



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

“The natural evolution of non-alignment”

A qualitative case study of how Sweden’s identity as non-aligned is reconstructed through narratives in a changing security context

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Abstract

Sweden's defence policy is characterized by non-alignment, which historically has meant avoiding military alliances to stay neutral in war. This policy of non-alignment is over 200 years old and deeply ingrained into Swedish national identity. In recent years, military tensions in Europe have increased, most notably through the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and subsequent presence of Russia in northern Europe. This increased threat has brought on a shift in the strategic implementation of the non-aligned policy and Sweden has increasingly been seeking military cooperation. This shift in the policy has received criticism from the public, as well as attention from the academic community. Scholars have mostly focused on the strategic implementation of the policy in this new security context, while leaving the implications for identity mostly unexplored. This thesis aims to understand how Sweden's identity as non-aligned is reconstructed in this changing security context. I do this through a qualitative analysis of articles and speeches published by the Swedish government regarding the military cooperation between Sweden and Finland. I utilize a framework of strategic narratives, distinguishing between system, identity, and issue narratives. The thesis draws upon critical constructivist theory and the co-constitutive nature of identity and security, emphasizing the role of language. This approach enabled me to study the discursive connections between identity as plural and fluid in the context of Sweden's non-alignment. Findings show that the tensions arising between the normative and strategic parts of non-alignment are being resolved discursively. The Swedish Government achieves this mainly through drawing on three distinct identity narratives. The first represents the historical non-aligned identity and is contrasted by the two other identity narratives. These additional narratives both serve to extend the notion of "we" and emphasize collective security obligations, thus facilitating the strategic implementation of military cooperation. All narratives exist simultaneously but are utilized by the government in different contexts. Thus, non-alignment is still held high but has been re-constructed discursively through these two additional identity narratives.

Keywords: non-alignment, identity, security, critical constructivism, strategic narratives, Sweden

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem formulation

Non-alignment is traditionally understood as a defence strategy where countries remove themselves from power politics, in particular from military alliances, in order to stay neutral during war (Wieslander, 2021, p. 4). In contradiction with this, Swedish Minister of Defence Peter Hultqvist (31st of August 2015) claimed that “deepened military cooperation is the natural evolution of non-alignment”.

Swedish neutrality is unique in several ways. Most prominent is the fact that it dates back almost 200 years, contrary to most other neutral states whose neutrality was born out of the post-war era. Swedish neutrality has traditionally been described as “non-alignment in peace aiming at neutrality in war” (Andrén, 1967, p.191). During the Cold War, Sweden had to justify the choice of staying neutral by proving its worth in other ways in the international arena. Sweden did so by assuming a role as mediator and international peacekeeper (Goetschel, 1999, p. 120). Additionally, the country took on a role as spokesman for the rights of small independent states (Möller & Bjereld, 2010, p. 376).

When the bipolar structure of the cold war disappeared, neutrality and non-alignment were expected to become irrelevant as there was simply nothing to be neutral between anymore (Goetschel, 1999, p. 115). The states in Europe that had pursued a policy of neutrality during the Cold War were expected to adapt and integrate into the forming European security community where there was an emphasis on collective security. Sweden did not. On the contrary, the Swedish prime minister at the time stated that the policy of non-alignment would be pursued consistently, stating that neutrality “contributes to stability and détente in our part of the world and, at the same time constitutes the basis of our efforts at the International level to achieve peace and solidarity” (Carlsson as cited in Agius, 2006, p. 35).

Both Agius (2006) and Wieslander (2021) argue that Swedish neutrality and non-alignment are closely tied to the hegemonic role of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Swedish politics. It rests on the idea of society being about solidarity, consensus, and universalism (p. 6; p. 16). Furthermore, Sweden has always practiced “positive” or “active” neutrality, which means being

present in the international arena and using the neutral policy to export Swedish core values and norms. Agius (2006) argues that this attachment to ideas of progressivism has formed Sweden's unique form of neutrality (p. 6).

Constructivist scholars argue that neutrality had become integral to national identity by the end of the Cold War and that this was the primary reason why Sweden could not abandon their policy of non-alignment (Agius, 2006; Goetschel, 1999). This can be interpreted as non-alignment consisting of two parts: one *normative* part that is tied to identity, and one *strategic* part that consists of the actual policy actions taken (Möller & Bjereld, 2010). Andrén argues that the balancing of security interests and need for cooperation with demands for non-alignment has always been a practical problem for Sweden (Andrén, 1967, p. 113). Sweden did slowly integrate, joining the United Nations (UN) in 1946 and the European Union (EU) in 1995.

Over the years, the term “neutrality” discursively evolved to “non-alignment” and eventually “military non-alignment” – which is the term used in Sweden today. The strategic policy actions associated with this defence policy – avoiding military alliances – stayed consistent. Because territorial strategic defence was redundant in the period after the cold war, Sweden continued its line of military non-alignment leaning increasingly on the normative, identity building, part (Löden, 2012).

In 2008, the security context in Europe began changing. It started with Russian aggression towards Georgia, but it was an incident in 2013 dubbed the “Russian Easter” that caught Sweden's attention. It entailed Russian aircrafts practising bomb attacks close to the Swedish border after midnight on Good Friday. Later, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) claimed that the bomb attacks were in fact nuclear bombs (Wieslander, 2021, p. 1). In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea which further deteriorated the security situation in Europe. In light of these events, the perception of Russia was drastically altered and many Nordic countries now considered Russia to be a “main security challenge” (Lunde Saxi as cited in Wieslander, 2021, p. 1).

The new level of threat took Sweden by surprise. After the cold war, Sweden had to a large extent dismantled its defence force, and instead focused on threats from non-state actors and building smaller task forces that could be used internationally. However, the changed security situation in Europe brought the antagonistic state threat back to the core of Swedish defence policy (Wieslander, 2021, p. 7). Strategic defence policy was once again needed, and Sweden adopted a

new policy in 2009 that was implemented 2014. This new policy still claimed to be a policy of non-alignment, but it was the first instance of Sweden stating that security is something to be achieved “together” and that the country needs to be able to both give and receive military support. It further states that Sweden would “not remain passive” should an EU member be attacked (Wieslander, 2021, p. 8).

In the following years, Sweden elaborated this policy and formed an extensive security network of bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation, increasingly diverting from the original understanding of a non-alignment. They signed Letters of Intent with Germany in 2017 and with France in 2021 as well increasing their cooperation with NATO, ratifying a Host Nation Support Agreement in 2016 (Government Offices of Sweden, n.d.). The most comprehensive defence cooperation to date is with neighbouring Finland and includes joint planning for crisis or war. Sweden and Finland have also signed trilateral statements of Intent with both USA and Norway, which are both NATO members (Wieslander, 2021, p. 11).

Swedish non-alignment is an integral part of Swedish identity and is rarely questioned (Agius, 2006, p. 90). Because of this embedded nature of non-alignment into the construction of the nation state and its identity, abandonment of the policy is a sensitive subject, and discussing it is almost considered taboo according to Agius (2006, p. 48). Still, the new policy has received much criticism from the public, pointing to contradictions between non-alignment and the increasingly cooperation-based defence policy (Möller & Bjereld, 2010, pp. 363-364). Hultqvist (31st of August 2015), as earlier mentioned, responded to the criticism by claiming that the defence cooperation can still be considered part of a military non-aligned policy – it is just non-alignment “evolving”.

The persisting public debate about the implementation of the new policy indicates that there is a societal demand to understand the dimensions and implications of Swedish non-alignment better. Besides the societal interest, the changing non-alignment policy has also interested the academic community. Still, Wieslander (2021), argues that non-alignment policy of Sweden in the changed security context has not been sufficiently studied (p. 3). Those that have studied the topic, focusing mainly on the strategic side of non-alignment (see Devine (2011), Kunz (2015) and Wieslander (2021)) mostly disagree with Hultqvist. They claim that Swedish non-alignment is dead in all but name. However, these studies exclusively employ traditional and theoretical perspectives which neglect identity. How the normative part (i.e., the identity part) is reconstructed in the changing

security context is, hence, poorly understood. By employing a critical constructivist approach, understanding identity and security as social constructs that are fluid, I will in the scope of this bachelor thesis study how Swedish non-aligned identity is reconstructed in the changing security context. Research exploring why states act a certain way in the international system, and how identity can restrict or enable this action, is fundamental to the field of international relations as well security studies.

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the thesis is to better understand the relationship between identity and security and how it can be reconstructed. I will explore this through a qualitative case study of Sweden's identity as non-aligned, using a narrative approach. The main research question of this thesis is:

How is Sweden's identity as non-aligned reconstructed in relation to the changing security context?

This thesis is limited to study the military cooperation between Sweden and Finland (the limitations are further addressed in chapter *1.4 Delimitations*). To help answer the main research question the following sub-questions are studied:

Sub-question 1: How is Sweden's position as non-aligned presented?

Sub-question 2: How is the military defence cooperation with Finland justified?

1.3 Delimitations

In this section I will present the main limitations that have been set in this thesis: the case, the timeframe, the material, and the approach. Additional, more specific, limitations will be presented in their respective chapters.

The first limitation concerns the choice to limit the study to the military cooperation with Finland. This limitation was made to ensure that the material did not exceed what I was able to process in the timeframe of this thesis. Finland was chosen because of it being referred to as Sweden's closest partner, with their cooperation extending to times of war and crisis (Hultqvist & Kaikkonen, 14th of December 2019).

Secondly, the material is limited to articles and speeches published by the Government offices of Sweden on their website (www.regeringen.se). Since this thesis aims to understand how national identity is reconstructed in a changing security context, it is useful to study the narratives put forward by the elite politicians. In addition, opinion pieces by politicians originally published in other newspapers are re-published on this webpage, meaning that I could get a good overview of the narratives put forward by the government (*discussed in 4.3 Empirical method and Material*).

Thirdly, the timeframe was set from 2014 up until the time of the material collection which took place in October 2021. The timeframe was chosen because the aim of the thesis is to study the reconstruction of identity in *the changing security context*, which began in 2014. In addition, there is no material published on the government offices of Sweden's webpage regarding the military cooperation with Finland before 2014, and the cooperation itself was presented the same year (Government Offices of Sweden, n.d.).

Fourth and finally, the origin and evolvement of Swedish neutrality and non-alignment up until 2014 is well studied. This thesis will rest on this existing body of work (Agius, 2006; Andrén, 1967) and not conduct any historical research on non-alignment. In addition, this study does not aim to decide the value of a non-aligned policy nor its implementations.

1.4 Disposition

This thesis is structured as follows: I will start with a literature review of existing research, first presenting neutrality as a concept, and then dividing the existing research into strategic non-alignment and normative non-alignment. After that I move on to introduce my theoretical framework of critical constructivism, including key concepts of security communities and the Identity/Security nexus. This is followed by a chapter where I present my methodological choices and critical reflections about validity, reliability, and subjectivity. Additionally, I present my material. The chapter concludes with my analytical framework of strategic narratives, including the “tools” used to analyse the strategic narratives. The next chapter analyses the three types of narratives found: system narratives, identity narratives and issue narratives. This is followed by a “Results” chapter that discussed how the findings of the analysis can be linked and used to answer the research questions of the thesis. Finally, I conclude the thesis by summarizing my findings and discussing potential future research.

2. Literature review

This chapter serves to give an overview of the existing literature regarding neutrality and non-alignment. I will start by briefly presenting how neutrality as a concept has been approached by scholars and then move on to the two strands of literature that this thesis builds on: *strategic non-alignment* and *normative non-alignment*. These terms are adapted from Möller & Bjereld (2010) who use them on a smaller scale to compare the nature of Swedish and Finnish neutrality. They argue that non-alignment rests on these two separate parts. *Strategic non-alignment* has implications for security and is concerned with the strategic usefulness of non-alignment as a policy and whether it contributes to territorial integrity and/or national autonomy. *Normative non-alignment* has implications for identity and is concerned with whether non-alignment contributes to an appropriate international role and national narrative (pp. 364,369). In this thesis I adapt their terms and use them in a broader sense to distinguish between studies on the practical implementation of non-alignment policy (i.e., strategic) and studies on the identity aspects of non-alignment (i.e., normative). The literary review will mainly focus on studies done on Sweden in particular. This is due to the heterogenous nature of neutral states and their history meaning that studies done on other neutral countries might not be applicable to the Swedish context.

2.1 Neutrality as a concept

Neutrality is a concept that predates both state and sovereignty but has often been pushed to the sidelines by academics more interested in power and war (p. 10). Historically, it has been depicted as an unrealistic and unacceptable security stance, commonly regarded as a choice only for small, weak states trying to stay out of conflicts. Agius (2006) argues that neutral states are seen as peripheral actors and subsequently they have been of little interest to international relations theory and security studies (p. 1). Andrén (1991) calls neutrality an “illusive concept” (p. 67). The definition of neutrality has never been fixed, and the term has varied through the years and between countries. Different countries have called neutrality by different names, such as military non-alignment (Sweden), military neutrality (Ireland), armed neutrality (Switzerland). Wieslander (2021) argues that the goal of neutrality, regardless of the term used, is ensuring national freedom

of action and to reduce dependency on great powers and institutional structures (p. 14). Practically, this entails staying out of (military) alliances to avoid being drawn into conflicts, should they arise. The lack of universal agreement on the meaning of the term has, according to Devine (2011), often resulted in a political misunderstandings and difficulty communicating with the public (p. 335).

Agius (2006) writes that neutrality has been a largely neglected subject, mainly studied in the fields of law and history. She argues that the scholars that have commented on neutrality in International Relations Theory predominately belong to the realist school of thought. Realists view neutral states as anomalies that don't have a place in the international anarchic system because they are not power maximisers. They make an exception for the Cold War period when neutral states were reluctantly seen as having a "balancing" role in the international anarchic system (Agius, 2006, pp. 2-4). Traditional theories, such as realism, view neutrality as a response to external phenomena.

The choice to stick to a policy of neutrality after the end of the Cold War could not be explained by the traditional theories and these states were mostly written off. Agius (2006) writes that neutrality is still mostly treated as obsolete, but that there are a minority of scholars that view neutrality in relation to identity and not only as a security tool (pp. 3-4).

2.2 Strategic non-alignment

The scholars studying the strategic part of Swedish non-alignment after the end of the Cold War have mainly focused on Sweden's integration into the European security structure in conjunction with increasing bilateral and multilateral security cooperation (see Devine (2011) and Wieslander (2021)) as well as increasing cooperation with NATO (see Kunz (2015) and Ydén, Berndtsson, and Petersson (2019)). These defence strategies are seen as contradictory to a non-aligned policy and the studies presented in this section agree that Swedish non-alignment (the strategic part) can – and should – no longer be considered non-aligned. These studies will now be presented in more detail.

Devine (2011) studies the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which Sweden is a part of. She examines whether it is compatible with neutrality through elite and public discourses, arguing that the strategic meaning of non-alignment has been stretched further and further, to a point where it now means "non-membership of military alliances with mutual defence clauses" (p. 360). However, she proceeds to prove false even this stretched definition

because the CSDP has in fact accepted a mutual defence clause by subsuming the Western European Union (Devine, 2011, p. 353). Elite understanding and public opinion on the concept of non-alignment have a “near zero-degree norm overlap”, and she suggest that implementation understandings might be even further apart (Devine, 2011, p. 360).

Wieslander (2021) studies Swedish neutrality through a neoclassical realist framework measuring different aspects of the policy on a scale from integrative (based on cooperation) to non-aligned (isolationist) (p. 5). She finds that Sweden’s policy is integrative, and that the policy has changed considerably since the end of the Cold War, concluding that the remnants of a non-alignment policy are “so few to be considered dismissive, regardless of the official emphasis on this dimension” (Wieslander, 2021, pp. 9,17). The only component of Swedish defence policy that has stayed consistent, according to Wieslander (2021), is the emphasis on a rule-based international security order as the only fair way to protect and hear small states (pp. 11,17).

Kunz (2015) comes to similar conclusions as Wieslander, but focuses more specifically on Sweden’s increasingly strong relationship with NATO and how it fits in with a non-aligned policy. She argues that NATO membership was a non-issue for Sweden before the introduction of a threat, and describes Sweden’s new policy as a “NATO workaround” where Sweden pursues every alliance short of collective defence (pp. 31,33). She argues that Sweden’s military non-alignment is “stretched to its limits” (Kunz, 2015, p. 38).

Ydén et al. (2019) also focus on Sweden’s relationship with NATO but base their research on a paradox found in a national survey from 2015 regarding NATO membership. Out of the respondents that supported Swedish NATO-membership, 25% also favoured a non-alignment policy (p. 1). This indicates a considerable confusion among the public regarding the meaning of non-alignment and/or NATO membership since these two options are obviously not compatible (Ydén et al., 2019, p. 8).

Ydén et al. (2019) argue that the reason for this discrepancy could be explained by the public having reacted to a political “performance” surrounding non-alignment where actions and statements were not aligned (p. 2). They state that while Swedish non-alignment is put on as a front by Sweden’s elite, this elite seems to be less idealist “backstage” and more concerned with increasing cooperation with NATO to gain security guarantees (Ydén et al., 2019, p. 14). These military preparations with NATO are made in public but phrased to be compatible with non-

alignment. Consequently, Ydén et al. (2019) conclude that this is a reason why the public is confused (p. 15).

I will now move on to look at the literature that has studied the normative side of Swedish non-alignment (i.e., the identity).

2.3 Normative non-alignment

The scholars and studies presented in this section are tied together by their search for connections to norms and identity, which could be understood as drawing on constructivist thought in different capacities. Goetschel (1999) was one of the early scholars to make a link between identity and non-alignment. Building on his work, Agius (2006; 2011) contributes literature about the constructed nature of non-alignment and the role of security communities and normative non-alignment. Comparative studies, such as (Möller & Bjereld, 2010; Löden, 2012) give further insight into the specific nature of Swedish normative non-alignment. I will now present these studies in more detail.

Goetschel (1999) argues that there is more to neutrality than the political function to hold on to sovereignty during war, he argues that neutrality has an idealistic side and could be better understood through the role of identity (p. 116). Goetschel (1999) traces this link back to neutral states having to prove their usefulness, both domestically and internationally, during times of war. The need to prove their usefulness sprang from the critique neutral states often received from the international community for choosing not to participate in war. According to Goetschel (1999), this critique was especially harsh during conflicts based in ideology, such as the Cold War. To justify their existence, neutral countries adopted different roles in the international arena to prove they had a place in it (p. 120). Goetschel (1999) further concludes that Sweden assumed the role as international mediator during the Cold War, making this an identity marker for the domestic population. Instead of seeing neutrality as a response to something external, Goetschel argues that the main function of neutrality after the end of the Cold War has been to serve as an identity provider (p. 132).

Agius (2006) determines that neutrality has played a crucial role in both external and internal identity building and that Swedish neutrality has been reconstructed since the 1990s through a lens of identity (pp. 5,7). She argues that this has resulted in neutrality and non-alignment having deep,

normative roots in Sweden which is part of the reason why Sweden has chosen to stay neutral in face of external pressure to align (Agius, 2006, p. 33).

She further uses a framework of security communities and collective identity to explain why some states did align after the end of the Cold War. She explains that the shift in policy for these countries can be explained by a growing European identity and the creation of a European security community (Agius, 2011, p. 371). Security communities are communities where large-scale violence is deemed almost unthinkable (Adler & Barnett as cited in McDonald, 2018, p. 52). They are built on shared norms and values, but also reproduce these. Agius (2006) argues that the countries that shifted from neutrality had to adapt to fit into the European community. These efforts create a process of adopting certain norms and result in some shift of identity of the nation state (p. 56). She further explains that the reason that Sweden did not adapt may be because there are already established meanings of security and identity that have deeper domestic roots and are not readily interchangeable with European norms. Agius (2011) argues that even if identity is not fixed, it takes time to change because of the embedded nature towards language, history, and social context (p. 384).

Scholars that study the normative side of neutrality or non-alignment argue that the traditional view of the policy as “negative” (Stern as cited in Agius, 2006, p. 3) or “isolationist” (Wieslander, 2021, p. 4) is not the only way to view non-alignment. Instead of this view of non-alignment as states withdrawing from the international arena in order to not be drawn into conflict, they propose a second type of non-alignment, called “positive” (Stern as cited in Agius, 2006, p. 3), “active” (Andrén, 1991, p. 79) or “credible” (Agius, 2006, p. 90) neutrality. This is a more interactionist approach where neutral states prove themselves useful in different roles in the international arena, such as in the role of mediator and peacekeeper.

Comparative studies of Sweden and Finland also point towards the normative nature of Swedish non-alignment. Löden argues that the normative nature of Sweden’s neutrality has made Sweden more vulnerable and eager to prove themselves useful in the international arena (Löden, 2012, p. 276). Möller and Bjereld (2010) conclude that the Finnish and Swedish decisions to keep their non-alignment policies rest on the two factors presented in the beginning of this chapter: Firstly, its strategic usefulness, and secondly, its appropriateness regarding identity (Möller & Bjereld, 2010, pp. 364,369). Their study showed that normative arguments were more dominant in Sweden

than in Finland, emphasizing Sweden's role as mediator in conflicts. Sweden depended on the identity feedback more to compensate for the strategic decision to stay non-aligned after the end of the Cold War (Möller & Bjereld, 2010, pp. 377-378). Writing before 2014 and the annexation of Crimea, Möller and Bjereld (2010) stated that there was "a complete absence of territorial threats" (p. 378).

This thesis builds on all the research presented in this chapter, but in particular aims to contribute to the discussion on the normative nature of Swedish non-alignment. According to Agius (2006), this side of non-alignment has not been researched enough. Since the security situation in Sweden changed in 2014, traditional theories based on power balancing have been favoured when researching non-alignment (p. 5). As indicated in this literature review, much of the research on the normative nature of Sweden's non-alignment stems from before 2014. In this thesis, I aim to further explore how the changing security context has affected and reconstructed Swedish identity as non-aligned. In the next chapter I will present the theoretical framework used – critical constructivism.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will present the theoretical framework and key concepts used in this thesis. The ontological base of this thesis is constructivist, viewing reality as socially constructed. Knowledge is defined as interpretations of the world, taking an epistemological postpositivist position (Bryman, 2016, p. 375). I will start by briefly presenting the main tenets of critical constructivist theory with an emphasis on ideas about identity and security. Subsequently, I present two key concepts for the thesis: security communities and the identity/security nexus.

3.1 Critical Constructivism

Constructivism is a broad and rich theoretical approach that emerged in the 1980s and draws on the discipline of sociology. Shared key assumptions are the understanding of the world as socially constructed through inter-subjective interaction, putting norms and identity at the heart of world politics (McDonald, 2018, p. 49). Conventional constructivism has come to be associated mostly with the thoughts of Alexander Wendt and Peter Katzenstein. They view agents and international structures as co-constitutive, illustrated by Wendt's often cited claim that "Anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt as cited in Fierke, 2001, p. 116). Fierke (2001) argues that Wendt made change possible in the international anarchical system by emphasizing the intersubjectivity of identity and interests, which was a departure from traditional theories (p. 116). Even though change is considered to be possible in constructivist theory (as illustrated by the end of the Cold War), constructivists still argue that the norms that surround legitimate political behaviour can become hegemonic and effectively limit political action. This understanding of the relationship between actors and structures draws on sociology theory (McDonald, 2018, p. 58). Constructivists avoid universal and abstract definitions of security, instead arguing that the meaning of security is negotiated and constructed in a particular social and historical context through interaction. Security is given meaning in practice (McDonald, 2018, p. 50).

The main difference between the conventional and critical strands of constructivism lies in *how* they incorporate norms and identity. Conventional constructivists treat identity as an explanatory variable for different security phenomena, viewing it as something external to the analyst that can be discovered objectively (Cho, 2009, p. 96; McDonald, 2018, p. 52). In contrast, critical

constructivists are more interested in how- questions such as “how is identity constructed?”. Cho (2009, pp. 96-97) writes that critical constructivists view identity as something that needs explaining in and of itself to make sense of the cultural productions of insecurities. They understand identities to be inherently unstable and constantly negotiated (McDonald, 2018, p. 53). McSweeney (1999) argues that critical constructivists see identity as continuous process rather than a state (p. 73). Consequentially, critical constructivists discard the traditional focus on states as unitary actors with a single identity. States are still considered important but should be studied for what they are - human communities.

In addition to a wider understanding of identity, Fierke (2001) argues that critical constructivists give more weight to the role of language in analysis (p. 117). She argues that language creates meaning, for example through the use of metaphors such as family and the protection of it (Fierke as cited in Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021, p. 27). Weldes (1999) claims that elite actors draw on popular culture, common-sense norms through discursive resources when making policies plausible and persuasive to the domestic audience (pp. 241-242). Actors with high social positions such as elite politicians are considered important in deciding the dominant security discourse, even though it is then a constant site of contestation and other actors can engage in the negotiation (Weldes & Saco, 1996). Both Fierke and Weldes argue that elite representation of key beliefs play a role in whether individuals recognize themselves as part of that community (Fierke and Weldes as cited in McDonald, 2018, p. 55).

The widening of the concept of identity made by critical constructivism, in addition to the emphasis on language, is the reason I have chosen to utilize this strand of the theory for this thesis. Considering that the aim is to study the reconstruction of identity through elite narratives, this theory can give considerable insight. The important role of language in critical constructivism is shared with post-structural approaches and therefore some of the methodological tools presented in the next chapter have an overlap between the theories.

3.2 Security communities

Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (as cited in McDonald, 2018) argue that a regional identity has developed in Western Europe and has in turn given rise to what they call a *security community*. A security community is defined by the likelihood of force being used to resolve conflicts inside

the security community being very low (p. 52). Barnett and Adler argue that the “logic of community” can overcome a security dilemma when actors construct a shared social identity underpinned by norms, values and symbols reflecting long-term interest (Barnett & Adler as cited in Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021, p. 22). Shared meaning is constantly changing and redefined because social circumstances change, which renders collective identity and the creation of “we-ness” a never-ending process (Mattern, 2001, p. 360). The exact origin of collective identity is uncertain, but scholars have pointed to factors such as shared norms and meanings of technology, economics and external threats (Mattern, 2001, p. 353). Mattern (2001) argues that this regional we-ness replaces the coercive threat system of power politics to create international order (p. 353). In her view, the international system is not only built on a language of force and deterrence, but also on the forming of security communities which can build a foundation of security, making threats and use of force redundant and even prohibited (Mattern, 2000, p. 300).

The unidirectional analysis of Barnett and Adlers, where collective identity explains and creates the security community is disputed by Mattern (2000), instead arguing that the complexity of the relationship between the two is underestimated. Alternatively, she goes on to propose a multidirectional approach where identity and security interact in a process (p. 301).

3.3 The Identity/Security nexus

The process in which identity and security interact can be studied in many ways. McDonald (2018) argues that negotiations of identity dictate what is regarded as feasible political action in a specific setting and at a specific time (p. 53). Similarly, Mattern (2005) describes identity as “a power-laden narrative construct” and argues that identity can be reconstructed in times of crisis when understood as social construct (p. 9). Identity is, hence, not only re-constructed in the face of a changing security context, but the meaning of security is re-constructed in regard to identity. Bilgin (2010) calls this co-constitutive relationship the Identity/Security Nexus (p. 85). She argues that insecurity can stem from a threat to identity, while simultaneously strengthening collective identity (p. 87).

Wibben (2011) describes identity and security as linked through narrative (p. 68). Her focus is on how insecurity and danger are discursively constructed in relation to the construction of identity, where self and other are constituted. Stern (2017, p. 174) argues that security and insecurity are

directly linked – one defining what the other is not. She underlines this by stating that people don't think about feeling secure if they are not aware of a threat. Further, she argues that how security is defined is political at its core (p. 174). The construction of threat, thus, is part of producing the line between perceived self and other, between security and insecurity (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021, pp. 24-25) Threats are generally described as being existential in security studies, but they are not limited to being threats to the physical survival. Wibben (2011) argues threats to acquired values can be equally existential (p. 67). By naming these values as being in need of securing, security narratives (re)produce the subject's identity (Wibben, 2011, p. 68).

This chapter has introduced the theoretical approach that this thesis is based on, namely critical constructivism and concepts of security communities and the Identity/security Nexus. The importance of language and narrative that has been presented will be explored in the next section where I explain my methodological framework.

4. Methodology

This chapter will introduce the empirical and analytical methods used in this thesis. I start with presenting the overall research design and choices made, followed by a critical discussion about reliability, validity, and subjectivity in qualitative research. I then present my empirical method and material, ending the chapter with presenting the analytical framework of strategic narratives.

4.1 Choice of Method

The overall research design is a qualitative, descriptive case study. This design is helpful in answering the research questions because, as Yin (2018 pp. 15, 45) points out, case studies can investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real world context. He writes that they are especially useful answering “how” questions where the boundary between phenomenon and context is not easily discerned (pp. 15,45). My approach is abductive, grounded in critical constructivist theory but oscillating between the theory and the data during the analysis (Bryman, 2016, p. 394).

To fulfil the purpose of this thesis, I aim to study *how* the Swedish non-aligned identity has been reconstructed in the changing security context. Both Wibben (2011) and Mattern (2005) state that a good way to study the identity/security nexus is by studying narratives, as they can help to discern underlying mechanisms (p. 68; pp. 5-9). Narratives are the primary way in which human experience is made meaningful. We tell stories at all levels of society – stories about who we are and where we belong, about our countries and stories about the international system we live in. A narrative approach tries to explain why some narratives make sense and others do not, and how they can restrict imagination for other alternatives (Wibben, 2011, p. 44). There is a debate on what exactly constitutes a narrative as well as what part of research the narratives should be seen as (object of analysis, analytical method, result presentation). I will in this thesis use narrative analysis as an analytical method.

Bilgin (2010, p. 86) argues that since identity is a process, it can be studied by looking at the discourse of political leaders and all actors who are part of negotiating the collective identity. Public support for elite discourse matters and critical constructivists especially have contributed multiple studies trying to understand the relationship between political leaders and domestic

audiences. They argue that certain groups of actors have a privileged role in construction of the security narrative that can be traced to power relations (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021, p. 24). This makes it useful to look at narratives presented by Swedish political elite, such as the Swedish minister of Defence.

Fierke (2001) argues that it is important to look at the underpinning language when doing textual analysis. She argues that a more poststructural incorporation of the importance of language is to be preferred. According to her, it is impossible to discern meaning and interpretations without looking at the nature and role of language (p. 118). This is in line with the post-positivist epistemological approach where language is constitutive of the world, and we cannot compare language to the world it describes to find it truthful or false. Language produces meaning in and of itself (Fierke, 2001, p. 126). These points were further explored in *3.1 Critical constructivism*.

Building on these insights, this thesis will consider texts produced by the Swedish government and utilize strategic narrative analysis. The analysis will be supported by poststructural tools, such as dichotomies, to facilitate deeper analysis (*see 4.4 Strategic Narratives*). Before covering the detailed descriptions of the process of the empirical and analytical methods, I will discuss some of the main limitations and considerations regarding the choices of methods in this thesis.

4.2 Critical reflections

Reliability and Validity

Reliability (consistency of measure) and validity (accuracy of measure) are concepts given high status in quantitative research. They have traditionally been applied to qualitative research as well, but there has been discussion on whether they are applicable (Bryman, 2016, p. 383).

The goal of reliability is to minimize errors and bias in a study, allowing it to be replicated by another researcher. I address the specific question of subjectivity in the next section. Additionally, Yin (2018) argues that in reality, case studies are rarely repeated. Still, I aim to make all parts of this thesis as explicit as possible to enable the reader to follow the steps taken to arrive at conclusions (p. 46).

One of the advantages of a qualitative approach, as mentioned by Bryman (2016, p. 397), is that the less structured nature of the research enables the researcher to be flexible. This allows for an abductive approach where the data can guide the researcher while still being grounded in theory.

Bryman argues that qualitative research enables the researcher to develop a good understanding of the congruence between concepts and observations leading to high internal validity (Bryman, 2016, p. 384).

The external validity, or generalizability, on the other hand is often described as poor in qualitative research, especially in case studies because the sample size is so small that it is impossible to draw conclusions that are valid outside the case (Bryman, 2016, p. 399). Yin (2018) argues that qualitative research and case studies should be measured to something he calls “analytical generalization” instead, and that a case study should not be considered a sample. Instead, he argues that they can “shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles”. The generalizations can therefore be found at the conceptual level rather than at the specific level of the case (pp. 37-38). In this thesis I aim for analytical generalization by putting the conclusions into the context of my theoretical framework and building on previous research.

Subjectivity

Another common critique against qualitative research and case study design is that it is difficult to establish objective measures and that the researcher is prone to prejudgments that might lead them to only confirm preconceived notions (Yin, 2018 p. 43).

The theoretical base of this thesis is critical constructivism, as presented in *3.1 Critical Constructivism*. Consequently, I understand the world as constructed by the viewer in this thesis, which renders objectivity redundant. Instead, I aim for transparency. This is achieved by thoroughly explaining my theoretical standpoints and supply an extensive amount of excerpts from the original material to accompany the analysis. This will allow the reader to form their own opinion. In addition, the reader should be aware of my position as a Swedish citizen who has experienced the non-aligned identity first-hand. I do not view this as a restriction, because it means that I am more familiar with the subject of study. Instead, I address this by reflecting upon my own analysis throughout the process.

In narrative analysis, the analyst inadvertently creates a narrative of the studied narrative which is then always subject to her own prejudgments (Wibben, 2011, p. 51). Wibben writes that this can be mitigated by not being too rigid with the elements in the plot, adapting them along the way. Poststructural narrative theorists add that the goal should not be to reduce a narrative to a stable meaning and coherence, but instead to see the process, differences, and contradictions (p. 45).

Narrative analysis does not aim to, nor can it, provide truth or decide value. Nonetheless, narratives can structure how we understand our reality, and by funnelling our attention a certain way, narratives can inform a particular logic to be the dominant one (Agius, 2011, p. 372). In this sense, narrative analysis can make visible the mechanics used to encourage a specific meaning (Wibben, 2011, p. 46). That is the aim of this thesis, to use narrative analysis to better understand *how* non-alignment is reconstructed in the current security context.

4.3 Empirical method and Material

To study the reconstruction of the Swedish non-aligned identity, I drew upon collecting texts. The source was limited to texts published on the website of the Government offices of Sweden (www.regeringen.se). Because this thesis aims to understand the reconstruction of identity through narratives presented by the government, considering material published by them is appropriate. Since the government offices of Sweden re-publish opinion pieces written by politicians in other newspaper on their webpage, the material is broad and gives a good overview of the narrative the government wants to present. It is also a public source which makes it possible for the reader to refer to the original material if they wish to.

The government webpage has a search function making it possible to set a timeframe and search for keywords as well as limit the search by area (e.g., Defence, Judicial system). Using these tools, I set the timeframe between 1st of January 2014 and 20th of October 2021 (the date I conducted the data collection). I used “Finland” as a key word and limited the results to texts in the area “defence”. This rendered 235 matches on the webpage. I further tried changing the timeline parameters to see what type of material had been published before 2014. It turned out that the first text matching the other parameters was published in 2014, which was suitable with my chosen timeframe for the thesis.

A first review was made to eliminate material that did not mention the cooperation between Sweden and Finland such as texts regarding cyber security or short press releases mentioning group meeting in the EU or other where Finland was simply listed as a participant. After this round, I focused on opinion pieces and speeches to further narrow the material. This choice was made because the aim of the thesis is to explore how the government reconstructs identity through narratives. Longer format text that are written to convey a certain opinion or sentiment are therefore more fruitful to look at when discerning narrative structures. Press releases and reports

on the other hand are generally more objectively structured and though some were used to point to certain word choices, the core of the empirical material for this thesis is opinion pieces and speeches. At the end of this elimination process, I ended up with 37 texts, of which 9 were speeches and 10 were opinion pieces. The most prominent author was Swedish Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist, who authored or co-authored 16 of the texts. The rest was authored by other Swedish government officials, their Finnish counterparts, and the Swedish Ministry of the Defence.

All material was marked with date, author, and type of text. All texts, except 4, were published in Swedish. The exceptions were published in English. All coding was done using the original language of the texts. This was done because the aim was to discern narrative structures using language. Word choices were therefore important, as well as repetition of words which could have been obscured by translation. All quotes that are presented in the analysis and result have been translated by me.

The process of coding the material will be described in the next section that presents the analytical method of the thesis.

4.4 Analytical method: Strategic Narratives

The specific narrative approach used in this thesis is a framework of strategic narratives introduced by Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle in their 2013 book *Strategic narratives: communication power and the new world order*. They present three types of narratives: System Narratives, Identity Narratives, and Issue Narratives.

System Narratives are narratives describing the general structure of international relations, such as the narrative of the rise of China or the War on Terror.

Identity Narratives are narratives regarding the actor's own identity in the domestic and international sphere, its values, and goals. The narrative of the US as a beacon for peace and hope (in some countries) is such a narrative.

Issue Narratives are narratives seeking to shape policy discussion on a specific topic, they tell the story of a specific conflict or issue and propose solutions that will solve them. They put political action in a context (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin, 2014, p. 76). These are narratives such as why a country should or shouldn't use nuclear power plants.

Every narrative has a life cycle consisting of three phases: the formation (how the narratives are created and by whom), the *projection* (how they are communicated), and the *reception* (how wide they are distributed and how they are understood) (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013, p. 14).

Strategic narratives are profoundly political, and it is logical to assume that they are actively employed to achieve political goals (Robertson, 2012, p. 234). The types are inextricably linked, and if they do not align it can severely limit their effectiveness (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 10).

Strategic narratives are employed for political gain by representing certain events and political processes in a way that appeals to the targeted audience (Schmitt, 2018, p. 489). These narratives are constructivist at the core, building on social constructs and influenced by norms, identity, and culture. Building on Wendt, Miskimmon et al. (2013) argue that “If anarchy is what states make of it, then what they make of it depends on the narratives they experience reality through” (p. 150).

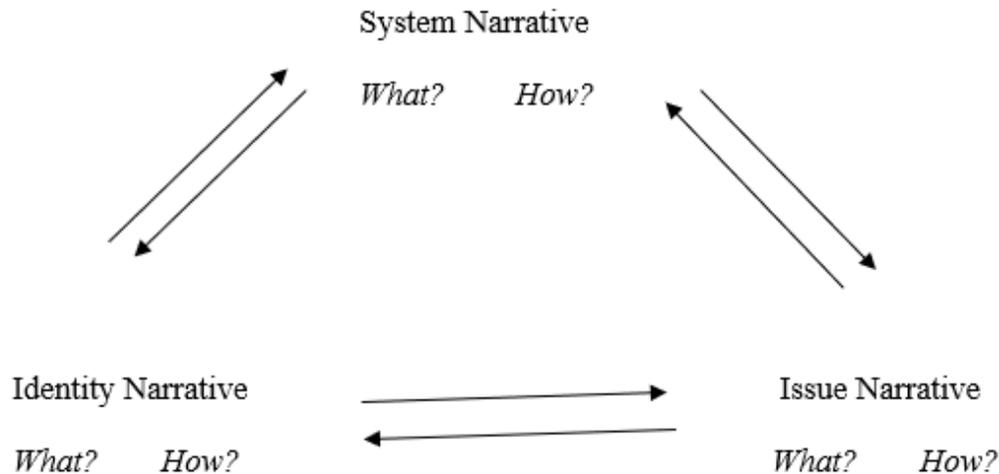
In this thesis, I will code the text into strategic narratives, but limit it to solely focusing on the *formation* of the narratives. This is due to the nature of this research and the research questions asked.

Operationalization

Miskimmon et al. do not present a specific way to operationalize strategic narratives. I will therefore combine different frameworks from other scholars to “read” the material. Having a set method for “reading” makes the research better organized, which increases replicability (Milliken, 2001, p. 145). Narrative analysis is argued to be mostly an inductive approach, but I have chosen to ground it more firmly in theory. By repeatedly looking at the material in detail, the narrative becomes clear. This approach enables the researcher to be more open to different interpretations of the text before moving on to the little building blocks that make up the structure. This thorough analysis of strategic narratives was achieved by breaking them down with a framework proposed by Chatman (as cited in Robertson, 2012). He defines narratives as existing of two parts – the “what?” and the “how?”. The “what?” of the narrative explains the temporal linking of events and the overarching story. The “how?” consists of the smaller linguistic building blocks and connections that result in causal connections between events to convey the overarching narrative (p. 230). I started the analytical process by looking at the overarching structure of the text, before moving on to the linguistic details. The combination of frameworks is pictured in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.

Combination of strategic narrative framework and Chatman's part of a narrative.



Note. Figure is authors own work.

The “what” was distilled by identifying different temporal categories of a narrative set by Labov and Waltesky (as cited in Robertson, 2012). These categories are: summary, orientation, a complicating act and resolution (p. 229). While not all apply in each type of strategic narrative, they help to structure the chronology and causality of the overarching narrative structure by identifying characters and the temporal linking of events. The material was coded according to narrative type (system, identity and issue) and within each narrative these categories were identified. During this process it became clear that multiple identity narratives existed in the material. In total, five distinct narratives were found in the material: one system narrative, three identity narratives, and one issue narrative. I present a summary of the “what” of each of these strategic narratives in *5. Analysis: the narratives*, including all involved actors.

The “how” consists of the linguistic pieces that are used to project the narrative structure found in the “what”. These can be found by using poststructural tools, connecting to the idea that words acquire meaning through their context because there is no objective truth (Robertson, 2012, p. 230; Åhäll, 2018, pp. 87-88). Mattern (2001) argues that narratives inscribe realities through phrases and links, and these realities become structures which shape behavioural patterns (p. 364)

A collection of different tools from several authors were chosen for this thesis and are presented below with their respective definition and characters.

<i>Phrase</i>	word or word sequence used by an author to frame the narrative to his reality (Mattern, 2001, p. 367).
<i>Link</i>	logical and causal connections between phrases. This is where the narratives is given meaning (Mattern, 2001, p. 367).
<i>Cementing meaning</i>	narrative procedure, such as frequency of use, that is meant to cement the “correct” meaning of a specific meaning of a word or concept and can contribute to changing the meaning of an event (Wibben, 2011, p. 62).
<i>Dichotomies</i>	word pairs that are opposites and ordered hierarchically, positioning one above the other. This structuring contributes to giving meaning to the words, one defining what the other is not. Examples are: <i>Self/ Other</i> <i>Security/Insecurity</i> <i>Stable/Unstable</i> (Derrida in Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021, p. 99)

5. Analysis: The Narratives

This chapter will be divided into three sections, one for each type of strategic narrative. I start with the system narrative, and then move on to the identity narrative. Within the identity narrative, I discuss three sub-narratives found. In the last section I present the issue narrative.

Every narrative section will start with the narrative “what” that summarizes the overarching narrative structures and involved characters found in the material. This summary is created by me through using the tools presented in *4.4 Analytical method: Strategic Narratives* and then distilling all the information from the material into one summary. Next, the narrative “how” that underpins the narrative “what” is analysed and presented (Chatman as cited in Robertson, 2012, p. 230). Both sub-questions of the thesis are answered in this chapter: sub-question 1, how Sweden’s non-aligned position is presented is answered in *5.2 The three Identity Narratives* while sub-question 2, how military cooperation with Finland is justified, is answered in *5.3 the Issue Narrative*.

5.1 The System Narrative

The system narrative describes the general structure of the international system (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 10). In this thesis, based upon the empirical material, the system narrative present describes an international system based on norms and rules. The 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea violated these norms and rules, resulting in the international system becoming unstable and unpredictable. The narrative is mostly presented in context of Western or European security order having been disrupted. Consequently, the West is called upon to join together in defending the Western values that have been violated.

Summary: The international rule-based system has become increasingly unstable and unpredictable, western fundamental values are under attack by Russian authoritarianism and aggression. As a consequence, the West need to offer a united defence.

Characters: *Protagonist:* The West – defenders of democracy
Antagonist: Russia – authoritarian lawbreaker

This narrative structure can be recognized in the yearly speech made by Swedish Minister of Defence, Hultqvist in the beginning of 2020:

We live in a time of rapid change. Fundamental norms and shared commitments to human rights, democracy and the rule of law are increasingly being challenged. The focus is shifting rapidly in an unpredictable international and national landscape. We see strong political tensions across the Western world, and there are constant deliberate attempts to undermine our societies. The democratic structures and openness of society are being deliberately, systematically and shamefully exploited. (Hultqvist, 13th of January 2020)

The main building block – the “how?” – of the system narrative is threat creation. Threat highlights deliberate violations to both norms (“shared commitments to human rights and democracy”) as well as formal rules (“rule of law”). The threat construction is used to draw the line between us/them as well as to define what constitutes as secure/insecure. Russia is not only presented as a threat to territory, but as a threat to democratic values (“openness of society”) by building on Cold War parallels and the dichotomy of democracy/authoritarianism. The discursive tools used to construct this threat can be found when looking closer at the language.

The most blatant construction of Russia as a threat is the open framing of Russia as the reason for the changed security situation:

The root cause of the new security situation in our part of Europe is the Russian aggression against both Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. What has happened is a violation of international law and of the European security order. (Hultqvist, 15th of January 2018)

In addition, the antagonistic role is cemented by consistently linking negative qualities and words (as decided by Sweden) to Russia. Russia is mentioned 84 times in total in the material, with 82 times being in a negative context. Examples are linking “Russia” with keywords like aggression (Hultqvist, 14th of May 2016), “military violence” (Hultqvist, 11th of January 2016), “authoritarianism” (Hultqvist, 11th of January 2016), “law breaker” (Hultqvist, 31st of August 2015), “nuclear weapons” (Hultqvist, 31st of August 2015), “misinformation” (Hultqvist, 13th of January 2020), “military build-up” (Hultqvist, 31st of August 2015) or “military exercises” (Hultqvist, 13th of January 2019).

In two instances, Russia is linked with the cooperative connotation “dialogue”. However, it is made clear that it is the Russian civil society that is worth communicating with, not because of, but *despite* the government that is referred to as “authoritarian” (Hultqvist, 13th of January 2019; Hultqvist, 13th of January 2020). This clearly emphasizes the difference between Russian government and society and the fact that Russia’s actions are not considered congruent with democratic values.

The threat construction is given further urgency as well as historical context by drawing on Cold War parallels. This linking is achieved discursively in two ways; framing Russia’s actions and noting Europe’s vulnerable position. Russian military exercises are described as having “clear parallels with” (Hultqvist, 9th of January 2017), or “a pattern that dates back to” (Hultqvist, 17th of March 2021) the Cold War. Russian defence spendings are described as being “the highest level since the fall of the Soviet Union” (Hultqvist, 31st of August 2015), implying that Russia is increasingly returning to the Soviet Union enemy that is well cemented in the history of the West. Another linking method is to describe the changed security situation as representing “the most serious challenge to European security since the end of the Cold War” (Löfvén & Sipilä, 11th of January 2016). This phrasing invites the reader to think about the current security situation in cold war terms. This is further encouraged by phrasing the current security challenge as a clash between democracy and authoritarianism:

The most important thing is to dare to recognise that what we are facing is a confrontation between forces that advocate open and democratic societies and those that want to push towards a more authoritarian direction. This power struggle exists both in the international arena between countries and within all our countries. (Hultqvist, 13th of January 2020)

The dichotomy created between Western democracy/Russian authoritarianism echoes the dichotomy of Western democracy/Soviet Communism that was at the heart of the Cold War.

The solution to the threat as described in the system narrative is phrased as the West joining together to “stand up for common values and principles” (Hultqvist, 14th of May 2016). This is described as the antidote to the uncertainty created by Russia: “An increasingly uncertain world requires closer cooperation with other countries and organisations” (Hultqvist & Ninistö, 21st of June 2016). In addition, sanctions must be imposed on Russia, and military should be repositioned

(Hultqvist, 15th of January 2018), following the logic of a rule and law based international order. This threat creation of Russia as an authoritarian lawbreaker is drawn upon in all other narratives.

5.2 The three Identity Narratives

When revising the empirical material related to Sweden’s identity, values, and goals in the domestic and international sphere, I concluded that three distinct identity narratives can be identified. The three narratives are: 1. Sweden the peacekeeper, 2. Sweden the European, and 3. Sweden the brother of Finland. They differ in their emphasis on Sweden’s role and what actors are juxtaposed to motivate that role. The three narratives exist simultaneously but are given less or more weight depending on context.

1. Sweden the peacekeeper

This identity narrative rests on a historical Swedish identity that was at its height during the Cold War. The narrative is normative in nature, positioning Sweden as an important actor in the quest for peace, democracy, and freedom. This notion is contrasted by the threat established in the system narrative (*see 5.1 The System Narrative*). This identity narrative mirrors normative non-alignment as identified in previous research presented in *2.3 Normative non-alignment*.

Summary:	Sweden is a mediator and peacekeeper that has a duty to protect the rule based democratic international order by staying firm on the policy of non-alignment that contributes to peace and stability.
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Characters:	<i>Protagonist:</i> Sweden – mediator and peacekeeper <i>Antagonist:</i> Russia – authoritarian lawbreaker
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The main building blocks of the peacekeeper narrative – the “how?”– are the linking of normative non-alignment to “peace, security and stability” as well as phrasing the peacekeeper identity as being courageous and important:

I know that our contribution is appreciated, requested and important. (...) It is crucial and important to stand up for democracy, openness, the equal value of all people and freedom!
(Hultqvist, 11th of January 2016)

Today's turbulent world needs more, not fewer, governments that dare to articulate visions of peace, security and international disarmament. (Dalunde, Hultqvist, Stålhammar & Wallström, 2nd of March 2016)

The usage of words such as “dare” and “stand up for” links this identity with ideas of courage. “Requested” hints to expectations by the global community that come with Sweden’s historical role in similar situations. Sweden’s identity is linked to contributions to “peace, security and stability”, creating a dichotomy with the uncertainty presented in system narrative. Its role as protector of small states through support of a norm and rule based international order is also cemented, positioning Sweden as the courageous protector of peace by stating: “We stand united in the fight for respect for international law, and for the right of each country to make its own security policy choices” (Löfvén & Sipilä, 11th of January 2016). The importance of this normative non-alignment, the identity, is further highlighted multiple times in the excerpt below:

Our military non-alignment gives us the freedom to act in any given situation in the way that best promotes détente and peaceful development. It contributes to our own security and to stability in the neighbourhood. A change in security policy doctrine would mean new conditions for security in our part of Europe. The stability that has been built up around Sweden's military non-alignment would be disrupted. Such a development would also have an impact on our close neighbours, not least our close partner Finland. It would change the entire security situation in our part of Europe, and the significance of this must not be underestimated. Security policy should be long-term, stable and protected from quick party tactics. (Dalunde et al., 2nd of March 2016)

This first two sentences mirror the words of Carlsson in 1990 that were quoted in the introduction of this thesis. He stated that Swedish neutrality “contributes to stability and détente in our part of the world and, at the same time constitutes the basis of our efforts at the International level to achieve peace and solidarity” (Carlsson as cited in Agius, 2006, p. 35). This mirroring emphasises the historical ties of this narrative.

Sweden’s role as mediator is referenced directly by Hultqvist (13th of January 2019) when describing Swedish security policy in 2019, stating that “Sweden's role as an international bridge builder” and that “our work is peacekeeping”. This again points back to Sweden’s neutral role during the Cold War, mediating between opposing parties (Möller & Bjereld, 2010, p. 376).

This section has answered sub-question 1, describing that Sweden's position as non-alignment is presented as being historical, stable, and as contributing to "peace, security and stability" not only for Sweden, but for Europe as a whole.

2. Sweden the European

The second distinct narrative that I could identify from the empirical material was the European identity narrative. In this narrative, Europe (sometimes referred to as entire the West or Northern Europe) is the referent object that needs to be secured, and Sweden is portrayed as being responsible to defend it. The threat in this narrative is obtained from the system narrative (*see 5.1 The System Narrative*).

Summary: Sweden is a valuable part of the European Union where security is built together, and Sweden is therefore obliged to protect the European security order against the Russian threat.

Characters: *Protagonist:* Sweden – integral member of the European Union
Antagonist: Russia – authoritarian lawbreaker

The main building block of this narrative – the "how?" – is the linking of European and Swedish ideas of security and norms. This results in an extended "we" that includes all of Europe (sometimes the whole West). The extension is achieved linguistically by frequently linking proposed solutions to security in Europe and the Nordic Region. In a 2019 Speech, Hultqvist claimed that Sweden, together with Finland, Norway and Denmark had "a common responsibility for Nordic security" (Hultqvist, 13th of January 2019). Further, European and Swedish security are presented as interdependent:

A united and strong EU, with a principled and effective foreign policy, is of fundamental importance for Sweden's security. (...) For Sweden, safeguarding the norms, principles and commitments that make up the European security order are important security policy issues and a prerequisite for building long-term peace, stability and security in Europe. (Hultqvist & Wallström, 8th of September 2016)

By establishing that safeguarding European security norms and principles is an essential responsibility, Sweden places itself firmly inside the European security community that should be united. In that unity, Sweden is not singled out but a member equal to other European states. This unity is framed as prerequisite for an effective security strategy. As an example, the phrase “Security is built together” is mentioned multiple times in different contexts, cementing a link between security-cooperation (Dalunde et al., 2nd of March 2016; Hultqvist & Kaikkonen, 14th of December 2019; Wallström, 9th of September 2016). Furthermore, being part of Europe is framed as the only viable way forward:

The future of regional peace and stability depends on keeping European unity. Only together, with a unified European response and through a strong transatlantic link, can we stand up for common values and principles. (Hultqvist, 14th of May 2016)

In this identity narrative, Sweden draws on principles of security communities, presenting Swedish security interests and norms as aligning with those of with the Europe.

3. Sweden the brother of Finland

The last identity narrative I identified in the empirical material was the “brother of Finland” narrative. It serves as a connector between Sweden and Finland, linking them historically and in the present. Similarly to the other identity narratives, the threat is obtained from the system narrative (*see 5.1 The System Narrative*).

Summary:	Sweden is tied to Finland not only due to its geographical proximity, but also culturally and socially. Therefore, Sweden and Finland must stand united to face the threat of Russia.
Characters:	<i>Protagonist:</i> Sweden – brother of Finland <i>Confidant:</i> Finland – brother of Sweden <i>Antagonist:</i> Russia – authoritarian lawbreaker

The main building block of this narrative – the “how?”– is the phrasing of Swedish–Finnish relations as historical and special. In the first speech made by the Swedish and Finnish ministers

of defence in January 2015, they start by citing the first stanzas from the Finnish national epic “Kalevala” that begins with “Dear brother and boy of honour, we who have grown up together”. The ministers then state that: “Finnish and Swedish history have long been intertwined like a tapestry, like a couplet. Our history is bound together” (Haglund & Hultqvist, 12th of January 2015). Two years later, Hultqvist reveals that his own mother was a Finnish refugee that came to Sweden during the Second World War, bringing the metaphor of brotherhood into the real world. He goes on stating that: “This means that I, and many others like me, have close ties to Finland and follow its development particularly closely” (Hultqvist, 6th of December 2017). The narrative of brotherhood is called upon frequently throughout the material. Related to the patriotic description of a state as “motherland”, state brotherhood has a strong positive connotation that indicates not only a geographic closeness but one bound by history, culture and societal values.

The military cooperation with Finland is described as “natural” because of the countries’ similar security positions and “long history of cooperation” (Hultqvist, 6th of December 2017) and Finland being Sweden’s “close partner” (Dalunde et al., 2nd of March 2016). With this in regard, cooperating with Finland is not only an opportunity to combine forces against an aggressor, but a natural obligation justified by the close relationship. In the empiric material, reference is made to defence cooperation with multiple states. However, the cooperation with Finland is frequently singled out as the most important, referred to as “unique”, “the most far reaching” or, “the most long lasting” (Ministry of Defence, 29th of September 2021), “having a special place” (Hultqvist, 6th of December 2017). While the previous identity narrative, “Sweden the European”, emphasizes cooperation based on collective responsibilities and policies, this narrative draws upon emotional language to justify a cooperation based on shared history and values, singled out amongst a larger community. In this sense, the “Sweden the brother of Finland” narrative further builds on ideas of collective identity and security communities, similar to the “Sweden the European” narrative.

5.3 The Issue Narrative

The issue narrative seeks to shape policy discussion regarding military defence cooperation with Finland. It focuses on practical problems and finding policy-based solutions in response to the changing security context. The practical nature of this narrative presents a contrast to the system and identity narratives, that are mainly normative. The issue narrative mirrors the strategic part of

non-alignment (i.e., the practical implementations of the policy) as presented in 2.2 *Strategic non-alignment*.

Summary:	Sweden has strengthened the military defence cooperation with Finland in order to protect the Swedish territorial integrity in the face of Russian threat.
Characters:	Russia – problem Sweden – problem solver Finland – solution

The main building blocks of this narrative, the “How”, is the adaptation of the threat taken from the system narrative. The general antagonistic role of Russia is adopted, but in contrast to the previously described narratives, is converted from the normative level of “threat against democracy and western norms” to an acute practical “threat to Swedish territorial integrity”. This is achieved by describing the deteriorating security situation as existing “in our immediate surroundings” (Hultqvist, 11th of January 2016), “in our own neighbourhood“ (Löfvén & Sipilä, 11th of January 2016), and the Baltic sea region as “significantly more of a security front zone than in the past” (Hultqvist & Ninistö, 21st of June 2016).

This territorial threat was introduced in the beginning of the cooperation with Finland in 2015 with Hultqvist (31st of August 2015) stating that exercises showing cooperation with other countries in specific locations were important to “demonstrate the determination to defend the entirety of Swedish territory”. In 2020, Hultqvist went so far as to state that “we cannot rule out an armed attack or the use of military force against Sweden” (Hultqvist, 13th of January 2020).

The presented solution is clear: “This requires a hard core of military capability in our country combined with developed cooperation with other countries and organisations” (Hultqvist, 31st of August 2015). The military cooperation with Finland is presented as the most prominent, reaching “beyond peacetime” (Hultqvist & Kaikkonen, 14th of December 2019) and being “crucial to our country’s security” (Hultqvist, 17th of March 2021). This answers sub-questions 2, concluding that military cooperation with Finland is justified by the creation of an urgent threat and presenting

the military cooperation as the solution. This justification is aided by the identity narrative of “Sweden the brother of Finland” previously discussed.

Even though the threat in itself is against Swedish territorial integrity, the aim of the military cooperation with Finland is repeatedly defined as stabilising the security situation in “our part of Europe” (Hultqvist, 6th of December 2017) or “the Baltic Sea Region” (Hultqvist & Kaikkonen, 14th of December 2019). The phrasing of the solution linked to the referent object of the Baltic Sea Region can be seen in the following excerpt:

Cooperation sends a clear signal to potential aggressors that we are both willing and able to cooperate in all circumstances. Enhanced defence cooperation between Sweden and Finland will continue to be central to the management of current and future security challenges and we are committed to taking this work forward in order to contribute to stability. Together, Sweden and Finland are determined contributors to security in the Baltic Sea region. (Hultqvist & Kaikkonen, 14th of December 2019)

The issue narrative therefore builds on both “Sweden the Brother of Finland” and “Sweden the European” identity narratives. The phrase “together” is used to draw on the “Sweden the Brother of Finland” narrative while the referent object is taken from the “Sweden the European” narrative, assuming both Sweden and Finland to be good members of the European security community.

In addition, the issue narrative is presented with high importance – the solution “has to be” adopted. Hultqvist argues that Sweden otherwise “will not be able to fulfil our fundamental obligation under international law, namely, to safeguard our territory!” (Hultqvist, 31st of August 2015).

In the next chapter I will discuss how these narratives are drawn upon to reconstruct the Swedish non-aligned identity and answer the main research question.

6. Results: Reconstructing the non-aligned identity

Throughout this thesis, I have categorized Swedish non-alignment into two parts: one *normative* identity building part and one *strategic* policy implementation part (Möller & Bjereld, 2010, p. 378). In the previous chapter, the *normative part of non-alignment* was found to mirror the identity narrative of “Sweden the peacekeeper” while the *strategic part of non-alignment* was found to mirror the issue narrative.

When Möller & Bjereld (2010) wrote their study, they considered the strategic and normative parts of non-alignment as mostly congruent in Swedish defence policy, as this was before Russia’s aggressions in Georgia and Crimea. Normative non-alignment was linked to the strategic non-aligned policy actions, namely, to stay out of alliances as to not be drawn into conflict. Even considering that Sweden pursued an “active” non-aligned policy, meaning that they promoted peace internationally and participated in the joint missions on behalf of the UN, they only did so far away from home, meaning that Sweden’s territorial integrity was never involved. After the security situation changed, there was suddenly a threat to Swedish territory that needed addressing.

The Swedish government responded to this new threat by slowly replacing the strategic part of non-aligned policy with a policy built on defence *cooperation*, a change described by Kunz (2015) and Wieslander (2021). This created a tension between the normative and strategic parts of non-alignment, which is reflected in the public criticism of the new strategic non-alignment policy.

The normative part of non-alignment has remained integral to Swedish national identity; thus, the government could not abandon the policy officially. Instead, the normative part of non-alignment was reconstructed in the new security context to align with the new strategic part of non-alignment (i.e., *cooperation*).

This reconstruction was achieved mainly by drawing on different identity narratives to allow for a widening of the meaning of the strategic part of non-alignment. The “Sweden the European” and “Sweden the brother of Finland” narratives were used to create a new dichotomy between us/them that encompassed Europe and especially Finland. The threat that was constructed in the system narrative was used to justify the cooperation that was required in both narratives, albeit with slightly different emphasis. In a European context, the Russian aggression poses a threat to

democratic values and international law as represented by the western hemisphere. In the context of Finland, Swedish and Finnish vicinity to Russia heightens the importance of the shared emotional bond between the states. In both narratives, Sweden emphasizes *cooperation*, with either a collective of states bound by common policies and socioeconomic interests, or an individual state bound by shared sociocultural values.

To uncover the underlying discursive mechanisms of the reconstruction of normative non-alignment, it is helpful to return to the presentation of the normative non-alignment that was found in the “Sweden the Peacekeeper” identity narrative. This narrative links normative non-alignment to the promotion of peace, security, and stability which is the essence of what a Swedish non-aligned identity stands for and aims to achieve. The few times that the contradiction between non-alignment and cooperation is addressed, this identity is used. This can be seen when Hultqvist (13th of January 2020) speaks about military cooperation with Finland and states that “It is a far leap from two militarily non-aligned states. But it is about contributing together to peace and stability in our part of Europe”. The military cooperation is tied back to the essence of the peacekeeper identity, which is facilitated by the extended “we” of the “Sweden the brother of Finland” narrative and the “Sweden the European” narrative.

By linking cooperation to these same words as normative non-alignment, they are discursively moved closer together. This is illustrated by an article where Hultqvist and Wallström (8th of September 2016) first state that military non-alignment positively contributes to the “security stability in our neighbourhood” and then go on to state that “increasing broad bilateral and multilateral cooperation” *also* has a “stabilising effect in our neighbourhood”. The linking of non-alignment and cooperation is counterintuitive – traditionally, they are opposites as illustrated by Wieslander (2021) using a scale of non-alignment/integration(cooperation).

Instead of this traditional understating, a dichotomy is created between non-alignment/*isolation*, putting cooperation and non-alignment on the same side of the dichotomy: non-alignment/*isolation* and cooperation/*isolation*. This is achieved discursively by using the negative connotation of isolation as a link between military non-alignment and defence cooperation as illustrated below:

Finland and Sweden are both outside military alliances. We believe that non-alignment serves us well and is an experience to be considered when assessing the current challenges.

It also contributes to the stability and security of Northern Europe as a whole. *But we have*

not chosen a line of isolation. We are active members of the European Union. Cooperation with the other Nordic and Baltic countries is of particular importance. Although we are not members of NATO, we have a close line of cooperation with the organisation. We also have a strong transatlantic link. (Löfvén & Sipilä, 11th of January 2016, emphasis added)

Here, Löfvén and Sipilä start by stating that Sweden is non-aligned, and use “but we have not chosen isolation” as a bridge to emphasise the importance of Sweden’s cooperation. This new link between normative non-alignment and cooperation (i.e., the new strategic non-alignment) is cemented by repetition of different iterations of the phrase: “on the basis of military non-alignment, Sweden will cooperate”. Military non-alignment is mentioned 18 times in the material and almost exclusively linked to cooperation in this manner as illustrated by the excerpts below:

The second important part of this strategy is to deepen our international cooperation on the basis of our military non-alignment. Intensive work is currently under way to deepen relations with militarily non-aligned Finland. As you know, this cooperation also extends to opportunities to act together beyond peacetime conditions. (Hultqvist, 11th of January 2016)

Swedish and Finnish military cooperation is strengthening. We build on a common security policy platform of military non-alignment. (Hultqvist, 11th of April 2016)

In conclusion: on the basis of military non-alignment, we are developing our cooperation. (Hultqvist, 18th of February 2021)

This last excerpt makes the distinction between normative and strategic non-alignment especially clear. “Basis of military non-alignment” is tied to the normative part, to an identity that stands for stability, security, and peace, while “developing our cooperation” is the changed strategic part of non-alignment that has now been linked through repetition and phrasing.

In summary, the Swedish non-aligned identity, or normative non-alignment, is reconstructed in the changing security context by using threat construction and drawing on different identities to expand the understanding of the “we” that needs to be secured from the threat. In doing so, normative non-alignment is linked with cooperation.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summarizing Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how the Swedish identity as non-aligned has been reconstructed in the changing security context by looking at how non-alignment is presented and how the military cooperation with Finland is justified. This was done by identifying strategic narratives formed by the Swedish Government and analysing how they are constructed through language and interact with each other.

Findings show that Sweden addresses the tension between upholding its normative non-alignment policy and increasing military cooperation by drawing on three separate identity narratives: “Sweden the peacekeeper”, “Sweden the European”, and “Sweden the brother of Finland”. These narratives exist simultaneously but are used in different ways to juxtapose the historical identity of non-alignment with an extended understanding of “we” to reconstruct the meaning of strategic non-alignment.

In the normative identity narrative “Sweden the peacekeeper”, it is underlined that non-alignment policy is still an integral part of Swedish identity by drawing upon its historical role, portrayed as standing for “peace, security and stability”. In contrast, the other two identity narratives enable military cooperation through an extension of the “we”, although in different ways. In the “Sweden the European” narrative, the threat is to democratic values and international law, presenting collective military cooperation as an obligation. The “Sweden the brother of Finland” narrative instead highlights the shared emotional and sociocultural bond between Sweden and Finland which in turn requires military cooperation in the face of a common enemy.

The threat that is referenced in all narratives is constructed in a larger system narrative that embeds multiple single acts of Russian aggression into a larger conflict between democratic values and authoritarianism, creating a us/them dichotomy. The issue narrative uses this constructed threat to justify military cooperation on a strategic level, but this, as mentioned, creates a tension with the normative “Sweden the peacekeeper” narrative. This tension is released by discursive reconstruction, which links normative non-alignment to cooperation instead of to traditional strategic non-alignment. This reconstruction is facilitated by drawing on the extended “we” and

obligations to collective security presented in “Sweden the European” and “Sweden the brother of Finland”.

In concluding, by focusing on Sweden’s identity in the light of the changing security contexts, this thesis points toward the fluidity and plurality of national identity and how it can be reconstructed discursively, which is congruent with the critical constructivist school of thought. In addition, the thesis highlights the importance of considering the implications for identity in defence policy by indicating that identity is inherently linked to the construction of security/insecurity.

7.2 Future Research

The single-case study approach in this thesis has been useful as it allowed for an in-depth investigation of Sweden. However, this approach could be complemented by comparative case studies to compare identity re-construction across multiple cases or with quantitative methods. To better understand the reconstruction of national identity in a changing security context, further study could be done on other non-aligned countries to explore how different historical, social and geographical context reconstructs identity in different ways.

Considering that the re-construction of Swedish identity as non-aligned is an ongoing process, and that the security context has further deteriorated during the writing of this thesis, future research could study if the discursive mechanisms identified in this thesis change over time.

Additionally, future research could explore the reception of security narratives by the Swedish public, especially as the security context is deteriorating and the Swedish government keep stretching the strategic meaning of non-alignment. This thesis has focused largely on the formation of strategic narratives by the government. However, Ydén et al. (2019) find that there already exists a confusion among the Swedish public as to what strategic non-alignment means. The paradox they base their study on, that people report supporting both NATO membership and non-alignment, would be useful to further explore with the identity reconstruction presented in this thesis. A study on the younger generation that might not have as strong a bond with the historical “Sweden the peacekeeper” identity could be fruitful to better understand how it might develop form here on.

Finally, it could be useful to zoom out and look at how other countries in the international community understand Swedish non-aligned policy and the changes in the new security context.

Constructivist theorists argues that how countries view one another affects how they treat each other. A study on how the international community views Sweden's changing policy and identity could hence be important to understand Sweden's international relationships.

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