Græger, “Need to Have or Nice to Have? Nordic Cooperation, NATO and the EU in Norwegian Foreign, Security and Defence Policy,” *Global Affairs*, 4, no. 4–5 (2018): 363–76.

⁴⁴ Reinfeldt, *Halvvägs*, 331.

⁴⁵ See C. Haglund and P. Hultqvist, 2015, 27 February, “Så ska Sverige och Finland samarbeta i militär konflikt,” *Dagens Nyheter*, <https://www.dn.se/debatt/sa-ska-sverige-och-finland-samarbeta-i-militar-konflikt/>.

⁴⁶ M. Wallström and P. Hultqvist, 2016, 9 September, “Inte aktuellt ändra säkerhetspolitiken,” *Dagens Nyheter*, <https://www.dn.se/debatt/inte-aktuellt-andra-svenska-sakerhetspolitiska-doktrinen/>.

In trying to explain the far-reaching cooperation between the two countries, we must consider not only the well-developed tradition of such action, but also the strong historical ties that are a consequence of existing as the same country for about 700 years. This has resulted in similar government structures and a significant Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. In the annual foreign policy declaration delivered to parliament in February 2016, Sweden's Foreign Minister Margot Wallström (2014–19) put heavy emphasis on how Sweden was seeking security together with others, including NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations, or within the Nordic sphere. But in this declaration, with regard to Swedish security policy, the government mentioned only one bilateral relationship, that is, the relationship with Finland.⁴⁷ This one example illustrates how close the two countries were perceived and the priority given to the Finnish–Swedish relationship in Swedish security policy.

For the Social Democratic–Green coalition government (2016–2021), Finnish–Swedish cooperation was the most far-reaching part of what has been discussed in terms of the web of defence agreements, that is, the Hultqvist doctrine. Although Finnish–Swedish cooperation was bilateral, both countries also cooperated with the United States, which gave credibility to both the Finnish and Swedish defence capabilities. Nevertheless, the underlying idea was to build bilateral cooperation that would strengthen both Finnish and Swedish defences without causing upset in Moscow.

The question was whether Finland and Sweden had found the Alexandrian solution to the Gordian knot, avoiding both a purely national defence, with its limited capacity, and full NATO membership, with its potentially destabilizing effect, and instead identified a third option (Brommesson 2018), according to which a certain degree of autonomy could be preserved, permitting the development of a value-driven foreign policy based on the heritage arising from the role as an autonomous activist (see [Chapter 4](#)), albeit in a new context (SWEBE1).

5.1.4 Towards NATO Membership and the Role of an Integrated Security Seeker

While the parties of the left seemed to think that the web of agreements, not least Finnish–Swedish cooperation, had indeed let Sweden (and Finland) escape the dilemma of a weak national defence and a potentially destabilizing

⁴⁷ Wallström, *Foreign Policy 2016*.

decision to join NATO, the opposition did not agree. Even if they valued the agreements, they displayed a horizontal contestation and argued that the agreements were not enough to provide Sweden with the necessary level of security.

In 2014, a public inquiry led by senior diplomat Tomas Bertelman arguably supported the conclusion of the centre-right parties. In its conclusions, the inquiry stated that the Swedish web of cooperation with Western partners had brought Sweden close enough to NATO to be identified with the alliance, without acquiring the benefits of full membership.⁴⁸

Sweden had, during the 1990s and in 2002, developed roles as both an integrated security provider and also as a security seeker, but only to a certain degree. Full integration into Western defence structures, with membership of NATO, was still ruled out by the Social Democrats, the Green Party, the Left Party, and also the Sweden Democrats. Support (or enthusiasm) for membership also varied among the centre-right opposition parties. The Liberal Party was the first party to take a clear position in favour of membership, doing so in 1999. The Moderate Party followed in 2003, although the party leadership often continued to argue that future Swedish membership was dependent on the same decision being reached in Finland. The Centre Party decided in 2009 to advocate an impartial inquiry regarding possible membership, and in 2015 they took the next step and decided to promote membership. In the same year, the Christian Democrats took the same decision.

Based on the united view of the four parties that had been in government from 2006 to 2014, support was achieved for a new public inquiry into Sweden's present and potential future forms of cooperation within the realm of defence and security policy. This inquiry was the price the Social Democratic government had to pay in order to win a broad majority for the defence bill in 2015. While the Social Democrats emphasized that the inquiry was not about membership of NATO, the centre-right parties welcomed the inquiry as an unbiased study of the different existing and potential future forms of cooperation, including NATO membership. Senior diplomat Krister Bringéus, who led the inquiry, appeared to deliver what the centre-right parties were hoping for. During the inquiry, Bringéus did not argue explicitly in favour of membership, but the final report still downplayed the potentially destabilizing effect membership would have, while emphasizing the benefits in terms of security guarantees.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Swedish Government, *Försvarspolitiskt samarbete - effektivitet, solidaritet, suveränitet*. Fö 2013:B. D. o. *Defence* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014b).

⁴⁹ Swedish Government, *Säkerhet i ny tid*. SOU 2016: 57 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016), 57.

Still, the majority in the Swedish parliament was against NATO membership, including both the Social Democrats and the growing nationalist party, the Sweden Democrats. The Sweden Democrats were, however, somewhat hesitant, and in December 2020 they joined the centre-right parties to form a majority that expressed their support for a NATO option, implying that Sweden should keep the door open to a possible membership of NATO.⁵⁰ This statement had little direct effect, but it was a clear sign that the tide was changing. However, two important obstacles to Swedish membership of NATO remained in place: the Social Democrats and public opinion.⁵¹ The Moderate Party had continued to argue that membership was dependent on a broad consensus between the Social Democrats and themselves, and public opinion was still against membership, at least in most opinion polls. Despite growing support in parliament, membership of NATO still seemed distant, but circumstances were about to change dramatically and rapidly.

The change would come, paradoxically, after Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This invasion was motivated by the desire to stop the enlargement of NATO, but the direct effect was that the process towards Finnish, and soon Swedish, membership ignited. Finland took the leading role in this process and Sweden had little option but to follow, at both the public and elite levels.

Figure 5.1 shows how at the public level Finnish opinion changed dramatically after the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. It was as if the Finnish public, with more or less one voice, said 'enough is enough' and Finland must now take the final step into an overt Western role. According to David Arter, it was as if a 'psychosis of fear among the Finnish public' took hold, with the rapid change in public opinion making the political decision easier.⁵²

In the Swedish case, we also saw a dramatic shift in opinion, but it took a few more days, and even if the shift was dramatic, it was not as dramatic as in Finland. Still, a rapid increase in support for Swedish membership of NATO occurred soon after the Russian invasion, and this meant that one of the two major obstacles to membership was removed.

⁵⁰ Swedish Parliament, *Säkerhetspolitisk inriktning—Totalförsvaret 2021–2025. Betänkande 2020/21:UFöU4* (Sveriges Riksdag, 2020), https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/sakerhetspolitisk-inriktning-totalforsvaret_h801ufou4/.

⁵¹ K. Ydén, K. Berndtsson, and M. Petersson, "Sweden and the Issue of NATO Membership: Exploring a Public Opinion Paradox," *Defence Studies*, 19, no. 1 (2019): 1–18.

⁵² D. Arter, "From Finlandisation and Post-Finlandisation to the End of Finlandisation? Finland's Road to a NATO Application," *European Security*, 32, no. 2 (2022): 179–89; Lundqvist, "A Convincing Finnish Move," 92–3; T. Forsberg, "Four Rounds of the Finnish NATO Debate," *Nordic Review of International Studies*, 1, no. 2023 (2023): 41–50; M. Pesu and T. Iso-Markku, "Insufficiently of Informal Alignment: Why Did Finland Choose Formal NATO Membership?" *International Affairs*, 100, no. 2 (2024): 569–88; this is also supported in several of our interviews (FIN8, FIN9, FIN12 2022).

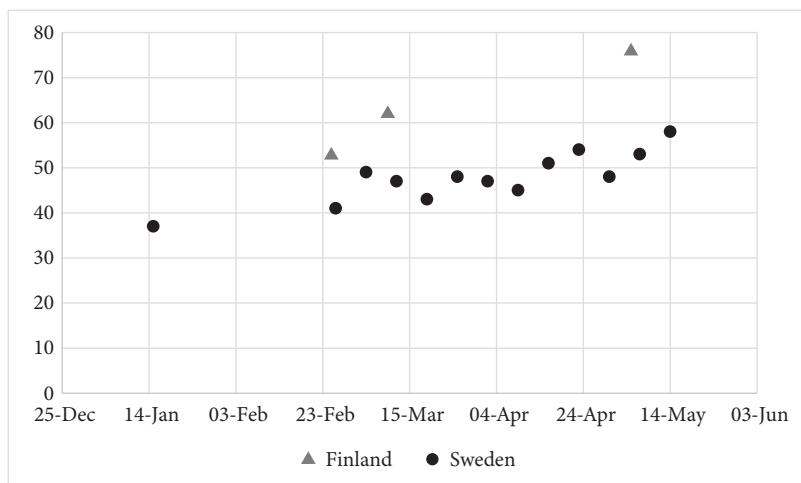


Figure 5.1 Support for NATO Membership in Finland and Sweden.

Note: Data on Finnish public opinion in favour of NATO membership (YLE 2022). Data on Swedish public opinion in favour of NATO membership (Bjereld and Oscarsson 2023).

The second obstacle seemed more firmly in place. The comparison with Finland is also relevant here. While the Swedish government started the process towards NATO membership with hesitation and somewhat mixed signals, Finland moved more quickly. In the build-up to the conflict, and also right after the Russian invasion, Finnish President Suli Niinistö had maintained contact with President Putin in order to call for peace. Niinistö was attempting to make use of Finland's established role as a communicator with Russia. However, the relationship between the two neighbours had now changed fundamentally (Interview FIN9 2022), and Finland soon chose to turn towards its Western role.⁵³

The Finnish leadership soon drew the conclusion that due to a rapidly increasing threat level, and with increasing public support, the time had come to take the final step to the West by undertaking full membership of NATO.⁵⁴ In one of the Helsinki interviews conducted for this research, it was clear as of early March 2022 that Finland would apply for membership, with or without Sweden (Interview FIN5 2022).

While President Niinistö travelled to Washington for consultations with President Joe Biden immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine,

⁵³ Interviews FIN2, FIN12 2022; see also Brommesson et al., "Variation"; A. Michalski, D. Brommesson, and A.-M. Ekengren, "Small States and the Dilemma of Geopolitics: Role Change in Finland and Sweden," *International Affairs*, 100, no. 1 (2024): 139–57.

⁵⁴ Brommesson et al., "Small States."

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson (2021–22) stayed at home. While the two presidents did make a telephone call from Washington to inform Andersson, the call was on the initiative of President Biden (Niinistö 2023, see also Strömberg and Nilsson 2024).⁵⁵ In the meantime, Andersson resorted to a well-established narrative on the risk of destabilization if Swedish security policy was changed (SWEBE1).⁵⁶ At the same time, Hultqvist lobbied behind the scenes for even more far-reaching defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden as an alternative to membership of NATO (Interview FIN2). However, for the Finns, cooperation with Sweden was not considered as an alternative to NATO due to the limited military strength of such cooperation (Interviews FIN5; FIN6; FIN7).⁵⁷

With the clear signals from Finland that it was moving towards membership, Andersson no longer ruled out the possibility of membership and new NATO expertise was recruited to the Prime Minister's office (SWEB2).⁵⁸ The new signals in March 2022 initiated a reorientation process within the Social Democratic Party, although this was conducted without much enthusiasm (SWEB4, SWEE2 2022).⁵⁹

Within the Social Democrats, the clear message from Moderate Party leader Ulf Kristersson was that an application for membership would be handed in if his party were able to form a government after the election in September of the same year.⁶⁰ The Social Democrats thus ran the risk of having to deal with the unfavourable prospect of a debate around the NATO issue during the election campaign. The risk of foreign attempts to influence the debate also worked in favour of a swift decision.

As a result, a broad horizontal and vertical consensus emerged, and a parliamentary committee of inquiry was given the task of analysing the new security situation and deciding which of the two possible roads to choose. According to the committee's report, published on 13 May 2022, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine had resulted in a 'new' and 'changed' threat assessment. The majority, with the exception of the Left Party and the Green Party, argued that neither the existing web of bilateral security arrangements nor the European Union's security cooperation were deemed sufficient to provide Sweden with security in the event of an attack against the

⁵⁵ S. Niinistö, 2023, August 20, "Sommar," *Swedish Radio P1*, <https://sverigesradio.se/sommar-i-p1>

⁵⁶ SVT, 2022a, 8 March, "Natomedlemskap skulle destabilisera säkerhetsläget," <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/andersson-om-nato-medlemskap-skulle-destabilisera-sakerhetslaget>.

⁵⁷ But cf. Arter, "Finlandisation," 12–13; Pesu and Iso-Markku, "Insufficiently."

⁵⁸ SVT, 2022b, 30 March, "Magdalena Andersson öppnar för NATO-medlemskap: Utesluter inget," <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/magdalena-andersson-oppnar-for-natomedlemskap-utesluter-inget>.

⁵⁹ See also Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen*.

⁶⁰ SVT, 2022c, 8 March, "Allt bäddar för att NATO frågan blir en viktig valfråga," <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/ingen-vektoratt-for-s-i-nato-fragan>.

country.⁶¹ On 16 May 2022 the government followed the committee's recommendations and decided to apply for NATO membership. Sweden had finally accepted the role of an integrated security seeker to its full extent, based on broad horizontal as well as vertical support.⁶²

When Türkiye raised concerns regarding Finnish and Swedish membership of NATO due to an embargo on the export of weapons to Türkiye and issues around anti-terrorism, Finland was able to convince Türkiye of its trustworthiness and so became a member in April 2023. Sweden, on the other hand, was left in a state of limbo when Türkiye and Hungary refused to accept Sweden as a member of the alliance. One of the reasons for Hungary's objection was the Swedish criticism of Hungary's breach of democratic standards. Türkiye's stance was predicated on the repeated pro-Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK) demonstrations in Sweden and the permission granted to protestors to burn the Quran.

A further difference between Finland and Sweden appeared in interviews. Finland, with its long geographical border and its history of war with Russia, has, based on a clear will to belong to the Western core, made security an overwhelming priority. One leading Finnish politician compared this with the Swedish case, which encapsulated a more multifaceted foreign policy trying to achieve many things (FIN12), something recognized also in the Swedish interviews (SWEB2; SWEB6). While some politicians regard the ambition to have a wide-ranging foreign policy agenda without restrictions in positive terms (SWEBE1), others see this as a moral megaphone, demonizing others, and an attempt to enforce a Social Democratic domestic agenda (SWEB2). Accordingly, this built-in contestation of remaining autonomous traits in the Swedish role repertoire increasingly undermined these parts, which resulted in weaker role adaptation.

Chapter 4 (but see also Section 5.2) explains how this multifaceted approach was not least manifested in the role as an autonomous activist, which was, from time to time, expressed through strong criticism. This led to a more delicate position for Sweden compared to that of Finland, with a weaker horizontal unity regarding Sweden's role in the world, and also a position where Sweden had become vulnerable to criticism from other states. After several rounds of negotiations between Sweden and Türkiye,

⁶¹ Swedish Government, *Deterioration of the security environment—implications for Sweden*. M. f. F. Affairs, Ds 2022:8 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022), 7–8; Brommesson et al., “Small States.”

⁶² Swedish Parliament, *Sverige Medlemskap i Nato. Betänkande 2022/23:UU16* (Sveriges Riksdagen, 2023), https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/sveriges-medlemskap-i-nato_ha01uu16/.

and also between Türkiye and the United States, on Turkish procurement of new F16 fighter jets,⁶³ Sweden's membership was approved by Türkiye in January 2024, followed by Hungary in February the same year, and the long journey from the emphasis of an autonomous role to a role as a fully integrated security seeker into Western security structures was completed.

5.2 A Post-Neutral Internationalist Role

Sweden's role as an autonomous activist did not vanish from its foreign policy role repertoire and was still important in the context of the United Nations in the 1990s and the early 2000s. For example, during the period from 1994 to 2010, Sweden's annual statement in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) illustrated that statements regarding children's, women's, and human rights, as well as humanitarian interventions and human security, increased at the end of the 1990s. These references, which suggest a normative view on how to organize world politics, very often related to ongoing conflicts in the Balkans and Central Africa. During the early 2000s, the number of statements with a focus on human rights and humanitarian interventions decreased, until 2008 when they started to increase again, illustrating the renewed importance of normative issues.⁶⁴

In this section we discuss to what extent, and in what way, the role of a normative internationalist remained relevant after 2007. Here, we turn to a renewed focus on global norms and Sweden's efforts to promote certain values in order to shape the behaviour of others during the period 2007 to 2023, which includes the period when the international security climate deteriorated. By playing the role of a normative leader, a so-called norm entrepreneur, Sweden's intention was to make the surroundings consistent with their own values.⁶⁵

Practical examples of this normative turn became visible in Sweden's launch of a feminist foreign policy in 2014; in giving unilateral recognition to Palestine in 2014, when campaigning for a seat in the UN Security Council; and in the return to criticism of the deployment of nuclear armaments.

⁶³ Reuters, 2023, 26 September, "Turkey will back Sweden's NATO bid if U.S. keeps promise on F-16 sale—Erdogan," *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-will-back-swedens-nato-bid-if-us-keeps-promise-f-16-sale-erdo\gan-2023-09-26/>.

⁶⁴ D. Brommesson and A-M. Ekengren, *The Mediatization of Foreign Policy, Political Decision-Making and Humanitarian Intervention* (Palgrave, 2017), 59.

⁶⁵ C. Ingebritsen, "Norm Entrepreneurs: Scandinavia's Role in World Politics," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 37, no. 1 (2002): 11–23; A. Björkdahl, "Swedish Norm Entrepreneurship in the UN," *International Peacekeeping*, 14, no. 4 (2007): 538–52.

Specifically, a number of policy areas (e.g., human rights and human security; foreign aid; and the global climate change and sustainability agenda) became more visible in the framing of Sweden's foreign and security policy. These policy areas became important themes in Sweden's self-identification as a normative internationalist. Hence, in this section we connect to the rediscovered global dimension in Sweden's foreign policy outlook.

5.2.1 Human Security as Part of Sweden's Participation in International Missions

After the end of the Cold War, an international debate was initiated on what real security should entail. According to ideas developed within the UN framework, security should not be related to states and territories, but to individuals and people. Security should not only be understood as military security but should be broadened and also include safety with regard to discrimination, dehumanization, deprivation, under-development, and environmental degradation. Sweden's ongoing foreign aid programme from the time of the 'active' foreign policy in the 1960s was a clear sign of Sweden's willingness to continue with its economic support for development and peace. In a way, this foreign aid programme was a sign of the continued importance of the Swedish foreign policy role as a normative internationalist.⁶⁶ Rather than use force in order to solve conflicts, Sweden believed that the best approach was to focus on development and human rights, to use preventive diplomacy, and to reform global institutions.

If a preventive approach proved to be futile in solving a crisis or conflict, sanctions and the collective use of force would be possible, but not as the first choice.⁶⁷ The principle of 'Responsibility to Protect' (RtoP) was coined in 2001 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) when it tried to reconcile the tension between state sovereignty and humanitarian protection in times of genocide and other dreadful events.⁶⁸ According to this outlook, the international community and individual states should, under certain circumstances, have an obligation to intervene in order to protect individuals. In 2005, RtoP was adopted at the UN World Summit and acknowledged as resting on the responsibility

⁶⁶ Brommesson and Ekengren, *Mediatization*, 97.

⁶⁷ K. P. Bajpai, *Human Security: Concept and Measurement* (Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2000).

⁶⁸ A. J. Bellamy, *Responsibility to Protect: A Defense* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

of states to protect their own populations, on the international community's responsibility to assist a state to fulfil its obligations, and on the international community's responsibility to act when a state failed to protect its own population.⁶⁹

It is partly against this normative turn that the increasing global focus on international missions in the 2000s should be understood. In the 2005 Government Bill on Swedish Defence, Sweden's ability to contribute to international missions was underlined as a means of achieving an active foreign and security policy.⁷⁰ The ambition was to increase 'Sweden's ability to participate in peacekeeping as well as in peace enforcement [...] both qualitatively and quantitatively.'⁷¹ This was supposed to lead to an increase in Sweden's credibility, opportunities to affect global development, and to enhance the chances of sustainable peace.

Some important aspects of the concept of human security later appeared in the 2008 Swedish National Strategy on participation in international peace support and security-building operations.⁷² The strategy highlighted the importance of development, justice, and solidarity with people and countries threatened by conflict. According to the government:

Swedish involvement in international peace-support operations is ultimately intended to contribute to maintaining international peace and security and consequently to facilitate fair and sustainable global development. Swedish participation in peace-support operations is also concerned, in the longer term, with promoting national security and Swedish interests. Underlying the strategy is defence of a number of universal norms and values, such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, human dignity and development. In addition, Swedish participation in international operations contributes to safeguarding and promoting general interests such as a world order, founded in international law, to attain peace, freedom and reconciliation.⁷³

The basis of Swedish policy on participation in international peace support and security building operations was, according to the strategy, 'the defence of democracy, human rights, gender equality, human dignity and

⁶⁹ A. J. Bellamy, "Libya and the Responsibility to Protect: The Exception and the Norm," *Ethics & International Affairs*, 25, no. 3 (2011): 263–9.

⁷⁰ Swedish Government, *Vårt framtida försvar (Prop. 2004/05: 05)* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2004/05), 12.

⁷¹ Swedish Government, *Prop. 2004/05: 05*, 25.

⁷² Holmberg, "Swedish Security," 123.

⁷³ Swedish Government, *National Strategy for Swedish Participation in International Peace-Support and Security-Building Operations. Government Communication 2007/08:51* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2007/08), 51: 3.

development.⁷⁴ Sweden only anticipated a deteriorated security situation in the long run, which suggests that global considerations were prioritized for the Swedish involvement. ‘Higher idealistic aims of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, welfare and a fair and sustainable development’ were important preconditions for Swedish involvement.⁷⁵ Taken together, these were clear indications of the increasing importance for Sweden of the role of normative internationalist.

Following the change in the international security discourse after the end of the Cold War, Sweden’s armed forces went through a fundamental change.⁷⁶ The change in Sweden’s military capacity, from defence against invasion to mobile and flexible defence, was a way to show Sweden’s interest in prioritizing commitment to international missions and the defence of democracy and human lives.⁷⁷ As also shown in the previous section, Swedish participation in, for example, the Nordic Battle Group 08 was seen as a means of transforming Swedish defence even more quickly (see also [Section 5.3.1](#)).⁷⁸

Another important aspect essential to an understanding of Sweden’s new focus on international norms through international missions was the continuation of Sweden’s policy of military non-alignment until 2022. At the time, EU membership was a dominant aspect of Sweden’s foreign policy, and Sweden cooperated more closely with NATO through the PfP (see [Sections 5.1](#) and [5.3](#)). Non-alignment was once again combined with the need to demonstrate responsibility and engagement in international issues. Sweden’s willingness to play an internationalist role by contributing to military missions can be understood as a way to appease criticism of non-alignment as passive and free-riding. According to Möller and Bjereld, the normative internationalist role was a way to demonstrate Sweden’s willingness to contribute to peace and development.⁷⁹ As mentioned in [Chapter 4](#), this was an argument repeated from the 1950s and 1960s with regard to the role as an autonomous activist.

⁷⁴ C. Wagnsson, “A Security Community in the Making? Sweden and NATO Post-Libya,” *European Security*, 20, no. 4 (2011): 588.

⁷⁵ Wagnsson, “A Security Community,” 588.

⁷⁶ H. Edström and D. Gyllensporre, *Svensk försvarsdoktrin efter kalla kriget: Förlorade decennier eller vunna insikter?* (Santérus Academic Press, 2014a).

⁷⁷ Swedish Government, *Prop. 2004/05: 05*, 5. The transformation of Sweden’s defence was not taking place in isolation. Most NATO countries reformed their defences because of the end of Cold War. However, the transformation of the defences was not simultaneous, it took place at different paces and the width of it differed between countries (Græger 2018).

⁷⁸ H. Edström and D. Gyllensporre, *Alike or Different? Scandinavian Approaches to Military Interventions* (Santérus Academic Press, 2014b); M. Christiansson, *Defence Transformation in Sweden: The Strategic Governance of Pivoting Projects 2000–2010* (Santérus Academic Press, 2020), 126.

⁷⁹ Möller and Bjereld, “Nordic Neutrals.”

During the 2000s, Sweden tended to engage in more international missions but for shorter terms, and the operations, which used enforcement, were mainly conducted within the NATO or EU frameworks.⁸⁰ Sweden's willingness to contribute to these missions had started after the end of the Cold War, but this trend was strengthened once the armed forces had been transformed to the right capacity for international missions. Table 5.2 lists the international missions in which Sweden has participated after 2007, regardless of their starting date.

The first three missions (in the Middle East, between India and Pakistan, and on the Korean peninsula) are unresolved Cold War conflicts related to disagreements over territory. Few Swedish personnel have been stationed within these classic peacekeeping operations after the end of the Cold War. More recent missions were either initiated by the United Nations or the European Union and involved not only peacekeeping but also peace enforcement. While the mandates for these missions came from the United Nations and the European Union, NATO has frequently been in command. Swedish participation in these missions has been framed as contributions to our 'common security'.⁸¹

Erik Noreen and Roxanna Sjöstedt discuss how 'peace nations' like Sweden have stressed the broader ideational aspects of making a difference through international missions. However, taking part in international missions has also led to actual combat experience, and socialization with fighting partners has moved the boundaries of legitimate and expected behaviour.⁸² For example, Sweden's mission to Afghanistan was motivated by a desire to contribute to stability and security, democracy and human rights, and fair and sustainable development.⁸³ The initial decision to contribute to ISAF was taken with great horizontal and vertical agreement and no hesitation was shown even when it was clear that ISAF would be led by the NATO command.

Some horizontal disagreement was evident once the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated. As a consequence, missions were involved in more severe battles from 2005 onwards, and the consensus was broken when the Green Party and the Left Party expressed concerns that ISAF's mission in

⁸⁰ J. Ångström and I. Duyesteyn, *Modern War and the Utility of Force. Challenges, Methods and Strategy* (Routledge, 2010), 173–5.

⁸¹ Möller and Bjereld, "Nordic Neutrals," 373.

⁸² R. Sjöstedt and E. Noreen, "When Peace Nations Go to War: Examining the Narrative Transformation of Sweden and Norway in Afghanistan," *European Journal of International Security*, 6, no. 3 (2021): 322.

⁸³ Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Strategi för Sveriges stöd till det internationella engagemanget i Afghanistan* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2010).

Table 5.2 Swedish participation in international missions

Mission	Swedish Participation
The United Nations Truce Supervision for the Middle East (UNTSO)	1948–ongoing
The United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP)	1949–ongoing
Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission on the Korean Peninsula (NNSC)	1953–ongoing
The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)	1991–ongoing
Kosovo Force (KFOR)	1999–ongoing
The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC and MONUSC)	MONUC 1999–2010 MONUSC 2010–2020
The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)	2001–2014
The European Union Naval Force Somalia (EUNAVFOR/Operation Atalanta)	2009–2017
The European Union Training Mission Somalia (EUTM Somalia)	2010–ongoing
Operation Unified Protector. The Security Council approved ‘No-Fly Zone’ over Libya	2011
The United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS)	2011–2020
European Union Training Mission Mali (EUTM Mali)	2013–2022
The Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)	2014–2023
Task Force Takuba in Mali (by invitation of Mali)	2021–2022
Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq (OIR, US-led coalition to militarily defeat IS/ISIS)	2014–ongoing
NATO’s Resolute Support Mission (RSM), training and advisory mission in Afghanistan	2015–2021
The UN Mission to support the Hedaydah Agreement, Yemen (UNMHA)	2019–ongoing

Note: The table lists international missions in which Sweden has participated 2008–2023 (Forsvarsmakten.se).

Afghanistan would be confused with US Operation Enduring Freedom.⁸⁴ This horizontal disunity can be interpreted as a questioning of whether participation in international missions could actually be understood as an expression of normative internationalism in cases in which operations were too closely intertwined with NATO and US interests.

⁸⁴ Sjöstedt and Noreen, “Afghanistan,” 326.

Other missions, such as, for example, engagement in Tchad and Somalia (EUNAVFOR/Atlanta), mentioned the protection of civilians more overtly.⁸⁵ The European Union Naval Force for Somalia was a military operation carried out under the leadership of the European Union. The mission's goal was to prevent and combat piracy off the coast of Somalia and illustrated that Sweden was happy to take on missions within both the UN and the EU frameworks. This mission was the first maritime operation launched under the framework of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (more on this in [Section 5.2.2](#) on how Sweden's European role developed).

When the Swedish government decided that Sweden should participate in the UN-sanctioned no-fly zone over Libya in 2011, Sweden became the only non-NATO and non-Arab country participating in the no-fly zone. The Swedish government argued that the global community should defend human rights and freedom in Libya and was positive towards the UN- and the EU-imposed boycott of the Libyan regime. NATO's acceptance of a leadership role in the no-fly zone mission was seen as something positive.⁸⁶

Sweden's decision to contribute to the no-fly zone was in line with the overall Swedish policy of contributing to UN-mandated missions, for which there was a clear legal basis for participation, and as a way to aid individuals in need of help. The decision to assist in the no-fly zone received clear vertical and horizontal domestic support,⁸⁷ but only after the centre-right government limited the Swedish Gripen fighter's assignment to reconnaissance, which was in line with the expressed wishes of the opposition (see also [Section 5.3](#)).⁸⁸

Sweden also contributed, by invitation, to several missions that were without a UN or EU mandate—Task Force Takuba, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) in Iraq, and the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan—all of which illustrated that Sweden was willing to accept missions without a UN mandate as long as they have indicated an ambition to contribute to the defence of human rights in a very severe situation.⁸⁹

All in all, Sweden's frequent participation in international missions underlined a willingness to contribute to, and take part in, endeavours by the international community to use force, if necessary, to defend individuals, but also to support democratic forces in undemocratic regimes in severe security

⁸⁵ Holmberg, "Swedish Security," 125.

⁸⁶ Brommesson and Ekengren, *Mediatization*, 146–8.

⁸⁷ F. Doerer, "Sweden's Libya Decision: A Case of Humanitarian Intervention," *International Politics*, 51 (2014): 197–9.

⁸⁸ Brommesson and Ekengren, *Mediatization*, 148–9.

⁸⁹ I. Österdahl, "An Invitation is an Invitation is an Invitation: Legitimate Authority to Invite in Recent Swedish Practice," *Uppsala Faculty of Law Working Paper*, 2020 (2020): 2.

situations. Such participation can also be interpreted as a sign of the desire to play the role of normative internationalist. Regular cooperation in international missions with ambitions to defend human lives by increasing security and freedom, including also missions led by NATO, was a way to show that Sweden was a reliable partner, even if still non-aligned. Furthermore, the ongoing foreign aid programme demonstrated that Sweden's commitment to the defence of human rights and freedom not only entailed military components, but also, after 2007, Sweden showed ambition to be a global partner and not to focus only on the area of its immediate regional neighbourhood. Overall, the vertical and horizontal agreement was strong with regard to Swedish commitment to international missions and foreign aid, making the role of the normative internationalist a part of the Swedish foreign policy role repertoire also after 2007. The normative internationalist role was seen as compatible with the more integrationist position vis-à-vis NATO and the European Union as long as the discussion focused on international missions.

5.2.2 Feminist Foreign Policy and a Renewed Focus on Sweden's Role as a Normative Internationalist

In 2014, when the centre-right government lost the general election and a minority coalition government consisting of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party came to power, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (2014–2021) stated in the Government Declaration in the autumn of 2014:

Sweden should be a strong voice for freedom, peace, human rights and solidarity in the world. [. . .] Sweden's voice should always be clear and loud when human values are violated. Human rights, international law, international disarmament and the work against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction should be cornerstones of Swedish foreign policy.⁹⁰

With this statement, Löfven set the tone for the ambition to revive the role of normative internationalist based on a more autonomous position. The newly elected Swedish government also explained its intention to pursue a feminist foreign policy (FFP), which, to a great extent, related to the overall global discussion on how to improve women's participation and security. The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, the first thematic resolution on Women, Peace and Security, was a sign of an enhanced global focus on

⁹⁰ Swedish Government, *Statement on Government Policy, 3 October* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2014a).

gender and foreign policy. According to the resolution, peacekeeping operations should include a gender perspective and women's participation in all aspects of post-conflict reconstruction should be expanded. The goal was to ensure that women and men benefited more equally from peace and peace processes.⁹¹

Wallström has been described as central to the launch and content of the FFP.⁹² The ambition was to make Sweden the 'strongest voice for gender equality and the full employment of human rights for all women and girls', to eradicate discrimination against women, and at the same time to 'contribute to peace and development' (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2015). Earlier research characterized the introduction of the FFP as a 'normative reorientation of [Sweden's] foreign policy'⁹³ and an indication of an ambition to be a normative force for good. Sweden has repeatedly emphasized the importance of being the first state to pursue a feminist foreign policy,⁹⁴ thereby underlining the uniqueness of the Swedish approach and a willingness to be perceived as a role model to others. It was also an indication of the intent to connect current Swedish foreign policy to the ideals communicated during the tenure of Olof Palme's foreign policy: to be active and to contribute to normative changes on a more systemic level.

To some, the FFP was an indication of a recent feminist transformation of Swedish government on a more general level. According to this perspective, the FFP is just one of many examples of how feminism has been a guiding principle, which has been combined in this instance with cosmopolitanism and a wish to 'do good'.⁹⁵ The Social Democratic–Green coalition government framed the FFP as an innovative and inspirational policy⁹⁶ with positive effects on Swedish security.⁹⁷

The launch of the FFP did have an effect on Swedish foreign policy, as for example when Wallström criticized the Saudi government for human rights abuses and called the state's punishment system 'medieval'. In response, Saudi Arabia recalled their ambassador from Stockholm and other Muslim

⁹¹ L. Olsson and T-I. Gizelis, "An Introduction to Resolution 1325: Measuring Progress and Impact," in *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325*, ed. T-I. Gizelis and L. Olsson (Routledge, 2015).

⁹² A. Bergman Rosamond, "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy and 'Gender cosmopolitanism,'" *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 16, no. 2 (2020): 217.

⁹³ K. Aggestam and A. Bergman-Rosamond, "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender," *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30, no. 3 (2016): 323.

⁹⁴ Bergman Rosamond, "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy," 227.

⁹⁵ Bergman Rosamond, "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy," 225.

⁹⁶ M. Rosén Sundström and O. Elgström, "Praise or Critique? Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy in the Eyes of its Fellow EU Members," *European Politics and Society*, 21, no. 4 (2020): 418–19.

⁹⁷ Bergman Rosamond, "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy," 227.

states condemned the Swedish government for what was seen as a critique of Islam. Around the same time, the Swedish government chose not to renew a memorandum of understanding concerning a military agreement with the Saudi government from 2005 as it was seen as non-compatible with the FFP.⁹⁸ Saudi and Arab criticism of Sweden intensified, and business relations were damaged.

Since Saudi Arabia was Sweden's largest export market in the Middle East, the deterioration in relations prompted a reaction from the Swedish business sector. The political opposition and the former Foreign Minister Carl Bildt saw this as an example of how the FFP appeared to be detrimental to Swedish interests. Although Bildt agreed with Wallström's characterization of Saudi Arabia, he feared that Saudi Arabia would look unfavourably on Sweden, and that the termination of the agreement would make Sweden appear unreliable.⁹⁹ His prediction on the Saudi reaction proved to be correct, and Sweden had to send a special letter from the Swedish King to Saudi Arabia in order to normalize the relationship. Björn von Sydow, at the time a member of the Swedish Parliament and a former Speaker of Parliament and Minister of Defence, was appointed a special envoy for the Swedish government and handed over the letter.

The debacle in relation to Saudi Arabia illustrated, to some extent, the different views on the launch of the FFP. The Moderate Party and the Christian Democratic Party saw the launch of the FFP as a symbolic measure with little (or even negative) effect, while others argued that it was better to speak about human rights in general and to not only focus on women and/or children (SWEM2; SWEB4). For example, the Liberal Party and the Centre Party declared their support for feminism, but also that they sought a more liberal feminism than that of the Social Democratic Party, while the nationalist Sweden Democrats dismissed the idea that feminism could be seen as a legitimate platform for the conduct of Swedish foreign policy.¹⁰⁰

From its initiation, the FFP was surrounded by strong horizontal as well as vertical disunity, probably as a reflection of different views on feminism in general, but also out of concern for whether the FFP was an effective way to allocate resources. This horizontal disunity was also reflected on the diplomatic level. A senior official at the Swedish Foreign Ministry described the FFP as a 'profile area' with little actual effect on the ground (SWEM1;

⁹⁸ Utrikesdepartementet, *Sveriges internationella överenskommelser. Samförståndsavtal med Saudiarabien om militärt samarbete, SÖ 2005:59* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2005).

⁹⁹ Bildt, "Russia."

¹⁰⁰ Bergman Rosamond, "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy," 224.

SWEB4). Another senior official at the Swedish Foreign Ministry argued that Sweden (and the Social Democratic Party) had a tradition of using foreign policy as a tool for advocating their own political principles and to 'demonize' their political opponents. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was even portrayed as a ministry for political propaganda (SWEB2).

The launch and effect of the FFP is clearly an issue area that displays divergent ideological views. In the Social Democratic Party and among some diplomats, FFP has provided the means to reinvigorate Sweden's focus on international norms and to demonstrate the will to play the role of normative internationalist in line with a more autonomous position:

The FFP could have been a joint project for Swedish foreign policy, but instead there has been a political fight, mostly regarding how it should be labelled. If we had managed to achieve unity [between the parties] on FFP we could have made a difference for women in the world. Presently, there is no common peace project in Sweden. The risk is that Sweden and the Nordics have made themselves irrelevant [in global discussions]. We need more political unity regarding Sweden's global role, but that is lacking today. We are united regarding our security policy. But this means a clear shift of emphasis (SWEE1).

External evaluations of the FFP have concluded that it made a difference and had an impact on the amount of gender equality work done in foreign policy agencies and aid embassies. However, they also show that implementation has varied between different agencies because there is room for manoeuvre in interpreting the guidelines.¹⁰¹

During the inaugural speech in the Swedish parliament in October 2014, Prime Minister Löfven not only launched the FFP but also presented the decision to recognize the State of Palestine.¹⁰² This latter action made Sweden the first member of the European Union to recognize Palestine, although other EU member states, such as the Czech Republic, Malta, and Cyprus, had recognized Palestine before they entered the European Union. The Swedish decision to recognize Palestine can be seen as an expression of a more constitutive view on the practice of recognition: 'a political entity becomes a state when existing states recognize its statehood.'¹⁰³ According to Wallström, Sweden's decision to recognize Palestine was a way to underline the importance of a two-state solution, to infuse positive energy into the Middle East peace

¹⁰¹ A. Towns, E. Bjarnegård, and K. Jezierska, "More Than a Label, Less Than a Revolution: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy," Report 2023:02 to The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), 2023.

¹⁰² Swedish Government, *Statement on Government Policy*, 3 October.

¹⁰³ E. Badarin, "States Recognition in Foreign Policy: The Case of Sweden's Recognition of Palestine," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 16, no. 1 (2020): 78.

process by making the two parties less unequal, and to act as a forerunner and put pressure on other states to follow suit.¹⁰⁴

Hence, recognition of Palestine can be seen as another expression of the Swedish desire to play the role of a normative internationalist and a state willing to take the lead on issues relating to peace and security in line with a more positive view on autonomy. The European Union did not have any specific guidelines on the issue of recognition of Palestine, or on how states should vote within the United Nations.¹⁰⁵ The political opposition in Sweden criticized Sweden's decision to recognize Palestine as indicative of support for undemocratic Palestinian agents, displaying a clear horizontal disunity over the decision.

Further, the recognition decision contrasted, to some extent, with Sweden's role as an integrationist European. Political contestation of the decision to recognize Palestine perhaps illustrates the willingness of political parties to show ideological commitment through foreign policy issues and different emphasis on autonomy or integration. According to such a perspective, it is easier to politicize issues related to more geographically distant actors. The decision to recognize Palestine was followed by intense criticism from Israel and led to a deterioration in Sweden's relations with the only democracy in the Middle East. The Israeli ambassador was even recalled from Stockholm.

Sweden also sought to reinvigorate its normative role through the campaign for a seat on the UN Security Council and the subsequent term therein (2017–2018). All three candidates for the seat in the West European and Other Group (WEOG)—Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden—had substantive multilateral merits and considerable previous experience of serving on the Security Council. When Prime Minister Göran Persson's (1996–2006) Social Democratic government announced Sweden's candidature for a seat on the Security Council in 2004, it did so with the full support of the political opposition. Just two years later the government changed, and Reinfeldt's centre-right government (2006–14) made plans for an understated campaign.

The Social Democrats were critical of what they regarded as a delayed start to the campaign and asked the government repeatedly to reveal its plans for a successful Swedish campaign.¹⁰⁶ The discussions around a central campaign message during Bildt's time as a foreign minister resulted in a campaign primarily focusing on the merit of Sweden's candidature. Sweden

¹⁰⁴ Badarin, "Palestine."

¹⁰⁵ Badarin, "Palestine," 83–84.

¹⁰⁶ A-M. Ekengren and U. Möller, "Campaigning for an Elected Seat on the UN Security Council," in *The Role of Elected Members on the Security Council: Key Players or Lame Ducks?*, ed. N. Schrijver and N. Blokker (Brill, 2019).

should seek support for a seat through the circulation of its 'UN CV' summarizing contributions made to the UN over the years.¹⁰⁷ The CV listed Swedish personnel involved in peacekeeping; its economic support for development; main policy-priorities; and engagements in key areas such as peacebuilding, human rights, sustainable development, and gender equality.¹⁰⁸ In many respects, the CV summarized Sweden's main achievements as a normative internationalist.

In 2014, the Social Democrats formed a government together with the Green Party. The change of government also meant a change in approach to the campaign. This involved engagement by Löfven and Wallström and a number of activities, such as country visits, meetings, and seminars. However, the Social Democratic government did not alter the content of the message but continued to show Sweden's past record of solid contributions to the UN in the areas of international peace, security, and development.

The campaign pamphlet repeated many of the merits circulated in the UN CV, such as the number of Swedish men and women who had served within the United Nations, Sweden's top ranking on the United Nation's donor list, and the extent of Swedish Official Development Assistance (ODA). Accordingly, the campaign highlighted peacebuilding, respect for international law, human rights, and development as prioritized issues. On peacebuilding, the Swedish campaign emphasized the involvement of women in conflict resolution. On sustainable development, it focused on climate change action and Sweden's long-standing commitment to this issue.¹⁰⁹

In campaign mode, Sweden used the slogan 'Global commitment, independent voice', which clearly displayed a willingness to connect to both the role as an autonomous security seeker and the role as a normative internationalist. According to the slogan, the two roles were important aspects of Swedish identity that were clearly compatible. The political opposition quickly claimed that the slogan was inaccurate—Sweden should not have an independent voice but should be part of the European foreign policy choir. There was clear horizontal disunity on how the campaign aligned with

¹⁰⁷ Ekengren and Möller, "Campaigning."

¹⁰⁸ U. Cronenberg-Mossberg, *Uppföljning och utvärdering av kampanjen för Sveriges kandidatur till FN:s säkerhetsråd* [Assessment of the Swedish Campaign to the UN Security Council] (Foreign Affairs Committee of the Swedish Parliament, 2017).

¹⁰⁹ A.-M. Ekengren and U. Möller, "Campaigning for the Prize: The Quests by Sweden and the Kingdom of the Netherlands for Security Council Membership, 2017–2018," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 16 (2021): 1–26.

Sweden's commitment to the European Union and whether or not autonomy or integration should be emphasized as the foundation for the Swedish position.¹¹⁰

The campaign team at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs were able to observe that the slogan played well and gained appreciation from other UN member states.¹¹¹ Still, the domestic debate and the disunity resulted in a political decision to phase out the description of Sweden as an independent voice and to replace it with 'Sweden—a voice with integrity'. This new slogan toned down the autonomous part of the Swedish role conception. The message—Sweden as a UN member with integrity—became an important part of the description of a small state that did not hesitate to stand up for certain norms and principles. The campaign pamphlet described Sweden as a defender of 'common values and principles' and sought to substantiate the description of Sweden as a globally committed voice with integrity by referring to Swedish diplomats and politicians who were internationally recognized, including Dag Hammarskjöld, Hans Blix, and Olof Palme.

The campaign also made references to Sweden's military non-alignment for this purpose and used the recent controversial decision to recognize Palestine as a sign of Sweden's independent voice. All in all, the Swedish campaign for a seat on the UN Security Council for the 2017–2018 term of office clearly displayed Sweden's efforts to play the role of normative internationalist. However, the campaign also illustrated the political disunity surrounding this foreign policy role. According to the centre-right opposition, the role of an integrationist European conflicted with the role as a normative internationalist.

Once on the UN Security Council, Sweden was able to use that platform to underline some of the norms presented in the campaign. Earlier research has shown that one important objective Sweden tried to achieve was to integrate considerations on women, peace, and security into UN Security Council Resolutions.¹¹² By integrating these into resolutions on peace operations and political mission mandates, Sweden aimed to positively affect

¹¹⁰ U. Möller and A-M. Ekengren, "Domestic Debate and International Office: Sweden in the UN Security Council 2017–18," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 20, no. 1 (2024): orad037. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orad037>.

¹¹¹ A-M. Ekengren and U. Möller, eds. *The Quest for Power in the UNSC: The Campaigns and Selection of Non-permanent Members* (Brill, 2023).

¹¹² L. Olsson et al., *Sweden as an Elected Member of the UN Security Council: Promoting Women, Peace and Security as Core Council Business, 2017–18* (Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO); The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala University, 2021).

women and girls in conflict as well as post-conflict areas. According to the Social Democratic elite, the Security Council seat made it possible for Sweden to pursue a number of priorities in line with the FFP:

Several evaluations show we made a difference. We did a great job in connecting climate and security, in drawing attention to women's role and in influencing UN working procedures. [...] And it was about the feminist foreign policy (SWEE2).

According to the foreign policy elite in the centre-right opposition, the campaign for a seat on the UN Security Council and the subsequent term were an expression of the will to connect to some parts of the old role as an autonomous activist. But EU membership was also, to some extent, in conflict with the role as a normative internationalist (SWEM3). A high-ranking diplomatic official saw Sweden's past as clearly marked by its role as a normative internationalist. The war in Ukraine and the application for NATO membership opened the country up to role change:

Until today, Sweden's foreign policy, as well as how Sweden has been perceived abroad, has been informed by non-alignment, strong values with regard to freedom of speech, human rights, democracy and so on. We have seen it almost as if the democratic world is opposed to the authoritarian world and our job is to work against authoritarianism. I think we have been seen as supporters of free trade, multilateralism, a generous ODA, and that we have had many skillful diplomats at service in the global system. We have had a broad definition of security, and we have advocated gender equality. [...] NATO membership will change the image of Sweden. Countries are worried that we will abandon them now when we no longer are part of the same group. Like Malta and similar countries. They are worried what [membership] will do to Sweden. They are saying 'do not abandon us'. They are afraid that we [in the future] are only defined by our NATO membership (SWEE3).

How the role as a normative internationalist was affected by the Swedish application for NATO membership was highly debated within and between the different political parties in Sweden. Some of the foreign policy elite in the Social Democratic party believed the application had negative implications for the possibility of Sweden playing a normative global role, and that the focus in foreign policy had shifted to traditional security issues. According to this expectation, membership of NATO was difficult to combine with a more outspoken critique of, for example, the deployment of nuclear arms (SWEE1, SWEE2) and this expectation was repeated by a senior official at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SWEM1). As an example, some viewed

Norway as a not very successful actor in combining NATO membership and nuclear arms critique. Lack of credibility was seen as a problem in relation to actors in the Global South. Overall, the 'old' Swedish model from the 1950s and 1960s, focusing on (national and global) equality seemed under attack (SWEE1).

Other members of the Social Democratic foreign policy elite believed that Sweden, given sufficient political will, could be a global actor in the future. The question was then, is the political will strong enough? 'If we want to mediate in a conflict we can do so. NATO is an intergovernmental organisation so Sweden makes its own decisions. We have an autonomous voice if we want' (SWEBE1). The Social Democrats were not alone in describing the role of the normative internationalist as important for Swedish foreign policy after NATO membership. Among the foreign policy elite in the Moderate Party, the need to continue to play the role of the normative internationalist was considered as a means of contributing to rules-based order. China was explicitly mentioned as a country that should learn to abide by international rules (SWEM2).

In 2022, the Social Democratic government lost the general election, and a new centre-right coalition government between the Moderate Party, the Liberal Party, and the Christian Democratic Party was formed, with Ulf Kristersson as Prime Minister. The new government was a minority government and made an agreement with the nationalist Sweden Democrats to secure majority support in parliament. The government immediately announced the retraction of the FFP and lowered Swedish ODA, sending a clear signal of change, which indicated that the role of normative internationalist would not be prioritized. The government also stated that it regretted the decision by the former government to recognize Palestine. All in all, the clear horizontal disunity and the arguments brought forward against the decisions with regard to the PFP, the former campaign for a seat in the UN Security Council, and the decision to recognize Palestine clearly showed that the role of a normative internationalist was seen as incompatible with the role as an integrated European. The conflict revolved around the question whether autonomy or integration should be the foundation of Swedish foreign policy.

5.3. Sweden as an Integrationist European: Seeking Shelter, Influence, and Autonomy

In the decade that followed Sweden's entry into the European Union, the country gradually settled into its new role as an EU member state, and

the public gradually became more positive towards the European Union as a growing portion of the population viewed membership as good for the country.¹¹³ Part of Sweden's adjustment to its new European role was that the fears associated with becoming a member of the European Union at the time of accession in 1995 had not materialized and had subsequently faded away,¹¹⁴ which cleared the way for a more profound adjustment of the established foreign policy roles and eventually a reshaping of Sweden's foreign role repertoire. In addition, the political elite was quick to learn how to promote Swedish interests in Brussels. An early highpoint to that effect was the first Swedish presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2001.¹¹⁵

The three issues at the heart of the referendum campaign in 1994 (i.e., the effects on Sweden's democracy, welfare state, and policy of military non-alignment) gradually appeared less challenging. The centre-right government in power 2006–2014, under Reinfeldt's leadership, adopted a more ambitious stance regarding the European Union and, to a lesser degree, NATO. In the first government statement on foreign policy to parliament on 14 February 2007, Bildt announced that 'Sweden has a crucial mission to strengthen European cooperation, turning the Union into the force for peace, liberty and reconciliation that the world increasingly needs' and, for these reasons, 'we want Sweden to belong to the core of European cooperation.'¹¹⁶

Yet, the foreign minister recognized that 'Sweden, through its membership of the political alliance that the EU constitutes, has broken with a tradition with roots from 1812.'¹¹⁷ This statement epitomized the government's somewhat ambivalent position, which on the one hand placed Sweden's foreign and security policy within the European Union with profound implications for its role as autonomous security seeker, as its nature as a political alliance was recognized, while, on the other hand, retained the position as a militarily non-aligned country opening for a potential inter-role conflict. Bildt gave two reasons to justify the duality of this position: first, that 'the development and shaping of our foreign and security policy must continue to be conducted on the basis of a broad national consensus',¹¹⁸ thereby implicitly recognizing

¹¹³ M. Weissenbilder and U. Andersson, *Politiska skiljelinjer i stödet för EU, 12epa* (Swedish Institute for European Studies (SIEPS), 2022).

¹¹⁴ F. Bynander and Y. Nilsson, eds. *Tio år i EU. Vad vet vi och vad vill vi?* (Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle, 2005).

¹¹⁵ J. Tallberg, ed. *När Europa kom till Sverige* (Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle, 2001).

¹¹⁶ C. Bildt, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, 14 February* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2007); author's translation.

¹¹⁷ Bildt, *14 February*; author's translation.

¹¹⁸ Bildt, *14 February*.

that there was no consensus on giving up military non-alignment. Second, that Sweden's 'future security builds on cooperation and solidarity with other countries', which acknowledged that the country was not seeking a neutral security position.¹¹⁹

The centre-right government's foreign policy, which rested on the duality between Sweden's professed status as a non-aligned state and its engagement and commitment to the European Union as a political alliance, waxed and waned between these two considerations during the following decades. The same duality was in large parts also adopted by the red-green governments in power between 2014 and 2022, albeit with a different emphasis. This duality can be seen as the result of the long-standing schism within the Swedish political elite between the political parties that sought closer engagement with political and military alliances, that is, the European Union and, to a lesser extent, NATO, and those who remained aloof because of a belief in Sweden's policy of non-alignment as a precondition for peace in northern Europe. This dissension lay at the heart of the role of an integrationist European and at times gave the impression that the country still had half a foot outside the European Union. Concretely, the reluctance to adopt the euro as the national currency and the refusal until the early 2020s to consider qualified majority voting in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) were expressions of role dissonance. Another apparent sign of the reluctance to fully adhere to an integrationist role was Sweden's tendency to align with the UK on opposing the deepening of the European Union's competences and the concerns regarding the prospects of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union after the referendum in 2016.¹²⁰

In some parties (e.g., Social Democratic Party), the duality also existed within the ranks of the party and was often expressed as a strong ambivalence towards possible future membership of NATO, as Sweden's membership of the European Union was tolerated on economic grounds and its significance for security policy was often downplayed in the national debate.¹²¹ The elites' views on the ability of Sweden to influence the political direction of the European Union varied to an equal degree. Some believed that Sweden could gain in influence and therefore strengthen its capacity to act from

¹¹⁹ Bildt, 14 February; author's translation.

¹²⁰ N. Huhe, D. Naurin, and R. Thomson, *With or Without you? Policy Impact and Networks in the Council of the EU after Brexit*, *European Policy Analysis*, 2017:8epa (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2017); Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, *Brexit: Konsekvenser för EU och Sverige* (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), 2017).

¹²¹ H. Edström, "Efter EU-medlemskapet. Nya linjer i svensk utrikespolitik?" *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 118, no. 4 (2016): 497–527; C. Karlsson, M. Mårtensson, and T. Persson. *Hur mycket opposition finns det i svensk EU-politik?* *European Policy Analysis*, 2018:5epa (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2018).

within the European Union, while others believed that Sweden's autonomy was irrevocably compromised by its membership of the European Union. As Sweden was not about to withdraw from the European Union—there was never a majority for such an option—the former camp tended to advocate an active stance within the European Union, while the latter preferred Sweden to remain aloof with regard to new policy initiatives and to greet proposals to strengthen the European Union's foreign and security policy with scepticism.

With regard to the vertical dimension, the public gradually shifted in its attitude towards the European Union, first by accepting, and then increasingly supporting, membership, but without necessarily agreeing to deepen integration. Nonetheless, the acute debate during the referendum campaign in 1994, which continued into the first few years of membership, had petered out by the mid-2000s. From the 2010s onwards, Sweden became one of the most content members of the European Union.¹²² With progressively stronger public support for membership of the European Union, the Green Party withdrew its demand for Sweden to leave in 2008. The Left Party and the Sweden Democrats, the latter of which entered parliament in 2010, toned down their demands for a withdrawal from the European Union, albeit without entirely abandoning this position. Reflecting on significant changes to Sweden's foreign and security policy in the last decades, a senior civil servant recognized the role of the European Union:

The big change in Swedish foreign policy, concerning its orientation, decision-making and implementation, came with EU membership. Given that decisions in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) are taken by consensus, Sweden must always take a position, even on issues where there is no clear position or where one has no real desire to get involved. If one does not take a position, i.e. if one does not support a decision within the CFSP, that standpoint will not be adopted due to a lack of consensus, and Sweden absolutely does not want to be part of that. This implies that a lot of work needs go into anchoring points on the EU's foreign policy agenda in the [Swedish] parliament. Once a decision is passed in CFSP, the Swedish government has already taken a position. On this basis, the CFSP has acquired a strong formative role. The EU's foreign and security policy is a strong external driving force in Swedish foreign and security policy (SWEM1).

¹²² Eurobarometer, 2023, "Standard Eurobarometer 98, Winter 2022–2023," <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2872>.

5.3.1 Promoting Swedish Foreign Policy Interests in a Deepening European Union

The Social Democratic government (1994–2006) and the centre-right coalition government (2006–2014) laid down the role of Sweden in the European Union during the first twenty years of membership. In many respects, these governments adopted similar policy lines and attitudes towards the role of the European Union as a global actor, albeit with some differences.¹²³ The foreign ministers of both governments argued that the European Union provided a platform to pursue Swedish interests in certain areas, chiefly EU enlargement to the east, the European Union's relations to the countries in the eastern neighbourhood (to a lesser degree to the south), and the European Union's emerging peacekeeping capacities.¹²⁴

Moreover, they also shared the ambition of the European Union to promote international free trade, global governance, and multilateral cooperation, and supported its role in spreading human rights, democracy, and the rule of law worldwide. In essence, the elites in the leading parties on the left and right (i.e., Social Democrats and Moderates) shared a belief in the European Union's burgeoning role as a normative power that could be integrated and internalized to their own worldviews, albeit with different nuances and grounded in slightly different causal beliefs.

The European Union's role as a normative power, which grew stronger during the 2010s, resembled in many respects Sweden's role as a normative internationalist.¹²⁵ Through an overlapping normative orientation towards foreign policy, Sweden could integrate its own role within the larger EU role. This facilitated Sweden's integration into the European Union and boosted its ability to advance its interests through the European Union. It also led to a two-way Europeanization process regarding policy reform. For instance, Sweden's traditional orientation on development policy changed in line with the European Union, but membership also meant that it gained access to, and influence over, international policy reform efforts through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee.¹²⁶

¹²³ Edström, "Efter EU-medlemskapet."

¹²⁴ A. Michalski, "Sweden: Shedding Exceptionalism in the Face of Europeanization," in *The Member States in the European Union*, ed. S. Bulmer S. and C. Lequense, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹²⁵ D. Brommesson, "Normative Europeanization: The Case of Swedish Foreign Policy Reorientation," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45, no. 2 (2010): 224–44.

¹²⁶ B. Odén, "Sverige och internationellt utvecklingsarbete," in *Sverige i världen*, ed. D. Brommesson and A-M Ekengren, 4th ed. (Gleerups förlag, 2022).

At the same time, there were differences in how the governments saw Sweden's role in the European Union and the coordination of national foreign policy within the European Union. The Social Democrats saw the European Union as an important arena and a means for achieving long-held objectives, such as peace, human rights, and justice in the world, as well as stability in the Baltic region and in the Balkans, but they did not articulate a European identity or a specific ambition to influence the orientation of the European Union's foreign and security policy. The strong internationalist engagement of the Social Democrats remained, in essence, intact.

The then Foreign Minister, Anna Lindh, expressed this as a triptych: 'Sweden is a Nordic country . . . Sweden belongs to Europe . . . Sweden has, for a long time, had strong global engagement.'¹²⁷ In view of the impending Swedish presidency of the European Union in 2001, Lindh continued: 'for Sweden, it is about strengthening the EU as a peace project'; further, the minister extolled the United Nations as 'the ultimate guarantor for right before might in international politics',¹²⁸ while the role of the European Union was to secure stability and progress in the wider European region.

The Moderate Party, whose foreign policy was strongly influenced by Bildt (then Foreign Minister), stated that Sweden should be placed at the heart of the European Union¹²⁹ and should work 'to make [the EU's] voice in the world stronger'.¹³⁰ Different to the Social Democrats, Bildt wanted to impress 'that Sweden's foreign policy is part of the EU's foreign policy, and a main part of our daily work consists of shaping and conducting [European foreign policy]'.¹³¹ Regarding security policy, both the Moderate Party and the Social Democratic Party argued that the most crucial dimension of security lay in a stable eastern neighbourhood. However, the Social Democrats saw a new European security order as indivisible and believed that it should include all European states, including Russia, and involve not only the European Union and NATO but also the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other organizations. Furthermore, in the early 2000s, the Social Democrats paired a pledge for security in Europe with a focus on

¹²⁷ A. Lindh, 2000, 9 February, *Riksdagens protokoll 1999/2000:63* (Riksdagen), https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/protokoll/riksdagens-snabbprotokoll-1999200063-onsdagen_gn0963/.

¹²⁸ Lindh, *Riksdagens protokoll 1999/2000*.

¹²⁹ Bildt, 14 February; C. Bildt, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, 18 February* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2009); C. Bildt, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, 17 February* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2010); C. Bildt, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, 16 February* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2011).

¹³⁰ Bildt, 17 February.

¹³¹ Bildt, 17 February.

human security in the United Nations under an umbrella of humanitarian developmental objectives (see also [Section 5.2](#)).¹³²

The Moderate Party had a much stronger focus on peace and stability in Europe. The European Union was seen as a security actor, not least for its ability to ensure ‘freedom and democracy’ as well as ‘stability and prosperity for an increasing number of people’, which could be attained by ‘build[ing] a peace order’ in Europe.¹³³ For Bildt, the European Union was a political alliance built on solidarity among the member states for common security.¹³⁴ In 2010, after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty that introduced two new security clauses into the treaties of the European Union (articles 42(7) (TEU) and 222 (TFEU)), Bildt widened the definition of Sweden’s security by stating that Sweden would not remain passive in the event of an attack on another EU member state.¹³⁵ Built on an expectation of reciprocity, this declaration of solidarity remained in place up until February 2022, when, for a short while, the Social Democratic government believed it to constitute a possible alternative to membership of NATO.¹³⁶

Upon its accession to the European Union, Sweden was immediately confronted with issues regarding the depth and breadth of political, economic, and social integration within the European Union. Due to the geopolitical shift in the wake of the Cold War, EU member states sought to strengthen EU foreign and security policy and to bolster its role as an international actor. To this end, several initiatives were taken both inside the EU institutional structures and through bilateral and plurilateral agreements of cooperation among member states to enhance European security and defence capabilities. This increased urgency to enhance European foreign and security policy can be traced back to the necessity to stabilize eastern Europe in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the wars in the former Yugoslavia. The United States impressed on European governments the necessity for them to take greater responsibility for conflicts in Europe, either under the flag of NATO or as EU missions. Around the same time, the very definition of security changed as a result of the attack on the New York World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, triggering the so-called war on terror and the notion of non-state terrorism and failed states.

EU member states supported the US war in Afghanistan but were deeply divided on how to respond to the American decision to invade Iraq in

¹³² Lindh, *Riksdagens protokoll 1999/2000*.

¹³³ Bildt, 14 February; Bildt, 17 February; Bildt, 16 February.

¹³⁴ Bildt, 14 February; Bildt, 16 February.

¹³⁵ Bildt, 17 February.

¹³⁶ A. Linde, 2022, 16 February, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs* (Riksdagen), <https://www.government.se/speeches/2022/02/statement-of-foreign-policy-2022/>.

2003 and subsequent American requests for support. Nonetheless, they came together in 2003 to endorse the first-ever European security doctrine, the European Security Strategy (EES), elaborated under the oversight of Javier Solana, the European Union's first High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP).¹³⁷ During this period of unsettled relations among the western allies, Sweden attempted to navigate a middle-way by refusing to lend support to the war in Iraq due to the absence of a mandate from the UN Security Council while at the same time contributing troops to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan (see [Section 5.1](#)). This approach was in line with its strong tradition of supporting international law and enhancing the role of the United Nations in world politics, in accordance with the role of normative internationalist.

Against the backdrop of an increasingly tense international climate, Swedish governments had to navigate their new role as an integrationist European by finding their way between the big policy files, major new initiatives, and the complexities of the daily coordination procedures, while at the same time promoting Swedish interests and concerns. Research shows that Sweden was able to build quite strong relationships of trust vis-à-vis other EU member states that rate Sweden among the most preferred coalition partners among the smaller member states 2015–2021.¹³⁸

The efforts of other EU member states to deepen integration in the area of foreign and security policy and to strengthen the European Union's military capabilities were sometimes met with consternation and suspicion from Stockholm's side, while at other times new initiatives were welcomed, especially if they aligned with Swedish security interests and normative outlook. Regarding the establishment of European battle groups in 1999, the Social Democratic government, subsequently followed by the centre-right government, took the initiative of setting up a joint Nordic battle group, which, besides Sweden, comprised Finland, Norway, and Estonia, with Sweden committing the majority of the soldiers and equipment.¹³⁹

For Sweden, the Nordic battle group was a welcome initiative as it combined the participation of Norway (a Nordic partner but not a member of the European Union) and Estonia, whose participation was seen as a step towards stability in the Baltic region. As described in [Sections 5.1](#) and [5.2](#), the

¹³⁷ Council of the EU, *A Secure Europe in a Better World—European Security Strategy* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2003).

¹³⁸ M. Johansson, O. Larsson, R. Lindahl, and D. Naurin, *Cooperation in the Council of the EU: Explaining Network Relations among Member States, European Policy Analysis 2023: 15epa* (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2023).

¹³⁹ J. J. Andersson, *Armed and Ready? The EU Battlegroup Concept and the Nordic Battlegroup. Report no. 2006:2* (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), 2006).

Nordic battlegroup brought together two long-standing Swedish interests: the strengthening of the European Union as a global actor and the deepening of the European Union's capacity to take decisions in the area of foreign and security policy while maintaining security in the Baltic Sea area.

With respect to the deepening of the European Union's own competences, the centre-right government, holding the rotating presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2009, handled the concluding stages of the negotiations in the Lisbon Treaty competently, despite last-minute opposition by Czech president Vaclav Klaus, which almost scuppered the signing of the new treaty.¹⁴⁰ Bildt, as chair of the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council, steered the process of appointing a new HR/VP of the European Union's foreign and security policy and oversaw the first stages of the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS).¹⁴¹

When it came to EU enlargement, Swedish governments invariably supported the accession of the Central and East European and Balkan states to the European Union, and for a long while Sweden also gave support to Türkiye's application for EU membership. As the Central and Eastern European candidate states joined the European Union in 2004 and 2007, respectively, the issue of how to stabilize the countries in the eastern neighbourhood through a combination of market access and norm diffusion climbed the European Union's agenda, closely aligned to long-standing Swedish interests.

Concerned by the perceived imbalance in the European Union's attention to the countries in the southern neighbourhood, the Swedish and Polish governments took a joint initiative in 2008 to set up the Eastern Partnership, subsequently launched in May 2009, with Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.¹⁴² The setting up of the Eastern Partnership was in line with a long-standing Swedish concern regarding stability in northern Europe and the approach of using the European Union's structures, political weight, and resources as a way to realize this goal.

To address Swedish concerns in its more immediate neighbourhood, successive governments promoted stability in the Baltic Sea and the High North. During the first Swedish presidency of the European Union in 2001, the Social Democratic government successfully obtained EU support for

¹⁴⁰ F. Langdal, and G. von Sydow, "Introduction: Interim Judgements of the Swedish EU Presidency," in *The Swedish Presidency: European Perspectives (2009:30p)*, ed. F. Langdal and G. von Sydow (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2009); M. Rosén Sundström, "Leading the European Union: Sweden's EU Presidencies 2001 and 2009," in *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics*, ed. J. Pierre (Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁴¹ Bildt, 17 February.

¹⁴² Council of the EU, *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, 8435/09 (Presse 78), 7 May 2009 (Publications Office of the European Union, 2009); A. Michalski, "The Eastern Partnership: Time for an Eastern Policy of the EU?" *European Policy Analysis*, 14 (2009): 1–12.

establishing the Council of the Baltic Sea States, whose secretariat was to be located in Stockholm.¹⁴³ During the second Swedish presidency of the European Union in 2009, the European Union adopted a Baltic Sea strategy, which had been a priority area for Sweden before it took the helm of the European Union.¹⁴⁴

Despite Sweden's ability to pursue some of its national interests within the European Union, integration into the European Union's foreign and security policy was not without tension. In this period, Swedish elites viewed the strengthening of European security and defence policy with considerable suspicion. On the one hand, Sweden did not want to give up military non-alignment and therefore the European Union ought not, in its view, evolve into a military alliance. This meant that Sweden was opposed to a merger between the Western European Union (WEU) and the European Union if it meant that the security guarantees for the former were kept intact (see [Chapter 4](#)). Instead, it advocated in favour of the European Union developing peacekeeping capacities in the guise of the Petersberg tasks and supported the development of the European Union's capacity to conduct peacekeeping, confidence building, and training missions in line with its traditional normative internationalist role.

Another major concern of Sweden was to ensure that participation in specific missions was voluntary, based on flexible solutions taken on a case-by-case basis, and grounded in a UN mandate or an expressed invitation from the government of the country in question (see also [Section 5.2.1](#)). This can be seen as part of an attempt to bolster the status of international law, in line with its internationalist role, thus combining this role with the role of an integrationist European. The bottom line of successive Swedish governments was to prevent the institutionalization of the European Union's foreign and security policy by opposing a centralization of its security and defence capacities in Brussels.

In a bid to retain the maximum degree of autonomy over foreign policy decisions, the Social Democratic government strongly resisted a move towards majority voting in the European Union on foreign and security policy. Although not a member of NATO, Sweden was also sceptical of closer cooperation between the two organizations, while at the same time it recognized the need to adopt a constructive stance and to build good relationships with some member states, primarily the United Kingdom and Germany, in view of new political initiatives in the European Union.

¹⁴³ Edström, "Efter EU-medlemskapet."

¹⁴⁴ R. Bengtsson and J. Tallberg, "Avslutning. Lärdomar från två svenska ordförandeskap," in *I Europas Tjänst. Sveriges ordförandeskap i EU 2009*, ed. R. Bengtsson (Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle, 2010); R. Bengtsson, "Sweden and the Baltic Sea Region," in *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics*, ed. J. Pierre (Oxford University Press, 2016).

In this vein, Sweden has participated in Operation Atalanta since 2009, as well as in training missions in Mali, the Central African Republic, and Somalia. The Swedish government also opted to lend support to other EU member states taking the lead in missions in Africa as part of a reformed security policy based on out-of-area missions (see [Section 5.1](#)). For instance, Swedish armed forces joined French operations, that is, Serval and Barkhane, in Mali (2012–2022). Swedish Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre was the Force Commander for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) between 2018 and 2021.¹⁴⁵ Sweden also joined French and British forces under the NATO flag to secure a no-fly-zone over Libya in 2011 in order to enforce UN Resolution 1973.¹⁴⁶

The decision to participate in the military operation in Libya was taken after extensive debate in parliament, where the opposition, led by the Social Democrats, opposed a French advocated, EU-led military operation. An agreement to join the military operation could not be reached before a UN resolution was in place, and the Swedish political elite therefore couched Sweden's participation in terms of it representing a humanitarian mission.¹⁴⁷

Overall, the stance adopted by Social Democratic and centre-right governments in power during the first twenty years of EU membership was rather reactive to attempts within the European Union to strengthen European foreign and security policy. Therefore, on the central questions regarding the institutionalization of the European Union as a foreign and security policy actor, as well as on major international issues, the governments remained somewhat passive and aloof. However, on issues concerning regional stability (especially in the Baltic Sea and in general towards eastern Europe), they actively promoted a stronger role for the European Union.¹⁴⁸

5.3.2 Sweden and the Evolving Strategic Autonomy of the European Union in an Increasingly Ominous Neighbourhood

In 2014, a minority government consisting of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party came to power after the centre-right government lost the general election. Lacking a majority, this government had to rely on

¹⁴⁵ D. Gyllensporre and A-C. Monin Nylund, *Military Peacekeeping Mediation: A First-Hand Account from Mali* (Santérus Academic Press, 2024).

¹⁴⁶ Doeser, "Sweden's Libya Decision."

¹⁴⁷ A. Michalski and L. Norman, "Conceptualizing European Security Cooperation: Competing International Political Orders and Domestic Factors," *European Journal of International Relations*, 22, no. 4 (2016): 749–72; Brommesson and Ekengren, *Mediatization*.

¹⁴⁸ Bengtsson and Tallberg, "Avslutning."

other parties to pass legislation. The new minority government ushered in a new approach to the European Union that downplayed its centrality in Sweden's foreign and security policy and promoted a universalist approach (Section 5.2). The government sought to conduct a more autonomous, normatively oriented foreign policy in line with the traditional normative internationalist role that satisfied the political inclinations of both the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party.

Concretely, this resulted in the launch of the FFP in 2014 and the decision, taken without prior consultation with other EU member states, to unilaterally recognize the state of Palestine in the same year. However, in many respects the European Union was seen as both useful and necessary. For instance, at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, the European Union (supported by the Swedish government, which helped to coordinate a unified EU approach to negotiations) played a prominent role.

The minority government also followed its predecessors in defining its relations with the great powers (China, Russia, and to a lesser extent, the United States) within the framework of the European Union's external trade, foreign, and security policies. Particularly in the case of China and Russia, the government avoided pursuing difficult issues (i.e., human rights, democracy, and the rule of law) bilaterally with these states and argued that the government's stance was integrated into EU strategy.¹⁴⁹

Since joining the European Union in 1995, Sweden had supported endeavours to create a partnership between the European Union and Russia, building its approach to Russia within the framework of the European Union and focusing on Russia's role in the European security order and stability in the Baltic Sea region.¹⁵⁰ During the second Swedish presidency of the European Union in 2009, Bildt called for a summit in Stockholm to start talks on a Partnership for Modernisation as a way of putting European Union–Russian relations back on a productive footing. This eventually proved futile as Russia was not willing to change its approach to Georgia.¹⁵¹

The European Union's increasingly close relations with the countries in its eastern neighbourhood were resented by Russia. At the Eastern Partnership meeting in 2013, Russia 'launched an aggressive effort' to stop these countries

¹⁴⁹ A. Michalski, "Europeanization of National Foreign Policy: The Case of Denmark's and Sweden's Relations to China," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51, no. 5 (2013b): 884–900.

¹⁵⁰ Lindh, *Riksdagens protokoll 1999/2000*.

¹⁵¹ M. Lindström, "Utrikespolitiken: Sverige medlare snarare än ledare," in *I Europas Tjänst. Sveriges ordförandeskap i EU 2009*, ed. R. Bengtsson (Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle, 2010); Bildt, "Russia."

from signing agreements on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the European Union.¹⁵² The strong show of public support for closer relations with the European Union in Ukraine provoked Putin to annex the Crimean Peninsula and to stage a pro-Russian uprising in the secessionist regions of Luhansk and Donetsk, bringing relations between the European Union and Russia to a new low. This was followed by the suspension of the Strategic Partnership.¹⁵³

Within the European Union, Sweden supported the condemnation of Russia and the decision to punish Russia through sanctions and diplomatic isolation.¹⁵⁴ For Sweden, ‘Russia and the war in Ukraine confirmed a long-standing view of Putin and his regime [. . .] Sweden has for a long time belonged to the EU member states that warned other states, chiefly France and Germany, not to be so naïve about Russia’s intensions’ (SWEM1). Nonetheless, when Russia annexed Crimea, the government seemed at first to hold out hope that Russia would adjust its belligerent stance if President Putin could only realize the extent of the consternation in Europe. In this vein, Wallström declared that ‘Sweden welcomed that the EU stood united in its response to the development in Russia and Ukraine.’¹⁵⁵ However, the language on Russia grew sterner, and in 2018 Wallström declared that:

Russia bears the responsibility for the conflict in eastern Ukraine [. . .] We condemn the Russian aggression, including the illegal annexation of Crimea. These flagrant violations of international law are the most serious threat to the European security order since the end of the Cold War. The EU’s sanctions must be upheld as long as the reasons for their introduction remain.¹⁵⁶

However, Russia’s belligerence was only one aspect of a more ominous international context. The rise of China, whose impact was increasingly felt among EU member states, represented an additional worrying trend. In Sweden, governments had traditionally been ambivalent towards China, on the one hand promoting closer economic relations, and, on the other hand, deploring the lack of political reforms and the deteriorating human rights

¹⁵² Bildt, “Russia,” 7.

¹⁵³ K. Wolczuk, “Ukraine in the European Neighbourhood Policy,” in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighbourhood Policy*, ed. T. Demmelhuber, A. Marchetti, and T. Schumacher (Routledge, 2018).

¹⁵⁴ B. Fägersten and B. Jerdén, “En moralisk stormakt i post-neutral tappning: Svensk utrikespolitik 2011–2018,” *Internasjonal Politikk*, 76, no. 4 (2018): 343–54.

¹⁵⁵ M. Wallström, 2015, 11 February, *Statement on Foreign Policy 2015* (Riksdagen).

¹⁵⁶ M. Wallström, 2018, 14 February, *Statement on Foreign Policy 2018* (Riksdagen).

situation. In the 2000s and 2010s, Sweden had had a fairly open and positive attitude towards China, pursuing closer bilateral economic bonds in line with many other EU member states.

In 2018, however, this attitude changed. This was, in part, a result of the actions of Gui Congyou, the Chinese ambassador in Stockholm, a self-proclaimed wolf warrior diplomat. Prompted by his intimidation of politicians, journalists, and exiled Chinese citizens, as well as his refusal to accept Swedish law, the government adopted its first strategy on China in 2019.¹⁵⁷

A further development that shook both the European Union and Sweden was the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in November 2016. For many EU member states, including Sweden, President Trump's general attitude towards the European Union and his 'America First' policies and actions risked undermining international cooperation, including multilateralism and international norms.¹⁵⁸ For Sweden, the erosion of the international rules-based system and the insecurity that President Trump brought to Europe, through his waning support for NATO and criticism of the European Union, challenged Sweden's traditional roles as both a normative internationalist and as an autonomous security seeker, but strengthened its integrationist European role.

Wallström expressed the government's concern by stating that:

We believe that Sweden, the EU and the US have everything to gain from working for a rules-based world order, from standing up for our common norms and values, and tackling global challenges together. [. . .] But the White House's actions raise questions about the role of the United States in the world (Wallström 2017).¹⁵⁹

The deep-seated feeling of insecurity caused by the actions of President Trump were summed up as follows: 'We have long been able to trust the US, but during the time President Trump was in power relations with the EU worsened. Yes, the whole transatlantic partnership was shocked to its foundations' (SWEE2).

¹⁵⁷ B. Jerdén and V. Bohman, *China's Propaganda Campaign in Sweden, 2018–2019* (Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2019); Swedish Government, *Arbetet i frågor som rör Kina. Regeringens skrivelse, Skr. 2019/20:18* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019), <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/8a6d4e54b01d48ed9c196a252d09aff4/arbetet-i-fragor-som-ror-kina-skr-2019-20-18.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ European Parliament, *EU strategic autonomy 2013–2023* (European Parliament Research Service/EU Strategic Autonomy Monitor, 2022). [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733589/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733589_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733589/EPRS_BRI(2022)733589_EN.pdf).

¹⁵⁹ M. Wallström, 2017, 27 March, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs 2017* (Riksdagen).

5.3.3 Sweden and the Strengthening of European Strategic Autonomy in an Increasingly Geopolitical World

Against this increasingly uncertain international context, in 2016 the European Union published the Global Strategy, a new doctrinal document that aimed to strengthen the European Union's capacity as an international actor and better support European interests and security without relinquishing its role as a normative power.¹⁶⁰ In response to revisionist states (those states wishing to put an end to the existing international system) and those political leaders taking an increasingly critical attitude towards the European Union, the strategy sought to bolster the European Union's strategic autonomy and proposed 'principled pragmatism' for engagement abroad.

Wallström welcomed the Global Strategy and emphasized that Sweden had been one of its initiators and was closely involved in its elaboration, chiefly with the aim of strengthening the European Union's crisis management capabilities.¹⁶¹ In a statement geared towards strengthening the integrationist European role, Wallström signalled the importance of protecting the European security order, in which the European Union was seen as an important player that stood for fundamental values and principles, not least with regard to its eastern European neighbourhood. Wallström expressed the need to strengthen the European Union's capacity and its internal cohesion on account of this, albeit without clarifying which concrete reforms Sweden might support to this end, as its reticence to take decision through majority voting remained just as strong.

Nonetheless, the red–green coalition government, which had demonstrated its universalistic stance on world politics and willingness to forge a more autonomous foreign policy at the beginning of its tenure, shifted to an approach geared towards security in the region and support for those (European) common values and principles being challenged by revisionist forces both inside and outside the European Union. In line with this thinking, Wallström reverted to earlier stances designating the European Union as 'Sweden's most important political arena', claiming that Swedish foreign policy 'builds on cohesion in the EU'.¹⁶²

Yet, this gradually shifting position was still portrayed as congruent with Sweden's claim that 'non-participation in military alliances serves us well,

¹⁶⁰ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2016).

¹⁶¹ Wallström, *Foreign Policy 2016*.

¹⁶² Wallström, *Foreign Policy 2016*.

and contributes to the stability and security in northern Europe, predicated on an 'active, broad and responsible foreign and security policy combined with credible national defence capabilities.'¹⁶³ Soon, however, the European Union would set about building strategic autonomy through a number of new initiatives in the security and military domains. These would test Sweden's balancing act that was aimed at retaining a maximal degree of autonomy within the European structures, while at the same time remaining a credible and constructive partner within the European Union.¹⁶⁴

In 2017, EU member states decided to establish closer cooperation in the area of security and defence policy through PESCO to realize the objectives of the Global Strategy of 2016 regarding peacekeeping, civilian missions, and other forms of military and security engagement outside of EU borders.¹⁶⁵ PESCO was built on a commitment from EU member states to enhance their military and security capabilities with a view to strengthening the CFSP and the European Union's strategic autonomy. This was to be achieved by participating in common projects on a voluntary basis in the areas of cyber, civil, and military security. There were other initiatives to bolster the European Union's security role, including an annual defence review (CARD), a training initiative (Military Training and Conduct Capability), and the establishment of the EDA.

It fell on the red–green coalition government to decide on Sweden's participation in PESCO, towards which it had long held a sceptical view.¹⁶⁶ In its proposal to parliament, the government argued in favour of Sweden's participation on the grounds that PESCO was in line with the government's policy of strengthening the European Union's foreign and security policy through enhanced military capabilities for crisis management.¹⁶⁷ It was deemed especially useful to strengthen the European Union's capacity to take on various security and civil missions abroad, particularly given the increasingly testing international environment and heightened traditional and non-traditional security threats in the European neighbourhood.

¹⁶³ Wallström, *Foreign Policy 2016*.

¹⁶⁴ C. Håkansson, "European Strategic Autonomy: Engaged, Drawing Red Lines. A View from Stockholm," in *Strategic Autonomy: Views from the North*, ed. J. Lewander (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2021a).

¹⁶⁵ M. Britz, "European Defence Policy: Between Flexible Integration and a Defence Union," in *The EU between Federal Union and Flexible Integration*, ed. A. Bakardjieva, P. Ekman, A. Michalski, and L. Oxelheim (Palgrave MacMillan, 2023).

¹⁶⁶ C. Håkansson, "Finding its Way in EU Security and Defence Cooperation: A View from Sweden," *European View*, 20, no. 1 (2021b): 80–7.

¹⁶⁷ Swedish Government, *Nationell säkerhetsstrategi* (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017).

Sweden's participation was deemed compatible with military non-alignment due to the intergovernmental character of PESCO, and the government underlined that PESCO did not constitute a threat to national sovereignty. In the government's view, the risk of PESCO developing in an undesirable supranational direction was small as decision making by consensus would continue and EU member states were to participate voluntarily in projects decided on a case-by-case basis. Parliament concurred with the government's view, clearing the route for Sweden to join PESCO in December 2017. The decision was taken despite dissenting voices from the Left Party and the Sweden Democrats, both of which, for different reasons, opposed a perceived militarization of the European Union.

PESCO was only one part of the development towards a European Defence Union (EDU) by 2025—a goal announced by European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen in her 2019 inaugural speech.¹⁶⁸ In 2004, the European Union had already established the EDA, and in 2021, the EDF, with an initial funding of over seven billion euros for the years 2021–27, was created in order to boost intra-European capacity-building. The EDF was to be placed under the stewardship of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space in order to strengthen the market logic of common defence procurement and armaments production.

The creation of the EDF put the Swedish government on the horns of a dilemma.¹⁶⁹ First, centralization of the EDF in the hands of the European Commission was a decisive step towards supranational integration in the area of security and defence, which had hitherto been a red flag for the red-green government. In addition, it also entailed a risk of promoting national champions—a logic often associated with French industrial policy—which had long been resisted by Sweden which, in a bid for market efficiency, had privatized most of its defence industry. At the same time, the EDF was based on competitive bidding and a market-oriented logic that is in line with the Swedish belief in competition, even in the domain of the security and defence industry.

Second, the Swedish defence industry is large relative to the size of the national economy and is, in international comparisons of absolute numbers, on par with the United Arab Emirates and Türkiye, whose industries

¹⁶⁸ U. von der Leyen, 2019, 27 November, *Speech in the European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6408; K. Engberg, "A European Defence Union by 2025?": *Policy Overview work in progress* (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), 2021); Britz, "European Defence Policy."

¹⁶⁹ A. Lundborg Regnér and C. Håkansson, *Sweden, the European Defence Fund and Permanent Structured Cooperation: Challenges Ahead for Third-Party Participation. UI Paper 4/2021* (Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2021).

are much less sophisticated and broad-ranged.¹⁷⁰ Since the early 2000s, the Swedish defence industry has been in the hands of private companies, some of which are entities from outside the European Union, specifically Norway, the United States, and the United Kingdom, which puts the Swedish state in a different position compared to most other EU member states.¹⁷¹

The Swedish red–green government was, therefore, initially quite sceptical towards the EDF and worked to ensure that third-country partners would be allowed to participate in projects funded by the EDF. It was reported that the Swedish government, contrary to its otherwise arm's length attitude to the defence industry, was urged by these companies to actively get involved in the negotiations in order to influence the shaping of the EDF's rules.¹⁷²

The outcome of the negotiations contained a compromise designed to satisfy EU member states concerned with risks to security and seeking to bolster their domestic defence industry, which were often fully or part-owned by the state, and those, such as Sweden, whose defence industry has extensive partnerships with foreign entities. These entities must now pass a security clearance, may not control or own any of the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) generated by projects, and any results generated by projects must stay within the European Union.¹⁷³

The American defence industry was reported to be actively lobbying in Brussels to ensure that it would be allowed to take part in projects funded by the EDF.¹⁷⁴ By 2022, Norway was the only country whose defence industry had received an affirmative security assessment by the EDF.¹⁷⁵ With these modifications to the rules, Sweden's defence industry has participated in a number of projects funded by EDF. However, the ongoing challenge for Sweden is to balance national security and defence industry interests with a stronger transatlantic link and deeper European integration.¹⁷⁶

5.3.4 Sweden and the Strengthening of the European Union's Geo-Economic Defence

Parallel to launching the plan to establish a European Security and Defence Union in 2019, under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen the European Commission actively pursued a number of new instruments and measures

¹⁷⁰ P. Olsson et al., *Defence Industrial Outlook. A Global Outlook with a Special Focus. FOI-R-5333-SE* (Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2022), 19, 34.

¹⁷¹ Lundborg Regnéér and Håkansson, *Challenges Ahead*; Olsson et al., *Defence Industrial Outlook*.

¹⁷² Olsson et al., *Defence Industrial Outlook*, 56.

¹⁷³ Olsson et al., *Defence Industrial Outlook*.

¹⁷⁴ Engberg, "A European Defence Union."

¹⁷⁵ Olsson et al., *Defence Industrial Outlook*.

¹⁷⁶ Olsson et al., *Defence Industrial Outlook*, 10.

to ensure the European Union's economic security, many of which received the support of the member states and were subsequently enacted into EU law. Some of these instruments, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) of 2023, protect the European Union's internal market from undue competition from abroad, while others, such as the Foreign Investment Screening Mechanism (FISM) of 2019 and the Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI) of 2023, are classical instruments of economic statecraft to protect EU member states from undue external pressure.¹⁷⁷

The underlying rationale for these initiatives was China's reaction to EU criticism of its actions during the Covid-19 pandemic and in relation to human rights breaches in Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong. Also, EU criticism of Russia's increasing belligerence towards Ukraine, including the unlawful annexation of Crimea in 2014 and invasion in 2022, was met with attempts from Russia's side to weaponize the EU member states' vulnerability, especially concerning the importation of oil and gas. For the Swedish political and economic elites, the increasingly antagonistic stance taken by China and Russia, and the European Union's willingness to defend itself collectively, constituted a dilemma.

Given its deep-seated belief in the benefit of international free trade in general and, more specifically, the European Union's duty to promote this within a rules-bound multilateral system, these initiatives were contrary to many of the country's principled beliefs. Sweden, therefore, initially adopted a reluctant stance towards these measures, which were seen as the European Union adopting an increasingly protectionist stance.

However, Swedish companies (e.g., H&M, Ericsson) had on several occasions been the target of Chinese punitive measures, and Chinese firms had grown increasingly interested in investing in Sweden and acquiring Swedish companies. Among growing concerns about the security implications of Chinese strategic investments, Sweden banned the telecom giants Huawei and ZTE from its 5G networks in 2020.¹⁷⁸ The decision to make the ban a public display was in contradiction to the more diplomatic approach of many other EU member states; however, Stockholm had soured considerably towards China's attempted operations, understood as designed to extend domestic

¹⁷⁷ European Union (EU), "Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing a Framework for the Screening of Foreign Direct Investments into the Union," *Official Journal of the European Union*, L79I, no. 1 (2019): 1–14; European Commission, 2022, 13 December, *European Green Deal: Agreement Reached on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)*, Press release, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7719; Council of the EU, *Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Protection of the Union and its Member States from Economic Coercion by Third Countries*, 2021/0406 (COD), 23 October 2023 (Publications Office of the European Union, 2023).

¹⁷⁸ B. Fägersten, 2021, 17 February, "5G-affären visar behovet av en ny säkerhetsstrategi," *Dagens Industri*, <https://www.di.se/debatt/5g-affaren-visar-behovet-av-en-ny-sakerhetsstrategi/>.

influence, that were played out during Congyou's time as Ambassador of China to Sweden, 2017–21, when he conducted an open campaign of intimidation of parliamentarians and journalists who did not toe China's line on a number of issues:¹⁷⁹

Sweden's shift away from China went further: Our role as a free trading nation has prompted us to re-evaluate our China-policy given that we have a different view on what constitutes free trade. It has led to a much more critical view of China in Sweden [. . .] The Chinese way of conducting trade, with land grabbing, influence operations, etc., is alien to us (SWEB3).

In conjunction with Russia's increasingly belligerent behaviour, Sweden therefore saw the need to protect European economic interests abroad, as well as to push back on Chinese and Russian investment in strategic infrastructure and efforts to undermine the international rules-bound system.

As the European Union adopted far-reaching measures to green its economy in the fight against climate change, the competitiveness of European companies had to be guarded against foreign companies that did not have to follow stringent environmental protection rules or climate reduction measures, and which received generous state subsidies. Sweden therefore supported the CBAM and other measures, which united parties to the left and the right of the political centre. However, regarding the European Commission's proposals on the Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI) and Foreign Direct Investment Screening Regulation, Sweden regrouped with like-minded EU member states in the 'Frugal Four' constellation to prevent centralization of the European Union's economic defence instruments into the hands of the European Commission.¹⁸⁰ Instead, as a result of the opposition of the Frugal Four, the decisions to apply anti-coercion measures and the screening of foreign investment remained in the hands of individual member states, rendering the geoeconomization of the European Union, if not more uncertain, at least less supranational. To summarize, the Swedish government argued in favour of adopting measures that respected the balance between centralization in the hands of the European Union institutions, primarily the European Commission, and retaining the implementation of policy in individual cases with its member states, thus retaining a measure of autonomy in foreign

¹⁷⁹ Jerdén and Bohman, *China's Propaganda*.

¹⁸⁰ Engberg, "A European Defence Union"; A. Lundborg Regnér, *Screening Foreign Direct Investment: As Important as it is challenging*, UI Paper 9/2022 (Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2022).

affairs. These policies can be seen in the light of forging a stronger integrationist European role which due to a more ominous international context was becoming increasingly dominant in the Swedish role repertoire.

5.3.5 Sweden, the European Union, and Russia's War in Ukraine

The European Union responded with unprecedented resolve and unity to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the implications for Sweden in the area of security and defence. Here, we concentrate on Sweden's actions within the European Union as prompted by the war and its wider consequences.

The unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 pushed the EU member states, including Sweden, into a position of unmitigated support for Ukraine. To that end, the European Union adopted a number of unprecedented measures, the most conspicuous of which is probably the recourse to the European Union's Peace Facility (PF) to compensate member states that donated weapons to Ukraine and to purchase ammunition and other military equipment for use by Ukraine.¹⁸¹ The PF was introduced in 2021 as an off-budget financial facility to strengthen the European Union's ability to prevent conflicts, build peace, and strengthen international security. It was initially strongly opposed by Sweden as a step too far for the European Union to potentially provide munitions and other military equipment to warring parties.¹⁸²

However, when the war in Ukraine broke out, the EU member states, including Sweden, authorized the PF to finance military support for Ukraine's defence. By mid-2023, the European Union had adopted the eleventh sanctions package targeting Russian individuals, companies, and state-controlled entities, while the EU member states that had been dependent on Russian oil and gas moved quickly to end that dependency, or at least a large part of it.¹⁸³ During the Swedish presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2023, the newly elected centre-right minority government worked to support Ukraine militarily and financially, to punish Russia for its actions through further sanctions, and to strengthen the links between

¹⁸¹ K. Engberg, *Invasionen driver Ukraina närmare EU och fördjupar unionens försvarssamarbete: Perspektiv* (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), 2022b).

¹⁸² Håkansson, "Finding its Way."

¹⁸³ S. Kardas, 2023, 13 February, "Conscious Uncoupling: Europeans' Russian Gas Challenge in 2023," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://ecfr.eu/article/conscious-uncoupling-europeans-russian-gas-challenge-in-2023/>.

the European Union and NATO. The government also appointed a high official to lead the working group on using the proceeds from frozen Russian financial assets in Euroclear to the benefit of Ukraine.¹⁸⁴

Russia's war in Ukraine set in motion a significant re-orientation of Swedish views on the European Union as a security provider. In this context, Andersson's letter in March 2022, written jointly with Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, aimed to remind their colleagues in the European Council of the collective security guarantees contained in the TEU, paragraph 42(7). This initiative was interpreted as the government seeking an alternative to membership of NATO, which was still anathema for important parts of the Social Democratic Party. However, Andersson's move was criticized domestically for being a bit rich given that Sweden had previously been against endowing the European Union's collective security clause with real meaning in order not to undermine its policy of non-alignment, as seen in its earlier refusal to integrate the WEU in the realm of the European Union.¹⁸⁵ It was also seen as futile, given that the European Union does not have an independent military capacity on a par with NATO.¹⁸⁶

Nonetheless, this incident clarified that the Swedish political elites were shifting very quickly away from the policy of non-alignment on the issues of security and defence. A senior centre-right politician put Sweden's shifting position in the following terms:

. . . the realisation has dawned on Swedish foreign policymakers that Sweden is too small to push for an autonomous policy position or to protect our interests. We have to do it together with others, primarily the EU. What has happened is that we have received economic cooperation in the EU that we understand in terms of security policy. Economic matters and security are better joined up in Sweden's foreign policy (SWEB3).

With regard to Sweden's European role, the most significant aspect of this shift is the acknowledgement of the European Union's role in military matters, including a strengthening of the European Security and Defence Policy

¹⁸⁴ L. Bengtsson, "Ordförändskapet inom EU:s externa relationer. En viss roll trots institutionella begränsningar," in *För Europa i en ny tid. Sveriges ordförändskap i EU 2023*, ed. R. Bengtsson (Santerus Academic Publishers, 2023).

¹⁸⁵ A. Dahlberg, 2022, 12 March, "Blågul egoism räddar inte Sverige," *Expressen*, <https://www.expressen.se/ledare/anna-dahlberg/blagul-egoism-raddar-inte-sverige/>; I. Österdahl, 2022, 13 April, "Det betyder EU:s och Natos säkerhetsklausuler," *Utrikesmagasinet*, <https://www.ui.se/utrikesmagasinet/analyser/2022/april/det-betyder-eus-och-natos-sakerhetsklausuler/>.

¹⁸⁶ J. H. Roswall et al., 2022, 11 April, "Ett misstag om Sverige bara förlitar sig på EU:s försvarsgarantier," *Europaportalen*, <https://www.europaportalen.se/2022/04/debatt-ett-misstag-om-sverige-bara-forlitar-sig-pa-eus-forsvarsgarantier>.

(ESDP). Since 2022, Sweden has accepted, or even supported, the building of stronger capacities for the European Union in the area of security—a policy shift clearly visible in its support for the use of the PF to finance military support for Ukraine, including the purchase of arms. Major parts of the Swedish elite recognize that the European Union must be a central actor in the rebuilding of the European security order and the reconstruction of Ukraine and supported its bid for membership of the European Union. Also, concerns for China’s great power ambition and rivalry with the United States increased¹⁸⁷ and common European efforts to strengthen the European Union’s economic security grew. To this end, the Swedish presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2023 organized the Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum to bolster the European Union’s international standing as well as a meeting of the Trade and Technology Council between the European Union and the United States.¹⁸⁸ In his speech to parliament in March 2024, Foreign Minister Billström reconfirmed that Sweden’s foreign and security policy is defined within the confines of the European Union, especially regarding the security and stability of the neighbourhood, the protection of strategic interest, and the competitiveness of the European economy. He also confirmed that Sweden’s relations to China are anchored in a European strategic framework and in close cooperation with the United States.¹⁸⁹ In addition, the taboo of keeping the European Union and NATO separate was broken. Swedish Minister of Defence Pål Jonson confirmed in a speech during the Swedish presidency of the European Union in 2023 that Sweden ‘welcomes a deeper and more efficient cooperation between the EU and NATO’ as Sweden ‘does not see a contradiction between a strong EU and a stronger NATO’ and intends to ‘participate fully in both organisations.’¹⁹⁰

Nonetheless, Sweden remained fairly sceptical of the movement towards strengthening the European Union’s strategic autonomy because lingering suspicions of French ambitions for an independent European military defence and wish to keep good relations with the United States. In this period, the United Kingdom exited the European Union, which, from the Swedish

¹⁸⁷ J. S. Englund et al., “Kina och Asien,” in *FOI:s underlag inför nästa försvarspolitiska inriktningsbeslut*, ed. B. Ottosson (Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2022).

¹⁸⁸ Bengtsson, “Ordförandeskapet.”

¹⁸⁹ T. Billström, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, 14 February (Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

¹⁹⁰ P. Jonson, 2023, 10 February, *Inledningsanförande av försvarsminister Pål Jonson vid konferensen om säkerhet och försvar inom ramen för Sveriges ordförandeskap i EU* (Government Offices of Sweden), <https://www.regeringen.se/tal/2023/022/inledningsanforande-av-forsvarsminister-pal-jonson-vid-konferensen-om-sakerhet-och-forsvar-inom-ramen-for-sveriges-ordforandeskap-i-eu/>.

perspective, left a void within the European Union.¹⁹¹ Brexit forced Sweden to look for new EU coalition partners, particularly to resist the tendency of the European Union to lean towards a more protectionist orientation. Had Russia not attacked Ukraine in 2022, some of these considerations might have become troublesome for Sweden's role conceptions. However, the war in Ukraine made the need for security in the wider Baltic region more urgent and Sweden's role conceptions evolved accordingly in the direction of a more unambiguous support of the European Union's strategic autonomy.

In addition, the growing tension between liberal and revisionist states in the international system meant that the European Union's defence of the multilateral rules-based order was strongly supported by Sweden, which saw the necessity of a common platform to defend democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law. The European Union's ability to promote and spread such norms and values was integrated into the adjusted Swedish role conceptions and the governments holding power in the period became increasingly at ease with defining their room of manoeuvre within the European Union. Overall, in this period Sweden strengthened its role as an integrationist European—a role conception that met with strong public support among the Swedish population, which had become one of the most supportive of EU membership, pointing to a strong role enactment on the back of a domestically driven role change.

The integrationist European role was supported by most political parties by the first half of the 2020s building on strong horizontal and vertical consensus. Although the Left Party and Sweden Democrats eventually formally gave up their demand for Sweden to leave the European Union (which in the case of the Left Party was adopted in November 2023), they remained deeply sceptical, and at times even hostile, towards the European Union.

5.4 Sweden and Deep Role Change: Achieving Security and Integration in Political and Military Alliances

In the period following the Russo–Georgian war of 2008, the Swedish political elite slowly became aware of growing security threats in the neighbourhood and challenges to the rules-based international system. The increasingly ominous external environment, both close to Sweden and on Europe's borders, as well as further afield, had a profound impact on the world view

¹⁹¹ Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, *Brexit: Konsekvenser för EU och Sverige* (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), 2017).

of the Swedish elite, the assessment of risk to the country, and appreciation of the policies Sweden could and ought to pursue in the international arena. However, it was not until Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the realization of the advent of a more hostile world with the weakening of international norms that Sweden's foreign policy roles started to evolve more profoundly.

The role set that had emerged in the second half of the twentieth century continued to be relevant into the new millennium up until Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, when the earlier roles were uprooted, and a new master role of an integrated security seeker emerged. Nonetheless, although the war acted as a trigger for deep role change, the previously established roles had undergone intrinsic change in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. This change included a strengthened role as a security provider acting in cooperation with others, as an integrationist European, and, occasionally, as a normative internationalist.

The balance between these roles was adjusted in accordance with the orientation of the governments in power, their worldview, threat perceptions, and ideological outlook. The traditional role as an autonomous activist was downplayed and then resurrected again in a slightly different format as a normative internationalist. In a similar way, the European role waxed and waned but, on the whole, moved from a hesitant, somewhat sceptical European to become more integrationist again. The traditional role as a non-aligned security seeker was reinforced but also evolved at times into a security providing role, as Sweden attempted to provide security in out-of-area missions to prove its trustworthiness to potential allies.

From 2007 onwards, the individual roles in the traditional role set arguably proved more malleable than during the Cold War and the first post-Cold War era. As the security situation in its neighbourhood deteriorated and the international system grew increasingly contested, contrasts within Sweden's foreign policy roles were thrown into sharp relief. For instance, the increased emphasis on territorial defence after Russia's annexation of Crimea contrasted with the role of normative internationalist, which built on an FFP and human security. Also, the role as an integrationist European was pushed into the background when Sweden decided to highlight its normative internationalist role by conducting independent foreign policy within the United Nations and emphasizing the big paradigmatic programmes of global development and sustainability goals in its quest to earn a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Nonetheless, the roles also complemented each other. For example, the new security doctrine of the early 2000s, which included out-of-area missions

to keep or enforce peace abroad, reinforced the internationalist commitment of Sweden to the brand of normative diplomacy conducted within the United Nations. Towards the end of the 2010s and the early 2020s, the normative internationalist role merged increasingly with the integrationist European role to become a normative integrationist European role. In a similar manner, the role as a security seeker partially merged with the integrationist European role as the European Union strengthened its role as a security provider. Finally, some roles, such as those as security seeker and normative internationalist, experienced intra-role incoherence, which explains the gradual adjustment of these roles.

The role as a security seeker gradually lost its autonomous quality during this period as Sweden approached individual countries, primarily the United States, the United Kingdom, and Finland, for co-operative agreements, while seeking increasingly tighter cooperation with NATO. Initially, the move towards closer partnership and cooperation was based on a causal belief that the security of Sweden was best sought by enforcing peace in the far abroad and battling radical political regimes that did not respect the safety of their populations or regional stability. Furthermore, Sweden, according to the security-providing role, needed to demonstrate its engagement in international causes and its ability to conduct military operations, which at the same time acted to reinforce the role as a normative internationalist.

Still, Sweden maintained its status as a militarily non-aligned state up until Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, thereby preserving a certain amount of autonomy. Although the Social Democrats initially tried to argue for the preservation of a policy of non-alignment at the onset of the war, both public and intra-party opinion changed during the spring of 2022. One important reason for this was Finland's rapidly changing position on membership of NATO, while a growing consensus in favour of membership also evolved in Sweden.

Evolution of the European role displayed similar characteristics. Both the European Union's position as a diplomatic actor and the CFSP as a framework within which Sweden could shape its foreign policy were downplayed during the left-green government, which instead prioritized the normative internationalist role. From time to time, the European Union was seen as useful in relation to the stabilization of Eastern Europe and in the Southern neighbourhood. While Sweden often participated in different EU foreign and security policy initiatives, it was often a participation without strong enthusiasm.

However, from 2020 onwards this would change, and the European Union increasingly became seen as a security provider. The centre-right government that came to power in 2022 supported the link between NATO and the European Union as well as a positive stance on majority-voting in the CFSP. Sweden again wanted to be at the heart of the European Union and pursued a pro-EU position, not least for the European Union’s approach towards Russia’s war with Ukraine. The role as an integrationist European grew stronger to the point where it absorbed the normative international role and some elements of the security-seeking role.

In terms of the analytical dimensions on autonomy and integration, we see a clear tendency towards an adjustment of Swedish foreign and security policy in the direction of an increasing degree of integration during the period 2008–23 (Table 5.3). This was manifested in closer bilateral cooperation with selected partners, not least Finland, the United States, and the United Kingdom, but the plurilateral dimension of security seeking within the European Union and in relation to NATO also grew increasingly strong. The ultimate manifestation of this journey towards the roles as European and integrated security seeker came with Sweden’s support for the European Union’s role in security and defence, and the decision to seek membership of NATO.

Table 5.3 Role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy 2008–2024

Integration Autonomy	Low	High
Low		The integrationist European The integrated security seeker
High	The security provider	The normative internationalist

Note: The identified role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy from 2008 to 2023.

The search for autonomy resurfaced from time to time, not least in conjunction with the normative internationalist role between 2014 and 2020, in the form of FFP, the unilateral recognition of Palestine as an independent state, and by refraining from joining NATO and instead relying on more limited bilateral agreements. Still, with the increasingly ominous security situation and the decision of Finland—a trusted security partner—on NATO, Sweden had few alternatives but to seek membership of NATO and to take up the role as a fully integrated security seeker.

The changing role conception—from an autonomous security seeker to that of a security provider taking part in international missions to support human rights and democracy—was formulated with limited inter-party contestation. The Swedish political parties, most often, agreed on the need to take part in and contribute to international missions. Yet, the changing role conception—from a security provider to an integrated security seeker—took place despite a lingering horizontal disunity within and between some political parties. The decision to apply for NATO membership was eventually formulated with broad political support, but the Social Democrats did not change their position enthusiastically and the decision was not embraced by the Green Party or the Left Party. Public opinion grew more strongly in favour of NATO membership during the spring of 2022, showing vertical unity and thereby making it easier to embrace the new foreign policy role. While explicit horizontal contestation was rather limited (as only two of the smaller parties refused to support the application for membership of NATO), the somewhat reluctant behaviour of the Social Democrats still indicates a certain degree of horizontal contestation (or at least hesitation). This illustrates that although the somewhat cautious behaviour from the Social Democrats displays elements of a muddle-through strategy, the action policy behind the evolution of Sweden's role as an integrated security seeker was domestically driven, allowing the role to emerge as the new master role in Swedish foreign and security policy.

The role as a normative internationalist, focusing on human rights and democracy, was initially formulated with strong political unity. The role conception was, to some extent, a continuation of the old role as an autonomous activist, but, in other respects, it was new, with a clearer Western outlook relying to a lesser extent on a universalist understanding of equality. Still, once the left-green government formulated an understanding of the role of normative internationalist as something dating back to the Palme era, role contestation increased. Hence, the FFP and the recognition of Palestine were criticized by the centre-right parties. The action strategy behind Sweden's role as a normative internationalist can, therefore, be best described as an action strategy

displaying disunity and weak enactment, the latter of which was probably a reason why certain parts of the normative internationalist role were later absorbed by the integrationist European role.

The roles of integrationist European and normative internationalist went hand in hand for as long as the focus was directed towards the Eastern Partnership and on how the European Union and Sweden could reinforce democracy and human rights in the neighbouring areas. The European Union's normative focus on the Eastern Partnership was favoured by all political parties in Sweden. The role as an integrationist European became increasingly important from 2020 onwards once the European Union was seen as a security provider. A growing consensus emerged within the Swedish elite on the importance of the European Union, with the Social Democrats unable to refute the usefulness of being part of a political alliance that would provide Sweden with security. With the centre-right government coming to power in 2022, a more positive approach to the European Union having a role in security and defence was confirmed. Hence, the role as an integrationist European demonstrates clear signs of domestically driven role adaptation and strong role enactment.

6

Sweden's Grand Strategy

Between Autonomy and Integration

This book has traced the evolution of the major characteristics of Sweden's grand strategy over time, with a particular focus on the period from 1945 to 2024. Our account has taken the concept of grand strategy as a guiding principle when seeking to understand the relationship of a state with other actors.¹ Grand strategy is understood as an expression of a coherent policy encapsulating an overarching idea of how the state will achieve its national objectives.² For Sweden, this over-arching idea led to the formulation of a grand strategy centred on a few principled aims: to preserve peace in the neighbourhood; to trade freely around the world; and to defend the values and norms grounded in a Swedish culture and worldview that was of importance to the conception of Self.

The point of departure for our account of the evolution of Swedish foreign policy is that small states, in a manner not so different from great and middle-sized powers, formulate and uphold strategies, which, at times, may even take the stature of grand strategies. From a role-theoretical perspective, we have argued that grand strategies can be observed through the role conceptions and role sets adopted by small states, as well as through the priority given to certain roles over others, eventually resulting in the development of a master role. Throughout the account of the evolution of Sweden's foreign policy, the waxing and waning of role sets has been observed along two dimensions: the degree to which a small state seeks autonomy, and the extent to which it is willing to conform to different forms

¹ L. K. Danner, *China's Grand Strategy: Contradictory Foreign Policy?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 27; N. Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" *Security Studies*, 27, no. 1 (2018): 27–57; T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal of Grand Strategy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs. Oxford University Press, 2021), 5.

² Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal"; A. Wivel, "The Grand Strategies of Small States," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, ed. T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs (Oxford University Press, 2021), 490; C. Demirduzen and C. G. Thies, "A Role Theory Approach to Grand Strategy: Horizontal Role Contestation and Consensus in the Case of China," *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 7, no. 1 (2022): ogab018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogab018>

of cooperation with other states by integrating into alliances and seeking partnerships.

To trace which roles have been prioritized at different moments in time and to assess role change using these dimensions, we have developed a model with four action strategies: disunity; elite-driven role change; muddle-through role adaptation; and domestically driven role change.³ According to this model, successful role adaptation can be explained by a high degree of consensus within the elite, and between the elite and the public, regarding role change, while a failing role adaptation indicates the presence of a high degree of contestation. The model, which includes assumptions regarding the scope conditions in small, liberally oriented states, permits a fine-grained analysis of variation in domestic strategy role adaptation. This results in our four types of role change predicated on the degree of national consensus among the elite and the public. The conceptual framework provided by role theory and national action strategies for role change forms the basis for an empirical analysis of Sweden's grand strategy.

According to this account, Sweden's grand strategy is expressed in the dominant foreign policy roles that at times form clear master roles in a dynamic process of role-taking and role change. The analysis of role change in Sweden considers the domestic environment in which grand strategies are devised as small states are more exposed than great powers to the vagaries of the international system. To this end, we posit that grand strategizing by the Swedish foreign policy elite is the result of national action strategies that are constantly calibrated to domestic aims and the pressures generated by developments in the regional and international environment.

In this chapter we return to the findings of our empirical analysis, first in terms of the different role conceptions identified in Swedish foreign and security policy from after the Second World War up until Swedish membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and second in terms of an account of role change based on the dynamic model of national action strategies. At the end of the chapter, we consider the theoretical contribution of our study of Sweden's grand strategy, followed by a discussion of its empirical contribution to the literature on Sweden's foreign policy. Finally, we outline some thoughts on a broader future research agenda regarding the study of small state grand strategy.

³ See also A. Michalski, D. Brommesson, and A.-M. Ekengren, "Small States and the Dilemma of Geopolitics: Role Change in Finland and Sweden," *International Affairs*, 100, no. 1 (2024): 139–57.

6.1 Identifying Sweden's Role Conceptions: From the Second World War to the Present

Our analysis of Sweden's role conceptions shows the process of revision and confirmation with regard to autonomy and integration. Under certain conditions, role conceptions have been geared towards seeking autonomy, whereas when conditions shift and create uncertainty, they have instead been oriented towards a greater degree of integration with formal organizations, aligning with existing alliances without seeking formal membership. By and large, our empirical analysis shows that Swedish foreign and security policy was based on a more autonomous role in the period during the Cold War and a more integrationist role from the end of the Cold War to the present. Nevertheless, autonomous elements also occur in Swedish role conceptions in more contemporary periods, and, inversely, integrationist elements made up role conceptions at times during the Cold War. We deduce from this observation that the two dimensions have often complemented each other, but at the same time, their respective presence in actual role conceptions has varied over time.

Starting with the autonomous dimension, Sweden developed an autonomous security-seeking role from the early 1800s onwards. Based on this role, Sweden strove to build security without posing a threat to others. This autonomous security-seeking role came to dominate Swedish foreign and security policy before, during, and directly after the Second World War. This role reappeared in Swedish foreign and security policy at times when the general security environment deteriorated (e.g., in the 1980s). The central expression of this role lay in recurring declarations of neutrality and the gradual development of the policy of neutrality and non-alignment, which eventually became a keystone in Swedish foreign and security policy identity.

From the 1960s onwards, the autonomous security-seeking role was complemented by the role of autonomous activist. Departing from the established pattern of avoiding interference in great power affairs, Sweden began to act as an activist on the international stage, unilaterally criticizing great power behaviour, providing generous foreign aid to the Third World, and mediating in international conflicts. Although the role of autonomous activist became important for Sweden from around 1960 and throughout the 1970s, note that this role developed both in relation to and as a complement to the role of the autonomous security seeker. While Sweden stayed out of alliances and instead developed a quite strong national defence, commensurate with its role

as an autonomous security seeker, the role of autonomous activist allowed Sweden to engage with and criticize the great powers. By doing so, Sweden demonstrated a moral conscience, which was consistent with its autonomous activist role. This resolved the degree of tension inherent in the policy of neutrality, according to which Sweden could not take a stance on issues requiring a clear moral position. The experience of the Second World War, when Sweden had been more or less forced to acquiesce to Nazi Germany's demands to stay out of the war, provided further motivation for the role of autonomous activist, thereby making it possible for Sweden to take responsibility and speak up against perceived atrocities and injustices.

Swedish foreign and security policy in the post-Cold War period came to be characterized by integrationist efforts. The autonomous activist role would reappear, but it did so in the form of normative internationalist, whereby emphasis was put on the defence of human rights, a liberal world order, and the role of the United Nations (UN). This role was exemplified in Sweden's heavy investment in international missions around the globe and its strong engagement in the various UN bodies. The unilateral recognition of Palestine and feminist foreign policy (FFP) are also examples of a desire to return to a more autonomous activist role. This autonomous voice once again paired with efforts to strengthen national defence, which now took the form of cooperation with Finland and other chosen partners. This development resulted in steps towards greater security policy cooperation, but it was, simultaneously, a way for Sweden to avoid the otherwise necessary and ultimate step towards an integrated security-seeking role as a member of NATO.

Turning to the integrationist dimension, Sweden had already made cautious efforts to integrate into Western institutions during the early part of the Cold War, even if the self-understanding of the Swedish foreign and security policy elites was dominated by Sweden's autonomous character during this period. An important example of this was covert cooperation with the United States (US) and NATO on security matters, a sort of 'lifeline' in the event that the first-choice policy, a comparatively strong national defence and a policy of neutrality, failed to keep Sweden out of conflicts. Another equally important example was the role of hesitant European, which depicts the cautious and hesitant position of Sweden vis-à-vis political and economic integration into Europe from the early 1950s to the end of the Cold War. Although participation in the European integration project was long seen as a threat to Swedish autonomy and, therefore, the credibility of Sweden's policy of non-alignment, the question of membership in the European Economic Community (EEC), later the European Community (EC), or, at a minimum,

a free trade agreement with the Community, was a recurrent topic in the domestic debate during the Cold War period.

With the end of the Cold War, the debate on Sweden's integrationist ambitions changed character, and membership of the European Union (EU) became a top priority. This meant that the European role gradually transformed from hesitant to integrationist European—a transformation premised on a more favourable position towards political and economic integration as a member of the European Union. From 1995 onwards, the role of integrationist European became a dominant role in Swedish foreign and security policy. At times it was complemented by the role of normative internationalist while it also cohabited with an emerging role as an integrated security provider—two roles that from the end of the 2010s and early 2020s became increasingly intertwined.

The role of integrated security provider implied that Sweden's armed forces, which had been downsized at the end of the Cold War, become an integrated part of Western and multilateral efforts to contribute to conflict prevention in out-of-area-missions. Integration into such structures meant that Sweden could adjust to NATO standards and build strong bonds in the areas of security and defence with the United States and other NATO partners. During this time, Sweden also gave support to the development of the European Union's peacekeeping capacity and even to strengthening its ability to pull European military capacities together, in the form of the European battle groups, and to achieve various headline goals. With Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and a dramatically deteriorating security situation in Northern Europe, Sweden could therefore take the step into the new role of integrated security seeker. This role combined a strong security alliance with both the European Union and NATO, which, from the Swedish perspective, was no longer incompatible with its security concerns.

[Table 6.1](#) summarizes the roles identified in [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#). During the periods examined in the case studies, the respective relationship between roles has shifted. At times, some roles have taken a more dominant position, while other roles have been more subordinate. At any one time, a dominant role can take the position as a master role, while other roles subside into complementary roles, regardless of whether or not they were previously master roles. While several roles can have dominant positions in the foreign and security policy role set at any one time, they can either complement each other, thereby avoiding an inter-role conflict, or, alternatively, should their development diverge, then an inter-role conflict will occur. In the event that a master role and several dominant roles complement each other, a coherent role set will have been formed, resulting in a grand strategy. Different

Table 6.1 Role conceptions in Swedish foreign and security policy

Integration \ Autonomy	Low	High
Low		* <u>Integrated security seeker</u> * <u>Integrationist European</u> * <i>Integrated security provider</i>
High	* <i>Hesitant European</i> * <u>Autonomous security seeker</u> * <i>Autonomous activist</i>	* <i>Normative internationalist</i>

Note: Underlined roles are defined as dominant roles while roles in italics are defined as subordinate.

roles thus constitute crucial components of the same coherent strategy. The shaping of grand strategy, however, begs the questions as to why certain roles have dominated Swedish foreign and security policy at certain times, while others have not, and, how roles, whether dominant or complementary, have coalesced into a master role.

6.2 Tracing Role Change through National Action Strategies

To understand how, and under what conditions, role change takes place and why certain roles evolve to take dominant positions, we use a conceptualization of role contestation on two levels: a horizontal level (where contestation plays out between different groupings within the domestic elite) and a vertical dimension (which depicts contestation between the elite and the public).

Role contestation can be driven by a wide range of factors, both material and immaterial, such as the state's understanding of its position in the world, as well as the elite's appreciation of the challenges and opportunities presented to the country, which are based on external threats and its material and immaterial resources. Varying understanding of such challenges and opportunities implies that different roles may be promoted at any one time, despite the risk of this resulting in an incoherent role set. Internally incoherent roles or disjointed role sets have a negative impact on the ability of a state to form a grand strategy.

Following this line of thinking, members of the elite, according to their interpretation of these roles, are likely to try to block role change or abandon a

role if there is a lack of coherence between roles. If there is coherence between an old established role and a new role, it is easier to incorporate the new role into the role set, as was the case with the roles of autonomous security seeker and autonomous activist.

Chapters 4 and 5 presented a number of dominant roles that underpinned Swedish foreign and security policy in the periods investigated. The autonomous security-seeking role dominated after the end of the Second World War, thereby following a by then well-established path of neutrality and non-alignment, which was consistent with a self-understanding of Sweden's passive position outside great power politics. By and large, this role received broad support, both within and outside of the elite, and the levels of contestation were low, both vertically and horizontally. The autonomous security-seeking role can therefore be considered the master role during the post-Second World War period, resulting in a coherent grand strategy.

In the 1960s, the autonomous activist role was introduced, complementing the autonomous security role, sometimes harmoniously, but at other times causing inconsistencies in role conception. This new role was in direct conflict with the autonomous security-seeking role in terms of involvement in great powers politics. Most of the time, however, these two roles still formed a coherent role set. This was possible due to a revised understanding of the policy of neutrality, which evolved from demanding a passive stance in relation to great power politics to active engagement, often in the form of criticism or mediation, which was seen as credible because of Sweden's long-standing policy of neutrality. The shaping of this adjusted master role was driven by leading elite groupings on the centre-left of Swedish politics.

On the vertical dimension, public support for the autonomous activist role was secured through educational programmes and active support from the student movement. While support was stronger for the 'positive elements' of this role (i.e., mediation efforts and foreign aid), its more 'negative elements', in terms of criticism of great powers, was supported mainly by leftist forces within the elite and student movements. Still, the role was enforced by a dominant and highly committed faction of the elite through an elite-driven process of role change. Further, the role was secured by the fact that it did not challenge the autonomous security-seeking role and the policy of neutrality. The master role of autonomous security seeker was thereby complemented by the role of autonomous activist, forming a coherent role set and producing a double-sided grand strategy.

The end of the Cold War saw the next major role change as the role of hesitant European developed into the role of integrationist European. Role change was driven by the radical shift in the international environment when

the end of the Cold War resulted in the dwindling of significant security threats to Sweden, thus rendering the policy of neutrality obsolete. It also made it possible for Sweden to integrate into political alliances, such as the European Union, and officially align with the West. Sweden's adherence to autonomy as a prerequisite for non-alignment was superseded by a budding European identity. This role change was possible due to increasing horizontal and vertical unity. While role change was initiated and driven by the elite, it gradually came to also benefit from increasing vertical unity. The role of integrationist European became possible through domestically driven change as the elite took action to introduce a new role in conjunction with the support of the public.

From the 2000s onwards, the role of integrationist European was complemented by a security-providing role, which compelled Sweden to contribute to multilateral out-of-area missions. Nonetheless, Sweden maintained its position of military non-alignment, indicating incoherence in the role set. As the security situation deteriorated in Northern Europe, not least after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Sweden took steps that introduced further inconsistency into its non-aligned position by deepening bilateral security cooperation with selected partners, such as Finland and the United States.

This role inconsistency can be explained by the fundamental disagreement within the elite—parties to the left opposed NATO membership and parties on the centre-right supported membership—as well as among the public, blocking any steps towards membership. This resistance dissipated quickly as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. After some initial hesitation, wide party-political support, apart from the Left Party and the Green Party, buffered by strong public support, emerged, making domestically driven role change possible. Sweden could then follow Finland and apply for NATO membership in May 2022. The submission of the autonomous security-seeker role, with its lingering attachment to military non-alignment, meant that a more coherent role set has been achieved. This role set, based on the merger of the integrationist European and integrated security-seeker roles, has resulted in a new grand strategy. In a strong signalling about these roles, governmental elites announced that they no longer perceived an incompatibility between NATO and the European Union, as the two alliances were seen as each contributing to European security, albeit in different dimensions.

Finally, the role of normative internationalist, which followed an action strategy that can best be described as 'muddling-through', is an example of weak role enactment. This role was introduced during the 2000s as complementary to the security-providing role, building on the heritage

of the role of autonomous activist. However, when these roles clashed, the security-providing role took precedence. This became increasingly clear as the security situation in the European neighbourhood deteriorated, and Sweden eventually chose the role of fully integrated security seeker.

6.3 Exploring Grand Strategy with the Help of Role Theory

Based on our study of role change in the development of Sweden's foreign policy, we have shown how certain roles have weakened over time, while other roles have grown in importance, eventually taking the position of master role. Such role change has occurred at the intersection between structural shifts within the international system and domestic change at the national level. By using role theory, we have been able to bridge the divide between systemic structures and domestic agency. This is illustrated by the foreign policy elite's perceptions of room for manoeuvre discussed in [Chapters 4 and 5](#). While decision makers often referred to their understanding of the international system and the possible paths open to small states under the existing systemic conditions, their choice of action was not predetermined. Even under less-generous systemic conditions, such as during the late 1940s, the late 1970s, or the 2020s, Swedish decision makers had to contemplate alternative courses of action, and various parts of the elite have, from time to time, emphasized contending roles. The conclusions in this regard indicate that the room for agency is not insignificant, even when structural conditions made the agency of small states less obvious.

These results, seen through the lens of role theory, teach us something important about small state grand strategy. As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), a small state is often seen as having less room for manoeuvre due to its limited material resources compared to those of greater powers. According to earlier grand strategy literature, small states are expected to opt for a grand strategy when they are either completely out of the searchlight of the great powers (hiding), when they can safely get involved in international affairs by equivocation or otherwise hiding (hedging), or when they align with a greater power to gain security (shelter seeking).

As we show throughout this book, these traditional small state grand strategies are only one part of the story. The role-theoretical approach allows us to paint a more nuanced picture of Sweden's grand strategy over time. The case of Sweden illustrates how even a comparably small state can find room for a

significant degree of agency, even during times of high tension and conflict involving great power interests.

We also show how this agency sometimes worked in favour of an autonomous strategy, and, at other time, in favour of an integrationist strategy. Hence, with the help of a nuanced role-theoretical analysis, taking small state agency seriously, we have uncovered national strategies that break the boundaries of the limited strategies often ascribed to small states. The variation in national (grand) strategy is larger than anticipated.

That being said, the investigation also detected how a small state is affected by the systemic structures that surround it. A structure characterized by great power competition, with high levels of tension and instability, will inevitably put emphasis on material capabilities—the sort of capabilities that small states, by definition, are short of in comparison to greater powers. Such a structure also prevents the free enterprise and global trade that are prerequisites for upholding military capability and social cohesion.

The degree of activism in Sweden's grand strategy illustrates this point. Although there was some room for manoeuvre when tension in the surrounding security environment was high, the most activist-oriented part of the Swedish grand strategy, in terms of both economic and military alliance seeking, eventually became more limited. After a period of strong activism during the 1960s and early 1970s, Sweden returned to a focus on territorial defence and upholding international law during the late 1970s and early 1980s when great power competition increased. Furthermore, membership of the EC was deemed impossible due to the boundaries set by the position of non-alliance, even if economic necessity dictated closer economic ties, in lieu of membership.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the relative security afforded by membership of the European Union permitted Sweden to focus (again) on multilateral cooperation, democratization, and international conflict resolution. Hence, using the European Union as a platform, Sweden could act as a normative internationalist and, to some extent, a mid-range power.⁴ Prompted by rising instability in Eastern Europe, Sweden turned to a security-seeking role within Western security structures, which is more in accordance with what one could expect from a small state. However, some examples of more autonomous behaviour, such as the FFP and a renewed emphasis on the United Nations, which agreed with a long-established foreign policy identity, also remained part of Swedish foreign and security policy during these years.

⁴ D. Brommesson, "Nordicness' in Swedish Foreign Policy—from Mid-Power Internationalism to Small State Balancing?" *Global Affairs*, 4, no. 4–5 (2018): 391–404.

This illustrates the high degree of variation in small state behaviour during times of tension.

To conclude, applying our role-theoretical approach to the study of Sweden's grand strategy has helped us to bridge the structure–agency divide. Bridging this divide means that role theory has made it possible to take both structure and agency seriously and to avoid neglecting either. Under certain conditions, the given structure has been more demanding, leaving less room for agency, while other structural conditions have left Sweden with greater opportunities for active intervention.

6.4 A Broadened Perspective on Small State Grand Strategy

Our study on Sweden's grand strategy widens the empirical scope of the subject matter beyond strictly military-oriented grand strategy to include many areas of foreign and security policy. In this respect, we have followed the strand of grand strategy literature that argues for a broadened view of what constitutes evidence of a grand strategy.⁵ We therefore align with Avery Goldstein in saying that a grand strategy is the overarching logic behind the coordination of many different strands of policy, beyond security-related issues.⁶

This wider outlook on Sweden's grand strategy brings with it the possibility of contributing to not only the grand strategy literature but also more generally to the literature on Sweden's foreign policy. Sweden's foreign policy has often been described as consensual and dominated by continuity, rather than by contestation and change.⁷ Such consensus was indeed an important feature of the debate on Swedish foreign policy during the Cold War.⁸ For example, as we show, consensus on non-alignment was strong during the more tense parts of the Cold War. Small states were believed to benefit from domestic unity and few sudden changes in foreign policy.⁹ Greater powers

⁵ Balzacq and Krebs, "The Enduring Appeal."

⁶ A. Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁷ D. Brommesson and A-M. Ekengren, "What Happens When a New Government Enters Office? A Comparison of Ideological Change in British and Swedish Foreign Policy 1991–2011," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48, no. 1 (2013): 3–27; D. Brommesson and A-M. Ekengren, "When, How and Why Are Junior Coalition Parties Able to Affect a Government's Foreign Policy? A Study of Swedish Coalition Governments 2006–2014," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 42 (2019): 203–19.

⁸ U. Bjereld and M. Demker, "Foreign Policy as Battlefield: A Study of National Interest and Party Motives," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 23, no. 1 (2000): 17–36.

⁹ D. Brommesson, A-M. Ekengren, and A. Michalski (forthcoming), "Small States within the East–West Divide: Sweden's Foreign Policy Roles during the 1970s."

would expect continuity in Sweden's military, economic, or diplomatic paths in the event of governmental change, and uncertainty regarding Sweden's future foreign policy course would be low.

The Social Democratic government's commitment to consensus as an overarching value made it more difficult for others to deviate from the consensus, and this reinforced a willingness to express unity on non-alignment. This study provides an important complement to earlier studies on Sweden's foreign policy and consensual culture. Our results show that even though consensus has been common, there have also been a number of occasions when contestation, most often on the horizontal (elite) level, has been important for future role change.

European integration and questions on how and when Sweden should express its outlook on global concerns are two issues where different parts of the political spectrum have demonstrated different priorities. The liberal-right parties have favoured integration into Western and European structures of cooperation while the left parties have favoured engagement within the United Nations.¹⁰ This domestic discord was a forerunner to changes in Swedish foreign policy regarding relations with the EEC/European Union and how to deal with matters of importance for international security and development.

Hence, our study provides a more nuanced description of domestic conflicts and what that could entail in terms of revisions to foreign policy in the context of governmental change or when structural constraints have provided decision makers with new conditions in which to operate. The empirical results justify a widened research agenda for the study of small state grand strategy. Such a revised research agenda would highlight the considerably greater room for manoeuvre of small states compared to that acknowledged by traditional grand strategy theory.

¹⁰ But cf. U. Möller and A-M. Ekengren, "Domestic Debate and International Office: Sweden in the UN Security Council 2017–18," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 20, no. 1 (2024): orad037, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orad037>.

APPENDIX 1

List of Interviews

Finland

FIN1	2022-02	Senior politician
FIN2	2022-03	Former senior diplomat
FIN 3	2022-03	Senior politician
FIN 4	2022-03	Former senior diplomat
FIN 5	2022-03	Senior civil servant
FIN 6	2022-04	Senior diplomat
FIN 7	2022-11	Senior diplomat
FIN 8	2022-11	Senior diplomat
FIN 9	2022-11	Senior diplomat
FIN 10	2022-11	Senior diplomat
FIN 11	2022-11	Senior civil servant
FIN 12	2023-01	Former senior politician

Sweden

SWEB1	2022-05	Senior politician
SWEB2	2022-05	Former senior diplomat
SWEB3	2022-10	Senior politician
SWEB4	2022-10	Senior diplomat
SWEB5	2022-11	Senior diplomat
SWEB6	2023-02	Former senior diplomat
SWEBE1	2023-02	Senior politician

SWEE1	2022-08	Senior diplomat
SWEE2	2022-10	Former senior politician
SWEM1	2022-08	Senior diplomat
SWEM2	2022-09	Senior politician
SWEM3	2023-01	Senior politician

Interview Guide

World Views

How would you describe the current state of international relations in terms of underlying conflicts or challenges?

Looking at the different structural conflicts or challenges, which of these have the strongest influence on the foreign policy of your country?

How do other countries [neighbouring states, European Union, great powers] perceive your country? What are the attributes that your country most often is associated with?

National Roles

How would you describe the most prominent roles your country is playing in international relations?

If we look back fifteen years, have these roles changed in any significant way? Have the roles been reinterpreted over time? If so, can you reflect on the ways these roles have changed and why they changed?

Looking at other states with an interest in your country, what kind of action and behaviour do they expect from your country?

If we look at the present situation, are the positions and policies of your country challenged in any way?

Follow up: How are the positions challenged, and can you give us an example?

The positions can be challenged because of external forces (external actors/countries/ organizations) or situations. Do you see any examples of this?

Another possibility is that the positions are challenged because of internal (domestic) forces or situations. Do you see any examples of this?

Looking more closely at the internal pressure that can arise and lead to a changed foreign policy (positions, roles), all government agencies and ministries have their forms of organization and routines, and they are embedded in a political system.

Would you say that there are certain foreign policy actors that tend to initiate the discussion on changed policies or positions (i.e., roles)?

Follow up depending on answer: From your perspective how important are the following kind of actors and structures in order to understand how policies or positions are challenged?

- Political leadership of the ministry on an individual level (i.e., minister/s).
- Political leadership of the government (prime minister).
- Political leadership collectively (the collective government, coalitions).
- Presidential power (Finland).
- Parties (party leaders or foreign policy spokespersons).
- Parliamentarians (MPs in relevant committees, parliamentary leadership of government parties).

- Leading diplomats or other civil servants within relevant ministries.
- The routines of relevant ministries.
- Public opinion.

Would you say that there are parts of the foreign policy decision-making processes in the wider context that are making it easier for change or stability regarding positions and policies?

If contradictory expectations occur, internally or between internal and external actors, regarding your country's foreign policy positions or policies, what is likely to happen? How will decision makers deal with contradictory expectations?

Does it matter if the contradictory expectations come from external or internal actors/situations?

Looking closer at external pressure, what room to manoeuvre do you think your country has in order to pursue its preferred policies or positions? From your perspective, how important are the following kinds of actors in order to understand how policies or positions are challenged?

- Great powers
- Other states
- International organizations

Implementation

Think of a situation when a new foreign policy role or a redefined role develops and is received by other countries and international organizations. If one would like to understand the success of that process, what factors determine whether your state succeeds in establishing a new or redefined role at the international level?

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212 Bibliography

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Index

For the benefit of digital users, indexed terms that span two pages (e.g., 52–53) may, on occasion, appear on only one of those pages.

A

Afghanistan

- Swedish involvement in 7, 76, 95, 124–125, 128, 130, 148–149, 165–166
- war 165–166

Africa

- international missions 134, 169
- liberation movements 78, 89–90

Agrell, Wilhelm 124–125

Algeria, independence 78

Amsterdam Treaty 114–115

Andersson, Magdalena 141–142, 180

Andersson, Sven 77–78

Andrén, Nils 105–106

anti-colonialism 80–81, 83, 85–86, 89–90

autonomy 35–36, 40–41

and alliances 41–42

full autonomy equated with uniqueness 41

high-level autonomy and high-level integration 44

and integration 42*f*, 43–44, 96

low-level autonomy and low-level integration 43

no autonomy equated with full integration 41–42

no autonomy equated with strict neutrality 41, 43

see also under small states

B

Baltic states 95, 113–114, 115–116, 167–168

Balzacq, Thierry 17–18, 25–26

Beach, D. 52

Bennett, A. 52

Bernadotte, Jean Baptiste *see* Charles XIV John, King of Sweden

Bertelman, Tomas 139

Bertelman inquiry (2014) 56

Betts, Richard 12–13

Biden, Joe 141–142

Bildt, Carl 6–7, 77, 113, 153, 155–156, 160–161, 164–165, 167

Billström, Tobias 180–181

Bjereld, Ulf 91–92, 147

Blagden, D. 22–23

Blix, Hans 157

Brands, Hal 18, 25

Branting, Hjalmar 68

Brexit 181–182

Briffa, Hillary 11

Bringéus, Krister 139

Bringéus inquiry (2016) 56, 139

Brummer, K. 48

C

Cantir, Cristian 30–31

Carlsson, Ingvar 6–7, 109

Centre Party 67–69, 97, 153

Charles XIV John, King of Sweden 62–63

China 23

Belt and Road Initiative 1

and EU 177, 180–181

and Sweden 170, 171–172, 177–178, 180–181

Christian Democratic Party 153, 159

climate change 178–179

Cold War 1, 4–5, 71–74, 75–76, 78–79, 120, 198–199

Council of Europe 59–60

Crimean War 63–64

Czechoslovakia, coup (1948) 70

D

Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area 125

Delors, Jacques 106–108

Demirduzen, C. 23–24

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) 116, 128

Denmark 99, 101–102

and EC 104

and NATO 2, 70

and Nordic cooperation 136–137

and Scandinavian defence union 2, 70

and Second World War 68, 98

and Sweden 2, 62, 63–64 n.2, 73

E

Eastern Partnership 167, 170–171, 187

Edén, Nils 67–68

Elgström, Ole 24–25, 63–64

elites

and action strategies 50, 55*f*, 189, 193–194

- and foreign policy 34, 45–48
 - and grand strategy process 29–31
 - and national identity 46–48
 - and public 49, 54–55
 - and role adjustment/adaptation 49–50
 - and role conflict 37, 48
 - Erlander, Tage 74, 103–104
 - European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) 100
 - European Community (EC) 6–7, 79, 104–108, 118, 191–192
 - European Economic Area (EEA) 36–37 n.1, 107–109
 - European Economic Community (EEC) 6–7, 100–101, 103–104, 191–192
 - European Free Trade Association (EFTA) 79, 99, 100–102, 105–109
 - European Union (EU) 23, 35, 108
 - Amsterdam Treaty 114–115
 - Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI) 176–177, 178–179
 - Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) 176–177, 178–179
 - and China 177, 180–181
 - and climate change 178–179
 - Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) 110, 114–115, 116–117, 161–162, 174, 184–185
 - Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) 150
 - Concordia mission 116
 - Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) 134–135, 174
 - Council of the Baltic Sea States 167–168
 - Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area 125
 - eastern enlargement of 95, 113–114, 167
 - Eastern Partnership 114, 187
 - European Defence Agency (EDA) 134–135, 174
 - European Defence Fund (EDF) 134–135, 175–176
 - European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) 134–135
 - European Defence Union (EDU) 175
 - European External Action Service (EEAS) 167
 - European Peace Facility (EPF) 134–135
 - European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) 115–116, 180–181
 - European Security Strategy (ESS) 165–166
 - Foreign Investment Screening Mechanism (FISM) 176–177, 178–179
 - Frugal Four 178–179
 - Global Strategy (2016) 173
 - Lisbon Treaty (2009) 123, 165, 167
 - Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) 134–135
 - and NATO 180–181, 185
 - Northern Dimension of the European Union 114
 - Operation Artemis 116, 128
 - Operation Atalanta 169
 - Peace Facility (PF) 179–181
 - peacekeeping and military missions 76, 114–116, 149*t*, 150
 - Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) 134–135, 174–175
 - Petersberg tasks 114–116, 168
 - and Russia 125–126, 170–171, 177, 179–182
 - as security alliance 114
 - security policy 165–166, 168, 173–175
 - solidarity clause 123
 - and Ukraine 179–181
 - and United States 165, 180–181
 - and Western European Union 114–115
 - see also under Sweden*
- F**
- Farmers League *see* Centre Party
 - Finland
 - as buffer state 3–4
 - and EU 114–116
 - independence 66–67
 - and NATO 8, 15, 57, 140, 141, 143
 - and Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022) 140
 - and Second World War 68
 - and Soviet threat 71–72
 - and Soviet treaty (1948) 2–3, 70, 98
 - and Sweden 3–4, 7–8, 62, 135, 137–138, 141–142, 191, 195
 - First World War 67
 - foreign policy
 - action strategies 49–51
 - adjustment/adaptation of 48–50
 - and autonomy 41
 - and elites 34, 45–47, 48–49
 - and grand strategies 21–31
 - and public's role 48–49
 - foreign policy analysis (FPA) 52–53
 - France 133–134, 169, 175, 181–182
 - Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) 89–90
- G**
- Gaulle, Charles de 104
 - General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 100–101, 102–103
 - Germany 66
 - and First World War 67, 99–100
 - League of Nations, not members of 67–68
 - and Second World War 59, 68, 190–191
 - unification 64

- George, A. L. 52
 globalization, and grand strategies 20–21
 Goldstein, Avery 19, 40, 198
 Gothenburg 73
 grand strategies
 and autonomy 35–36
 definition of 17–19, 27, 198
 as domestic elite process 29–31, 34, 45–46, 48
 foreign policy roles and 21–31, 51
 great powers and 1, 10–11
 not codified in single document 19–20
 power and 27–28
 role theory and 21–38, 188–189
 security policy and 12, 25
 small states and 1–2, 9–10, 11–12, 17–21,
 31–32, 45, 196
 state's identity 25–27, 35, 46
 state's interests 25–27
 Green Party 107, 115–116, 132, 137–139,
 142–143, 148–149, 151–152, 156, 162, 186,
 195
 Group of 77 83
 Gui Congyou 172, 177–178
 Günther, Christian 71
 Gustav Vasa, King of Sweden 61
 Gyllensporre, Dennis 169
- H**
 Hague Conventions (1907) 33
 Hague Peace Conference (1899) 66
 Hakovirta, Harto 91–92
 Hammarskjöld, Dag 71, 73, 157
 Hanson, Per Albin 69
 Haugevik, K. 35
 hedging *see under* small-state strategies
 hiding *see under* small-state strategies
 Holsti, K. J. 26, 30
 Hultqvist, Peter 7–8, 133, 135, 141–142
 Hungary, and NATO expansion 143–144
- I**
 Iceland 99
 ideal-type analysis 40–44, 51–52, 54
 integration *see under* small states
 International Commission on Intervention and
 State Sovereignty (ICISS) 145–146
 Iraq war 165–166
 Ireland 101, 104
- J**
 Jonson, Pål 180–181
- K**
 Kaarbo, Juliet 30–31
 Kalmar Union 61
- Keohane, Robert 36, 40
 Klaus, Vaclav 167
 Krebs, Donald 17–18, 25–26
 Kristersson, Ulf 142
 Kuik, C.-C. 6
- L**
 League of Nations 67–68
 Lee-Ohlsson, F. 116
 Left Party 107, 139, 142–143, 148–149, 162, 175,
 182, 186, 195
 Leyen, Ursula von der 176–177
 Liberal Party 69, 89–90, 97, 103, 107, 121, 139,
 153, 159
 Libya, no-fly zone 150, 169
 Lindh, Anna 116, 164
 Lindström, Ulla 87
 Lisbon Treaty (2009) 123, 165, 167
 Löfven, Stefan 151, 154–156
 Luxembourg Declaration (1984) 107
- M**
 Maastricht Treaty (1993) 108
 McCourt, David 22, 25–26
 Malta 11–12
 Marin, Sanna 180
 Marshall Plan (1948) 99–100
 Moderate Party 69, 159
 and EC/EEC 103, 106–107, 121
 and European economic integration 97, 101
 and EU 111, 113, 122, 163, 164–165
 and FFP 153
 and League of Nations 67–68
 and NATO 132–133, 139–140, 142
 and non-alignment 132–133
 and US, criticism of 94, 121
 Möller, U. 147
 Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
 (MPLA) 89–90
- N**
 neutrality 33, 35–36, 41, 63
 Niinistö, Suli 141–142
 Nilsson, Torsten 89–90
 Nordic Council 99
 Nordic customs union 99
 Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) 8,
 133, 136
 Noreen, Erik 148
 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 3,
 20, 59, 70
 as asymmetric alliance 35
 and Denmark 2, 70
 and Eastern Europe 60
 and EU 180–181, 185

- and Finland 8, 15, 57, 140, 141, 143
 and Macedonia 116
 missions 149*t*, 169
 and Norway 2, 70, 158–159
 Partnership for Peace (PfP) 7, 36–37 n.1, 147
 Russian criticism of 125
see also under Sweden
- Norway 99
 and EC 104
 and EDF 176
 and EU 115–116
 and NATO 2, 70, 158–159
 and Nordic cooperation 136–137
 and Nordic customs union 99
 and Scandinavian defence union 2, 70
 and Second World War 68, 98
 and Sweden 2, 62, 65–66, 73, 126, 147
- O**
- Ohrid Framework Agreement 116
 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 58, 102–103, 163
 Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) 100–101
 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) 59–60, 164–165
 Oscar I, King of Sweden 63, 63–64 n.2
- P**
- Palestine 15, 154–155, 157, 159, 170
 Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) 93
 Palme, Olof 5, 80, 91–92, 152, 157
 and EC 104–105
 and EEC 6–7
 and foreign aid 86–87, 90
 and liberation movements 81, 90
 Moderate Party critical of 94
 and Swedish foreign policy 78–79
 and US role in Vietnam War 91–92, 93–94
 Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) 89–90
 Pedersen, R. B. 52
 Persson, Göran 155
 Poland, and Eastern Partnership 167
 Pompidou, Georges 104
 Posen, Barry 11
 process tracing
 and mechanism of role contestation 53–55
 as tool for causal inference 51–53
 public 48–49, 54–55, 55*f*
 Putin, Vladimir 125–127, 129, 170–171
- R**
- Reinfeldt, Fredrick 136–137, 155, 160
 Responsibility to Protect (RtP) 145–146
 Rieker, Pernille 35, 136
 Right Party *see Moderate Party*
 role theory 9–10, 13, 53
 grand strategies and 21–38, 188–189
 NRCs (national role conceptions) 9, 23, 26, 28, 30–31, 39–41, 48
 role adjustment/adaption 47–48, 49–51, 189
 role contestation 23–24, 48–49, 53–55, 55*f*, 189, 193
 role expectations 28
 role location 28–29
- Ross, Andrew 11
 Rothstein, Robert 46
- Russia
 and EU 125–126, 170–171, 177, 179–182
 and European security 164–165
 and Finland 62
 Revolution (1917) 66–67
 Russo-Georgian War (2008) 125, 131
 and Sweden 66, 170–171
 Ukraine, invasion of (2014) 7–8, 125–126, 131, 170–171, 182–183, 195
 Ukraine, invasion of (2022) 8, 15, 21, 126, 140, 179, 181–183, 192, 195
 USSR, rebuilding of 1
see also Soviet Union
- S**
- Saab AB 69–70, 73
 Sandler, Richard 69
 Saudi Arabia, Swedish criticism of 152–153
 Scandinavian defence union 2, 70
 Second World War 59, 68
 security policies 12
 and autonomy 41
 and grand strategies 18, 25
 and small states 12, 20, 31–38
 sheltering *see under small-state strategies*
 Silove, Nina 32, 37
 Sjöstedt, Roxanna 148
 small states 31
 action strategies 49–51
 and autonomy 13, 20, 33, 35, 36–37, 39, 41, 42*t*, 43–44, 47, 96
 and external threats 46–47
 and foreign policy 13, 32–33, 35, 40–45
 and grand strategies 1–2, 9–10, 11–12, 17–21, 31–32, 45, 196
 and integration (alliances) 13, 33, 36–37, 39, 41–43, 42*t*, 47, 96
 and internal processes 48–49
 and international cooperation 32
 and national security 12, 20, 31–38
 and NATO 20
 and neutrality 33, 41

- small-state strategies
 hedging 6, 21, 33–34, 196
 hiding 4, 20–21, 33, 50, 196
 leash slipping 21
 sheltering 8, 20–21, 33, 37, 43, 196
 strong national defence 4
- Smith, M. 24–25
- Social Democratic Party 121, 151
 and EC 106–107
 and EC, anti 118
 and EEC 103
 and consensus 199
 and EU 110–111, 163–164, 169
 and EU, anti 121
 and EU, military missions 115–116
 and EU, pro 97–98, 111, 122, 187
 and European cultural gap 97
 and European economic integration 101
 and European security 164–165
 and FFP 152
 and Finnish cooperation 137–138
 and *Folkhemmet* 80
 and foreign aid 87
 and League of Nations 67–68
 and NATO, anti 132–133, 139–140, 180
 and NATO, pro 142, 159, 186
 and neutrality 69
 and non-alignment, pro 132
 and UN Security Council campaign 155–156
 and US 121
- Solana, Javier 165–166
- South Africa, Swedish criticism of 78–79, 84, 90–91, 92–93
- South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) 89–90
- Soviet Union 67, 73
 fall of (1991) 108
 as Finnish threat 71–72
 and Finnish treaty (1948) 2, 70, 98
 and Second World War 68
 Swedish criticism of 91–94
 Swedish neutrality 73
- Spaak, Paul-Henri 100
- Stockholm Convention (1960) 101–102
- subjugation 36
- Sweden
 and Afghanistan 7, 76, 95, 124–125, 128, 130, 148–149, 165–166
 and Amsterdam Treaty 114–115
 autonomy 13, 69–76, 96–97, 100–101, 105–106, 110–111, 117–122, 119f, 135, 143, 151–152, 156–157, 159, 161–162, 173–174, 180, 184–186, 185f, 190–192, 193f, 194–195, 197–198
 as autonomous activist 2, 4–6, 14–15, 60, 77–96, 117–119, 119f, 120–121, 190–191, 193f, 194
 as autonomous security seeker 2, 5, 14, 60, 65–77, 96, 117–120, 119f, 132, 183–184, 190–191, 193f, 194
 as buffer state 4, 63, 71–72
 centralization of power 112
 and China 170, 171–172, 177–178, 180–181
 and Cold War 13, 71–74, 75–76, 78–79, 120, 198–199
 conscription abolished (2009) 7, 76, 127, 130
 conscription reactivated (2014) 131
 consensus culture 13, 198–199
 critiquing other states 91–94
 de-colonization and liberation movements 78–79, 80–81, 89–91, 121
 defence cooperation 133–135
 defence industry 175–176
 and Denmark 2, 62, 63–64 n.2, 73
 and Eastern Partnership 167, 187
 and EC 104–107, 118, 191–192
 and EEC 103–104, 191–192
 and EFTA 101, 105–106
 elites 62, 64, 102–103, 120, 187, 194
 equality 80–82
 and EU 14–16, 59–60, 112–117, 159–182, 194–195, 197–198
 and EU, defence cooperation 134–135
 and EU, eastern enlargement of 95, 113–114, 167
 and EU, EDF 175–176
 and EU, influencing 116–117
 and EU, membership 6–7, 101–102, 108–111, 111f, 192
 and EU, peacekeeping/missions 76, 115–116, 126–128, 169, 192
 and EU, PESCO 174–175
 and EU, presidency 167–168, 170, 179–181
 and EU, relations with small states 166
 and EU, Security Council 95–96
 and EU, security policy 168, 173, 180–181
 and EU, SFSP 114–115, 185
 and EU, solidarity with 77, 123, 165
 European stability, role in 3–4, 60, 173–174
 feminist foreign policy (FFP) 15, 151–159, 170
 and Finland 3–4, 7–8, 62, 71–72, 131, 135, 137–138, 141–142, 184, 191, 195
 and First World War 2, 67
 foreign aid 5, 85–91, 88f, 145
 foreign policy 4–6, 13, 16, 24–25, 78–80, 96, 110, 112–117, 132, 198–199
 foreign policy, Europeanization of 112–117
 foreign policy, within EU 163–169
 and France 133–134

- grand strategy 2, 8, 9–13, 14–16, 59–60, 196–198
- hedging strategy 6, 98–99
- as hesitant European 60, 71, 95–97, 98–99, 117–119, *119t*, 121–122, 124–125, 191–192, *193t*, 194–195
- hiding strategy 4
- Hultqvist doctrine 7–8, 133, 135
- human rights 93–95, 118, 144–145, 146–147, 150–151, 153, 186–187
- as integrated European 2, 14–15, 118, *119t*, 119–120, 122, 159–184, *185t*, 185, 187, 192, *193t*, 194–195
- as integrated security provider 124–125, 128, 139, 183, *185t*, 186, 192, *193t*, 195
- as integrated security seeker 126–144, *185t*, 185–186, *193t*, 195–196, 197–198
- integration 8, 13, 39, 65, 73, 77, 95–99, 102–103, 105–107, 112–113, 117–122, *119t*, 135, 159, 163, 185, *185t*, 190–192, *193t*
- and League of Nations 67–68
- as mediator 4–5
- military/defence capability 4, 5–6, 68–70, 72–74, 75–76, 127, 130–132, 191
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) 81
- Mohn plan 85
- national identity 80, 97, 158
- and NATO, cooperation with 7–8, 73–74, 76, 133–135, 147, 169, 184, 191–192
- and NATO, membership 15, 57, 123–124, 126, 138–144, *141f*, 158–159, 186, 195
- and NATO, membership opposed 132–133, 138–140
- neutrality 2–5, 7, 59, 62–64, 66–68, 71–73, 76–77, 81, 98–99, 101–106, 190–191, 194–195
- non-alignment 7–8, 14–15, 60, 61–65, 71–72, 74, 76–78, 81–82, 98–99, 114, 116–117, 123–124, 132, 147, 157, 161, 173–174, 184, 190, 194, 195
- and Nordic cooperation 69, 135–136
- and Nordic customs union 99
- and Nordic defence cooperation 8, 133, 136
- as normative internationalist 94–96, 144–159, 163, 183–184, *185t*, 186–187, 191–192, *193t*, 195–196, 197–198
- and Norway 2, 62, 65–66, 73
- nuclear disarmament 15, 75, 158–159, 174
- nuclear programme 72, 74–75
- Official Development Assistance (ODA) 156–159
- and Palestine 15, 154–155, 157, 159, 170
- Palme line 78–79
- peaceful 19th century 63–65
- peacekeeping and military missions 116, 126–128, 146–151, *149t*, 169, 186, 191
- as post-neutral 77, 123–124, 144–159
- and Russia 66–67, 142–143, 170–171
- and Scandinavian defence union 2, 70
- and Second World War 2, 68–69, 190–191
- security policy 2–3, 6–8, 13, 15, 108–110, 124–125, 127–129, 132, 162, 164–165, 180–181
- sheltering strategy 8
- and South Africa 78–79, 84, 90–91, 92–93
- and Soviet Union 73
- and Soviet Union, criticism of 91–94
- Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) 115
- Swedish Defence Commission (1995–2023) 129–131, *130t*
- and Third World 78, 80–91
- trade and exports 65, 69, 79, 100–101
- and UK 7–8, 73, 100, 133, 134, 184
- and UN 3, 59–60, 95–96, 113, 144, 191
- and UN, membership 71
- and UN, peacekeeping/military missions 7, 128, 150, 169
- and UN, Security Council 155–158
- and UN, Third World issues 78–79, 80–85
- and US 7–8, 73, 80, 131, 133–134, 184, 191–192, 195
- and US, criticism of 93–94
- as welfare state 79–80
- Sweden Democrats 139–140, 153, 162, 175, 182
- Switzerland 4
- Sydow, Björn von 153
- T**
- Thies, C. G. 23–24, 45–48
- Third World 78, 80–91
- Thorson, Inga 75
- Tingsten, Herbert 79–80
- Treaty of Rome 103–104
- Trump, Donald 172
- Türkiye
- and EU membership 167
- and NATO expansion 143–144
- U**
- Ugglass, Margaretha af 108
- Ukraine
- and EU 114, 125, 180–181
- Euromaidan (2013–14) 125–126
- Russian invasion of (2014) 7–8, 125–126, 131, 170–171, 182–183, 195
- Russian invasion of (2022) 8, 15, 21, 126, 140, 179, 181–183, 192, 195
- Undén, Östen 3, 71, 73, 84, 91
- United Kingdom

- United Kingdom (*Continued*)
 and Brexit 181–182
 and EC 104–105
 and EEC 101–102, 104
 and EFTA 101
 and Sweden 7–8, 73, 100, 133, 134, 184
 and Western European Free Trade Association
 100–101
- United Nations (UN)
 Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization
 Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) 169
 peacekeeping and military missions 7, 128,
 149*t*, 150, 169
 Responsibility to Protect 145–146
 Third World issues 78–79, 80–85
 Women, Peace and Security 151–152
see also under Sweden
- United States
 9/11 165
 defence industry 176
 and EU 165, 180–181
 grand strategy 11
 and League of Nation, not joining 67–68
 and Marshall Plan 99–100
 and NATO 70
 and Sweden 7–8, 73, 80, 93–94, 131, 133–134,
 184, 191–192, 195
- V
- Vanhanen, Matti 137
 Van Meegdenburg, Hilde 53–54
 Vietnam War 93–94
- W
- Walker, S. G. 30
 Wallström, Margot 137, 152–153, 154–156,
 171–173
 Warsaw Pact 3, 73, 125
 Weber, Max 40–41
 Wehner, L. E. 47
 Wendt, Alexander 26
 Western European Union (WEU) 114–115, 168,
 180
 Wivel, Anders 12, 19, 33
 women's rights 151–159
- Y
- Yanukovych, Viktor 125
- Z
- Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU)
 89–90
 Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) 89–90