‘Doing Good’?
Interpreting the normative underpinnings of Sweden’s foreign policy

Konstantinos Skenteris

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Konstantinos Skenteris
Abstract

This study seeks to contribute to the literature on ethical foreign policy through an empirical analysis of normative ideas guiding Sweden’s foreign policy since the 1960s. Drawing on normative theory, the study challenges the conventional distinction between and meaning of ethics and national interest in the foreign policy domain. Conceptualizing the state as an actor whose decision-makers are making an effort to pursue foreign policy in the interests of distant others, we are able to study the possibilities and pitfalls of ethical foreign policymaking on its own terms. Building on a theoretical framework coupling constructivism and foreign policy analysis (FPA) I generate a typology of two divergent normative directions in Swedish foreign policy tradition; active and Europeanized liberal internationalism. Applying the typology to a case study of Sweden’s current government (a coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party), I analyze the extent to and ways in which tradition has informed the government’s human rights-based, and more specifically women’s rights-based foreign policy.
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Responsibility for all possible errors and mistakes remains entirely mine.
The entire history of social improvement has been a series of transitions, by which one custom or institution after another, from being supposed a primary necessity of social existence, has passed into the rank of universally stigmatized injustice and tyranny. So it has been with the distinctions of slaves and freemen, nobles and serfs, patricians and plebeians; and so it will be, and in part already is, with the aristocracies of colour, race, and sex.

- John Stuart Mill
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Chapter 1
Ethics and foreign policy

1.1 Beyond the ethics-interests dichotomy

Arguments over right and wrong, and explicit government claims to morally suffused foreign policy “are now embedded both in the international arena and in domestic deliberations” (Gelb and Rosenthal 2003, 5). Governments of Western states are pursuing normative agendas as part of their foreign policy, redefining the national interest to act in the interests of distant others. It is remarkable, as Christopher Hill notes, how many wider responsibilities the foreign policies of some states insist on assuming (Hill 2003a, 241). Some attribute this heightened sense of moral commitment to the slow evolution of the international human rights regime evolving since 1945, which has materialized in policy areas such as foreign aid, conflict prevention and peacekeeping, democracy and human rights promotion, and, ultimately, humanitarian intervention and regime change (Sikkink 1993; Buergenthal 1997).¹ Others assert that the redefinition of national interest is due to the substantive changes in the international system with the end of the Cold War (Gelb and Rosenthal 2003; Chandler and Heins 2007). Karen Smith and Margot Light, for example, argue that the proliferation of foreign policy issues – trade relations with unsavoury regimes that undermine human rights, waning commitments to democracy, and problems arising from “failed states” and their environments – has raised tough questions on how governments should act and respond in international relations (Smith and Light 2001, 1-2). A third claim is that foreign policy is ethical by its very nature. This approach emphasizes that international relations, at the core,

concern the moral dilemmas and decisions of states and political leaders. (Brown 1992; Jackson 2000; Frost 1996; Bulley 2009; Erskine 2008, 705).

Although a rising number of governments promise commitment to moral values and the duties they engender, the trend has rarely been subject to empirical study on its own terms. The readiest answer for this lies in realist theory, which without question has been the dominant theoretical approach to international relations. Realist models of foreign policy regard the spheres of international politics and ethics “as polar opposites” (Hill 2003a, 251). To realists, the basic and inescapable fact of world politics is that states will sacrifice any international obligation whenever it comes into conflict with national interest. Thus, states make no international obligations in the moral sense of the word (Jackson and Sørensen 2010, 60). Since everything comes down to national interest, any ambition to pursue ethical foreign policy is by definition self-deceiving (Carr 1946; Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001). Tragically, there is perhaps “something inherent in states as representatives of particular, territorially delimited political communities which makes it inevitable that they will continue to play their part as monstres froids in a dangerous world” (Heins and Chandler 2007, 3). Governments may sometimes appear to act out of moral concern for the citizens of other states, but we repeatedly witness that their foreign policies are tainted by self-interest, or are ultimately about something else. In the worst scenario, foreign policy couched in moral language becomes smokescreen for self-beneficial agendas (with regard either to the state or to decision-makers themselves). For example, David Chandler has argued that moral foreign policy activism may have more to do with enhancing political legitimacy in the domestic sphere, where decision-makers often find themselves lacking clear purpose and mission. In an environment of increasing doubt over government and politics, a strong commitment to an international cause, where decision-makers are less accountable for matching ambitions with outcomes, can be used to raise status and moral authority at home (Chandler 2003; see also

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2 The anthologies of Smith and Light (2001), and Chandler and Heins (2007) are welcome exceptions.
Heins 2007). Another hard-hitting argument is that moral principles translate into action only when affordable. In areas where Western countries have deep economic or strategic interests, principles are toned down or cease to apply. In this light, the promise of governments to take on board moral concerns is empty, indicating no radical revision of their affairs with the outside world (Gaskarth 2006b). Richard Perkins and Eric Neumayer, for example, label the heightened commitment to protect the rights, freedoms and well-being of distant strangers “organized hypocrisy,” particularly in the case of Western arms sales to developing, autocratic and human rights abusing regimes (Perkins and Neumayer 2010).

None of these arguments are off the mark. However, I contend there is more to the concept of ethical foreign policymaking than posited by the above accounts. I do this by forwarding a different approach to the relationship between ethics and interests. Normative theorists of international relations have noted that there is something quite odd in positing the distinction between ethics and national interest in such absolute terms. Pinning down the meaning of “ethical” and “interest” is also done with remarkable easiness. Of course, no serious moral theory would argue that “a state whose rulers are out maximize their own power and wealth, with no consideration for anyone other than themselves” can be regarded as morally sound. (Brown 2001, 25). Nor does this express high regard for national interest. Responsible decision-makers, by contrast, understand that a healthy pursuit to defend the national interest will come to involve mediation of “the ways in which the outside world impinges on society” (Hill 2003a, 237). Ruthlessness in the international domain, a total disregard for the interests of non-citizens, whatever they might be, will not play out well for the national interest over time. In this light, the theory that political leaders only wish to

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3 Governments are quite frequently targeted with criticism of this kind. A recent example, is New York Times columnist Frank Bruni’s questioning of the Trump administration’s military action against Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria: “It’s impossible to ignore the degree to which the military strike pushes a slew of unflattering stories about the Trump administration [. . .] Nothing drowns out scandal like the fire and fury of 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles” (Bruni 2017).

4 There are, unfortunately, more than a few examples in history of such gangster-like states. Hill calls this approach “autistic power politics,” which can have fatal consequences domestically and internationally (Hill 2003a, 243).
cultivate their own garden “is trivial and myopic,” unless were dealing with total egomaniacs (Hill 2003a, 241; See also Hudson 2014). Decision-makers find that a focus on the interests of the nation’s own citizens “is not necessarily incompatible with a concern with the common good and broader principle” (Brown 2001, 24). A good thing for the national interest may well involve a broad concern for distant others. Thus, the notion of national interests as static and easily identifiable for foreign policy is not as clear-cut as strident realists would have it (Heins and Chandler 2007, 7; Finnemore 1996):

Citizens invariably look first to their government for political satisfaction, while a government’s primary responsibility is to its own citizens. Nonetheless, few thinking people in any country these days see that as the end of the matter. There must be moral and political discussion on the extent to which responsibility should also extend to foreigners, whether in their interests or our own. The foreign policies of all states must consider how far to attempt influencing the wider framework in which they operate—as opposed to their particular, parochial concerns (Hill 2003a, 237).

The integration of a global political and economic system over the past century means that governments inevitably have to take decisions within a wider international context (ibid, 241). Yet even if states and governments do this primarily for the sake of their own citizens, it can hardly count as un-ethical. The claim that the primary responsibility of decision-makers is to their own citizens still embodies an ethic. Hence, there is no reason to advance an antithesis between ethics and interests, and to argue otherwise is akin to what Chris Brown calls “pop realism” (Brown 2001, 23-24).

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5 Dan Bulley has perhaps a more eloquent way of putting it: “If we consider ethics as foreign policy, this means we can no longer answer within the dichotomy imposed by the question: is a genuinely ethical foreign policy possible? Every foreign policy contains an ethics, a conception of otherness and how a ‘we’ ought to act in relation to it (Bulley 2009, 5).

6 I need to underscore that the point is not to refute national interests all together, or to say that they do not have a material basis. My point is that the concept of national interest is more elastic than some versions of realism would have it, because it involves moral thinking. This is not an ontological argument on ideas versus material forces. More on this in the theory chapter.

7 Another discussion worth mentioning (one that I will not consider in detail) is between those defending statism and those rejecting statism all together. Strict forms of cosmopolitanism would deny that state conduct can be influenced by moral concerns. For cosmopolitans self-interest is morally sound only if the self is equated with the world as a single community. The argument here is that as long as states are the primary entities in the political realm, they will “stand between the individual and the claims of wider humanity” (Brown 2001, 27). In this sense, a world government
The flipside of “pop realism” is “moral absolutism,” a black-and-white view of international politics which assumes foreign policymakers have forsaken every good intention towards non-citizens the minute a degree national interest is involved (Brown 2001, 22; Brown 2002, 183). This view is a puzzling misreading of the requirements of morality, as no plausible moral theory holds that good intentions necessarily preclude other reasons for ones actions (Brown 2002, 184). In practical terms, it can be quite hard to imagine entirely selfless foreign policy decisions. For example, it is a stated goal of Scandinavian countries to commit up to 1 percent of GDP to foreign aid (Ingebritsen 2002). Even if the intention of decision-makers is solidarity with poor nations, some features of Scandinavian aid programs are evidently tied to national commercial and strategic motives (Alesina and Dollar 2000; Schraeder, Hook and Taylor 1998). Generous aid commitments are also a potential means to acquire higher status in the international system, which makes it easier to attract the attention of stronger powers towards issues Scandinavian countries consider important (De Carvalho and Neumann 2014). Yet these beneficial by-products of giving aid does not imply that notions of solidarity or moral duty have been ditched. Nor does attracting attention to issues of importance to Scandinavia constitute un-ethical behaviour. The well-being of distant others may in fact coincide with national interests, but that can hardly be equivalent to saying that Scandinavian foreign aid policies are solely a means to other ends. Nonetheless, the tendency towards such categorical thinking has been quite widespread:

[...] the extraordinarily absolutist terms in which a great deal of moral thinking about international relations is conducted should be noted. States are rarely allowed to have mixed motives for their actions [...] if it is the case that the merest hint of self-interest is sufficient to undermine any claim that a state might be behaving ethically, then states never do behave ethically, because there is always some element of self-interest involved in state action. If being partly motivated by self-interest becomes morally equivalent to being wholly motivated by self-interest, states then do indeed come to be seen as the kind of nakedly egoistic beings that virtually all ethical theories condemn (Brown 2001, 24).

is the only plausible basis from which to pursue moral duties, thus making all foreign policy unethical by definition. For an introduction to cosmopolitanism, see Kleingeld and Brown (2014).
From Brown’s point of view, such a puritanical dualism is unwarranted. Even those governments who claim wide-ranging international duties understand they have to balance those against the needs of their own citizens (Heins and Chandler 2007, 4). Accordingly, duties in both domestic and international realms involve moral obligations and it is a mistake to think of the first as simply interest-based, while the second constitutes the ‘ethical dimension’ of foreign policy. Both sets of duties involve both interests and ethics. On occasion the (ethical) duties states have towards their own citizens may seem to conflict with the (ethical) duties they have to the wider world. There is no reason to be surprised by this, any more than one is surprised by the common observation that sometimes a short-run view of foreign policy objectives conflicts with a longer-run perspective (Brown 2001, 26).

Instead of counter-posing ethics and national interest, focus should be directed towards in what form and what degree governments and political leaders believe their duties extend beyond their state borders, and what they consider their duties to imply (Heins and Chandler 2007, 4; Doyle 1986; Cochran 2001; Lawler 2005; Brock 2009). Their beliefs can produce “a wide range of ‘sliding scale’ hierarchies of solidarity” (Heins and Chandler 2007, 4); from introvert foreign policies that do not aspire to provide moral leadership abroad, to extrovert foreign policies, “undoubtedly more systemic in their ambitions and reach to others” (Hill 2003a, 242). Introvert foreign policies can be associated with communitarian ethical ideals, restricting their duties to the citizens of the state.8 At the other side of the spectrum are those states and their governments who see themselves as having special international responsibilities. Some of them are termed “internationalist” in their aspirations (Lawler 2005; Pratt 1989, 1990; Dunne 2008).

There is no easy way to pin down a definition of internationalism, as “its benchmarks are to be found more readily in the historical practices of a select

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8 Peter Lawler points out that when communitarianism is applied to international politics it can easily be read, and not entirely unfairly, as merely a normative supplement to realism, or as an apologia for self-regarding statism and international moral relativism” (Lawler 2005, 432). Brown, though, never claims there is a plausible international ethic that would approve naked, short-run self-interest, with no regard for the interests of others: “While it is legitimate and ethical for states to pursue their own security and prosperity, not everything that could be done in pursuit of these goals is morally acceptable” (Brown 2002, 186).
group of developed states than in the academic literature” (Lawler 2005, 432). Classic internationalism finds its manifestations largely in the fields of confidence building and multilateralism (within the UN in particular), international peacekeeping missions, conflict mediation and resolution, generous foreign aid programs and progressivism through economic redistributive action (Lawler 2005, 436; Ingebritsen 2002). Contemporary varieties occupy a normative space that comes closer to a liberal cosmopolitanism guarding the virtues of human rights, good governance, democracy and humanitarian intervention (ibid, 432).

Arguably, the more a country’s foreign policy claims to act in the name of good, the trickier foreign policy becomes, “epitomizing knotty problems with which policy-makers often have to grapple” (Smith and Light 2001, 3). Is the promotion of democracy across the world a self-evident responsibility of Western governments? Are the internal political arrangements of other states any business of ours? Should we denounce other leaders’ brutalizing actions? Should our sense of responsibility to protect human rights abroad override our duty to provide jobs at home? Is our notion of human rights universal? How should we respond to cultural otherness? On what conditions should we give foreign aid and how?

These questions have kept normative international relations scholars busy for quite some time, but since decision-makers have begun, perhaps more clearly than ever, to connect them with discussions on foreign policy practice, we have a lot of data that merits empirical analysis. Moreover, foreign policies designed to make the world a better place can have good consequences, but they can also turn out to be irresponsible or even detrimental to the very ethics that underpin them (see Bulley 2009, 58-60). Volker Heins and David Chandler remind that the presumed goodness of ethical foreign policy may “prolong wars, exacerbate power asymmetries, empower unaccountable intermediaries or demoralize

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9 See Peter Niesen (2007) for a discussion on the potential clashes between the internationalism of Kant (in coherence with classic internationalism) and that of Bentham (in coherence with contemporary cosmopolitan varieties).
supposed beneficiaries” (Heins and Chandler 2007, 8; see also Bulley 2010). Hence, it is vital to develop a critical understanding of the reasoning behind ethical foreign policy, and its limits. What do decision-makers believe is required of their states in order to pursue foreign policies in the interests of others? How do they try to reconcile international responsibilities with national interests? What do they believe are appropriate tools to respond to the perceived needs of strangers? Are there competing ethics?

1.2 Research puzzle: The case of Sweden’s foreign policy

This thesis applies the abovementioned questions to a case study of Sweden’s foreign policy. It has been argued that Sweden’s “adaptive pragmatism” in international politics has been moderated “by ethically-driven activism to a significantly greater degree than is the case with most other Western states” (Lawler 1997, 568; Hook 1995; Sellström 1999). Sweden has been described as that archetypical internationalist, taking on the roles of “teacher,” “world conscience,” “good state,” and “moral superpower” on the world political stage, although there are other contenders to these labels. Without a doubt, the description of Sweden as a moral superpower owes much to Olof Palme’s Social Democratic premiership, whose “active” foreign policy became renowned for audacious outspokenness, frequent condemnation of the world’s injustice and

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10 Some would point out George W. Bush and Tony Blair’s tactless moralism of dividing the world into “good” and “evil” as an example. Peter Lawler has described Bush’s venture as “centered on a quasi-theological evocation of a radical, neo-conservative activist foreign policy dedicated to the universal realization of ‘freedom’” (Lawler 2005, 428; see also Dunne 2001; Bulley 2009; Walzer 2006). Others point to outrage in Middle Eastern countries whenever Western states comment on their cultural practices, “which [to the outraged] appear to be based on the assumption that because something is not done in Western Europe or North America it ought not to be done at all” (Brown 2000, 200).

11 This adds a prescriptive component to the analysis, inevitably blurring the distinction between empirical and normative theory. See Price (2008).

12 Among them are Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Austria and Canada, of which the foreign policy of Canadian premier Pierre Trudeau was a frontrunner (Mouritzen 1995; Pratt 1989; Lawler 2005; Agius 2011). Others that have been referred to as striving for purposes beyond themselves are Australia when Gareth Evans served as foreign minister, and, perhaps more controversially, the UK under Tony Blair (Hill 2003a, 251; Dunne 2008, 13-14).
solidarity with the Third World (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 438; Nilsson 1988; Bjereld 2016). Although Palme sparked a great deal of domestic and international controversy, his sway and ideas on foreign policy are still felt, and it became something of a virtue of successive Swedish governments to keep a high profile on international matters. Policymakers across the Swedish political spectrum have since the 1960s persistently held on to the notion of their country as a responsible international actor with strong moral obligations outside its borders. However, the notion has been a disputed theme in foreign policy analysis and national debate. Some accounts consider the normative dimensions of Swedish foreign policy “real and sincere, seeing it as expressing political commitment” (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 440). They hold that ethical notions of solidarity, equity and social justice rooted in Swedish society have influenced and framed its external affairs (Lawler 2007, 104-105). Annika Bergman, for example, suggests that in Sweden’s case “the commonplace juxtaposition between ethical motives and national interests narrowly defined is [sometimes] misplaced [. . .] interests and normative motives are co-constitutive” (Bergman 2006, 82; see also Archer 1999; Bergman Rosamond 2016; Lawler 2005). Hence, solidarity, equity and social justice have been important guideposts of foreign policy decision-makers. Others are less convinced of the sincerity of Swedish internationalism, pointing to some of its Janus-faced features (Scott 2009; Doeser 2014; Aggestam and Hyde-Price 2016). They do not entirely dismiss other-regarding motives, but give weight to “political instrumentality” as a driving force behind Sweden’s internationalist undertakings. For example, the heydays of Swedish criticism, epitomized by vocal opposition to the Vietnam War, has been interpreted as strategic Ostpolitik to secure goodwill towards Moscow (Scott 2009). Sweden’s post-Cold War military engagements in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Libya, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo has been considered to be as much about influence, security and defense cooperation as it has been about “saving strangers” (Aggestam and Hyde-Price2016; Wheeler 2000). The toughest critics assert that Swedish internationalism has taken on mythical proportions. They hold that decision-makers are able to speak warmly of their human rights deeds simply by keeping dubious trade deals and political cooperation with autocratic
regimes as a separate subject matter (Dahl 2006; von Hall 2015; Greenslade 2016).

Perhaps more promising are the accounts that recognize that decision-makers have good intentions, but concede there are “limits to the ability of a state to put the world to rights through its foreign policy” (Hill 2003a, 252). Douglas Brommesson, for example, starts from the premise that Swedish foreign policy is generally responsive to normative international issues and studies changing values and principles among the foreign policy elite (Brommesson 2010). Anna Michalski’s illuminating study of Sweden and Denmark’s official relations with China empirically investigates the foreign policy elites’ perceptions of national interest and normative values and their appropriate expression in foreign policy (Michalski 2013). Michalski offers a rare and insightful account of how the two countries, whose small, open economies depend on access to foreign markets, try to balance these interests against ideals when those seem to come into conflict.

This thesis follows the same trajectory. It starts from the premise that ethical foreign policy does not entail acting purely without regard for national interest, however perceived. Nor does the fact that national interest may sometimes override normative international obligations testify to the perpetual realist nature of political behavior. Therefore, concepts such as “empty promises,” “smokescreen,” “status,” “organized hypocrisy” and “political instrumentality” will have little analytical purchase in what follows, as the invocation of such concepts marginalizes analysis of the normative dimensions of foreign policy. This study will attempt to elucidate the contents of Sweden’s internationalism by asking how decision-makers, both past and present, conceive of their moral requirements towards the outside world. In order to do so, the focus should be on the ideas and beliefs of decision-makers (Goldstein and Keohane 1993). By conceptualizing the state as an actor whose decision-makers are making an effort to pursue ethical foreign policy, we will be able to shed light on their perceived other-regarding commitments, and thereby develop a critical understanding of the prospects and pitfalls of trying to be a good state.
1.3 Prologue, research questions and thesis outline

Following the standard narrative in the literature, Swedish foreign policy underwent changes in the 1960s, and again at the beginning of the 1990s (Brommesson 2010; Bjereld et al. 2008). Until the start of the 1960s, Swedish foreign policy was associated with neutrality as an adaptive measure to the Cold War political climate, with decision-makers opting for non-alignment in peacetime in order to remain neutral in the event of war (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 437). Avoiding political ties and commitments enhanced confidence in Sweden as a neutral actor and signaled impartiality towards rival hegemons in the international power structure (Möller and Bjereld 2010). The late 1960s, however, saw the breakthrough of Sweden’s exercise of moral leadership in international affairs, which was heavily focused on expressions of solidarity beyond its borders (Bergman 2007). The plight of poor nations against colonial and post-colonial political and economic arrangements became the central theme of Swedish foreign policy from the 1960s until the 1980s (Sellström 1999). Injustice against the Third World informed the moral sensibility of Sweden’s internationalism to such a degree that decision-makers often chose to support regimes regardless of their proficiency in democracy (Nilsson 1991; Stenberg and Dahlgren 2006). The government offices became a bully pulpit to speak on behalf of the rights of Third World nations and lash out at the ideological assertiveness and missteps of strong powers. Sweden’s visible profile was coupled with a foreign policy designed to influence international developments in the direction of peace and security (Arter 2008, 332). Decision-makers cultivated international cooperation through the UN, promoted the concept of a “New International Economic Order” bent on global economic redistribution and defended the values of national autonomy and self-determination (Lawler 2007, 104). Non-alignment was perceived to increase the space for diplomatic activism. Sweden provided conflict resolution sites and engaged in conflict mediation, sent troops to international peacekeeping missions and contributed as bridge-builder between the United States and the Soviet Union. (Björkdahl 2013). It was further thought
that non-alignment ensured Sweden with a credible position from which to front its progressive domestic values (Agius 2001, 375).

The early 1990s saw a reorientation of Swedish foreign policy towards Europe and the West (Brommesson 2010). A new conservative government headed by Carl Bildt introduced a foreign policy of post-neutrality that reshaped the way Sweden engaged with the outside world. Strict non-alignment was no longer a viable option if Swedish internationalism were to be sustained (Möller and Bjereld 2010). The Moderate party, now in power for the first time, had long been wary of the qualities internationalists of the 1960s, 70s and 80s had attached to Swedish neutrality. They were also doubtful of the moral merits of Palme’s flamboyance, and found it awkward and embarrassing that Sweden’s premier frequently teamed up with autocrats who showed little regard for democracy and human rights (Dahl 2006; Stenberg and Dahlgren 2006). Through Sweden’s reorientation, there would be less room to grant carte blanche for autocrat-friends. Gaining membership in the EU in 1995, Sweden had finally found back to its natural bedfellow Europe, whose message of liberty, democracy, human rights, openness and the rule of law resonated with Swedish decision-makers (Michalski 2013; Agius 2011). The EU provided a stronger ground from which to defend and promote normative values Sweden and the Union held in common (Brommesson 2010). The turn to a more rights-based foreign policy entailed a somewhat different take on the dictates of solidarity and on how to respond to the perceived needs of others. It became increasingly accepted to use “soft” measures such as foreign aid and diplomacy to promote human rights expansion, and contribute to international military operations to ensure protection, rights and entitlements to people caught in conflict-prone areas or living under tyrannical rule (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 2016). Even though multilateralism, diplomacy and conflict mediation were preferred foreign policy tools, decision-makers found that military strategies also needed to be employed to manage threats to peace, security and development.

Where Palme perhaps had cooperated with less-than-democratic states for idealist reasons (Dahlgren and Stenberg 2006), the reorientation of Sweden’s
foreign policy was a turn to pragmatism. Decision-makers put a strong emphasis on free trade, which was vital to Sweden’s economy. It was therefore important to handle delicately relationships with trade-important states whose human rights records were less than impressive. This was not by definition inimical to the defense of human rights, but perhaps a signal of modesty as to what Sweden could do, or should do, to push the human rights agenda. Successive governments were aware of the damage strident criticism could do to national economic interests, but also doubtful of the merits of confrontation in the name of human rights (Michalski 2013, 897).

This brief prelude suggests that there have been two divergent internationalisms prevailing in Swedish foreign policy with ostensibly different focus on what the role of a good state entails. One is associated with the Olof Palme era, carving out an activist role for Sweden in international affairs. The other ascribes a less independent role for Sweden, but one that, hypothetically, has also revoked some of the ideas underpinning previous foreign policy. Putting ideas and beliefs at the center of the analysis, this thesis asks:

a) *What beliefs have been prevalent in Swedish foreign policy since the 1960s?*

It further asks:

b) *To what extent and in what ways do these inherited beliefs inform the foreign policy of Sweden’s current coalition government?*

In October 2014, a coalition cabinet made up of the historically dominant Social Democrats and first-timer the Green Party succeeded the center-right Alliance for Sweden, which had held government offices since 2006.13 Quite early on, it became evident that the new government, under the premiership of former trade unionist and Social Democratic leader Stefan Löfven, had decided it was going to be no lightweight in international politics. In her first foreign policy address to

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13 The Alliance was made up of the Moderate Party, the Centre Party, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats.
parliament, Sweden’s new top diplomat Margot Wallström stressed that “Sweden will take global responsibility by being a strong voice in the world” (Wallström 2015a). She further made it clear that Sweden’s new government would champion women’s rights, not through lofty statements, but by putting the pursuit of gender equality at the center of its foreign policy (ibid). Some have charged it a naïve venture, but to Wallström, it “is smart policy [. . .] a precondition for achieving our wider foreign, development and security policy objectives” (vanden Heuvel 2017). As the new government was set to fight doggedly for human rights, and more specifically women’s rights, its foreign policy was, if in fact carried out, likely to place Sweden at odds with a number of foreign powers. In the time since Wallström took office, Sweden has spurred diplomatic spats with Israel after officially recognizing Palestine, Turkey over its apparent legalization of sex with minors, Russia over the murders of Kremlin opponents, Saudi Arabia for its “medieval” methods of punishment of its citizens and restrictions against women, and Morocco for its de facto control of West Saharan territories. Sweden’s quarrels with Saudi Arabia and Morocco caused real trouble for Swedish business, and even put Sweden’s bid for a seat in the United Nations Security Council at stake.14 Interviewed for the New Yorker in 2015, Wallström stated “it’s time to become a little braver in foreign policy [. . .] does anyone seriously mean that Sweden should apologize for what we say about democracy and human rights? We’re not backing down from that” (Nordberg 2015). The radical flavor of Sweden’s post-2014 foreign policy indicates dissatisfaction with previous foreign policy. Ulf Bjereld suggested in an interview to the Washington Post that cadres within both the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party have urged to reclaim Sweden’s “progressive and independent foreign policy,” looking at “the foreign policy of Olof Palme during the 1970s and 1980s as an ideal” (Taylor 2015). The urge for a “braver” foreign policy is also closely associated with Margot Wallström herself, “who is an advocate of gender justice within the work of the United Nations, having held the position of the first-ever UN Special Representative on sexual violence in conflict” (Aggestam and Bergman

14 In 2015, in retaliation for Swedish support of West Saharan self-determination, the Moroccan Kingdom blocked the opening of an IKEA store and plans for five other stores in the country, even though IKEA is no longer registered as a Swedish company (Taylor 2015).
Rosamond 2016, 325). The Löfven government’s foreign policy has found sympathetic ears among policymakers and international organizations and attracted international media attention (The Economist 2015; The Guardian 2015; Cohen 2015; Milne 2015; Shah 2015), but what does the notion of becoming “a little braver” actually consist in? What underlying normative considerations does the current government give weight to in their formulation and conduct of foreign policy? Does Olof Palme’s ideational legacy really inform the current government’s decision-makers, or are their ideas in fact a continuation of Sweden’s foreign policy reorientation in the 1990s? Then again, it could be that old ideas have been exchanged for new ones.

The plan for the thesis is the following: Chapter 2 stresses the need to move beyond overtly structuralist and formalist explanations of foreign policy in favor of decision maker approaches that give explanatory force to ideas and beliefs. Chapter 3 makes the case for an interpretivist methodology that allows for a fine-grained analysis of the Swedish foreign policy elite’s underlying ideas and beliefs. Chapter 4 offers an historical analysis of Swedish foreign policy. Through the analysis, I generate a typology consisting of two divergent sets of ideas, which I label active and liberal internationalism. Together they make up Sweden’s traditional modes of thinking on normative issues. In Chapter 5, the typology serves as an analytical tool to investigate the beliefs underpinning the current coalition government’s foreign policy. Chapter 6 presents a summary of the main findings. Finally, I discuss shortly the pitfalls of putting contemporary notions of ethical foreign policy into practice.
Chapter 2
Theoretical framework

2.1 Outline
This chapter seeks to arrive at a theoretical framework appropriate to the study of normative underpinnings guiding Sweden’s foreign policy decision-makers. In the following, the chapter explains how foreign policy analysis (FPA), arguably the most decision-maker oriented approach to foreign policy, offers a contributing perspective to the study of international relations (IR), and how we can enrich our understanding of foreign policy by engaging FPA and IR in theoretical interaction. I go on to question the usefulness of overly exogenous accounts of foreign policy. The chapter further questions the strand of FPA that allies assumptions of power politics, rational choice and anomalies pointed out by political psychology to explain foreign policy, because it does not help us elucidate the ethics involved. Finally, I emphasize a theoretical bridge between constructivism, and its focus on ideas, and FPA’s longstanding interest in foreign policy decision-makers. A merger of these schools of thought provides for a theoretically sound approach to analyze the normative underpinnings of foreign policy. Whatever the particular policy area, ideas (of normative nature in particular) are a variable that seems increasingly important to bring to the forefront of FPA. It is therefore important to find a theoretical lens that brings us into contact with the explicit concerns of normative theorists.

2.2 FPA as a decision-maker approach to IR
FPA is conceptualized as (1) a subfield of IR or area of research, and (2) as a distinct perspective to the study of international politics (Kaarbo 2015). As an
area of research FPA is concerned with explaining “decisions taken by human decision-makers with reference to or having known consequences for entities external to their nation-state” (Hudson 2014, 4). Decisions could refer to action, but also behaviors such as inaction or indecision, constellations of decisions or elements of the process of decision-making itself, such as problem recognition or goal prioritization (Hudson 2005, 2). Research areas include the political psychology, personality and operational codes of state leaders (Holsti 1962; Holsti and Rosenau 1969; Hermann 1970, 1984; Rosati 2000; Dyson 2006), small decision making group dynamics (Janis 1982), organizational processes and bureaucratic politics (Allison 1971), public opinion, domestic political contestation and opposition dynamics (Kaarbo and Kenealy 2015), foreign policy tradition and guiding principles (Gaskarth 2006a, 2013; Bratberg 2011) and identity and national role conceptions (Brummer and Thies 2015; Breuning 1995; Cantir and Kaarbo 2012; Holsti 1970). Despite a variety of empirical and methodological orientations, FPA scholars have committed mostly to studying domestic politics and decision-making variables.

What makes FPA a distinct approach to IR, is the ontological claim that the explanatory focal point must be foreign policy decision-makers themselves. The claim draws on the assumption that “all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups” (Hudson 2005, 1). FPA’s ontological underpinning is thus different from mainstream theories in IR, which have taken states to be the central actors in international politics, and hence, as the explanatory focal points for their theories. FPA is further committed to “actor specific” theory rather than “actor general” theory (Hudson 2005, 4). In the latter, actors are conceptualized as unitary and rational, which implies that it does not matter whether a theory is operating with human beings or states. Whatever unit is involved, “[it] can be approximated as a unitary rational actor and therefore be made equivalent to the state” (Hudson 2005, 2; 2014, 3). This theoretical abstraction is called “black boxing” the actor. From the perspective of FPA, it makes little sense to theorize decision-makers as equivalent to the states they serve. Drawing on actor specific theory, FPA holds that decision-makers are far from generic, analytically
substitutable actors. On the contrary, the idiosyncrasies of decision-makers can do a lot to impact foreign policy. Therefore, in order to reach satisfactory explanations of the foreign policies of states, there should be analytical focus on the contributions of decision-makers or groups of decision-makers to state behavior - how they leave their imprint on foreign policy, and how they are influenced by and perceive the world around them (ibid, 1-2). The next section provides a fuller explanation for opening the “black box” of foreign policy behavior.

2.3 Why turn attention to decision-makers?

Influential theories in IR, such as realism and liberal institutionalism, regard states as the principal actors in international politics. The key theoretical premise is that there is no world government or overarching policing body to enforce state compliance. Due to the international realm’s condition of anarchy, relations between states have a different dynamic than what goes on in domestic politics. What follows is a self-help system in which states are left for themselves and must maximize their interests accordingly. Ultimately, that means ensuring survival; in routine exchanges, it means maximizing material security. Further, the material attributes of the state – most importantly natural resources, population, size, geography, military and economic capabilities – define its power capabilities relative to other states. These two features together determine to a large degree the preferences, or interests, of states and the parameters of foreign policy behavior. Structural and material conditions more or less fix national interest and inform them to behave in certain logical ways (Baldwin 1993). Liberal institutionalism follows suit: the international system is anarchical, states are the principal actors, and they behave rationally to attain their interests. However, liberalists have predicted a higher degree of international cooperation and institution building where states find there are common problems to deal with, and where cooperative ventures are mutually beneficial (Keohane 1989; Young 1986).
The advantages to this kind of theorizing are theoretical elegance and methodological rigor (Korab Karpowitz 2013). First, it gives an account of the primary determinants of international politics. It helps us understand why states tend to behave in similar ways despite their differences in governmental make-up, culture, and political ideology, and further, why the uniform behavior of states is unlikely to change in significant ways. Second, a theory of foreign policy behavior, in which states rationally plot the course that will serve their interests, subject to structural and material constraints, understandably makes methodological consistency an easier task, and predictive science more amenable (Jackson and Sørensen 2010, 76). This does not mean that realists or liberalists believe their theories have elucidated all relevant factors and omitted irrelevant ones. Nor do they necessarily believe that the unitary rational state is a true reflection of reality. Rather, the conceptualization is an aid that has scientific utility (Keohane 1984, 108; Simon 1985). Even Kenneth Waltz admitted to this, but in pursuit of a scientific theory of IR, he maintained that such abstractions were necessary for helping us test the probability of certain types of foreign policy behavior (the probability of Y) given any combination of material and systemic conditions (if X) (Waltz 1979).

The influence of state-centered IR-theories have provided insight into structural and material constraints on state behavior, but it has been at the expense of insight into decision-makers. Despite admitting that their theories include simplifying abstractions, the assumption that the range of policy options for decision-makers is severely limited, “owing to the confining international structure in which they must operate,” is still widespread (Jackson and Sørensen 2010, 75). If interests are more or less fixed, and states tend to operate according to an expected rational model of choice, then turning attention to the conduct of decision-makers would probably do little to boost explanations of foreign policy. What is more, if human elements, for example personal beliefs, were to have some impact, it would be immensely difficult to account for the mechanisms through which they mattered, other than in ambiguous terms. Their specific effects would be too diverse to enable theories with any meaningful scope. As Mark Schaefer concludes of state-centered IR-approaches, sometimes they “accept the general
idea that the individual level might provide some value-added, marginal increases in explained variance, but, they suggest, it is much more parsimonious to operate on the “higher” levels of analysis (Schaefer 2003, 155).

If the goal is to explain some of the core long-term tendencies in international relations, one can make some theoretical headway with accounts of the configuration of the structural and material variables. However, one will fall short of being able to analyze the development of specific foreign policies, which is where many significant research puzzles are grounded (Hudson 2014; Kaarbo 2003). This is precisely where FPA comes in. Valerie Hudson advances this argument with the concept of “foreign policy substitutability,” which holds that for any possible combination of material and structural conditions, there will still be variability in resulting foreign policy (ibid, 9; See also Hill 2003a). For example, “arguably materially dissimilar states can act similarly, and arguably materially similar states can act dissimilarly” (ibid, 11), depending on an array of explanatory factors. Hudson acknowledges that structural and material constraints, however they are perceived, “set the stage” for foreign policymaking, but the “drama” taking place on that stage is ultimately played by decision-makers. In the same vain, Christopher Hill holds that “[. . .] foreign policy is a ‘political space’ in which meaningful action can be pursued (Hill 2003a, 237). Thus, we need theories and research fields that are able to analyze the development of specific foreign policies, which are ultimately the product of human agency, and which can have profound consequences.

Another major theoretical downside of black-boxing foreign policy, which I have addressed in Chapter 1, is that morality finds no logical place in international relations. Since states act out of necessity given the characteristics of the international system, morality becomes separated from the field. Moreover, since human agency is also out of the theoretical matrix, “the idea that the state [or the decision-maker or group] might be a bearer of moral burdens [outside state boundaries] is either precluded or (perhaps most notably in the case of classical realist positions) allowed but unexamined” (Erskine 2008, 704). This amoral conception of foreign policy is, as discussed, fascinating in light of
the wider developments in world politics (Hudson 2014, 9). Claims to morality by decision-makers, and public eagerness to hold individuals and governments accountable for gruesome acts and outcomes, or for failing to react to such, suggests an “explicit recognition of the possibility of individual [and collective] agency in world politics” (Gaskarth 2011, 395). The international community and the wider public do not hold foreign policy decisions as always compelled by paramount necessity. On the contrary, they may often be inspired by the personal choices of decision-makers, or groups of decision-makers. FPA may contribute to this recognition by offering a theoretical framework that links foreign policy to moral agency (see Bevir and Daddow 2015; Gaskarth 2011; Hudson 2005, 2014; Erskine 2012).15

2.4 Engaging FPA and IR

Historically, the relationship between FPA and IR has been largely disconnected due to different styles of theorizing (Hudson 2014, 204; Kaarbo 2015, 192-195; Houghton 2007). It was difficult to identify starting points for conversation between overtly structural accounts of international politics and explicitly agent and domestic-driven FPA. Treated as a subfield uneasy to connect logically to the main theories of IR, FPA has long been a free-floating approach to international politics (Houghton 2007, 26). Kenneth Waltz where among the prominent IR-scholars that welcomed the insights of FPA, but suggested a division of labor between the two fields. While IR were to continue its pursuit of a grand theoretical models of international politics, FPA was welcome to focus on actor specifics, or as he put it, “why state X made a certain move last Tuesday” (Waltz 1979, 121). However, this has been an unsatisfactory answer to FPA scholars, seeing as to goal of FPA scholarship was to correct some the assumptions of mainstream IR-theories (Houghton 2007, 24). Several responses have to Waltz have been made. Sheri Berman notes that research is moving beyond this division of labor argument: “the juxtaposition of new questions and unsatisfactory old

15 See Erskine (2008) for a highly interesting discussion on where to locate moral agency and responsibility in international relations.
answers, especially in comparative politics and international relations, has driven a search for new ways to analyze and understand political phenomena” (Berman 2001, 231). A lot of IR-theory incorporates decision-making and domestic politics factors to offer foreign policy explanations (Kaarbo 2015, 194; Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro 2009; Wivel 2005). FPA has also attempted to reach out to the major “isms” of IR (Kubalkova 2001; Bratberg 2011; Mintz 2007). Moreover, separating IR from FPA would still make it difficult to grapple with the issue of morality, making it hard to understand, explain, and respond to practical moral problems in world politics (Erskine 2008, 704). Explaining international relations without an account of decision-makers fails to “link acts of human agency in that realm to the consequences thereof” (Hudson 2014, 9). Nor is it an easy task to separate empirically structural patterns in international relations from human action: “systems become bipolar or multipolar, balanced or unbalanced, nuclear or nuclear-free, polluted or clean, growing or contracting because of the interdependence among individual decisions [. . .] international politics are formed by the aggregated consequences of individual and collective decisions (Bueno de Mesquita 2002, 7). In this light, comprehending why state X made a certain move last Tuesday, or states X and Y came to agreement or disagreement last Tuesday, becomes immensely important.16 Furthermore, this moving beyond the division of labor does not entail a rejection of structures on the part of FPA. Rather it states that there is no easy way to demarcate structures from agents (Carlsnaes 1992). The resulting patterns of interstate behavior have to come from somewhere in the first place, that is, from states interacting through their foreign policies, their foreign policies following from the choices of decision-makers.

2.4.1 Neoclassical and formalist approaches

There are many attempts to cross-fertilize FPA and IR approaches to foreign policy. Neoclassical realism, for instance, has reached toward FPA assumptions

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16 This warrants idiographic studies of the stories behind foreign policy decisions, but it allows also for comparison and studies of cross-country trends (Garrison 2003; Kaarbo 2003).
by incorporating decision-maker motivations, perceptions and beliefs: “the policies states pursue are rarely objectively efficient or predictable based upon a purely systemic analysis” (Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman. 2009, 4). Perceptions of the international system and material capabilities are filtered through the state, which is made up of decision-makers, foreign policy elites, the public and so forth. In this way, domestic politics and decision-makers become intervening variables on state responses to international politics. However, neoclassical realists hold interests as fixed, which means ideas are treated in a very limited way, for example as devices to rally support for causes of national interest (Kaarbo 2015, 204; Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 4). Structural and material attributes still give states and their decision-making elite space to define their own interests and develop idiosyncratic foreign policies, but interests and goals are still cast in the language of security, power, and threat assessment (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro 2009; Wivel 2005; Rose 1998). This brings us back to the problem of dealing with the ethical dimensions of foreign policy. Neoclassical realists are inclined to think of states as purposive actors through their decision-makers, but their realist account of interests evades the question of moral agency in international affairs (Erskine 2008, 703).

Another approach to engaging FPA and IR has been “behavioral” IR. Alex Mintz and others have sought to increase the explanatory power of rational choice models with accounts of cognitive factors that are thought to have an impact of foreign policy (Mintz 2007; Walker, Malici and Schaefer 2011). These are for example decision-maker susceptibility to negative political information (so-called “poliheuristic bias”), wishful thinking, misperception, the way political leaders are presented with information etc. Drawing on research in political psychology, which has been a popular enterprise within FPA, their aim has been to incorporate “numerous anomalies from the expected utility model of choice” into IR research (Mintz, 2007, 157). The focus is to investigate empirically how rational models might be integrated with psychological models that can control for cognitive biases to better explain, or predict, foreign policy behavior. However, it is not easy to figure out whether rational choice models come to appreciate a more nuanced view of decision-makers and their preferences, or if
their thin accounts of rationality are replaced by thicker accounts informed by psychology only to make more “realistic” models of behavior (Hudson 2014, 207). If the latter is their argument, then it does matter whether we operate with decision-makers or states as actors; they are both reducible to actor-units with bounded rationality. It seems then that both neoclassical and formalist approaches place insights from FPA and political psychology “rather uneasily within a discussion of realism and treated as a more “realistic” form of realism” (Houghton 2007, 24).17

To be fair, rational choice models are not necessarily restricted to self-regarding goal attainment. Duncan Snidal argues that rational choice “is remarkably open to alternative specifications” (Snidal 2002, 75). Models could treat appropriate conduct, such as other-regarding or ethical motives as a form of goal seeking. Rational choice could take on a theory of normatively appropriate conduct and determine what the best choice in a given situation is: “[. . .] insofar as other values can be treated as objectives of actors, rational choice can readily incorporate them” (ibid). However, one would still need to bracket well-defined normative preferences and goals, which requires us to identify preferences and beliefs. It is a formidable empirical task just to try to aggregate them, let alone treat them as fixed, which makes it difficult for models to accommodate clashing beliefs or ideational change.

2.4.2 FPA and constructivism

In contrast to the above attempts at collaboration, the logical connections between FPA and constructivism seem more an appropriate theoretical framework for analyzing the normative underpinnings of foreign policy. Insights from both constructivism and FPA were intended to correct some of the assumptions of mainstream IR, realism in particular, and the ideational turn in

17 I do not discredit political psychology in itself, which has helped enrich our understanding of the differences between decision-makers, and sometimes overlaps ideational studies (Schaefer 2003; Levy 1994; see Hudson 2014 for an overview).
FPA focusing on culture, identity, national role conceptions, ideas and discourse, fits with much of the constructivist perspective to IR (Kaarbo 2003, 2015; Houghton 2007; Kubalkova 2001; Bratberg 2011; Weldes 1996; Bevir, Daddow and Hall 2013; Goldstein and Keohane 1993). The claim that ideas matter resonates with FPAs ontological premises, stressing the role of foreign policy elites and “the subjective understandings of leaders [decision-makers] as funnels for international and domestic factors” (Kaarbo 2015, 190). As Steve Smith claims:

[... ] social constructivism should be particularly relevant to foreign policy analysis (FPA), precisely because social construction starts from the assumption that actors make their worlds, and this assumption lies behind most of the foreign policy analysis literature.

Foreign policy is what states make of it, to paraphrase Alexander Wendt (Smith 2001, 80).

To constructivists, and hence constructivist-inspired FPA, “the national interest” is not objectively given, for example, but must be interpreted through the prism of ideas” (Houghton 2007, 26; see also Weldes 1996 and Hay 2011a). The concept of interests is elastic, and thus open to interpretation. The claim is not that ideas are more important than interests are, or that states or decision-makers do not have interests. Rather, the claim is that interests are not given a priori, but shaped by ideas (Bratberg 2011, 330; Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 4; Hay 2011a, 68; Kaarbo 2015, 206; Weldes 1996, 280). Actors are not blessed with a “20/20 vision” of the material context they inhabit, and therefore, that context is not an obvious guide to their behavior; ideas are (Hay 2011a, 72-73). Moreover, perceived self-interest does not have to be the sole motivation foreign policy. Decision-makers could also make decisions based on convictions of the right thing to do (Kaarbo 2015, 206). Ideas inform not only interests, but also what decision-makers deem to be appropriate, legitimate and proper (Béland and Cox 2001, 3). This again makes room for actors to address normative issues that could redefine or give a more nuanced view of their interests. However, as David Houghton and others argue, the goodness of fit between constructivism and FPA requires some justification, particularly with regard to the relationship between agents and structures and epistemological views (see chapter 3) (Houghton 2007; Kaarbo 2015, 2003; Thies and Breuning 2012).
While the focus on ideas began in IR with the constructivist turn, early contributions, such as those of Alexander Wendt and Martha Finnemore, brought attention to shared norms of appropriateness at the systemic level and ideational structures producing similar state behavior through socialization (Wendt 1999; see also Finnemore 1996). The misfit between FPA and Wendtian constructivism was thus obvious. Without a convincing account of human agency, it would fail to understand how ideas vary across and within states. As Hudson argues, “by leaving in ideas, but omitting human agents, he [Wendt] leaves ideas in the realm of the untouchable zeitgeist [. . .] the ideas are there, but they have no handles for us to hold and turn” (Hudson 2014, 13; Hudson 2005).

However, constructivism offers many approaches operating at domestic and decision-maker levels, which should be expected, since the account of the world as socially constructed is easy to ally with a strong notion of agency: “[. . .] put simply, human beings matter because it is they who fashion – and have the capacity to change – social reality” (Houghton 2007, 28; see also Onuf 1989). In this way, they also “applaud the tendency of FPA to look for the agent – the foreign policy decision-maker – wherever he or she might be found” (Kubalkova 2001, 19). Yet, as Michael Barnett argues, constructivists operating with foreign policy decision-makers tend to treat agents as secondary to structures:

Constructivism has tended to operate with an oversocialized view of actors, treating them as near bearers of structures and, at the extreme, as cultural dupes. The real danger here is the failure to recognize that actors have agency, can be strategic, are aware of the cultural and social rules that presumably limit their practices, and as knowledgeable actors are capable of appropriating those cultural taproots to various ends (Barnett 1999, 7).

Walter Carlsnaes has likewise claimed that these approaches “assume that the contents of their perceptions lie beyond the contingency of individual action,” and that “human subjectivity is conceived as the reproduction of social structure” (Carlsnaes 1992, 252-253). Sheri Berman has also noted “that most work in the field discusses how relatively static ideas, norms, or cultural attributes produce stable patterns of behavior over time” (Berman 2001, 234). Agents are conceptualized as “bound together in often unacknowledged inter-subjective
communities (Hay 2011b, 170), where culture, identity and collective ideas limit alternative thinking. For example, in a study of British foreign policy Jamie Gaskarth argues that the social construction of “the way things have always been done” in foreign policy, ideational constraints that shape decision-makers’ understanding of what is possible, appropriate or legitimate, seem to exclude or “haunt” attempts at foreign policy innovation (Gaskarth 2006, 328). He has a point. Foreign policy is a public policy arena “which seems to display more continuity than most” (Hill 2003, 242). However, given constructivism’s original aim to challenge (material) structural accounts, it seems odd to privilege social and ideational structures that constrain agency. In principle, however, it does not have to be structure all the way down. Most constructivists share the assumption that agents and structures are co-constitutive which should allow for agency (Houghton 2007, 28; Flanik 2011, 9).

By contrast, FPA has been criticized for treating international politics as merely an arena ready for action, and for its overtly individualistic and asocial accounts of agents, often focusing on the psychological attributes of single leaders (Kaarbo 2015, 201; see Hudson 2014 for an overview). It is true that empirical studies have focused on how foreign policy can be susceptible to the personality and convictions of state leaders or key decision-makers. Leaders with foreign policy expertise, or who take keen, or even emotional interest in foreign policy, have been though leave a significant imprint on a country’s external affairs (Hermann 1970, 1984; Barber 1985; Post 2003; Ekengren 2005; Dyson 2006). Although political leader studies focus on internal belief systems or psychological microfoundations that influence their beliefs, they do not dismiss the intersubjective and social component that constructivism stresses (Kaarbo 2015, 206; Kaarbo 2003, 161; Daddow and Schnapper 2013). Nor do these studies exhaust the field of FPA. In theory, leaders and foreign policy elites can more than the sum of their parts; “agents do not exist in isolation from the structures they create” (Houghton 2007, 28; Kaarbo 2015, 200). As Sheri Berman points out, “no intellectual vacuum ever exists” (Berman 2001, 233). The agent-centered approach, however, allows for the instrumental use and varying interpretations of and responses to structures (Kaarbo 2015, 201). By coupling constructivist
insight on ideational structures with FPA’s insistence on tilting in the direction of political agency, this study allows for both continuity and change in foreign policy.

2.4.3 Ideational continuity and change

Swedish foreign policy studies point both to the influence of historical continuity, identity and domestically shared values, and the international role to which Sweden ascribes itself (Bergman Rosamond 2016). They also point to foreign policy as an arena that has become more contested and subject to change (Möller and Bjereld 2010; Bjereld and Demker 2000; Brommesson and Ekengren 2012; Brommesson 2016). Sweden’s role as an internationalist state with moral obligations beyond its borders has been bound up with notions of solidarity, equity and social justice rooted in Swedish society, which have in turn has framed (or structured if you like) the direction of foreign policy since the 1960s (Lawler 2007, 104-105). Douglas Brommesson has drawn the conclusion that Sweden’s role as an internationalist has been open to interpretation, resulting in ideational revision during the 1990s (Brommesson 2010, 2016; see also Möller and Bjereld 2010, Bergman Rosamond 2016 and Aggestam and Hyde-Price 2016). The literature suggests a distinction between two traditions of living up to Sweden’s internationalist self-conception, consisting each in a set of collective beliefs of the “ways things ought to be done” in foreign policy. In chapter 4, I attempt to seek out the ideational distinctions between these two foreign policy traditions. Following the literature on Swedish foreign policy, the first tradition dominated the ideational landscape from between the 1960s and the 1980s with Olof Palme as front figure. The second tradition has dominated Swedish foreign policy from the 1990s onwards. Constructivist inspired FPA suggests that collectively held beliefs derived from tradition are “allowed immediate leverage on the formulation and justification of foreign policy” (Bratberg 2011; see also Bevir and Daddow 2015; Bevir, Daddow and Hall 2013). In theory, these traditions, inform today’s decision-makers, “usually at the apex of foreign policy machineries,”
about their country’s international role “and the strategic habits that have evolved from that role” (Bevir and Daddow 2015, 274). They inform decision-makers of which political themes, issues and dilemmas have been given priority, and traditional ways of responding to them (ibid; see also Levy 1994). Decision-makers may draw on, or even adapt prior foreign policy tradition

[... ] to identify the national interest and the scope and limits for foreign policy action they see as flowing from dilemmas they encounter in the international arena. These dilemmas might be foreign policy ‘crises’ that challenge preconceptions about the behavior of another state or international actor. Dilemmas can also arise in the form of new information or knowledge about ‘routine’ or non-urgent foreign policy matter (Bevir and Daddow 2015, 275).

Chapter 5 attempts to detect beliefs guiding the ambitious foreign policy of Sweden’s current government, and clarify to what degree and in what ways decision-makers are informed by prior foreign policy traditions. In this way, hopefully we will be able to tell whether the new government represents continuity or change. In the next chapter, I account for a viable methodological design to measure the extent to which the current government draws on these traditions.

2.4.4 Ideas: worldviews, principled beliefs and causal beliefs

As factors crucial to understanding foreign policy, it is important to seek to establish the beliefs that decision-makers draw on through analysis (Hay 2011, 167). Therefore, we should employ a theoretically sound definition of ideas which enables us to know what to look for in the analysis. There are many useful definitions of ideas. According to Nina Tannenwald, “ideas are mental constructs held by individuals, sets of distinctive beliefs, principles and attitudes that provide broad orientations for behavior and policy” (Tannenwald 2005, 15). Daniel Béland and Robert Henry Cox define ideas as products of cognition, “produced in our minds and our connected to the material world only via our interpretations of our surroundings” (Béland and Cox 2011, 3). Even though ideas and beliefs are oriented towards action, it does not mean that they are acted upon
all the time. They provide guides for action, but also inaction. Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane distinguish between three types of ideas, which can be held both individually and collectively. They are worldviews, principled beliefs and causal beliefs (Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 7-8). This categorization of ideas is not intended to exhaust other ways of making distinctions between ideas, nor do Goldstein and Keohane assume that these ideational levels are as clearly cut in social life as in the abstract. However, they are ideas at three levels of generality that may prove analytically useful in identifying beliefs prevalent in foreign policy.

At the most fundamental level, ideas come in the form of worldviews. Worldviews are ideas that are often widely shared and “define the universe of possibilities for action” (Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 7-8). They profoundly affect our modes of thought and how we look at ourselves, and they make the world understandable to us. Religion and science both provide worldviews. So does particular philosophies of life. One can for example have a Buddhist or Christian worldview, or one can have an individualist worldview, which elevates the rights of the individual human being above those of the collective (a kin group, culture or nation state, for example). Applied to international politics, realism is a worldview, which holds that the system of states is governed by one law only: anarchy. Worldviews are often general enough to room contradictory beliefs.

“States should intervene militarily in other states to protect civilians under repression,” “women should not be discriminated against based on their gender” and “economic redistribution is fair” are all principled beliefs. They are ideas “that specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong and just from unjust” (Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 9). Arguably, most political ideas are of this sort; they sum up what actors hold valuable (Bratberg 2014, 58). A set of more or less coherent principled beliefs can for example make up a political party’s ideological platform. Principled beliefs are often justified based on a worldview, and function as a mediator between the worldview and the policy conclusions that are believed

18 Ethical realists argue that some principled beliefs are independent of subjective opinion, i.e., that they report to objective facts. For an overview of ethical realism and its proponents, see Sayre-McCord (2015).
right to pursue. It is fully possible to justify contradicting principled beliefs in terms of the same worldview.

“The political elite in Hungary pay no respect to democratic standards,” “the proportion of low income pupils in schools impact educational achievement,” “generous welfare benefits make the jobless lazy,” “Advancement of women’s rights is critical to the stability of a country and to reducing political violence.” Causal beliefs are beliefs that posit connections between things. \(^{19}\) They can be verified or falsified against empirical evidence. However, many causal beliefs about the social world are not easy to operationalize (Bratberg 2014, 59). Consider the belief that democracy increases people’s life satisfaction. Even distinguished political scientists and philosophers have contesting measures of both phenomena, and so it is not easy to give scientific answers that attest to the trueness of this causal link. This is not the same as saying that no answers based on scientific inquiry can be candidates to the truth. Some scientific answers are better founded, or closer to the truth, than others are. Nevertheless, the empirical examination of causal beliefs about the social world reach at best probabilistic conclusions, which make them vulnerable to political coloration. Anyone who follows the political debate will come to see that causal beliefs are prone to coloration, and not just in the form of scoring political points (Bratberg 2014, 59). Especially within the realm of politics, we encounter beliefs about cause and effect that are often influenced by ones principled beliefs. Here is another example: “Tayyip Erdoğan’s slide towards authoritarian rule causes harm to the Turkish people” (The New York Times 2017). This makes sense because of the principled conviction that authoritarian leadership is inherently bad. Principled beliefs may also value certain strategies for the attainment of goals, even when there is evidence pointing to cause-effect relationships that suggests other strategies work better. For example, a hardline believer in libertarian values could be reluctant to accept forced busing as a solution to school segregation problems, even if it has

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\(^{19}\) Some beliefs are of metaphysical nature. For example, football players occasionally cite God as the reason for their impressive performances on the pitch (The Guardian 2013). This could be either a matter of faith or an actual belief in God as a helping cause when steering the ball into the net or saving a penalty. In any case, I leave beliefs of metaphysical nature aside.
been shown to work in some areas (The Economist 2011). International sanctioning against hostile regimes is another example. Even if evidence point to the ineffectiveness of sanctions, decision-makers may follow them through, because they signal that international society does not tolerate the practices of the hostile regime. This shows that causal beliefs are often inextricably linked to principled beliefs. As Daniel Béland and Robert Henry Cox put it, “by giving definition to our values and preferences, ideas provide us with interpretive frameworks that make us see some evidence as important and others less so” (Béland and Cox 2011, 3).

Theoretically, though, it will still be useful to make the distinction between principled and causal beliefs, but the apparent links between them once again indicate that ideas are worthy of examination in themselves; the way that decision-makers think about the world is where explanation for their behavior should be looked for.

Table 1. A summary of ideas at three levels of generality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldviews</th>
<th>Principled beliefs</th>
<th>Causal beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worldviews define the universe of possibilities for action. Worldviews are entwined with our conception of identity, and they deeply affect modes of thinking and understanding of the world around us.</td>
<td>Principled beliefs specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong and just from unjust. They are justified in terms of an actor’s worldview, but worldviews are often general enough to room contradictory beliefs at this level. For example, one could have a principled belief in gender equality: unequal treatment of woman and men is unjust.</td>
<td>Beliefs about cause and effect provide guides on how to achieve objectives (which serve as proxies for one’s principled beliefs). Causal beliefs are held as consistent with one’s principled beliefs and broader worldview. For example, microfinance aid programs help to empower woman in poor communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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20 Which is among the insights of political psychology sparking foreign policy analysis of belief systems, operational codes, national role conceptions, or the psychologies of political leaders.
Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 FPA and constructivism: common epistemological ground

While it should not cause too much controversy to couple FPA and constructivism in terms of ontological assumptions, there is considerably less agreement on how we can attain knowledge. There is disagreement not just between FPA and constructivism, but also within both tents. Both avoid the search for causal “Big-T claims,” rendering the uncovering of determinate laws in foreign policy conduct impossible (Kaarbo 2003; Houghton 2007; 30), but apart from that neither constructivism nor FPA is an epistemologically unified approach (Houghton 2007, 39). This is especially evident of FPA, which can be subsumed under both rational choice and neoclassical realist studies (as shown in chapter 2): “[…] the subfield today seems to reflect a genuine eclecticism about epistemological issues (ibid). FPA accepts much of the work coming out of domestic politics and institutions, which seeks middle-range theories – clearly on the explanation side of the epistemological debate in IR (Kaarbo 2015, 200). However, FPA also values single-case studies belonging to the understanding side of the divide. Arguably, the easiest way for FPA and constructivism to find common epistemological ground is to apply interpretivism (Bevir, Daddow and Hall 2013; Houghton 2007). Since actors make their worlds, then knowledge (about the social world) is largely mediated by beliefs, which requires us to try to understand those beliefs through interpretive techniques (Hay 2011a, 2011b).\(^{21}\)

\(^{21}\) Interpretive approaches tend to give preference to qualitative methods. However, interpretivism does not rule out the use of quantitative techniques (Hay 2011b).
3.1.1 Interpreting foreign policy

A common claim is that interpretivist approaches to foreign policy are essentially anti-positivist, repudiating positivist scientific methodology altogether. The argument goes: if the subjects under study, e.g. foreign policy decision-makers, encounter the world of international politics through the veil of ideas, then the same must apply to the researcher. The researcher can never move beyond their own interpretations of foreign policy decision-makers’ interpretations. How can researcher enjoy an unfiltered access to reality, if political actors are themselves constrained by their cognitive filters? There is no way in which the interpreter’s research findings can be anything more than perspectival. By the logic of the above argument, the interpreter must claim that knowledge is always biased. All that political analysis can offer is interpretation, and the interpretation is doomed to reflect the interests and perspectives of the interpreter. Accordingly, the strong-minded positivist would claim that interpretivism fails to explain anything in scientific terms. From an anti-positivist and postmodernist vantage point, this epistemology is simply that which befalls all science. Taking this assumption to its extreme, empirical theory becomes nothing but a myth, since any claim to knowledge can yield an irreconcilable response. Interpretation is all there ever can be. The American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty has argued along these lines: “no description of an object is more true to the nature of that object than any other” (Rorty 2000, 23).

Following Hay, I argue that interpretivism does not need to accept the above claims. Interpretivism does not assume that scientific inquiry beyond our subjective understandings of social phenomena is impossible. As Hay points out, “interpretivism is far less characterized by epistemological skepticism than is invariably assumed” (Hay 2011b, 169; see also Clark 2009). Interpretivists acknowledge that interpretation is all there ever is, but they do not need to acknowledge this in an anti-positivist sense. Surely, interpretations are “not only the subject but also the medium of political analysis” (ibid 168). Our interpretations of what goes on in other people’s minds can certainly be wrong, but it hardly follows that no interpretation can come closer to what is actually the
case than any other. One can argue, quite oppositely, it is when we move beyond the observable, when we speculate on what decision-makers have in their minds, that we actually gain substantial returns on our epistemic efforts. Interpretivism is also reluctant to make the conventional distinction between explaining and understanding. Surely, one way of understanding an outcome or a case is to try to explain how things came to be the way there were (Hay 2011b, 171-172). The main trouble for interpretivist accounts though is establishing validity and reliability. This is exactly what Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane have in mind when they ask “how we can reconcile our demand for systematic social science with our recognition of the role of interpretation (Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 27).

3.2 Qualitative content analysis

The key methodological challenge that students focusing on ideas and beliefs face is that they must find a way to figure out what is in people's minds. One of the primary techniques used for this task is content. Content analysis is, according to Valerie Hudson, an at-a-distance measure for analyzing the traits, motivations, beliefs and other characteristics of decision-makers (Hudson 2014, 61). Hudson refers to content analysis as at a distance because the researcher seldom has the chance to talk to decision-makers in person. Luckily, decision-makers leave behind a trail of things they have said or written that becomes documented in text. Hence the content of content analysis, or the key empirical data the researcher relies on to draw inferences about politics, is textual material. Underlying the attempt to analyze decision-makers in this fashion is the methodological assumption that the artifacts of one’s personal characteristics “include the things one has said and written” (ibid). Following content analysis, there must be some relationship between the oral or written statements of decision-makers and the beliefs that decision-makers hold. Through careful analysis of the content of those statements, which are found in texts, we should be able to reveal some of the ideas underlying them.
Qualitative content analysis is one of several possible approaches to detect the appearance of ideas within texts, and the one arguably most fit for the purpose of my research task, which is to detect ideas and beliefs underpinning foreign policy (Hudson 2014, 62; Bratberg 2014, 57). With this approach, the researcher goes a step beyond mapping just the observable textual content. What is important for qualitative content analysis is to try to unveil or recognize explicit or implicit ideas within the observable text. This means that what the subjects under study said and wrote are not taken at face value; there is meaning and analytical depth beyond the observable content, which must hence be interpreted and contextualized by the researcher (Bratberg 2014, 60). The analyst’s task is to interpret statements decision-makers make as expressions of specific ideas. The validity of these interpretations depends on making a clear argument of the logic behind them (Bratberg 2014, 79). Qualitative content analysis is thus essentially interpretivist, “first and foremost concerned with capturing the meanings and beliefs of agent participants in political processes and practices” (Hay 2011b, 168). It also runs parallel to the FPA insistence on opening the black box of foreign policy decision-making, analyzing the ideas and beliefs of those who are assumed to be at the center of international politics (Bevir, Daddow and Hall 2013, 166).

3.3 Analytical recipe

3.3.1 The first step

The following study applies a two-step logic. The first step is to conduct a thorough historical analysis of ideas and beliefs that have guided Swedish foreign policy decision-making since the 1960s. Since ideas and beliefs do not appear out of thin air, I start out with a prologue, or “backstory” as Sheri Berman calls it (Berman 2001, 233), of previous events and dilemmas that gave rise to the ideas that achieved prominence from the 1960s onwards. I base my analysis on a review of authoritative scholarly accounts of foreign policy focusing on the foreign policy elite and their ideas, and issues that traditionally have occupied Sweden’s foreign
policy itinerary, such as development and aid, democracy and human rights, conflict mediation and peace work, international cooperation, and security and trade. I have occasionally supplemented the historical review with material from newspapers interviews with key decision-makers where the material helped to exemplify points made by researchers. Through the historical review, I generate a typology consisting of ideal type representations of two internationalisms, with divergent sets of beliefs that together make up Sweden’s traditional modes of thinking on normative foreign policy issues. The two ideal types are (1) active internationalism, and (2) Europeanized liberal internationalism. Both internationalisms fall within the established standard narrative of research on Swedish foreign policy after World War II (Brommesson 2016; Bjereld et al. 2008). Since the typology is based on readings of scholarly literature, I hope that the review and the resulting typology will not be too controversial with regard to validity. However, as the review has a more detailed normative focus, interpretation has been used to sort out content involving normative issues. What is more, the ideal types should not be understood as exhaustive of Sweden’s foreign policy, as there may be aspects that have gone unnoticed.

3.3.2 The second step

In the second step, I conduct an empirical analysis of ideas underpinning the current Swedish government’s foreign policy. I trace ideas using a variety of primary textual sources, including speeches by key decision-makers, government statements and opinion pieces on foreign policy and newspaper interviews, where issues and themes similar to the ones that have predominated Swedish foreign policy tradition are present (see chapter 5 on the specifics of the data selection). In sorting out ideas, I apply the typology of internationalisms as a categorization scheme. Here the ideas that make up active and liberal internationalism are categorized and operationalized as divergent sets of worldviews, principled beliefs and causal beliefs. The aim is then to trace the appearance of these within

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22 The analytical table is presented at the end of chapter 4.
the textual material by interpreting statements that can be classified either as expressions of active internationalist or liberal internationalist beliefs. In this way, we evade the problem of searching for ideas in the dark. Behind this approach is the theoretical argument (made in chapter 2) that beliefs seldom pop up *ex nihilo* (Berman 2001, 233). Beliefs rooted in Swedish foreign policy tradition are thought to have constraining properties in the sense that they inform the elite thought on what has been essential to Sweden’s international conduct (Bevir and Daddow 2015, 274). Therefore, it is likely that statements by present-day decision-makers will relate to beliefs that fall within the scope of the typology.

The categorization scheme enables the analysis to identify the extent to and ways in which the current government’s ideas on foreign policy are informed by foreign policy tradition. As I see it, the government’s foreign policy can be informed by tradition in four possible ways: (1) the Löfven government’s foreign policy exhibits ideational features that come close the liberal internationalist ideal type; (2) the ideas guiding its foreign policy are highly related to active internationalism; (3) the government may be informed by a more complex combination or synthesis of ideas derived from both ideal types; (4): the government has made substantial revision to ideas prevalent in tradition, or brought entirely new ideas to the table that depart from tradition.

It is important to make clear that the current government’s foreign policy cannot fully match the features of, or be equivalent to, an ideal type at the empirical level (Kim 2012). We should regard the ideal types as imagined extremes of different normative directions that have been more or less influential at different periods in time, so that the foreign policy of the Löfven government can be linked to, or associated with one ideal type, and thus more divergent from the other (see Brommesson 2010; Brommesson and Ekengren 2012).

### 3.2.2 Validity and reliability concerns

Content analysis based on interpretivism has the potential of scoring high on internal validity. However, that depends to a large degree on the method’s
reliability, which can be difficult to achieve. Obviously, reliability depends on supplying the reader with your reasons for the particular selection of texts (see chapter 5), providing the reader with a full list of textual sources and a manual for how classification of statements was conducted (see chapter 5). The challenge here is to avoid interpretation becoming impressionistic rather than analytical (Krippendorf 2004, 87). A consistent classification manual could remedy for the potential pitfall of reading too much meaning into the text when trying to make statements fit into the categorization scheme. A manual will also improve transparency (Bratberg 2011, 339; Hopf 2002, 28-29). As for external validity, interpretivist approaches will not offer much, which is not the purpose of this study anyway. It is reasonable, however, to argue that strong internal validity could lead us to generate some theoretical assumptions about other Western states that try to pursue ethical foreign policies.

Having the first and second steps of the analysis not rest on the same data, which would otherwise blur the analytical process, further ensures stronger validity and reliability (Bratberg 2014, 73; Bergström and Boréus 2005, 171-173). Another way of strengthening validity would be to apply foreign policy ideal types derived from general international relations literature. Both Martin Wight’s typology of three normative strands in foreign policy decision-making and Cranford Pratt’s categorization of internationalisms share similarities with the typology developed in this chapter (see Wight 1991 and Pratt 1989, 1990). However, given that there is something specifically Swedish about Sweden’s foreign policy, tradition being tied to those specifics, I argue that the typology should be grounded in an analysis of scholarly literature on Sweden.

As argued in chapter 2, foreign policy tradition consist in ideas that make up what decision-makers find normatively sensible and appropriate to do (Bratberg 2014, 80). A claim against the usefulness of my typology is that the beliefs of each ideal type are tied to the specific historical conditions in which they were evoked.\(^{23}\) True, some beliefs achieve prominence at particular times and are

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\(^{23}\) This is a claim against using the typology to study Swedish contemporary foreign policy, not against developing the typology in itself.
then discredited or considered inappropriate; an historical narrative would perhaps periodize Sweden’s foreign policy tradition, from small state realism via active internationalism to liberal internationalism. However, my intention has not been historical periodization. From a normative point of view, it is hard to argue that the beliefs that make up the typology in question do not apply to a contemporary context. Both internationalisms have the potential to have offered guidance on a range of issues and dilemmas facing contemporary foreign policymaking in Sweden. It does not mean that they in fact do so. That is up to the empirical analysis to resolve.
Chapter 4
Beliefs guiding
Swedish foreign policy: A typology

4.1 Prologue: Small state realism

Ulf Bjereld describes “Undénlinjen,” named after Minister for Foreign Affairs Östen Undén (1945-1962), as careful and non-provoking (Bjereld et. al. 2008). Tage Erlander’s social democratic government, in which Undén served, pursued a low-profile policy of non-alignment in order to enable Swedish neutrality in case of war. This implied a passive approach to international politics in which Sweden did little to interfere in the affairs of other states. Ulf Bjereld and Ulrika Möller similarly describe Sweden’s initial Cold War foreign policy as “small-state realism without normative ambitions” (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 437). The ambitions to speak of were upholding international law, preventing conflict and strengthening the United Nations. Still, lack of normative ambitions did not imply lack of normative considerations. Non-alignment served both strategic and normative purposes:

By treating the two superpower blocs impartially and by implementing foreign and security policies based on international law and a strong UN, Sweden not only enhanced its own ability to stand outside any major war, but also helped strengthen peace throughout Europe (ibid, 438).

Undén did not seem to doubt that ethics had a place in foreign policy (Holmström 1981; Möller and Bjereld 2010). However, he came to believe that an ethics easily turned into moral sloganeering. He particularly had in mind the tendency to group states into righteous and rogue categories, which was an endemic tendency throughout the Cold War era. Undén held deep antipathy towards the sort of
moralizing that, at the time, was especially explicit in the political style of United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (Holmström 1981, 79). Sweden’s relations with other states, he held, should not contain weak moral or ideological considerations of their politics and culture.

Non-alignment was a move that followed from the power asymmetries between Sweden and the Soviet Union (Bengtsson 2016, 452). It also enabled Sweden to deploy its own exemplary foreign policy dodging both Cold War camps. Swedish foreign policy did not adjust to the vocabulary of the Cold War politics, which without reservations split the world into two irreconcilable camps. For example, applying the expressions “the free world” and the “non-communist world” interchangeably, did not sit well with Undén, and he disliked American leaders for doing so (Holmström 1981, 78). He also targeted the Swedish opposition parties, mainly accusing the center-right and conservative parties for conforming to misleading distinctions such as the one above.24 Barry Holmström discusses two cases where Undén explicitly confronted what he considered the inevitable pitfalls of moralistic foreign policy. On one occasion he asked why Sweden should conform to the free-world polemic of the United States, a country whose foreign minister discussed “the peace and security of free nations” with Francoist Spain: “In the American Secretary of State’s language, Spain apparently belongs to the free world” (as cited in Holmström 1981, 79, my translation).

The other case concerned the official status of the Baltic States. Undén had noticed that the Swedish newspapers Dagens Nyheter and Handelstidningen praised Secretary of State Dulles for his brave and confronting line against the Soviet occupation of the Baltics. Their editors applauded Dulles on defending the principle that annexation cannot be tolerated. For Undén this was nothing more than a “politics of fiction,” which demonstrated a refusal to admit unpleasant facts (Holmström 1981, 80). The Soviet annexation was a fact, principled condemnation would not change it, and the only consequence condemnation would produce was to give the Baltic peoples a false sense of hope that they could

24 For an introduction to the Swedish party system, see Aylott (2016) and Esaisson and Wängnerud (2016).
be liberated – a hope the West could not possibly fulfill (ibid). Further, he remarked that U.S. decision-makers were not very consistent in applying principles of justice to foreign policy issues (ibid). On the other hand, if they had done so, it would surely have led to chaos in international relations. Undén did not believe that states should always shy away from denouncing other states. Rather, officials should be very careful not to let their criticism of other states turn into an exercise in self-glory. If Western states were to denounce regimes of the communist world, they should not do so without critically scrutinizing their own conduct, and stop grounding their criticism in deceiving narratives that demarcated the righteous West from the vicious East.

To ensure peace and stability based on sharp assessment of the international environment were the primary ambitions under small state realism. A policy of non-alignment, holding diplomatic channels open and being careful in passing dubious moral judgement on other states, would safeguard Sweden’s long-term interests. While this may sound like cynical realism, this was exactly what decision-makers at the time thought was required in order for Sweden to act as a good international citizen and enhance peace – which was ultimately a moral goal. Honesty, transparency and stability were thus seen as the most effective means.

The Erlander government’s harshest critics cast its foreign policy in terms of moral weakness (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 436). How could Sweden not stand up alongside the West against Soviet land-grab in the Baltics? This sent signals that territorial annexation would be tolerated in the future. Undén was aware of both the grim consequences of remaining passive on the matter, and the broader consequences for international relations if foreign policy were to be based on confrontation. He had no problem seeing the illegality of the Soviet annexation of the Baltics. On the other hand, he saw little reason to put Swedish security at risk by standing up to the combative Soviet leadership. Nor did he consider confrontation morally superior to other lines of policy (Holmström 1981, 80). His answer to the quandary was to outline a general form of foreign policy conduct to which Sweden should adhere, an early and modest version of leadership by
example (Archer 1994, 377; Bjereld et. al. 2008; Holmström 1981, 81; Lawler 1997, 567-568). Ironically, Secretary Dulles was the one who inspired the notion of leadership by example in the first place. Dulles’ ambition was for the United States to pursue a policy of enlightened self-interest, which meant to show the world through their own example the value of freedom and democracy, and thereby convince those who lived under communist oppression of the superiority of Western-style government. However, Undén concluded that U.S. containment policy, which sought to restrain the further expansion of communism, involved actions that conflicted deeply with their determination to be a world role model (Holmström 1981, 81). Thus, the U.S. strategy was inherently flawed. Besides, teaching what is forwards and what is backwards helped nobody. By contrast, the Swedish notion of leadership by example would have a better chance of matching theory with practice. The affinity between the domestic values shaping Swedish society at large (social reform, solidarity, respect for rule of law, peaceful arbitration of disputes) and those influencing its external activities (commitment to diplomacy, adherence to international law in practice), was thought to make Sweden leave a lighter footprint on the world (Björkdahl 2013, 326; Archer 1994). In turn, other states could look for inspiration in this model without Sweden resorting to foreign policy extroversion. The positive impact of Sweden on international peace and progress would however decrease should the country scrap its policy of non-alignment for the alternative of taking a political side bent on imposing its will on other states.

In 1951, the government made a decision that provoked one of the most intense debates on foreign policy since the end of the war (Holmström 1972). A U.S. delegate to the Political Committee of the UN General Assembly had presented a resolution calling on the United Nations to declare the Chinese communist government an aggressor in the Korean War. After ten days of debate in the Political Committee and revisions to the wording, the resolution was adopted with the support of the Western states, including Denmark and Norway (Keesing’s Worldwide 1951). Sweden abstained, doubting the wisdom of placing the responsibility at China’s door. Undén believed that passing such a resolution only made a settlement on Korea more difficult (Holmström 1981, 88). Not only
would a resolution condemning the Chinese government undoubtedly give China reason to reject any proposal to negotiate. Seeing how polarized the General Assembly was on the matter, Swedish representatives also became worried that the resolution could impair the work to strengthen the United Nations (Holmström 1972; Agius 2012, 107-108). It was a catch-22 for the Swedish Government. If the UN failed to become a strong organization that could potentially hinder aggression in the international sphere, it would end up a powerless forum for informal debate. However, if the resolution were adopted, the UN “was in danger of appearing as an appendage of Western foreign ministries” (Wallensten 1995, 12) – and worse, becoming a forum for propagandistic manifestations. A few years later, Swedish foreign policymakers witnessed how the United States itself worked to prevent their invasion of Guatemala from being brought before the UN Security Council (ibid). The Erlander Government believed that as long as the UN’s impartiality was questioned, it was best to remain passive on Korea.

To the opposition parties, the fact that Sweden abstained was a national disgrace (Holmström 1981, 88). Principled condemnation was hardly an empty gesture, even if it weakened the prospect of an early settlement. Besides, many in the opposition thought remaining passive on issues such as the Korean War would leave Sweden without any close friends in international politics. The term “doctrinaire isolationism” was used to denounce the government’s foreign policy, while calling for a policy of “Western-oriented non-alignment” (Holmström 1981, 83). The case provides a classic example of how the government’s foreign policy divided policymakers between those who judged it prudent and responsible, and those who were baffled by its dogmatism, hesitancy and moral weakness.

Although the opposition accused the government of being apprehensive of taking active stance on international matters, Undén did not always refrain from speaking his mind. His general skepticism of the American foreign policy agenda is a case in example. This was, according to Holmström, consistent with Undén foreign policy principles:
His line of thought [...] was that one should apply moral arguments towards addressees that were responsive to moral arguments, but not towards others. The Russians were not responsive to moral arguments. Undén was sure of that. The elites would not listen, and the masses were not able to listen, to the preaching of foreign governments [...] in the liberal United States moral arguments could have resonance. But in the closed Soviet system the method had no chance of success (Holmström 1981, 90, my translation).

4.1.1 Small state realism summarized

Decision-makers were aware of the fragility of peace in the post-war years, and thus mainly concerned with international order and the importance of peaceful relations between states. Security, peace and international order were at the foreground, and Sweden’s voice followed whichever line of reasoning that would contribute to those ends. Further, decision-makers did not believe they traded moral conduct for security. Rather, they strongly believed that the manner in which certain Western states used the language of morality to demean states not belonging to the “free world” would engender hostility towards the very ideals we sought for ourselves and for others. Constructive engagement, within a strong UN framework, and working towards solutions attuned to the specific international situation at hand, was a better path towards desired ends (Ekengren 2011, 124). Accommodation rather than confrontation in international affairs would result in reduced tension. On that account, Undén gave privilege to the principles of open diplomatic channels and international cooperation, holding that moral manifestos in foreign policy were fraught with contradictions. Moral criticism should be used extremely wisely, and towards recipients that were amenable to such criticism. For Undén this was as normative a consideration as it was strategic.

There was also an early understanding of Sweden as a country that could provide an example, a state practicing the virtues of social democratic reformism. However, it was paramount not to let the idea burst into patronizing in the foreign policy domain, a thought consistent with his distaste for moralism (the American way in particular). The focused attention was to be Sweden’s own footprint in the
foreign policy domain rather than resorting to the simplifying dichotomy of good states and bad states. Undén helped develop a brand of international conduct that often reached conclusions that departed from the foreign policies of other Western states, and which were perceived as superior solutions to international issues. Eventually, and perhaps unintended by Undén himself, it was going to serve Sweden’s confidence and self-impression as an increasingly extrovert, and ideological, partaker in international affairs.

4.2 Active internationalism

The analysis now turns to active internationalism, which is often perceived as the emblematic form of Swedish foreign policy. According the Marie Demker, the first marker of an active internationalist foreign policy came as early as 1959. Sweden had held a pro-French position, in concord with all other Western states, voting ‘no’ to an African-Asiatic proposition in the UN General Assembly for Algerian self-determination. However, Sweden pivoted, and became the first Western state to acknowledge Algeria’s right to form its own future (Demker 1998, 135). The UN had taken up the question on Algeria “during a decolonization process which, until then, had not directly affected Sweden” (ibid, 131). The process, however, had coincided with growing demands within the Social Democratic Party to develop a more solidarist approach to international politics. Inspired by new ideas on independence for colonized territories and peoples’ right to self-determination discussed at the Socialist International, policymakers and key diplomats concluded that self-determination and freedom from colonial subservience were necessary conditions for international peace and development (ibid, 137; See also Åström 1992).

The ideas guiding small state realism gave Swedish decision-makers initial guidance on the Algerian question. Östen Undén seemed to believe that the UN was a proper forum to discuss where the Algerian war (Demker 1998, 136). After the UN had passed the motion on the Korean War, Sweden’s view of the organization as guardian of a strong international cooperative and legal
framework had become more pessimistic, fearing that the rest of the world saw it as an instrument for Western domination (Wallensteen 1995, 13). Accordingly, it is likely that Undén believed voting for Algerian self-determination was an opportunity to build confidence in the UN among independence movements in the Third World. If Sweden could make a modest contribution to that end, voting in Algeria’s favor would be justified.\textsuperscript{25} At first, Swedish decision-makers had perceived the Algerian war as an internal problem of France. Eventually, however, it became difficult for Swedish officials not to side with those struggling for independence. The news had presented the Swedish public with evidence that France had made use of torture, in clear violation of principles of wartime conduct. In addition, the Algerian National Liberation Front were engaged in a struggle for what was essentially Western ideals of freedom. In light of these points, the Swedes saw no justification for continued support to the French cause. Further, indifference to the Algerian struggle could, as argued for above, thwart cooperation and understanding between the West and the rising Third World. They also reasoned that if Western states continued to support France’s case, it could potentially push independence movements into the Soviet orbit – which again could provoke major power confrontation and put international security at risk (Demker 1996).\textsuperscript{26}

Voting in favor the proposition, Swedish foreign policy had eventually caused a little stir. Demker concludes that the decision fell short of a total reconsideration of foreign policy: “[It was] more an extended orientation […] an established policy goal from one political domain became a guide for policy in another” (Demker 1998, 144). Recognizing the right to self-determination was well in line with the established policies of avoiding Cold War antagonism and building confidence in the UN. Still, Sweden went against the grain, and on this

\textsuperscript{25} Demker herself argues that there is no visible connection between Sweden’s waning hope for the UN and the decision to support Algeria’s struggle for independence (Demker 1998, 138). I argue that an opposite interpretation is plausible. Undén’s belief in a central role for the UN, which would certainly benefit a small state like Sweden, encouraged him to work to build trust between the organization and newcomer states – as it could potentially boost the UN’s legitimacy in more parts of the world.

\textsuperscript{26} Sweden was certainly not the only state supporting peoples’ right to self-determination (see Eriksen 2000).
occasion, it became evident that non-alignment could imply an orientation towards Third World demands and aspirations.

In the course of the 1960s, the belief that non-alignment entrusted Sweden with an independent voice in international politics was embedded in Swedish foreign policy (Elgström 2016, 432). Attentive to the developing world, its decision-makers turned increasingly confident, and increasingly ideological. In interpreting Sweden’s radicalized foreign policy approach, Ann-Marie Ekengren points to the central role of Olof Palme (Ekengren 2011). In 1962, Palme became Minister without Portfolio and political advisor to Prime Minister Erlander on both national and international issues (ibid, 124). The same year, Sweden initiated a comprehensive program addressing the potential of development aid as a foreign policy instrument (Bergman-Rosamond 2016, 469). The Parliament declared that an aid program was “an expression of a much deeper recognition that peace, freedom and welfare are not exclusive national concerns, but rather something increasingly universal and indivisible” (Hook 1995, 98). Palme was among the program’s most ardent defenders, and “from a very early stage, Palme actively presented his interpretations of what needed to be done in the Third World” (Ekengren 2011, 124). His beliefs in social justice and economic equalization in the domestic sphere, extended to the international. Global economic redistribution was not just an end in itself; it was a prerequisite for global order, international law and friendly relations between nations (Bergman 2007, 76-77). Taking office as Prime Minister in 1969, Palme set out to employ the ideas of non-alignment, equality, self-determination, and respect for a strong international legal order (Brommesson 2010, 231; Ekengren 2005). It was the start of a foreign policy with a global outreach developed from an obligation on the part of Sweden to “actively pursue other-regarding values and interests” (Lawler 2005, 441). The manner in which Sweden would employ these beliefs further distinguished its foreign policy from many other Western countries and created a self-image of exceptionalism (Brommesson 2007, 2010; Dahl 2006; Lawler 1997).
A substantial part of Sweden’s new, wide-reaching foreign aid program went to provide humanitarian and financial support to various independence movements in Africa (Barnes 1980; Ekengren 2011, 124; Sellström 1999). Policymakers considered aid flows to independence movements a direct contribution to help Africa oust colonialism, placing Sweden at odds with many Western countries. From the early 1970s, Swedish sympathies towards political movements in the Third World extended to the Far East and Latin America. Perhaps the most notable recipients of such sympathies were the Viet Cong of North-Vietnam, and later, the Sandinista movement in Nicaragua (Nilsson 1991; Ekengren 2005, 40-41). The Swedish government supplemented their support with fierce vocal opposition towards U.S. interventionism in both countries. Palme had expressed his opinion of the Vietnam War already in 1968, in an anti-war demonstration in Stockholm, during which he and the North-Vietnamese ambassador to Moscow, Nguyen Tho Chanl, marched hand in hand in protest against perceived American aggression (Bjereld 2016, 14). Four years later, after the United States had bombed Hanoi in a series of airstrikes, Palme went as far as ever in his criticism, comparing the bombing campaign to a list of atrocities, including the Sharpeville-massacre, the bombing of Guernica and the Treblinka death camp (ibid, 15). No other European leader had criticized the actions of the United States in such a fashion. Washington instantly recalled its ambassador to Stockholm and froze diplomatic relations with Sweden for more than two years (Leifland 1997; Logevall 2000; Jerneck 1983, Scott 2009, 244).

In Nicaragua, Sweden sustained their moral, material and financial support to the post-revolutionary Sandinista government. At the same time, the United States provided massive support to the opposition, the Contras, perceiving the Sandinistas to constitute a subversive element, and a communist threat, in Central America (Nilsson 1991, 177). Consequently, Sweden found itself confronting a superpower indirectly in that they supported opposite sides in an internal Nicaraguan conflict.

Sweden’s support to these particular movements were symbolic of active internationalism (Bjereld 2016, 14). With Palme as Prime Minister, the idea that
non-alignment made space for activism in international relations reached new levels. According to Ann-Sofie Nilsson, policymakers reasoned that Sweden’s radicalized foreign policy was not *despite* the doctrine of non-alignment, but *because of* the doctrine of non-alignment:

> Only neutrality provides Sweden with the opportunity, and room, to act successfully as an independent third force in world affairs, taking advantage of the fact that it is not tied to either superpower. As such a third force, Sweden has the ability to intervene, diplomatically and politically, in situations in which other actors would be enjoined from taking action either by reason of prior commitment or their alignment elsewhere (Nilsson 1991, 171).

The opportunity to act independently in international politics not only meant broadening the scope and ambition of Sweden’s foreign policy – it became Sweden’s moral obligation. Sweden had become a leading advocate for ideas considered as conducive to a more socially and economically equal world, speaking on behalf of what its policymakers saw as disadvantaged nations and liberation movements representing oppressed peoples. Non-alignment in this sense would ensure Swedish credibility among these movements when addressing concerns in the international sphere (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 438).

The foreign policy of the United States became, in several cases, the antithesis of that of Sweden, epitomized by U.S. interventionism in Central America. Especially in the case of Nicaragua, the United States profoundly challenged the beliefs underpinning Swedish foreign policy, serving to intensify Swedish support to the Sandinistas (Nilsson 1991, 179). Yet, Sweden did not guide its criticism exclusively toward the United States; criticism had become a substantial foreign policy tool. In a content analysis of Sweden’s official

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27 One argument in the literature on Swedish foreign policy holds that non-alignment was an illusion, and that Sweden “was in fact and in practice an informal member of the Western alliance” throughout the Cold War. I intend not to elaborate on that argument. Rather, I study how Sweden’s non-alignment was gradually believed to cohere with an active internationalist foreign policy.

28 Some place emphasis on the role of Swedish criticism as “signaling its neutral position to the Soviet Union” (Möller and Bjereld 2010, 376). Carl-Gustav Scott claims that criticism of the United States served strategic interests in terms of enhancing Swedish-Soviet relations: “[...] regardless of whether or not this policy was, at first, intentionally designed to have this effect – it ultimately served to put the two countries’ relationship on a better footing” (Scott 2009, 244). However, Bjereld holds that Sweden was no less critical of the Soviet Union (Bjereld 1995, 29). It
statements in the UN General Assembly’s general debates and the annual Government Declaration on Foreign Policy from 1947 to 1990, Ulf Bjereld found that criticism of other states drastically increased from the mid-1960s (Bjereld 1995, 28). Sweden vocally opposed the Soviet Union for intervening in Czechoslovakia in 1968 to crack down on reformists, and for its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to shore up a newly established pro-Soviet regime (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 436). It persistently attacked South Africa for its apartheid regime and the occupation of Namibia, while supporting the African National Congress (ANC) and South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO), allowing them to open diplomatic offices in Stockholm (Ekengren 2005, 191-200; Sellström 1999). Swedish officials were disappointed with their Western partners for their passive approach towards the Apartheid issue (Ekengren 2011, 124). Palme publically condemned Pinochet’s regime in Chile, the communist leadership in Czechoslovakia, the Greek Junta, the Salazar-regime in Portugal and General Franco’s Falangist government in Spain (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 436). Palme’s remarks on the latter, calling Franco’s regime “satanic murderers” after the execution of five opposition figures in 1975, made international headlines (Bjereld 2016, 13). In the Middle East, Sweden began to support the Palestine Liberation Organization, while denouncing Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 436).

However, Sweden’s activism did not receive admiration and respect across the political spectrum. Even in European states where social democratic parties held government Sweden’s foreign policy met considerable skepticism. Some criticized Sweden for being intrusive, ideologically motivated and counterproductive (Ekengren 2011, 126). The opposition, led by the Moderate Party, attacked the seemingly selective manner in which liberation movements and poor states were given aid and moral support (Nilsson 1988, 25). Much effort is equally plausible that Sweden often criticized what it perceived as inherently unjust, whomever had performed unjust actions. Further, it could be the case that the policy served both purposes. Criticism of the United States would set the atrocities of the Vietnam War on the agenda, and potentially bolstered the credibility of Swedish non-alignment, hence serving political advantages in terms of Soviet goodwill. This effect does not necessarily disclaim the policy’s moral intention.
was made to portray Palme as a friend of left-wing dictators (Ahlmark 1995). This was not merely rhetorical tactic, for behind the opposition’s criticism lay real concerns. They were two-fold: First, they argued that Palme consistently downplayed the human rights violations and democratic deficits of leftist recipients of support (Ekengren 2005, 41). Many therefore found it ironic that Sweden had gained reputation as a “moral superpower” (Dahl 2006). Second, they believed Swedish strategic interests would be hurt if Sweden did not align with the foreign policies of other Western states. The wish to promote justice (however selective) had to be balanced against more urgent Swedish needs. This signified a more inward-looking ethic on the opposition’s part. Members of the Moderate Party in particular had fears that Palme’s idealist overtures could both damage Sweden’s reputation among its closest partners, and potentially constitute a threat to Sweden’s security and economy (Nilsson 1988, 29). They would rather see a less extrovert role for Sweden in international affairs. The parties, however, seldom stated these beliefs explicitly. A plausible reason is that they did not want to give the government a chance to accuse them of moral cold-heartedness (Ekengren 2005, 180). Though Palme’s internationalism perhaps lacked broad consensus in parliament, it had strong support among broad segments of the Swedish public, something the opposition was well aware of (Nilsson 1988, 29). Accordingly, the opposition parties did not let the Government translate their legitimate concerns into moral pessimism, and worse, lack of solidarity with the Third World.

Palme held, unsurprisingly, the opposite view. As he saw it, Sweden’s moral duties extended far beyond Sweden and its neighborhood to encompass humanity more broadly. He also believed it was in Sweden’s long-term interest to support Third World states on their developmental paths. Support to the Third World would give Sweden a unique opportunity to influence states in a peaceful direction, act as an independent role model on questions of economic and social organization (leadership by example), and gain new partnerships in international politics (Ekengren 2005, 41-42).²⁹ As for the argument linking him to the club of

²⁹ See Mouritzen (1995) for more on the idea of Nordic model progressivity as a foreign policy tool.
left-wing dictators, Palme pointed to the government’s outspokenness toward both fascist regimes and socialist dictatorships on the European continent, and at times the Soviet Union (Bjereld 1995).

Still, the unwillingness to denounce authoritarian (many of them socialist) regimes in the Third World was evident. Ann-Marie Ekengren argues there was clear tension on this matter, arising from Palme’s strong beliefs in solidarity, self-determination and sovereign rights (Ekengren 2005, 42; see also Bjereld 2016 and Hammarberg 2016). There were a number of cases were leaders of Third World states did not follow up sovereign statehood with a commitment to democracy and human rights. Undoubtedly, Palme had hopes for gradual democratization, but if democratic gains failed to materialize, it hardly applied that Sweden should refrain from cooperating with them.  

Like Östen Undén, Palme was convinced that a foreign policy of criticism could make headway in states where capable social, economic and political institutions were in place. In some cases, it was right to link repression to intra-state factors. For example, South Africa satisfied most institutional and economic conditions to empower their citizens with rights, yet many of their citizens suffered under oppressive leadership. (Ekengren 2005, 196). Thus, the apartheid regime deserved nothing but international condemnation. However, in other distant places Sweden sought to be active, a more egalitarian language was required. It was Sweden’s preference to see Third World conform to the notions and practices of democracy, but if it were to cohere with Swedish solidarity, officials had to find ways of expressing their views that did not demean the people.

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30 Michael Ignatieff writes of the internationalism of the 1960s that causes in international politics could be supported or opposed based on Left or Right ideologies (Ignatieff 1998, 23). It is true that Palme had clear socialist sentiments. However, he based support or opposition to international causes on assessments of center and periphery, power and powerlessness. Campaigning against non-democratic regimes in the Third World made no sense without examining how the rich and powerful nations of the world bore responsibility for the situation in which people in peripheral states found themselves. I am not sure whether this belief is typical of Left ideology.

31 Palme officially condemned the Apartheid regime on several high-profile occasions. In March 1977 in a speech to the UN Security Council, Palme labelled the regime a “bastion of racism,” calling upon other states not to remain neutral towards the regime. In his address, he made a plea to the Council to put an immediate embargo on arms exports to South Africa and to show support with the ANC in their fight against the regime (Ekengren 2005, 190-196).
of Third World states. Palme did not want to associate Swedish foreign policy with the patronizing quality of imagining that we understand their ways and needs better than they did. He believed in Third World states’ capacity for self-determination and self-governance (Dahlgren and Stenberg 2006). If there were respect for their sovereign rights, and Western states assisted in peacebuilding and economic equalization, the groundwork would be laid for discussion, debate and societal transformation on their terms.

Further, democratic deficits and incidents of human rights violations in states with which Sweden had relations required broader contextualization, rather than outright denunciation. Emphasis had to be places also on the external factors thought to cause underdevelopment (Dolman 1979; Nilsson 1991; Ekengren 2005). Factors shaped by the intense global engagement of the West were viewed as obstacles to significant development in many parts of the Third World. This was a key belief in the Swedish doctrine of solidarity (Koivisto 2012, 78). The instability and underdevelopment which plagued Third World states, and which often produced their oppressive regimes, originated, as Sweden saw it, in decades of structural inequality, exploitation, and major power interventionism (Nilsson 1991, 177-178; Ekengren 2005, 188-189). Continued western domination, Cold War clientilism and poor commitment to target inequality weakened an already fragile basis for peace, development and democracy across the Third World. Therefore, Swedish policymakers thought it made less sense for Western states, especially the major powers, to criticize or intervene in the affairs of Third World regimes from what in the end was a morally dubious position, and conversely, more sense to address the structures that undermined economic and social development (Nilsson 1988, 29). There was a strong belief among the Swedish foreign policy elite that Sweden should do all it could to help eradicate inequalities and relationships of dependency between the prosperous North and the Third World. It was considered important to unite with these states and listen to their pleas in order to contribute to fairer global development (Agius 2006, 6; Ekengren 2005, 180-181; Stokke 1978). This belief was strongly reflected in Sweden’s development aid program, which sought to provide aid on the conditions of the recipients, often through budget support to
low income and low middle-income states, and with few strings attached (Bigsten, Isaksson and Tengstam 2016). Assistance to Nicaragua, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Vietnam, El Salvador and Cuba provide cases in example (Nilsson 1988, 27; see also Barnes 1980).

The belief in external forces preventing economic and social development in the Third World was echoed in Sweden’s leading role in forming the Like Minded Group at the United Nations. According to Peter Lawler, the Like Minded Group “advocated a more constructive posture towards Third World claims for a new international economic order [NIEO] than was the case with other developed states” (Lawler 1997, 569-570; see also Crane 1984 and Agius 2012). As the General Assembly had welcomed a number of new states during the decolonization process, it became the site of a growing number of heated debates on global poverty and dependency issues. The core of the Like Minded Group, most notably Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands, consistently positioned themselves close the G77, a body of Third World states in the UN advocating for NIEO (Koivisto 2012, 171; Dolman 1979). According to Koivisto, the Like Minded Group attempted to:

[...] persuade other OECD states (‘hardliners’) to shift some of their manufacturing to Third World countries, and to pay higher prices for the raw materials purchased from such states in order to facilitate their economic development and balance out the profit margins of international trade, particularly given some of the hardliners’ colonial past in Third World states (Koivisto 2012, 171).

UN activism on behalf of Third World grievances and an extensive aid program were policies viewed simply as the right things for Sweden to do. The alternative that Sweden should mind its own business was out of the question (Ekengren 2005, 188). Poor states needed help and support, not be ignored or subject to the interests of stronger states in the international system. Peter Lawler is consistent with both Brommessen and Ekengren in arguing that Sweden, championing development aid and moral support to the Third World, tied its policies “very much the principle of the right of the then newly independent states to self-determination and the concomitant obligations of the affluent states to assist in
this” (Lawler 2005, 435; Agius 2012, 114-115). Swedish officials strongly believed that “through enhanced north-south cooperation, more states might see their sovereignty transformed from a merely legal status to a political and economic fact” (ibid, 436). It was an obligation on the part of developed states to help poor states sweep away the obstacles stopping them from fully determining their own future.

The belief in solidarity corresponded with two other beliefs held among the Swedish foreign policy elite: the beliefs in conflict mediation and peacekeeping (Björkdahl 2013, 326; Bjereld 1995; Brommesson 2010). On the one hand, Sweden addressed inequalities through a vast development aid program and UN activism on behalf of Third World states. On the other hand, Sweden actively participated in international peacekeeping and acted as conflict mediator, seeing conflict, whatever its causes, as a major obstacle preventing development and equality between and within states. In this sense, the belief in solidarity entailed a commitment to, and provided justification for, mediation and peaceful resolutions of disputes in conflict-prone areas. Sweden worked simultaneously to defend peace, secure stable foundations for coexistence and contribute to economic and social development across the globe (Lawler 2005, 445). Policymakers believed non-alignment bolstered the credibility of these internationalist activities (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 438). It gave Sweden credibility in using criticism as a foreign policy tool, and in supporting post-colonial states in need of support. Non-alignment also gave Sweden credibility in its use of active diplomacy to negotiate peace and in peacekeeping missions under the UN flag. Sweden saw an increase in missions as conflict mediator and

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32 Many believed this policy often failed in practice. Liberals in the opposition maintained that aid, rather than going to people in need, propped up what they saw as corrupt and incompetent regimes (Barnes 1980, 142). The opposition were also less inclined to locate the problems of development in the context of inequalities created by the international economic system. Rather, they drew the lesson that Third World leaders that emerged as authoritarian could not be trusted. As Dolman argues, the opposition parties were “more prone to explaining underdevelopment in terms of internal causes – lack of political leaders and entrepreneurial capacities, unfavorable investment climate, overpopulation, too much corruption and waste, and so on - rather than in terms of the poor world’s dependence on the rich and the rich world’s domination of the poor” (Dolman 1979, 67).

33 Möller and Bjereld seem to view non-alignment as an expression of both strategic and normative beliefs: “at the heart of the Swedish decision to stay militarily non-aligned was the
protective power during the early 1970s. Policymakers took this as an indication that Sweden had gained confidence among many states on the international arena. There was a belief that this gained confidence should be utilized as often as possible, as the number of states in the world, and thus the number of potential missions increased (Bjereld 1995, 30).

The UN provided the central platform through which non-aligned Sweden pursued its international peacekeeping efforts. From 1956 onwards, Sweden “belonged to a group of the seven most active participants in international peacekeeping in the world” (Björkdahl 2013, 326). From 1968 to 1990 Sweden had participated in all UN peacekeeping operations except one, a rate only matched by Canada, which also considered itself a “do-gooder” on the international stage (Bjereld 1995, 29). Swedish support to international peacekeeping was “clearly found within the scope of international law and the international community based on independent and sovereign states” (Brommesson 2010, 233). The participation in peacekeeping operations were “primarily based on the consent of the government and/or parties to the conflict and usually involved some form of monitoring of a negotiated ceasefire” (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 2016, 488).

The government’s foreign policy had not enjoyed full consensus in parliament, but an increasing number among the opposition had taken some pride in active internationalism, seeing how its policies had given Sweden quite strong international standing and recognition (Nilsson 1988, 30). According to

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34 Peacekeeping contributions have included Croatia, Guatemala, Congo, Eritrea/Ethiopa, Kuwait and other Middle East countries, East Timor, Cambodia, Kashmir, Korea and Afghanistan (Agius 2012, 109).

35 According to Ulf Bjereld, Swedish officials did not perceive taking on the role of impartial conflict mediator and peacekeeper as incompatible with a foreign policy of criticism of other states. Taking an active part in international opinion-building or formulating criticism of other countries, did not inflict with successfully acting as a conflict mediator (Bjereld 1995). However, “restrictions on criticism and attitudes come up in conflicts where that country is also acting as a mediator or bridge-builder,” as was the case when Sweden acted as mediator in the Iran-Iraq war.
Bjereld and Möller, Sweden’s active diplomacy and engagement in international politics on behalf of the less fortunate, [...] became something of a virtue, rather than a means to an end, even outside Social Democratic circles. This is proven by the fact that the conservative/liberal governments of 1976–82 continued to maintain a high profile on international matters (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 438).

Both prime ministers Torbjörn Fälldin of the Centre Party and Ola Ullsten of the Liberal People’s Party sought not to differ from the foreign policy of the preceding Social Democratic government. Ulf Bjereld reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that these governments made a point of not deviating from the foreign policy line formulated by Palme:

This strategy led to more frequent criticism towards states which, for example, threatened the peace or violated human rights and international law [...] The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, Israel’s invasions in Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, US involvement in Latin America and the continuing tension in Southern Africa were all frequent objects of Swedish criticism (Bjereld 1995, 28).

Loyalty to the beliefs guiding active internationalism persisted all the way up to Ingvar Carlsson’s government, with Swedish foreign policy heavily focused on the developing world (Mouritzen 1996, 12). However, the intense involvement in international politics that was Olof Palme’s trademark significantly diminished. According to Ann-Sofie Nilsson, Palme’s successor Carlsson declined to succeed him in the international arena, where Palme’s verbal politics excelled (Nilsson 1988, 25–26). The ideational content, on the other hand, remained largely the same, although it was practiced with less remarkable (ibid).

4.2.1 Active internationalism summarized

The worldview from the perspective of active internationalism focused on economic and social inequality between states and between people. The international order was highly unjust and standing in the way of global peace,
freedom and prosperity. U.S.-Soviet bipolarity did not contribute to make the world situation any better, nor did many of the actions of other major powers in the international system, who too often placed their own interests over those of the Third World. Interventionism, exploitation and an unfair world market system were factors believed to obstruct the chances of Third World states to develop on their own terms. If there were more respect for international law and state sovereignty, and extensive cooperation between affluent and poor states, this would reinforce peace, security and, further down the road, endorsement of democratic principles.

The plight of Third World states led policymakers to a principled belief in solidarity without boundaries (Palme 1968, 202). There was not necessarily any difference between the obligations owed to fellow-citizens and the people of poorer states. Committed to the well-being of people in distant parts of the world, decision-makers found it necessary to contribute as far as possible to fairer global development. The beliefs in social justice and economic equalization, which Sweden sought for its own citizens, should also be called for on a global scale (Barnes 1980, 144). Annika Bergman Rosamond describes this belief as “a mutually co-constitutive relationship between domestic and international appeals to justice” (Bergman Rosamond 2016, 466).

Solidarity corresponded with the principled belief that Sweden should under no circumstances deviate from non-alignment. Non-alignment served normative purposes in that it was viewed as a prerequisite for Sweden’s foreign policy activism (Bjereld and Möller 2016; Nilsson 1988). Non-alignment placed Sweden in an ideal situation to assist developing states both in terms of ensuring these states that it had trustworthy reasons for giving assistance, and improving the chances of its domestic societal model having resonance abroad. In this way, Sweden could disperse its progressive ideas of peaceful relations and development, as well as contribute to global economic and social development (Bergman 2007). Further, non-alignment would enable Sweden to use active diplomacy to assure peaceful international relations, notably through conflict mediation and international peacekeeping under UN mandate.
To speak up against injustice was understood as an implicit part of being a good state - even if it could come with political costs. Sweden targeted its criticism toward the major powers for their interventionism and little regard for sovereign rights, remarking that their actions obstructed the chances of Third World states in particular to develop on their own terms. Sweden also criticized authoritarian regimes, but chose for the most part to lecture regimes were sovereignty was a political and economic fact, not merely a legal status, as was often thought to be the case in the Third World. In the Third World context, Sweden hesitated to launch vocal attacks, holding that developing states needed support for their causes, regardless of their democratic merits at the time being. Rather, it was important to highlight the external causes of underdevelopment, in order to assure that affluent states did not escape responsibility for what was still a very socially and economically divided world. In that perspective, it became necessary to dear to vote against the interests of the West in the UN General Assembly.

The belief in solidarity implied substantial commitment to development aid, in which the overall aim was economic independence for recipient states and social and economic equalization within them. Although aid programs should attempt to disperse Swedish versions of reformism and democracy, policymakers did not assume that these principles were practicable or desirable in all countries. Focusing on social emancipation and economic independence would lay the foundation for individual political freedoms and democratic standards (Barnes 1980, 148). Hence, supporting non-democratic states with aid was not believed to be inconsistent with stating support for democratic ideals. Then again, it was

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36 Sweden was, as argued, no stranger to diplomatic quarrels, often trading away the goodwill of close partners in order to live up to its internationalist promise.

37 This belief (see also pages 52-54) is very similar to an argument in an article by Toni Erskine titled Assigning Responsibilities to Institutional Moral Agents: The Case of States and Quasi-States: “[...] positive sovereignty . . . presupposes capabilities which enable governments to be their own masters. Quasi-states—upheld almost exclusively by what Jackson has described as a regime of negative sovereignty—lack such enabling conditions and the accompanying opportunity to be their own masters. These states are dependent on material aid, at the mercy of the dictates of foreign creditors, and more vulnerable to the whims of international markets than their more “developed” counterparts. In other words, even if we can consider them to be moral agents, the conditions under which they exist render them often ill equipped to exercise moral agency with either confidence or consistency” (Erskine 2001, 80).
“not in conformity with the motives or aims of Swedish assistance that it should help preserve anti-progressive structures” (Barnes 1980, 142). Palme’s foreign minister Torsten Nilsson (1962-1971) had argued that “in cases where a developing country had been ruled for a long time by a regime uninterested in economic and social development, there was every reason to show restraint in aid commitments, but not so towards those pursuing economic and social equality” (ibid, 147). Sten Andersson, serving as minister for foreign affairs under Ingvar Carlsson, expressed similar views, being confident that a more contextualized, open-ended and cooperative approach towards the Third World would acquire greater force (Nilsson 1991, 183-186). There were other precarious normative issues that had to be addressed before resorting to a politics of condemnation against these nations – at least if condemnation were to have any moral credibility.

4.3 Europeanized liberal internationalism

In 1991, the Swedish electorate voted Ingvar Carlsson’s government out of power. In came “a brief, but in foreign policy terms, highly effective coalition government of four non-socialist parties, led by [Carl] Bildt, who himself held a deep personal interest in international affairs” (Dahl 2006, 904). With the new government came a different foreign policy approach, which sought reorientation towards Europe, North America and the Baltic region (Brommesson 2010, 235; Mouritzen 1995). The change in geographical focus coincided with a revision Swedish internationalism, which was to come closer to a “Europeanized normative point of departure” (Brommesson 2010, 234). Douglas Brommesson attributes this ideational change to synthesis between Sweden’s active internationalism and the European Union’s (EU) normative foreign policy (Brommesson 2010). However, Annika Bergman Rosamond contends that Sweden’s post-Cold War foreign policy also needs to be understood in light of broader normative trends grounded in liberalism, which had gained influence across Western states, not just within the EU (Bergman Rosamond 2016).
In joining the EU in 1995, Sweden gave priority to co-ordination of Swedish and EU foreign policy. The government created new policy coordination structures, including an ambassador’s post to the Committee on Foreign and Security Policy of the Council of Ministers in Brussels, and gave extra resources to the EU section at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Brommesson 2016, 532). In the process, Swedish decision-making arrangements had to take account of the wider European system of foreign and security policy governance. Alongside institutional changes, Brommesson argues that the Swedish foreign policy elite gradually came to identify with a communitarian understanding of Europe; policymakers developed a commitment to the institution, swayed by the legitimacy of its normative claims (Brommesson 2010, 228-232). However, part of the Swedish foreign policy elite had for many years, as accounted for earlier in this chapter, expressed will towards closer integration (political and identity-wise) with Europe. The Moderate party in particular had long wanted to adopt a Europe-oriented foreign policy (Bjereld and Demker 2016, 440). Additionally, Ingvar Carlsson’s Social Democratic government had before handing power over to the opposition signified greater attention to Europe and the EU, taking the first steps that led to full membership application (Bjereld 1994; Bengtsson 2016, 449).

European affairs became central to subsequent governments after joining the EU. A key feature of Sweden’s reorientation to Europe was solidarity with the Baltic States (Bengtsson 2016). Aid was disbursed to the new independent states in Eastern Europe (Miles and Sundelius 2006; Bigsten, Isaksson and Tengstam 2016) and emphasis was places on European responsibility to address humanitarian concerns in the Balkans. It was imperative for the new government to gain the confidence of the EU as a good European. As Hans Mouritzen argues, the government seemed to “perceive that Sweden has suffered from a “goodwill deficit” in major European capitals – at least until recently,” and it was therefore

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38 For an argument on norm diffusion and socialization in the EU, see Checkel (2005). For different conceptualizations of the EU’s domestic impact, see Börzel and Risse (2003).
39 See Manners (2001; 2006), Scheipers and Sicurelli (2007) and Sjursen (2006) on the EU as a normative power.
“crucial to convince the [EU] Commission and major European Capitals that the new Swedish interest in Europe is serious and genuine” (Mouritzen 1995, 16).

While decision-makers were engaged in “adaptive acquiescence” towards the EU (Mouritzen 1995, 15), they also traded away features associated with active internationalism:

Whereas Sweden had previously promoted the economic and social liberation of the Third World, it now began to emphasize the universal human rights of individuals, a market economy, and free trade. [Moreover] Europe was identified as the territorial home of these values [...] According to Swedish foreign policy, to be European meant that one had the responsibility to promote and defend those values (Brommesson 2016, 533).

Europe represented a democratic and human rights based core, which paved way for a new normative point of departure in relation to developing states and other non-western states. Bildt’s government stated early on that Sweden, a western democracy and EU member, ought to express support for democracy and human rights abroad (Brommesson 2010, 232-234). Minister for Foreign Affairs Margaretha af Ugglas argued that Sweden would no longer legitimize the repressive or corrupt one-party states that it had supported “in the time of double standards,” unmistakably referring to the internationalism of the 1960s, 70s and 80s (af Ugglas 1991). She placed emphasis on the belief in solidarity, but refuted prior understandings of solidarity’s implications, specifying that Sweden “must show solidarity with individual human beings and not political systems or leaders that make use of revolutionary ideology to preserve power” (ibid). Brommesson argues that this normative point of departure depicts a worldview different from the one guiding active internationalism:

The world-view represented in Swedish foreign policy during the early 1990s was built on the belief of a divided world [...] states were categorized according to their specific social systems and the degree to which they respected individual rights” (Brommesson 2010, 233).

The divided world was perceived less in light of structural economic inequalities, and more in light of the unsavory features of authoritarian rule, which deprived
people of their rights. As Christopher Hill notes, “rogue” states had become the preoccupation of the moment (2003a, 250). The idea that some states in the international system stood for peace, democracy and freedom, and others for repression and arbitrary rule, had taken hold in foreign policy circles and came with several normative implications. Certain regimes were associated in varying degree with corruption, disappearance of dissidents, harsh prison conditions, torture, arbitrary arrests and killings, harassment of civil society groups and curbs on academic freedom, religious liberty and independent media. In light of these intolerable practices, Swedish non-alignment became harder to justify (Bjereld and Möller, 2016, 444). It was all the more important to express loyalty and solidarity with states that shared values such as liberty, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights (Dunne 2008, 13-15). To Bildt, the belief that non-alignment ensured Swedish exceptionalism in international politics had been a myth, and he saw every reason to align Sweden with a liberal European Union (Agius 2011, 378-379). Sweden’s voice would acquire more force within the foreign policy machinery of the EU, which policymakers perceived as a strong progressive counterweight to illiberal forces (Brommesson and Ekengren 2012, 14; Michalski 2013, 894). Common policy formulations by the EU would reduce Sweden’s vulnerability when addressing intolerable practices in third states, and solidify the EU as a normative power (Agius 2011, 379). During the 1990s, Swedish voting patterns in the UN and recognition of states policy, for example, aligned with the EU’s (Ulf Bjereld 1994; See also Lawler 1997).

40 Following David Chandler, this has become an influential normative position among Western states. “[...] The demise of social and political movements, which supported the cause of Third World independence and highlighted the inequalities of power inherent in the world market, has led to an increasingly localized focus on conflict and social problems in isolation from the international political and economic context” (Chandler 2001, 693).
41 The wording of this sentence is taken from Baker (2017).
42 For states that claim moral obligations to distant others “the doctrine of neutrality has become steadily more controversial as the new politics of human rights has entered the field (Ignatieff 1998, 119).
43 Swedish policy-makers both under and after Bildt’s term held a strong belief in Sweden’s enhanced foreign policy role within the EU context. For example, Göran Persson’s government actively sought to export some of their beliefs to the European level, for example by making the Program for the Prevention of Violent Conflict an integral part of the EFSP in 2001 (Agius 2011, 380; see also Björkdahl 2013).
44 See for instance Wong and Hill (2012) for discussions on synergies of national and European foreign policies.
Turning towards a liberal internationalism held in common with the EU, Sweden demonstrated a new sense of responsibility and engagement in international issues (Möller and Bjereld 2010; Agius 2012, 156-157). According to Brommesson this development “was manifested both when social democratic and center-right governments held office” (Brommesson 2016, 533). Changes in the international environment, such as the proliferation of regional and intra-state conflicts and the rise of a number of new threats, required changes to Swedish conflict prevention and peace policy (Agius 2011). In terms of threats, policymakers signaled increased readiness to contribute to the EU security architecture (Möller and Bjereld 2010, 377). In terms of international crisis, policymakers continued to stress the crucial importance of multilateral cooperation within a UN framework, conflict mediation and diplomacy. However, if Sweden were to make significant contributions to prevent conflict, humanitarian crisis and gross violations of human rights, it would potentially require the country to take part in forceful military interventions into another state. The belief was that making international military contributions, actingconcertedly and in cooperation with others would serve international peace and security (Agius 2011, 381).

Solidarity, in its liberalized revision, provided justification for a wide range of operations, which went considerably beyond Sweden’s longstanding tradition of UN peacekeeping (Aggemstam and Hyde-Price 2016, 480; see also Jahn 2007). Sweden thus found itself willing to work within the EU both on “soft” and “hard” measures, and on certain occasions engage in cooperation with NATO. This adjustment in favor of participation in the European and transatlantic security community indicates,

a gradual transformation of Sweden’s policy of neutrality into one of postneutrality

[...] The image of Sweden as a state that constructively engaged in matters of international peace and security could not be maintained through a policy of

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45 There has been a tendency to merge peace, development and security agendas, in the sense that these can no longer be conceptualized separately. As Chandler argues, “since the end of the Cold War, security and development concerns have been increasingly interlinked. Governments and international institutions have stated that they have become increasingly aware of the need to integrate security and development programs in policy interventions in post-conflict situations and in their relations with the growing category of failed and potentially ‘failing’ states.” (Chandler 2007, 362). I should add that Chandler’s article is an argument challenging the peace-development-security nexus.
neutrality but required a transformation towards a stronger European commitment and towards engagement with the “new” NATO (Bjereld and Möller 2016, 444).46

In the course of the 1990s, Sweden engaged in the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace program and became a member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (NATO 2016).

While the foreign policy of the Olof Palme had reflected strong support for international law, and more specifically, the political autonomy of states, post 1990-foreign policy signified the increased importance of the problems of non-Western states, thus disposing policymakers to a more interventionist rhetoric (Brommesson 2010, 236). At the 2004 Stockholm International Forum for the prevention of Genocide, Prime Minister Göran Persson (1996-2006) addressed the need of a better balance between state sovereignty and the protection of the individual (Amnéus 2006, 311). This belief saw its practical implementation in a series of operations in which Sweden participated, including NATO-operations in the Balkans, the ISAF-force in Afghanistan and the EU-led Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 2016, 490-491). Fredrik Reinfeldt’s government (2006-2014) took the position that the international community had responsibility to set sovereign principles aside when necessary. The legitimacy of intervention, however, required endorsement by the United Nations Security Council (ibid, 486; Björkdahl 2013, 332). In 2011, this position justified Sweden’s participation in the UN-authorized, NATO-led intervention in Libya to protect civilians against Muammar Gaddafi’s regime (Doeser 2014).47

46 “New” NATO refers to the transformation from a Cold War defense organization to a community of shared values (see Agius 2011, 377 and Adler 2008. For a discussion, see Sjursen 2004).

47 Doeser argues that Libya was also a chance for the government to demonstrate support for NATO, and cites the Reinfeldt government’s explicit references to Sweden’s partnership with NATO. Swedish contributions to peace operations was a means to maintain this partnership, and in turn, a means to strengthen Sweden’s security and influence on the international arena (Doeser 2014, 204-205). This may certainly be the truth, but it hardly negates ethical motives. In a similar vein, Aggestam and Hyde-Price argue that the normative commitment to defend peace and development in terms of solidarity and human rights was not simply a manifestation of altruism (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 2016, 480-481). They claim Sweden’s partaking in multinational operations serve Sweden’s security interests and diplomatic and foreign policy stance in terms of status. Again, the two manifestations need not be in conflict. I am not sure whether Aggestam and
Still, Swedish policymakers were determined not to become hawkish in response to non-Western environments. Göran Persson’s government pointed to the “troublesome tendencies in the United States’ response to terrorism, including the labelling of rogue states, and the decision to attack Iraq in the absence of a UN mandate (Möller and Bjereld 2010, 372). One thing was the common responsibility of the international community to intervene wherever humanitarian reasons were so compelling they demanded response. Another thing was how to deal with states which did “not conform to the dominant norms of the day in its internal conformation,” or which upset the international efforts on vital issues, such as non-proliferation (Hill 2003a, 250; Agius 2012, 196-197). To Swedish decision-makers, these issues warranted critical attention rather than scapegoating, a foreign policy practice Sweden had a history of associating with the United States. Sweden saw a difference between the politics of imposition fronted by the United States and the more constructive external politics of the EU. From Sweden’s point of view, it was crucial to maintain a European approach to international politics that sought to counterbalance American preponderance (Manners 2002, 242–52; Agius 2011). This was not only evident in disagreements on Iraq. Differences between the EU and the United States also extended in relation to the instrumentality of sanctions and isolation, of which Iran is a case in example. In 1997, the EU rejected pressure from the United States to push trade sanctions against Iran, opting instead for a symbolic package of measures against the Tehran regime, which excluded restrictions on the movements of diplomats and export credits (Pinto 2001, 106). In general “the US approach towards Iran was substantially more outspoken than the EU approach: it advocated regime change, strict sanctions and the further international isolation of Iran” (Kienzle 2013, 435). From 2002 though, the EU converged towards a slightly more Atlanticist position, viewing the Iranian non-proliferation as a key priority in need of a strong sanctions regime (which fell short of the use of force, an option the United States seriously considered). This shift in EU policy on Iran worried Swedish policymakers, who did not want to see Europe’s constructive

Hyde-Price seek to portray Swedish foreign policy as contradictory. An equally plausible interpretation is that policymakers believed their foreign policy served the common good and more security-related ends concurrently.
posture drift away. The governments of Persson and Reinfeldt both took a
skeptical view of the effectiveness of sanctions, and questioned the premises
behind them (Patterson 2013, 141). In an interview with Svenska Dagbladet in
2012, Prime Minister Reinfeldt stated that sanctions tend to play into the interests
of autocratic rulers. Carl Bildt made similar remarks in a retrospective op-ed to The Washington Post: “Let me confess: I’m not a big fan of sanctions [. . .] they
are easy to impose but difficult to implement, and it’s often hard to judge their
effects” (Bildt 2017). There was a causal belief that isolation from the
international community produce bad consequences not for the leadership, but
for regular people. They could even cause outrage at the west and the normative
international goals the west enacts, and conversely, lead people to support their
unpleasant regimes (Reinfeldt, cited in Svenska Dagbladet 2012). In view of
this, it was in the interest of every party to the Iran issue that the United States
dropped objections to Iranian membership in the World Trade Organization
(Kienzle 2013, 435). Again, Swedish decision-makers had raised concerns about
the United States’ swift articulations of how to deal with states they deemed
inherently bad.

Swedish objections to Iranian isolation were clear expressions of beliefs in
the multilateralism, peaceful and dialogic settlement of disputes, and free trade.
It also signaled a pragmatist position, accepting the fact that, up to a point,
Sweden had to tolerate the existence of unpleasant regimes. Sweden had trade
relations with Iran and a number of states that human rights organizations would
diagnose as “rogue”. To critics, these trade links with repressive foreign countries
reeked of hypocrisy. It suggested that Sweden would only go the way to make a
point on human rights in areas of little economic and strategic interest. Then
again, Swedish post-Cold-War foreign policy was not about self-abnegation.
As Gelb and Rosenthal notes “countries are complicated beasts most resistant when directly
challenged” (Gelb and Rosenthal 2003, 5).

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48 The article itself is an argument on Russia over its aggression against Ukraine, a case Bildt thought proved an exception to his principled view on sanctions.
49 As Gelb and Rosenthal notes “countries are complicated beasts most resistant when directly challenged” (Gelb and Rosenthal 2003, 5).
policy could change the world” (Milne 2017). Sweden belonged to the EU member states with the most liberal views on free trade, which was of immense importance to a small open economy like Sweden’s (Michalski 2013, 890). The Reinfeldt government in particular did not shilly-shally about Sweden’s trade motives, which involved commercial links with states like China, Russia, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, the UAE (Statistics Sweden 2011). Yet, its position on free trade was not considered inimical to human rights promotion. Decision-makers held the belief that free trade contributed to the economic integration of states, which again could remedy injustices and move the world in a more peaceful direction. The most effective means of putting the world to rights through foreign policy were not necessarily blame and international isolation. Economic cooperation on the other hand gave Sweden advantage in expressing concern wherever human rights conditions deteriorated. The same policy position has been documented in Sweden’s relations with China (Michalski 2013). Then again, *Swedish attitudes towards perceived aggressors were clearly more outspoken*, of which Russia’s behavior was a clear example. Bildt was among Russia’s harshest critics during the 2008 Georgia crisis, which led the Kremlin to declare him *persona non grata* (Bengtsson 2016, 454). Sweden further took a strong position within the EU against Russian involvement in Ukraine in 2014.

Decision-makers were, in the post-Cold-War years, in search of a more “reasonable” outlook as to what could be expected of Sweden on the world stage. For many non-socialists, especially, Sweden’s internationalism during the Cold War had involved a “generous measure of poetic license.”50 Sweden’s standing in the international community owed more to the “halo effect” of Palme’s outspokenness, than to its actual political practices (Agius 2011, 379; Arter 2008, 332-336). Nevertheless, Sweden’s self-narrative as a good state played into post-Cold War foreign policy, particularly in area of development aid. The Reinfeldt government’s aim to reduce the gap between the world’s rich and poor was framed within the “notions of obligation to distant others, in a fashion similar to the SAP [the preceding Social Democratic government]” (Bergman Rosamond

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50 This phrase is taken from Arter (2008, 337).
Annika Bergmand Rosamond detects a line of continuity between active and liberal internationalism in the importance attached to the reduction of global poverty. Decision-makers stayed true to the norm that 1 percent of GDP is budgeted for aid (ibid). However, Swedish commitments to the developing world increasingly came in the form of modern human rights based solidarity. Democracy and human rights, gender equality and the role of women in development, and government accountability were key thematic priorities that led to a change of funding channels (NGOs, private bodies, civil society, and research institutes). There was a gradual shift in policy towards stricter control of disbursements (Bigsten, Isaksson and Tengstam 2016, 6), coupled with an emphasis on market-oriented solutions to poverty, for example through providing assistance to improve the private sector (Bergman Rosamond 2016, 470). This shift indicates that policymakers had drawn the lesson that they could not entirely trust the regimes of developing states pursue, and therefore new modes of assistance that could by-pass governments had gained a certain preference.51

4.3.1 Europeanized liberal internationalism summarized

Devoting attention to European affairs and gradual integration into the EU made the organization the natural reference point for Swedish foreign policy, irrespective of government (Bengtsson 2016, 449). Sweden would look to Brussels in coordinating policy positions on international matters, and work within the organization to make it a civilizing, liberal force counterweighting both the impact of illiberal regimes and American interventionist discourse. Swedish reorientation towards the EU marks a step away from strict non-alignment, ensuring solidarity with the EU in terms of security and development, and identifying with values in need of defense on the international scene. The worldview expressed is that of a divided world where Europe constitutes a democratic sphere based on values of universal validity. Implicit is a conception

51 A trend seen in many Western states’ aid policies (Chandler 2001, 686).
of what a desirable world would look like; an global order in which states and individuals find it rational to cooperate and defend democracy and universal rights (Brommesson 2010, 233-235; Brommesson and Ekengren 2012).

The objectives of peace, liberty, democracy, human rights and rule of law guided both strategies on how Europe should develop, and acted as the normative point of departure in relation to third states (Brommesson 2010, 229). Gross violations of human rights and international crisis led Sweden to partake in interventions which affronted sovereign rights (Amnéus 2006; Aggestam and Hyde-Price 2016). New operational engagements went beyond traditional international peacekeeping operations, and under the auspices of both the EU and NATO, testifying to Sweden’s reorientation towards the west. However, the mandate for interventions was interpreted as having a limited scope of application, and Sweden advocated both within the EU and UN for proactive diplomacy and multilateralism as better options in conflict and humanitarian crisis management (Björkdahl 2013). Decision-makers saw limits to how far the human rights framework could legitimize intervention as a viable solution.

States that had less severe human rights records, but where the regime’s practices were still of concern, entailed prospects as well as challenges. The goodness of fit between Swedish and European principled beliefs led decision-makers to “support the EU’s normative approach to international politics and advocate a deepening of the EU’s human rights dialogue” with third states (Michalski 2013, 890). However, since Sweden was “torn between upholding professed values and norms and securing economic interests” (ibid), decision-makers admitted to the inevitability of having to balance principled stances on human rights against pragmatic solutions.52 Within the EU, Sweden would push for normative criticism whenever unpleasant regimes showed signs of aggression, while urging member states to take a more constructive posture towards regimes that posed no immediate threat, but otherwise payed little regard to human rights in their internal conformation. For example, Sweden was among the EUs

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52 For a normative argument in defense of inconsistency in normative international politics, see Brown (2003).
toughest critics of Russian incursion into Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. The hard tone against Russia was also a demonstration of Swedish solidarity with the Baltic region (Bengtsson 2016, 454). In relation to other states such as Iran and China, Sweden’s tone was much less critical. Yet a friendlier posture towards states that were economically important to Sweden was not by definition inimical to the defense of human rights. Rather than pursuing a policy of denunciation, opting for constructive bilateral relations would give Sweden weight to express human rights concern in a respectful way. In 2008 for instance, Reinfeldt brought up human rights at the end of bilateral discussions with Chinese officials by handing President Hu Jintao a list of names of Chinese dissidents (Michalski 2013, 895). While some took this as code for business as usual with oppressive regimes, there was a causal belief among decision-makers that a foreign policy of criticism, which often translated into offense, had stifling consequences for human rights (ibid). No gains were made from putting Sweden’s own interests at risk in opting for a potentially ineffective human rights promotion policy.

Sweden’s obligations to alleviate the unjustifiable living conditions of the world’s poorest is strongly reflected in sustained ODA commitments under Europeanized liberal internationalism. However, earlier needs-based approaches to ODA are coupled with a human rights and trade-oriented framework. There is more focus on improving the private sector while at the same time tying aid disbursements to human rights conditionalities. Stricter rules for allocation, finding alternative funding channels and focusing on government accountability reflects the view that local political leadership is untrustworthy in the pursuit of development. There is significantly less focus on structural causes for the problems of poor and fragile states, and more focus on remedying domestic variables such as poor governance, corruption, waste and commitment to human rights and democratic standards.
### Table 2. A typology of normative beliefs in Swedish foreign policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea level</th>
<th>Active internationalism</th>
<th>Europeanized liberal internationalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worldview</strong></td>
<td>The international system is characterized by inequalities between states and between individuals. The world economic order is highly unjust and stands in the way of peace, order, freedom and prosperity for all of humanity.</td>
<td>Europe constitutes a civil and democratic sphere in a divided world. A desirable world order is one in which states and individuals find it right to cooperate and defend democracy and human rights of universal validity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principled beliefs</strong></td>
<td>We have an obligation to help eradicate morally indefensible global inequality and relationships of economic dependency and exploitation.</td>
<td>We have an obligation to defend and promote individual freedoms, democracy, rule of law and human rights in our relations with other states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We should highlight the external causes of underdevelopment and conflict and the responsibility of affluent states for what is still a very socially and economically divided world.</td>
<td>We should highlight the internal causes of underdevelopment and hold governments responsible for waste, corruption and failing to meet standards of good governance and human rights obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We should respect national autonomy and trust states’ pursuit of development according to their own understanding of their needs – at least to the point where we end up supporting anti-progressive governments. Our solidarity is with underprivileged peoples, not governments.</td>
<td>Poor governance and the questionable willingness of leaders to meet democratic standards and enhance the economic and social rights of their citizens, warrants targeted aid focusing on good governance, human rights, economic barriers and gender imbalances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We have an obligation to use our independent voice and criticize what we perceive as unjust actions of any government capable of moral responsibility, even if criticism comes with political costs.</td>
<td>We should take a pragmatic route in relation to states that are capable of moral responsibility but fail to live up to our human rights standards - to gain mutual economic benefits and leverage needed to express concern about human rights breaches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We do not tolerate aggression in the international sphere. States have the right to sovereignty, and aggressors deserve condemnation.</td>
<td>We do not tolerate aggression in the international sphere. States have the right to sovereignty, and aggressors deserve condemnation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We should offer our good offices whenever tension or conflict breaks out, and play a role in peacekeeping, mediation and bridge building. Forced interventions may have severe unintended consequences and we should not contribute to that.</td>
<td>We should offer our good offices whenever tension and conflict breaks out. Conflicts and gross violations of human rights may legitimize forced intervention under UN authorization in which Sweden should participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We should focus our multilateral efforts at strengthening the UN and take a lead within the organization to enhance dialogue, cooperation, stable relations and understanding between states.</td>
<td>We should focus our attention at European integration and take a lead within the organization to strengthen its prospects to act as normative power and security provider.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Causal Beliefs

Respect for international law and state sovereignty, and cooperation between affluent and poor states will strengthen peace and understanding, ensure economic equalization and gradual endorsement of democratic principles and human rights.

Being independent from power alliances gives our critical voice the moral credibility to speak up against actions that are contrary to international law, democratic principles and human rights.

The less our foreign, trade and security policies leave a damaging footprint in the international domain, and the more we live up to the virtues of democracy, rule of law and social solidarity at home, the more likely that other countries take interest in our model of society.

Empowering people with individual rights and freedoms is paramount to peace, security, and economic, social and democratic development.

A foreign policy of criticism is not an effective means of improving human rights conditions. Extensive trade links and cooperation give us pull to express concern, and benefits human rights work in the long term. The EU is a global actor that provides Sweden with a strong platform to promote human rights and democracy.

The less our foreign, trade and security policies leave a damaging footprint in the international domain, and the more we live up to the virtues of democracy, rule of law and social solidarity at home, the more likely that other countries take interest in our model of society.
Chapter 5

The Löfven government’s foreign policy

5.1 Reference texts for analysis

Since the purpose of the analysis is to trace the beliefs of foreign policy decision-makers, the data material is naturally confined to the “trail of things” the foreign policy elite currently holding office “have said or written” (Hudson 2014, 64). This is an important confinement of sources (see Hansen 2006). However, limiting the range to central texts produced by key decision-makers still leaves a pool of potentially relevant material. Scholars have different preferences when it comes to choosing sources that may give us a clue of what the foreign policy elite believe. Some use a mixture of interviews in the media, letters, and notes to confidants, tape recordings and diaries (ibid). Others prefer texts of official character such as government manifestos, speeches and statements. A common way of detecting beliefs in Swedish foreign policy through text has been to confine the examination to the annual statements of government policy in the parliamentary debates on foreign affairs and supplement these with a selection of other official statements, opinion pieces and key speeches (Brommesson 2010; Brommesson and Ekengren 2012; Bjereld and Demker 2000). In conducting a broad preliminary reading of different textual sources, I concluded that the empirical investigation would have to involve the use of a range of texts, including

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53 See chapter 3 for more about the principal methodological assumptions upon which qualitative content analysis is based.
54 Brommesson and Ekengren (2012) combine textual analysis with a focus on voting behavior in the UN to study ideas and ideology. Ulf Bjereld and Marie Demker (2000) offer an illuminating account of ideology and foreign policy disagreement by analyzing parliamentary foreign policy debates and measuring the increase of reservations against members’ bills in the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs.
annual statements, official statements, key speeches and opinion pieces, as well as a selection of newspaper interviews. While official texts gave substantial clues to the government’s general view of the world and its foreign policy principles on important themes, they also had significant shortcomings. Statements are on occasion daring and frank, but they are sometimes articulated in ways that avoid controversies and criticism, both in the domestic and international domain. The latter proves a disadvantage in trying to interpret beliefs on sensitive normative issues. The initial readings, however, revealed that in newspaper interviews, decision-makers frequently provided useful details, both on their principled and causal beliefs, substantiating my interpretations. Further justification for the use of different textual sources is given in the following section.

5.1.1 A variety of reference texts: pros and cons

Every February, the Minister for Foreign Affairs gives the annual statement of foreign policy to Parliament, presenting the principal views and priorities shaping foreign policy the upcoming twelve months. A central argument for the relevance of these statements is that they reflect the core beliefs of the government (Hudson 2014, 64). They give clues of the government’s understanding of international politics and Sweden’s place in the international community (Brommesson 2010, 233). Additionally, the annual statements are well prepared and become subject to parliamentary debate directly after they have been made. The debates are also a chance for the minister to elaborate on and defend the government’s foreign policy, further disclosing core beliefs.

I also examined official government statements, key speeches and opinion pieces. The government often makes statements in direct responses to happenings in the international sphere. While they sometimes contain standard repertoire reactions to world events, they also express truthful concern in relation to subjects decision-makers consider important to take position on. Key speeches also generated valuable data, as they often testified to the importance the government attached to certain issues relative to others. Although they may have been written by aides, it is reasonable to assume that they have been prepared in cooperation with decision-makers (Brommesson and Ekengren 2012, 13). The
minister may even have redrafted the speech to accord with the message the government wants to deliver. Further, opinion pieces were of value, touching upon many of the themes present in both active and liberal internationalisms. Certainly, the opinion sections of Sweden’s leading newspapers represent national-level political debate, in which op-ed contributors, writing on behalf of the government, address foreign policy issues in form of nuanced and consistent argument.

On the one hand, the preliminary readings confirmed that official texts have recognized potential to disclose important information about policy positions and underlying beliefs. On the other hand, it was not difficult to see that they are political texts, concrete by-products of strategic political activity, sometimes with rather vague language, which made it more difficult to interpret the underlying content. In light of these observations, statements made in newspaper interviews would prove very useful. For example, in February and March 2015, Sweden worked itself into a lengthy diplomatic quarrel with Saudi Arabia and a number of Middle Eastern states over the flogging of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi. Although initial critical remarks on Saudi Arabia were made in front of Parliament in the 2015 statement of foreign policy, the government issued no official statement of informative value during the period of debacle. However, decision-makers gave a number of comments to Swedish and international media outlets. Interviews with journalists bent on challenging the government on delicate foreign policy issues provided data material which would otherwise be unobtainable, and which helped to clarify the sometimes more intangible content of official texts. There is, of course the overall risk that answers given may be shaped to avoid critical scrutiny. Decision-makers may also “say different things – and differently – to different audiences” (Hudson 2014, 61). The preliminary reading on the other hand suggested that this would not pose too much difficulty. Foreign policy issues have been particularly important to the profile of the new government, naturally followed by amplified domestic political and public opinion, intense media scrutiny and demands that decision-makers leave less mystery about what is on their mind.
Extending the analysis to a variety of textual sources increases the probability of detecting ideational consistency and/or dissimilarity, and enhance the prospects of arriving at an accurate result. Qualitative content analysis may further help us get to grips with the material, simply because the research technique requires careful and close reading of texts. This gives the interpretivist a chance to assess the text’s underlying themes, and cautiously distinguish ideas from rhetoric (Bratberg 2014, 75-78). However, qualitative content analysis will, all things considered, have to rely on the assumption that policymakers are generally sincere about the things they say and write – their statements are for the most part expressions of what they believe (ibid, 76; Hudson 2014, 61). Although the assumption is disputable, the sources examined in this analysis fall within genres that, at least ideally, do not leave much room for cheap talk, but require thoughtful deliberation. I hope that the choice of method and sources will be able to give the assumption a degree of support.

While qualitative content analysis benefits from digging deep into texts, the work required naturally makes it too costly for the interpreter to analyze even a moderately sized sample of texts. In order to confine the sample size, I performed a content search at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ website, selecting official statements, speeches and opinion pieces as filters. The search resulted in 335 document hits, excluding the annual statements of government policy. Omitting all documents that could plausibly be described as irrelevant, such as commemorations (e.g., the government’s statement marking ten years since the Tsunami of December 26) or celebrations (e.g. long-serving recognition of ambassadors), still left a large text sample. Add to this the volume of potentially relevant statements made through the media. As there is no outstanding criteria for non-random text selection, I chose to examine as many texts as possible. For the sake of validity and reliability, a full list of reference texts is provided.

Unsurprisingly, the promise of automated techniques lies in the fact that they substantially reduce the costs of going through large collections of text, though they come with other theoretical and methodological assumptions than QCA. See Grimmer and Stewart 2013 and See Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003.

The search was performed March 10, 2017. Results were filtered using the time period from October 3, 2014 (the date the Government took office) to March 10, 2017.
5.1.2 Tracing the presence of beliefs

Generating a typology of normative foreign policy directions proved exhaustingly hard. There two internationalisms diverge in quite nuanced ways, and sometimes they even accord, for example with reference to aggressive behavior towards sovereign states. Inevitably, this also means that classifying statements with reference to the ideal types proved to quiet a test. Because normative deliberations entail quiet detailed and nuanced argumentation, applying specific code words such as *peace* or *democracy* or *criticism* to code statements according to the relevant ideal type would be of little use, possibly giving us a less accurate result. Code words would certainly have improved reliability, but at the expense of fine-grained interpretation. My analysis gives privilege to interpretation. I give two examples of how classification was conducted in the following.

A virtue of qualitative content analysis is that it supplements textual interpretation with an argument on frequency. How frequent a belief appears in text or across several texts may be able tell us something about its importance. Hence, the regularity of certain beliefs appearing in text may be used to support the accuracy of the data interpretation. Qualitative content analysis does *not*, however, assume that there is a necessary connection between frequency and importance – it depends on the context (Bratberg 2014, 74). In the analysis, I make some references to frequency, for example in relation to the importance the government attaches to the EU. Still, the frequency of expressions that reflect the EU as Sweden’s central foreign policy platform cannot be interpreted straightforwardly. Because the EU and Sweden’s foreign policies have been interwoven since the mid 1990s, it was expected that the organization would be a central reference point in the textual material. On the other hand, there were somewhat fewer statements where decision-makers underscore the importance of the United Nations. However, the wording of the statements indicate a heightened importance attached to Sweden’s influence within the UN, especially in relation to Sweden’s seat in the UN Security Council. This I have interpreted as a belief informed by active internationalism. For example:

*At global level, the United Nations plays an absolutely crucial role for peace and security.*
It therefore needs to be strengthened – and the UN's place in Swedish foreign policy is therefore now being restored. We want and are able to take responsibility for joint solutions through the UN. Sweden’s candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2017–2018 is a concrete expression of the Government’s desire to influence the course of global politics.

[coding: Informed mostly by active internationalism]

The interpretation is also based on the context in which it was stated. In the parliamentary debate following the 2017 statement of foreign policy, where the above example is from, the opposition parties voiced concern that the prioritizing of the UN would be at the expense of the EU. Yet, the reply was an ambitious dual approach working both within the EU, and reclaiming Sweden’s voice on global issues, a voice that was presumably absent under previous administrations. In most cases the underlying meaning of a statement is coded in accordance with the general view of the ideal types. For example:

Perhaps the greatest challenge when it comes to human rights is that the universality of these rights is increasingly being called into question. Cultural or historical contexts are cited that enable the meaning of rights to be interpreted differently depending on where in the world a person lives or was born. This is an unfortunate trend that Sweden will forcefully counter. This is particularly relevant with regard to women’s enjoyment of their human rights. For example, about 100 states place restrictions on the types of jobs women can do.

[coding: Informed mostly by Europeanized liberal internationalism]

This statement reflects liberal internationalism, one in which the world is divided between states respecting human rights and states where human rights is a thorny issue. It also calls for Sweden to “forcefully counter” this unfortunate trend, which signifies a more interventionist stance in defense of human rights than active internationalism. With several other statements, the underlying meaning has been classified as to being informed by both traditions. This is most clear when it comes to the government’s use of criticism as a foreign policy tool (see section 5.2.2).
5.2 Beliefs guiding the Löfven government’s foreign policy

5.2.1 Wallström: “What is good for the world is good for Sweden.”

In the 2017 statement of foreign policy, foreign minister Wallström went into detail on the paradoxical times Sweden and the rest of the world is currently experiencing (2017a). While state leaders and governments tend to put emphasis on the unsettling international political environment, world developments also show crucial development and progress. Her message was clear. It is up to governments and state leaders to decide which narrative to feed (2017a). Still, the matter of how to respond to “insecurity” and “unsettling” times both on the European continent and around the world has been given much weight in most of Wallström’s speeches (2015a, 2015b, 2015d, 2016a, 2017a). Issues frequency center on the rise of threats, such as violent extremism, armed conflict and failed states, gloomy prospects for democratic gains, the injustice of global inequality, systematic sexual and gender-based violence, and the assertiveness of Russia (Wallström 2017a, 2017b 2015a; Lövin 2015d). Perhaps the greatest concern of the Löfven government is the international trend of states putting their own needs first, as if they were more urgent, and different from the needs of the world as a whole. Invoking the need to keep one’s own country safe from the threatening outside world has, according to the government, led to the reinforcement of traditional modes of thinking on foreign and security policy issues (Stenberg 2017). This is also evident of European countries, where developments in Europe’s neighborhood coupled with Euroscepticism has brought a re-emergence of state-centrism infused by nationalist tendencies, questioning the wisdom of European and global integration (Wallström 2014a; Melin 2016). The most disturbing developments among some EU member states is the curtailing and violations of the very ideas Europe is supposed to stand for in relation to outside countries:

[... ] the independence of legal institutions is being curtailed, people’s fundamental rights are being violated, the ability of civil society to function is being impaired. This is
unacceptable and unworthy of a citizens’ Europe [. . .] The EU must therefore develop the instruments to assert and defend respect for human rights and the rule of law. This applies both with respect to the EU’s own citizens and in relation to countries outside the EU. But then the Member States themselves must live up to the EU’s common values (Wallström 2014a).

The return to nationalist aspirations among EU members has ushered a climate more favorable to marginalizing liberal voices and government institutions standing in the way of the true interests of the nation-state - a deeply worrying trend according to the current government. Sweden’s Minister for EU affairs, Ann Linde, stated in an interview with Dagens nyheter, one of Sweden’s leading daily newspapers, that “there should be no doubt that the EU is an organization where democracy is upheld. Now, such a doubt exists, which is quite distressful” (Melin 2016). The breaching of Europe’s prim ideas of tolerance, rule of law, democracy and human rights within EU member states has challenged EU cohesion, and posed a major dilemma for the government (Melin 2016). In her first statement of foreign policy, Wallström further indicated discomfort with the self-defeating state-centrism observed within Europe, where the interests of the nation state are opposed to the interests of the EU and the wider world, and where internal stalemate has translated into waning commitment to the issues Sweden wish to front:

Effective cooperation within the European Union is a prerequisite for peace and prosperity. We need a stronger EU that can continue to stand up for fundamental common values and principles, not least in our European neighborhood. Internal divisions must be counteracted (Wallström 2015a).

The belief in the EU as Sweden’s most important foreign policy arena is strongly reflected in all three annual statements of foreign policy (Wallström 2015a, 2016a, 2017a). Wallström has made it clear that the voice of Sweden gains more resonance in concord with the EU members states (Wallström 2015a). However, internal stalemates and confusion, economic malaise, and member states pulling away from cooperative frameworks, has led the EU itself to turn inwards focusing on its own issues. Furthermore, the ongoing refugee crisis and conflicts right outside Europe’s doorstep, has tilted the EUs common foreign and security policy
towards a focus on pressing matters with often ad hoc policy solutions bent on damage control. While the approach has been understandable, given the pressing situation Europe faces on so many levels, the prospects of a common European voice asserting its distinct normative power in the international domain has deteriorated. All the time the EU is struggling to find its own internal coherence on matters of foreign and security policy, the government seems to have found it necessary to reignite an independent voice in the international sphere. Wallström’s primary message to the world was clearly outlined in this year’s statement of foreign policy: “simply putting one’s own country first would be selfish and unwise. What is good for the world is good for Sweden” (Wallström 2017a). The government has expressed urgent need to address insecurity and threats to peace applying a broader and different lens to international politics (ibid; 2017b).

This has not led to Sweden downgrading its work within the EU. However, decision-makers have also sought alternative routes for influence outside the EU, with several texts disclosing a more pronounced objective of a re-focusing on the United Nations (Wallström 2017a, 2016c, 2015c; 2016b). This is evidently tied to the government’s stated goal to secure a seat in the United Nations Security Council, which it secured in late 2016. In an op-ed to Svenska Dagbladet, Wallström explained the reasons for Sweden’s candidacy:

Sweden’s candidacy for a seat in the Council is about our voice in multilateral cooperation, which is one of the cornerstones of our foreign policy [. . .] It does matter who has a place in the Security Council. One example of a non-permanent member that has gained influence is Lithuania, which during this year in the Security Council has ensured that Ukraine has remained on the agenda, despite the risk of it slipping off in the light of other crises. A country such as Sweden, with our credibility in development issues, our human rights work and our ability to speak with integrity and without a hidden agenda, can make a difference (wallström 2015c).

In the Security Council, the government has underscored the need for better dialogue and understanding between its permanent members, and a different approach to tackling issues of peace and security. For the government this has implied a broader and more inclusive security concept involving the role of
women in conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations and peacekeeping, and sustainable peace-building (Wallström 2015b). It has been a matter of paramount importance to the government to bring the message of the role of women in every aspect of peace and security building to the Security Council. This is based on the belief that “women’s participation in peace processes increases the likelihood of achieving sustainable peace and long-term security” (ibid). The second key matter to address has been transparency in the Council’s work and the use of the veto. While the permanent members come across as nearly inapproachable, it has been crucial for Sweden to address the regrettable consequences for the legitimacy of the Council, the UN as a whole, and for global peaceful relations should the members continue to paralyze the chances of effective peace work. Both issues were put high on the agenda during Sweden’s Security Council presidency in January:

It is precisely in situations when the Council is threatened with paralysis that it is important that the Council has non-permanent members that take action to ensure that the Council takes its responsibility. The deadlocks between the permanent members are deeply regrettable – this is why Sweden is working for a reformed and effective Security Council with a more representative circle of members and less use of the veto (Wallström 2015c; the same point is made in 2016c).

As the sixth largest donor to the UN system and a respected actor in international affairs, the Security Council seat as an additional platform to promote smarter policy has been a top priority for the government (ibid). The normative consideration of reigniting Sweden’s active UN policy is a direct indication of an active internationalist take on foreign policy, promoting peaceful relations, order, dialogue and direct demands for the permanent members to act responsibly (Wallström 2015a)

Decision-makers have furthered expressed belief in partaking in UN peacekeeping missions as direct a contribution to ensuring peace (Wallström 2015a). The government has made Sweden’s first major contribution of personnel to a UN-led operation since 2006. There is emphasis put on peacekeeping missions which testify to Sweden’s longstanding tradition of contributing with military and civilian personnel under the UN flag. In her first foreign policy
address to Parliament Wallström states her belief that Sweden should take part in more UN-led operations, including in South Sudan, Liberia, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Middle East (Wallström 2015a). In the address she also states that “genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious international crimes must be combated and punished” (ibid). The government seems at least in principle not to rule out the use of force to protect the rights and entitlements of people caught in war zones. I have unfortunately not found data on decision-makers deliberating directly on the potential devastating consequences of forced interventions.58

5.2.2 Political and cultural divisions

Foreign minister Wallström’s statements in particular expose a bold approach to tackle international issues, and confidence of Sweden’s important role: “It is precisely at this moment – in unsettled times – that we must not hesitate [. . .] the Government is determined that Sweden will take global responsibility by being a strong voice in the world” (Wallström 2015a). To Wallström, this responsibility has entailed a foreign policy approach that is “active,” “unafraid” and “constructive” (ibid; Wallström 2016). Her words are indication of the importance of a more independent Sweden in international affairs, and the value of forthrightness. They are also indication of the virtues of diplomatic engagement and cooperation applying a long-term foreign policy perspective. The inherent tension between an “active” and “unafraid” (she also uses the word “fearless”), and “constructive” engagement for the long term has been evident in the government’s foreign policy. This applies particularly to the issue of human rights, and more specifically women’s rights (Wallström 2017b). In her first address to Parliament, Wallström introduced the concept of feminist foreign policy, “the purpose of which is to combat discrimination against women,

58 Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman Rosamond has pointed out consequences of forced interventions that may well compromise the efforts for gender equality: [. . .] “the use of such power to protect women may lead to their further victimization and may strengthen patriarchal views of protection, which would further inhibit the transformation of gendered power relations” (Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond 2016).
improve conditions for women and contribute to peace and development” (Wallström 2015a). Interviewed for the New Yorker in 2015, Wallström said “it’s time to become a little braver in foreign policy [. . .] I think feminism is a good term [. . .] It’s about standing against the systematic and global subordination of women” (Nordberg 2015). The government’s invocation of principles of feminism in all policy areas has really put Sweden’s foreign relations to the test. In the months after the Löfven government took office, the prevalent belief was that human rights breaches compelled an official response:

We will dare to influence other countries, for example in work on the great unfinished business of the new millennium: human rights are women’s rights. This is a dimension that I want to introduce into the traditionally male-dominated foreign and security policy domain (Wallström 2015b).

Wallström seems to believe that the haltered human rights situation in many authoritarian regimes owes less to the protection of cultural and religious values and heritage, and more the practice of authoritarian states to play the cultural card to resist change. The message of governments of nondemocratic countries assuring that their reticence about political liberalization actually reflects a deeper commitment to democracy in the long term has not been received well in Stockholm. The truth is rather that ordinary people show sustained determination to advance the frontiers of human rights, striving for nothing less for their countries than responsive and accountable government. As human rights are values widely shared, and movements for democracy have become more than Western idiosyncrasies, the belief among decision-makers has been that it is the prerogative of Sweden to do what it can to support people under authoritarianism (Wallström 2017c; Stenberg 2016):

Some argue that under the current circumstances, we should lower our ambitions concerning human rights; it is not realistic to push for their universal respect. To them I say: human rights are not based on idealism. Human rights are based on binding obligations of international law. This is not the time to question what has already been agreed but to work together for their full and equal implementation (Wallström 2017c).
An active foreign policy in defense of human rights seemed to imply to the appropriate reaction to violations were simply contemptuous dismissal. There has been a deep worry of the current trend of authoritarization. Decision-makers have pointed to disturbing developments both in Russia and in Turkey (Wallström 2015a; Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2016a; Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2016b). Moreover, developing countries with less than perfect human rights records and waning commitments to democracy, have found comfort in the resurgence of authoritarian and illiberal role models:

Our shared commitment is particularly important today, when authoritarian regimes have gained greater influence, scope for democracy is decreasing and universal rights are restricted […] People in Nigeria who protest against discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientation are silenced. Activists in Cambodia or Columbia who fight against environmental degradation and forced resettlement are threatened. Journalists who uncover abuses of power in Russia and secular bloggers in Bangladesh are murdered for the sake of their opinions. Women’s rights activists in Iraq are subjected to political persecution (Wallström 2015d).

A belief in principled encounters with regimes that do not live up to the standards of was prevalent in the run-up to the so-called Saudi Affair – the belief clearly reminiscent of active internationalism. The sentencing of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi for uttering political opinions on his internet blog, had caught the attention of foreign minister Wallström. The penalty led Wallström to send a frank message to the Saudi regime that its penal system falls short of being “medieval” (Svenska Dagbladet 2015). She followed up with strong remarks on the regime’s intolerable treatment of women (ibid). Her statements led to a long diplomatic quarrel with Riyadh, resulting in the cancellation of an arms deal and condemnation by a number of Arabic states. Wallström herself refused to apologize for the debacle officially. However, strenuous efforts were made to restore normal diplomatic relations. The debacle had caused harm to Swedish business interests and put Sweden’s United Nations Security Council bid at risk. Still Sweden had compromised its interests to stand up to Saudi Arabia and its human rights record.
In the aftermath, there was a lot of debate on how far Sweden should practice what it preached. The government had dared to do what should be done, to let other countries know that there are limits to what they can do to their own citizens. Decision-makers were both surprised and disappointed to see how little support Sweden got from its like-minded European counterparts. In an interview with *Dagens Nyheter*, Wallström confessed that she had hoped the EU would have the guts to stand by Sweden during the affair (Stenberg 2016). It had also caught the government by surprise how strong opposition there was against confronting another state on human rights issues: “it is unsettling how tough it is to argue in defense of human rights. There is such strong resistance” (ibid).

Since the Saudi affair, the government has taken a more modest stance that is relatable to liberal internationalism. Decision-makers were convinced of the importance of not willing to be silenced (Gravdal 2016). However, in practical terms, it was difficult to mix “active” and “constructive,” unfortunately hampering the prospects of dialogue and cooperative efforts. It was never the government’s intention to reduce countries to their faults, yet criticism was often taken literally. Therefore, there has been a change of tone in relation to less than democratic states. Prime Minister Stefan Löfven visit to Saudi Arabia in 2016 was much less confronting. To *Dagens Nyheter* he said, “Of course I would like to see gender equality be a fact around the world. But I also have to respect the fact that it is not so simple to remove the rule of guardianship from Saudi society. There is need for gradual change” (Stenberg 2016b). The same message was expressed by Wallström with regards to her visit to Iran this year:

“What raised people’s attention in Iran was the fact there was a majority of women in the Swedish delegation. While from Iran there were no women. It is practical and constructive cooperation that will change things in the long term. We should not travel there and demonstrate” (Stenberg 2017).

The point is simple. Sweden can contribute to change in more subtle and smart ways. This position was equally justifiable from a liberal internationalist perspective: Why undermine regimes that has steadily worked to improve the situation of women, though not at the pace one had wished for? Political and
commercial dialogue fosters trust and leverage to express concern on behalf of women. The government does not seem to go against this belief. Quite oppositely, trips have been made to Iran, China, Russia and Saudi Arabia where concerns regarding human rights and women’s rights are taken up during diplomatic conversation (Stenberg 2016b; Stenberg 2017). Statements concerning the relationship between free trade and sowing the seeds for democratic development is consistent throughout the textual material: “The EU’s free trade agreements provide opportunities to develop Sweden’s economic exchange with a number of countries, based on long-term Swedish support for freedom and democracy development” (Wallström 2015a). Still, the insistence on standing up for human rights poses a quandary in relation to states with atavistic attitudes towards women. The assertion of smart power seems to be the middle ground for the government. Political dialogue, constructive engagement and acting as a feminist role model paves the way in the long term, for example through sending a female majority delegation of women to state visits in countries where women’s rights are not upheld, sending female delegations to peace negotiations, and appointing female ambassadors to states where patriarchy rains (Wallström 2017a; Larsson 2015).
Chapter 6
Conclusion

6.1 Theoretical framework

Drawing on normative theory, the first goal of this thesis was to challenge the conventional wisdom that ethics and national interest are polar opposites in international relations. The invigoration of ethical foreign policies has proliferated among Western governments, claiming to act in the name of common good in the international domain. Because of the theoretical separation of ethics and foreign policy, in which the latter has been conceptualized as mainly preoccupied with securing self-interest, little empirical attention has been given to the normative side of states’ foreign policies. Acting in the interests of distant others has straightforwardly been disclaimed, most often by IR-realists, as empty promises, smokescreens for self-beneficial agendas, organized hypocrisy and political instrumentality. The supposed high regards of states for the plight of others who live under repression or in poverty are insincere, because states will fail to fulfill any promise the minute national interest is involved. However, I argued that the stark divide between ethics and national interest is not warranted. Nor is it easy to pin down what “ethics” and “interests” consist in. By conceptualizing the state as an actor in international politics whose decision-makers are making efforts to act good, I would be able to study ethical foreign policymaking on its own terms.

With this reconceptualization as backdrop, I turned to a case study of Swedish foreign policy. There were two reasons for the choice of Sweden as a suitable case to study: (1) Sweden has traditionally been highlighted as a moral actor in international affairs. Since the 1960s, Swedish policymakers have had perspective on international politics which prioritized the needs of others. The
country has been described as an internationalist state, playing the roles of “teacher,” “world conscience,” “good state,” and “moral superpower” in world politics. (2) Sweden’s current coalition government, consisting of the traditionally dominant Social Democratic Party and the Green Party, being the first ever government to publicly adopt a feminist foreign policy, with a stated ambition to become the strongest voice for gender equality and full employment of human rights for all women and girls. I operated with the hypothesis that there must be some kind of connection between Sweden’s current foreign policy and Sweden’s traditional internationalism.

In building a suitable theoretical framework for the study of ethical foreign policies, I was drawn towards foreign policy analysis (FPA) which puts decision-makers at the center of foreign policy theory. The main theoretical assumption of foreign policy analysis is that “all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups” (Hudson 2014, 3). While the focus of major schools in IR are on states, FPA focuses on foreign policy elites. A basic premise in the thesis is that the national interest is not objectively given, but must be interpreted through the prism of ideas that decision-makers hold. What do decision-makers believe is in the country’s national interest? What do decision-makers believe it entails to act in the interests of non-citizens? This comes down to ideas and beliefs. However, ideas do not appear out of thin air, which is a constructivist insight. It made logically sense to connect the insights of constructivism, focusing on how ideas shape behavior, and FPA, focusing on decision-makers who have the capacity to draw on or be informed by ideational structures.

A potential drawback in the theory chapter is the manner in which I make use of neorealism to justify the move to FPA and constructivist analysis. I am certainly not the only student of ideational variables contrasting works on ideas and identity to neorealist accounts of power and security. The question is whether I commit a strawman fallacy in posing neorealism as the main opponent. Surely, both classical, neoclassical realism and liberal studies have employed ideas into their theoretical frameworks. As Robert Keohane points out in an article titled
Ideas part-way down, constructivist arguments “are sensible, but I am not sure who the opponents are” (Keohane 2000, 128). Studies do not become constructivist just because ideas are under the loop. However, I claim that the thesis’ overall normative focus, and the distinct focus on the beliefs of decision-makers, who have a moral outlook and do not necessarily act according to a fixed concept of national interest, differentiates it from classical and liberal schools.

Moreover, the theoretical framework brings the empirical analysis in direct contact with Normative-IR. Due to space limitations, this study does contain a normative critique of the ethical foreign policy of Sweden, but it certainly could.

6.2 Summary of findings

Putting the ideas and beliefs of decision-makers at the center of analysis, this study sought to answer two questions: (1) What beliefs have been prevalent in Swedish foreign policy since the 1960s? (2) To what extent and in what ways do these inherited beliefs inform the foreign policy of Sweden’s current coalition government?

In answering the first question, I operated with the assumption that there have been two more or less distinct normative approaches prevalent in Swedish foreign policy tradition. I based my analysis on a review of authoritative scholarly accounts of foreign policy focusing on the foreign policy elite and their ideas, and issues that traditionally have occupied Sweden’s foreign policy itinerary, such as development and aid, democracy and human rights, conflict mediation and peace work, international cooperation, and security and trade. I found that there have been two general ways of approaching normative issues in Swedish foreign policy tradition. One is active internationalism which is associated with global inequality issues, beliefs in solidarity and global economic redistribution, state sovereignty and rights to political autonomy, active participation within the UN framework, conflict mediation and bridge building, and criticism as a useful foreign policy tool. The other is Europeanized liberal internationalism, which focuses on Europe as a democratic and human rights based core, where the values
of individual freedom, democracy, human rights and rule of law reign. Foreign policy should be about the pragmatic promotion of these values in relation to third states.

Based on the historical review I generated a typology of ideal type representations of the two internationalisms, with divergent sets of beliefs that together make up Sweden’s traditional modes of thinking on normative foreign policy issues. This proved a very difficult task. Normative issues demand careful deliberation and there are nuances to the ideas which made it hard to construct them as divergent. This also made the analysis of the Löfven government particularly hard. However, the typology worked in the sense that it covered many of the themes which make up the government’s priorities. Based on my interpretation, the current government draws on both ideal types to tackle dilemmas it has faced in its external affairs. It draws on active internationalism in its focus on the United Nations as the most important organization for tackling global issues, settling disputes and enhancing dialogue and cooperation. It also draws on active internationalism in its pursuit to exert an independent voice in international politics with smarter solutions to peace and security than traditional ways of thinking on these matters. On the other hand, the Löfven government relates to Europeanized liberal internationalism in its defense of human rights, adding a stronger emphasis on women’s rights. The initial attempt to merger defense of human rights with the tradition of criticism backfired on the government, leading decision-makers to rethink their approach to expand human rights, ending up with a more tolerant and pragmatic foreign policy line towards states that are less proficient in democracy.
Reference texts


Literature


