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Sweden's long road to NATO

Explaining Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership in 2022

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to answer the question of why Sweden decided to apply for NATO membership in May 2022. To explain the decision, the analysis explores three hypotheses rooted in realism, liberalism, and institutional path dependence theory. The theories offer different explanations related to external threat, Sweden's long-lasting tradition for military non-alignment, and the country's pre-existing cooperation with NATO. The hypotheses are evaluated by combining the congruence method with process tracing, entailing the analysis of previous Swedish alignment decisions, and comparing them with the membership application of 2022. The study is based on data collected through document analysis and research interviews with Swedish experts and decisionmakers. The main findings suggest that Sweden applied for NATO membership because it perceived Russia as an increased threat and had few other alternatives due to its dependence on the alliance, incrementally magnified since entering the Partnership for Peace in 1994. Moreover, the aggressive behaviour of Russia was the most influential component in Sweden's threat perception compared to observations of offensive capabilities. The results encourage future case studies and quantitative probes to explore the utility of operationalising threat in terms of aggressive behaviour when trying to explain alliance formation. They also encourage the mapping of states' existing alignments for clues about the directions in which alliances will form if exposed to triggering events.

Acknowledgements

Any errors or inaccuracies are my own entirely.

Contents

Tables and figures

Abbreviations

CD – Christian Democrats

CFSP – The European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy

CINC – Composite Index of National Capabilities

CoW – Correlates of War Dataset

EEC – European Economic Community

EU – The European Union

EOP – Enhanced Opportunity Partnership

E12 – European Intervention Initiative

FNC – Framework Nation Concept

HNS – Host Nation Support

IFOR – Implementation Force

IGO – International governmental organisation

IISS – International Institute for Strategic Studies

ISAF – International Security Assistance Force

JEF – Join Expeditionary Force

KFOR – Kosovo Force

MBT – Main Battle Tank

MD – Military district

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoD – Ministry of Defence

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

NACC – North Atlantic Cooperation Council

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NATO Agreement – The North Atlantic Treaty

NGO – Non-governmental international organisation

NORDEFCO – Nordic Defence Cooperation

NRF – NATO Response Force

NSD/SIKT – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PfP – Partnership for Peace

PII – Partnership Interoperability Initiative

SAM – Surface to Air Missile

SD – The Swedish Social Democratic Party

SOF – Special Operations Forces

SoI – Statement of Intent

SSBN – Nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine

SSM – Surface to Surface Missile

START – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

TEU – Treaty on the European Union

UN – United Nations

UNPROFOR – United Nations Protection Force

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explain why Sweden decided to apply for NATO membership in May 2022. The motivation for pursuing this question is twofold. First, Sweden's decision to join NATO constitutes a fresh case in the academic debate on what makes states form alliances in international relations. Sweden has been a valued object of study before, regarding explanations to why it has stayed out of NATO. That underscores the relevance of seeking explanations to why it has now decided to join. Second, it is interesting to investigate such a historical political decision in itself, given Sweden's retention of a military non-alignment policy for over 200 years. Understanding the abandonment of a policy with which a large proportion of the population has identified for generations, carries intrinsic value.

The visceral background for Sweden's NATO application is Russia's aggressions against Ukraine, starting in 2014, and culminating in the full-scale invasion launched in February 2022. The increased threat was echoed by the former Swedish prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, in her speech to the Swedish parliament in a debate on NATO in May the same year.[1] However, settling with an increased Russian threat as the sole explanation would be to ignore Sweden's complicated history of neutrality and military non-alignment. Moreover, it would overlook the ever-growing cooperation between Sweden and NATO that began long before Russian aggression.[2] The threat inference also rests on the premise that Russia's invasion of Ukraine actually constituted an unprecedented increase in military threat towards Sweden, a presumption too important to accept without precise analytical scrutiny.

This thesis investigates the mechanisms behind Sweden's decision from three different theoretical angles, evaluating external threat compared to alternative explanations rooted in liberalism and institutional path dependence theory. The rest of the chapter situates the thesis in previous literature and briefly introduces the theoretical and methodological approaches employed in the analysis. The main findings from the analysis suggest that Sweden applied for NATO membership because it perceived Russia as an increased threat and had few other alternatives due to its existing dependence on the alliance, incrementally magnified since entering formal partnership in 1994. The non-alignment tradition functioned as a constraint, but internal support for it repeatedly proved impressionable to external stimulus.

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[1] 'Riksdagens protokoll 2021/22:114', 1.
[2] See for example Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen*; af Malmborg, 'Sweden - NATO's Neutral "Ally"?'; Petersson, '"The Allied Partner"'; 'New Boots for NATO?' For overarching strategic change due to Russian aggression see for example Matlary and Johnson, *Military Strategy in the 21st Century*, 1–26.

1.1 Previous literature and research question

There has been a moderate number of contributions to the academic debate on Sweden and NATO relations through the years, and countless contributions to the Swedish public debate on the subject in general. This section gives a brief overview of some central perspectives. Literature and theories related to the wider debate on alliance formation are introduced later, in section 1.2 and chapter two. It should be noted that the focus lies on contributions of how to explain Sweden's relationship with NATO. The former does not come in abundance, because the debate to a large extent consists of contributions aimed at arguing for or against NATO alignment. This thesis has no intention of a taking standpoint on the normative question of whether Sweden should have applied for NATO membership or not.

In an article from 2019, Simons, Manoylo and Trunov provide a useful synopsis of perspectives in the debate on Swedish NATO relations. They argue that there exist two main divergent orientations on Swedish policy when it comes to NATO.[3] The first constitutes a traditional view of Sweden as a neutral state in international relations, dating back to the end of the Napoleonic wars. In that view, Sweden is perceived as best served by a military non-alignment policy, staying out of military conflicts between other countries and maintaining a strong national defence. The second view emphasises the threat of Russia, formerly the Soviet Union, and that Sweden could not alone have resisted an attack neither during the Cold War nor after and therefore would be better off as part of NATO. These two standpoints do not provide an explanation in themselves to Sweden's previous alignment choices. Even so, they provide a useful starting point in the search for driving and constraining forces with regard to Swedish NATO membership.

The tension between the external driving force of threat and the constraining nature of the military non-alignment tradition is a recurring feature in the debate. Military non-alignment has not always represented a plain security strategy in the Swedish context. Several studies have found the non-alignment policy to have served as an expression of the country's active and independent role in international politics, with which many Swedes have come to identify through the years.[4] As such, the policy embodies purposes beyond the achievement of security, enabling it to function as an independent constraint against outward alignment. The relationship between Sweden's non-alignment policy and its approach to NATO has,

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[3] Simons, Manoilo, and Trunov, 'Sweden and the NATO Debate'.
[4] Agius, *The Social Construction of Swedish Neutrality*; Möller and Bjereld, 'From Nordic Neutrals to Post-Neutral Europeans'; Beyer and Hofmann, 'Varieties of Neutrality'.

however, frequently appeared enigmatic. As most comprehensively pointed out by Mikael Holmström, Sweden maintained extensive military cooperation with NATO during the Cold War, which was kept secret from the public.[5] The ambiguity in Sweden's approach after the Cold War is also apparent.[6] On the one hand, Sweden has continuously postulated a policy of military non-alignment, but on the other entered multiple partnership agreements with NATO and contributed to most of the alliance's out-of-area operations.[7]

Pointing out this ambiguity has been a dominating trend, apparently intended at enlightening readers about aspects of which there is little public consciousness. That has left many contributions largely descriptive in nature, representing investigative and historical accounts of Sweden's dealings with NATO. To be clear, many of those contributions are fundamental to understanding Sweden's complicated history on the matter. However, a gap exists in terms of explaining why Sweden has drifted closer to NATO and eventually decided to join. This thesis aims at filling parts of that gap, by building on the existing perspectives and connecting them to applied theories in international relations. That does not mean no explanatory studies have been conducted, but they are rare and often focused on explaining Sweden's abstention from NATO membership, not increasing alignment. For example, Andrew Cottey shows in his study how Sweden's institution of neutrality, among other European neutrals, has constrained the country from joining NATO:

> Given the deeply embedded nature of the policies of neutrality and the way in which neutrality had become connected to national identity, however, it is not surprising that none of the neutrals chose to abandon the historic policy and join the alliance, nor that an event like the 2008 Georgia war also did not trigger a change of policy. [8]

Cottey focuses mainly on the neutrality institution as a constraint to alignment but also highlights the curiosity about Sweden's simultaneous integration into NATO. While not pursuing the idea in-depth, he hints towards the potential impact of institutional and path-dependent characteristics of initiating cooperation with NATO. The idea suggests that incremental adaptation and integration with the alliance over time had a self-reinforcing effect with the potential to culminate into full membership.[9] However, Cottey concluded that

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[5] Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen*.
[6] Petersson, '"The Allied Partner"'; Dalsjö, 'Trapped in the Twilight Zone?'; Westberg, 'Security Without Non-Alignment'; Ydén, Berndtsson, and Petersson, 'Sweden and the Issue of NATO Membership'; 'A Funny Kind of Neutrality; Sweden, NATO and Russia'; 'New Boots for NATO?'
[7] NATO, 'Relations with Sweden'.
[8] Cottey, 'The European Neutrals and NATO', 466.
[9] Ibid., 465.

the constraining nature of the neutrality institution likely would keep the country from drifting all the way to membership. The fact that Sweden ended up applying for membership nine years after Cottey's conclusion, only makes his perspectives more interesting as a starting point when aiming to understand why the eventual outcome took place.

To sum up, three compelling perspectives can be derived from the above-mentioned literature. First, there is the view of the Soviet Union, and later Russia, as an external threat driving Sweden towards alignment with NATO. Second, that the embedded tradition of neutrality and military non-alignment has been working as a force against NATO alignment. Third, that institutional path dependence, in the form of gradual commitments and adaptation to NATO over time, has made further alignment towards NATO the most natural way forward. All these perspectives add to our understanding of Sweden's NATO relations.

It is nonetheless important to remember that the perspectives originate from literature written before the decision to apply for membership in 2022, which never had the privilege of observing the ultimate variation on the dependent variable. Some studies have indeed explored Sweden's sub-membership alignment, but any argument of what would eventually drive Sweden to apply for membership could never be underpinned by observing the proposed outcome. The fact that Sweden applied for membership in 2022, therefore provides an opportunity to investigate the underlying mechanisms. Through examining the context of the actual application, it is possible to utilise and re-evaluate previous perspectives on Sweden's NATO relations. Furthermore, the overarching ambition is to contribute to the wider academic debate on alliance formation in international relations, by applying established theoretical frameworks to a yet modestly discovered case. Cottey encouraged the following in his article on the matter of future research:

> First, in terms of the neutral states and their engagement with NATO, there is scope for detailed case studies of national experiences, for further analysis of the factors shaping national policies, and for assessment of the impact of partnership with NATO on national security and defence policies.[10]

This thesis focuses on Sweden's relationship with NATO, and its application for alliance membership in 2022 represents such a detailed case study. The research question reads as follows: *What can explain Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership in 2022?*

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[10] Ibid., 468.

1.2 Theory

The theoretical approaches applied in the analysis are comprehensively outlined in chapter two, but a brief introduction is provided here. The first theory is derived from the dominating international relations strand of realism. Why and how states form alliances have been important questions in the field since the beginning of the Cold War. Kenneth Waltz's theory on the balance of power formed a groundwork for understanding alliance formation.[11] Stephen M. Walt refined that theory, arguing that mere aggregated power alone failed to explain many of the world's alliance constellations at the time. Instead, he pointed out that alliance formation must be seen in relation to states' perception of external threat.[12] The core notion is that an increase in external threat will push a state to ally with other states, to balance against a potential adversary.

In the Swedish case, one would then expect that the decision to join NATO was based on an increased external threat, notably embodied in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both the public and political-level debate in Sweden after the outbreak of war echoed that view.[13] However, there are two problems with jumping to such a conclusion. First, the interpretation of what constitutes a threat can vary greatly. For example, if one considers offensive capabilities as the core of threat, the relative threat from Russia arguably decreased because of the war in Ukraine, given the intense attrition of Russian forces early on in the war.[14] But if one considers offensive intentions the more important component, the threat did certainly increase in terms of Russia demonstrating willingness to go to the extreme of invading a neighbouring country. The ambiguity of the threat concept hence calls for caution and analytical precision. Second, the threat from the Soviet Union was arguably much greater than contemporary Russia but still failed to produce Swedish NATO membership during the Cold War. On the contrary, alignment accelerated after the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet threat was gone. These problems do not discard the balance of threat theory in the Swedish case, but they do illustrate the need for a more extensive analysis.

The second approach represents one of the most frequently applied analytical alternatives to realism: liberalism. While realism is concerned with the state as a rational and unitary actor in

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[11] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.
[12] Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power'.
[13] See for example 'Sveriges Natoansökan'; 'Vändningen kom i betongbunkern'; 'Utan Natomedlemskap riskeras Sveriges säkerhet'; 'Särskild debatt med anledning av rapporten från de säkerhetspolitiska överläggningarna'.
[14] *Armed Conflict Survey 2022*, 103–16; 'Russia's Army Is in a Woeful State'; Gould-Davies, 'Putin's Strategic Failure'.

the international system, liberalism highlights the significance of domestic politics and states' individual characteristics.[15] The interests of certain internal groups, or the entire population if the country is democratic, can prove paramount in a state's behaviour on the international stage. Liberalism does not offer a specific theory on alliance formation as realism does, but the merits of taking an inside-out approach when analysing foreign policy decisions can still be utilised in the Swedish context. One would then expect Sweden's membership decision to be a product of mainly domestic features, rather than of rational calculation of the Russian threat alone. The approach lends support from constructivism, to understand Sweden's military non-alignment tradition as an embedded norm, important to large segments of the Swedish population. As such, it serves as a constraint on political decisionmakers. This theory would suggest that Sweden applied for NATO membership because of a foregoing weakening in support for the military non-alignment tradition.

The third applied approach is derived from institutional path dependence theory. In that perspective, the critical objects of study lie in a preceding set of events which set development along a particular path.[16] Such a path is characterised by self-reinforcing mechanisms, excluding viable alternatives along the way. In the Swedish context, one would then expect the decision to join NATO to have been a result of such self-reinforcing processes, reflected in gradual alignment towards the alliance over time. The analysis employs this approach by taking Sweden's first formal partnership with NATO in 1994 as a point of departure. Consecutive alignment decisions, including the final membership decision, are then analysed as to what extent they can be connected to that original event.

1.3 Methods

The propositions above resemble the three perspectives from the previous literature on Swedish NATO relations, but are now embodied in distinct theories. Moreover, earlier studies could only observe non-membership or increasing alignment. It has not been possible to analyse Sweden with observations present before and after a decision to join the alliance, because such a decision never took place. From a methodological standpoint, this is suboptimal, since one ultimately wants to observe proper variation in the dependent variable if one is to make valid inferences.[17] In other words, explanations to why Sweden has not joined NATO have never been possible to evaluate in a situation in which the opposite

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[15] Dunne, 'Liberalism'.
[16] Pierson, 'Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics', 39.
[17] King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 105–7.

outcome happened. Likewise, explanations to why Sweden has aligned towards NATO have not been tried in the case of which it went to the step of seeking membership. However, that has changed with Sweden's decision in 2022, and that methodological opening is utilized in this thesis.

The analysis employs a mixed-methods approach, combining congruence analysis and process tracing. The former entails taking theoretical propositions as a point of departure for identifying a possible relationship between an independent and dependent variable.[18] The propositions suggested in the previous section all share the same dependent variable: the presence or absence of a Swedish decision to apply for NATO membership. Furthermore, they represent three different independent variables: external threat, internal politics, and previous path-dependent historical events. The next step is then to determine the value of the independent variable in the case and subcases, and what outcome the theory would forecast from that value. Parts of the empirical enquiry, therefore, amounts to accounting for the independent and dependent variables in the cases at hand. If the latter scores in accordance with the theoretical predictions, the idea of a causal relationship is possible to entertain.

However, this only takes the analysis so far, as George and Bennet point out, because consistency with theoretical predictions does not shield against the possibility of spurious correlation.[19] They discuss three main ways of how to mitigate that problem of which the first is combining the congruence method with process tracing to point out causal mechanisms and not just covariation.[20] The second approach is to analyse more than one theoretical proposition, as no single explanation will then stand unchallenged by alternatives. The third option is to do a comparison across time or cases or subcases. This thesis employs all these tools to some extent. The utilisation of different theoretical propositions is already accounted for, and the other two elements are briefly explained below.

First, although the aim is to explain Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership in 2022, it would not be satisfying to analyse this event alone. For example, congruity between one of the propositions and the empirical outcome might well be established in that single event, blind to whether similar conditions were present in a previous event not sharing the same outcome. Therefore, it makes sense to analyse Sweden's decision in relation to previous events in which the country took an official stance on its relationship with NATO. Such an

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[18] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 181.
[19] Ibid., 183–84.
[20] Ibid., 183–85.

approach improves the possibility of identifying what was different in 2022. Two additional subcases are subject to analysis in that regard: Sweden's decision to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 and its decision to enter a Host Nation Support (HNS) agreement with NATO in 2014. These events are interesting to analyse in relation to Sweden's recent decision, to identify which circumstances had changed in 2022 compared to earlier cases. A reason for choosing the specific events of 1994 and 2014, is that they, together with the decision in 2022, represent Swedish foreign policy decisions significant enough to have produced considerable documentation. In other words, they are possible to study empirically.

In addition to congruence analysis, process tracing is employed to analyse the mechanisms behind Sweden's decisions of 1994, 2014 and 2022. Process tracing is, according to Mahoney, an important method for "evaluating hypotheses about the causes of a specific outcome in particular cases."[21] The use of process tracing is intended to aid the evaluation of the theoretical propositions which are refined into hypotheses in chapter two. This supplements congruence analysis in the sense that it seeks to identify and explain the causal mechanisms linking the independent and dependent variables, instead of merely measuring their presence or absence. Furthermore, the main case and subcases can then be seen in relation to each other, aiming to yield a clearer picture of whether some mechanisms prove more prevailing than others, or potentially how they are entangled in a multicausal explanation.[22]

In terms of data, the main case and subcases are first and foremost studied through Swedish official documents connected to specific decisions, such as parliamentary notices and bills, governmental reports, and whitepapers. These represent Sweden's official reasoning and can yield indicators of motivations for the decisions to align with NATO. These indications may constitute references to external threat or institutional benefits such as building on existing cooperation. The documents are supplemented by political statements and party manifestos, public reports, and otherwise previous research and investigations. Document analysis is employed as collection method to extrapolate data from the mentioned sources.[23] Furthermore, the document analysis is complemented by research interviews, both to enhance the triangulation of sources and to obtain perspectives not necessarily captured in public

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[21] Mahoney, 'The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences', 571.
[22] King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 85–87.
[23] Bowen, 'Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method'.

documents. The respondent sample consists of Swedish experts and decisionmakers. Details about the collection methods and the informants are elaborated on in chapter three.

To sum up, the analysis of each subcase and the main case involve the following procedures. First, the antecedence of each independent variable is examined, and the outcome is defined, to see whether it is congruent with the theoretical propositions. Second, process tracing is applied to identify causal mechanisms through which the independent variables have worked, or not worked, in relation to the outcome. Third, comparisons are made across subcases and the main case as the overall analysis progresses, to identify whether some mechanisms appear more convincing than others.

1.4 Thesis outline

The thesis proceeds in chapter two with a detailed description of the theoretical approaches, including the balance of threat theory, a refinement of liberalism, and institutional path dependence. Hypotheses are deducted from each theory, which are later evaluated in the analysis. Chapter three provides a comprehensive outline of the qualitative methods of congruence analysis and process tracing and how they are employed in this thesis. Data collection, research ethics and limitations of the research design are also discussed in chapter three. The methodological framework and the hypotheses are then applied in the analysis, carried out in chapters four to six. Each of these chapters covers the PfP initiative in 1994, the HNS agreement in 2014, and the membership decision in 2022. Finally, chapter seven offers a conclusion on the main findings accompanied by thoughts on their implications.

2   Theoretical framework

This chapter is divided into four parts. It unfolds by making some conceptual clarifications to some of the most important terms that are used throughout the paper. Thereafter, three sections cover the respective theoretical approaches that are employed to produce the hypotheses that are evaluated in the analysis. Those hypotheses and the process through which they were deducted are summarised at the end of the chapter.

2.1   Defining alliance, alignment, and neutrality

Before carving out theoretical propositions for possible drivers behind Sweden's alliance choices, it is appropriate to define how the term 'alliance' is used in this thesis. In his work on alliance theory, Glenn H. Snyder defines an alliance as:

> […] formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement of their members, against specific other states, whether or not these others are explicitly identified.[24]

Snyder's definition captures the essence, and this thesis shares the understanding of an alliance as a formalised association, meaning that there has to be a treaty between two or more states. However, his definition is somewhat vaguer in terms of an alliance's purpose, as the use (or non-use) of military force for security purposes does not specify any threshold for when and how military force will be employed. Using Snyder's definition, it is therefore not clear exactly what kind of mutual security arrangements must exist for an agreement to constitute an alliance. To clarify that uncertainty, this thesis adopts the specification that to be counted as an alliance, the agreement must include a mutual promise of military support, should any signatory state be attacked. This resembles the collective security clause in the NATO Agreement, known as Article 5.[25] Furthermore, Snyder places alliances within the wider term of alignment:

> Alliances, however, are only the formal subset of a broader and more basic phenomenon, that of "alignment." Alignment amounts to a set of mutual expectations between two or more states that they will have each other's support in disputes or wars with particular other states.[26]

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[24] Snyder, 'Alliance Theory', 104.
[25] 'The North Atlantic Treaty'.
[26] Snyder, 'Alliance Theory', 105.

Absence of mutual
expectations of support

Degree of mutual expectations

Guaranteed mutual
expectations of support

Complete non-alignment /
absolute neutrality

Degree of alignment

Complete alignment /
formal alliance
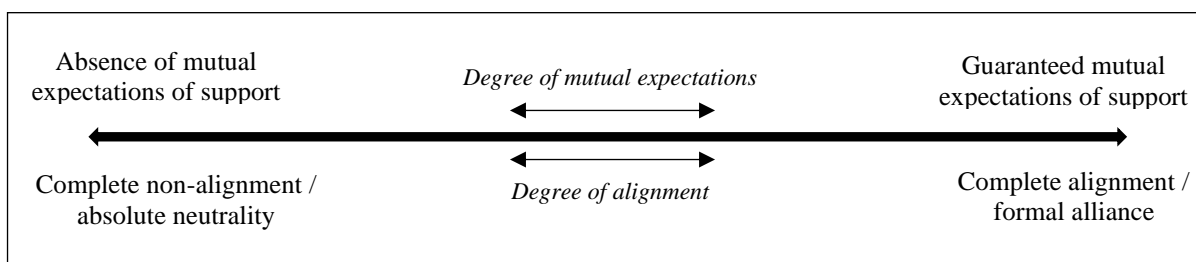
Figure 1 – The alignment continuum

In that sense, alignment is to be regarded as a continuum, in which an alliance, including formal commitments of mutual support in times of war, represents one of the two ends. Håkon Lunde Saxi has demonstrated how Snyder's definition of alignment can be useful when viewing Sweden's security policy.[27] Furthermore, defining alliance as an end state of alignment allows for the theoretical assumption that states' alliance and alignment choices are driven by the same causes. Consequently, the propositions deducted in the following sections should be valid as such for both decisions on entering formal alliances, and for other alignment acts in general.

The final clarification that should be made concerns the term 'neutrality'. Neutrality is in general understood as the opposite of alliance and alignment as defined so far: to pursue a policy of neutrality is to avoid the creation of mutual expectations of support in disputes or wars with other states. It should be stressed, however, that the use of the word 'neutrality' in the Swedish context is sometimes contentious, with 'military non-alignment' as the alternative term.[28] This thesis employs both terms. Neutrality is used when referring to military non-alignment as an instrument of a broader foreign policy, which was manifested in Sweden during the Cold War. That conceptualisation is elaborated on subsequently in section 2.3 and employed most frequently in the first chapter of the empirical analysis. Military non-alignment is thus understood as a narrower concept, referring to the mere absence of mutual expectations of military support. The choice to employ both terms follows from the empirical analysis, in which a natural shift appears around the end of the 1990s regarding how Sweden's pursuance of non-alignment is expressed in the source material. Non-alignment during the Cold War is mostly referred to as neutrality, while this gradually changes after the turn of the millennium to military non-alignment. This shift is reflected in some of the findings in the analysis and is kept from further amplification at this point.

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[27] Saxi, 'Alignment but not Alliance'.

[28] Instead of entering a consuming discussion of the term itself, this thesis settles with being clear about how the term is employed here, without disregarding alternative perspectives on its meaning in other contexts.

2.2 Realism – external threat and alliance formation

Realism is the oldest conceptual framework with which to aid analysis of state behaviour in the field of international relations. Realism also persists as the most widely applied framework when it comes to analysing security issues, including alliance formation, in international relations today.[29] Hence, when looking for answers to why Sweden decided to join an alliance, realism is a reasonable place to start. The following section briefly maps out the branches of the realist family and presents some divergent perspectives on alliance formation within that family.

In realism, there are some basic shared elements.[30] First, states are assumed to exist in an international anarchy in which there is no authority to provide common security or enforce agreements. Second, the significance of power follows from the anarchy, as all states must provide for themselves in the international system. What constitutes power is a matter of debate, but in its most traditional form it consists of "the resources available to a state for building military forces."[31] Third, states are assumed to be unitary actors, essentially meaning that their outward behaviour is conditioned only on changes in the international system and not internal features. Fourth, most realists assume states' unitary actions to be the product of a rational calculus between the state's interests and the constraining factors of its own power in the system. While most realists share these basic assumptions as a point of departure, there are different views on their weighted significance.

Charles L. Glaser divides realism into two main types: motivational and structural.[32] The former holds that competition in the international system does not derive from its anarchic nature, but rather from the motives of individual states. The international anarchy serves more as a constraint on states' security or greed motivations. Greed represents the wish for territorial expansion while security resembles the wish to be shielded from other state's expansion. However, motivational realists are not deeply concerned about explaining why some states are greedy or security-seeking, except for notions such as an inherent human lust for power or a state's general strive towards prosperity and wealth.[33] Motivational realism does not provide an explanatory framework for alliance formation distinct from structural realism either. The only difference is that states are inclined to ally with stronger states, rather

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[29] Glaser, 'Realism', 14.
[30] Ibid., 14–15.
[31] Ibid., 14.
[32] Ibid., 15–27.
[33] See for example Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*.

than with weaker states, because that would most effectively increase their power to expand.[34] It is difficult to see how a motivational realist framework would be an interesting path to pursue analytically in the Swedish case. One could argue that Sweden was bandwagoning, given that it has sought to join the stronger side, NATO, in terms of power. However, it would make little sense to assume that Sweden's motivation for doing so is connected to a lust for expansion, given the country's peaceful outlook for two centuries.

In the second type, structural realism, Glaser puts Kenneth Waltz' *Theory of International Politics* at the forefront.[35] Waltz postulates in his theory that states are mainly concerned with their own security, but that the international anarchy itself creates a general tendency of competition. This follows from the notion that states must provide for their own security, together with the constant and unsolvable uncertainty of other states' intentions. The result, according to Waltz, is that states will seek to balance their power relative to other states, and there are two ways of how that can be achieved. A state could either build up its own capabilities or merge them with those of other states by forming alliances. This is respectively referred to as internal and external balancing. According to Waltz, states will tend to balance externally by joining the weaker party against a stronger party.[36]

Alternatively, a state can choose to ally with the stronger party, referred to as bandwagoning. However, the long-term problem for a state when pursuing a bandwagoning strategy is the uncertainty that it might eventually be attacked and consumed by the stronger state. One of the few situations in which a state can benefit from bandwagoning is if it carries expansionist or revisionist intentions, which revisits the logic of motivational realism. Still, it does not seem accurate to view Sweden's decision as one of balancing either, because it has after all sought to join the stronger party. Moreover, balancing should only be triggered by a change in relative power. If changed at all, relative power likely changed to Sweden's benefit after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, given immense Russian battlefield losses and general costs of war.[37] Thus, Waltz' structural realist theory of balancing does not seem quite fit to offer a viable hypothesis.

Glaser further divides structural realism into two strands: offensive and defensive.[38] The front figure of offensive realism is John Mearsheimer, who claims that states have no choice but to

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[34] Schweller, 'Bandwagoning for Profit'; Schweller, 'Unanswered Threats'; Glaser, 'Realism', 26.
[35] Glaser, 'Realism', 17; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.
[36] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 127.
[37] *Armed Conflict Survey 2022*, 106–8; *Strategic Survey 2022*, 121:31–42.
[38] Glaser, 'Realism', 15–27.

assume the worst of others' intentions.[39] As a result, the only logic course of action for states is to maximise their power whenever possible, resulting in constant competition. Offensive realists also claim that external balancing is often ineffective and takes time to materialise, due to geographical separation of potential allies and problems of coordinating war efforts.[40] In their view, states therefore prefer to engage in buck-passing rather than balancing, counting on other states to deal with a threat instead. Yet again, when theorising about Sweden and NATO, if Sweden's intention had always been to maximise its power, it could have sought NATO membership long before 2022 or simply have kept on buck-passing and boosting its own military. As such, offensive realism does not offer a sound theoretical proposition either.

Finally, defensive realism holds that the international system, under certain conditions, does not create a general tendency towards competition.[41] Central to this is the argument that states face a security dilemma, a theory introduced by Robert Jervis.[42] Under the security dilemma, competition and acquisition of power persists when states are uncertain of other states' motives and the potential offensive utility of their capabilities. However, a defensive realist would argue that those uncertainties are not constant, but can be overcome by confidence building measures, increased transparency, or by defensive weapons having the advantage. If the uncertainties are overcome, competition and power acquisition would halt, because the cost of such endeavours can then be avoided. This emphasis on the connection between capabilities and motives has implications for how defensive realists view balancing and alliance formation. The balance of threat theory offers a useful refinement.

Stephen M. Walt formulated the balance of threat theory in his book *The Origin of Alliances* in 1987. He postulates that states' balance based on an assessment of the threat a potential adversary poses, abandoning the sole focus on power of other structural realists.[43] The external threat constitutes, according to Walt, a combination of aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions of other states. First, aggregate power is defined as the total sum of a country's economic and industrial base, the size of its military forces, and its technological sophistication. Second, geographic proximity relates to the logic that a state's ability to project power decreases with distance. Third, a state that posits

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[39] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
[40] Glaser, 'Realism', 20.
[41] Ibid., 20–24.
[42] Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma'.
[43] Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 17–49.

capabilities with a considerable potential for carrying out offensive operations is more likely to trigger other states to balance against it than states that posit defensive capabilities. The offensive power logic is closely related to that of geographic proximity, as distance impacts the utility of most military capabilities in some respect. Finally, Walt holds that a state's aggressive intentions impact others' alliance choices. He offers no specific operationalisation of such intentions, but the general understanding of threat as a combination of all these components opens analytical possibilities not offered in the rigid focus on power:

> By defining the basic hypotheses in terms of threats rather than power alone, we gain a more complete picture of the factors that statesmen will consider when making alliance choices. One cannot determine a priori, however, which sources of threat will be most important in any given case; one can say only that all of them are likely to play a role.[44]

Within this framework, it is feasible to work out a hypothesis, because it allows for variations in threat to be something more than potential changes in relative power between Sweden and Russia. However, some clarifications should be made on how the threat components are best understood in this thesis. Given the quantitative nature of aggregate power, it makes more sense to apply such a measure when there are many units of observation, as when analysing the international system as a whole. When concentrating on the balance of threat between only two countries, Sweden and Russia in this case, total-sum sizes of industrial base or economy yield rather purposeless values to analyse. Threat is therefore narrowed down to a composite of Walt's three remaining aspects. Moreover, geography is closely related to offensive power, as the offensive posture of a weapon system is influenced by its technological sophistication, range of delivery, and positional deployment. Offensive power and geography are therefore treated in tandem, instead of artificially separating the two aspects in the analysis. Finally, ascertaining offensive power, geographical proximity, and aggressive intentions objectively is unhelpful when trying to understand a specific country's response. It is more useful to think of threat as the perceived changes in the elements of which it is composed. With these clarifications, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

H₁: Sweden applied for NATO membership as a response to a perceived increase in external threat.

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[44] Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power', 13.

2.3 Liberalism – internal politics and the neutrality tradition

The balance of threat theory, and realism in general, puts great emphasis on how the external environment and the international system shape state behaviour. The most influential alternative to that approach is provided by the international relations strand of liberalism. The origin of liberalism is often traced back to the period of Enlightenment.[45] It evolved around ideas like the rights of individuals and principles such as popular sovereignty, in which all political power is vested in and derived from the people.[46] The state government's exertion of power is limited by the democratic participation of individuals and groups in political life. The following section proceeds by outlining liberalism's encouragement to take an inside-out approach when analysing foreign policy decisions. The outline also lends some wisdom from social constructivism to comprehend the political norm of neutrality as a domestic factor impacting foreign policy decisions in Sweden.

Liberalism holds an inherent optimism, compared to realism, in the sense that neither an international anarchy nor a security dilemma are deterministic features of international politics. That is not to say those features are totally written of, but rather that they are less important, because other actors and levels of analysis matter at least as much as the unitary state and the system in which it resides. Examples of such actors are international governmental organisations (IGOs), non-governmental international organisations (NGOs), multinational corporations, and domestic circumstances like interest groups, norms, political parties and political systems. Tim Dunne puts it like this:

> Like individuals, states have different characteristics – some are bellicose and war-prone, others are tolerant and peaceful: in short, the *identity* of the state determines its outward orientation.[47]

Central drivers in that perspective are domestic actors' power and their preferences. The actors have possibilities and limits given the nature of the domestic political systems.[48] This provides a steppingstone for looking for an explanation inside Sweden when it comes to the application for NATO membership, instead of the outside-in approach represented in the balance of threat theory. It is important to note that the latter is specifically tailored for explaining alliance formation, for which any subdivision of liberalism is not. That does not

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[45] Morgan, 'Liberalism and Liberal Internationalism', 31.
[46] Dunne, 'Liberalism', 116–23.
[47] Ibid., 114.
[48] Morgan, 'Liberalism and Liberal Internationalism', 31.

render liberalism irrelevant as an analytical springboard, as Sweden's NATO application can be treated as any foreign policy decision made by domestic political actors. However, it is necessary to sort and specify which domestic circumstances and actors should be emphasised, because covering the plentiful variation of aspects suggested by liberalism as a whole would exceed the capacity of most analyses.

In Andrew Moravcik's refinement of liberalism, he postulates three defining conditions of state behavior in international politics.[49] First, rational individuals and groups in a state often have conflicting interests that they want authorities to meet. Those interests impact a state's foreign policy to the extent of which groups with certain interests are holding positions where such decisions are made, essentially in government. Second, the state is not a unitary actor, but an institution representing diverging social interests among actors within. Government decisions, including those on foreign policy, are constrained by the identities, interests, and power of individuals and groups who are pressuring decision makers to pursue policies consistent with their preferences. Third, the internal preferences matter in states' interaction with each other, as any cooperative arrangement can only be reached where there is room for convergence between the internal interests of the states in question. Based on this, the foreign policy decisions of a government can be further refined to reflect its internal political win-set, which according to Moravcik amounts to: "the set of potential agreements that would be ratified by domestic constituencies in a straight up-or-down vote against the status quo of no agreement."[50] In other words, what international agreements that would be accepted by the government's principals, meaning those having the power to dismiss it. In democratic Sweden, that means the Riksdag and eventually the voting population.[51]

One would then expect a Swedish decision on alignment to reflect the incumbent government's stance in the question, as well as its support in the Riksdag and the Swedish public. In Sweden, a central domestic political characteristic, distinguishing it from many other European countries, is found in its long-lasting lasting tradition of neutrality. The neutrality policy began as a security strategy in the early 1800s, but during the Cold War, it also became an instrument for conducting an active and independent foreign policy.[52] This is where it is helpful to draw on elements of social constructivism, as several scholars have

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[49] Moravcsik, 'Taking Preferences Seriously', 516–21.
[50] Moravcsik, 'Introduction: Integrating International and Domestic Theories of International Bargaining', 23.
[51] The 'Riksdag' is the name of the Swedish Parliament.
[52] See for example Dahl, 'Sweden: Once a Moral Superpower, Always a Moral Superpower?'; Möller and Bjereld, 'From Nordic Neutrals to Post-Neutral Europeans'.

referred to the Swedish neutrality as an embedded norm.[53] Being neutral is in that sense something more than a security strategy, as it also fills the role as something with which Swedish people identify: taking a responsible, active and independent role in international politics.

It would also, within the framework of liberalism, be possible take a more material perspective on the neutrality tradition than the norm-oriented view presented here. For example, Sweden boasts a considerable defence industry, which arguably might be more interested in a policy building on a large and domestically supplied military. One could thus theorise about the industry's lobbying role regarding a decision to abandon such a policy. However, in 2021, Swedish defence industry realised deliveries worth 35 billion SEK in total, of which almost half came from foreign exports.[54] Increased defence cooperation would appear equally attractive to the industry in that sense, making it harder to derive a clear hypothesis from a material or economic perspective. While not writing off the potential in exploring economic beneficiaries of the Swedish NATO decision, probing the question from the norm perspective is considered more interesting at this point.

However, while social constructivism provides an understanding of Swedish neutrality as a norm and not just a security strategy, it is not the norm itself that makes decisions on foreign policy. Such decisions are ultimately made by the incumbent government with support of the parliament. Combining a liberal and constructivist perspective in this case helps viewing the neutrality tradition as a cause that many Swedish voters are emotionally and politically invested in, and therefore something which politicians must consider when making foreign policy decisions. Considering public opinion when it comes to decisions of alignment has therefore always been important to Swedish politicians, and perhaps especially for the Social Democrats (SD). For example, Robert Dalsjö wrote the following in 2017:

> Despite the fact that political scientists consider security policy as an issue of minor importance in the eye of voters, many leading social democrats still see a decision to part with 200 years of non-alignment and also with the heritage of Olof Palme, as a decision that could split the party, or lead to wide-spread defections to the left or the greens.[55]

[53] Agius, *The Social Construction of Swedish Neutrality*; Cottey, 'The European Neutrals and NATO'; Möller and Bjereld, 'From Nordic Neutrals to Post-Neutral Europeans'; Beyer and Hofmann, 'Varieties of Neutrality'.
[54] Regeringskansliet, 'Skrivelse 2021/2022:114 - Strategisk exportkontroll 2021', 41–48.
[55] Dalsjö, 'Trapped in the Twilight Zone?', 47.

Similar fears among the centre and right parties are easily imaginable, that a rash push for membership potentially would lead to serious voter defection. Another interesting notion in this regard is that the support for NATO membership has generally been pointed to as stronger with the public than the political elite.[56] Assuming that the political elite already was more inclined to membership, but were bound to consider public support, underlines the significance of the latter when investigating reasons for why it eventually was decided to apply for membership. Consequently, for any political leadership to be able to change position on the NATO question, the embedded public support for neutrality and military non-alignment must, in theory, have lost traction both among the political decisionmakers and their principals in the Riksdag and among Swedish voters. The following hypothesis can then be drawn:

H2: Sweden applied for NATO membership because of a gradual or rapid weakening in the political and public support for neutrality and military non-alignment.

2.4   Institutional path dependence – incremental cooperation with NATO

A third theoretical perspective on how one can analyse Sweden's decision to join NATO can be found in theory on institutional path dependence. The concept of path dependence is much used in historical research and is concerned with identifying event chains with deterministic properties that are put in motion by particular contingent events or institutions. Few political decisions are made in total isolation from antecedent experience. For example, in Sweden's case, when the government decided to apply for alliance membership, it did not do so independent of any pre-existing decisions made in relation to NATO. In that sense, a path dependence approach stands as a healthy supplement to the two previous theories, which are aimed at prediction without regard of Sweden's previous choices. The path dependence perspective entails more than the simple acknowledgement that 'history matters'. James Mahoney offers a specification of the theory as an analytical tool, which is briefly outlined below, before contextualising it to the Swedish case and deducting a third hypothesis.[57]

According to Mahoney, the concept of path dependence has three main characteristics. First, it involves the identification of causal processes that are linked to events taking place at an early point in time compared to the time at which a main outcome happens.[58] The postulation is that earlier events matter more than events taking place close to the event one seeks to

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[56] Beyer and Hofmann, 'Varieties of Neutrality'.
[57] Mahoney, 'Path Dependence in Historical Sociology'.
[58] Ibid., 11.

explain, although the latter often is decisive for the timing of the main outcome. In that view, the root cause of Sweden's application for NATO membership would lie in some earlier set of events, rather than in for instance a momentous increase in external threat. The latter might only have affected the exact timing for when the application was made. Second, in a path-dependent time sequence, the initial event or events are "contingent occurrences that cannot be explained on the basis of prior events or initial conditions."[59] This is an important criterion, because if the initial event itself could be explained as part of a previous sequence, it is difficult to hold that particular event as important for the main outcome one seeks to explain. The third characteristic holds that "once processes are set into motion and begin tracking a particular outcome, these processes tend to stay in motion and continue to track this outcome."[60] The essence is that some identified initial event impact a following chain of events eventually culminating in a main outcome of interest. However, the impact of the initial event can happen along two different lines: reactive sequences or self-reinforcing sequences.

The reactive sequence approach is concerned with chains of chronologically ordered and causally connected events, of which subsequent reactions to a contingent event transform or reverse the course of the starting point.[61] In other words, the initial event is important because it triggers powerful responses that changes course of things. In the second type, self-reinforcing sequences, an initial outcome is thought to activate continuous reproduction of that outcome in the future, because the costs associated with deviating from the initial path are greater than staying on course. For example, that logic has been used to explain the persistence of outdated technologies, such as electricity grids or certain software programming codes, because replacing them would induce a greater cost than the potential efficiency gain.[62] Along the way, alternatives are increasingly excluded, and actors get 'locked in' on the current path. The key feature of the self-reinforcing sequence perspective is therefore its inherent strength in explaining the persistence and reinforcement of some initial institution.

That makes self-reinforcing sequences the most interesting perspective to pursue when theorising about Sweden and NATO, compared to the reactive sequence approach. By the time at which membership was sought in 2022, Sweden had already been engaged in several

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 526–27.
[62] Ibid., 512.

other cooperative arrangements with NATO since the end of the Cold War. For example, it contributed to a range of peacekeeping operations under NATO command, as well as activity connected to training and exercises. Furthermore, Sweden took part in formal frameworks such as the Partnership for Peace (PfP) established in 1994, Enhanced Opportunity Partnership (EOP) in 2014, and even entered a Host Nation Support (HNS) agreement with the alliance the same year.[63] From the perspective of path dependence, it is thus possible that Sweden's long-standing cooperation with NATO reinforced itself over the years. Potential alternatives to NATO alignment could as a result have been excluded along the way, eventually making full membership the most viable option.

In such a self-reinforcing process, after created, the institution serves some function, which leads to the expansion of the institution, in turn enhancing the institution's ability to fulfil a useful function, which again leads to further institutional expansion.[64] This implies, that every time Sweden made a decision on its connection to NATO, that decision was made within or built upon any already existing cooperation. The logic starting point of such a sequence would arguably be the first formal cooperative framework Sweden entered with NATO: the PfP in 1994. An interesting notion in this regard is that the PfP, according to Petersson, became a steppingstone to full membership for many of the partner states, some of which joined within the decade after its creation.[65] It should therefore be relevant to investigate whether that could also have been the case for Sweden, only that it took longer time than other partners. However, although the PfP as a starting point makes intuitive sense, Mahoney presents an important criterium to be able to claim that a certain event constitutes the institutional genesis, or 'critical juncture', that initially facilitated a self-reinforcing sequence. He holds that:

> Critical junctures are characterized by the adoption of a particular institutional arrangement from among two or more alternatives. These junctures are "critical" because once a particular option is selected it becomes progressively more difficult to return to the initial point when multiple alternatives were still available.[66]

A critical juncture must be contingent, meaning that its occurrence was unexpected based on a given theoretical expectation or existing understanding of causal processes. That also means

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[63] Petersson, '"The Allied Partner"', 81–87.
[64] Mahoney, 'Path Dependence in Historical Sociology', 519.
[65] Petersson, '"The Allied Partner"', 83. Herd and Kriendler, *Understanding NATO in the 21st Century*, 52–53.
[66] Mahoney, 'Path Dependence in Historical Sociology', 513.

the process bringing about the initial event must be distinct from the causes of reproduction that begins first when the institution has been created. If the claimed initial event does not have such contingent features, it offers little explanatory relevance to the dependent final outcome, because it would not be more significant than the causes explaining the initial event itself. This does not mean arguing for an event being contingent is the same thing as claiming it to be truly random or completely without foregoing causes.[67] It means arguing that it was largely unpredictable, and as such significant to subsequent events that would otherwise not have followed. Establishing that a claimed initial event is contingent is therefore an important step in an empirical analysis of a hypothesised path dependent sequence. In other words, Sweden's entry into the PfP must be analysed both in terms of its features as a critical juncture, and to what extent it started a self-reinforcing sequence which led Sweden on a path to eventual NATO membership. The following hypothesis can then be formulated:

H₃: Sweden applied for NATO membership because partnership with NATO in 1994 had led Sweden on a path that fostered incremental adaptation to the alliance and excluded viable alternatives to further alignment.

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[67] Ibid.

2.5   Summary of hypotheses

Analytical level	Theory	Hypothesis	Empirical focus
International system (External threat)	Realism and balance of threat theory	H_1: Sweden applied for NATO membership as a response to a perceived increase in external threat.	Russia's offensive power, aggressive intentions, and Sweden's threat perception
State level (Characteristics of Swedish politics - tradition of neutrality policy)	Liberalism with a constructivist supplement	H_2: Sweden applied for NATO membership because of a gradual or rapid weakening in the political and public support for neutrality and military non-alignment.	Public opinion and political support for maintaining a policy of neutrality/military non-alignment
Intersection of state and international institution level (Sweden's interaction with of NATO)	Institutional path dependence	H_3: Sweden applied for NATO membership because partnership with NATO in 1994 had led Sweden on a path that fostered incremental adaptation to the alliance and excluded viable alternatives to further alignment.	Cooperative arrangements between Sweden and NATO following Sweden's participation in the PfP since 1994

Table 1 – Summary of theory, hypotheses, and empirical focus

3   Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodological choices that were consciously made from the beginning towards the end of the project, including the reasons behind those choices. In focus are choices regarding methodological approach, case selection, measurement, data collection, research ethics, and limitations. Briefly summarised, the research design constitutes a qualitative approach utilising congruence analysis and process tracing. Data collection was conducted in the form of document analysis and interviews.

3.1   A qualitative research design

The very first step of all research projects is to decide on a specific question to ask. According to King et. al, there are two criteria that must be met when formulating a research question.[68] First, it should be "important in the real world." Second, it should "make a specific contribution to an identifiable scholarly literature by increasing our collective ability to construct verified scientific explanations of some aspects of the world." The research question in this project satisfies the first criteria because it seeks to explain a historical political decision in Sweden, representing a turnaround in its foreign policy with consequences for both the country itself and for the international environment in which it resides. Understanding political decisions that carry such implications in the real world is of importance both to the actors affected, and in general to everyone who seeks knowledge on what shapes the world around them. Asking the question of why Sweden decided to apply for NATO membership also meets the second criteria. As already elaborated on in the two previous chapters, answering that question can provide further insight both to the specific scholarly debate on Sweden's security policy and in the broader debate on alliance formation in international relations.

After having formulated a research question, a next step is to produce hypotheses based on different theories. The choices and specifications with regards to those theories and hypotheses were comprehensively treated in chapter two. From a methodologically ideal perspective, it would always have been beneficial to include more theories and hypotheses to explore as many angles of the problem as possible. However, it is also a matter of having the capacity to properly evaluate each hypothesis, and therefore this project settles with three theoretical propositions. The reason behind applying three rather traditional theories on international relations to that end is that the case of Sweden's NATO application is young

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[68] King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 14–15.

and thus yet moderately studied. It therefore makes sense to aim for an early contribution by exploring the case within widely used theoretical frameworks, which could both aid the development of those theories and form a basis for future probes of the Swedish case from other perspectives within contemporary security studies.[69]

With the theoretical propositions established, the next step is to elaborate on the methodological approach. In other words, how to proceed to evaluate the hypotheses and answer the research question. This project employs a qualitative case study approach rather than quantitative analysis. The latter is associated with numerical measurement aimed at broadness and representativeness of general conditions.[70] Investigating the Swedish decision on NATO membership includes much more specific conditions that are less quantifiable and as such fits better with the in-depth and small-N focus of a qualitative approach.[71] The analysis in this thesis constitutes a within-case study, representing a variant of such an approach, in contrast to a common design of controlled comparison involving two or more cases.[72] The reason behind this is the intention of exploring the specific conditions of Sweden's NATO decision as comprehensively as possible, given its unique history of neutrality and non-alignment. Furthermore, the design involves certain subcases that captures internal changes in Sweden over time and is in that sense not completely without a comparative element.

The previous chapter held the balance of threat theory as quite intuitively fit to explain Sweden's NATO decision as a response to an increased Russian threat. The study of that decision is therefore understood as a most-likely case, in which the apparently strong balance of threat theory could be applied as analytical framework alongside two additional theories proposing plausible explanations as well. According to George and Bennet, the within-case approach entails a method of causal interpretation, involving congruence, process tracing, or both.[73] This project employs both. Congruence analysis begins by describing the value of the independent variable, proposed by a given theory, in the case at hand. Second, the researcher assesses what outcome she would expect on the dependent variable given the value on the independent variable. If the empirical inquiry yields a result that is consistent with the

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[69] Collins, *Contemporary Security Studies*.
[70] King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 2–3.
[71] Halperin and Heath, *Political Research*, 5–6.
[72] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 32–34.
[73] Ibid., 181.

theoretical prediction, there exists a possibility of causality.[74] However, the existence of such consistency is not a convincing argument on its own, because the relationship might be spurious. George and Bennet present three suggestions for how to mitigate that problem.[75] These are briefly outlined in the following within the context of this thesis' design.

First, congruence analysis can be combined with process tracing. Process tracing involves exploring causal connection between events by identifying and observing mechanisms linking an independent variable and its supposed outcome. This happens within the logic of what is often referred to as 'hoop tests' and 'smoking gun tests'.[76] The former intends to falsify a hypothesis by arguing either that a supposed cause cannot be necessary for the outcome unless it is necessary for all intervening mechanisms that are sufficient for the outcome. The supposed cause can neither be sufficient for the outcome if it is not sufficient for all intervening mechanisms that are necessary for the outcome.[77] Smoking gun tests, on the other hand, seek to confirm a hypothesis by arguing that the supposed cause is either necessary or sufficient for a mechanism that is known with certainty to be either necessary or sufficient for the outcome. There are, however, two important caveats regarding the practical use of these tests. First, they represent a logic within which the researcher builds her arguments and are rarely expressed explicitly in the empirical analysis.[78] This project is no exception from that custom. Second, hoop tests and smoking gun tests are seldom possible to carry out in their pure form, because it is extremely difficult to ascertain all intervening mechanisms in a supposed causal relationship. Hence, for all practical purposes, the logic of process tracing supplements the congruence approach in this project by providing probabilistic arguments for why the explanatory variables are, or are not, causally connected to Swedish NATO alignment.

George and Bennet's second suggestion for how to mitigate spuriousness is to allow for competing theories in the case study.[79] That aspect is embraced in this research design by including two theoretical propositions in addition to the one formulated from the balance of threat theory. Finally, the third recommendation to strengthen congruence is to include comparison across time or space. Therefore, Sweden's NATO decision is not merely

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 181–85.
[76] Mahoney, 'The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences', 571–72.
[77] Ibid., 579–80.
[78] Ibid., 583.
[79] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 184.

analysed in itself but is also seen in relation to previous Swedish alignment decisions. Two subcases are chosen to that end: Sweden's joining of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 and the signing of a Host Nation Support (HNS) agreement with NATO in 2014. Analysing those previous decisions in terms of the theoretical propositions provided in chapter two, provides a basis for comparison with the NATO decision. That aids in distinguishing the explanatory power of each hypothesis because the cause behind the decision made in 2022 was not necessarily the same as with previous alignment decisions. Since H_3 proposes that the 2022 decision was inherently linked to antecedent alignment, the exploration of subcases across time is particularly relevant. The reason for choosing the PfP and the HNS agreement as subcases is that they represent decisions of enough magnitude to have produced a researchable quantity of public documents.

To sum up, the analysis employs a methodological combination of congruence analysis and process tracing, with a supplement of within-case comparison. The alignment decisions of 1994 and 2014 are analysed in terms of congruence, and in turn causal mechanisms, between the proposed independent variables and the dependent variable. That forms the comparative basis supplementing the congruence and process tracing analysis of the final decision to apply for NATO membership in 2022. The next sections delve further into how the independent variables are measured and observed empirically. The dependent variable, alignment, was already comprehensively explained in section 2.1.

3.2   Operationalisation and measurement

A central challenge that scholars face in political science is how to properly link their concepts to empirical observations. In this thesis, for example, it is necessary to clarify how to measure the presence or absence of external threat, support for military non-alignment, and path-dependent events with regards to NATO cooperation. In their influential article from 2001, Robert Adcock and David Collier presents a useful guide to that end, in which they suggest three steps to follow.[80] First, one has to systematise a larger phenomenon into a specific concept, usually involving a specific definition used by other scholars. Second, the systematised concept must be operationalised, yielding even narrower definitions that can be measured in terms of indicators. Third, those indicators are applied to produce scores represented either quantitatively with numbers, or by using qualitative classifications. The following outline reflects how that procedure was employed when deciding on how to

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[80] Adcock and Collier, 'Measurement Validity', 531.

measure external threat, domestic support for military non-alignment, and path-dependent events in this project.

Moving from the broad concept of external threat to a systematised concept was done in section 2.2, drawing on components from Walt's understanding of threat, and ending up with offensive power, geography, and aggressive intentions. The next step is to identify appropriate and observable indicators of those components. Offensive power is restricted to meaning military capabilities with a reasonable potential to carry war to the enemy's territory. Such capabilities are operationalised in categories of military echelons and materiel, for example divisions, brigades, battalions, surface vessels, submarines, aircraft, nuclear weapons etc. They must also be viewed in terms of their technological sophistication. Third, the aspect of geographic proximity is not measured in itself, but is understood in relation to offensive power, restricting which echelons and capabilities that are relevant for Sweden. Finally, a state's aggressive intentions are particularly difficult to observe. One alternative is to note incidents in which the state employs military force to coerce another state, but those occasions are rare. It is therefore helpful to also assess indicators of perception.[81] Those indicators are observed through the interpretation of statements made in Swedish governmental documents or by political officials about Russian capabilities and intentions.

When it comes to H_2, the key element to measure is the political and public support for neutrality and military non-alignment. The systematisation of the neutrality and military non-alignment policy concepts as they are employed in this thesis was conducted in section 2.1. There are further three main indicators that are employed to measure the political and public support for such a policy. First, survey data on Swedes' attitude to neutrality and NATO can provide a general indication. Second, formal and informal statements about the role of neutrality and military non-alignment connected to political parties constitutes additional indications. Party manifestos are a good source to that end, as they are usually voted on at larger party congresses, and so reflect the majority opinion of affiliates. Governmental decision documents are also relevant, as they reflect the viewpoint of ruling parties and their support in parliament. The third indicator is found in how the status of domestic support for neutrality and military non-alignment is described and recorded in previous academic research.

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[81] Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power', 12.

Finally, H_3 poses perhaps the greatest challenge in terms of operationalisation of its independent variable. Measurement cannot be viewed conventionally within the logic of path dependence, but some specification is possible still. The discussion of path dependence in section 2.4 already narrowed the broad concept of path dependence down to the systematised concept of a set of events that nudged development along a particular path. First, events are in this context understood as formal agreements which can be traced back to the initial formal agreement, meaning the PfP. Indicators of this can be found in governmental decision documents in the simple form of written reference to existing agreements and cooperation with NATO. Second, events can be actions taken by Sweden as a result of the formal agreements mentioned, that in some way adapted Sweden's defence and security policy. Actions in that regard can also reinforce future actions outside the scope of a formal agreement and thus contribute into the path dependent process.

3.3 Data collection

The previous section outlined how certain concepts are being measured. This section elaborates on what types of data are utilised and the methods that are employed to collect the data: document analysis and research interviews. There are two overarching categories of data sources: primary and secondary.[82] Primary data is collected by the researcher herself, while secondary data is the recollection and re-analysis of data that has been collected by someone else and often for other purposes than academic research. Furthermore, data collection is about gathering information, which can be done in three different ways: by direct observation, asking someone questions, or read what others have written.[83] The latter commonly refers to documents, including not only written papers, but also visual and audible content found in recordings or video material.[84] The research question in this thesis is by nature not very answerable by conducting direct observation. Hence, providing data in line with the measurement strategies described in the previous section is heavily reliant on secondary data. To further strengthen the credibility of the study, primary data is also collected by conducting research interviews, which to some extent serves as a triangulation of the secondary sources and vice versa. These two collection methods, document analysis and research interviews, and how they are employed in this project, is explained in the following.

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[82] Halperin and Heath, *Political Research*, 195.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Grønmo, *Samfunnsvitenskapelige metoder*, 134.

Document analysis is a systematic approach to extracting and interpreting the content of documents.[85] This can be done quantitatively or qualitatively. The first often entails counting certain words or phrases, basically telling how often some coded meaning appears in a document. A qualitative approach on the other hand aims at going beneath the surface of the text and interpret certain content in the form of single words, sentences, quotations or paragraphs. From the context in which the document is produced, such extractions can be interpreted with regards to the question at hand and be used to draw logic inferences.[86] This thesis employs the qualitative approach to document analysis, as this is the more fitting with conducting research directed towards identifying certain mechanisms and causal processes. Furthermore, there are four important criteria when selecting which documents to use.[87] First, they must be practically accessible to the researcher within the scope and timeframe of her project. Second, they must be relevant in providing information to answer the question at hand. The third criterium is authenticity, meaning that one must ascertain that a source is what it is claimed to be. Finally, the content of the document must be trustworthy. When documents were selected for this project, those four criteria were kept in mind throughout the process. A wide range of documents are examined, and the most important are listed below.

Official documents published by the Swedish government and parliament, such as bills and white papers, constitutes a central pillar. They are important because of their accessibility, relevance, and authenticity, as they reflect the foundation for the official decisions made with regards to NATO in all subcases and involve the perspectives of both the incumbent governments and political parties at different points in time.[88] For information on military capabilities and threat, especially on Russia, the annual Military Balance reports published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) is another crucial source in this study.[89] That series offers some of the most comprehensive data, that is publicly available, on an aggregate overview of military capabilities by country. Furthermore, on public and political support for neutrality versus NATO membership, the analysis relies much upon data collected by other scholars in previous studies as well as party manifestos.[90] All the party

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[85] Halperin and Heath, *Political Research*, 200.
[86] Ibid., 376.
[87] Grønmo, *Samfunnsvitenskapelige metoder*, 136.
[88] All of these documents have been extracted from the Swedish Government's and the parliament's official websites.
[89] 'IISS Website: The Military Balance'.
[90] Devine, 'Neutrality and the Development of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy'; Beyer and Hofmann, 'Varieties of Neutrality'; Ydén, Berndtsson, and Petersson, 'Sweden and the Issue of NATO Membership'; Bjereld and Ydén, 'Skärpt försvarsdebatt NATO, Ryssland och försvarsutgifter'.

manifestos are extracted from an archival website of the Swedish National Data Service.[91] Additional documents from which data is used more sporadically, such as information pages on websites, news articles, and academic publications, are duly made reference to throughout the paper. An exhaustive list of all the documents is also found in the bibliography. Finally, data gathered through documents is supplemented by primary data from research interviews.

The first task when conducting interviews is to select a sample of respondents. Given the theoretical propositions and research design of this project, there are two categories of informants that were deemed most relevant and accessible for gathering information: scholars and experts within Swedish foreign and security policy, and politicians close to the decision-making process in May 2022. Contact was made with several potential informants that were considered relevant within those categories. However, the final selection to a large extent ended up being determined by accessibility, as far from all that were contacted responded positively or responded to the invitation at all. One of the planned interviews also had to be cancelled, due to the respondent's busy schedule as an active political figure. The final sample therefore ended up counting five interviewees consisting of experts and politicians.

In the invitation, the respondents were by default offered to remain anonymous, for reasons which are elaborated on in the next section. However, four of them gave explicit consent to being identified, after having proofread quotations. One of the informants wished to remain anonymous and is thus consistently cited as 'Respondent 1'. The second respondent, Lt. Colonel Håkan Edström, is currently an Associate Professor at the Swedish Defence University. He is also an active-duty officer in the Swedish Army. The third respondent was Krister Pallin, holding a position as Deputy Research Director at the Swedish Defence Research Agency. The fourth respondent, Mikael Holmström, is an investigative journalist who has been writing about Swedish security policy for more than thirty years. Holmström is also the author behind the book 'Den dolda alliansen', which is one of the most comprehensive works on Swedish NATO relations and neutrality ever published.[92] The final interview respondent was Ann Linde, who held office as Sweden's foreign secretary in the government that made the decision on membership in 2022. In that capacity, she also led the work on a public investigation conducted between 16th March and 13th May 2022, weighing

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[91] Swedish National Data Service, 'Party Manifestos Listed by Year'.
[92] Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen*.

arguments for and against a Swedish membership. The investigation culminated in the report that constituted the official basis on which Sweden made its decision.

In addition to finding a sample of respondents, it is important to be clear about the interview format. There are three main types of interviews in social research: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured.[93] The former contains standardised questions in a short and simple form which are asked in the same way and order in all the conducted interviews. Unstructured interviews involve more open questions, and new questions can be formed as the interview proceeds. The final category, semi-structured interviews, represents a combination of the two other methods, and is the approach used in this project. Semi-structured interviews are helpful when there is a small number of interviewees. The structured element ensures the obtainment of factual information while the unstructured element keeps open the possibility of probing into the unique experiences of each informant[94] However, a weakness with semi-structured interviews is that they yield less generalisable results. It was nevertheless deemed to be the most appropriate method for this project because of the small number and different backgrounds of the informants. Having the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and adjust some of the original questions along the way was crucial to get the most out of each session.

All of the interviews were conducted digitally using Microsoft Teams. That widened the accessibility to informants, as a digital interview opens for more flexibility in time and space compared to traveling and arranging physical meetings. Each interview began with a brief overview of the project's topic, but without revealing any hypotheses, to help prevent getting biased answers. The interview guides were also important to ensure the asking of open questions in the beginning of the interviews, also with the aim to get as unbiased results as possible.[95] The interviews were recorded, and notes were taken along the way. Before ending each interview, the respondent was asked to give brief feedback on the whole interview process and the questions asked, so that any unhelpful conduct could be adjusted for the further process. The results of the interviews were finally interpreted by using a transcribing function in the coding program NVivo combined with revisiting the recorded audio files themselves when that was necessary. The following section raises awareness on the ethical considerations made with regards to the research design.

[93] Halperin and Heath, *Political Research*, 312–14.
[94] Ibid., 313.
[95] Grønmo, *Samfunnsvitenskapelige metoder*, 173.

3.4   Research ethics

All research, especially involving human participants and information about people, should be conducted in line with guiding ethical principles.[96] First, information should not be collected without the knowledge, willingness and informed consent of participants. Informed consent requires the researcher to tell any participant about the study's purpose, selection procedures, what participation entails in practice, and potential risks. The principle of informed consent was maintained in this project by attaching an information letter to invitations sent to potential informants. The letter is based on a template provided by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (NSD/SIKT).[97] The second principle is to maintain confidentiality, relating to informants' right to privacy and what kind of information about them that should be made public. This research project was reported to NSD/SIKT, to receive approval of, and recommendations for, the conduct of interviews. Their recommendation was to offer participants anonymity, unless they explicitly expressed consent to be identified. Four participants made such consent in this project, while one wished to remain anonymous. All the personal data collected in the project has exclusively been stored in protected and authorised drives administered by the University of Oslo. Finally, the collected personal data will be deleted within three months after the project ends 2023-05-23, in accordance with the guidelines received from the NSD/SIKT.

A third ethical principle that becomes important when collecting primary data is related to incorrect reporting.[98] To deliberately hide relevant findings or disproportionately highlight certain elements with the potential to mislead results is unethical. When one of the interview respondents is anonymous as well, extra awareness and integrity is demanded from the researcher. This has been strived for to the best of abilities in this project, and an important safeguard to that end was providing respondents with the possibility to review and approve the data included in the publication. It should also be reminded that the information collected through research interviews has served as a supplement to the secondary sources upon which the analysis mainly relies. That should help in providing the study with credibility compared to a situation in which it had relied solely on interviews.

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[96] Halperin and Heath, *Political Research*, 175–77.
[97] 'Informasjon til deltakarane i forskingsprosjekt | Sikt'.
[98] Halperin and Heath, *Political Research*, 180.

3.5 Limitations and weaknesses

All research designs carry inherent methodological shortcomings in some form or another. In the design process, the researcher must always make a range of choices and consider trade-offs between different approaches. The chapter has so far presented an account of such choices within the context of this project. However, it is also important to be open about potential weaknesses of the design, and the ones that have not yet been covered are brought to attention here.

First, the most prevalent weakness comes with the risk of selection bias. The case of Sweden's application for NATO membership became interesting precisely because the country made that decision. Constituting only a single main case, it thus comes close to having been selected on the dependent variable. Selecting on the dependent variable can be problematic, simply because the outcome of interest happens regardless of which independent variables the researcher chooses to examine. That can lead to misleading conclusions, especially if the researcher claims findings of causal relationships to be generalisable to a larger population. However, this does not mean single-case studies are unmerited. According to George and Bennet, they are helpful in identifying causal paths and conditions under which the outcome of interest happens.[99] Understanding the mechanisms between independent and dependent variables is important, and that is where within-case studies provide a valuable contribution in the bigger picture of large-N analyses. The efforts made by combining congruence method with process tracing, comparing subcases across time, and including three different independent variables, aid in reducing the risk of bias relating to case selection in this project.

Partly because of the challenges mentioned above, and because of the low representativeness of a single-case study in general, the research design in this thesis imposes clear limits to the external validity of its results. However, the strive to be precise about conceptualisation in chapter two and operationalisation in section 3.2 is intended to at least improve the conditions under which readers can utilise both the approach and findings beyond the case of Sweden. Any such attempts are most welcome but are advised to be conducted with the clarifications from this chapter kept in mind. Some final remarks should also be made with regards to data collection and interviews.

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[99] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 23.

One limitation that inevitably shaped the data collection in this project is related to accessibility. It is a general challenge for any project investigating matters of international and national security that relevant data is not always publicly available, or even classified by law. There are most certainly parts of Swedish threat perception of Russia in May 2022, and other assessments related to the membership decision, that are protected by state secrecy. That puts some clear limitations on making an accurate analysis of Sweden's threat perception and other potential reasons behind the decision. This challenge is sought mitigated as much as possible by triangulating data from documents with data from interviews of both Swedish military experts and relevant decisionmakers. However, the accessibility problem should still be contemplated when interpreting the empirical findings. Finally, the small sample of interviewees constitutes a representativeness problem. The data collected from the interviews might be biased towards the perspectives of those few participants. This problem is also alleviated by the triangulation of sources, but nonetheless adds to the list of limitations of which any reader of the following chapters should be mindful.

4 The Partnership for Peace in 1994

After the Cold War had ended, NATO sought new areas of cooperation and expansion to retain its relevance and took several initiatives to that end. The most comprehensive and far-reaching of those was the Partnership for Peace (PfP), founded in 1994.[100] Sweden joined the program from the very beginning, and the following chapter explores the background for that decision. The aim is to aid the further analysis of Sweden's alignment towards NATO and its eventual decision to apply for membership. The chapter begins by clarifying in what sense Sweden's connection to the PfP constituted an increase in alignment towards NATO, before systematically analysing the alignment decision from each of the three theoretical perspectives presented in chapter two.

Sweden had already been engaged in extensive secret cooperation and coordination with NATO countries during the Cold War.[101] Some of those cooperative efforts amounted to extensive intelligence sharing and preparations to receive western military support. For example, a direct agreement was made with the Unites States, beginning in 1952, authorising its use of Swedish airbases in wartime, and Sweden rebuilt certain airfields to enable reinforcements of US bombers. Furthermore, safe lines of communications were established to some NATO countries and headquarters, and defence plans were shared.[102] There existed, in other words, several elements indicating mutual expectations of military support between Sweden and NATO during the Cold War. Sweden was as such already aligned with the alliance, even though only to a minor degree.

In contrast to the Cold War, however, entering the PfP in 1994 constituted a public and formal connection to the alliance, with an inherent prospect to deepen institutional ties in the long term. The PfP also represented a much broader security agenda, than the narrow scope of the few specific Cold War arrangements. The ambitions of the PfP were far from modest, exemplified in the program's wide range of cooperative areas that partner states would be able to pursue:

> facilitation of transparency in national defence planning and budgeting processes; ensuring democratic control of defence forces; maintenance of the capability and readiness to contribute, subject to constitutional considerations, to operations under

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[100] Herd and Kriendler, *Understanding NATO in the 21st Century*, 70–71; Schmidt, *A History of NATO*, Vol. 3:307.
[101] af Malmborg, 'Sweden - NATO's Neutral "Ally"?', 297.
[102] Ibid., 296–99.

the authority of the UN and/or the responsibility of the CSCE; the development of cooperative military relations with NATO, for the purpose of joint planning, training, and exercises in order to strengthen their ability to undertake missions in the fields of peacekeeping, search and rescue, humanitarian operations, and others as may subsequently be agreed; the development, over the longer term, of forces that are better able to operate with those of the members of the North Atlantic Alliance.[103]

The full implementation of all these cooperative areas would constitute a rather significant connection to NATO for any partner state. However, the PfP Framework Document clearly stated that each partner would individually develop their own plans for which specific areas they would like to pursue. The list above was in that sense more a menu of options for the signatory states than deterministic paths of future cooperation. Sweden's initial interest in the partnership was related to peacekeeping operations, and to partake in training with NATO forces to improve capabilities for such operations.[104]

Still, regardless of the focus on peacekeeping, entering the PfP provided a lowering of the threshold for expanding future cooperation. The last clause of the PfP Framework Document even resembled aspects of the alliance's traditional security purposes: "NATO will consult with any active participant in the Partnership if that Partner perceives a direct threat to its territorial integrity, political independence, or security."[105] This is not very different from Article 4 in the NATO Agreement itself: "The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened."[106] The Swedish government reiterated the voluntary aspect on this point, underlining that such consultations would only happen on the invitation of the partner state.[107] The clause did, nevertheless, open a formal channel to ask for external support in the event of conflict.

Sweden was also interested in increasing the interoperability between its own military and NATO forces, mainly directed towards peacekeeping capabilities.[108] Interoperability however, for all practical purposes, lowers the threshold for providing or supporting each other militarily, to which the original purpose of achieving such interoperability does not

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[103] NATO, 'Partnership for Peace: Framework Document'.
[104] 'Regeringens skrivelse 1993/94:207', 6–7.
[105] NATO, 'Partnership for Peace: Framework Document'.
[106] 'The North Atlantic Treaty'.
[107] 'Regeringens skrivelse 1993/94:207', 5.
[108] 'Utrikesutskottets betänkande säkerhetspolitiska frågor 1993/94:UU18'; 'Regeringens skrivelse 1993/94:207', 4.

necessarily matter. For example, the experience gained from a Swedish infantry unit training to improve its ability to cooperate with that of a NATO country, would still be applicable for other types of operations than mere peacekeeping. When seeing the consultation clause and increased interoperability in relation to one another, it is reasonable to think that the mutual expectations of support in the event of crisis or war would increase from entering the PfP compared to non-partnership. Sweden's decision to become a partner state to NATO represented, in that sense, an act of alignment, even though it was moderate.

4.1 The end of the Cold War and decline in threat

The aim of this section is to gather evidence in support of, or against, H_1, which proposes that an increase in an external threat should drive Sweden to align or ally with other states to balance against the threat. The section unfolds by discussing the extent to which there existed a variation in an external threat against Sweden from Russia preceding the formation of the PfP. Thereafter, it assesses whether any variations in that threat can be linked to Sweden's joining of the partnership.

The first aspect of threat to consider is offensive power, understood as military capabilities capable of carrying war to the enemy's territory. This can be captured by looking at the changing quantities, in the years preceding the PfP, of the conventional forces stationed in the Soviet/Russian military districts (MDs) and fleets that were designated for operations in Scandinavia. This includes the Leningrad MD, the Baltic MD and the Baltic Fleet.[109] The Northern Fleet, located on the Kola Peninsula, could potentially also have directed some of its capabilities towards Sweden, but is left out of the analysis, as its designated areas of operations were the Arctic and Atlantic. The same logic applies for the districts that were located in East Germany and Poland. Russia was vastly superior to Sweden in terms of offensive capabilities in the mentioned MDs throughout the 1980s, fielding a stable total of 3 armour divisions, 18 motorised divisions, 3 artillery and airborne divisions, 1 amphibious brigade and 4 missile brigades.[110] Moreover, the sea and air forces in those MDs counted around 50 major surface vessels, more than 300 smaller vessels, and a little more than 500 combat aircraft. Sweden as a whole would on the other hand have been able to mobilise a total of four armour brigades, 1 mechanised brigade, 18 infantry brigades, and some 160 light

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[109] *The Military Balance 1989*, 37–39.
[110] *The Military Balance 1984-1993*.

infantry battalions.[111] In terms of sea and air power, Sweden boasted more than 100 smaller vessels and around 500 combat aircraft.

Those numbers show that Sweden possessed a considerable fighting force, although not close to the regional power of the Soviet Union, except for in the air domain. However, not surprising, during the period between 1991-1993 the mass of Soviet ground forces in the counted MDs decreased by half, and sea and air capabilities by around a third, due to the dissolution of the USSR and the following dismantling and withdrawal of Soviet forces from the Baltic states.[112] Despite the collapse, Russia retained a superior presence of conventional offensive forces opposed to Sweden's defence, a balance that was recognised in a Swedish white paper from 1991.[113] In relative terms however, Russia's offensive power against Sweden had decreased significantly.

Furthermore, Russia kept control of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal after the Cold War.[114] Even though nuclear weapons are mainly meant to deter enemy attacks, it is hard for any potential adversary to ignore that the deterrence utility of nuclear weapons paradoxically lie in their incredible offensive advantage. Through their small size, ease of delivery, and immense destructive power per unit, nuclear weapons represent a tremendous instrument of offensive power.[115] Since Sweden did not have any nuclear deterrent of its own, together with the fact that it was outside the US-NATO nuclear umbrella, Russia would have been able to combine its conventional and nuclear power in a potential conflict with Sweden.

The final aspect of threat is perceptions of intentions. The most pressing fear during the Cold War had been the possibility of a massive Soviet conventional attack on Western Europe, and a following war between the superpowers, in which Sweden would be made a theatre of war. That fear was, according to the Swedish government, no longer imaginable in 1992.[116] On the other hand, it was underscored that the future domestic developments in Russia were highly uncertain, pointing to possible scenarios in which Russia would revert to a militaristic and authoritarian rule with an aggressive outlook towards its neighbours.[117] Moreover, the Swedish perspective observed that there were small or no changes in the geostrategic

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[111] Ibid.
[112] *The Military Balance 1991-1993.*
[113] 'Proposition 1991/92:102 - Riksdagen', 21.
[114] *The Military Balance 1993*, 33–34; ibid., 35–36.
[115] Lieber, *The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution*, 27.
[116] 'Proposition 1991/92:102 - Riksdagen', 15.
[117] Ibid., 10.

importance of the Nordic region for Russia, compared to the Soviet era.[118] This was related to the continued necessity for Russia to be able to operate its strategic nuclear deterrent assets in the High North. It was the Swedish view that, for Russia, securing operational flexibility for its ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) would be of even increased strategic value, given the general reductions in conventional power, and the decreasing stockpile of nuclear weapons and launchers under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) of 1991.[119] Sweden also reckoned that the North would still play the same important role in the conventional balance between Russia and the United States. In other words, Russia continued to constitute Sweden's main traditional security concern, and Russia's strategic interest in the Nordic region were perceived as unchanged.

However, there were no longer a pronounced and real anxiety that Russia would behave aggressively towards Europe. The main concern was now related to the uncertainty of which direction domestic political development in Russia would take, and whether any path would lead to a renewed revisionist and aggressive foreign policy in the future.[120] In sum, the external threat against Sweden decreased in every aspect, offensive power, geography, and aggressive intentions, during the years preceding the PfP. The logic of the balance of threat theory and H_1 does therefore not apply very well in this case, and any further search for mechanisms through which external threat could have played a role would thus make little sense. Sweden could not have sought partnership with NATO because of an increase in external threat, when that threat had decreased compared to an earlier point at which Sweden did not seek such alignment. That does not mean Sweden regarded the Russian threat as dissolved, but the explanation to why it entered the PfP must be looked for elsewhere.

4.2   Continued but adjusted support for neutrality

This section aims to highlight evidence for and against H_2, which proposes that Sweden applied for NATO membership because of a gradual or rapid weakening in the political and public support for neutrality and military non-alignment. The section begins by providing a slightly more detailed introduction to the Swedish neutrality and its Cold War turn to a more actively propagated foreign policy instrument, before describing how that view lost some traction towards of the end of the Cold War. Second, that change is analysed with regards to what extent it can help understand Sweden's entry into the PfP.

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[118] Ibid., 26.
[119] Ibid., 29.
[120] 'Proposition 1992/93:100 Proposition 1992/93:100 - Riksdagen', 10.

The general notion is that Sweden has been neutral for over 200 years, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1814.[121] According to Robert Dalsjö, the Swedish neutrality began around that time as "a small state's version of realism".[122] After experiencing great losses in war with the great powers, referring to the loss of Finland in 1809, it would simply be safer for Sweden to stay on the side-line of great power plays in the future. The practical and realist notion of neutrality would later change its public face dramatically during the 1960s, spearheaded by the Social Democratic Party (SD) and its leader at the time, Olof Palme.[123] In 1960, the SD party manifesto held that "The goal of the foreign policy is, through a firm neutrality policy, to secure the country's peace and independence. This is supported by a strong defence policy."[124] In 1970, the aim was described quite differently:

> We shall fulfil a firm and consistent neutrality policy. We shape this policy ourselves. Within its structure we will work for (1) peace and lowering of conflict in the world and a stronger UN; (2) increased aid to the poor peoples and their struggle for liberation; (3) increased trade and expanded economic cooperation. We want to continue a policy that fortifies Sweden's neutrality and maintains the prospects for our country to internationally promote solidarity and social justice.[125]

This change of course expressed the wish for a more active and solidarity oriented foreign policy residing with the SDs political base, whose elected representatives constituted half of the Swedish parliament at the time.[126] The public engagement around the policy sprung out increased attention to global grievances, such as the Vietnam War and the poverty of the developing world. According to Petersson, this turn gave Sweden's foreign policy an idealist and moral dimension.[127] The interweaving of neutrality as an instrument for a broader foreign policy agenda was largely self-chosen and internally motivated.[128] Instead of being one of several means to the end of security, it evolved to be viewed as a necessary precondition for the integrity of Swedish foreign policy as a whole:

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[121] Westberg, 'Security Without Non-Alignment', 1–2.
[122] Dalsjö, 'Trapped in the Twilight Zone?', 44.
[123] Petersson, '"The Allied Partner"', 80.
[124] 'Program för Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti 1960', 6.
[125] 'Socialdemokraternas Valmanifest 1970', 1.
[126] 'Historisk statistik över valåren 1910-2014. Procentuell fördelning av giltiga valsedlar efter parti och typ av val'.
[127] Petersson, '"The Allied Partner"', 80.
[128] Möller and Bjereld, 'From Nordic Neutrals to Post-Neutral Europeans'.

According to this uniquely Swedish interpretation, only such actors that stand detached from the hegemonic or dominant powers of the international system enjoy the political credibility required to pursue an activist foreign policy.[129]

Even though the broadened meaning of neutrality originated with the SD, it eventually became common property and was even actively propagated across the population.[130] The emerged identity can be summarised in Dalsjö's quite straightforward wording: "To be Swedish was to be neutral, to be neutral was to be good, thus it was good to be a Swede."[131] Maintaining neutrality had in this sense become an interest in itself among large segments of the population, often regardless of political affiliation. To challenge it would be equal to challenging the very idea of what it meant for some people to be Swedish. From a political perspective, this made it more or less impossible for any later incumbent politician in Sweden, especially so for social democratic ones, to suggest any deviation from the neutrality policy.

Despite its origin with the left-wing, party manifestos from the Cold War period suggest that the neutrality policy was supported across the political spectrum.[132] However, while confirming its support for the policy, a centre-right government in 1976 expressed that there also existed some differences between right and left on the matter.[133] That was exemplified by the Swedish foreign minister, Karin Söder from the Centre Party, who in 1977 firmly advised against the view that neutrality signified any kind of moral supremacy.[134] The Moderates also considered, during the active neutrality's heydays, potential Swedish participation in the European Economic Community (EEC) to be fully compatible with the country's foreign policy.[135] These are examples that there existed some variation between the political blocs, but the policy was generally supported overall. It would have been ideal to

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[129] Dahl, 'Sweden: Once a Moral Superpower, Always a Moral Superpower?', 899.
[130] Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen*, 86, 79.
[131] Dalsjö, 'Trapped in the Twilight Zone?', 45.
[132] 'Socialdemokraternas Valmanifest 1970'; 'Moderaterna Valmanifest 1970'; 'Folkpartiet Valmanifest 1970'; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 1970'; 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest 1970'; 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 1973'; 'Moderaterna Valmanifest 1973'; 'Folkpartiet Valmanifest 1973'; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 1973'; 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest 1973'; 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 1976'; 'Moderaterna Valmanifest 1976'; 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest 1976'; 'Folkpartiet Valmanifest 1976'; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 1976'; 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 1979'; 'Moderaterna Valmanifest 1979'; 'Centerpartiet Partiprogram 1979'; 'Folkpartiet Valmanifest 1979'; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 1979'; 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 1985'; 'Moderaterna Valmanifest 1985'; 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest 1985'; 'Folkpartiet Valmanifest 1985'; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 1985'.
[133] Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen*, 75.
[134] Ibid.
[135] 'Moderaternas principprogram 1969', 2.

supplement that picture with systematic survey data on public opinion. Such data does not exist, but Karen Devine managed to compile some sporadic data from the period 1950-1989, which indicates that support was strong both among the political elite and the public.[136] In sum, the neutrality policy stood strong throughout the Cold War since its manifestation in the 1960s.

The broad support would create the expectation that an open and formal alignment towards NATO would be out of the question. This is supported by one of the interview respondents, who emphasised that the neutrality policy made a partnership with NATO, like the PfP, totally unthinkable during the Cold War.[137] Yet, Sweden joined the PfP only a few years after the end of the Cold War, implying that something must have changed. In 1991, Carl Bildt, now as leader of the Moderates, assumed office as prime minister in a minority coalition with the Liberals, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats (CD).[138] The slightly different interpretation of the neutrality policy with this bloc compared to the left, as pointed to before, would suggest the new government to be more positive to an initiative like the PfP. In its white paper to the Riksdag in 1994, right after Sweden had been officially invited to enter the partnership, the government clearly expressed the potential merits of such a an agreement.[139] More surprising however, is that the opposition parties' processing of that white paper revealed support for a Swedish partnership as well, even from the Left Party.[140] The SD did emphasise the partnership's conflict-preventive purpose and peaceful outlook and the Left Party held reservations regarding any potential for future NATO enlargement, but they did nevertheless embrace the initiative.[141] In other words, the political support for neutrality as a precondition for an independent foreign policy appeared to have loosened by 1994, more or less among all the political parties.

This change can be traced back to the Bildt government's bill regarding national defence and security in 1992, in which the Swedish neutrality was redefined and loosened from its Cold War origin:

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[136] Devine, 'Neutrality and the Development of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy', 342.
[137] Respondent 1, Research interview.
[138] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Tidigare regeringsbildningar och statsministrar'.
[139] 'Regeringens skrivelse 1993/94:207', 4–6.
[140] 'Utrikesutskottets betänkande säkerhetspolitiska frågor 1993/94:UU18'.
[141] Ibid.

> […] the core in our security policy still is to stay out of alliances and retain a satisfying national defence, so that we can remain neutral in the event of war in our geographical proximity. No one else defends Sweden, and we defend only Sweden.[142]

The Cold War neutrality wording had been 'aiming at neutrality in war', while the reformulation in 1992 suggested neutrality in war was more of an option than an aim in itself. The adding of 'in our geographical proximity' also opened for non-neutrality regarding conflicts that happened beyond the immediate adjacency of Swedish territories. This adjustment represented an important opening for entering agreements such as the PfP.[143] The 1992 defence bill was also enacted with broad political backing, including the left-wing parties.[144] Thus, it reflects, like with the decision on the PfP, that the support for neutrality as a crucial cornerstone for a broad foreign policy had weakened in Swedish politics.

That is not to say, however, that the idea had disappeared, especially not among the Swedish public. National surveys suggests that two thirds during the 1990s still wished to hold on to the Cold War neutrality.[145] Moreover, Devine's data from the same period points to a loosening rhetoric on the neutrality policy among the political elite, who across the political spectrum started to emphasise the benefits of European cooperation.[146] To sum up, the support for the strict Cold War neutrality started to erode in the early 1990s at the political level, opening the gates to agreements such as the PfP, and likely so also for integration with Europe through the entering of the European Union in.

The public support for neutrality persisted on the other hand, which makes it curious that none of the political parties expressed reservations about revising the neutrality policy in 1992 and aligning with NATO in 1994. The answer to that may lie in the multifaceted character of the PfP. Although it constituted modest alignment towards a military alliance, its main purpose had been to enhance peacekeeping capabilities, secure the stable development of democracy in Eastern Europe, and promote humanitarian values. That message, combined with the voluntary character of the PfP, was in fact largely compatible with the idea of Sweden as an independent and active force for good in foreign affairs. In that sense, it did not

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[142] 'Proposition 1991/92:102 - Riksdagen', 35.
[143] Respondent 1, Research interview.
[144] Prop. 102.
[145] Devine, 'Neutrality and the Development of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy', 343.
[146] Ibid.

necessarily appear as a devastating threat to the public's current view of their country as neutral.

To conclude this section, the neutrality that became embedded in large segments of the population and across political parties, functioned as a constraint with regards to any Swedish alignment towards NATO during the Cold War. That neutrality was officially weakened with the defence bill in 1992, making neutrality in war more optional. That change was necessary to make a partnership with NATO compatible with the country's policy. However, the policy revision was itself largely preconditioned by the structural changes brought about by the end of the Cold War. With the Soviet Union gone and a new prospect of all European countries, including Russia, cooperating with each other, there was simply no blocs left to remain neutral between. In that view, the weakening of the neutrality tradition that stipulated Sweden's entry into the PfP appears more fitting as an intermediate variable between external stimulus and the country's alignment.[147] This partly weakens the understanding of neutrality as a domestic political tradition independently affecting foreign policy decisions. At the same time, the prevalent effort of politicians to explain how the PfP was compatible with Sweden as an independent and neutral state, indicates that the neutrality norm was not insignificant either.[148] It just was not strong enough to rival the external pressure of a totally transformed international situation in Europe and thus had to be adjusted.

4.3   A critical juncture setting the direction for future cooperation

This section explores Sweden's entering of the PfP in the perspective of institutional path dependence. H_3 proposes that Sweden's entry into the PfP in 1994 constituted an initial event, which subsequently led the country on a path that fostered self-reinforcing adaptation to NATO. As discussed in section 2.4, the first task when analysing a hypothesised path dependent chain of events is to assess whether the claimed critical juncture is characterised by contingency. The following section therefore investigates to what extent Sweden's partnership in 1994 can be regarded as a contingent event. The aim is to form the foundation for the further analysis on whether later alignment acts, and eventually NATO membership, were results of a self-reinforcing sequence starting with the PfP.

The most important criterium of a contingent event is that its occurrence was unexpected based on theoretical expectations or existing understanding of causal processes. This is

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[147] The significance of the systemic changes brought about by the collapse of the bipolar world order is also emphasised in Beyer and Hofmann, 'Varieties of Neutrality', 288.
[148] 'Regeringens skrivelse 1993/94:207'.

assessed through basic counterfactual analysis in which one considers one or more alternatives that could have happened with the same plausibility as the actual event. Such an argument is further bolstered if the counterfactual alternative would have been better predicted by a theory dominant in explaining the phenomenon in question.[149] The most obvious counterfactual to consider when it comes to Sweden's immediate participation in the PfP after its creation is the alternative of no partnership and continued neutrality. That would not in fact have been very surprising, as both the persistence of NATO, and non-members' alignment towards the alliance during the 1990s, appeared contradictory to what scholars and dominating theories would have predicted from the collapse of the bipolar world.[150] After the end of the Cold War and demise in the Soviet threat, NATO could have taken many different paths. The alliance's persistence was among the less expected of those paths, let alone its expansion.[151]

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the decline in the Soviet threat should, according to realist theory, have seriously reduced the need for alignment with other powerful states. Yet, Sweden joined the PfP together with the majority of non-NATO European countries. Sweden's entry into the PfP was as such a contingent event, because it did not appear as an outcome easily predicted by foregoing events. On the contrary, the least surprising course of events would have been the absence of new alignments, or maybe even the dismantling of NATO as a whole. That is not to argue that the expanding ambitions of NATO and Sweden's joining of the PfP were without foregoing causes. The point is that it represented a new phenomenon, which was unpredictable and surprising compared to its counterfactual alternatives. That does not make it unexplainable, but it makes it interesting as a critical juncture to which one can link a subsequent set events casting light on Sweden's eventual decision to join NATO.

Rather interestingly, when confronted with the open question of why Sweden joined the PfP in 1994, all the informants interviewed in this project presented an almost unanimous answer, which can be resembled in the following words: "Everyone else did it."[152] That notion carries a deterministic undertone, pointing in the direction that Sweden had few or no other alternatives to the PfP. Three of the informants emphasised that it would have made very

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[149] Mahoney, 'Path Dependence in Historical Sociology', 513.
[150] See for example McCalla, 'NATO's Persistence after the Cold War'; Rauchhaus et al., 'Explaining NATO Enlargement'.
[151] McCalla, 'NATO's Persistence after the Cold War', 1.
[152] Interview respondent 1-5.

little sense for Sweden to shy away from the PfP initiative, because a clear majority of European countries that were not already NATO members jumped on the train.[153] There were even signals that Russia would join.[154] The PfP as such represented an innovation that caught wide interest among European countries, of which most had also come to acknowledge NATO's survival and that the alliance would continue to play an important role for future security cooperation, complementary to the OSCE and the EU. In that sense, there were few or no other alternatives that would make sense for Sweden to pursue with regards to the areas of cooperation that were captured in the PfP framework. Considering the initiative's broad support across Europe, Sweden would not have gained much by standing on the outside, as it would have sacrificed potential influence and other benefits of partaking.[155] These aspects were also reflected in the Swedish government's account to the Riksdag in 1994 of why the country should become a NATO partner:

> PFP is now at a malleable stage. Broad participation seems likely. The Government recognises the extensive support that has emerged around the initiative. PFP offers Sweden a possibility to influence the work aimed at enhancing peacekeeping efforts within the mandate of the UN or the OSCE.[156]

> Even from a general security perspective the PFP has significant positive elements. It has the potential to supplement European cooperative efforts with something new and meaningful.[157]

The above discussion thus suggests that Sweden was to a large extent locked in on a path of cooperation with NATO. The persistence of NATO had excluded any other viable alternatives to security cooperation in Europe on areas that were not covered by the OSCE or the EU. Furthermore, Sweden's participation in this expansionary element of NATO after the Cold War was characterised by contingency, and as such carries the qualifications to serve as a critical juncture bearing consequence for Sweden's alignment choices. This forms the groundwork for the further analysis of whether later Swedish alignment towards NATO, and the eventual membership, can be explained by a self-reinforcing sequence following from its joining of the PfP in 1994.

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[153] Interview respondent 1-3.
[154] 'Regeringens skrivelse 1993/94:207', 4.
[155] Edström, Research interview.
[156] 'Regeringens skrivelse 1993/94:207', 4.
[157] Ibid., 5.

4.4 Chapter conclusion

Sweden's entry into the PfP in 1994 constituted an act of alignment towards NATO. The first section in this chapter described how the external threat against Sweden had decreased in every aspect preceding that alignment, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. That means Sweden's first formal alignment towards NATO cannot have been driven by external threat, weakening the theoretical logic underpinning H_1.

The second section discussed how a weakening of the domestic support for neutrality related to the decision to join the PfP. The findings suggest that a weakening in such support took place at the political level shortly after the Cold War, when a unanimous Swedish parliament backed the rephrasing of the neutrality policy in a defence bill in 1992. That revision unlocked the possibility for joining the PfP two years later, which under the Cold War neutrality would have been unthinkable. However, this does not form a convincing argument in favour of H_2, because the adjustment of the neutrality policy in 1992 was itself largely a result of the collapse of the bipolar world. That indicates how structural changes in the international environment trumped the domestic political norm, rather than the other way around. This does not disprove the neutrality tradition as an important domestic constraint to outward military alignment, but it underscores its inferiority to transformations in the international system.

The third section illustrated how Sweden's joining of the PfP was a contingent event, as it appeared contradictory to established theoretical expectations. The decline in threat following the Soviet Union's collapse would propose a reduced need for military alignments and perhaps even the dissolvement of NATO. Instead, NATO persisted and even widened cooperation in Europe by launching the PfP in 1994. Almost every non-NATO country in Europe joined the initiative, de facto excluding other alignment alternatives. This also ruled out the alternative of staying completely non-aligned. If it had, Sweden would in practice have renounced much of its influence over shaping the new European security environment in which it would be residing anyway. Sweden's joining of the PfP can therefore be seen as a critical juncture, pointing out the direction for future alignment. Together with the other findings in the chapter, this forms a comparative basis for the further analysis. The following chapters investigate later alignment decisions, and eventually the membership decision, to evaluate if the latter is best explained by a resurgence in external threat, a decline in the neutrality tradition, or by self-reinforcing cooperation that began with the PfP.

5   An agreement on Host Nation Support in 2014

In September 2014 during the Wales Summit, twenty years after entering the PfP, Sweden signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with NATO on Host Nation Support (HNS).[158] The agreement was ratified in May 2016.[159] The following chapter proceeds similarly as before. First, the chapter explains to what extent the HNS agreement constituted an act of alignment towards NATO in accordance with the definition provided in chapter two. Second, the background for that alignment is investigated through the lenses of the respective theories underpinning H_1, H_2, and H_3, with the aim to aid the analysis of why Sweden eventually joined NATO.

Recalling the definition from section 2.1, alignment constitutes the set of mutual expectations between two or more states that they will have each other's support in disputes or wars with particular other states."[160] Increased alignment thus means whatever new measures that are taken to strengthen those expectations. The chief aim of the HNS agreement between Sweden and NATO reads as follows:

> The purpose of this MOU is to establish policy and procedures for the establishment of operational sites and the provision of HNS to NATO forces in, or supported from the HN [Host Nation], during NATO military activities.

> This MOU and its follow-on documents are intended to serve as the basis for planning by the appropriate HN authority and by NATO Commanders anticipating HNS agreements for a variety of NATO military activities. These missions include those for which deploying forces have been identified and those for which forces are yet to be identified.[161]

In other words, the goal was to improve the facilitation of hosting NATO forces on Swedish soil, within the rather wide definition of 'a variety of military activities'. Moreover, the last sentence indicates that there were no predefined restrictions on the type or quantity of any potential forces that could be hosted, although such arrangements would always be jointly decided on between NATO and the host nation.[162] An important goal with the HNS

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[158] 'Regeringens proposition 2015/16:152 Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd'.
[159] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd Sammansatta utrikes- och försvarsutskottets Betänkande 2015/16'.
[160] Snyder, 'Alliance Theory', 105.
[161] 'MOU between Sweden and NATO Regarding Host Nation Support'.
[162] 'Regeringens proposition 2015/16:152 Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd', 24.

agreement was to ease the rules and bureaucracy regarding military exercises with NATO, many of which Sweden had both already participated in and hosted.[163] However, that did not exclude the possibility of receiving forces for the purpose of conducting military operations, should that be deemed necessary. On the contrary, the agreement ascertained that its provisions would apply in peace, emergencies, crisis and conflict or periods of international tension.[164] As such, the agreement signalled increased expectations of military support in conflict or war, constituting increased alignment towards NATO.

It did also arguably represent a much stronger formal alignment than the twenty years older joining of the PfP. The latter constituted a modest alignment regarding the potential of increased interoperability in addition to the consultation clause, but peacekeeping had been the main focus.[165] The HNS agreement of 2014, on the other hand, entailed the active adaptation of Swedish domestic laws to facilitate the hosting of NATO forces on its own territory. Compared to the PfP, in which increased expectations of mutual support was more of a biproduct, the HNS agreement represented a direct lowering of the threshold for receiving military forces. Increasing expectations of support had become the end in itself.[166] The rest of the chapter explores the background for the Swedish decision to align with NATO in this manner, from the perspective of external threat, internal politics and path dependence.

5.1 The resurgence of a threat from the East

The aim of this section is to examine Sweden's entering of the HNS agreement in light of the balance of threat theory and H_1. The proposition suggests that an increased external threat, in this case from Russia, should drive Sweden to align with other states to balance against the threat. The subsequent discussion starts by assessing whether an increase in external threat against Sweden took place in the years preceding its signing of the MOU with NATO in September 2014. Any finding of such variation in external threat is then analysed as to how it affected the decision on HNS.

The first measure to consider is offensive power. The previous chapter concluded that the ten-year period preceding the decision to join the PfP in 1994 had brought with them a significant decrease in Russian offensive power towards Sweden, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The period preceding the signing of the MOU on HNS in 2014 looks quite

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[163] Respondent 1, Research interview.
[164] 'MOU between Sweden and NATO Regarding Host Nation Support'.
[165] NATO, 'Partnership for Peace: Framework Document'.
[166] 'Regeringens proposition 2015/16:152 Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd', 13.

different. While there had been a large reduction in both the size, resources, and technological and doctrinal sophistication of the Russian armed forces during the 1990s and the early 2000s, a change of direction was marked in 2008. That year, the current President, Dimitry Medvedev, announced an overarching defence modernisation program: "The Future Outlook of the Russian Federation Armed Forces and Priorities for its Creation for the period of 2009–2020".[167] This included the shifting from a large mobilisation-based military, to smaller, professional and more flexible forces that would better serve contemporary Russian foreign-policy goals. The program was launched after the short Russo-Georgian war the same year, and largely reflected a reaction to lessons of poor performance of the conventional forces in that conflict.[168] Already in 2012, some of the reform goals were declared completed by the Russian military leadership, such as the transformation of army units to brigade-sized combined-arms echelons made for quick deployment.[169] Further goals of structural and technological modernisation in all military branches were set for the road ahead to 2020, along with procurement of a variation of new missiles, missile systems, aircraft, and armoured vehicles.[170]

The military forces located in the Western MD, the most important Russian MD to Sweden, had in the ten-year period preceding 2014 not varied significantly in size, since the post-Cold War period of major reductions.[171] However, the elements of the reform discussed above indicated a turn towards developing capabilities more suitable for offensive operations. For example, long-range precision guided weapons, armour, and a structural setup with mobile high-readiness units, constitute capabilities associated with better utility in offensive operations. This does not mean Sweden witnessed an equal to the powerful conventional deployments it had faced from the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Nevertheless, the Russian military reforms had in the years before 2014 both already improved, and cemented the prospect of further improvement of, a range of capabilities with offensive advantage. In that view, Russia's potential offensive power against Sweden had been moderately increased in the period preceding the HNS agreement and was on an ever-rising curve.

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[167] *The Military Balance 2010*, 211.
[168] Ibid., 211–12.
[169] *The Military Balance 2012*, 183–84.
[170] *The Military Balance 2012-2014.*
[171] The Western Military District included since 2010 what were previous the Leningrad MD, the Moscow MD, and the Kaliningrad Special Region. *See The Military Balance 2005-2014.*

This should also be seen in relation to the present Swedish military forces, which had been constantly decreasing and restructured since its Cold War size and organisation. The latter was aimed at large scale territorial defence.[172] Sweden abolished conscription in 2010, and defence reforms that began during the late 1990s had aimed at maintaining a small, professional military purposed for minor flexible operations at home or abroad.[173] It should also be remarked that Russia still retained much of its nuclear arsenal, and although such weapons continued to serve the purpose of deterrence, their inherent offensive potential as discussed in section 4.1, could still not be ignored in the eyes of an adversary.[174] The nuclear weapons aspect did not stand out as an increased offensive power in the years before 2014, but it represented a constant capability Sweden would always have to consider with regards to intentions and willingness to escalate conflicts.

The final aspect of threat amounts to Sweden's perception of Russian aggressive intentions. In 2008, Russia employed military force to occupy two regions in Georgia.[175] In 2014, it did the same when it occupied Crimea in Ukraine, to be followed by the employment of force in the Eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.[176] Those acts demonstrated a will to use offensive power for political goals. It would therefore be timely to think that Swedish efforts to improve HNS capabilities were a reaction to those perceived intentions. Crimea was annexed in March 2014, and Sweden's MOU with NATO was signed in September, only five months later, during the NATO Wales Summit. The summit had itself dedicated much focus to the Russian aggressions that had occurred against Ukraine a few months earlier.[177]

In the domestic ratification bill of the HNS agreement from 2016, the Swedish Government described the background for why it was necessary with an HNS agreement with NATO. It was briefly stated that "The security situation in Europe has worsened."[178] While not describing the situation in detail, the document instead referred frequently to a defence bill enacted in 2015, which included a more comprehensive threat assessment. The latter clearly linked the worsened security situation to Russian behaviour along two lines.[179] First, it emphasised the revisionist nature of Russian aggression against Ukraine, and how that

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[172] *The Military Balance 2000-2014.*
[173] *The Military Balance 2012.*
[174] Quinlivan, *Nuclear Deterrence in Europe*, 65–69.
[175] See for example Cornell and Starr, *The Guns of August 2008*; Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World*; Eisler, 'Blitzkrieg Reconsidered?'
[176] Allison, 'Russian "deniable" Intervention in Ukraine'.
[177] NATO, 'Wales Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2014)'.
[178] 'Regeringens proposition 2015/16:152 Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd', 12.
[179] 'Försvarspolitisk inriktning - Sveriges försvar 2016-2020', 21–24.

fostered great uncertainty with regards to future Russian intentions. Second, this was seen in relation to the Russian rearmament program explained earlier, which had already reached some interim goals in 2012.[180] The conflict in Ukraine were seen as a demonstration of the improving ability of Russian forces to conduct offensive and modern military operations, in line with the 'Future Outlook' program. The prospects of further expansion and modernisation of the armed forces generated a fear that "larger operations beyond Russia's immediate geographical proximity" would be possible.[181] The Swedish defence minister at the time, Peter Hultqvist, expressed in 2015 that cooperation with the United States and NATO had to be expanded. He pointed to the following Russian developments as the background for that need: increased Russian military activity in Sweden's geographic proximity, Russian exercises with clear offensive operations scenarios, the recurrent rhetorical underlining of Russia as a nuclear power, and finally the demonstrated will to employ force to the end of annexing Ukrainian territories.[182]

To sum up, although the aggregate power between Sweden and Russia varied insignificantly in the years preceding 2014, the years that followed the military reforms that began in 2008 marked a period of increase in Russian offensive power. Moreover, the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, signalled the Russian regime's increased will to use military force to reach political ends. The above findings suggest that those developments were clearly reflected in Swedish threat perception and that they can be linked to the ratification of the HNS agreement. Although the ratification document from 2016 did not explicitly refer to Russia, its reference to the 2015 defence bill, which had been dominated by the perception of Russia as a resurging threat, constitutes that connection. In that view, it is plausible that Sweden's HNS agreement with NATO was a product of a changed external threat. However, other perspectives must be tried before jumping to that conclusion. One interesting point, for example, is that the MOU with NATO was signed only five months after the annexation of Crimea. If the annexation was the main reason behind the signing of the MOU, the deal would have represented an uncommonly rapid crafting of such an agreement in response to a change in the external environment. The HNS agreement was in fact planned already in 2010.[183] That calls for the investigation of complementary explanations, something which is further investigated in the rest of the chapter.

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[180] Ibid., 22.
[181] Ibid.
[182] 'DN Debatt. "Sveriges militära samarbete med USA måste fördjupas"'.
[183] 'Regeringens proposition 2015/16:152 Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd', 11.

5.2 Eroding political support for military non-alignment

This section aims to investigate the background for Sweden entering the HNS agreement with NATO in light of the theoretical proposition of H_2. That would suggest Sweden signed the MOU with NATO in 2014 because of internal political circumstances rather than a change in external threat. More specifically, that the political and public support for maintaining an active and independent non-alignment policy had weakened. The section begins by mapping out the status of support for non-alignment in the years before 2014, before analysing how that stood in relation to the decision to enter the HNS agreement with NATO.

In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that about two thirds of the Swedish public supported a policy of neutrality in the 1990s. That support persisted in the early 2000s.[184] After 2004, surveys only sporadically asked about neutrality.[185] Instead, they began to ask whether people supported or opposed a Swedish membership in NATO, which to a reasonable extent can be viewed as a reflection of attitudes regarding neutrality. Public support for NATO membership remained weak around 20 percent in the years between 2004 and 2012.[186] In 2013 and 2014 support rose to around 30 percent. On the one hand, such a rise helps to entertain the theoretical suggestion that increased approval from the public would lower the threshold for aligning with NATO, considering that the rise coincided with the timing of the HNS agreement. The signing of the agreement did, after all, provoke some public debate.[187] However, there are two problems with that line of thinking. First, the 2013-2014 rise in opinion can largely be explained by Russia's increased aggressive posture, rendering public support to an intermediate variable between external threat and alignment.[188] Second, 30 percent support is still far from a majority, and one should therefore avoid reading too much into the 10 percentage points rise alone.

A more interesting point considering public support during the early 2000s and the years preceding 2014, is that a divide started to show between the voter segments of the political right and left. For example, in 2010, among voters of the SD, the Left Party, and the Green

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[184] Devine, 'Neutrality and the Development of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy', 344.

[185] This is stated by Devine in the article mentioned in the previous note. The article is from 2011, but efforts to find survey data mentioning neutrality explicitly after 2011 have not been successful either, except for one survey conducted in 2015, which is brought up in the next chapter. See Ydén, Berndtsson, and Petersson, 'Sweden and the Issue of NATO Membership'.

[186] Bjereld and Ydén, 'Skärpt försvarsdebatt NATO, Ryssland och försvarsutgifter', 5.

[187] Pallin, Research interview.

[188] Bjereld and Ydén, 'Skärpt försvarsdebatt NATO, Ryssland och försvarsutgifter', 3–5; Ydén, Berndtsson, and Petersson, 'Sweden and the Issue of NATO Membership', 6.

Party, only 9, 6 and 8 percent respectively supported the idea of a NATO membership.[189] Among voters of the Moderates, the Liberals, the Centre Party and the CD, some 28, 18, 24, and 20 percent respectively supported the idea. In 2014, the numbers had correspondingly changed to 22, 12, and 13 percent among the left-wing parties and 47, 50, 22, and 46 percent among the centre and right-wing parties.[190] In other words, differences in opinion persisted despite the increase in external threat. The centre-right parties should therefore be more inclined to make decisions leading to military alignment compared to the left-wing parties. Considering that Sweden had a centre-right government when the MOU was signed in 2014, it is worth exploring further the divide between the blocs on the political level.

The previous chapter concluded that the support for the Cold War neutrality had weakened among most Swedish political parties during the early 1990s, but not to an extent in which any of the political parties supported a full-blown alliance membership. That had changed in 1997 when the Liberals for the first time advocated Swedish NATO membership in their party manifesto, and the Moderates followed suit in 2002.[191] No such steps were taken by the Centre Party or the CD at the time, except for the former mentioning NATO sporadically as an important security actor in Europe with which Sweden should cooperate.[192] The mentioning of neutrality or military non-alignment was completely absent in the centre-right parties' manifestos since the dawn of the 2000s. The political left on the other hand, showed a continued steadfastness with regards to military non-alignment as an instrument in a credible foreign policy. In the SDs manifesto from 2002, the proclamation of the military non-alignment policy was presented in the following whole paragraph:

> Sweden is and shall be military non-aligned. Sweden's voice is strong and respected over the whole world. We are active in the UN, the EU and other international settings. Disarmament and human rights, international law and sustainable development, free and fair trade – those are and shall be cornerstones of Swedish foreign policy.[193]

That stance was repeated in several SD manifestos preceding 2014. In the one from 2013, the title of the foreign policy section read "Military Non-Alignment and an Active Foreign

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[189] Bjereld and Ydén, 'Skärpt försvarsdebatt NATO, Ryssland och försvarsutgifter', 6.
[190] Ibid.
[191] 'Folkpartiets Partiprogram 1997'; 'Moderaterna Valmanifest 2002'.
[192] 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest Riksdagsval 2002'; 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest 2006'; 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest 2010'; 'Centerpartiet Idéprogram 2013'; 'Kristdemokraterna Valmanifest 2002'; 'Kristdemokraterna Valmanifest 2006'; 'Kristdemokraterna Valmanifest 2010'.
[193] 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 2002'.

Policy".[194] Moreover, military non-alignment was not only mentioned as a tool for military security, but that it also "[…] makes us more able to be an instigator in the global disarmament efforts."[195] Those sentiments were echoed by the Left Party, only in stronger terms, as they were against any sub-alliance military cooperation with NATO as well. The party would even work actively towards the dissolvement of the alliance.[196] The Green Party stood firm on maintaining military non-alignment too, including staying out of NATO and avoiding any military cooperation with the EU.[197] This supports the notion that, during the early 2000s and the years preceding 2014, support for non-alignment had clearly eroded with the political centre and right while the left parties stood firm.

According to one of the interview respondents, the strict neutrality policy of the Cold War had been weakened in the early 1990s and arguably died in 2009 when Sweden made a unilateral solidarity declaration related to the Treaty of Lisbon from 2007.[198] The treaty's article 42 contained a solidarity clause, which committed participating states to aid each other in the event of armed aggression against a member state. The unilateral Swedish declaration went far in aligning militarily with the EU when it was formulated as part of a comprehensive defence bill in 2009:

> The Government supports the solidarity declaration that includes EU members and Norway and Iceland. Sweden will not be passive in the event of a disaster or attack against another member state or Nordic state. We expect that these countries would act in the same way towards Sweden. Sweden should have the ability to give and receive military support.[199]

The above declaration is a clear expression of increasing mutual expectations of providing or receiving support in the event of conflict. Arguably, the Swedish EU membership from 1995 had already represented a break with neutrality, but it had still been possible to hold that Sweden remained neutral in the basic sense of avoiding mutual military defence commitments. Such a policy of military non-alignment was therefore the most important remnant of the Cold War neutrality. The wording in the 2009 solidarity declaration clearly

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[194] 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 2013', 28.
[195] Ibid., 29.
[196] 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2002', 7–8; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2006', 18; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2010', 4; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2013', 19–29.
[197] 'Miljöpartiet Valmanifest 2002', 5; 'Miljörpartiet Partiprogram 2005', 36–37; 'Miljörpartiet Valmanifest 2010', 15; 'Miljöpartiet Partiprogram 2013', 35.
[198] Respondent 1, Research interview; Westberg, 'Security Without Non-Alignment', 434.
[199] 'Ett användbart försvar - försvarspolitisk proposition', 29.

contradicted that approach. Moreover, the defence bill in which the declaration was formulated also left open the question of whether Sweden would participate in NATO's Response Force (NRF), a multinational standing military unit established in 2003.[200] The bill was planned and proposed by a centre-right government led by the Moderates, which had been elected in 2006.[201] The SD, the Left Party, and the Green Party voted against the bill, partly arguing that it disrespected the Swedish stance on military non-alignment.[202]

> The Social Democrats regret that the government have left a long-lasting Swedish tradition of seeking broad political agreement in the security and defence policy. The Social Democrats also find it remarkable that the government in the bill not even once mentions Sweden's military non-alignment policy.[203]

The defence bill of 2009 therefore stands as a formal expression of the divide that had emerged between the political right and left after the 1990s. The right wanted more European and transatlantic military integration, while the left held on to the core of the non-alignment approach: no military alliances or mutual defence commitments. The latter persisted as a tradition with the political left, resembling its roots from the Cold War:

> Military non-alignment was still connected to the enabling of an active and independent foreign policy on issues like nuclear disarmament and humanitarian issues.[204]

Based on the above, it is reasonable to argue that the 2009 defence bill would not have looked like it did if the incumbent government at the time had consisted of left-wing parties. In that sense, the centre-right majority was a necessary condition for the bill to pass. That makes for an interesting comparison with the signing of the MOU with NATO in 2014, as the HNS agreement constituted an even stronger expression of alignment in terms of mutual expectations. There was still a centre-right government in Sweden at the time when the MOU was signed, and one could therefore speculate whether such an agreement would have been planned for and signed had the political left held office. But somewhat surprisingly, the SD eventually came to support the government's signing in 2014, while only the Left Party and

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[200] Ibid., 32.
[201] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Tidigare regeringsbildningar och statsministrar'.
[202] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Behandling av Försvarsutskottets Betänkande 2008/09:FöU10';
Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Försvarets inriktning - Försvarsutskottets Betänkande 2008/09:FöU10', 17–19.
[203] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Försvarets inriktning - Försvarsutskottets Betänkande 2008/09:FöU10', 91.
[204] Edström, Research interview.

the Green Party opposed it.[205] The SD's support, however, plausibly stemmed from the background of Russia's annexation of Crimea a few months earlier. It is uncertain whether the party would have supported the deal had that not happened:

> There were lively discussions about the HNS agreement, and many were critical. However, the Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 and against Ukraine in 2014 made us think that Russian aggression against Sweden in some scenario could no longer be ruled out.[206]

Furthermore, the SD was in government themselves when the agreement was ratified in 2016. The resurgence of a Russian threat was the main explanation provided by that government for why the HNS was necessary. The SD had thus taken yet another small step away from its traditional support for the military non-alignment policy, but they likely did so as a response to what was perceived as an increase in external threat. Still, the SD government equally sought to ascertain that the agreement would not substantially challenge the core of the military non-alignment policy: staying out of alliances.[207]

To sum up, the early 2000s and the years preceding the signing of the MOU with NATO in 2014 saw no dramatic changes in public support for military non-alignment, except for a one-time contraction from 2013-2014. On the political level, the approach was more or less abandoned by the centre-right parties while the left continuously supported it. It was therefore no surprise that the MOU on HNS with NATO was signed by a centre-right government in 2014. On the one hand, it is reasonable to think that the abandonment of the military non-alignment policy among the centre-right parties, which happened after the 1990s, was a necessary condition for the planning and signing of the MOU. On the other hand, the SD yet came to support the centre-right government's decision in 2014, and two years later ratified the agreement themselves when in office, casting doubt on the previous inference. The explanation for the SDs support, however, to some extent resides in the increase of external threat represented by Russia's annexation of Crimea, in turn questioning the significance of internal politics at all.

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[205] Holmström, 'Klart för Natotrupper på svensk mark'; Jonsson, 'Ledare: Beklämmande beröringsskräck'.
[206] Linde, Research interview.
[207] 'Regeringens proposition 2015/16:152 Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd', 31.

5.3   A functional expansion within the framework of PfP

This section aims at investigating the background for the HNS agreement in light of H_3. The previous chapter concluded that the PfP can be viewed as a critical juncture locking Sweden in on cooperation with NATO. This section builds on that and investigates whether the HNS agreement can be traced back to, and explained by, a self-reinforcing sequence of events connected to Sweden's engagement in the PfP. The point is again to guide the final analysis of the eventual decision to join NATO. If a path dependent link can be established between the PfP and the HNS agreement, the logical step in the next chapter with regards to H_3 is then to analyse whether the decision to apply for membership in 2022 can be linked to self-reinforcing features of the HNS agreement, essentially binding the 2022 decision to the PfP.

> Sweden has cooperated with NATO through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework since 1994. Sweden is an active partner state and our cooperation with NATO within the PfP has gradually developed and deepened.[208]

Those were the very first words of the introduction in the Swedish HNS ratification bill from 2016, early revealing a connection between the agreement and the PfP. When the PfP was established in 1994, one of its main purposes had been to enhance interoperability with regards to peacekeeping operations. There existed a wish to be more able to operate alongside NATO forces in UN mandated peacekeeping operations, which Sweden was already doing in the Balkans during the 1990s.[209] Sweden contributed with forces to the United Nations Protection Force in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNPROFOR) and joined the reflagging of that operation to the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) in 1995.[210] Furthermore, they joined the peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR) in 1999, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in 2003, and Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya in 2011.[211] Sweden was, in other words, an eager partaker in NATO-led operations, corresponding well with its initial motivation for utilising the PfP. The ratification of the HNS agreement from 2016 did, on the other hand, carry little resemblance to the conduct of such operations, given its emphasis on increased Russian aggression. That gives rise to the question of how a framework on peacekeeping

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[208] Ibid., 11.
[209] 'Regeringens skrivelse 1993/94:207', 6.
[210] NATO, 'Relations with Sweden'.
[211] Ibid.; Regeringskansliet, 'Sveriges väg in i Nato'.

enhancement ended up with the preparation to receive NATO forces on home territory in the event of crisis or conflict.

In 1995, NATO launched an initiative within the PfP framework called the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (PARP), aimed at providing a structured approach and concrete measures for improving interoperability in operations.[212] Sweden joined that initiative the same year, and over time PARP became a central pillar in developing Swedish military capabilities that could work together with NATO forces in international operations.[213] Moreover, the participation in operations did in itself both boost, and foster increased demand for, interoperability.[214] To fill that demand, training and exercises with forces from NATO countries were increasingly hosted on Swedish soil, but facilitating such activity was often marked by complicated and cumbersome bureaucracy. For example, before 2014, comprehensive and separate agreements had to be settled upon in advance of every single activity involving the hosting of NATO forces.[215] The main aspect Swedish decisionmakers had in mind when planning for an HNS agreement in 2010, therefore was to streamline bureaucratic processes connected to the hosting of exercises within the cooperative framework with NATO.[216] One of the interview respondents stressed that while coinciding with, and perhaps modified according to the events of Russian aggression in 2014, the HNS agreement should not be misperceived as an isolated reaction to those events. The informant further remarked that the HNS agreement constituted a natural expansion of ever tighter cooperation and demand for common exercises, within the framework of the PfP, and would likely have happened regardless of a change in Russian behaviour.[217] The Russo-Georgian War in 2008 had not been subject to much concern in Swedish threat perception at the time.[218] Moreover, the annexation of Crimea happened too late to have been an initial driver for the HNS agreement.

This points in the direction of a chronological chain of events starting with the PfP in 1994, enabling Sweden to join the PARP initiative in 1995, then further expanding cooperation within that framework on training, exercises and operations, eventually culminating in an agreement on HNS in 2014. That chain of events also carries self-reinforcing characteristics.

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[212] NATO, 'Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (PARP)'.
[213] 'Regeringens skrivelse 2008/09:137 - Sveriges samarbete inom NATO, EAPR och PFF', 14–16.
[214] Regeringskansliet, 'Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd', 13–15.
[215] Ibid., 14.
[216] Respondent 1, Research interview.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Edström, Research interview.

The participation in the PfP and PARP, together with the increased interoperability that followed, lowered the threshold for taking part in NATO-led operations, and the increased partaking in such operations in turn fostered increased demand for more coordination, training and exercises.[219] Ultimately, the evolved volume of such efforts demanded the functional expansion within the framework of PfP and PARP, to remove bureaucratic obstructions. This supports a claim that the HNS agreement was not only preconditioned, but also driven, by Sweden's cooperation with NATO within the PfP and PARP framework.

One could of course regard Sweden's prevalent interest in conducting peacekeeping operations as a driver of its own. However, without the interoperability gained with NATO forces from participating in the PfP and PARP, it is less likely that Sweden would have been able to partake in NATO-led operations at all. Furthermore, the increasing amount of training activities, combined with experiences gained in the Swedish armed forces after many years of operating alongside NATO forces, fostered adaptation in both operating procedures and equipment.[220] Enhancing interoperability with one actor in this way often comes at the cost of excluding the alternative of retaining ability to operate alone. The Swedish military's increased reliance on exchanging competence with NATO countries broke with its tradition of maintaining a strong and independently operated defence, which had always been a precondition for a credible military non-alignment policy.[221] Incremental cooperation with NATO had rendered the Swedish military more reliant on, and adapted to, the alliance. The HNS agreement stood as a testament to that fact:

> The ability to provide and receive military support is also a precondition for the Armed Forces to be able to carry out its mission, both independently and in joint effort with others, to defend Sweden and enhance Swedish security both nationally and internationally.[222]

To sum up, it has been argued in this section that the HNS agreement, and the inherently growing dependence on NATO it represented, is best understood as an extension of the successive cooperation that followed from Swedish participation in the PfP and PARP. However, while the findings quite convincingly point in the direction of path dependence, one should still be careful about claiming that participation in the PfP had deterministic

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[219] 'Regeringens skrivelse 2008/09:137 - Sveriges samarbete inom NATO, EAPR och PFF'.
[220] Inerview respondent 1.
[221] Ibid.
[222] 'Regeringens proposition 2015/16:152 Samförståndsavtal om värdlandsstöd', 13.

properties. It was an important driver, but the findings of the two previous sections in this chapter highlight the inherent complexity in the phenomenon at hand. First, the NATO-lenient centre-right government that held power both during the planning and signing of the HNS agreement certainly was no hinder to deepening ties with NATO within the existing cooperative framework. Second, although an increase in external threat could not account for the agreement's origin, it likely played a role in tilting public and political support in favour of it.

5.4   Chapter conclusion

The first section in this chapter found that there was a resurgence in threat from Russia antecedent to the HNS agreement between Sweden and NATO signed in 2014. The threat increase was represented by enhanced offensive capabilities combined with Russian aggressive behaviour. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was particularly important to Sweden's threat perception, evident from a defence bill enacted in 2015. The threat assessment from that bill was referred to as the main background for why Sweden needed an HNS agreement with NATO, when the deal was ratified in 2016. This clearly indicates alignment to have been driven by an increase in external threat. However, the HNS agreement had been planned between Sweden and NATO since 2010, motivating further explanation.

The second section found that the neutrality tradition had severely weakened in substance since the 1990s. This was most clearly expressed in a unilateral solidarity declaration from 2008, in which Sweden pledged itself not to remain passive in the event of attack against other EU countries. The use of the neutrality term had also been phased out, and replaced by military non-alignment, meaning that Sweden would stay out of formal alliances but not necessarily be neutral in the event of conflict. Moreover, there had emerged a clearer political divide, in which the left parties were more persisting in their support of non-alignment, while the centre-right parties had left the idea. Since the government between 2006-2014 consisted of parties from the centre-right wing, it is no surprise that Sweden opened for the planning of an HNS agreement already in 2010. However, when the same government signed the deal with NATO in 2014, SD supported it, likely due to the annexation of Crimea a few months earlier. This was accompanied by a decrease in public support for non-alignment around the same time. The heavy emphasis on threat in the SD government's own ratification of the agreement in 2016 underscores the significance of Russia's behaviour. Combined, all this indicates that the weakened support for military non-alignment among the centre-right parties

likely influenced the HNS agreement at an early stage. However, the impact external threat wielded on domestic politics in the final stage raises doubts about the latter's significance as an independent variable.

Finally, the picture is further complicated by the findings presented in the third section. They convincingly suggest that the need for an HNS agreement with NATO sprung out of a functional rationale linked to existing cooperation within the PfP framework. Sweden's already established path of cooperation with NATO constituted the underlying driver of the agreement. Still, the agreement cannot be ascertained as part of a deterministic path when seen in relation to the other findings. The weakened political support for military non-alignment with the centre-right parties likely enabled the early planning of the agreement, while the annexation of Crimea in 2014 likely functioned as the final trigger. In sum, this chapter has revealed the complex and intertwined relationship between the independent variables and alignment, offering important lessons to bring into the final analysis of what eventually made Sweden apply for NATO membership.

6 Applying for NATO membership in 2022

On 16th May 2022 Sweden formally made the decision to apply for NATO membership, and barely two months later signed the attachment protocol with the alliance's members.[223] It thus opted for the final step on the alignment continuum.[224] Moreover, the decision to apply for membership represented the abandonment of the country's centuries long tradition of military non-alignment. This chapter seeks to explain that decision on the background of the hypotheses presented in chapter two, while at the same time seeing the explanatory power of each proposition in relation to their performance in the previous chapters. First, that entails analysing to what extent there was an increased external threat against Sweden preceding its membership application, and how such an increase affected the outcome. Second, the chapter investigates whether the positive decision on membership was preconditioned by a weakening of the public and political support for the non-alignment tradition. Third, the decision is analysed as to what extent it can be understood as the final outcome in a path dependent process of increasing cooperation with NATO.

6.1 A new war of aggression in Europe

This section unfolds in two steps. First, a brief look is taken at the increasing Russian threat against Sweden in the years preceding 2022. Second, a closer examination is dedicated to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and to what extent that event culminated in a threat surge to which Sweden responded by aligning with NATO. The aim is to scrutinise Sweden's decision to apply for alliance membership in the light of H_1.

Russian offensive power had continued to develop in the years preceding 2022, in line with the rearmament and modernisation program that was described in the previous chapter. The program was concluded in 2020 and although not all goals were fulfilled within time, there had nevertheless been substantial improvements since 2008.[225] More capable weapons and platforms had been introduced across military branches, especially within the air force and the Strategic Rocket Forces, the latter operating Russia's nuclear weapons and strategic deterrence assets.[226] Furthermore, the ground forces had continued to be reorganised into units supposedly more suitable for mobility and offensive operations. A significant acquisition of, and upgrades to, the army's inventory of main battle tanks (MBTs) had also

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[223] Regeringskansliet, 'Sverige och Nato'.
[224] It is reminded that Sweden has not yet formally been incorporated into the alliance. Regardless of that, it is the intention of seeking alignment that is important to this analysis.
[225] *The Military Balance 2021*, 166–72.
[226] Ibid.

been ongoing for years.[227] MBTs are usually viewed as an essential component in the conduct of offensive ground operations, and as such symbolised the aspirations for what purpose the modernised Russian military was supposed to serve. Moreover, ambitions did not end with the rearmament program of 2008-2020. In 2017, a new program prompting further modernisation towards 2027 had been introduced.[228]

Sweden's own defence had, as portrayed in the previous chapter, undergone extensive build-down in size during the 2000s, with the abandonment of conscription and the introduction of a military structure made for small-scale operations. After 2014, renewed efforts were made to enhance national and territorial defence once again, and conscription was reintroduced in 2018, indicating attempts at internal balancing.[229] However, in 2022, Sweden's defence was nowhere close to the size it had been around the end of the Cold War, and was considerably smaller than Russian military deployments in the Western MD.[230] It also lacked several of the means needed to trustworthily defend against specific Russian offensive capabilities, such as long-range precision guided munitions.[231] Sweden's perceptions of the developments made with regards to Russian offensive capabilities can be clearly read in a defence bill that was enacted in 2020:

> Since the military reforms that were initiated in 2008, the Russian military capabilities have strengthened significantly: it has moved from the capability of handling a local war to being able of starting a regional one. Russian military flexibility has expanded as the number of units within the ground forces have increased with more than 50 percent between 2011 and 2019. At the same time, capabilities are enhanced across the other military branches. The enhanced potential is a result of modernised weapon systems, extensive exercise activities, and heightened readiness. […] The structure of the Russian armed forces also clearly indicates what type of conflict the Russian leadership thinks the country must prepare for.[232]

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[227] Ibid.
[228] *The Military Balance 2018*, 169–80.
[229] 'Försvarspolitisk inriktning - Sveriges försvar 2016-2020'; Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Totalförsvaret 2021–2025 Proposition 2020/21'.
[230] *The Military Balance 2021*, 147–50, 166–205; *The Military Balance 2022*, 151–53, 166–208; *The Military Balance 1989*.
[231] Holmström, Research interview; Edström, Research interview.
[232] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Totalförsvaret 2021–2025 Proposition 2020/21', 37.

It was also emphasised that many of the enhanced Russian capabilities were present and operated in Sweden's geographical proximity.[233] Russia's continued involvement in Eastern Ukraine, its proxy operations in Syria, combined with more intensive training and exercises, often conducted without prewarning, manifested the perception of an increased threat from the Swedish perspective.[234] The defence bill of 2020 proposed to mitigate that increase along two lines. First, to strengthen the Swedish territorial defence, resembling the preparation for an attack on the country as a whole, and not just preparation for smaller operations.[235] Second, to "as far as possible develop common operational planning with Denmark, Norway, Great Britain, the United States, and NATO."[236] In other words, a key answer to the perceived increase in threat was further NATO alignment. However, the bill did not on any account propose a full alliance membership, and as such the increase in threat was not strong enough to push Sweden all the way on the alignment continuum.

The next step is therefore to delve into the large-scale invasion of Ukraine that began 24th February 2022, specifically its implications for the balance of threat relationship between Sweden and Russia. The first point that should be made is that the invasion led to the rapid attrition of Russian land forces. In the attack on Ukraine, Russia had engaged around 75 percent of all its deployable ground formations, and already in the first few months following February, those forces had suffered enormous losses.[237] Even though the situation initially was characterised by the fog of war, it should be safe to assume that Swedish intelligence monitored the Russian war efforts closely. It is reasonable to think that Sweden had a decent overview of the status of Russia's deployments at the time at which the decision on NATO membership was made.[238] Since most of Russian forces capable of conducting offensive ground operations were pinned down in Ukraine, combined with the fact that they were suffering heavy losses with tremendous velocity, the interesting notion appears that Russia's potential to threaten Sweden had significantly decreased as a result of the war.

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[233] Ibid., 33–34.
[234] Ibid., 32–45.
[235] Ibid., 67.
[236] Ibid., 70.
[237] *The Military Balance 2023*, 156–57.
[238] Sweden also had access to intelligence sharing with NATO countries thanks to its partner status. Intelligence sharing was even intensified in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. See 'Ds 2022:7 Ett försämrat säkerhetspolitiskt läge - konsekvenser för Sverige', 29.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Sweden in many respects became safer, because Russia expended its forces early in the war, including those normally situated in proximity to the Nordic countries. It will be a long-term challenge for Russia to rebuild those forces.[239]

Another point that should be made in this context is that Russia's fighting in Ukraine revealed great operational weaknesses within its armed forces' considering logistics, the inadequate delivery of tactical intelligence, poor command and control systems, inability of carrying out multiple air sorties simultaneously, as well as regular displays of tactical and strategic incompetence.[240] In other words, Russia struggled with some of the most elementary aspects of larger scale conventional warfare. The combination of poor performance and serious war attrition pointed in the direction of a decrease in Russian offensive power preceding Sweden's NATO application. If viewed isolated, that decrease seem to contradict the logic of H_1, but there are three important things to keep in mind.

First, Russian naval and air forces remained mostly intact.[241] Second, there had been no harm to nuclear weapons and other unconventional assets, such as cyber capabilities and covert action capabilities.[242] On the contrary, the importance of both strategic deterrence forces and unconventional assets grew along with the depletion of land forces, in theory making the use of such capabilities more likely than before the war. When this is seen in relation to the heightened tensions between Russia and Western countries, the notion that Sweden was less threatened after the outbreak of war should be moderated.[243] It is also important to keep in mind that Russia had put its country on war footing, and Russia's land forces could be replenished and strengthened in the long term. Replenishment could also happen faster than expected given war time mobilisations.[244] To sum up, the immediate threat of an offensive territorial attack on Sweden had decreased after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, heightened tensions combined with remaining capabilities in all other domains arguably increased the threat. One of the informants put it like this:

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[239] Respondent 1, Research interview.
[240] *The Military Balance 2023*, 156–57; *Armed Conflict Survey 2022*, 103–16; 'Russia's Army Is in a Woeful State'; Gould-Davies, 'Putin's Strategic Failure'; 'Fokus 2023'.
[241] 'Fokus 2023'.
[242] Ibid.
[243] In the case of an escalation between Russia and Western countries, it is difficult to imagine how Sweden would remain completely unengaged, considering its geographical location.
[244] 'Fokus 2023'.

The Russians could not even conduct paradrops on the tactical level, or support its units in areas with land connections, or not even manage an amphibious assault against Odessa in the Black Sea despite the mere 350km distance from the naval base in Sevastopol. How could they then possibly pose a threat to Sweden when there are 700km from St. Petersburg to Stockholm? It was not the conventional capability aspect of threat that was important in this sense, it was Russia's demonstrated political will, and at the end of the day Russia possesses large amounts of nuclear weapons and long-range precision-guided munitions which Sweden is not able to deter on its own.[245]

The last sentence in the above quote leads the discussion on to the perception of aggressive intentions. The formal basis for Sweden's decision to apply for membership can be read in a government report that was compiled between 16th March and 13th May 2022.[246] In that report, the invasion of Ukraine was highlighted as a testament to Russia's will to employ military force to reach political ends.[247] In line with the arguments discussed above, the report also emphasised the contemporary depletion of Russian land forces, while at the same time recognising the persisting strength of Russian nuclear and unconventional capabilities.[248] Moreover, several of the informants pointed out that the way in which Russia employed force in the war was important for how it was perceived.

The first element that was important to our assessment of the situation was the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the way in which Russia conducted warfare, in direct violation of international humanitarian law, as for instance civilians were targeted, and that the attack happened against a neighbouring country which did not represent any kind of increased threat to Russia.[249]

The way in which Russia conducted warfare in its invasion of Ukraine made an impact. The Russians kept violating international humanitarian law, frequently firing at Red Cross personnel and civilians. I think this brutality expressed a Russian willingness to go further in their aggressive behaviour than many could have imagined.[250]

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[245] Edström, Research interview.
[246] 'Ds 2022:7 Ett försämrat säkerhetspolitiskt läge - konsekvenser för Sverige'.
[247] Ibid., 10.
[248] Ibid., 9–14.
[249] Linde, Research interview.
[250] Holmström, Research interview.

The demonstrated Russian will to go surprisingly far in its use of military force was in this sense critical to Swedish threat perception. Observing that Russia was not afraid to unprovokedly attack a neighbouring country and bomb major cities full of civilians without hesitation, created reasonable uncertainty about whether it in some unforeseen scenario would employ force on other countries that were not under protection of mutual defence guarantees as well.[251] Although the use of violence through conventional land forces in such a scenario seemed less likely after attrition in Ukraine, there were still a range of sea, air and nuclear capabilities Russia could utilise. The recognition that the employment of such capabilities suddenly no longer appeared unrealistic, given Russia's demonstrated risk willingness, was therefore of the essence. In sum, the findings presented in this section suggest that an increase in threat, primarily driven by Russia's display of aggressive behaviour, explains the Swedish government's conclusion that the country needed guarantees of external support.

However, while the presented evidence speaks convincingly in favour of that conclusion so far, it is important to keep in mind some important lessons from the two previous chapters. For example, the alignment Sweden conducted towards NATO in 1994 cannot be explained by external threat at all. Moreover, the HNS agreement in 2014 was only partly driven by external threat at the very end of its coming into being, as it initially had been planned as an extension within the PfP framework. For H_1 to hold in light of the evidence presented in this section, it must therefore be possible to exclude that the decision in 2022 can be convincingly explained by a further erosion in domestic support for military non-alignment or that membership had been rendered the most functional alternative due to already existing cooperation with NATO. This is explored in the next two sections.

6.2   Turning the public support

The aim of this section is to investigate Sweden's decision to apply for alliance membership in the light of H_2. First, the section describes the status of support at the political level in the time period between 2014 and 2022. Second, it explores trends in public support within the same time span. Finally, a discussion is provided with regards to how weakened support for military non-alignment can be linked to the decision on NATO membership in May 2022.

The previous chapter found that support at the political level had withered between the end of the Cold War and 2014. This was expressed in the Liberals' and the Moderates' outright

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[251] It is relevant to remark that Ukraine also held EOP-status with NATO. It was not enough to deter an attack.

support for membership since the late 1990s and early 2000s, as well as the absence of any references to a policy of military non-alignment in the manifestos of the Centre Party and the CD. In 2014, the CD also came to underline the negative trend in European security as a result of the developments in Ukraine.[252] Consequently, they suggested an "open-ended public investigation about pros and cons with a Swedish NATO membership."[253] They also supported the application for membership in 2022.[254] The Centre Party officially pushed for full membership from 2018 and onwards.[255] None of these parties had mentioned the non-alignment tradition in their manifestos for two decades.

The exception from this was the ever-growing Sweden Democrats, a populist right-wing party, which supported existing cooperation with NATO on the one hand, but on the other supported a policy of military non-alignment to the extent of staying out of alliances.[256] On the political left, military non-alignment was still the preferred direction, even though signs of gradual erosion were starting to show with the SD. In 2014, their policy was: "Sweden's security is built through an active foreign policy and military non-alignment."[257] In 2018, this had evolved to:

> Sweden's policy of military non-alignment serves us well, and we shall not pursue NATO membership. But we must continue step-by-step to strengthen our military capability – and deepen our military cooperation with others[258]

This balancing between maintaining military non-alignment on the one hand, and deepening cooperation on host nation support and interoperability on the other, came to be known as the Hultqvist Doctrine.[259] Peter Hultqvist was defence minister in all SD led governments from 2014 to 2022, and his balanced approach towards NATO was signalled early on by his strong support for the HNS agreement. He was, however, one of the last in the SD leadership to turn around in the membership question in 2022.[260] NATO membership meant the full abandonment of the military non-alignment tradition for the SD:

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[252] 'Kristdemokraterna Valmanifest 2014', 20.
[253] Ibid., 21.
[254] 'Kristdemokraterna Valmanifest 2022'.
[255] 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest - Riksdagsval 2018'; 'Centerpartiet Valmanifest 2022'.
[256] 'Sverigedemokraterna Valmanifest 2018', 17.
[257] 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 2014', 44.
[258] 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 2018', 32.
[259] Ydén, 'Hultqvistdoktrinens uppgång och fall? Svensk försvarsopinion i en osäker tid', 371–72.
[260] 'Så gick det till när Sverige vände om NATO'.

> The policy of military non-alignment served Sweden well for a long time. But now it is necessary with even more cooperation, with security guarantees, to secure our peace and freedom. Therefore, we want Sweden to join NATO.[261]

The Green Party and the Left Party remained the firmest supporters of military non-alignment, and unlike the SD, none of them wanted to leave that approach after Russia's invasion of Ukraine either.[262] The Left Party even held it imperative to "[…] reverse the dependence of NATO. We shall resign from the agreement on host nation support and restore a credible policy of military non-alignment."[263] To sum up, the political support for maintaining a military non-alignment policy had weakened before 2022 This was expressed in the Centre Party's support for NATO membership, the CD's wish for a public investigation, and the SD's increased emphasis on the importance of military support from others. The Green Party and the Left Party remained unchanged in their views. The next element is then to review the status of public opinion.

The previous chapters found that public support stood firm after the Cold War and into the early 2000s, before seeing a slight decrease after 2014. In 2015, 60 percent of Swedes stated that they supported a policy of military non-alignment, aiming at neutrality in war, a figure which in 2017 had fallen to 49 percent.[264] In the 1990s and early 2000s the figure had been around 70 percent.[265] Those numbers depict a gradual overall decrease in support for such a policy. However, between 2014 and 2022, there had been only SD led governments, backed by the Greens and the Left Party, and thus no elected majority for abandoning the military non-alignment policy existed during those years.[266] Had there been a majority of centre and right-wing parties, a push for full membership would not necessarily have been more likely, because the half of the Swedish population that still supported military non-alignment did not always mirror party affiliations.[267] That means a push for membership would have entailed the unnecessary risk of tarnishing popularity for any Swedish party. In total, the findings presented so far suggest there had been an overall decrease in both political and public support for the military non-alignment policy, although not dramatic enough in any respect to

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[261] 'Socialdemokraterna Valmanifest 2022', 28; 'Så gick det till när Sverige vände om NATO'.
[262] 'Miljöpartiet Valmanifest 2014'; 'Miljöpartiet Valmanifest 2018'; 'Miljöpartiet Valmanifest 2022';
'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2014'; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2018'; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2022'.
[263] 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2018', 21; 'Vänsterpartiet Valmanifest 2022', 15.
[264] Ydén, Berndtsson, and Petersson, 'Sweden and the Issue of NATO Membership', 7.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Tidigare regeringsbildningar och statsministrar'.
[267] Ydén, 'Hultqvistdoktrinens uppgång och fall? Svensk försvarsopinion i en osäker tid', 381.

incentivise a domestic debate on NATO membership before 2022. The question then remains what role the public and political support played in the three-month period after the Russian invasion began in February until the decision on membership was made in May.

In the autumn of 2021, public opinion remained stable, with one third of Swedes supporting a NATO membership, a third being against, and a third uncertain.[268] That changed in the aftermath of the Russian invasion to around half of the population supporting full membership.[269] This indicates that an external variation triggered a sudden change in the public opinion, similar to the change that took place in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea.[270] That weakens the view of public support as an internal force opposing realist calculations of the external environment. That mechanism was also emphasised by one of the informants:

> Support had gradually been moving more in favour of membership over the years, but for the public opinion the invasion certainly had great impact. Moreover, the invasion only constituted a slight change in threat for Sweden and other European countries in the sense that there was an increased risk of escalation, but I think the public opinion perceived the invasion as a much more dramatic change in threat. That perception might in turn have affected political decisionmakers.[271]

Corresponding with the findings of the two previous chapters, political public opinion thus appears more like an intermediate variable through which external threat wields its impact on policy decisions. The following statement from one of the informants reflects that view:

> It was a difficult decision to make. At the government level we knew about and discussed Russian troop movements long time in advance of the invasion, and we were also continuously updated after the war broke out. It thus became a matter of informing party members about our assessment of the dramatic change in Russian risk willingness. We had a lot of party meetings to that end. All party districts received someone from the party leadership who presented arguments and answered questions.

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[268] Ibid., 379.
[269] Ibid., 382.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Pallin, Research interview.

The military non-alignment policy was important to many, especially older party affiliates, and had become sort of an identity. I would almost go as far as to say that the decision to leave that policy was a sad affair to some of those party members. However, there was eventually major support for the approach advocated by the leadership. I think the extensive exposure to media coverage from the battlefield in Ukraine, which revealed the brutality of Russia's way of conducting war, affected how people thought about this.[272]

There are two interesting notions to draw from that statement. First, it indicates that public opinion, at least in the form of voters affiliated with the party, did matter in the government's considerations, especially given the sizable efforts made to inform all local party districts. Second, it suggests that public opinion was not only affected by changed threat perceptions, but also by the party leadership actively seeking to influence opinions in favour of its desired approach. This paints a picture of a complex dynamic in which it is difficult to distinguish whether public opinion influenced the political leadership or the other way around. What is fairly safe to argue though, is that both the political leadership and the public opinion were affected by the perceived change in external threat, ultimately lending more support in favour of H_1 than H_2. That does not mean domestic public and political support for military non-alignment was insignificant. On the contrary, the findings of the two previous chapters as well as this chapter, suggest that the support for such a policy has acted as a counterweight to continuous alignment with NATO. The careful considerations made by the SD leadership of how abandonment of the policy would be received by party affiliates serves as an important testaments to that. However, the change in support that was necessary for a majority to accept both the HNS agreement and the decision on NATO membership were both likely driven by external threat. That strengthens H_1 at the expense of H_2 without writing off entirely the existence of the mechanisms postulated by H_2. It becomes a matter of leverage, and in this case the external force of threat overwhelmed the internal forces resisting further alignment.

That inference triggers the question of what was special about the increased threat in 2022, and why it affected both the political leadership and the public opinion so dramatically. Sweden had after all faced deceptively similar threat increases before, both during periods of high tensions during the Cold War and with Russia's aggressions against Georgia in 2008 and

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[272] Linde, Research interview.

Ukraine in 2014. When confronted with this question, all of the informants pointed to the notion that Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 represented an unprovoked territorial aggression on a scale not seen since the Second World War.[273] 'Unprovoked' constitutes a keyword in this context, as it points to the importance of intentions. The threat Sweden faced against the Soviet Union was immense in terms of offensive power, but fear of a grand scale Soviet invasion of Europe was mostly theoretical, as no such intentions could be deducted based on real major events. The threat increase that happened gradually after 2008 and 2014, culminating in the shock of 2022 expressed both an initial bolstering of Russian offensive power, but also eventually revealed its inherent weaknesses. More importantly therefore, the invasion of Ukraine signified a live demonstration of Russia's unpredictable and aggressive behaviour.

Combined with the other findings presented in this chapter regarding the effect that Russia's way of waging war had on the Swedish public, one is left with the picture of aggressive behaviour constituting the most impactful component of threat. Additionally, the findings propose a mechanism behind that relationship, indicating that aggressive intentions expressed in brutal action catches the attention of domestic public opinion and politics to a larger extent than technical assessments of offensive capabilities. In that way, observations of aggressive behaviour become more important than power and rational calculations, especially to democracies, because decisionmakers must consider the views of the public.

To briefly summarise this section, both public and political support for the military non-alignment tradition had continued to erode in the years between 2014 and 2022. Moreover, the support tilted to a majority in favour of leaving the tradition, both at the political level and in the public, after Russia invaded Ukraine. The problem is that this gradual and eventually sudden decrease in support largely can be explained by the changed perception of Russia as an aggressive state, weakening H_2 at the benefit of H_1. The discussion also led to important lessons regarding the theoretical framework behind H_1, as the findings point in the direction of aggressive behaviour, and the perceptions of such behaviour, as the superior component of threat. Finally, H_1 stands yet to be challenged by H_3, which is done in the next section.

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[273] Interview respondent 1-5.

6.3 The final step on a long path

This section investigates whether Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership can be explained as the result of a self-reinforcing sequence, in which cooperation with NATO has expanded successively since 1994. The two previous chapters concluded that the PfP can be viewed as a critical juncture locking Sweden in on future cooperation with NATO, which was an important driver for the HNS agreement that was signed in 2014. The following analysis builds on that to explore the possibility of linking the membership decision of 2022 to such pre-existing cooperation with NATO.

> I do not see the Russian invasion of Ukraine as an explicit event that alone caused Sweden to apply for NATO membership. Rather I consider it to be the outcome of a long process through which Sweden has become more and more integrated to NATO, a process starting with the Partnership for Peace in 1994. Membership was only a natural last step in that process.[274]

Such goes a rather straightforward answer to the question of why Sweden decided to join NATO from one of the interview respondents. In connection to the Wales Summit in 2014, Sweden shortly after became a so-called Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP) of NATO, which was launched in extension of something labelled the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII).[275] This program was intended for existing partner states that wanted to be even more integrated with the alliance, enabling them to operate with NATO forces according to NATO standards, rules, procedures, and using similar equipment.[276] Sweden had access to this through its existing partnership, rooting it within the framework of PfP. The EOP can also be seen in relation to the HNS agreement, which facilitated activities necessary for increasing interoperability in accordance with the PII, such as common exercises. In sum, Sweden's established cooperation and integration with NATO was already substantial before it decided to apply for full membership in 2022.

The probe is therefore to look for mechanisms through which that existing cooperation might have influenced the decision to apply for membership. If one looks beyond the heavy focus on external threat when scrutinising the Swedish government report that constituted much of

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[274] Respondent 1, Research interview.
[275] NATO, 'Relations with Sweden'.
[276] Ibid.

the parliament and government's basis for the decision, several references can be found to pre-existing cooperation:

> Since 2014, Sweden has deepened its cooperation on security and defence with around twenty countries by entering different forms of understandings and agreements. Cooperation on defence is necessary to strengthen Sweden's military capability in order to be able to counter an armed attack.[277]

> The cooperation with NATO is central to be able to develop the Armed Forces' capabilities, both with regards to national defence and out-of-area operations. Among our international cooperative arrangements on defence, it is primarily cooperation with NATO that enhances the Armed Forces' ability to meet a qualified adversary and operate together with other states to the end of fighting an armed attack.[278]

As evident from the first extraction, Sweden had developed defence cooperation with a range of countries since 2014, including the Nordic countries through NORDEFCO and bilateral arrangements with Finland.[279] Moreover, cooperation was established with France through the European Intervention Initiative (E12), Poland within the Framework Agreement, Britain through the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), Germany within the Framework Nation Concept (FNC), the United States through a Statement of Intent (SoI), as well as the EU within the CFSP.[280] However, all these arrangements filled only small and supplementary roles. The second extraction above clearly indicates that NATO constituted the most important relationship with regards to both territorial defence and international operations. The same acknowledgement can be found in a white paper from 2020, meaning that this was the official view even before the invasion of Ukraine.[281] It is interesting to see that notion in relation to the last sentence in the first of the two above quotes, which expresses how cooperation on defence with other countries had become a necessity for developing a credible defence. Since NATO constituted the only substantial actor regarding such defence cooperation, the credibility and functioning of Swedish defence was in other words conditioned on the existing cooperation with NATO. That suggests Sweden's alternatives to further alignment

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[277] 'Ds 2022:7 Ett försämrat säkerhetspolitiskt läge - konsekvenser för Sverige', 23.
[278] Ibid., 29.
[279] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Internationella försvarssamarbeten Skrivelse 2020/21'.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid., 18.

with NATO in 2022 were seriously confined as a result of its deep integration with the alliance.

One of the most viable alternatives to NATO had been the deepening of Sweden's already close alignment with Finland, but that option withered the moment it became evident that Finland would seek NATO membership.[282] The significance of Finland's course of action should thus not be underestimated when trying to understand Sweden's decision to apply for membership. Furthermore, as all other countries geographically proximate to Sweden were NATO allies, the other theoretical alternative would have been to stay military non-aligned and boost national defence. However, as elaborated on in section 6.1, the Swedish military was not in a condition corresponding to the requirements of such an approach. Rebuilding the Swedish military to its independent strength from the Cold War era would have taken years. Staying military non-aligned by internal balancing was as such not an advantageous option when faced with the more acute danger of an increasingly aggressive adversary. In that sense, the dependent and slender condition of the Swedish defence undermined the alternative of continued non-alignment. That acknowledgement motivates an inquiry into whether Swedish military's dependence was a result of a self-reinforcing process related to incremental NATO cooperation.

It would be unbalanced to blame Swedish military downsizing during the 2000s on its cooperation with NATO, considering that almost all European countries cut back on their militaries in the same period.[283] On the other hand, the ever-increasing cooperation on host nation support and interoperability, from a functional perspective, made the option of going back to an independent national defence less attractive. In a counterfactual thought experiment, one could imagine that Sweden already in 2008 and 2014 had the alternative to respond to signs of increasing Russian threat by reviving the old policy that rested almost entirely on a strong national defence. Instead, as the previous chapter showed, Sweden was by that time already engaged in cooperation that opened for support from NATO in a potential conflict. Strengthening that existing cooperation proved easier than going back and revive a policy of operational independence. Sweden did admittedly boost national defence after 2014, as also explained in section 6.1, but that was done parallel to expectations that it would not fight a conflict alone, expressed in agreements like the one on HNS.[284] In other

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[282] Linde, Research interview.
[283] *The Military Balance 2000-2013.*
[284] Riksdagsförvaltningen, 'Totalförsvaret 2021–2025 Proposition 2020/21', 70.

words, the strive between 2014 and 2022 was not to restore an independently credible national defence, but rather in practice to strengthen national capabilities in complementation to existing interoperability with NATO. In the government report from March-May 2022, direct reference is made to the HNS agreement:

> Sweden's cooperation with NATO, especially through operations and exercises, has contributed to strengthen the ability to provide and receive military support in accordance with our doctrine. The HNS agreement between Sweden and NATO from 2016 has been a prerequisite to that end.[285]

This stands as an example of how the ever-increasing cooperation with the alliance gradually made the alternative of maintaining or revitalising military non-alignment less effective. The mechanism behind this can be viewed as self-reinforcing, simply because the more Sweden built its defence on operating with, and receiving support from, NATO, the greater the cost and time of restructuring and refinancing it for the purpose of national and operational independence. In this view, Sweden was on a way towards increased NATO alignment, and perhaps even membership, regardless of the invasion of Ukraine. All other things equal, that lends support in favour of H_3. However, given the evidence provided on the significance of external threat at the beginning of this chapter, it is not possible to conclude that path dependent cooperation provides a sufficient explanation to the membership decision. This was also echoed by one of the informants:

> In the long term, membership could have been a possibility without an increased threat perception, but in 2022 it was still necessary with a powerful external stimulus.[286]

The self-reinforcing nature of pre-existing cooperation can only explain why NATO was the most viable alternative to Sweden at the particular point in time at which an external threat precipitously came to be perceived as real. If Sweden had not entered the PfP in 1994 and engaged in all the following cooperation within that framework, the alternative of keeping or reviving a credible and independent national defence would have been more equally incentivised as to that of deepened NATO alignment. That also draws the limits of the path dependence explanation, because even though Sweden could have had more alternatives in the hypothetical absence of pre-existing cooperation with NATO, it would not exclude the

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[285] 'Ds 2022:7 Ett försämrat säkerhetspolitiskt läge - konsekvenser för Sverige', 29.
[286] Pallin, Research interview.

possibility that the response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine still would have been pursuance of alliance membership. That renders H$_3$ to explain that Sweden, as a result of its pre-existing cooperation with NATO, was much likelier to opt for membership compared to other alternatives, but it cannot independently explain Sweden's decision. The curious question of whether self-reinforcing cooperation with NATO eventually would have driven Sweden into full membership without an increase in external threat remains an open one.

6.4   Alternative perspectives

Before concluding this chapter, two additional perspectives that have not been covered by the analysis so far should briefly be mentioned. They were voiced by some of the informants, in response to the last standard question of the interview guide, which encouraged them to raise possible alternatives to the perspectives that had been covered by the other questions. The purpose of mentioning them in the following is not to provide a comprehensive investigation of their propositions, as that would exceed the initial scope from which this thesis has its limits. The reason is rather to ensure the transparency of collected data that could be relevant for future attempts to challenge the inferences produced in the foregoing sections and chapters. First, one of the respondents emphasised the significance of individuals, their convictions, and their personal relations:

> It might have mattered that Magdalena Andersson was prime minister and not her predecessor from the same party, both because she was ten years younger and her non-emotional attitude to NATO, but perhaps more importantly because she enjoyed good personal relations with the other Nordic social democratic prime ministers, all in favour of Sweden joining NATO.[287]

The most important of those relationships was arguably the one with Sanna Marin, given the pivotal role Finland's decisiveness on NATO membership played for Sweden's available alignment alternatives. Analysing the research question at this individual level certainly carries the potential to produce interesting results that could cast critical light on the inferences made within the perspectives of this thesis.

The second alternative perspective that was accentuated, pointed to the interests of Swedish defence industry with regards to domestic politics and neutrality. Given the industry's considerable size, and its traditional position as the main supplier of equipment and munitions

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[287] Holmström, Research interview.

to the Swedish military, it had always been in its interest that Sweden avoided any military alignment that would entail the introduction of competition from foreign suppliers.[288] That perspective was raised at the theory formulation stage in chapter two, but was chosen not be pursued within the scope of this thesis. Instead, the policy of neutrality and military non-alignment has been treated as an embedded tradition, and as such an interest in itself to those identifying with that tradition. However, as pointed to in chapter two, detailed inquires of certain economically oriented interest groups, such as the defence industry, certainly carries the potential to add value to the understanding of Swedish neutrality.

6.5   Chapter conclusion

Sweden's decision to apply for membership constituted the final step on the alignment continuum. The first section in this chapter found that the decision to largely had been motivated by a change in external threat. Between 2014 and 2022, Russia had continuously been rearming offensive capabilities, a development recognised in Sweden's threat perception. However, the impression of those capabilities changed drastically after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, when observing the demonstrated limits of Russia's offensive land power. Rather, it was the perception of Russia's risk willingness that was decisive to Sweden's action. Combined with the acknowledgement that Russian sea, air, nuclear, cyber, and covert capabilities remained intact, Sweden perceived a substantial increase in external threat. The findings clearly link that change in perception to the decision on membership, lending strong support in favour of H_1.

The period between 2014-2022 also saw a gradual weakening of both political and public support for the military non-alignment policy in Sweden. However, the findings suggest that the perception of a rearmed and more aggressive Russia was the main catalyst for that decrease in support. The display of aggressive behaviour in Ukraine, represented both by the unprovoked attack and the conduct of warfare in violation with humanitarian law, was a clear influencer of Swedish politicians and the public opinion. This means that the proposed independent variable of H_2 is seen better as an intermediate variable between the explaining variable of H_1 and the outcome. Essentially, that weakens H_2 relative to H_1, but it also provides a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms in play: aggressive behaviour appears as the most important component of perceived threat, because that is what captures best the attention of the public, to which democratically elected decisionmakers must adapt.

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[288] Edström, Research interview.

The third section found that Sweden's pre-existing cooperation with NATO made its decision to join the alliance considerably more likely, compared to the alternative of continued military non-alignment. In other words, it constitutes an important underlying explanation, but it cannot singlehandedly explain the timing of the decision in 2022. The overall findings suggest that Sweden was already on a path of ever-increasing alignment, also evident from the two previous subcases. Membership could plausibly have been the long-term outcome of that path, even without an external stimulus, but it would in that case have taken more time. Still, the findings are not strong enough to make that claim with certainty.

7 Conclusion

On 16th May 2022, Sweden made a historical move when it applied for membership in NATO. The decision concluded a period of almost thirty years during which the ties with the alliance had grown ever stronger. Sweden first entered a formal partnership with NATO in 1994, and thereafter participated in almost every NATO-led military operation abroad. Sweden also took part in a range of cooperative initiatives that followed within the partnership framework, aimed at improving interoperability with NATO forces. In 2014, Sweden signed an extensive agreement on Host Nation Support (HNS) with the alliance, easing the practical preparations for receiving and providing military assistance in the event of conflict. This gradual expansion kept pushing the limits of Sweden's centuries-long tradition of military non-alignment, but without betraying its bottom line: avoiding alliance membership and mutual security guarantees. That tradition was, however, ultimately abandoned with the decision in May 2022. This thesis set out to explore that important decision, departing with the research question: *What can explain Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership in 2022?*

Asking this question has been based on two primary motivations. First, to explore recent empirical data on a case of alliance formation, and thus contribute to the scholarly debate on that phenomenon in international relations. Second, to improve the understanding of different perspectives within the local debate on Swedish NATO relations and military non-alignment. The question was answered by examining three hypotheses, deducted and formulated in chapter two. The hypotheses were evaluated by employing a combination of the congruence method and process tracing, as explained in chapter three. In practice, this involved analysing two previous subcases in which Sweden had made formal decisions on NATO alignment: the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 and the HNS agreement in 2014. The results from those subcases then formed a comparative basis aiding the final analysis of the decision to apply for full membership in 2022. These analytical steps were conducted in chapter four to six. The main findings from the analysis are presented in the following, before outlining their implications.

7.1 Main findings

The analysis found the strongest empirical support for H_1 and H_3. The former proposed that Sweden applied for NATO membership because of an increase in the country's perception of external threat. After 2008, Sweden's perception of Russia as a threat slowly started to get worse. This change was grounded both in Russia's aggression against Georgia and the comprehensive Russian rearmament and modernisation program that followed shortly after and continued into the next decade. However, it was the annexation of Crimea in 2014 that functioned as a trigger to changed perceptions. That change partly influenced Sweden's decision to enter an HNS agreement with NATO in 2014. The next shock to threat perceptions then came with the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. On the one hand, Russian forces suffered heavy losses during the first weeks of war, and the fighting also revealed great operational weaknesses within those forces. This contributed to easing Sweden's existing perceptions of the Russian threat in some areas, for instance amphibious assaults across the Baltic Sea. On the other hand, Russian sea, air, nuclear, cyber, and covert capabilities remained intact. The demonstrated will to take huge risks in the pursuance of political ends in Ukraine made it look more plausible that Russia would also use such capabilities in a scenario of escalation. Sweden, therefore, ended up perceiving Russia as a significantly greater threat than before, despite the attrition and operational limits observed in the Ukraine theatre. The findings in the analysis link that dramatic shift in threat perception to the decision to apply for NATO membership, constituting support for H_1.

However, the significance of threat does not offer a complete explanation. The study of the first subcase showed how Sweden's first official alignment towards NATO in 1994 happened in direct contradiction with the balance of threat theory. Moreover, the second subcase analysis demonstrated how the decision to enter an HNS agreement with NATO in 2014 was motivated not only by threat but equally much by an underlying driver of path dependence. Cooperative arrangements within the PfP framework had incentivised the planning of an HNS agreement years before there were any substantial shifts in threat perception. The ever-increasing cooperation with the alliance, of which the HNS agreement was an important component, was in chapter six found to eventually have left Sweden with few alternatives but further NATO alignment. Consequently, when the threat shock of 2022 came, Sweden's pre-existing cooperation made the decision to join NATO the most likely response. To sum up, the alignment decision in 1994, a critical juncture which cannot be explained by threat, set Sweden on a path of self-reinforcing cooperation with NATO, in turn making a positive

decision on membership increasingly likely over time. This formed an important condition for Sweden's decision in 2022, and as such offers a worthy complement to the threat explanation. Whether Sweden eventually would have joined NATO without a change in external threat cannot be concluded. Neither can it be ascertained whether the threat shock in 2022 would have been sufficient to provoke a Swedish NATO entry had there not existed any previous alignment towards the alliance. The main answer to the research question in this thesis shall therefore be limited to the following: Sweden applied for NATO membership in 2022 because it perceived Russia as an increased threat and had few other alternatives due to its dependence on the alliance, incrementally magnified since entering the PfP in 1994.

H_2 proposed that a decline in domestic support for neutrality and military non-alignment could explain Sweden's decision. The findings suggest that the non-alignment tradition consistently functioned as an important domestic political constraint with regard to decisions on further NATO alignment. Moreover, a decline in support for that tradition took place antecedent to all three alignment decisions analysed in chapters three to six, descriptively corresponding with H_2. However, the results of each analysis repeatedly showed how those declines to a large extent followed from external stimulus. The fall of the bipolar world order in 1991 rendered Sweden's bloc independent neutrality from the Cold War irrelevant, motivating the policy's revision two years before entering the PfP. Moreover, the decline in support for non-alignment necessary to enter into the HNS agreement in 2014 was found to most likely have been a result of observing Russia's annexation of Crimea. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine likewise drove support for military non-alignment to a record low in 2022. In sum, the findings indicate that the independent variable proposed by H_2 fits better as an intermediate variable through which external stimulus, including threat, worked some of its impact on the alignment decision. That principally rejects H_2.

Nevertheless, the findings on which H_2 is rejected provide a more substantive understanding of Sweden's response to external threat. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union had been a much bigger threat to Sweden in terms of offensive power compared to Russia in 2014 and 2022. Still, support for neutrality was unshakable in that period. What eventually proved to be essential for turning domestic support was the perception of unprovoked aggressive behaviour from a proximate state. Russia convincingly demonstrated such unprecedented behaviour in 2014 and left no doubts about its intentions in 2022. Those actions caught the attention of both Swedish politicians and the public in a way that a new missile capability or battle tank never could.

7.2 Summary

	Alignment towards NATO		
Hypothesis	1994 – The Partnership for Peace	2014 – Host Nation Support Agreement	2022 – Applying for NATO membership
H_1: Sweden applied for NATO membership as a response to a perceived increase in external threat.	Threat perception decreased severely preceding alignment decision, directly contradicting the theoretical logic underpinning H_1.	Threat perception increased preceding alignment and likely influenced the decision at a late point, but this cannot explain why the agreement had been planned long before the threat increase that came with the annexation of Crimea in 2014.	Threat perception increased preceding alignment, most critically in terms of Russia's aggressive behaviour, providing the strongest explanation to the membership decision. The complementary explanation of H_3, however, creates uncertainty about external threat as sufficient cause.
H_2: Sweden applied for NATO membership because of a gradual or rapid weakening in the political and public support for neutrality and military non-alignment.	Weakening in support opened for alignment decision, but the adjustment was driven by post-Cold War structural changes and not internal factors.	Weakening in support enabled alignment, but the critical portion of that weakening was likely driven by change in threat perception. Appears as intermediate variable between threat and alignment.	Weakening in support enabled alignment, but threat perception was also this time a catalyst for the decisive changes in that support. Military non-alignment tradition wielded constraining effect but proved impressionable to worsened threat perception of adversary's aggressive behaviour, favouring H_1.
H_3: Sweden applied for NATO membership because partnership with NATO in 1994 had led Sweden on a path that fostered incremental adaptation to the alliance and excluded viable alternatives to further alignment.	Sweden aligned with NATO because almost all other European non-NATO members did so, leaving few other viable alignment alternatives. Appears as a critical juncture contradicting dominating expectations that the demise of threat after the Cold War would reduce alignment incentives.	Self-reinforcing expansion of existing cooperation was an important driver for the alignment decision, but the additional influence of threat and domestic politics blocks a conclusion of deterministic path dependence.	Pre-existing cooperation with NATO made a positive decision on membership more likely in 2022 because it over time had incremented Swedish defence's dependence on such cooperation, which incentivised further NATO alignment in response to Russian aggression rather than restoring independent national defence.

Table 2 – Summary of main findings

7.3 Implications

The findings presented in this thesis carry some potential theoretical implications, answering the primary motivation for investigating the Swedish case: to contribute to the wider debate on alliance formation in international relations. First, the study of Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership has reiterated the significance of external threat as a driver for alliance formation. After the Cold War, greater emphasis was put on alternative explanations, often concerned with NATO expansion in the absence of a prevalent external threat. Sweden's membership application has as such brought threat firmly back into analytical pertinence. However, the finding that threat can still be an important driver for alliance formation is not more than a modest contribution to underpinning existing theory with a fresh case study. The more interesting part of the findings instead relates to the dissection of the components from which threat is observed. Russia's unprovoked and aggressive behaviour was found to be the crucial element that drove both some of Sweden's sub-membership alignment as well as the membership decision itself. The indicative mechanism is that sudden violent actions capture the attention of politicians and their electorate much more effectively than do repeated technical calculations of capabilities. Walt's theory offers no basis on which the clout of each threat component can be distinguished.[289] The results from the within-case study of Sweden's alignment decisions, however, point in the direction that aggressive behaviour is paramount.

Representing only Sweden, this finding cannot be readily generalised to a larger population, but it nevertheless offers an indication interesting enough to be investigated further in future research. If the proposed mechanism could be supported by more evidence, it could carry implications for how to view alliance formation and other international relations phenomena involving threat perception, such as the security dilemma. Knowing whether it is the acquisition of new capabilities or the mere demonstration of will to use violence that is more likely to trigger a response from other states, matters both to the scholarly debate and to policymakers. The results presented in this thesis thus encourage future case studies of alliance formation from the perspective of responding to aggressive behaviour. It would also be interesting to conduct quantitative probes in which aggressive behaviour is treated as an independent variable, instead of aggregate power and capabilities. The latter two are most commonly preferred in such studies, likely due to the simplicity of measuring physical

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[289] Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power', 13.

capabilities compared to the ambiguous nature of intentions.[290] However, operationalising intentions in terms of actual violent behaviour should enable sound aggregate measuring.

Second, the study has indicated that external threat is not a necessity for alignment to take place. This is not a revolutionary thought by itself. It is rather the explanation of Sweden's non-threat-driven alignment towards NATO that has potential implications. Sweden's initial alignment towards the alliance in 1994, despite being only a small step, made future alignment in the same direction ever-more likely. If that finding carries external validity, then observing states' existing alignments, regardless of magnitude, could constitute a fruitful point of departure for scholars trying to predict the directions in which alliances will form if exposed to triggering events. Moreover, policymakers should take into consideration that even modest acts of alignment, especially if interoperability is part of the ambition, can lead onto a path from which it may be difficult to depart in the future.

Third, it should be mentioned that the rejection of H_2 does not imply that domestic political circumstances should be overlooked when analysing other cases of alliance formation. First, the failure of that perspective to produce an independent explanation might well be limited to the Swedish case, given the focus on a domestic feature unique for Sweden: the military non-alignment tradition. Exploring domestic circumstances from other angles, as suggested in section 6.4, could have yielded different results. The second reason for why the domestic perspective should not be written off based on this study is grounded in the same methodological weakness by which the above-mentioned implications are also constrained: single-case studies have low external validity. The mentioned implications should thus only be regarded as advice for future research and theory development, not as generalisations.

Finally, the main implication for the narrower debate on Sweden concerns the significance of the neutrality tradition as a force working against NATO alignment. Despite the rejection of H_2, the findings still indicate that the embedded support for that tradition has functioned as a constraint in Sweden's alignment decisions along the way. However, the findings also suggest that the neutrality tradition was too weak when faced with a combination of increased threat and a dependence on NATO established over time. As a final remark, it should be noted that such an inference carries no normative implications and that whether Sweden should have applied for a membership in NATO remains a question left for others to debate.

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[290] Johnson, 'External Threat and Alliance Formation', 736–40.

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Appendix

I – List of interview respondents

Respondent 1 chose to be anonymous and information about the respondent beyond what is presented in chapter three is therefore kept from further disclosure.

Ann Linde was Sweden's foreign secretary between 2019-2022 and was heavily involved in the decision-making process of the country's NATO application. She led the work on a public investigation conducted between 16th March and 13th May 2022, which culminated in the report that constituted the official basis on which Sweden made its decision. Linde has had a long political career with the Swedish Social Democratic Party and has held various positions in government.

Håkan Edström is an Associate Professor at the Swedish Defence University (SEDU). He is also an active-duty officer (Lt. Col.) in the Swedish Army. At SEDU, Edström teaches military strategy, defence planning, and security politics of the Nordic countries.

Krister Pallin is a Deputy Research Director at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), with military doctrine, defence planning and command & control as his foremost areas of expertise. He has led several major projects within his expert areas and held various management positions within FOI. He is an active reserve officer in the Swedish Armed Forces.

Mikael Holmström is an investigative journalist who has been writing about Swedish security policy for more than thirty years. Holmström is also the author behind the book 'Den dolda alliansen', which is one of the most comprehensive works on Swedish NATO relations and neutrality ever published. He has held positions at various Swedish newspapers. Holmström currently works at Dagens Nyheter (DN).

II – Letter of consent

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

"Why Sweden applied for NATO membership"?

1 Purpose of the project
You are invited to participate in a research interview in an MA thesis project, in which the main purpose is to explain Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership. I am an MA student at the Peace and Conflict Studies program at the University of Oslo, and my name is William B. Diseth.

My main supervisor in this project is Professor Olav Schram Stokke at the University of Oslo, and my co-supervisor is Associate Professor Paal Sigurd Hilde at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, a department at the Norwegian Defence University College.

2 Which institution is responsible for the research project?
The University of Oslo / Faculty of Social Sciences / Department of Political Science is responsible for the project (data controller).

3 Why are you being asked to participate?
You are invited to participate in a research interview, because you are assumed to have extensive knowledge on Swedish and international security policy. The topic of this project is Sweden and NATO, and hopefully you can provide interesting answers to interview questions related to that topic. The rest of the sample of interviewees for the project are academics, experts, and politicians.

4 What does participation involve for you?
If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you participate in a personal interview conducted digitally. It will take approx. 30-45 minutes. The interview includes questions about possible explanations to Sweden's application for NATO membership in 2022, both in light of the Russo-Ukraine war and in relation to Sweden's historical relationship to NATO, as well as its long-standing neutrality tradition. Your answers will be recorded by audio and I will take notes. The interview may be conducted in Swedish, as I speak Swedish myself.

5 Participation is voluntary
Participation is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

6 Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data
We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified here and we will process your personal data in accordance with data protection legislation (the GDPR).

- The people who will have access to the data gathered in this project is limited to the project group: the MA student, the main supervisor and the co-supervisor. In practice

it will only be me (the MA student) who will be collecting, working with, and storing the data. The data will be stored on drives administered by the University of Oslo.

- When processing the data, I will replace your name and contact details with a code (i.e. Respondent 1/Expert 1). The list of names, contact details and respective codes will then be stored separately from the rest of the collected data, meaning your answers to the interview questions will not be traced back to you. Hence, you will not be recognisable in the publication (the MA thesis).

7 What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The planned end date of the project is 2023-05-23, when the thesis is submitted. The thesis will be published and available through the University of Oslo Library's search engine. The collected data, including the data from your interview, will be deleted within three months after the thesis is submitted 2023-05-23.

8 Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

9 What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the University of Oslo, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

10 Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:
- The University of Oslo via the main supervisor or the MA student. Contact information is found below.
- Our Data Protection Officer: Roger Markgraf-Bye: personvernombud@uio.no.

If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project, contact:
- Data Protection Services, by email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,   Contact information of supervisors:

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Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project "Why Sweden applied for NATO membership" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

☐ to participate in a personal interview

☐ for my personal data to be stored after the end of the project (2023-05-23) in maximum three months.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

Signature, date

III – Interview guides

Interview with Respondent 1

1) What would you say were the main causes behind Sweden's decision to join NATO?
2) What role did Russia's invasion of Ukraine play in Sweden's decision?
3) In what way did Russia's invasion of Ukraine represent an increased external threat to Sweden, and how important was that change in threat for the decision to join NATO?
4) Could Sweden have applied for NATO membership without the Russo-Ukrainian war happening – why/why not?
5) If external threat played a central part in pushing Sweden towards NATO membership in 2022, what do you think was different this time from other times when Sweden faced a major external threat, such as for example during periods of high tensions during the Cold War?

6) How would you describe the tradition of neutrality in Sweden and what distinguishes it from other European neutrals?
7) In what ways did the neutrality tradition affect the decision to apply for NATO membership in 2022?
8) Was the political and public support for neutrality as strong in 2022 as before? If not, when and how did it get weaker?
9) The Social Democratic Party was in government when the decision to apply for membership was made, but they have always been firm supporters of neutrality. How would you explain the party's abandonment of that decades long policy?
10) To what extent was the decision to join NATO preconditioned by a decline in public support for the neutrality tradition?

11) How important was the already existing cooperation and agreements Sweden had with NATO and European countries for the decision to apply for membership?
12) What would you say were the main reasons for Sweden joining the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994?
13) What role did the cooperation that followed from the PfP play in Sweden's eventual decision to apply for membership?
14) How would you explain the reasons for Sweden entering the Host Nation Support Agreement with NATO in 2014?
15) What role did that agreement play in the decision to apply for membership?
16) To what extent was Sweden constrained by previous alignment towards NATO and Europe – did there exist any other options than membership in May 2022?'
17) Are there any other factors you think are important to consider when trying to explain the decision to join NATO, that are not covered by the previous questions?

Interview with Ann Linde

1) How would you explain Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership?
2) In what way did Russia's invasion of Ukraine represent an increased external threat to Sweden, and how important was that change in threat for the decision to join NATO?
3) If external threat played a central part in pushing Sweden towards NATO membership in 2022, what do you think was different this time from other times when Sweden faced a major external threat, such as for example during periods of high tensions during the Cold War?

4) The Social Democrats were firm supporters of the neutrality policy during the Cold War, and later of the military non-alignment policy – how do you think the process went forward in the party towards the abandonment of that policy in May 2022?
5) Had public support for neutrality and military non-alignment gotten weaker over the years and were voters more inclined to accept a membership application in that sense?
6) How important do you think considerations of public opinion was when the government made the decision to apply for membership?
7) How would you explain Sweden's decision to enter the Host Nation Support Agreement with NATO in 2014? Why did the Social Democrats support the agreement?

8) How important was the pre-existing cooperation with NATO, such as the PfP, participation in international operations, and Host Nation Support, to the membership decision?
9) The cooperation that steadily increased between Sweden and NATO throughout the 2000s, did that in any way limit Sweden's alignment alternatives towards May 2022?

10) Are there any other factors you think are important to consider when trying to explain the decision to join NATO, that are not covered by the previous questions?

Interview with Håkan Edström

1) What would you say were the main causes behind Sweden's decision to join NATO?

2) What role did Russia's invasion of Ukraine play in Sweden's decision?

3) In what way did Russia's invasion of Ukraine represent an increased external threat to Sweden, and how important was that change in threat for the decision to join NATO?

4) Could Sweden have applied for NATO membership without the Russo-Ukrainian war happening – why/why not?

5) If external threat played a central part in pushing Sweden towards NATO membership in 2022, what do you think was different this time from other times when Sweden faced a major external threat, such as for example during periods of high tensions during the Cold War?

6) How would you describe the tradition of neutrality in Sweden and what distinguishes it from other European neutrals?

7) In what ways did the neutrality tradition affect the decision to apply for NATO membership in 2022?

8) Was the political and public support for neutrality as strong in 2022 as before? If not, when and how did it get weaker?

9) The Social Democratic Party was in government when the decision to apply for membership was made, but they have always been firm supporters of neutrality. How would you explain the party's abandonment of that decades long policy?

10) To what extent was the decision to join NATO preconditioned by a decline in public support for the neutrality tradition?

11) How important was the already existing cooperation and agreements Sweden had with NATO and European countries for the decision to apply for membership?

12) What would you say were the main reasons for Sweden joining the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994?

13) What role did the cooperation that followed from the PfP play in Sweden's eventual decision to apply for membership?

14) How would you explain the reasons for Sweden entering the Host Nation Support Agreement with NATO in 2014?

15) What role did that agreement play in the eventual decision to apply for membership?

16) To what extent was Sweden constrained by previous alignment towards NATO and Europe – did there exist any other options than membership in May 2022?

17) Are there any other important factors you think are important to consider when trying to explain the decision to join NATO, that are not covered by the previous questions?

Interview with Krister Pallin

1) What would you say were the main causes behind Sweden's decision to join NATO?

2) What role did Russia's invasion of Ukraine play in Sweden's decision?

3) In what way did Russia's invasion of Ukraine represent an increased external threat to Sweden, and how important was that change in threat for the decision to join NATO?

4) Could Sweden have applied for NATO membership without the Russo-Ukrainian war happening – why/why not?

5) If external threat played a central part in pushing Sweden towards NATO membership in 2022, what do you think was different this time from other times when Sweden faced a major external threat, such as for example during periods of high tensions during the Cold War?

6) How would you describe the tradition of neutrality in Sweden and what distinguishes it from other European neutrals?

7) In what ways did the neutrality tradition affect the decision to apply for NATO membership in 2022?

8) Was the political and public support for neutrality as strong in 2022 as before? If not, when and how did it get weaker?

9) The Social Democratic Party was in government when the decision to apply for membership was made, but they have always been firm supporters of neutrality. How would you explain the party's abandonment of that decades long policy?

10) To what extent was the decision to join NATO preconditioned by a decline in public support for the neutrality tradition?

11) How important was the already existing cooperation and agreements Sweden had with NATO and European countries for the decision to apply for membership?

12) What would you say were the main reasons for Sweden joining the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994?

13) What role did the cooperation that followed from the PfP play in Sweden's eventual decision to apply for membership?

14) How would you explain the reasons for Sweden entering the Host Nation Support Agreement with NATO in 2014?

15) What role did that agreement play in the eventual decision to apply for membership?

16) To what extent was Sweden constrained by previous alignment towards NATO and Europe – did there exist any other options than membership in May 2022?

17) Are there any other important factors you think are important to consider when trying to explain the decision to join NATO, that are not covered by the previous questions?

Interview with Mikael Holmström

11) How would you explain Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership?

12) In what way did Russia's invasion of Ukraine represent an increased external threat to Sweden, and how important was that change in threat for the decision to join NATO?

13) If external threat played a central part in pushing Sweden towards NATO membership in 2022, what do you think was different this time from other times when Sweden faced a major external threat, such as for example during periods of high tensions during the Cold War?

14) The Social Democrats were firm supporters of the neutrality policy during the Cold War, and later of the military non-alignment policy – how do you think the process went forward in the party towards the abandonment of that policy in May 2022?

15) Had public support for neutrality and military non-alignment gotten weaker over the years and were voters more inclined to accept a membership application in that sense?

16) How important do you think considerations of public opinion was when the government made the decision to apply for membership?

17) How would you explain Sweden's decision to enter the Host Nation Support Agreement with NATO in 2014?

18) How would you describe the political disagreements about that deal and do you think the Social Democrats would have supported it if it had not been for Russia's annexation of Crimea?

19) How would explain Sweden's decision to enter the PfP in 1994, and what consequences did that have later on for Swedish security and defence policy?

20) How important was the pre-existing cooperation with NATO, such as the PfP, participation in international operations, and Host Nation Support, to the membership decision?

21) The cooperation that steadily increased between Sweden and NATO throughout the 2000s, did that in any way limit Sweden's alignment alternatives towards May 2022?

22) How do you think a decision on membership would have played out if there had not existed any previous cooperation?

23) Are there any other factors you think are important to consider when trying to explain the decision to join NATO, that are not covered by the previous questions?