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LARS WIKMAN

# Don't Mention the War

The forging of a domestic foreign policy consensus on the entry, expansion and exit of Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan



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### **Abstract**

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Consensus is not something that just happens in the foreign policy domain when political actors seemingly agree on a policy. Rather, in this dissertation I demonstrate that actors construct consensus through the framing of policy as they highlight and downplay certain elements. Interestingly, for consensus to emerge, the attraction of political support is not always necessary; sometimes it is enough to not mobilize opposition. In the Swedish context a “foreign policy line” [*utrikespolitisk linje*] captures the prevailing consensus view and embraces a particular understanding of foreign policy in the national interest, historically conditioned and elevated above party politics. Based on archival records and 55 interviews, this dissertation explores and analyzes the political process in which a domestic foreign policy consensus was constructed for the entry, expansion and exit of the Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan in the early 2000s.

Advocates and opponents frame their preferred policy with the intention of aligning it with a dominating perception of the continuity of Swedish foreign policy to gain wider acceptance. In the case of military contributions to Afghanistan, distancing themselves from sensitive issues such as the US warfare and framing policy so it resembled traditional Swedish foreign policy was a way for advocates to suppress political conflict within the political left and rally support behind the respective government's proposition. Afghanistan was a defining military operation at a pivotal time for Swedish foreign policy. The results therefore have wider implications for our understanding of the domestic politics of Swedish foreign policy, providing an important view of how a general reorientation following the Cold War was managed. In addition to conceptualizing the “foreign policy line” this study contributes theoretically with two frame alignment strategies, which actors employ when faced with an unfavorable context to avoid negative connotations.

*Keywords:* Sweden, foreign policy, consensus, framing, foreign policy line, domestic politics, ISAF, Afghanistan, peace support operations, NATO.

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*To Mom and Dad*



# Preface

When I was working in the Swedish Parliament a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs told me a story about the table in the meeting room. Apparently, it had been under discussion some years back to remove it and instead put in an oval table. Most committee meeting rooms in the Parliament have oval tables placing the parties supporting the government on one side and the opposition on the other. But, she told me that the members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs strongly objected to this idea. Because in foreign policy, she explained to me, they need to reach broad agreements and that is easier to do with a round table. A round table reduces the sense of conflict and breeds consensus. And in foreign policy the stakes are too important to be left to political bickering.

So, I have not done any research to find out whether this story is true or not but that really does not matter – and that is the point of my dissertation. The story, true or not, reveals a particular understanding of foreign policy and their very role as politicians. Foreign policy is above conflicts and the need for consensus is principal.



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- Yes, dear, today I finished it.

Lars Wikman  
Uppsala, March 18, 2021.

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# Abbreviations

AI	Agreement Index
AiP	<i>Aktuellt i Politiken</i>
CCC	Coalition Coordination Center
CENTCOM	Central Command
CHOD	Chief of Defense
COIN	Counterinsurgency
DN	<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>
EU	European Union
EUCOM	European Command
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GOV	Government
GP	<i>Göteborgs-Posten</i>
IFOR	Implementation Force
IR	International Relations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KFOR	Kosovo Force
MeS	Mazar-e-Sharif
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NORDCAPS	Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OMLT	Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RSM	Resolute Support Mission
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SAFHQ	Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SEK	Swedish Krona
SF	Special Forces
SFOR	Stabilization Force

SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SvD	<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i>
SWECON	Swedish Contingent
SVT	<i>Sveriges Television</i>
TT	<i>Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå</i>
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US	United States



# Chapter 1 – The forging of a domestic foreign policy consensus

The Swedish military contributions to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan occurred at a pivotal time when Swedish Cold War policy transitioned into a post-9/11 world. They embraced many sensitive and controversial political issues, most prominently the friction between the continuity of the traditional policy of neutrality and rapprochement to NATO. The deteriorating security situation on the ground in Afghanistan increasingly called into question the Swedish use of military force in an operation that more and more resembled war. Notwithstanding this reality was the military contributions supported by a consensus or broad cross-party support in the Parliament.

This dissertation explores the process in which a government builds and maintains domestic support for military contributions to peace support operations. It takes into consideration the discursive context, how government and opposition navigate the political dynamics of these processes, and places the concept of consensus at the center of the analysis. In this dissertation I argue that the framing of policy in certain ways, by highlighting some aspects and downplaying others, is central to understanding the process by which a consensus is constructed.

The government holds a privileged position in foreign policymaking but the foreign policy process is complicated by the relationship with oppositional forces. A strong norm to form consensus places significant constraints on the leadership of all political parties. A political opposition cannot be overrun or ignored to the same extent as in other areas. The government is dependent on the opposition for support or acquiescence. At the same time the government holds an advantage to call out defection from consensus as the opposition is inclined not to endanger national unity on these issues. So, a consensus yes. But it is not entirely clear how it is constructed and on whose terms?

Previous research on consensus tends to study situations when political conflicts emerge, thereby overlooking decisions that arise without overt controversy. If we instead turn the focus to instances without overt dissent and ask ourselves *why not conflict* new questions emerge. Most notably, it is less clear when, where and how the issues are resolved in these circumstances, as well as who has the power to influence or control foreign policy and how.

These issues point to the larger conundrum on the nature of a consensus and how a policy is shaped and formulated within decision-making processes permeated by consensus. For a “consensual behavior” does not necessarily indicate a lack of political division “either in public or behind closed committee-doors” (Jerneck, 1996, p. 164). The construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus therefore touches upon democratic aspects of foreign policy and the tension in a society that can arise on matters that deal with national interests. For if accountability can be considered an important trait of democracy, this raises a normative question of how we can ensure a democratic constraint on foreign policy without a strong opposition (Dahl, 1966, p. 387).

## Foreign policy continuity in Sweden

Swedish foreign and security politics has traditionally been a policy field favoring continuity. An integral goal has been to reach a general understanding of what constitutes Swedish foreign policy, not to cause imbalance or upset the status quo, especially when factoring in changes in government (Bjereld & Demker, 1995; Brommesson & Ekengren, 2007, 2013). Political and ideological differences are forced aside by the requirement of domestic political stability in foreign policy. This status quo is in the Swedish foreign policy discourse commonly referred to as “the foreign policy line” [*utrikes-politiska linjen*]. This concept, further developed in chapter 2, captures the prevailing consensus and embraces a particular understanding of foreign policy in the national interest, historically conditioned and elevated above party politics. Inherent in the concept lies a state of hegemonic discursive influence, mainly through its linkage to consensus as a display of credibility. The traditional manifestation of this was expressed during the Cold War as: “freedom from alliances in peace, aiming for neutrality in war.” It is through this concept of “the foreign policy line” that decision-makers both comprehend the basis for Swedish foreign policy as well as legitimize political support for state action, since no foreign policy is politically possible that is inconsistent with this dominating perception of what foreign policy entails. Some sort of substantive linkage to domestic forces is necessary for something to be politically possible regardless if this is based on the support, compliance, acquiescence, or consent of a political opposition (Barnett, 1999; Doty, 1993; Holland, 2013; McDonald, 2013, 2015; McDonald & Merefild, 2010). It can also be convincingly argued that an elite consensus shields leaders from democratic accountability and that domestic forces have minor, if any, effect on policy (Kreps, 2010).

Embedded in the concept of “the foreign policy line” lies the perception amongst actors that a consensus is vital for the credibility of Swedish foreign policy. It is therefore an intrinsic relationship between the “foreign policy line”, a domestic foreign policy consensus and legitimization, tying together

domestic and foreign politics. The alignment between the issue policy and the overall “foreign policy line” becomes central in this understanding. As Hollis and Smith notes, “Whatever one’s purpose in pursuing a policy, it will fail unless it can be presented as a legitimate and plausible policy in the forum where the collective decision is taken” (Hollis & Smith, 1990, p. 167). The discursive alignment between the specific policy and the overall “foreign policy line” determines the nature of the political conflict and the degree of domestic contestation of the policy at hand. In the twists and turns of the policy process many alternatives are discarded before even entering political deliberations, other alternatives need to be packaged in a way that resonates with a broader audience. In this dissertation, I argue that actors construct domestic political support in the foreign policy process primarily by shaping how policy is discursively portrayed. I recognize in this argument that these decision-makers cannot successfully frame a policy any way they seem fit, it must resonate in the context and to be successful it must also have the ability to countermand competing alternatives (Barnett, 1999; Benford & Snow, 2000; Holland, 2013). The conduct of actors, the roles they have in these processes, and the strategies that they employ are of particular importance and occupy a central part of the analytical framework of this dissertation (Carlsnaes, 2002, 2012; Hudson, 2005, 2014; Snyder et al., 1962; Sundelius, 1994).

## Sweden and military contributions to Afghanistan

Between 2002 and 2014 Sweden contributed substantially to ISAF in Afghanistan. It was initially quite unexpected when Sweden decided to contribute militarily, especially with Special Forces. Well outside of Sweden’s normal sphere of interest, this was also a military operation in close proximity to an ongoing US war on questionable legal grounds. Yet, the Swedish Parliament [*riksdagen*] voted unanimously in favor of the Government’s proposition in 2002.

Over the following years, after NATO assumed leadership of ISAF, the Swedish military contribution expanded substantially in size and scope, all decisions made with broad political support, even as the government abandoned the notion of consensus. The most significant decision, however, was when Sweden assumed lead nation responsibility for a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan. This commitment was quite an undertaking for a small non-NATO nation. As violence began to escalate and dominate the development in Afghanistan the grounds for the contribution were increasingly questioned back in Sweden, eventually challenging the broad political support for the military deployment. Even while the politicization of foreign policy is not new in the Swedish context it was still unusual when Afghanistan surfaced in the 2010 election campaign and the Government and opposition proclaimed two conflicting directions for the

future of the engagement. Nevertheless, after the election the Government could come to terms with the opposition and reach a settlement.

Decision-makers and the military all struggled to make sense of the underlying reasons and justification for the military involvement to uphold the consensus in favor of the operation. Opponents questioned the necessity and productivity of the Swedish military engagement in Afghanistan while advocates struggled to frame a cohesive and credible policy. The incompatibility rested in the contested perception of whether or not Sweden was in a war. This challenged the stability of the domestic foreign policy consensus. Yet, each of the 14 decisions on military contributions to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014 were still supported by a consensus or a broad cross-party support in the Parliament. It is puzzling how the domestic foreign policy consensus could be constructed and persist in support of Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan despite this apparent ground for political conflict.

The interpretative approach that I propose, which is necessary to capture actors' perceptions of the context and the reasons behind their conduct, requires an in-depth understanding of the decision-making process. A study of the politics of these processes is in itself an interesting and important study, primarily for its impact and policy relevance (Agrell, 2013; Christiansson, 2020; Holmberg & Hallenberg, 2016; Honig & Käihkö, 2014; Johnsson, 2017; Noreen et al., 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Sandman, 2019; Ångström & Honig, 2012; Ångström & Noreen, 2016). It turns out, however, that our knowledge is not only limited on the Swedish case of military contributions to Afghanistan, but we also know rather little in general about the politics of decision-making in processes that are permeated by a domestic foreign policy consensus. The strong presence of consensus in Swedish foreign policy and the political dynamics of the military contribution to Afghanistan therefore make it an appropriate case study to explore how a consensus is forged. Afghanistan is a deviant operation in a country predisposed to consensus. The Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan further displays variation in consensus over time, which will be further elaborated in chapter four. This variation asserts itself in three phases of the engagement.

- ENTRY. A consensus supported the Swedish entry with Special Forces, despite the presence of US offensive operations and the ongoing War on Terror which was a controversial issue in Sweden.
- EXPANSION. During the substantial expansion of the Swedish military contribution the norm of consensus was transformed into broad cross-party support with surprising ease.
- EXIT. Political controversy reached a peak after the 2010 election and despite being a polarized issue during the campaign a cross-bloc settlement is reached after the elections setting the terms for a continued presence but an exit of combat troops.

These three phases of engagement (entry, expansion and exit), thus, enable a within-case analysis of the empirical exploration of consensus construction through a comparison of the specific phases (Levite et al., 1992).

## Aim and research questions

The dominant interpretation of foreign policy within a political body sets the perimeter for what actors conceive of as politically possible, the conduct of political opposition, and the extent that political conflict can be suppressed. Assuming that there is an underlying political division in all situations, discernible or not, I set out to theoretically and empirically investigate the process by which a domestic foreign policy consensus is constructed. This is the primary aim of the dissertation. In order to understand this process, it is necessary to analyze the actors operating in it and how they shape and formulate the policy in question and thereby influence how the policy is comprehended. To be clear, this dissertation is not aimed at explaining why Sweden contributed militarily to Afghanistan in terms of the motives of the actors, which are difficult to research empirically (Krebs & Lobasz, 2007, p. 411). The research focus is instead placed on how it was possible to deploy troops to Afghanistan and why the advocates succeeded in bridging with opponents and constructing political legitimacy through a domestic consensus. It is therefore vital to identify central actors and how they reasoned. It is furthermore necessary to understand how the policy process works, the nature of the political divisions, and the key decisions made. In order to accomplish this, and the secondary aim of this dissertation, I set out to develop an in-depth understanding of the decision-making process on Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan during the ISAF years 2002-2014. Approaching this particular case offers an opportunity to study within-case variation of consensus over time. In addition are military contributions to Afghanistan deviant to the normal pattern of consensus in Swedish foreign policy, in particular on peace support operations. An in-depth analysis is necessary in order to have an empirical ground suitable to explore how a domestic foreign policy consensus was constructed. The primary aim of exploring the construction of consensus is therefore contingent on the in-depth empirical account of the decision-making process.

To achieve these aims this dissertation investigates three interrelated research questions. First of all, it is necessary to reconstruct the foreign policy process. This question is aimed at descriptively mapping-out the decision-making process and empirically laying the foundation for the continuation of the analysis.

1. *What actions constitute the foreign policy process of the entry, expansion and exit of the Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan?*

The second question is centered on the conduct of the actors with an analytical emphasis on how they shape and formulate policy through framing.

2. *How do actors frame policy on the military contributions to Afghanistan in the foreign policy process?*

The third question reconnects to the primary aim of the dissertation to explore the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus. It centers on the result of the process – which is consensus, or the lack thereof – and is theoretically oriented towards addressing how a consensus is constructed.

3. *How has the domestic foreign policy consensus on military contributions to Afghanistan been constructed over time?*

In order to study the three research questions I assume that decisions are a result of a process in which support is developed behind a particular configuration of the contribution at a specific time, discursively portrayed in a certain way (Henke, 2017). The analytical focus is therefore placed on the question of why a particular decision occurred and when and how this was made possible. Consequently these three questions together expand the scope of the inquiry beyond investigating *why* Sweden would contribute, in the first place, to *how come* Sweden participated in the way that it did rather than in some other conceivable way (Barnett, 1999; Doty, 1993; Henke, 2017; Holland, 2013; Houghton, 2007; Sterling-Folker & Badie, 2012; Weldes, 1996, 1999). Chapter 3 will present an analytical framework of three dimensions that corresponds to the three research questions: process, framing and consensus. While I analytically keep the three dimensions distinct I recognize that empirically the three dimensions permeate each other which is why it is difficult to keep them separate later on in the empirical analysis.

## Studying the forging of a consensus

The success of a research approach utilizing these kinds of research questions depends a lot on the method and material which would allow for a reconstruction of the political context through the perspective of the decision-makers to account for how they reasoned and perceived the situation (Sundelius et al., 1997, pp. 45-50). To capture the forging of a consensus behind a particular foreign policy it is necessary to penetrate the decision-making process, beyond the formal exchange between government and Parliament, as well as into the reasoning of specific actors.

My approach assumes that the final stage of the policy process on military contributions, and most apparent outlet for a domestic foreign policy consensus, is the final vote in the Parliament's chamber. This is empirically recognized by actors in the process through my interviews and it is also legally

substantiated as it is required in the constitution that the Parliament gives consent on every deployment of an “armed force” abroad. Building on the structuring of a protracted military intervention into three phases by Levite et al. (1992), I identify the corresponding parliamentary decisions of the *entry* (January 18 2002), *expansion* (December 7, 2005), and *exit* of the military contribution to Afghanistan (December 15, 2010) (Levite et al., 1992). Starting with these decisions I trace the process backwards and identify critical decision points, the relevant and important actors, and how they experienced and reasoned in lieu of the choices that they faced (Bengtsson & Hertting, 2012; Bennett & Checkel, 2015; Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005; Guzzini, 2012; Mahoney, 2015; Norman, 2015; Sundelius et al., 1997). To facilitate my analysis, I conducted 55 semi-structured in-depth interviews with politicians, civil servants, and military officers from all levels of the policy process ranging from ministers to desk-officers. The primary purpose of these interviews is to understand through the viewpoint of the actors what entered into their reasoned judgement and what constrained and/or enabled their conduct. While interviews are the primary material for my research I also collected a significant amount of written material from different archives, mainly the Government Offices and the Armed Forces, to complement the analysis.<sup>1</sup>

By placing the analytical focus on the framing process, this dissertation explores different strategies that actors employ as they try to win acceptance for their policy alternative. The main tenet of framing theory is quite simple and intuitive: the way a problem is portrayed determines the way it is interpreted and in extension conditions the action of decision-makers (Bacchi, 1999, 2009; Buzan et al., 1998; Entman, 1993, 2004; Eriksson, 2004; Kahneman, 2011; Mintz & DeRouen Jr, 2010; Vertzberger, 1990). A key concept for this dissertation is frame alignment, which is overlooked in previous research of foreign policy (Barnett, 1999; Benford & Snow, 2000; Holland, 2013; Snow et al., 1986; Stone, 1989, 2012). While framing is not new in the analysis of foreign policy, previous research has not clearly specified what strategies actors formulate and how they go about adapting them. The latter is an especially important oversight given their choices have a reproductive or transformative effect on the context or their conduct (see for example Barnett, 1999; Holland, 2013). The overall dominant perception within the foreign policy community more or less sets the boundaries for what is politically possible. The pressure to form a consensus behind decisions on military contributions makes alignment with “the foreign policy line” decisive for any policy to be perceived as legitimate in an authoritative decision-unit can otherwise could block it. I argue and demonstrate in this dissertation, that inherent in the concept of frame alignment is a ‘wiggle

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<sup>1</sup> All translations in this study are made by author, and checked by a professional translator. For all the original quotes I refer to the primary source.

room' in which actors can integrate policy changes within a sense of continuity of "the foreign policy line".

## The domestic politics of a domestic foreign policy consensus

By extensively mapping out the decision-making process, this study contributes to our general knowledge of the dynamics in foreign policy decision-making processes. Foreign Policy Analysis, or FPA, has opened up the black box of the state and delved into the decision-making processes and domestic influences of foreign policy, encompassing for example different middle-range theories of the complex relationships between governments and other domestic actors. This has produced a research field which investigates multifactorial explanations on a variety of levels using interdisciplinary approaches, all with the common denominator in their influence on decision-making (Hudson, 2014).

This particular study contributes to this literature by going beyond the formal exchange between government and Parliament and penetrating in-depth the formal and informal exchanges that precede consensus in the decision-making process. For what makes foreign policy truly special is the balancing act between the international and domestic arenas, performed by representatives of the state (Hill, 2003; Putnam, 1988). Foreign policy elites need to sustain alliances, commerce, and diplomatic relations with other states, and at the same time consider domestic factors such as political coalitions, the will of the people and the likelihood of reelection. Internationally a domestic consensus on these issues is important as this kind of national accountability strengthens the ability to enforce policy as it sends signals of resolve and unity, both toward allies and adversaries (Schultz, 2001). Here unity on foreign policy issues becomes a national interest in itself and part of the domestic foreign policy discourse (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, 2000; Jerneck, 1996; Weldes, 1996, 1999).

The legitimacy and credibility that consensus entails in the political process has given credence to the conventional wisdom that 'politics stops at the water's edge' on matters of national security (Mearsheimer, 2001). There is a wide-spread assumption, however, that consensus is constructed within the formal institutions of the state. Studies centered on the domestic politics of foreign policy, however, challenge many of the assumptions underpinning this literature. This scholarship has, for instance, drawn attention to different democratic influences, such as partisan politics, political opposition, coalition-building, public opinion, and competition of political power (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Groeling & Baum, 2008; Hagan, 1993, 1995; Hildebrandt et al., 2013; Kaarbo, 2013; Kaarbo, 2015; Rathbun, 2004; Schultz, 2001; Wagner et al., 2018). This analysis will place a supplementary focus on the human aspects and the way politics and decisions are channeled through the actions of actors. This will highlight informal channels, personal relation-

ships and the reasoning of actors and give further weight to the relevance of studies that center on actors.

In addition to an increased general understanding of actors within decision-making processes, this study adds to our explicit knowledge of decision-making in a process permeated by consensus. Consensus has been addressed in studies that directly and indirectly center on the discursive conditions for foreign policy (Holland, 2013; Krebs, 2015; Krebs & Jackson, 2007; Krebs & Lobasz, 2007). This scholarship explores what is politically possible and how dominating intersubjective understandings in the context enable and constrain certain conduct. Consensus is here mainly equated with the dominant discourses or narratives that rise above contestation and set the parameters for political action. The analytical use of framing that I propose recognizes and balances the dialectical interplay that occurs between actor and context. Approaching the construction of consensus in this way furthers our knowledge of the role of consensus in foreign policy decision-making and suggests a theoretical understanding of how we can understand the forging of consensus through framing.

In sum, consensus remains a multifaceted and elusive concept within the study of international relations and foreign policy. This present study is a novel attempt to expand our knowledge of politics in a process permeated by consensus. To the best of my knowledge, it is the first attempt to directly study the construction of consensus in foreign policy analysis by placing it in the center of the study.

## The politics of peace support operations in Sweden

In addition to the exploration of consensus, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the Swedish foreign policy decision-making process for military contributions to Afghanistan. Existing studies explore different aspects of military contributions to peace support operations, but they do not investigate at a deeper level the interplay between government, political parties, parliament, bureaucracy, and individual decision-makers. By addressing political decision-making, this study makes a substantial empirical contribution to this literature (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015; Agrell, 2013; Andersson, 2007; Bjurner, 2010; Doeser, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Egnell, 2015; Eriksson, 2012; Hellman & Wagnsson, 2013; Matz, 2013; Noreen et al., 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Sandman, 2019; Tullberg, 2012; Ångström & Honig, 2012; Ångström, 2010). It identifies important actors, significant decisions, and the political divisions and investigate the dynamics of the process. This substantiates a deeper knowledge of not only the Afghanistan process, but also processes on military contributions to peace support operations in general.

By studying the foreign policy decision-making process in Sweden through the prism of consensus, I further demonstrate how the supremacy of

particular perceptions are a prerequisite for the approval of military force and that political actors engage in a framing contest to influence the political decision. The extant of empirical research focused on the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan either investigates the influence Afghanistan has had on institutional transformation in the security and defense fields in Sweden (Holmberg & Hallenberg, 2016), the contextual factors for decision-making (Noreen et al., 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Sandman, 2019; Ångström & Honig, 2012; Ångström & Noreen, 2016), or focus primarily on the situation in Afghanistan and the conduct of the military force there (Agrell, 2013; Honig & Käihkö, 2014; Johnsson, 2017). These studies are mostly driven by the puzzling discrepancy between the public narrative and situation on the ground in Afghanistan (Agrell, 2013; Johnsson, 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015). Agrell goes as far as to conclude that this discrepancy is so vast that either the ISAF operation were not comprehended by politicians or it was deliberately concealed from the public (Agrell, 2013, pp. 317-333). This lack of controversy and public debate regarding the ISAF contribution is an important point, but this has not been properly problematized and the political consequences of this have not been explored (Agrell, 2013; Hellman & Wagnsson, 2013; Wendt & Åse, 2016). This problem also underscores a public interest in this research to unpack the political process and shed light on the politics when important decisions on the entry, expansion and exit of the Swedish military contribution were taken.

While past studies on Swedish military interventions do look at political actors and touch upon important political factors, analysis of the *politics* of Swedish military interventions remain rare. By focusing on the process in which a domestic foreign policy consensus is constructed this dissertation will make a substantial theoretical and empirical contribution to the literature on Swedish peace support operations, in general, and the Afghanistan case, in particular.

## Outline of the dissertation

In the next chapter (2), the theoretical foundation for the empirical study is presented. It summarizes previous research on Swedish peace support operations, builds on the aspects of domestic support for military contributions and offers theoretical definitions of “the foreign policy line” and consensus.

Chapter 3 presents the analytical framework constructed to capture how actors use framing strategies to align policy on the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan with the foreign policy line. The strategic-relational approach by Hay (2002) is discussed as the theoretical foundation from which I then extrapolate framing as a fruitful approach to incorporate actors into the analysis of foreign policy decision-making without ignoring structural influences.

Chapter 4 discusses relevant methodological issues which directly affect the study at hand. Besides a general discussion on research design and the case selection, this chapter focuses on the advantages and challenges of mapping out this decision-making process through process-tracing and interpretative analysis. A large portion of this chapter is devoted to a presentation of the empirical material and data collection with an emphasis on the interview process.

Chapter 5 is the first empirical chapter and explores how the Government managed to build a unanimous support for a Special Forces contribution to Afghanistan, deployed in January 2002.

In chapter 6, the parliamentary approval to substantially expand the Swedish ISAF contribution is placed at the center of analysis. The political unity in the entry was surprisingly abandoned with ease by the Government and transitioned into a broad cross-party support.

Chapter 7 centers on when political controversy reached its peak and the broad support for the military contribution to Afghanistan collapsed before the 2010 election. This chapter explores how it was possible for a controversial political conflict to ascend in this policy field, predisposed to consensus, only for a cross-bloc settlement to be reached after the elections setting the terms for a continued presence, but with an exit of combat troops.

The concluding chapter (8) summarizes the results and situates the contributions in broader literatures and discuss overall implications of the dissertation.

## Chapter 2 – Previous research and theoretical foundation

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First of all I will review previous research in order to more clearly situate the contributions of this dissertation in the literature of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and country specific studies on Swedish military contributions to peace support operations. The second aim is to tackle some important theoretical challenges in order to build a solid theoretical foundation for the analytical framework, which will be presented in the next chapter.

This chapter begins with a review of research on Swedish military contributions to peace support operations, situating the empirical contribution of this dissertation in that literature. Previous research has pointed to several important structural and categorical factors which bear consequences for domestic politics. It is also necessary to place these theoretical insights in an actor-centric context in order to understand how actors understand and use these factors in order to manage perceptions by highlighting or downplaying certain aspects of a policy.

As was made clear in the introductory chapter the concept of “foreign policy line” holds empirical importance and it is necessary to relate this concept to the importance of a consensus in Swedish foreign policy. Previous research points to domestic consensus as a determinant for foreign policy but it is necessary to nuance the way that consensus has been treated previously. It is also necessary to further engage with the field of Foreign Policy Analysis to secure some clarity in this theoretical discussion. This discussion will focus on the interplay between discourse and domestic politics and the way that consensus influences the political process.

The chapter will conclude with a short discussion addressing my approach to this study, presenting the tentative theoretical definitions of consensus and “the foreign policy line” on which I build my analytical framework.

### Previous research on Swedish military contributions

Sweden, following an international trend, invested heavily in multinational peace support operations and contributed to several different conflict theatres

in the 1990s and 2000s (Jakobsen, 2005; Matz, 2013; Ångström, 2010). Humanitarian values and international peace and security were prominently placed in the forefront of official justifications but there are arguments of more traditional security policy reasons for deployment. One example is that the principal objective for these contributions was placed on “participation”, for security concerns, rather than the results in theatre (Ångström, 2019, p. xx). In neighboring Nordic countries this was explicitly linked to the accommodation of larger military partners, most prominently the US (Godal et al., 2016; Mariager & Wivel, 2019a, p. 64). On a similar note, Swedish military contributions were considered by many to be an instrument for manifesting a transformation of Swedish foreign policy in the post-Cold War world as old principles of neutrality and non-alignment were gradually abandoned in favor of a view of security best achieved in cooperation with others. Further, these military contributions to UN-, EU-, and NATO-led operations also gradually introduced Sweden to international security politics (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015; Agrell, 2012; Dahl, 2012; Doeser, 2014b; Egnell, 2009, 2015; Egnell & Abrahamsson, 2006; Matz, 2013).

There are several studies highlighting different aspects linked to the Swedish decision-making process, for example the parliamentary process (Matz, 2013; Österdahl, 2011), strategic narrative (Noreen et al., 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Sandman, 2019), strategic culture (Doeser, 2016), new media (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2013), domestic politics (Doeser, 2014b) and constitutional and international legal aspects (Österdahl, 2011, 2016). Military operations are also indirectly treated in studies that focus on a Swedish rapprochement to NATO (Wagnsson, 2011; Ydén et al., 2019).

Together these studies of military contributions to peace support operations have suggested several factors as to how and why Sweden participates. Most prominently addressed are humanitarian values (Björkdahl, 2007; Egnell, 2015; Wendt & Åse, 2016; Ångström, 2010), national interest (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015; Doeser et al., 2012; Edström et al., 2018; Gyllensporre, 2016; Ångström, 2019), international legitimacy (Andrén, 1996; Doeser, 2014a, 2014b; Egnell, 2015; Österdahl, 2016), and domestic support (Doeser, 2014b; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Egnell, 2015; Matz, 2013; Noreen et al., 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Wendt & Åse, 2016). In the following sections each of these factors will be briefly reviewed.

## Humanitarian values and the national interest

Humanitarian values are central in understanding the dynamics behind Swedish military contributions to international peace support operations. Ideas of conflict prevention, sustainable development, eradication of poverty, building of institutions, and humanitarian norms have dominated the Swedish foreign policy discourse throughout the Cold War (see for example Björk-

dahl, 2007). Mostly channeled through the UN, this humanitarianism has gone hand in hand with a foreign policy in which Sweden has displayed a strong preference for “idealistic and utopian statements within the dominating Swedish left – from liberalism to social democracy” (Andrén, 1996, p. 28). Sweden has been an active member of the UN and within the domestic debate issues concerning global solidarity and the developing world have gained more attention than more regional or national security issues.

In a study of the Swedish decision to participate in the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011 Doeser argues that altruistic reasons were a “necessary, but not a sufficient” reason for the political decision to be realized (Doeser, 2014b, p. 197). A similar argument was stressed by Egnell: “A genuine humanitarian concern and a perceived need to protect civilians, therefore, were the primary basis for the Swedish support of the invention” (Egnell, 2015, p. 312). Sweden’s role in international peace support missions has intimately been related to the Swedish approach to peace building efforts and self-image of Sweden as a “humanitarian superpower” (Wendt & Åse, 2016; Ångström, 2010).

There is also a wide-spread notion that Sweden is a “do-gooder” which has embraced military activism in international operations as an outlet for this idealistic agenda. Some argue that this primacy of humanitarian issues on the political agenda increased discretion for actors to resolve national security issues outside of the public spotlight (Andrén, 1996).

In Sweden’s role in international military operations lies, however, a paradoxical tension between liberal interventionism and small-state realism (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015). On the one hand the pursuit of altruistic ideals and humanitarian values has broad public and parliamentary support. On the other hand it is an instrumental use of force to gain advantages in other policy areas and to strengthen Swedish influence internationally (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015; Ydén et al., 2019; Ångström, 2010, 2019). This apparently paradoxical tension can however be housed within a coherent policy on military contributions since it is possible to accommodate both extremes. Ydén et al. (2019) point this out:

Sweden’s increasingly close relationship with NATO, can thus be understood as an expression of a seemingly interests-based approach to defence and international security issues. It can, however, also be described as an updated continuation of Sweden’s ideas-based United Nations peacekeeping tradition (Ydén et al., 2019, p. 4).

So the humanitarianism that Doeser and Egnell points to, as “the primary basis” for support and “necessary” for a decision, is by others interpreted as a “justification with which even the most neutralist of Swedes will find it hard to argue” (Huldt, 2005, p. 43) or that “Sweden’s military activism is legitimized by reference to the foreign policy tradition of liberal internation-

alism” (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015). Wagnsson (2011) stresses how this is linked to a transformation away from the old Cold War policy of neutrality:

The Swedish rapprochement with NATO equally requires carefully worked out self-representations that can transfer an old self-image as a neutral outsider activist ‘force for good’ into a new self-image as an activist ‘force for good’ that is working closely with a military alliance (Wagnsson, 2011, p. 586).

Studies which embrace the national security dimension emphasize that for peace support operations not to be regarded as imprudent there are underlying security concerns explaining participation (Doeser et al., 2012; Edström et al., 2018; Gyllensporre, 2016; Ångström, 2010). Peace support operations are in this discourse a means to seeking insight and influence in international organizations, most prominently NATO, the UN and the EU. They also strengthen Swedish bilateral relationships and promote reinsurance policies towards the US and neighboring states (Dahl, 2012; Dalsjö, 2010; Edström et al., 2018; Eriksson, 2012).<sup>2</sup>

## International legitimacy and domestic support

It is also important to recognize that for a small state like Sweden, traditionally non-aligned, the legitimacy for the use of force in an international context also holds direct consequences for Swedish security (Andrén, 1996; Doeser, 2014b; Ydén et al., 2019, p. 4). Wide-spread compliance with international law is intrinsically linked with the likelihood that rules and norms are respected by other members of the international community. As a strong agitator for the rights of the third world, but also stemming from being a small state in between two superpowers, pursuance of institutionalization of sanctions and collective security has been in the Swedish interest (Andrén, 1996, p. 215). This mixture between ideational principles of a better and more peaceful world with more pragmatic solutions to counter a security dilemma as a small non-aligned state situates the UN as a central feature within Swedish foreign policy. Sweden’s national interest coincides in this view with the principles of international law. This has been reinforced by a historically rather awkward affiliation with the use of force which was resolved with a discursive division between two different logics to the use of force: one international and one national (Noreen et al., 2017; Ångström,

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<sup>2</sup> In this discussion it is also important to recognize that while contributions to international peace support operations strengthen Swedish security it could also be the other way around: that participation in military interventions in places such as Afghanistan or Mali exposes Sweden to antagonists seeking to influence political decision-makers in Sweden (Egnell, 2009; Ångström, 2010). The two terrorist attacks in Stockholm in 2010 and 2017 are examples of this.

2010). This would allow for a national defense where the use of force was unproblematic while internationally it had to rest on international legitimacy.

An emphasis on the UN and support for international law has been an integral part of Swedish foreign policy, especially when it comes to international military operations. This has been the case from the very first UN mandated peace operations in the Middle East in the mid-1950s throughout the end of the Cold War and the dynamic period that followed. An operational mandate, based on a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution, has been almost a necessity for Swedish involvement (Doeser, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Egnell, 2015). Doeser argues that “Sweden would not participate in a military operation without a legal basis” and he explicitly refer to a mandate from the UN Security Council to be a necessary condition for Swedish participation in Operation Unified Protector in Libya (Doeser, 2014b, p. 198). I contend that there is a danger in concluding so strongly that international law through a UNSC mandate is a necessary condition for Swedish involvement internationally. First of all, there is leeway in the interpretation of international law and therefore also a way in framing an operation in accordance with it. As we will see in the first empirical chapter it is debatable whether the initial “terrorism” resolutions taken by the UNSC after 9/11 were sufficient for the US military actions, or if this action would fall under article 51 on the right of self-defense. The domestic interpretation of international legitimacy will affect the potential for Sweden to be military involved in Afghanistan. Secondly, there could be other values or reasons to contribute that would outweigh insufficient support in international law. In a joint policy memo the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence wrote in 2000 that:

Sweden stands for a broad interpretation of the concept of international peace and security, and it is less likely that we would, on the basis on international law, oppose a politically desirable operation (GOV, 2000-02-01).

This does not mean that an operation could be launched without any support in international law. As the Head of the Department for European Security Policy at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs wrote in 2005: “A UN General Assembly mandate, an invitation from the OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe], or consent by the parties involved could in such cases serve as a legal basis for a mission. Under any circumstances, a careful analysis of the political and legal aspects will be made on a case-by-case basis to ensure compliance with international law” (Bjurner, 2005, p. 37). For example, a deadlock in the Security Council in the face of a humanitarian disaster could possibly trump a Security Council mandate. At least, and this is my point, it would provide an opportunity to frame the operation in this way and gain support and/or legitimacy for a deployment.

Wendt (1999, p. 2) claimed that states’ “foreign policy behavior is often determined by domestic politics” and a political consensus (or at least broad

parliamentary support) has been identified by several researchers as an important explanatory factor for decisions on Swedish military contributions (Doeser, 2014b; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Egnell, 2015). There is both a substantially supported principle of consensus in foreign policy issues, especially decisions on the military force, as well as a constitutional aspect to this (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, 2000; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Matz, 2013; Wendt & Åse, 2016).<sup>3</sup> Consensus first emerged in parliamentary proceedings on peace support operations in 1998 (Matz, 2013).

Constitutionally, approval from Parliament is required on all military deployments on Chapter VII mandated peace support operations (Österdahl, 2011).<sup>4</sup> Between the year 1990 and up until the end of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2014 a total of 46 decisions were taken in the Parliament for military deployments to 12 different conflicts. 26 were reached with acclamation in the chamber and in 20 cases the voting procedure was activated. However, in these 20 cases the variation of the votes against and abstaining extends between circa 5% and 20% of the votes in the Parliament with an average of 10.4% opposing (see table 2 in chapter 4). While the constitution requires a formal consent from the Parliament to deploy military force abroad the government still holds a prerogative when it comes to foreign policy in general, and perhaps especially the foreign deployment of military personnel. (Hegeland, 2006). There is also the possibility that in the current practice the Parliament enters the decision-making process for military contributions so late that most commitments and pledges have already been made. So despite the constitutionally authoritative role of the Parliament it is, as Edström and Gyllensporre state, “difficult to change the trajectory” once the government has sent the proposition to Parliament (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a, p. 192).

Internationally a domestic consensus is important as this kind of national accountability strengthens the ability to enforce the policy as it send signals of resolve and unity, both toward allies and adversaries (Schultz, 2001). Domestically it deals more with strategic considerations and the idea that no party wants to be perceived as dissolving the national unity (Bjereld & Demker, 1995). For the government a political consensus is an insurance policy against opposition critique in case the military operation goes adrift (Doeser, 2014b). The appeal for consensus thus raises the bar to engage in political conflict in the arena of foreign policy (Andrén, 1996; Bjereld & Demker, 1995; Hegeland, 2006).

Noreen and Ångström suggest in their analysis of the government’s public narrative an explanation for how the government opted for an inclusive

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<sup>3</sup> This is also expressed by practitioners, see for example a report from the Committee on the Constitution [*konstitutionsutskottet*] in 2016 (Rep., 2015/16:KU10, p. 142).

<sup>4</sup> In accordance with Chapter 10 Article 9 of the Swedish Instrument of Government [*regeringsformen*]. In 2011 the numbering changed to Chapter 15, Article 16, still in the Swedish Instrument of Government.

“catch-all narrative” to satisfy a plethora of target audiences, and traced this back to the “consensus-seeking political culture” (Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Ångström & Noreen, 2016). They reached the conclusion that the narrative became “too heterogeneous” and while it prevented strong counter-narratives to emerge it fueled the “widening gulf between policy-makers and the general public” (Noreen & Ångström, 2015, p. 295). This is an important contribution that points to several interesting effects of framing in the construction of ISAF policy and the constitutive role of the consensus-seeking culture. Further, this “catch-all narrative” points to an intricate disagreement on what the proper purpose, means, and ends are to an operation. Noreen and Ångström do not, however, go into detail over the critical target audiences, important framing actors, and what the political divisions in fact are. In extension this overlooks how in fact the strategic narrative is constructed to accommodate these problems other than trying to combine the “more altruistic motive of helping Afghans with the more narrow Swedish self-interest of protection against terrorism” (Noreen & Ångström, 2015, p. 296).

### The way forward on the Swedish military contributions

Previous research has expanded our knowledge on different factors important for decisions on Swedish military contributions to peace support operations. It matters whether a military operation is aligned with the national interest; is it considered to improve humanitarian conditions; does it have support in international law; or can a consensus be reached. While a particular understanding of the military operation can be paramount for broad political support to form, actors can accommodate this kind of constraint by influencing how the military operation is comprehended and received in a target audience. The aforementioned studies have included exogenously given factors for the actors and not fully addressed how actors take part in the reconstruction of these contextual factors and indeed have the ability to reproduce or transform them. This said, these studies have still empirically described several important aspects of how operations are framed in the political process and provided us with an indication of what we can expect to be present in actors’ reasoning.

What is missing in this research and what I intend to contribute with in this present study, is an in-depth understanding of the foreign policy process in which policy is shaped and formulated for military contributions, with the case study of Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the analytical element of my process-tracing approach which will be directed toward questions such as: who are the central actors and what are they doing? What are the central decision points and how does the process evolve? What influences the timing and configuration of the military contribution? The answers to these questions will broaden our understanding of decisions on military contributions and how they emerge

from decision-making processes. This can in turn be used as a point of departure to expand our knowledge of how a domestic foreign policy consensus can be forged in favor of deployment.

## Previous research on domestic foreign policy consensus

In this part of the chapter I will expand the theoretical discussion on consensus. I will begin with a short review and problematization of previous research that has implicitly or explicitly conceptually connected to consensus in order to understand foreign policy and the relationship between government and opposition. I will thereafter elaborate on the elusiveness of the concept of consensus and how it theoretically relates to the foreign policy line. But first it is necessary to establish a minimum understanding of foreign policy, as coined by Cohen and Harris. Foreign policy in this definition is understood as:

a set of goals, directives or intentions, formulated by persons in official or authoritative positions, directed at some actor or condition in the environment beyond the sovereign nation state, for the purpose of affecting the target in the manner desired by the policy-makers (Cohen & Harris 1975, p.383 cited in Carlsnaes, 2013, p. 305).

I find this definition fruitful for the purposes of this dissertation because it highlights intentionality, it accentuates the centrality of the state with a focus on the representatives of the state, and it places an emphasis in the use of language in foreign policy. The balancing act for government representatives between signaling foreign policy to international counterparts and debating with domestic political adversaries aggravates the foreign policy process. This renders the statements that these individuals, both government and opposition, make, even in a domestic setting, an intrinsic part of foreign policy. For example during the Cold War the restrictions that the declared neutrality policy placed on the government also applied to the opposition to a great extent making disagreement an issue of national credibility (Bjereld, 1997; Björklund, 1992).

Perhaps the greatest achievement of foreign policy analysis has been to open up the black box of the state and delve into the decision-making processes and domestic influences of foreign policy, encompassing the complicated relationships between governments and other domestic actors (Breuning, 2007; Hudson, 2005; Kaarbo, 2015; Kubáľková, 2001). Consensus has previously been dealt with in this literature in two main ways: as a discursive contextual condition and through the relationship between government and opposition. First, consensus is both directly and indirectly addressed in studies that center on the discursive conditions for foreign policy

(Holland, 2013; Krebs, 2015; Krebs & Jackson, 2007; Krebs & Lobasz, 2007). This scholarship explores what is politically possible and how dominating intersubjective understandings in the context enable and constrain certain conduct. Consensus is here mainly equated with the dominating discourses or narratives that rise above contestation and set the parameters for political action. Second, the more traditional literature on the domestic politics of foreign policy center on political competition between government and opposition. Consensus is at its core a political resultant dependent on the relationship between political counterparts and the process in which political coalitions are formed (Hagan, 1993, 1995).

### **Consensus as a dominating discourse**

The discursive nature of foreign policy not only “shapes political contestation and policy outcomes” but also limits the range of policy options that could be legitimately expressed and sets the very boundaries for what is politically possible (Heffernan, 2002; Krebs & Lobasz, 2007, p. 450). Public discourses are important for the perception of legitimacy and political contestation and it is reasonable to assume that leaders either feel responsive to the will of the citizenry or are at least dependent upon them for reelection. Krebs defined the Cold War consensus in the US as a “public discursive code that American policymaking elites felt compelled to adhere to in their public pronouncements, regardless of their private qualms” (Krebs, 2015, p. 812). Even if I find Krebs’ discursive approach too much centered on public speeches I later build on this discursive approach to widen our theoretical understanding of “the foreign policy line” and how it affects decision-makers. Implicit in this understanding lies the idea that consensus is the hegemonic understanding of foreign policy. But, as will be clearer later on in this chapter, this Cold War consensus is directly related to the public discourse and not to a policy process or a target audience. I argue that in a foreign policy study it is necessary to confine the study of a political consensus to an audience or “authoritative decision-unit” (Hagan et al., 1987; Hermann, 2001). This literature however provides us with an understanding for legitimate policy alternatives and the realm of discursive conditions that enable and constrain political action. How a policy is interpreted in the “authoritative decision-unit” and elevated to a dominating perception within the foreign policy community, forcing actors in the process to relate to and adhere to that interpretation, is indeed part of the policy outcome, especially when attracting political support for military contributions (Buzan et al., 1998; Holland, 2013; Krebs, 2015; Krebs & Jackson, 2007; Stone, 2012). In many cases this takes the form of a narrative which ties together the past, present, and future with a common objective and a particular problem formulation (De Graaf et al., 2015; Krebs, 2015). While these narratives “take into account and resonate with national culture of norms, values, and attitudes regarding war and peace” (De Graaf et al., 2015, p. 8) it is necessary to under-

stand the process in which certain narratives become dominant and constrain or enable certain behavior. As Krebs puts it:

Only some narratives, however, become dominant, an accepted “common sense” about the world, and thus set the boundaries of what actors can legitimately articulate in public, what they can collectively (though not individually) imagine, and what is politically possible (Krebs, 2015, p. 813).

This is further complicated by the different target audiences and the challenges that policy makers face when they need to draft a line of argument that satisfies a plethora of audiences for the deployment of military personnel in harm’s way. Political actors recognize this and use narratives strategically in order to gain legitimacy for their policy initiatives.

### **Domestic politics**

In political contestation the government and opposition stand in the center of attention. Depending on how governmental decision-makers experience the characteristics of the opposition (including such factors as institutional location, strength and intensity) they are inclined to engage with the opposition in different ways when they attempt to push their agenda. Hagan points to three ways for decision-makers to specifically deal with domestic political opposition: accommodation, mobilization, or when the leadership chooses to insulate foreign policy from domestic pressures (Hagan, 1993, 1995).

When accommodating political opposition the government tries to contain opposition “by avoiding publicly disputed policies and actions” (Hagan, 1995, p. 128). Hagan points to bargaining and controversy avoidance as the means to form a political coalition with enough political strength for a decision to transpire. In achieving this, the policy tends to take an ambiguous form which can attract the support from political actors from different groups, with perhaps incompatible interests, who would probably disagree on specifics of the decision (Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Stone, 2012). As Stone makes clear, “ambiguity can unite people who might benefit from the same policy but for different reasons” (Stone, 2012, p. 252). A vaguely defined policy on a military contribution to a western coalition of the willing in Afghanistan could incorporate divergent political ideologies. For example, the formulation of an ambiguous strategic narrative is one example of an accommodating strategy to deal with political opposition (Noreen & Ångström, 2015).

Since accommodation is central to attracting broad support it is vital to understand its utility in the construction of consensus. Accommodation could entail incremental changes in “the foreign policy line” as long as they are accepted by the opposition as continuity. It is important to note that framing ambiguous policies is not the only way to accommodate opposition. Framing policy in line with “the foreign policy line” or downplaying politi-

cally sensitive aspects are two ways of also accommodating political opposition. The issue could also be avoided altogether, a point raised by Elman:

Tough foreign policy trade-offs must be swept under the table in order to maintain fragile coalitions made up of diverse and contradictory bases of support. Since coalitional governments can be easily dismissed by legislative censure, there is an institutional incentive for cabinets to choose the foreign policy path of least resistance (Elman, 2000, p. 103).

Another approach that Hagan specifies is the mobilization of legitimacy and support in favor of the government's policy. In this strategy the opposition is confronted in an attempt to construct a political coalition by mobilizing "support among those actors still uncommitted on the issue" (Hagan, 1993, p. 7). When mobilizing support, actors highlight and emphasize positive aspects of the policy, often framing it as a Hobson's choice (Stone, 2012). For the construction of consensus, mobilization is better understood as an attempt to marginalize any existing or potential opposition. The underlying rationale is to mobilize support for their own politics by rallying coalition partners behind the policy and avoid defection within their own ranks (Hagan, 1995, p. 129). Information advantage and the secret nature of the foreign policy process speaks in favor for the government in successfully mobilizing support for a policy. The government is the primary actor in foreign policy and can to a certain degree regulate what information reaches the opposition since it controls the resources of the bureaucracy.

The government can also seek to insulate foreign policy from domestic politics altogether by "deflecting, suppressing, and overriding opposition" (Hagan, 1995, p. 131). In this way of marginalizing the opposition, decision-makers can choose to ignore or co-opt opposition and in this way override them in the decision-making process. The central aspect of this strategy lies in the combination of "the foreign policy line" and the logic of consensus in pursuit of political support. "The foreign policy line" holds a hegemonic influence on any oppositional movements departing from the consensus. Aligning a policy with "the foreign policy line" elevates the threshold for political conflict and coerces opposition into compliance since defection turns to a political impossibility (Holland, 2013; Krebs & Jackson, 2007).

In this study I will adopt a vocabulary that differentiates between two different kinds of oppositional relationships. First is the institutional relationship between the government and opposition. The second concerns policy and that of advocates and opponents of a specific policy. In a study of consensus these two relationships are necessary to differentiate as advocates of a policy could be located within the political opposition and vice versa. Accommodation, insulation and mobilization all work together with both oppositional relationships.

## The way forward on domestic foreign policy consensus

There is a widespread notion that Sweden is especially sensitive to rapid changes in foreign policy, a long-term legacy from the hegemonic policy of neutrality and non-alignment policy during the Cold War. Neutrality, in case of war, would not be credible, if a political consensus would not support it, the argument went. This consensus behind this “foreign policy line” of Sweden can in part account for the predominant focus of previous research on structural and/or categorical explanations, which I raised in previous sections of this chapter (Doeser, 2014b; Egnell, 2015; Noreen et al., 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015). These structural explanations are not without merit as they can provide an account for contextual boundaries which limit decision-makers room for maneuverability, as well as providing leaders with certain incentives for action. On the other hand, this overemphasis on structural factors has left us with an understanding of Swedish security politics as conforming to international developments in a retrospectively predictable way. Despite having a strong commonsense appeal, Sundelius argues that there is a risk of overemphasizing the value of a structural explanation.

[A structural approach] sidesteps any examination of how the readily observed changes filter into national policy-making processes behind the subsequent decision choice in favour of a revised policy position. By stressing the direct linkage between the international, situational context and the resultant policy action, the analyst dismisses other pertinent but also more complex elements behind a major redirection of established governmental policy (Sundelius, 1994, p. 183).

In this “filter” are actors within these processes active in their interpretation of these exogenous events and very much part of the (re)construction of the situational context in which they formulate and choose between potential courses of action. Structural explanations therefore provide only a partial answer and in this dissertation I argue that if we wish to fully understand the political process in which a domestic foreign policy consensus is built it is necessary to bring the actors and their conduct into the analysis. For in the twists and turns of the policy process actors highlight, downplay, emphasize, reject, accept, and so on, different aspects of a policy in order to incorporate it with the dominating understanding of Swedish foreign policy.

The contextual pressure for a consensus for military contributions to peace support operations might be perceived by the actors as a necessity and this literature that I have reviewed points to important elements that need to be included in the analysis. It does not, however, provide a clear or satisfactory answer to questions regarding how a political process predisposed to consensus differs from other political processes. In a study of public opinion and elite-consensus Kreps reaches the conclusion that:

Public opinion then has less influence because voters are unable to differentiate among these similar positions; elites can therefore continue the status quo of troop deployments and in some cases even increase commitment to NATO operations in Afghanistan without the threat of electoral punishment (Kreps, 2010, p. 209).

This result points to foreign policy elites having discretion on foreign policy as a result of consensus but this does not necessarily imply that there is not a political conflict still. This instead raises questions such as, how did this consensus emerge? How and why does it persist in the face of negative public opinion? What does this consensus consist of?

Human decision-makers are ultimately responsible for the decisions taken in foreign policy and as Hill makes clear, “We may analyse the parameters of choice, constraint and change but human beings will always have the wiggle room of specific historical circumstances in which to remake at least some of their world” (Hill, 2003, p. 27). If the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus is approached as the “product of a process of negotiation and contestation” we can apply the concept of consensus to a process in which different actors try to enact their foreign policy vision, enabled and constrained by the discursive context (McDonald, 2015, p. 654). As Melanson argued, in discussing the Cold War domestic consensus in the US:

when a consensus did exist, it did not ‘just happen’. Cold War presidents worked diligently to achieve domestic legitimacy for their foreign policies... Presidents and their foreign policy advisers try to provide interpretative images of the international situation that are compatible with domestic experience to justify the necessity, urgency, and character of their actions (Melanson, 2005, p. 37).

This way of framing policy can be regarded as a central undertaking for advocates and opponents of a policy attempting to legitimize and gain support for their alternative (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Henke, 2017). For actors operating in these decision-making processes, understanding the political context and acknowledging what is politically possible and impossible is decisive for success. Actors can shape and formulate policy and engage in a framing contest over policy in an attempt to influence or exploit the aforementioned discursive conditions (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Henke, 2017; McDonald, 2015; Melanson, 2005). The real challenge for the actors lies however in balancing diverging and/or oppositional interests of different audiences while taking into account the events taking place in the conflict environment while articulating a credible and coherent policy.

## Understanding the construction of consensus

On the basis of previous research and the above discussion I have adopted an open theoretical approach towards consensus and the foreign policy line in order to approach the construction of consensus. In essence it builds on three elements drawn out of previous research, which then form points of departure for this dissertation. The first is directed towards addressing the discursive foundation of a consensus as part of the dominating perception of the continuity of Swedish foreign policy. In the Swedish context the concept of “the foreign policy line” captures this as the empirical manifestation of the domestic foreign policy consensus. What is central in this conceptual understanding is that part of the domestic foreign policy consensus in Sweden is a view of foreign policy that implies that they should be in consensus. There is a “consensus on consensus” if you may. This contextual understanding is important for, regardless of policy preference, it sets the perimeters for what is politically possible.

This leads to the second point of departure and the contextual pressure to form a consensus in the spirit of national unity and the impact that this has on political deliberations. Consensus raises thresholds for political conflict, and prudence is exercised by both government and opposition, by both advocates and opponents. Both government and opposition have incentives to avoid political conflict but they are still involved in a political power struggle over the right to govern. It is reasonable to assume that a consensus informs decision-makers of the broader objectives of foreign policy and that information is interpreted through the lens of consensus. This study also suggests, as the third element, a way of bringing in the actors and analyzing the linkage between a political process and the framing of policy. Within a decision-making process actors use consensus in mainly two ways in advocating or opposing a particular policy: First by indirectly taking advantage of the dominating consensus by aligning policy in accordance with the foreign policy line; Second, by using consensus as a rhetorical device to generate political legitimacy and marshal political support. Given the exploratory nature of this dissertation and the elusive conceptual treatment of consensus so far in the literature I adopt an inductive approach and enter the exploration with an empirically open mindset towards consensus based on these three points of departure.

### Consensus is what actors make of it

One contribution of this dissertation is to expand our knowledge of consensus: through this study we will learn more about the concept as it is placed in the center of analysis. The Swedish case of Afghanistan is fruitful in this respect. Domestic consensus has been recognized by several researchers as an important explanatory factor for decisions on Swedish military contribu-

tions to international peace support operations (Doeser, 2014b; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Egnell, 2015). The literature is not clear, however, on what constitutes a domestic consensus or what its theoretical nature is. It is referred to as a decision-making regime (Sundelius, 1989), a culture (Noreen & Ångström, 2015), an ideology (Bjereld & Demker, 1995), a broad political support (Egnell, 2015), political unity (Bjereld & Demker, 2000), or broad parliamentary support (Doeser, 2014b). Another way is to add an additional label to consensus, such as authoritative consensus (Hagan et al., 2001) or operative consensus (Bynander, 2004; Sundelius et al., 1997). The use of “operative consensus” specifically denotes “a compromise on the main features of the policy, which has been reached for different reasons, but which is held together by the needs of different interests for domestic policy stability” (Bynander, 2004, p. 2). While this operational consensus can be constructed by reaching an agreement with the opposition or suppressing deviating views it can also be mobilized by avoiding controversial aspects in the policy, downplaying these aspects or formulating it ambiguously enough to encompass the interests of the political opponents.

There is overlap between some of these classifications but the theoretical and empirical elusiveness of the concept is the very point of departure for this research project. As Bjereld and Demker (1995) point out consensus can connote many different things, for example: complete unity on the political issue; a method leading to compromises between the political parties; and an agreement on the institutional framework which encompasses decision-making (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, p. 27). These conceptualizations all rest on the assumption that there are clearly distinguishable and solid preferences and overlook the possibility that a consensus can suppress political conflicts without them ever becoming visible.

To paraphrase Wendt, *consensus is what actors make of it* (Wendt, 1992). While it can imply many different things it still holds a strong intersubjective position of authority, for without it foreign policy would risk becoming ineffective, counterproductive, or even illegitimate. At least that is the general perception of the importance of consensus. This study is a first step toward clarification when it comes to understanding domestic foreign policy consensus and exploring the process in which a consensus is forged. Bjereld and Demker conclude in their research that foreign and security politics pushes decisions toward party and national unity. They argue that “[i]n these matters, political parties are *expected* to put aside their differences in order to attain unity across party lines” (Bjereld & Demker, 2000, p. 17, my emphasis). This expectation that Bjereld and Demker refer to is what permeates the conceptual understanding of consensus in the Swedish foreign policy context. The stakes for a confronting behavior are higher and actors are more lenient to the wishes of the opposition. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that in their strategic behavior they are aware of the boundaries of the politically possible, set by the political opposition. But, as Björklund

makes clear in her dissertation on Swedish Cold War politics, “the consensus also turns the opposition into an advocate for a policy administrated by the [government]. The opposition could not have a deviating position” (Björklund, 1992, p. 192).

Beyond the policy position the government is also in the position to accept an unfavorable consensus on policy issues as they control the implementation process. Consensus in this case is a way of balancing power and controlling the domestic situation on sensitive foreign policy issues. For a very long time the “extensive culture of consensus in Swedish politics has favored the Social Democrats in government. To decide the substance of status quo has always been the Social Democrats’ privilege” (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, p. 368). The time period covered by the analysis in this dissertation includes a change of power in 2006 when the Social Democrats lost power to the four-party center-right ‘Alliance’ coalition [*Alliansen*]. Two of the empirical chapters will therefore address decisions during a Social Democratic government while in the last chapter the Social Democrats are in opposition. It would not be inconceivable to assume that the dynamics between the government and opposition will be different in the final empirical chapter.

In an exploration into how consensus has been managed over time and political divisions overcome, I maintain a theoretically open definition of consensus. I therefore define consensus as *the absence of overt dissent on a policy issue*. Given that actors can support, comply, consent, and acquiescence policy they do not necessarily need to be active in their support in order for a consensus to emerge. A positive definition of consensus (as *unity on a policy issue* - which would perhaps be close to the common understanding of the concept) implies that the policy issue is actively supported. The purpose defining consensus negatively instead of positively is therefore vital in order to explore empirically the process in which a consensus is constructed and political division submerge and surface over time. The negative conceptualization accommodates the positive but not the other way around.

The purpose of this broad definition is to set the perimeter for the research process while leaving the form of consensus as an open empirical question. What meaning do in fact the actors under scrutiny in this study give to consensus? Consensus can for example be something that actors seek that has an intrinsic value in itself. Conflicts can be avoided and swept under the rug in order to achieve this price. These political divisions lay under the surface of a consensus and are essential to empirically identify. Consensus can also be seen as a method to harness political power and diverging political interest through bargaining.<sup>5</sup> In exploring consensus discovering these defining ele-

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<sup>5</sup> This is perhaps even more central to the Social Democrats, who empirically played an important role, both as the ruling party (-2006) and in opposition (2006-2014) in the time period that this dissertation investigates but also historically - most prominently during the Cold

ments of a consensus is crucial in order to analyze how political divisions are overcome and consensus was managed over time.

Related to consensus and of central importance for actors operating in foreign policy circles in Sweden is the concept “the foreign policy line”, which is a literal translation from the Swedish term *utrikespolitisk linje*.

## The foreign policy line

In the Swedish context the concept of “the foreign policy line” is the dominating understanding of stability in Swedish foreign policy. It is recognized empirically both in research on military contributions and in Swedish foreign policy in general, as well as by actors involved in the processes. Many policymakers and scholars address it but there is meager theoretical progress on its conceptual nature. In an analysis of continuity and change in Swedish foreign policy Edström uses the concept of “the foreign policy line” interchangeably with strategy (Edström, 2016, 2017). In doing so he attributes each political party with their own foreign policy line, dividing it up into three elements: environment, ends and means. This way of simply substituting strategy with “the foreign policy line” is problematic and potentially misleading both empirically and theoretically, for it does not correspond with how actors empirically use the concept. Further, to use it interchangeably with strategy reduces the concept to a plan or a vision for foreign policy which more or less strips it of any added value in the analysis. The “foreign policy line” is something more than just a strategy. It must be related to consensus, historically conditioned, and elevated above politics; and inherent in the concept lies a state of hegemonic discursive influence. Actors give meaning to Swedish international relations through this concept and understand what policy actions are considered legitimate.

I therefore advance the argument that “the foreign policy line” must be considered an empirical manifestation of the domestic foreign policy consensus. The concept of “line” inhabits both the political dimension as well as a metaphorical trajectory, two things that are lost in the English concept of policy. This is not a semantic issue that follows the distinction between politics and policy in English but more of a conceptual issue that is lost in translation and does not have an equal English significance. In the Swedish context political actors apply the empirical concept of line [*linje*] to denote the pursued policy of Sweden. Moreover, politics are played out within the confines of “the foreign policy line” and as a result this sets the boundaries of what is politically possible, encouraging compliance. So even if political

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War. See Jenny Jansson’s doctoral dissertation *Manufacturing consensus* for an interesting historical expose of the Social Democratic legacy and integration of a fragmented working class into an integrated and cohesive labor movement (Jansson, 2012). This became the very foundation of the Social Democratic Party’s strive for peaceful solutions through negotiations and in cooperation with adversaries.

parties and other actors do not agree upon “the foreign policy line” they are still forced to relate to it; and, if they attempt to engineer a change, they cannot deviate too much without risking either upsetting the consensus or being attacked as dissolving national unity. It is therefore an intrinsic relationship between “the foreign policy line”, the pursuit for consensus and legitimization of foreign policy.

In this study “the foreign policy line” is treated as *the dominating perception within the foreign policy community of the continuity of Swedish foreign policy*. This definition inhabits the commonsense nature of the concept and opens the way for a flexibility to encompass different empirical manifestations of “the foreign policy line” and the degree that it is permeated by a domestic foreign policy consensus. By this I do not refer to an ambition for this dissertation to determine “the foreign policy line” at any given time. “The foreign policy line” enters into the analysis through the perceptions of the actors and how they interpret it, how they frame it, and essentially how they use it in their framing of the military contribution to Afghanistan. This is essentially what I mean when I say empirical manifestation: how actors perceive it and then act on the basis of this perception. This definition enables an analysis where actors frame a chimera of an underlying foreign policy.

I acknowledge the difficulties in constructing rigid conceptual boundaries for “the foreign policy line”. Returning to the three points of departure drawn from previous research I am intrigued by the potential of the concept to function as a bridge between how actors perceive the milieu that structures, forms and produces certain actions and the political possibility to construct legitimacy through a domestic consensus. Actors capitalize on their understanding of “the foreign policy line” when advocating (and opposing) policy by (dis)aligning it with this perception. Regardless of their policy preference the dominating perception within the foreign policy community of the continuity of Swedish foreign policy will set the boundaries for what is politically possible. “The foreign policy line” needs to be in harmony with issue policies and vice versa or else its status will be questionable. As stated previously, any alterations to “the foreign policy line” that substantially deviate, risk upsetting the consensus, if one exists. A perception of continuity is therefore essential for changes to be accepted.

Swedish neutrality during the Second World War was the foundation for “the foreign policy line” that dominated during the Cold War. According to Dalsjö (2014), originally a pragmatic approach, neutrality evolved in two stages. First, a “climate of orthodoxy” developed during the 1950s. This in turn brought self-censorship and placed a lid on domestic debate. Second, in the 1960s the Social Democrats, through Prime Minister Olof Palme, completely reversed the former position of avoiding controversial statements directed toward the two superpowers. Sweden instead balanced an official global, idealistic foreign policy and a clandestine realist approach to regional

security politics. The idealistic position manifested in an advocacy for compliance with international law and international détente. It also included being the voice for the oppressed and exposed. The more pragmatic regional approach was a result of the geopolitical position between the two superpowers, and implied establishing secret military cooperation with the West. This “active foreign policy”, as it was called, contributed to the management of the intrinsic conflicting positions of Sweden’s pro-West position and the military non-alliance.

In order for a policy of neutrality to be credible the government proclaimed that it needed a domestic consensus in support (Andrén, 1996). A stable and predictable foreign policy, with domestic support, was therefore considered a vital national interest. To deviate from the official position and oppose foreign policy, regardless of government, would upset the status quo and jeopardize stability, and in extension the continuity of Sweden’s international relations. Or, this is at least how the argument went. Neutrality became part of the Swedish national identity (Dalsjö, 2014) and as Sundelius accentuates: “to many Swedes, neutrality is a dogma as embedded in the national character as democracy” (Sundelius, 1990, p. 124).

In in the review of the literature on Swedish military contributions at the beginning of this chapter, I raised four main factors as to how and why Sweden participates in peace support operations. These can all be traced back to the “foreign policy line” of Swedish Cold War politics. In order to comply, and not to violate the Swedish neutrality position, the military contributions had to be in accordance with the principles of international law (Andrén, 1996). The use of force was typically sanctioned in self-defense in these operations, stemming from a UN Security Council Resolution (Ångström, 2010). This indirectly implied that both superpowers had sanctioned the peacekeeping force and Sweden therefore did not risk challenging the policy of neutrality. But it was also through this engagement in peace support operations that Sweden began to view itself as part of the European security order (Dalsjö, 2010, p. 68).

In the 1990s the secret life-line toward the West during the Cold War came to light and many began questioning the foundation of the neutrality policy (Dalsjö, 2006, 2014). The concept of neutrality was further challenged with the Swedish membership in the European Union (1995), but also to an extent by joining NATO’s partnership for peace (1994). However, the assiduity of “the foreign policy line” intrinsically linked to neutrality continued to prevail. In this dissertation I will explore the construction of consensus for the military contribution to Afghanistan. This is perhaps the most defining military contribution to a peace support operation in the post-Cold War period. During this time the traditional neutrality policy will gradually be called into question by a view of security best achieved in cooperation with others. This reorientation is a central part of the political climate and the prospect of building political support for military deployments.

As has been discussed in this chapter the elusive nature of consensus and the unexplored potential of “the foreign policy line” form the foundation of the approach of this dissertation. I have chosen two definitions that will allow for an empirically open approach in the analytical chapters. Based on this theoretical foundation I will in the following two chapters first develop my analytical framework and then expand on the research design, methods and material for this explorative study of consensus construction through framing.

## Chapter 3 – A framing approach to the study of consensus construction

This chapter will provide the dissertation's analytical framework and is divided into two parts. The first part will outline the bridge between the theoretical foundation presented in chapter two and the analytical framework that will be used to capture the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus empirically. The first part will mainly address one of my main points and theoretical assumptions which is that it is difficult if not impossible to separate the actor from the context. I will in the first section of that part elaborate on Colin Hay's (2002) strategic-relational approach of a situated actor in a strategically selective context. However, I will not settle with this theoretical observation but instead suggest framing as an analytical pathway to build a framework that captures the interaction of actor and context in the construction of consensus within a political process. Based on the three points of departure that I concluded the last chapter with, I argue that framing is a fruitful way forward to capture the influence of "the foreign policy line", how the context pushes consensus onto the actors and how they in turn take advantage of the context and use consensus as a political tool.

The second part of this chapter will then expand on the analytical framework which consists of three interrelated dimensions based on the research questions posed in the introductory chapter. These three dimensions are process, framing, and consensus. While they are difficult to keep distinct, the purpose of these three dimensions is to capture the important elements in the construction of consensus. In the first dimension the focus is placed on reconstructing the foreign policy process. The second framing dimension emanates from the twists and turns of the policy process and highlights the discursive aspect of what the actors do in the process when policy is advocated or opposed. A central aspect in this is how actors frame policy and align it with "the foreign policy line". In the third and final dimension of the analytical framework, process and framing come together in the consensus dimension and the analytical attention is placed on how a consensus is forged by framing policy in the policy process.

## A situated actor in a strategically selective context

The field of Foreign Policy Analysis has made it predominantly clear that in order to understand international relations and the making of foreign policy we need to focus our analysis on the representatives of the state that are making the decisions (Breuning, 2007; Hudson, 2014). Hudson argues convincingly that a failure to include human beings in our theorization will predispose “a world without change, no creativity, no persuasion, no accountability” (Hudson, 2002). Elsewhere, she writes:

After all, there is no ghostly Structural Engineer; there is no ghostly Structural Steering Force – in the end, *there is only us*. There is only human agency. Theories that pull a veil over that human agency hurt our ability to go in the preferred value direction. Such theories impoverish our agency, for they blind us to its reality and its power (Hudson, 2014, p. 14, emphasis in original).

Hudson argues that the field of International Relations (IR) has been predisposed on structural explanation and she advocates that IR would benefit from transferring the focus from the state as a collective actor, modelled as a unitary rational actor, and towards the human decision-makers acting as representatives of the state, the *raison d'être* for Foreign Policy Analysis. The assumption underlying this premise is the counter-factual argument that had the actors not reasoned and acted in the way that they did we would have witnessed a different outcome (Carlsnaes, 2012, p. 124). Central for this dissertation is the recognized entrepreneurial push that some actors engage in when promoting particular policies (Eriksson, 2004; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Henke, 2017, 2020; Payne, 2001).

I do agree with Hudson on the importance to bring the human decision-makers into the analysis. The very role of actors has also been overlooked by previous research on Swedish military contributions. But in her quest to bring the actors back into the analysis I contend that Hudson may overreach. A balance must be struck between agential and structural influences, which I, in my work, place in the discursive context. As Wight puts it:

Agency, although only ever manifest through the practices of human agents, also resides in structural contexts. Hence, whilst system structures are constituted through, and by, the practices of agents, it is also true that those same agents are constituted through the structuring properties of structures (Wight, 2006, p. 293).

Structural forces in the discursive context push actors to action by presenting certain conduct as reasonable, or at times even inevitable, from the perspective of the decision-makers. “The foreign policy line” is one such contextual factor. I would contend that an understanding of why actors behave the way they do should however begin with a reconstruction at the individual level.

As Hollis and Smith explicates, if we wish to understand decision-making “the concern is to understand decisions from the standpoint of the decision-makers by reconstructing their reasons” (Hollis & Smith, 1990, p. 74). The emphasis in this understanding is placed on how decision-making is conceptualized as “*reasoned* – rather than rational” (Carlsnaes, 2013, p. 315). Hollis and Smith clearly separate reasoned decision-making from that of a strict economical calculation of expected utility. They write “our actors *interpret* information, *monitor* their performance, *reassess* their goals. The leading idea is that of reasoned judgement, not of computation” (Hollis & Smith, 1990, p. 165).

Regardless of the ingenuity and the entrepreneurship of the actor, they are still not unrestricted in their conduct and may not behave in whatever way they wish (Holland, 2013; Krebs, 2015). The context sets boundaries for potential actions and but at the same time it can stimulate certain conduct. It is therefore important to recognize both the enabling as well as the constraining influences of the context (McDonald, 2015, p. 655; McDonald & Merefieid, 2010, p. 191). Precisely because this analysis centers on actors and their agency it is important not to reduce the analysis to the individual. Guzzini warns:

By concentrating so strongly on the individual for the understanding of action, the pull for ideas does always come from the actors themselves. It is *their* perception, *their* values and belief systems which predispose their preferences and action. But by having such a strong commitment against holistic concepts or dynamics of all sorts, it is as if we would study ideational structures, such as belief systems, as being of a private sort. But there is no private language, no atomistic cognition (Guzzini, 2013, p. 10).

Guzzini is correct in this critique. The surrounding context that actors are embedded within structures, forms and produces certain actions. This makes some actions inevitable, some more plausible, and some inconceivable. The solution does not however lie in a balance between individual and contextual factors but in the relationship between them. The first step lies in the interpretivist’s recognition of the social context as purely ideational. As Hay points out:

It is, quite simply, that the context considered by interpretivists – the context within which interpretivism situates actors – is almost solely ideational [...] a context understood in terms of the structuring role of inter-subjective traditions as interpretive resources (Hay, 2011, p. 176).

Elsewhere Hay has referred to this ideational context as “the setting within which social political and economic events occur and acquire meaning” (Hay, 2002, p. 94). Central in this is that my approach to the context begins with the actors’ perceptions of it. This complicates the analysis theoretically

and methodologically since “context means different things to different actors, depending not only on where they are placed, but also on how they interpret the features of the terrain surrounding them” (Brighi & Hill, 2012, p. 150).

Theoretically actors are approached as situated agents embedded in a relational and dialectical linkage with the ideational context. But not to fall victim to Guzzini’s warning, there is a risk to immerse oneself in an analysis where the individual receives an overcompensation in the analysis.

There are certain aspects in which the conduct of the actors is not dependent on their interpretation but on the influence that these contextual factors have. For example, the results of international negotiations, other countries’ policies, media, and events in Afghanistan, are all instances of events that are interpreted by the actors but still have a differentiating level of intersubjectivity. In other words, the room for interpretation and the level of constraint varies, between actors and between contexts. Wight discusses this plurality of structural constraints and reaches the conclusion that “agential interests can be seen to vary according to the structural milieu of the agents, and since agents face differing structural contexts they acquire differing interests and identities” (Wight, 2006, p. 292).

The conduct of actors can therefore only make sense if analyzed in relation to the context and vice versa, the context is only relevant if looked at from the perspective of the actor (Brighi & Hill, 2012). Actors are therefore not isolated or indeed independent from the context and the important contextual factors are what actors empirically introduce into the analysis through their experiences. Empirically in this analysis it may prove to be previous peace support operations, what happens on the ground in Afghanistan, the political institutional situation in Sweden, available foreign policy instruments etcetera. One fundamental concept in this dissertation that captures the actors’ perception of their contextual situation is “the foreign policy line”, which I defined in the previous chapter as the dominating perception within the foreign policy community of the continuity of Swedish foreign policy.

Even if this dissertation centers its theoretical premise on actors and *their* conduct it is necessary to point out that this distinction between actor and context is made analytically and does not indicate that there is an ontological dualism between the two. A focus on the relationship offers a way of balancing and recognizing the dialectical interplay which occurs “between what goes on inside the actor and its projection towards the outside” (Brighi & Hill, 2012, p. 155). It is therefore imperative to comprehend the interaction between actor and context in order to understand how certain conduct becomes reasonable, or in fact at times inevitable (Carlsnaes, 1992; Doty, 1993; Hay, 2002; Holland, 2013; Weldes, 1996, 1999; Wendt, 1992).

I therefore embrace the idea that actors internalize their perceptions of the context and orient themselves in their conduct toward a context that deter-

mines the parameters of what is possible which obviously favors some courses of action over others through the eyes of the actors. In doing so they act strategically toward their surroundings. “Strategy” in this sense means “intentional conduct oriented toward the environment in which it is to occur” (Hay, 2002, p. 129). Hay later continues that this action “must be informed by a strategic assessment of the relevant context in which strategy occurs and upon which it subsequently impinges” (Hay, 2002, p. 129). Consequently, as Brighi and Hill accentuate, “the context only becomes truly ‘real’ when looked at from the perspective of the individual actor in question; therefore it always exists in relation to something” (Brighi & Hill, 2012, p. 149). As Hay writes:

Agents are situated within a structured context which presents an uneven distribution of opportunities and constraints to them. Actors influence the development of that context over time through the consequences of their actions. Yet, at any given time, the ability of actors to realise their intentions is set by the context itself (Hay, 2002, pp. 116-117).

Playing to, and navigating, the context, an actor can exercise power over another actor by engaging resources, such as financial capabilities, authority, position, or knowledge. In this way they can capitalize upon the dominating interpretation of the foreign policy line in getting other actors to do something that they would not otherwise do (Christensen et al., 2011; Hay, 2002). Understanding what is politically possible and impossible is indeed an advantage in statecraft but there is also another element to this. Actors who understand this and play the game to their advantage can also realize how they can change the very nature of the game to their advantage. When a specific interpretation of a policy has resonated and reached a level of domination all actors are compelled to relate to this understanding, regardless of whether they support it or not. This level of domination can surface with or without conflict, but once it has reached a level of a dominating perception, it sets the parameters for subsequent action, what Hay labels as context-shaping (Hay, 2002).

This strategic-relational connection between actors and context, as articulated by Hay, forms a suitable theoretical starting point for this dissertation in order to build an analytical framework that will be able to empirically capture the process by which a domestic foreign policy consensus is forged. Recapitulating the three points of departure that concluded chapter two, the analytical framework needs to be able to capture contextual influences as well as the discretion and ingenuity of actors to operate vis-à-vis the context. Building on the strategic-relational approach I argue that framing is a suitable and fruitful way forward. Framing analysis occupies the middle ground, since the framing strategies that actors formulate are part actor and part context. What I mean by this is that the strategies are formulated on basis of the

actor's own experiences and perceptions but at the same time the context is selective in presenting only a few actions as reasonable. Actors are in this way embedded in their social context and their conduct can be analyzed through the act of framing. For the central assumption underlying this dissertation is that how a policy issue is framed determines how it is received in an audience and in extension conditions the conduct of actors (Bacchi, 1999, 2009; Boettcher & Cobb, 2006, 2009; Buzan et al., 1998; Entman, 1993, 2004; Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson & Britton, 1998; Kahneman, 2011; Mintz & DeRouen Jr, 2010; Vertzberger, 1990).

## Framing as an analytical bridge

As demonstrated by Tversky and Kahneman the framing of an issue influences how actors relate to it or even the preferences they have (Kahneman, 2011). A successful framing can make a particular course of action more reasonable, legitimate or appropriate given the context in which it is embedded and depending on which elements are highlighted and downplayed. Actors also compete to frame events because the dominating frame will most likely determine the political agenda. As Yanow argues: "Frames direct attention toward some elements while simultaneously diverting attention from other elements. They highlight and contain at the same time that they exclude" (Yanow, 1999, p. 11). This is a key characteristic of framing that is central to the forging of consensus.

Consider the difference in connotation between "peacekeeping", "armed conflict" and "war" when it comes to understanding the situation in Afghanistan. Or the perlocutionary effects when Prime Minister Göran Persson referred to the Taliban regime as "these damned murderers", alluding to the legacy of former Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme and his statement regarding the Franco regime. Both these instances are examples of when framing occurs in politics. The first example alludes to the central tenet of this dissertation. It matters a lot for the potential to build political support for military contributions to Afghanistan if Swedish soldiers are perceived to be involved in a war or not. The second example, the use of the phrase "these damned murderers", connects two previously unlinked political issues and in linking these it also provides members of the Social Democratic Party with an ideological rationale on how to relate to the Taliban. This was central in mobilizing support for the by the Prime Minister's preferred policy. There are numerous examples of framing within international relations and foreign policy analysis, both where leaders and policy makers have framed a situation in order to gain acceptance for a preferred outcome or to control the agenda, and situations where they have been restricted by certain interpretations or intersubjective understandings (Buzan et al., 1998; Jacobs &

Shapiro, 2000; Khong, 1992; Snyder et al., 1962; Sylvan & Voss, 1998; Zaller, 1994).

In an analysis of the French decision to intervene in Mali in 2013 Marina Henke develops an actor-centric approach that includes the framing of policy (Henke, 2017 see also Henke, 2020). In her study she addresses the role of actors in shaping and promoting the launch of a military intervention. She puts forward the point that these actors, or entrepreneurs as she labels them, operate to “maximize their own interests” (Henke, 2017, p. 311). This role of entrepreneurs has a tradition from the 1980s in policy analysis with the seminal work of Kingdon (2011) but is fairly unexplored in relation to military interventions with the exception of Henke’s own excellent analysis. Without using the term ‘framing’ Henke recognizes in her work how actors can influence the policy process by framing policy and highlighting particular aspects. Key to Henke’s framework is the construction and promotion of a narrative in which the actors frame the military intervention in ways that promote and enable the decision for a “particular type of intervention at a particular moment in time” (Henke, 2017, p. 319). Especially salient is how this constructs an understanding of the intervention as the only option going forward which creates, in her words, “a slippery slope toward military intervention” (Henke, 2017, p.312).

What framing analysis does is to move beyond mere rhetoric or propaganda and turn the focus toward the construction of social reality and “the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613). “Ideas do not float freely”, as Risse-Kappen once proclaimed and continued that “[d]ecision makers are always exposed to several and often contradictory policy concepts” (Risse-Kappen, 1994, p. 187). This conflict over interpretative dominance, the prerogative to interpret certain events and policies in a specific way, is at the center of framing analysis. I have elected to build on the framing analysis which emanate from the social movement literature which is well equipped to make sense of the political process when a consensus is forged (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988, 1992; Snow et al., 1986). In essence Benford and Snow’s approach to social movements is about political mobilization of different forms which is why their approach to framing fits well in my framework. Actors are in this perspective not viewed merely as carriers of ideas that exogenously enter deliberations but they are “actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 136). There is one minor but important difference between the study of social movements and political support. In their approach they are dependent on the activation of the movement participant. In a study of a political consensus it is not necessarily the case that an individual needs to be mobilized to actively support the policy. A political consensus can be formed even if the individual is in-

different or coerced into this position, two situations not present in the social movement literature.

Benford and Snow argues that the analytical usefulness of frames goes beyond cognitive structures by emphasizing the more intersubjective, constructivist character of the framing process. In making this distinction between the psychological concept of 'schema' and frames it follows that frames are not the aggregated result of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiating shared meaning (Gamson, 1992, p. 111). Benford and Snow have been criticized for treating frames as "objects people possess in their heads and develop for explicitly strategic purposes" (Van Hulst & Yanow, 2016, p. 93). Benford and Snow, however, accentuate in their work that a frame does not exist in isolation from social interaction and cite Medvedev and Bakhtin in that frames, as any "dialogical phenomenon", reside "not within us, but between us" (Medvedev and Bakhtin 1978, p.8 cited in Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 4). In their approach to frames Benford and Snow recognize the social intersubjective aspects of the framing process as individuals uses frames as a way to extract meaning out of their perceived world *and* how frames are open to social influences, i.e. that actors take part in constructing social reality (Benford & Snow, 2000). This analytical move transfers the focus from the noun: *frame*, to the verb: *framing* (Benford & Snow, 2000; Björnehed, 2012, p. 42; Van Hulst & Yanow, 2016; Yanow, 1999, p. 13).

## Intentionality and strategic framing

This focus on the *act of framing* captures the way actors engage in the construction of social reality. In Entman's well cited definition framing is:

to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

This way of advancing a particular understanding in a contested framing process recognizes how actors strategically influence how the world is interpreted and related to. Recall that this strategically implies that it is "intentional conduct oriented toward the environment in which it is to occur" (Hay, 2002, p. 129). Barnett stated that "the challenge is to recognize that the underlying structure that both constitutes and constrains actors also provided the wellspring for social practices and allows for strategic behavior" (Barnett, 1999, p. 8). He later continues by emphasizing the strategic component of framing:

actors strategically deploy frames to situate events and to interpret problems, to fashion a shared understanding of the world, to galvanize sentiments as a way to mobilize and guide social actions, and to suggest possible resolutions to current plights (Barnett, 1999, p. 15).

Albeit difficult to tackle methodologically, the level of consciousness in this strategic action is an empirical question. For example, Björnehed explicitly states that:

an actor in any given situation is expected to act in a rational way in accordance with his/her constructed interest, which in turn is influenced by the discursive context (Björnehed, 2012, p. 48).

When actors choose to highlight certain aspects of a policy and downplay others they do this more or less consciously, but in a manner always capable of rendering their intention explicit. This forms a theoretical spectrum between two ideal types in which actors in the decision-making process sometimes act unreflexively but at times fully intended to realize their intentions.

The strategic deployment of frames to mobilize social action is central in this study of consensus formation for military contributions. However an entrepreneurial focus implies a one-sided analysis which would be detrimental to a study of the forging of a domestic foreign policy consensus, with diverging and/or oppositional interests. A theoretical presumption of rationality with actors operating as machines maximizing their utility risks neglecting conduct made in a routinely fashion. However, an advocate for a military intervention does not necessarily need to be “benefitting disproportionality from the intervention decision” (Henke, 2017). Many actors occupying central positions merely act in accordance to what is perceived as “the foreign policy” line, especially when it comes to conforming to a consensus view. “The foreign policy line” can therefore be reconstructed without an explicit intention on the individual level to do so.

In the empirical material this will for example show itself in the way that actors articulate the geographical division of northern and southern Afghanistan. Even if this is done without a manipulative intent for the decision to pass the parliament, the reinforcement of the geographical division enables the decision to resonate and align with the foreign policy line. For, as Hansen points out, in articulating a policy position it would be “extremely unlikely – and politically unsavvy – for politicians to articulate foreign policy without any concern for the representations found within the wider public sphere as they attempt to present their policies as legitimate to their constituencies” (Hansen, 2013, pp. 6-7). So even if a policy position is articulated without an explicit intention, this action is still performed situated in a strategically selective context which “favours certain strategies, actors and perceptions over others” (Hay & Wincott, 1998, pp. 955-956). Therefore, any actor “pursuing policies incapable of public justification would find her path

strewn with numerous practical obstacles. This lack of rhetorical resources might even compel her to alter her course of action” (Krebs & Jackson, 2007).

While we can safely assume that actions taken by actors are sometimes very calculated moves, we can also accept that actors sometimes act in routine and habitual manners without any significant consideration. To be clear, the purpose of this dissertation is not to explain the decisions of the Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan in terms of the motives of the actors. Instead the central point lies with intentional conduct and the produced effects of their action (Guzzini, 1993, p. 459). The relationship between intentions and actions becomes in this conceptualization teleological and not causal (Carlsnaes, 1992, 2013). Even if an actor does not intend to produce certain effects when they (re)construct a particular framing this will still consequentially influence action. Björnehed addresses this in her dissertation when she writes:

the way a problem is framed and what causes are given for the defined problem, whether this is intentional with regard to a specific interest or not, will influence the kind of response that is deemed appropriate or perceived possible (Björnehed, 2012, p. 47).

When a policy, or the actions of others, has been framed in a particular way there is no going back to the original state. Once a framing is done it produces certain effects on the discursive context and ultimately influences the conduct of other actors. On the same note, this points to certain pathology of framings that are early established or intuitively reasonable. Successful framings, that have resonated and received acceptance, will be difficult to influence as time progresses (Benford & Snow, 2000; Bynander, 2015; Heath & Heath, 2007; Vertzberger, 1990).

## Policy framing

In chapter two I presented a definition of foreign policy which accentuates the representatives of the states, highlights intentionality, and places an emphasis on language. Here in this chapter I have expanded on a theoretical idea which suggests framing as a middle ground between a situated actor and the strategically selective context. The framing of the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan is therefore considered framing a specific issue within overall Swedish foreign policy. The framing of policy captures the act when actors attempt to “guide political mobilization toward a particular outcome and for a particular goal by using symbols, metaphors, and cognitive cues to organize experience and fix meaning to events” (Barnett, 1999, pp. 8-9). A ‘policy framing’, or the framing of policy, is then how policy is dis-

cursively portrayed by the actors in the process (Lombardo et al., 2009; Rein & Schön, 1993; Yanow, 1999, p. 10).

In relation to this it is important to point out that it would be impossible for political actors to simply construct and try to sell *any* policy framing for it is contingent on a successful resonance (Barnett, 1999; Benford & Snow, 2000; Henke, 2017; Holland, 2013; Payne, 2001). So an unbelievable or inconsistent policy framing, perhaps presented by an incredible actor, would most definitely not resonate or dominate the discourse. This can be related to the substance in the frame not corresponding to empirical turn-outs and/or the potential of success (Benford & Snow, 2000; De Graaf et al., 2015). Baum and Groeling accentuate that “if things are, in fact, going well, then an administration may be able to continue framing the conflict as a success... However, if the state of the conflict is more ambiguous, or if events are not going well, a negative frame becomes increasingly likely to dominate” (Baum & Groeling, 2010b, p. 34). One of the main findings in their research relates to the information advantage that a governmental actor has, especially in the early stages of a conflict, but how “reality asserts itself” over time (Baum & Groeling, 2010a, 2010b). This points to the importance of the unfolding of events and the degree of constraint it places on the decision-makers’ potential to frame such “reality”. It is necessary to recognize that these exogenous events do not have an unmediated impact on decision-makers but only through the perceptions of the actors (Hay, 2002; Krebs, 2015; Weldes, 1996, 1999).

So far in this chapter I have established Hay’s “strategic-relational approach” as the theoretical foundation for a dynamic relationship between actors and their context (Björnehed, 2012; Erikson, 2011, 2015; Hay, 2002). This relationship is both passive (discourse as structure) but also as active (actor as a producer of discourse). Therefore the actor is actively engaged in the construction of social reality and does not simply absorb impressions. However as important as it is to recognize the framing actor it must not obscure the context in which certain strategies are promoted over others (Hay, 2002, p. 129). The framing process does not work in a vacuum in which the actor simply proposes an idea out of the blue. The actor is a part of a context which authorizes some people to speak rather than others, and some arguments to be persuasive rather than others. As Barnett states:

Yet what is possible and legitimate also is delineated by the institutional context that shapes: the calculations of strategically-minded political elites; which narratives and frames are selected and become politically consequential; and the societal aggregation and interaction processes that are the factory of new cultural configurations and policy making outcomes (Barnett, 1999, p. 9).

When political actors package policy and embed it in a context, in order to gain support and convince each other of the merits of their policy proposal, they draw upon the existing discursive framework (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, pp. 906-907). Alignment between the issue policy, in this case the military contribution to Afghanistan, and the perception of the foreign policy line becomes central in this understanding.

## The forging of a consensus – an analytical framework

In this second part of the chapter the central ideas raised in the first part will be transformed into an analytical framework that can be employed empirically to explore the forging of a domestic foreign policy consensus for the Swedish military operations to Afghanistan. It is only through a proper analysis of the actors, the framing contest that they are involved in and the strategies they use that we can build a better understanding this phenomenon. This framework consists of three dimensions: process, framing and consensus. While I analytically keep the three dimensions distinct, I recognize that empirically the three dimensions permeate each other, which is why it is difficult to keep them separate later on in the empirical analysis. In each dimension a number of analytical questions will be recognized that will capture the features necessary to complete the aim of the dissertation.

### Reconstructing the process

The purpose of this part of the analytical framework is to map out the process and identify not only the relevant actors and information but also how they experience the dynamics of the process and lay the groundwork for understanding their reasoning, intentions and how they engage in the process of constructing a consensus. The three analytical questions presented in the sections to follow reconnect to the first research question and aim to capture what actions that constitutes the foreign policy process of the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan.

What are the central decision points and how does the process evolve?

The analysis begins with identifying the central decisions and the authoritative decision-unit. This is indeed the starting point for the dissertation and will be elaborated on in the next chapter. However, given the purpose of the dissertation to explore the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus this implies a process. I therefore do not approach the central decision as a single moment in time but as a constellation of decisions taken over time that inevitably leads up to that point. In a pioneering study of the Korean War in the 1960's Paige famously stated that "analytically the Korean deci-

sion may be viewed either as a single decision or as a sequence of decisions.” (Paige, 1968, p. 279). In this chain of events there are decision points that are significant in the analysis as they reveal how the politically possible changes through a sequence (Collier, 2011; Krasner, 1999; Mahoney, 2015; Pierson, 2000). Analytically I determine the centrality of the decision point based on the actors’ perceptions. The perspective of the decision-maker is therefore crucial for the analysis and how these actors perceived of the situation.

Part of mapping the process, and a central element to a study exploring how a consensus is forged in favor of a military contribution, are the political dynamics, even if perhaps a consensus is favored among the actors in the process and they do everything in their power to avoid confrontation. My approach is based on the assumption that there is always a political division in some aspect, even if it is not visible. In order for actors to avoid confrontation it is necessary for there to be something. This division is important to identify, in order to expand the analysis to include the framing and the actual construction of consensus in the two following dimensions. Here the framing and consensus dimensions will assist in identifying the political division. Depending on how advocates and opponents frame policy will be an indication for where they experience that the political equilibrium present in “the foreign policy line” lies.

Who are the central actors and what are they doing?

After identifying the central decision and the authoritative decision-unit (this will be discussed further in the next chapter) it is almost stating the obvious in an actor-centric analysis that the next step lies in pinpointing the actors involved in the process leading up to that decision. If political alternatives enter into deliberations and whether they can contest the dominating understanding depends on if the actors within the foreign policy elite bring them up and if they retain credibility. As securitization theory underlines, not every actor can successfully enter into the framing contest (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 27f). It depends on the status and position in the process.

I examine the empirical material in search of both individual actors as well as collective actors that are central to the process. The reason for mixing this is that sometimes in the process it is necessary to rise above the individual and talk about the collective features. For example, sometimes I will discuss Urban Ahlin (senior Social Democrat on foreign policy) while sometimes referring to the Social Democrats. When Urban Ahlin acts he obviously also acts as a social democrat but sometimes there are qualities in his actions that can be inferred to the party and sometimes they can be reduced to him as an individual. Similarly, I will address the Minister for Defence sometimes and the Ministry of Defence on other occasions. The distinction between the individual and the collective is important at times as it can be

directly related to the practice of political power. Collective actors are central in a political analysis, especially in a study of consensus construction in a proportional parliamentary democracy with many political parties. Additionally, it is important not to overlook the bureaucracy in this as the ministries could be driven by the expertise of the civil servants more than the political level. It would not be inconceivable if consensus construction takes places in the forces at work within the ministries and the military.

Inherent in this lies also an analytical step in identifying where the central actors are institutionally located. I will expand on some elements of process-tracing relevant to this mapping in the following chapter but for now it is sufficient to mention that it is important to analyze how this varies over time. For example, in a process permeated by consensus a Member of Parliament in opposition has probably more influence on the course of decisions than if their party was in control of the government. The reason for this is that much in foreign affairs is decided within the government and the ministries in charge of affairs. While insight is probably expanded, their *de facto* influence is diminished as their acceptance of a policy position driven by the ministry is expected, perhaps even more so on issues driven by consensus.

Important in this aspect is the division between internal and external institutional policy conflict. On the one hand there are the institutional conflicts between government and opposition. The government holds a significant amount of influence and power in articulating and determining foreign policy. When dealing with oppositional parties and actors the government can choose to accommodate, insulate or mobilize opposition in the process of constructing a consensus. In addition to this external state of affairs there is also the internal relationship between advocates and opponents within the government and opposition. Within an opposition there can be advocates trying to reach an agreement with the government and vice versa. Separating these two oppositional relationships, the internal and external, is important especially since parties hold such a strong position within Swedish politics. While a party holds a policy position in the Parliament in support of the consensus it does not necessarily imply that there is no political opposition within the party.

Part of the process dimension of the analytical framework is the identification of political divisions. The institutional location of these conflicts will provide an indication of how the government, and advocates, deals with opposition, and opponents. In the next chapter I will present the material and method used to capture the perspective of the actors involved in the process. When conflicts are suppressed and opposition and opponents are in silent acquiescence it offers a challenge to the analysis. Here the discursive aspect and the articulation of policy becomes important in order to differentiate between support, compliance, acquiescence, or consent of a political opposition.

A substantial amount of effort is placed on sorting out what these actors are doing within these processes. Important in this is to explore how they perceive the situation and what aspects enter into their reasoning as relevant. An understanding of this will facilitate the linkage between intentions and actions. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the methods that I employ in order to capture their unique perspective but it is sufficient for now just to emphasize that the primary material I use comes out of in-depth interviews and this is supplemented with archival material in the form of minutes, notes and reports. The actors' inside perspective is important to identify their intentional conduct in a context as they perceive it. This is vital in order to understand how actors operate and construct consensus.

In the process some actors are advocating for the policy while some are opposing it. These positions are definitely related to the configuration and timing of the military contribution and the composition of the policy. Having these two categories also reiterates a previous point I have made, that in exploring consensus it is necessary not only to focus on utility maximizing entrepreneurs but instead shift the focus to the more general and inclusive advocates and opponents. This is done with the purpose of being more open to the process in which a consensus is forged. One central part of this lies with the need to go beyond reiterating the institutional relationship between government and opposition to also include advocacy and opposition within the government. It is also important to penetrate the bureaucracy to explore the advocacy and opposition there.

What influences the timing and configuration of the military contribution?

The way that the policy is framed determines the political dynamics for a military deployment. This is a central argument of this dissertation. The formulation of the policy but also what the contribution consists of and the timing of the decision can influence the extent that opponents choose to comply, acquiescence or oppose the government's preferred course of action. There is an inherent dynamic in the relations between actors and how they maneuver the political landscape and position themselves. Actors are simply part of the "pulling and hauling that is politics" (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 255). It is essential to analyze the converging of different powerful actors and their preferred options. In order to build a comprehensive understanding of the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus it is therefore paramount to understand the political game and how actors play it. With this analytical question I attempt to "cast the net widely" and be "equally tough on the alternative explanations" that does not place framing in the center of the explanation (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, pp. 23-24).

This analytical question reconnects to the first concerning decision points and the development of the process. When the decision-making process has been dissected and an understanding for how the chain of events unfolded,

the next step is to understand the factors that influenced this particular development. This is very much an open empirical question that relies heavily on the granularity of the empirics used to reconstruct the decision-making process. The primary material and the methods for collecting them will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

Windows of opportunity open and close during the process and sometimes it is mere coincidence that determines how it evolves. It is important to develop an understanding of the institutional process and the interplay between government and Parliament to get a basic understanding of how windows of opportunity open and close. They are frequently triggered by some event or action but this does not necessarily need to be the case. Depending on this trigger it could shape the process and set certain things in motion that determine the continuation of the process. In the first empirical chapter the UK defense attaché specifically requested a certain type of military unit from Sweden. This request centers the deliberations within the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces on this particular unit and nothing else enters the decision-making process after that. This is also an example of how the international dimension, through organizations or bilateral contacts, affects timing and configuration within Sweden. When it comes to peace support operations there are multiple simultaneous processes going on which feed back into the Swedish decision-making process. These contextual factors can also originate from within Sweden and affect actors' perceived room for maneuver. Of course these two levels are difficult to separate and they continuously influence and reinforce each other. For example, as will be seen in the first empirical chapter, a rushed process due to international conditions can be even more time constrained due to Swedish institutional limitations.

In general this first dimension is crucial to the analysis since it lays the very foundation for the framing and consensus dimensions. It is only through a meticulously mapped-out process that we can proceed with an analysis of the framing of policy and the construction of consensus.

## Framing policy

After all the relevant actors have been identified and the process has been mapped out the next dimension of the analysis introduces the framing aspect. This centers on the way that the policy at hand is articulated by actors in their advocacy or opposition to the same policy. Through framing analysis we can assess the role of the actor in shaping the context but also how they in turn are shaped by their understanding of their environment. This dimension centers on identifying the different nuances in how the policy is portrayed. When actors choose to articulate and package policy in a certain way it is intentionally done in order to “guide political mobilization toward a particular outcome” (Barnett, 1999, pp. 8-9). It is therefore not only im-

portant what is being highlighted and downplayed in policy but also by whom. Which actors emphasize what aspects of the policy and for what reasons? The corresponding research question reads: how do actors frame policy on the military contributions to Afghanistan in the foreign policy process?

The general purpose of this dimension is to capture the discursive struggle over meaning as different framings compete for interpretative dominance. Given the historical context of Swedish military contributions to peacekeeping operations, extensive humanitarian aid programs and the legacy of peacebuilding activities these elements are likely to be highlighted. In the case of Swedish troop contributions to ISAF in Afghanistan, it was a sensitive political issue whether the Swedish contribution followed this trajectory or was in any way related to the US war in Afghanistan.

It is therefore important for the policy to resonate within the cultural and historical context. Framing analysis is therefore “critical for understanding the cultural foundations that make possible and desirable certain actions” (Barnett, 1999, p. 9). This way of understanding how interpretations are embedded into a credible and coherent narrative is part of understanding how actors adjust policy framing contextually. In addition to corresponding to real-world events, a successful framing must fit into the dominating ideational structures. Consequently, framing must be viewed “in terms of prevailing power structures” (Payne, 2001, p. 54). “The foreign policy line” through its position as a dominating perception has reached the status of a “prevailing power structure”. It is the present dominant perception in the context that actors are forced to relate to. It is the concept that actors use not only to understand Swedish foreign policy but it is also used to legitimize state action. This is why no foreign policy is politically possible that deviates from the dominating perception within the foreign policy community. Actors operate to enact their foreign policy vision while being both enabled and constrained by the discursive context (McDonald, 2015, p. 654). This is why alignment between policy and the foreign policy line is crucial for the consensus to emerge.

What is important to accentuate is that once a framing attempt to align an issue has been achieved it is only temporarily and “subject to reassessment and renegotiation” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 476). Benford and Snow emphasize the continuous framing contest over social reality (Benford & Snow, 2000). Other actors challenge and confront the articulated framings in order to gain support for their preferred interpretation. Framing does not occur in a vacuum and it is evident that frames are always employed in relation to the currently dominating frame(s). This is intrinsically linked to the ways in which a specific conceivable interpretation can resonate in the context and appeal to targeted audiences and “be coercive of potential oppositional voices, acquiescing them to accept a position they might otherwise contest” (Holland, 2013, p. 63). This way of mending a policy frame to a congruent and complimentary foreign policy which takes into account and resonates in the dis-

cursive context is what Benford and Snow conceptualize as a “frame alignment process” (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986). Even if political parties and other actors do not agree on a cohesive understanding of “the foreign policy line” they are still forced to relate to the dominating perception and if they attempt to engineer a change they cannot deviate too much, or risk either upsetting the consensus or being attacked as dissolving national unity. In the sections that follow I will elaborate on five strategies that I identify as significant in order to understand the dynamics of the frame alignment process. The corresponding analytical question that will guide the analysis is:

What framing strategies are used to align policy with “the foreign policy line”?

When political actors package policy and embed it in the context, in order to gain support and convince each other of the merits of their policy proposal, they draw upon the existing discursive framework. Actors adopt strategies based on how they interpret the contextual situation and their knowledge of how the political process operates, i.e. what strategies have previously worked, what arguments are powerful, which the currently dominating frames are, etcetera. Depending on whether they interpret the contextual circumstances as favorable or not, in accordance with their policy position, they adapt framing strategies accordingly.

In the framing literature several strategies are used in different studies, including but not limited to frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986); jurisdictional framing (Erikson, 2015, p. 460; 2017, p. 45); frame stretching, frame bending, frame shrinking, and frame fixing (Lombardo et al., 2009). In this study I will base my work on Benford & Snow, as their approach is more closely related to the process of building a consensus; their strategies are purposefully design to capture the stimuli to participate in social movements. Benford and Snow consider the frame alignment process to be the “strategic efforts by social movement organizations to link their interests and interpretive frames with those of prospective constituents and actual or prospective resource providers” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 624). In my adaptation of their work I have opted to exclude frame transformation and continue to build on three of their other strategies: bridging, amplification, and extension.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> When it comes to *frame transformation* I exclude it from my analysis of two reasons. Benford and Snow define it as “changing old understandings and meanings and/or generating new ones” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 625). What appears to be central is some sort of radical reconstitution. First of all I am skeptical of the definition of a frame transformation and how that can be held separate from an entire new framing attempt (see for example Erikson, 2011). Secondly, the kind of transformational shifts that Benford and Snow try to capture with frame

According to Benford and Snow *frame bridging* is the connectivity of two frames and the consistency in which they together can reinforce a congruent and cohesive narrative. They define it as the linkage of “two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue of problem (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 624). The original policy frame is linked to a structurally unconnected frame. One potential way to successfully establish legitimacy for a military humanitarian intervention is to align the military use of force with, for example, the protection of human rights.

Extending the boundaries of the frame in order to appeal to a larger pool of supporters without changing the intrinsic characteristics of the original frame is called *frame extension*. Benford and Snow hold that the objective of frame extension is to enlarge a frame’s pool of supporters by framing the issue as “attending to or being congruent with the values or interest of potential adherents” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 472). I interpret this as the original frame being ideologically extended in order to attract supporters. Mission creep could be one such example. The policy frame for the initial ISAF operation in Afghanistan was restricted geographically to the vicinity of Kabul. However, this was reframed and in 2003 a nationwide expansion begun, extending the geographical component of the policy frame to all of Afghanistan. Another example will be presented in the first empirical chapter when military action toward the Afghan regime is legitimized with Taliban human rights atrocities. That is a clear case of extending the problem of the Afghan regime harboring Bin Laden and al-Qaeda with their own actions toward their population.

Benford and Snow define *frame amplification* as “the clarification and invigoration of an interpretative frame that bears on a particular issue problem or set of events” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 469). They divide frame amplification into two categories: value and belief amplification. Value amplification emphasizes values already present in the existing frame while belief amplification highlights a specific interpretation of a causal relationship (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986). There are therefore no new features added to the frame but instead already present aspects are articulated and highlighted, clarifying the relevance of the policy and how it relates to “the foreign

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transformation are undoubtedly part of actors’ short-term strategies. In the short-term this kind of strategy would be reliant on external factors such as a pervasive international event or structural transformations. These activities could provide room to reinterpret and reframe an issue, however, returning to my initial critique, this would in fact be very close to a new framing attempt. To simply reframe an issue in a given context and give it new meaning is not included in what I would define as transformational. Frame transformation does not hold any theoretical relevance for the short-term strategies of the actor and while it potentially can be part of a long-term alignment strategy, adjusting a frame to a structural transformation or a rapprochement to a previously sensitive or inconceivable issue, I exclude it from my framework.

policy line”. Amplifying the UN mandate, when articulating the policy frame for the military contribution, is one way of reconnecting to the intrinsic values present in the Swedish foreign policy line.

The three framing strategies presented above, bridging, amplification, and extension, all share a certain characteristic. They are conceptualized in a context favorable to the attraction of supporters. That is, they have a positive connotation and works as a tool to attract more support. In this study I will contribute by identifying and developing two additional framing strategies that can be employed by actors in an unfavorable setting: contrasting and downgrading.

### **Frame alignment in an unfavorable context**

There is one important step that is overlooked by Benford and Snow and that is the perception of the context and an overemphasis on what I label “positive framing”. Benford and Snow’s strategies are only sensible in a favorable context where the framing is done purposefully to attract supporters. As Björnehed demonstrates in her dissertation there is a reason to separate between “positive frames with which the actor wishes to be identified [and] a negative frame [which] incites rejection on the part of the framed actor” (Björnehed, 2012, p. 231). Whether the context is favorable or not, and in extension whether the policy is desired to be framed in negative or positive terms, depends on the perspective of the actor, the political divisions on the issue, and the nature of the prevailing foreign policy line.

The common denominator in the strategies put forth by Benford and Snow is the favorable contextual condition in which these strategies are formulated. The purpose is to expand the pool of supporters by constructing a frame that is more attractive. However, in a context in which an unfavorable frame has gained momentum it is then not reasonable to amplify, extend or bridge that framing. Benford and Snow recognize counterframings by opponents in which they attempt “to rebut, undermine or neutralize” but this taps into a different kind of political process (Benford, 1987, cited in Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 626). Counterframings are an intrinsic part of frame alignment processes in which advocates and opponents struggle for interpretative dominance.

However, negative framings can also be a preferred alignment strategy to build political support. Björnehed found in a study of the Maoist movement in Nepal how they perceived to be trapped by a framing by being labeled as a terrorist movement, a clear instance of a negative frame. She writes that “they rejected it, they attempted to refute its inherent logic and they tried to disprove its accuracy in describing their movement.” She concludes “that they were not entrapped within the frame, but by the frame. That is they felt the need to act in relation to the frame but not in accordance with it” (Björnehed, 2012).

A positive frame is something that fuels a favorable response. Actors wish to tap into the mobilization potential of a positive frame. A negative frame, however, stimulates negative associations but depending on how it is used it could potentially be significant in building a political consensus. This is because a consensus does not necessarily need to attract political support but is content with not mobilizing opposition. To expand the analytical framework in this dissertation I theoretically suggest three additional frame alignment strategies in order to capture the process in which a consensus is forged. These are contrasting, downgrading and curtailment. However, due to difficulties in empirically distinguishing between downgrading and curtailment I will only include downgrading in addition to contrasting in the final analytical framework.

If bridging is the linkage of “two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue of problem” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 624), then frame *contrasting* is the strategy when two frames, in a structural or ideological relationship are contrasted in an attempt to separate them. This strategy is employed by actors facing an undesirable linkage that does not favor the policy position that they advocate. Contrasting the Swedish military contribution to ISAF with the negatively associated US military operation in Afghanistan served the purpose of enforcing a perception of the Swedish force consistent with the peacekeeping tradition.

We can imagine an unfavorable situation where the ideological and structural element of the frame is so dominant in the context that it is not possible to change the character of the frame. Under such circumstances, frame *downgrading* is employed in order to trivialize and reduce the importance of those elements of the frame. To exemplify again with the US and the strong association with offensive operations and war: combined operations with Swedish and American forces could be downgraded in official accounts in order to precede potential opposition toward the Swedish contribution based on the association with US forces. Downgrading is also the proposed strategy when there is an unfavorable situation but there is not a particular structural or ideological connection that can be addressed. Downgrading the political importance of that policy frame is then the primary strategy in order to attract political support.

While extension expands the ideological scope of the policy frame, when faced with an unfavorable situation an actor can use *curtailment* to reduce the frame. Therefore curtailment is the framing strategy that frames the policy in a way to reduce unwanted ideological burden that reduces the frame’s political attractiveness. While it is possible to make a theoretical distinction between downgrading and curtailment they are difficult to distinguish empirically and I will therefore exclude curtailment from my analytical framework.

This theoretical enlargement of frame alignment strategies to include also how they manifest in unfavorable situations is important for three reasons. Firstly, it enables the inclusion of the political opposition in the analysis as it provides a richer analysis of the counterframing dynamics. This is extremely salient in a study where I examine the process behind a political consensus and the framing contest to align the policy frame from the foreign policy line. Benford and Snow's framework is limited to the use of the concept of counterframings to capture this process, but there is no added value to understand this as a dynamic process. Using the complementary strategies we can capture in the analysis why advocates and oppositional actors use different strategies when framing the policy on military contributions to Afghanistan. For example, advocates in this study are not necessarily determined to use strategies to attract political supporters in the same way that social movements are dependent on attracting new supporters. When analyzing how a political consensus is constructed it can also take the form of successfully aligning the policy frame with the dominating foreign policy line which in turn coerces other actors into accepting it. It is not necessary to mobilize support. It is sufficient to not mobilize opposition.

Secondly, the theoretical enlargement enables an analysis of the variations of strategies over a longer period of time. If we presume that the foreign policy context is in a constant flux of ideas and "the foreign policy line" is the temporary hegemonic interpretation. Then, given the constant evolution of the frames underpinning "the foreign policy line", the changes in "the foreign policy line" itself, and the strength of counterframings, every new framing is related to the present intersubjective interpretation of the contextual situation. This enables an analysis of the change in strategies as the context changes from favorable to unfavorable or vice versa. For example, at one point in time an actor advocating a Swedish military contribution to ISAF could contrast the relationship between the two frames of the two military operations in Afghanistan, portraying the American influence in Afghanistan as illegitimate. However, as US presence builds within ISAF American influence is instead downgraded and avoided in political deliberations.

The final point is that it also theoretically merits an analysis of the different combinations of positive and negative framing strategies that actors employ in framing of the military contribution policy. Intrinsic values in the policy frame can be amplified in a simultaneous attempt to discredit and construct a contrast to the negative frame. An example would be an amplification of the UN mandate for the ISAF operation in order to more elaborately contrast it with the lack of international legitimacy for the American operations in Afghanistan.

In this dissertation I argue that "the foreign policy line" plays an important role in the attraction of political support to construct a political consensus.

The five strategies that I have just presented (bridging, amplification, extension, contrasting and downgrading) are used by actors to align the policy frame of the military contributions to Afghanistan with “the foreign policy line”. Following this line of argumentation, I contend that the framing of the policy frame determines the potential to construct a consensus in support of the military contribution.

## Constructing consensus

In this third and final analytical dimension the questions center on the very construction of consensus. Here the outcome from the two previous dimensions is analyzed through a consensus lens which focuses on the management of political conflict and dissent over time. While in the previous two dimensions we learn who the advocates and opponents are and which one is articulating a particular framing, this analytical step aims to capture how they are advocating or opposing the policy issue. In accordance with the third research questions the two analytical questions presented here explores how the domestic foreign policy consensus on military contributions to Afghanistan has been constructed over time.

What framings of the policy are central for consensus?

In accordance with the main argument of this dissertation, this is a central question in order to build an understanding of the process in which a consensus is forged through framing. In the previous chapter I presented three different ways for the government to deal with opposition, developed by Hagan: accommodation, insulation and mobilization (Hagan, 1993, 1995). While I do not claim that these are exhaustive they are sufficient to understand the broader relationship between government and opposition.

It is essential to understand how the policy process works and identify central actors and determine how they reason. Getting a grasp of the nature of the political divisions and which the key decisions are will indicate where the balance lies on a consensus. The idea is to draw on the findings from the process and framing dimension to determine which frames are crucial to forge consensus in favor of a particular policy.

One way is to avoid controversy in the formulation and articulation of policy and with this suppress incompatible interests that only transpire in the details of the decisions. Actors can attempt to forge consensus by formulating ambiguous policies that take into account different, and perhaps diverging, interests of the participants in the process (Stone, 2012). Returning to a point made previously, it is sufficient to not mobilize opposition in order to avoid overt dissent on a policy issue. A more direct approach to suppress political conflict is to avoid controversial aspects in the formulation of policy. This can be accomplished by avoiding the controversy altogether and the

challenge is then to detect the silences in the formulation of policy in order to understand their political importance (Bacchi, 1999, 2009, 2012).

Previous research has pointed to inconsistencies between how actors officially described the military operation and media reports on the situation on the ground in Afghanistan (Agrell, 2003; Johnsson, 2017). These inconsistencies challenge the credibility of policy framing and the actors articulating it. It also affects actors 'perceived maneuverability' (Björnehed, 2012). As Baum and Groeling point out exogenous events are important to the policy process as they determine the room for maneuver for the actors to frame policy independently (Baum & Groeling, 2010a, 2010b). If, for example, events on the ground in the military theatre contradict an ambiguous policy formulated to achieve consensus this could provide decision-makers with a challenge to uphold the consensus. It is however important to recognize that these events do not have unmediated impact on decision-making but filter through actors' perception of the situation (Hay, 2002; Krebs, 2015; Weldes, 1996, 1999). Depending on if the actors experience the context as favorable or unfavorable it is assumed that they will behave differently in their pursuit of consensus and the way that they frame policy.

How is consensus managed over time?

Since the historic trajectory is important in consensus building in foreign policy it is important to determine whether the policy is perceived as a continuity or deviation from previous policies. Inherent in this lies the very essence of alignment and how a policy decision is framed in accordance with "the foreign policy line". Any alterations to "the foreign policy line" risk upsetting the consensus, if one exists, if they deviate substantially. A perception of continuity is therefore essential for changes to be accepted. So even if political parties and other actors do not agree upon "the foreign policy line" they are still forced to relate to it and if they attempt to engineer a change, they cannot deviate too much, or risk either upsetting the consensus or being attacked as dissolving national unity.

In a conceptualization of change, in accordance with social rules, Onuf states that:

Every time agents choose to follow a rule, they *change* it – they strengthen it by making it more likely that they and others will follow the rule in the future. Every time agents choose not to follow a rule, they change the rule by weakening it, and in so doing they may well contribute to the constitution of some new rule (Onuf, 1994, cited in Zehfuss, 2002, p. 152).

This is the same underlying logic as Heraclitus suggested when he claimed that no man ever steps into the same river twice for it is not the same river and it is not the same man. I share this conceptualization of the foreign poli-

cy context in a constant flux of different framings that compete for interpretative dominance. This ontological assumption of a context in constant flux leads inevitably to epistemological consequences. It would logically entail that every alignment and deviation of a foreign policy issue with “the foreign policy line” are to be considered a “change”, even if they are accepted in the target audience as continuity of foreign policy. How does this conform to the literature on foreign policy change? While this issue is recognized in most research, foreign policy change is mostly concerned with “fundamental redirections in a country’s foreign policy” (Hermann, 1990, p. 5). Herman proposed four levels of foreign policy change: adjustment change, program change, problem/goal changes, and international orientation changes (Hermann, 1990). My conceptualization of alignment is close to adjustment change but differentiates in one important and decisive aspect. Instead of placing the focus on foreign policy change I slightly shift the focus towards alignment and the actors’ perceptions of continuity or deviation. Alignment is relative to the acceptance within a wider audience and to previous dominating understanding of foreign policy. The very notion of an alignment implies that the nature of the “foreign policy change” is minor, to such degree that it can be framed by the actors as a continuation. Framing in this aspect enables the disguise of a foreign policy change under a veil of continuity.

It is this relationship that permits gradual changes in the framing of the military contributions as long as it stays within the boundaries of what can be accepted by other actors and aligned with general foreign policy. Since there is an understanding within the foreign policy community that there should be a consensus on important foreign policy issues any diversion or differentiation (disalignment if you may) between the policy and “the foreign policy line” is potentially foreshadowing a potential overt political conflict.

The challenge for this analysis, which makes the analytical move to transfer the focus of the study to the conduct and produced effects of actor’s actions, is to be found in the dynamic interplay between the interpretation of “the foreign policy line” and the strategic actions to reconstruct, transform or capitalize on it. “The foreign policy line” is the dominating perception which sets the contextual boundaries upon which the foreign policy debate takes place. Whether advocating or opposing a policy, “the foreign policy line” is the expression of the interpretative dominance that coerces (Krebs & Jackson, 2007) or persuades (Payne, 2001) actors into a particular behavior. Regardless if an actor internalizes the foreign policy line, if it dominates the foreign policy community actors are bound to act in relation to it. Holland accentuates the supremacy of interpretative dominance:

Foreign policy becomes dominant when its particular framings remove the cultural and discursive materials that opponents might otherwise have access

to in order to formulate a socially sustainable rebuttal. By setting the terms of debate and establishing certain meanings, foreign policy can be framed to acquiesce and co-opt potential oppositional voices, leaving them to contest minor, procedural matters rather than the fundamental direction of policy (Holland, 2013, p. 55).

So in a conceptualization of a foreign policy context in a constant flux, where competing frames struggle for interpretative dominance and actors are constantly exposed to competing frames, how can we empirically determine what constitutes “the foreign policy line” at any given moment? I argue that the important concept is “burden of proof” which discloses where the intersubjective perceptions in the discourse lie (Tannenwald, 2007). That is what the dominating perception within the foreign policy community of the pursued foreign policy of Sweden as a political entity, or the foreign policy line, is. This is central for an analysis of the construction of consensus in relation to the foreign policy line. Nina Tannenwald faced a similar problem in her work in which she traced the evolution of a normative prohibition to use nuclear weapons during the cold war. She moved beyond the actors’ internal thought processes and focused on their strategic behavior:

Although we should always be alert to the incentives actors have to misrepresent their motives, in this case decision makers themselves believed they were constrained by a taboo— including those who objected to it as an unwelcome constraint on their behavior and sought to do away with it. The fact that people talk and act as if they believe a taboo exists is important evidence into what orients—and constrains—behavior. The notion of “burden of proof,” which indicates where the normative presumptions in a discourse lie, provides a useful measuring device (Tannenwald, 1999, p. 440).

This concept of burden of proof is important in understanding discursive contextual changes and how arguments become more or less effective and legitimate. The factual circumstances are of secondary importance to the arguments legitimizing action. For example, to identify the burden of proof when states justify military interventions it is for this argument of lesser importance whether or not these justifications correspond with the actual turn of events. That states advance these particular justifications “imply that intervention in other circumstances would be [considered] illegal” (Orakhelashvili, 2019, p. 466). Statements justifying military interventions are therefore a clear indication where “the normative presumptions” in a discourse lie.

By looking where the burden of proof lies it is possible to understand how decision-makers experienced what the dominating frames of that particular time were and how they adjusted their strategies accordingly. This is a minor yet important contribution made by Tannenwald. If decision-makers feel obligated to address a matter in a particular way this could be interpreted as

empirical evidence by itself that the strategic-selective context pushes these kinds of explanations.

Tannenwald accentuates that the analysis should capture whether actors “acknowledge a greater burden of proof” and if these “departures from the purportedly dominant normative expectations are treated as exceptional and in need of special justification” (Tannenwald, 2007, p. 52). Tracing how the burden of proof shifts through the three periods of interest in this dissertation provides us with an indication of the status of “the foreign policy line” and how advocates and opponents relate to it in the competition to forge a political consensus. It is also key in analyzing the arguments that actors put forth when articulating a particular policy frame and if they feel compelled to motivate their position. Through the analysis in this dissertation I operationalize “the foreign policy line” through the notion of “burden of proof”.

## Summary of analytical framework

In this chapter I have presented an analytical framework consisting of three interrelated dimensions that aim to map out the decision-making process and explore how a domestic foreign policy consensus is constructed through framing. Below, in table 1, the analytical questions for the three dimensions are summarized.

Table 1. *An analytical framework in three dimensions.*

Process	Framing	Consensus
- What are the central decision points and how does the process evolve?	- What framing strategies are used to align policy with “the foreign policy line”?	- What framings of the policy are central for consensus?
- Who are the central actors and what are they doing?		- How is consensus managed over time?
- What influences the timing and configuration of the military contribution?		

This analytical framework is built on the foundation of the strategic-relational approach and centers on situated actors in a strategically selective context. I have argued that framing and frame alignment strategies, constitute a fruitful middle ground which captures the interaction of actor and context and highlights the discursive aspect of what actors do in the policy process. Moreover, it strikes a balance between bringing actors into the analysis without the neglect of contextual influences. The framework centers on five frame alignment strategies used by actors to align the policy frame of the military contributions to Afghanistan with “the foreign policy line”: bridging, amplification, extension, contrasting and downgrading. It is only

through a proper analysis of the actors, the framing contest they are involved in and the strategies they use that we can build a better understanding of the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus. The approach that I have chosen through this analytical framework requires rich and detailed empirics in order to reconstruct the political context as well as capture the actors' perspective and perceptions. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the type of research design that is necessary to explore the forging of a domestic foreign policy consensus.

## Chapter 4 – Design, method and material

In the sections that follow in this chapter I will expand on some of the choices I have made during this research process and some advantages and disadvantages of the research design for this exploratory study of consensus construction through framing, built on a single case study of Sweden and military contributions to the Afghanistan operation. In the previous chapter I underscored the importance of understanding the process from the perspective of the actors. It is, therefore, methodologically necessary to capture their perceptions of the context, most prominently “the foreign policy line”, and the reasons behind their conduct. The kind of research that I envision, therefore, requires an in-depth understanding of how decision-making processes on military contributions to peace support operations in Sweden unfold and how actors in these processes perceive of their context and act upon these perceptions. The context sets the boundaries for conduct but can also drive it, depending on how they interpret it.

To this end it is necessary to have a rich and suitable empirical ground and in-depth interviews have constituted the methodological foundation to accomplish this, complemented by documents, archival records and media reports. A substantial part of this chapter will therefore be devoted to discussing the primary material I have gathered and the different methods for collecting it.

The process-tracing that I draw on has a strong interpretative component. In the text below I expand on some of the challenges in extrapolating meaning in this particular context and validating claims provided to me during interviews. The discursive element is important in a framing analysis; however, as I argued in the previous chapter, the discursive context defined in this study only makes sense through the actors’ interpretation of it, and in extension my interpretation of that. Therefore, my own experiences and abilities as a researcher come into play, both when it comes to understanding the situation that the actors find themselves in but also to construct an interview situation purposefully designed to achieve this.

### Exploration of consensus construction

The combined aim of this dissertation is to explore the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus through an in-depth study of a decision-

making process. To this end I opted for a research design based on a single case study of Sweden's military contributions to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014. The class of events (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 17) that this particular case study represents is domestic foreign policy consensus construction. Afghanistan makes up a deviant case in the Swedish context which is traditionally a consensus democracy, predominantly in foreign policy issues as I discussed in chapter 2. While the Swedish case on military contributions to Afghanistan in itself qualifies for an in-depth study, if only for its impact and policy relevance in Sweden, it also merits some theoretical and methodological justifications as to how and why an exploratory study of Sweden can teach us more of the phenomenon of consensus construction in this way. I assert that the coupling of a deviant case in a country traditionally predisposed to consensus makes it suitable to empirically explore consensus construction as I presuppose that theoretically interesting characteristics are more prominent in this case (Esaiasson et al., 2007; George & Bennett, 2005; Teorell & Svensson, 2007; Yin, 2009).

The content of each decision is fundamentally linked to the political value and therefore also to the potential to reach consensus. Therefore, it matters how many soldiers deploy, what the force's restrictions are, where the area of operations will be etcetera. All these factors influence how the policy can be framed and aligned with "the foreign policy line". Even though this study will bring me very close to the reasons and the different motives of why Sweden participated in Afghanistan, this research design is not optimized at explaining this engagement, in the first place. It centers instead on how and why advocates succeeded in constructing consensus for military deployment through framing.

Given the purpose of this research to understand and capture the dynamics in consensus construction I opted not to sacrifice the depth of the analysis by increasing the scope by including more cases, either other instances of military contributions within Sweden or cases from other states. Additional cases, such as military contributions to Afghanistan by states that share certain characteristics to Sweden (see for example De Graaf et al., 2015; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Edström et al., 2018; Ekhaugen, 2019; Henke, 2017; Jakobsen, 2006; Mariager & Wivel, 2019a; Oma, 2014; Oma & Ekhaugen, 2014; van der Meulen & Grandia Mantas, 2012; Zehfuss, 2002; Ångström & Honig, 2012), would have increased the external validity of the results. However, I would argue that several cases are not suitable for an exploratory approach to consensus construction. Immersing into a similar, albeit slightly different, context is still time consuming and the potential to go back and forth between theory and empirics restricted. Further, it would unquestionably have limited the depth of the study, which is of great importance in understanding the meanings in any given context.

Instead I followed Levite et al. (1992) and empirically identified three crucial phases during the Swedish military engagement in Afghanistan: to

enter (2001-2002), expand (2003-2005), and exit (2009-2010) (Levite et al., 1992). In this dissertation I devote one empirical chapter to trace the decision-making processes for each corresponding phase. Each of the empirical chapters then functions as a base for within-case analysis between the different phases. Together they will tell the story of the overall evolution of the Swedish contributions to Afghanistan 2002-2014 and capture how consensus construction varied over this time.

One important caveat is worth mentioning. I contend that Sweden and Afghanistan hold potential for the exploration of consensus and expansion of our general knowledge of consensus construction through framing by analytical generalization. However, given the weight placed on context-specific attributes there could be a problem that this single case study in itself is not optimal to empirically generalize to other states' foreign policy processes and/or decisions on military contributions. A note of caution is therefore warranted before the theoretical claims and empirical results of this study have been validated in other countries with other kind of democratic institutions. Many of the contributions show, however, promising potential to travel to other contexts, such as the theoretical addition of frame alignment strategies to operate in an unfavorable context as discussed in chapter three.

The choice to explore consensus construction through a single case study of Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan calls however for three major clarifications, each addressed in the sections that follow. The first involves Sweden as a case of consensus construction. The second clarification concerns Afghanistan as a deviant case in the Swedish context. And finally third, the study of consensus construction as a process needs to be explained.

## Sweden: a traditional consensus democracy

Sweden is recognized as a traditional consensus democracy (Lewin, 1998; Lijphart, 2008) which is perhaps even more evident when it comes to foreign affairs (Andrén, 1996; Bjereld & Demker, 1995, 2000; Brommesson & Ekengren, 2007, 2013; Hegeland, 2006; Jerneck, 1996). In their study of Swedish and British foreign policy, Brommesson and Ekengren (2013) conclude that continuity, as opposed to conflict, seems to have been the hallmark in Swedish foreign policy, especially in the post post-Cold War era. This is explained by, in their view, this being a period of “overall stability in the surrounding world” (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2013, p. 20). It can therefore be presumed that actors face a strong notion of consensus within foreign policy circles. Previous research has acknowledged this and pointed to consensus as being an important explanatory factor in decisions concerning military force deployment abroad (Doeser, 2014b; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Egnell, 2015).

The primary focus of this dissertation is placed on the politics of military contributions when advocates of deployment work to evade overt dissent from the political opposition and construct political legitimacy through a domestic consensus. It is a first attempt to directly study the forging of consensus by placing it front and center of the study. It should be regarded as an exploratory empirical study expanding our understanding of domestic foreign policy consensus and how it is constructed. For consensus construction is theoretically relevant not only in a Swedish context but for other states as well, primarily smaller western states sharing certain characteristics with Sweden (Cf. Edström et al., 2018; Noreen et al., 2017; Ångström & Honig, 2012).

In this dissertation my intention is to expand the scope of the inquiry beyond investigating why a country contributes to peace support operations to how come it participates in a particular way. In multilateral military coalitions it can be argued that the main objective of smaller states is to merely participate, engaging in what Ångström designate as “contribution warfare” (Ångström, 2019). In these cases the smaller coalition partner contributes to the overall military operation “in order to gain advantages from the dominating coalition partner in other areas” rather than affecting the outcome of the conflict or influencing the situation on the ground (Ångström, 2019, p. 5). It could also potentially be the case that the smaller coalition member has minor influence over decisions regarding the overall military operation. This case study of a smaller coalition contributor addresses the problem of building domestic support without control over the overall military operation.

Additionally, it is a case study in the tradition of foreign policy analysis that further explores domestic factors that shape the outcome of foreign policy. In my work I consider agency and the role of actors as important. They highlight actor’s involvement in how events plays out, how they use and shape discursive structures, and the dynamic interplay between government and opposition as well as advocates and opponents of a particular policy. The selection of Sweden as a case study places this dynamic in a consensus-prone environment. For actors operating in these decision-making processes understanding the political context and acknowledging what is politically possible and impossible is sometimes decisive for success. Therefore this study will both theoretically and empirically contribute to similar cases where actors shape and formulate policy and engage in a framing contest over policy in an attempt to influence or exploit the discursive conditions (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Henke, 2017; McDonald, 2015; Melanson, 2005). The findings travel in this aspect to the foreign policy analysis literature and most apparently to other actor-centric approaches that include the framing of policy on military interventions (Henke, 2017).

## Afghanistan: a deviant case in a consensus context

Sweden was an active contributor to international peace support operations in the 2000s. Between the year 2000 and 2014 a total of 42 decisions were taken in Parliament for military deployments to 12 different conflicts – Kosovo, Afghanistan, Macedonia, Congo, Liberia, Bosnia, Lebanon, Darfur (did not deploy), Chad, Coast of Somalia, Libya and Mali.

The military contribution to Afghanistan is considered the most difficult and complex mission that Sweden embarked upon (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015, p. 491). Some of the characteristics that make the mission complex are the length, Swedish force posture, the conduct of opposing military forces, the number of actors involved, the international attention, and the comprehensive nature of the mission objectives. While the military engagement in Afghanistan continues to this day, and Swedish soldiers are still deployed there, the study is confined to the years 2002–2014 for three reasons. First, in 2014 ISAF ends and is replaced with a new mission: Resolute Support Mission (RSM). This change signals a transition to a non-combat mission focused on training and advising Afghan forces. Second, coinciding with this, Sweden reduces its troop presence significantly. This is preceded by a political settlement between the center-right four-party coalition government and the Social Democrats and Green Party. Third, despite Sweden still having troops deployed to RSM the primary deployment is still considered to have been to ISAF. When the Government issued a governmental inquiry on Sweden's engagement in Afghanistan it too was confined to 2002–2014 (Tingsgård, 2017).<sup>7</sup>

The military contribution to Afghanistan offers a possibility to empirically explore consensus construction as Afghanistan marks a deviant case in the Swedish context (George & Bennett, 2005). The benevolent intentions of the Swedish humanitarian engagement clashed with the military reality on the ground in Afghanistan. The operation gradually shifted toward combat-like situations and Sweden suffered the first combat casualties since Lebanon in 1991 and before that in 1978. As one scholar argues:

The competing view of a traditional peacekeeping operation that was meant to provide security for the Afghan people became more and more difficult to maintain, and from an outside perspective the policy decisions no longer seemed to correlate with their implementation on the ground, and vice versa (Johnsson, 2017, p. 15).

Politically, due to the linkages with the US war on terror, this caused the tradition of consensus behavior to at times be replaced with open political conflict (Agrell, 2013). A vibrant opposition surfaced in a critique of the Swedish engagement and in the election in 2010 three oppositional parties

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<sup>7</sup> As was the Danish and Norwegian (Godal et al., 2016; Mariager & Wivel, 2019b).

united in a demand for complete withdrawal. This challenged the stability of the domestic foreign policy consensus yet each of the 14 parliamentary decisions on military contributions to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014 were still supported by a consensus or a broad cross-party support.

In the Swedish context, approvals in the Parliament of military operations, based on a UN Chapter VII mandate, have traditionally been reached with extensive support in the chamber. Most decisions are in fact taken in acclamation and when a vote is called it is rarely below 90% of supporting votes. A comparative study of parliamentary votes on deployment decisions in Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France by Wagner et al. (2018) assessed the degree of contestation of these decision by using an Agreement Index (AI). It was originally developed by Hix et al. (2005) to measure party cohesion in the European Parliament. It is an acknowledged measure to capture cohesion within a political body.

In order to produce comparable data to other research and present an estimate of the level of consensus in the Parliament I have calculated an Agreement Index for all Swedish parliamentary decisions on military contributions between 1990 and 2014 using the following formula:

$$AI_i = \frac{\max \{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2} [(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max \{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

where  $Y_i$  denotes the number of Yes votes cast in the Parliament,  $N_i$  the number of No votes and  $A_i$  the number of Abstain votes. This will result in an Agreement Index between 0 and 1 where 1 indicates absolute cohesion on the issue while 0 indicates the votes are equally divided between the three voting options. Table 2 below displays all decisions taken in the Swedish Parliament in relation to military contributions to peace support operations in the post-Cold War period with the corresponding Agreement Index as well as the variation of percentage of yes votes cast in favor of the deployment.

The mean for the Agreement Index for all Swedish parliamentary decisions is 0.93 compared to the slightly lower mean on Afghanistan, 0.89. If we extrapolated only the decisions that came to an actual vote (many decisions are taken in acclamation) the mean drops to 0.84 and 0.83 respectively. The lowest AI (0.70) is recorded for the last vote on Libya as well as the last vote on Afghanistan in this time period. Wagner et al. (2018) found an aggregated variation of the AI between 0.46 (UK) and 0.98 (Spain). Germany which is perhaps the best comparison of the four had an AI between 0.62 and 0.95. These results in table 2 support that the level of consensus in the parliamentary votes is high in the Swedish case and that the government in general was supported with “an overwhelming consensus” (Noreen et al., 2017, p. 14).

Table 2. *Decisions on military contributions in the Swedish Parliament, 1993–2014.*

Country	Operation	Date for decision	Percentage of Yes votes	Agreement Index
Bosnia	UNPROFOR	June 8, 1993	95%	0,92
Bosnia	IFOR	December 15, 1995	89%	0,83
Bosnia	SFOR	December 17, 1996	92%	0,89
Kosovo	KFOR	June 14, 1999	100%	1,00
Kosovo	KFOR	March 21, 2001	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	January 18, 2002	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	June 12, 2002	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	December 18, 2002	100%	1,00
Macedonia	CONCORDIA	February 19, 2003	100%	1,00
Congo	MONUC	April 16, 2003	100%	1,00
Congo	ARTEMIS	June 12, 2003	87%	0,81
Afghanistan	ISAF	December 11, 2003	100%	1,00
Liberia	UNMIL	February 18, 2004	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	May 26, 2004	91%	0,87
Bosnia	ALTHEA	October 27, 2004	100%	1,00
Liberia	UNMIL	February 16, 2005	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	December 7, 2005	91%	0,86
Liberia	UNMIL	February 16, 2006	100%	1,00
Bosnia	ALTHEA	May 3, 2006	100%	1,00
Congo	EUFOR	June 14, 2006	100%	1,00
Lebanon	UNIFIL	October 13, 2006	100%	1,00
Bosnia	ALTHEA	March 28, 2007	100%	1,00
Lebanon	UNIFIL	April 11, 2007	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	June 1, 2007	87%	0,81
Darfur	UNAMID	October 31, 2007	100%	1,00
Chad/RCA	EUFOR	November 21, 2007	100%	1,00
Chad/RCA	EUFOR	June 18, 2008	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	December 19, 2008	87%	0,81
Kosovo	KFOR	December 19, 2008	100%	1,00
Gulf of Aden	ATALANTA	March 12, 2009	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	November 19, 2009	94%	0,90
Kosovo	KFOR	December 9, 2009	100%	1,00
Gulf of Aden	ATALANTA	March 3, 2010	100%	1,00
Afghanistan	ISAF	December 15, 2010	100%	1,00
Libya	OUP	April 1, 2011	91%	0,87
Libya	OUP	June 17, 2011	86%	0,79
Libya	OUP	September 21, 2011	80%	0,70
Afghanistan	ISAF	December 14, 2011	88%	0,82
Kosovo	KFOR	December 14, 2011	94%	0,91
Afghanistan	ISAF	December 19, 2012	89%	0,83
Gulf of Aden	ATALANTA	March 6, 2013	94%	0,92
Mali	MINUSMA	June 18, 2013	95%	0,92
Afghanistan	ISAF/RSM	December 17, 2013	89%	0,84
Mali	MINUSMA	June 12, 2014	93%	0,90
Afghanistan	RSM	December 17, 2014	80%	0,70
Gulf of Aden	ATALANTA	December 17, 2014	100%	1,00

There is one operation that stands out together with Afghanistan and that is the intervention in Libya in 2011, with an AI between 0.70 and 0.87, which also experienced political disagreements (Doeser, 2014a, 2014b; Egnell, 2015; Suhonen, 2014). But Afghanistan, being both a protracted military operation and substantially larger military commitment than Libya, experienced a more dynamic political conflict with variation of consensus over time (for example five decisions in acclamation) while Libya only experienced overt political conflict. Afghanistan also enables a within-case analysis, for example between the initial decision (chapter 5) and the decision to withdraw (chapter 7). This variation also allows an exploration of the overall trajectory for military contributions to Afghanistan over a time span of nearly 10 years.

### Studying consensus construction as a process

In view of the complexity, length and varying conditions for the Afghanistan operation I opted to break down the case study of Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan into sequential stages by the differing dynamics of a protracted military intervention. Following Levite et al. (1992) I have empirically identified three crucial decisions of the political decision-making processes during this time period and identified the vital parliamentary decisions corresponding to each: the decision to enter (January 18, 2002), to expand (December 7, 2005), and exit (December 15, 2010) (Levite et al., 1992). In their own terminology, Levite et al. (1992) divide a protracted military intervention into three stages: getting in, staying in, and getting out. All three parliamentary decisions represent the end of the decision phase and I then trace the process backwards and structure my empirical analysis around the process that led up to each decision. For example, the decision to exit was taken on December 15, 2010. It represents the end of the “staying-in” stage and the beginning of the “getting-out” stage but the process of interest in this dissertation is the process that leads up to the parliamentary decision. Levite et al. explain the transition.

The staying in stage typically goes through a few phases in the course of which the military commitment and expectation of success are initially high but gradually diminish. It usually ends at a point in which the frustrated leadership of the intervening country lowers its expectations and decides to recalibrate the size of its military commitment with what it reassesses to be its intrinsic value, further costs, and other options (Levite et al., 1992, p. 18).

Dividing a protracted military operation into three different phases provides an opportunity to extrapolate the finding from the different periods to similar subclasses, both within Sweden as a case but also to other similar cases. Identifying the defining parliamentary decisions and linking them to the

three stages presented by Levite et al. is already a minor empirical contribution in itself since it distinguishes crucial *political* phases of the protracted military Swedish contribution to ISAF. Previous research has predominantly focused on the development on the ground in Afghanistan and structured the analysis accordingly (Agrell, 2013; Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015; Johnsson, 2017; Roosberg & Weibull, 2014). The inferences these studies draw to the political deliberations are done presumably on congruence between the development in Afghanistan and the Swedish political process. While the political deliberations are influenced by the developments in Afghanistan, the political phase is usually ahead and looking to the future progress. For example, the “PRT-phase” (expansion) started politically already in 2003, well ahead of the military’s actual expansion to Mazar-e-Sharif (in 2004) and takeover of the PRT (in 2006).

I consider a decision being a result of a process of decision-making and not as a single moment of choice (Brunsson, 2007; Hudson, 2014; Paige, 1968). Several alternatives are disregarded along the way and some alternatives surface as the only possible alternatives. These alternatives can be negotiated and discussed but they may also never have reached political deliberations. Political actors can for example successfully frame their preferred outcome as the only conceivable alternative in order to gain legitimacy and control the process further. As Deborah Stone points out placing items on the agenda, as well as keeping them off, can be an important determinant of how the process unfolds (Stone, 2012, p. 253).

Therefore it is difficult, if not impossible, when studying the forging of a consensus, to separate between the decision to participate and the content or form that the military contribution obtains, as other research tend to suggest (Doerer, 2014b; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a, 2014b; Gyllensporre, 2016; Oma, 2014; Ångström, 2010). What I mean by this is that the decision in Parliament is not a one-off decision on participating or not. There is a political value which depends on the number of soldiers, force caveats, the operational tasks, potential partners, as well as the timing of the contribution. These factors could be exactly what the success of forging a political consensus balances on. But more importantly these factors are intrinsically part of how the policy is framed and decisive of the potential for a policy to reach a status in which it dominates the domestic foreign policy context.

As previously explained, this dissertation is structured after the formal decisions in the Swedish Parliament to give approval for the military contributions. There are two reasons why these decisions form the starting point of my analysis. First of all, it has a constitutional component. A deployment of an “armed force”<sup>8</sup> abroad constitutionally requires parliamentary consent in

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<sup>8</sup> The constitution specifies an “armed force” [*väpnad styrka*] but a practice has evolved over time setting a political precedent to seek the support of the parliament in many cases of military deployment even when this does not concern an “armed force” in a strict legal sense.

accordance with Chapter 10, Article 9 of the Swedish Instrument of Government (Matz, 2013; Österdahl, 2011).<sup>9</sup> A majority in the Parliament is therefore necessary for any decision on military contributions. In the case of the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan the Parliament has taken 14 decisions between the years 2002-2013, five in acclamation and nine by voting procedure.

The second reason draws both on theoretical as well as empirical lessons learned. The parliament, in the role of “the authoritative decision unit” (Hagan et al., 1987; Hermann, 2001) would be the most likely outlet of a political domestic foreign policy consensus and the audience in need of persuasion in order to form a political coalition in support of the policy. This, in the literature referred to as an “elite-consensus” (Berinsky, 2009; Kreps, 2010; Zaller, 1994), is also recognized by all participants within the process.<sup>10</sup> Foreign policy decisions in the parliament need to be substantially supported to be accepted as legitimate, preferably with a consensus, especially decisions on military force (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, 2000; Doerer, 2014b; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Wendt & Åse, 2016). The parliament’s treatment of military contributions also receives attention in media, which indirectly politicizes it to a certain extent. The implications of this strong notion of a consensus in “the authoritative decision unit” is that the government’s strong position, due to informational advantage and control of the decision-making process, is to a degree balanced with the capability of the opposition to block the action in parliament (Hagan et al., 2001). This is the primary reason why the way that the policy is received in the target audience, i.e. the parliament, becomes central for a consensus to emerge.

Starting with the decision in parliament, the objective of this research is to trace the decision-making process and observe how a consensus is forged for a military contribution. Given that consensus, as defined in this study as *the absence of overt dissent on a policy issue*, will be visible in the chamber, but not necessarily reveal the political divisions, it is important to unpack the process and focus on the details of the process. This in order to build an understanding of the bargaining, positioning and exercising of political power along the way. Additionally, attention needs to be given to how, in turn, actors frame policy in order to align it with “the foreign policy line” and thereby construct political support for the deployment of troops to Afghanistan. Beforehand I assume, and through that motivate this study, that there is an internal dynamic in this in-depth case study stemming from Sweden being a traditional consensus-prone state in foreign policy, that Afghanistan represents a deviating case in that context, and the division into three political

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<sup>9</sup> In 2011 the numbering changed to Chapter 15, Article 16, still in the Swedish Instrument of Government [*regeringsformen*].

<sup>10</sup> Interview Civil Servant, Parliament, 2014.

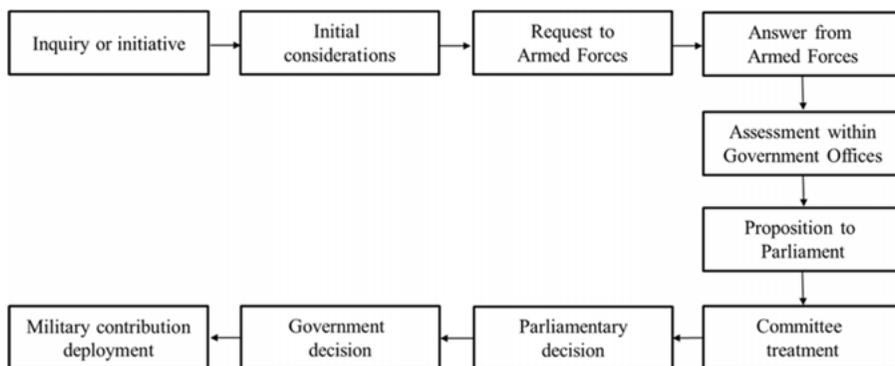
phases. In the next part of this chapter I will turn to the procedure for collecting the rich empirics necessary to conduct the study.

## Tracing the policy process of consensus construction

An important contribution of this dissertation, important in itself and essential to the overall purpose of exploring consensus construction, is to provide an in-depth understanding of the how decision-making processes on military contributions to peace support operations unfolds. This is accomplished by a reconstruction of the process identifying not only the relevant actors and decision-points but also how they experience the dynamics of the process. This lays the groundwork for understanding actors' reasoning, intentions and how they engage in the process of constructing a consensus through the framing of policy. Process-tracing is, however, a work intensive method which takes a long time to realize properly. As further elaborated below, there are certain important decisions along the way for the researcher to be aware of. For example the decision to stop collecting additional empirics or to end the tracing of the process further back in time (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, pp. 28-29). Failure to be aware of this balancing act between workload and the utility of additional evidence risks setting the doctoral researcher, much like Alice, off tumbling down a rabbit hole.

The process-tracing that I employ in this research to accomplish the in-depth account of the development of consensus construction through the framing of policy has two important aspects. The first is an historical, or sequential, aspect of process-tracing which is not more complicated than a research approach which traces the unfolding events of a process, i.e. reconstructing how we got from point A to point B (Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2017; George & Bennett, 2005). However, while this sounds commonsensical there is a chance of equifinality in a process, i.e. multiple paths leading to similar outcomes (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 23; George & Bennett, 2005, p. 215). I will in the following sections discuss certain research strategies that are applied in order to manage this problem. Still, it is important not to underestimate this inherent problem of process-tracing.

Despite being an “ideal linear decision making process” when investigating a policy process it is very convenient to start with the formal decision-making process and work from there, see figure 1 below (Johnsson, 2017, p. 252). A formal decision by the government is preceded by a parliamentary decision since the Parliament holds the constitutional power in Sweden to decide on any contributions with military force internationally. The parliamentary process starts when the government sends a proposition to the Parliament which is considered the final phase of formal consultations between different ministries within the Government Offices and the agency in charge of the instrument, the Swedish Armed Forces.



*Figure 1.* The formal decision-making process.

This process has several natural breaking points and leaves a paper trail in the communication between ministries, embassies and agencies through requests, referrals and instructions. Theoretically, according to my approach, a consensus is forged in the interaction between parties in the parliament since I have designated the chamber as the “authoritative decision-unit” (Hagan et al., 1987; Hermann, 2001). However, my process-tracing method is not restricted to only include the formal parliamentary or governmental process. While the formal power emanates from parties’ strength in the chamber it can be exercised through informal channels and consultations, as well.

Therefore, as an additional layer to this process, and difficult to illustrate, lies in the informal aspects of the policy process. The formal process is very much controlled by the government in each step, since they control the ministries. There are nevertheless informal consultations with the opposition, as well as many informal meetings between representatives of both government and opposition. These range from invitations to discuss matters at the ministry and deliberations in conjunction to the Defence Commission to casual conversations in coffee shops or the hallways of Parliament. Part of these are the consultations and debates taking place within the political parties as well. Through previous research, we know that many important historical foreign policy considerations for Sweden as a state have taken place within the confines of the Social Democratic Party, due to their historic continuance in government.

Therefore, given this discussion, certain actors are identified beforehand as important to the process. These actors include, but are not limited to, the chairs of the committees for defense and foreign affairs, the parties’ representatives in these committees, spokespersons, as well as ministers, civil servants, and military officers. However, as I will elaborate below, the method is open to identifying individuals along the way that have played a noteworthy role in the process, snowballing my way through the interviews.

Secondly, the analysis also needs to incorporate an interpretative element of process-tracing as well to capture the meaning “given within a particular context” (Guzzini, 2012, p. 255). Building on the reconstruction of the process this interpretative element takes into account the discursive aspects of the process when policy is advocated and opposed. This is necessary in order to capture the meaning that actors bestow upon consensus, especially when it comes to understanding how they interpret consensus, and use it in their framing of policy and how this evolves over time. This interpretative element is a critical part of the research design and a primary reason why an in-depth study is necessary in order to explore the construction of consensus through framing. Without immersing into the details of a case, it is difficult to gain knowledge of how certain events, actions and process are understood within a specific context. Here it is necessary to strike a balance, between what Pouliot describes as being “both alien *and* native to the interpreter’s own system of meanings”, in order to take advantage of my own prior knowledge and still be opened to identifying and comprehending the meaning within that context (Pouliot, 2015, p. 244). In the following sections I will elaborate on how the interpretative element enters into the process-tracing analysis.

Based on these two aspects I make use of an inclusive definition of process-tracing, following Bengtsson and Ruonavaara, as a research process “that looks at how various social and political outcomes are produced by events that results from actors’ actions and interactions and various contextual factors” (Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2017, p. 46). This broad understanding of process-tracing fits well with the premise of this dissertation, not to set out to explain why Sweden contributed militarily to Afghanistan but to explain how it was possible. That is, how it was possible for advocates to succeed in bridging with opponents and constructing political legitimacy through a domestic consensus. Since the nature of these decisions under study is almost self-evident once they have reached the parliament, a reconstructive and interpretative process-tracing is an appropriate tool to unravel the process in which a decision emerges and understanding how certain meanings are established and the terms of the debate are set (Holland, 2013).

In this study I utilize process-tracing to sort information, structure decision-making points, identify important actors, and ascertain political divisions. Process-tracing is a qualitative methodological tool to unravel how a decision-making process evolved by “soaking and poking” the way backwards (Fenno, 1978). This enabled me as a researcher to engage meticulously with my empirics to “capture the serendipitous, unexpected reality of the social world we inhabit and study” (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 267). Given the dual purpose of both providing a detail account of the process and capture how a consensus is constructed within this process I find process-tracing a functional tool since it is sensitive to how time passes and how the

politically possible changes through a sequence (Collier, 2011; Krasner, 1999; Mahoney, 2015; Pierson, 2000).

Process-tracing is also important as I do not approach these decisions as single moments in time. I am interested in how a consensus can be forged which implies a sense of process. It involves expanding the analysis from “examining not a single decision, but a constellation of decisions taken with reference to a particular situation” (Hudson, 2014, p. 4). The process is re-structured by linking these smaller decision occasions together in a cohesive process. The purpose with identifying decision occasions, as Nohrstedt explains, is to highlight “the most critical phases” of a process “from the perceived necessity to response as seen from the actors’ points of view” (Nohrstedt, 2001, p. 18). He accentuates that this is necessary as decision-makers themselves rarely occupy a holistic point of view but perceive processes as “a chain of urgent and often interrelated decision-making problems.” The perspective of the decision-maker is therefore crucial for the analysis.

The way that actors perceive the policy under treatment, their contextual surroundings and especially “the foreign policy line” are central in order to understand their conduct. Otherwise we risk “interpreting the past through the eyes of the present” placing too much of an emphasis on structural factors while reducing agency (Zelikow & Rice, 1995, p. 5). The actor-centric focus of this study and the elusive conceptual nature of consensus (as I outlined in chapter two and three) give rise to a need to understand the meaning that actors bestows upon consensus. Therefore it becomes vital to include an interpretative element into the process-tracing (Guzzini, 2012; Norman, 2015). It is not simply to place the sequence of the events in a correct order but also to understand from the actors’ point of view how these were interpreted in order to understand the actions taken.

Consequently, when I present the results of the process-tracing in the empirical chapters the structure will follow a combined chronological and thematic approach. While I would like to follow a strict chronological review, a thematic elucidation does at times best serve the purpose to illustrate important aspects of the process and how the actors experienced it. The sensitivity to history is even more central in this kind of analysis since framings need to fit into the discursive context rather than being entirely “new” products on their own (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018, p. 6). Furthermore, building on the works of Holland (2013), for a foreign policy to materialize and become politically possible it is necessary not only that decision-makers can conceive it in the first place and that it resonates domestically; it also has to co-opt or appease political opposition and silence other policy alternatives.

## Process-tracing as an intrinsic part of the research design

Bennett and Checkel compare the work of a researcher conducting process-tracing with that of a homicide detective for it “often involves analyzing events backward through time from the outcome of interest to potential antecedent causes, much as a homicide detective might start by trying to piece together the last hours or days in the life of a victim” (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 18). This approach has guided me through the research as it involves several of the best practices for process-tracing that Bennett and Checkel advances, such as “cast the net widely” and be “equally tough on the alternative explanations”, “consider potential biases”, “be relentless in gathering diverse and relevant evidence”, and make justifiable decisions on when to start/stop the process tracing (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, pp. 23-31).

I initiated this study with a rather vaguely formulated empirical research puzzle based on my interest in the reasoning of actors in decision-making on Swedish military peace support operations. Process-tracing is an excellent way to initiate a research process around either an empirical puzzle or a theoretical problem, collect a vast plethora of material and go back and forth between the empirical material and theoretical constructs and continuously shaping the data collection/generating process. This going back and forth between theory and empirics has resulted in an extension of the empirical scope of the research as well as in theoretical insights with the entailed adjustment of the theoretical framework (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008, p. 55; Maxwell, 2013; Yanow, 1999, p. 85). In this dissertation has this been expressed in three ways. First, the research question and the research puzzle have been refined after engaging with the empirical material. My ambition has been to understand, through interviews, how politically salient problems surfaced in the process from the perspective of the decision-makers. Gradually during the process I gained knowledge which I incorporated in the research design and adjusted my approach accordingly.

Secondly, I have used interviews and collected documents to expand the empirical search for alternative explanations and identifying new empirical venues to explore. This led to a more precise focus on the pressing political matters from the decision-makers point of view and brought me closer to the purpose of this dissertation, i.e. to explore how a political consensus is constructed by the participants in the policy process.

This leads to the third step. Theoretical concepts such as frames, consensus and “the foreign policy line” exist both as first-order constructs (the concepts under study empirically in the analysis) but also as second-order constructs (concepts as the analytical tools to make sense of the empirics). In this study, where the reasoning and perspective of the actors is in the center of the analysis, the first-order constructions (how the actors themselves give meaning to them) must be related to the second-order constructs of the researcher (explicated from theory and previous experiences). Ljungkvist clari-

fies that this entails that “researchers must comprehend evidence through their own conceptions, while simultaneously being able to reconstruct the perspectives of the agents under study” (Ljungkvist, 2014, p. 93). I have gone back and forth between theory and empirics in the analysis in order to align my theoretical constructs with the empirics.

For example, the five alignment strategies that I presented as part of my analytical framework in chapter three are analytical second-order constructs, extracted from theory, which I use to give guidance and focus to the study. These strategies are also first-order constructs on the level of the individual decision-maker, with the purpose of aligning the frame of the military contribution to Afghanistan with the master frame of Swedish foreign policy. The relation between these second- and first-order constructs is essential in this research process as “theory functions as a guide to empirical exploration and sensitizes the analyst to the processes, phenomena or events under study, and theory thus helps to select what aspects of a richly complex empirical reality to focus on” (Ljungkvist, 2014, p. 93).

How can I then determine that the first-order construct correspond to the second-order constructs that I use to analyze the empirics, and are not imposed by me as a researcher? I have used two ways to counter this problem. The first concerns a diverse approach in gathering material and using different methods, that is being “relentless in gathering diverse and relevant evidence” in Bennett and Checkel’s terms (2015, p. 27). This provides the analysis with a rich empirical material which allows for identifying important nuances and details in different empirical material. The second solution is the overall approach to this dissertation to go back and forth between theory and empirics continuously adjusting theoretical concepts to better reflect empirical constructs, which process-tracing is particularly suited for. This approach increases the validity of the operationalization of the theoretical concepts to conform to the first-order constructs.

Previous research on framing tends to place a primary focus on the external context. Because actors with their perceptions and reasoning, are the focus of this dissertation I contend that they should be placed in the center of data-collection (Björnehed, 2012, p. 64; Kvale, 1997, p. 9). I therefore approach the empirical material with the purpose “to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view and to unfold the meaning of their lived world” (Kvale, 2006). The analysis is restricted in this sense since the focus is placed on the actors’ perception of the context and any conclusions and empirical generalizations from this study should therefore be made with caution.

Interviews therefore form a key aspect of this study, both in understanding the development of the process of these decisions and generating empirical material for the analysis but also capturing the unique perspective of the decision-makers which is almost only available by talking to them. I decided

early in the research process to opt for interviewing as a method, not only to penetrate the case in-depth and collect rich and qualitative data for the analysis but also because it was suitable to generate more precise research questions and discover the politically sensitive issues through the eyes of the actors.

So beyond being a central tool for generating empirical material, interviewing has also been an integral part of the research design in going back and forth between interviews and theory and learning from my respondents. The research process is in this respect more iterative than linear as further analysis has resulted in revisions of the design, collecting of more data and refinement of the analytical questions (Maxwell, 2013; Yanow, 1999, pp. 84-85). As Maxwell maintains: “the different parts of a design form an integrated and interacting whole, with each component closely tied to several others, rather than being linked in a linear or cyclic sequence” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 4). My reliance on interviews is intimately linked to the overall framework of process-tracing, as these interviews have also been a central step in snow-balling my way through a list of respondents as well as expanding the scope of the study as I discover new knowledge about the process through my respondents.

## A practitioner’s approach to research

Professional experience risks colliding with research integrity as experiences, knowledge and the outlook of a potential future career can be in the balance in the research project. There are three important experiences that are necessary to disclose in this discussion. First, during my undergraduate studies at Uppsala University I conducted a six-month internship at the Mission of Sweden to NATO. During this time I gained a unique view from the inside and worked substantially with Swedish peace support operations, predominantly at this time the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan. Second, since 2004 I have had an employment with the Swedish Armed Forces as an officer. I have served one tour abroad on a peace support operation in 2008 to Chad and the Central African Republic and worked at the Swedish Joint Forces Command in Stockholm. I entered graduate school funded by the Ministry of Defence as part of a special designated program for officers seeking a doctoral degree. Third, during my graduate studies I received a reputable scholarship to serve in the Swedish Parliament from August 2015 to July 2016.

This professional experience has contributed enormously to this research project both in accessing empirics as well as in the overall research design. I would not have been able to go back and forth in the extent I did between design, theory and empirics without the professional foreknowledge I had of the process (Yanow, 1999, p. 85). I consider these experiences a tremendous advantage but they bear consequences as well that are necessary to reflect

upon. I had previous knowledge on where to begin, where to look, and what to expect. At the start of my research project I had an idea about which actors were the most important in the process. Based on reading of literature on qualitative interviews and my firsthand knowledge I could construct an interview strategy based on a snow-balling method in which I already had identified a couple of important actors beforehand and I could complement and revise this strategy as I conducted the interviews.

As an intern at the Mission to NATO, albeit to a very small extent but still important to disclose, I was the originator of some of the material that I came about during my archival studies. Perhaps even more important, I monitored firsthand some of the salient discussions of that time from a bureaucratic perspective. It is therefore important that I make clear that in this dissertation I do not include any information where I am the originator of that information. To put more simply, I am not the empirics. However, this experience has helped me in more ways than one. In addition to the aforementioned construction of the research design I could also use my knowledge and experience on military contributions and especially the ISAF operation to build rapport with my respondents during the interviews I conducted. This proved also a central factor to gain access to interviews. Here also my background as an officer and veteran of international deployment has contributed to this posture, in particular in my interviews of military officers but not exclusively. But the downside of access and shared understanding comes with the ethical difficulties of researching one's own organization. Drake and Heath raises this problem:

Working and researching in the same establishment gives practitioner doctoral researchers potentially easy access to their participants and both the researcher and the researched must live with this. There are inevitably also potential tensions through the researcher's relations with colleagues. Thus difficulties may arise through potential exploitation of close personal and professional relationships, and authority over junior staff and/or students (Drake & Heath, 2010, p. 53).

So while knowledge about the organization and collegial connections can provide access to people and to understanding of empirics it can also be potentially harmful in that it dampens the objectivity of research and could potentially influence research integrity. Similarly to creating multiple identities, both as a professional and a researcher, it is necessary to complement these with "multiple integrities" (Drake & Heath, 2010, p. 31).

Despite being funded by the Ministry of Defence and conducting my doctoral studies as part of my professional career within the Armed Forces I have not experienced that my research integrity has been jeopardized as a result of this. I have had full discretion in formulating my research problem and the scope of my research and while the grant was abundant in covering all expenses I have not been influenced to pursue a particular track.

It was invaluable to spend time in the Parliament and receive firsthand experience of how the political discussions took place behind closed doors when they treated military operations in the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. How interviews and written material are interpreted may depend on previous experiences (Mosley, 2013). The time at the Parliament surely shaped my understanding of the political process, the role of the Parliament, and how official publications are to be read in order to weed out the irrelevant formulations and identify the political divisions. At the time of the interview I had not had any previous working relationship with any of my respondents. After conducting the interview I worked professionally for some of them during my time in the Parliament.

All these experiences have obviously had an influence but I worked consciously not to let this have a negative impact on the research process. Drake and Heath discuss the unique situation in which “doctoral teaching and learning, ethical issues, relationships with colleagues, loyalty, duty and integrity place the practitioner in a situation that may not methodologically align with conventional approaches” (Drake & Heath, 2010, p. 3). The two most challenging dilemmas for me are both related to me returning to a position somewhere within the policy process of which I study after I complete my doctoral studies. The first regards the potential exploitation of individuals who could end up as colleagues or future superiors. The second is a lot harder to account for but there is of course a possibility that my own status as a professional could influence the choices I make if they could reflect on my future career. I am not aware of any such trade-offs where this would be seen as something negative in the research process.

Later in this chapter I will account for how I have dealt with anonymity and potential harm for the individual. Perhaps, I have been overly restrictive in using potential classified information or excessively restrictive in not interviewing individuals with whom I have a personal relationship. However, I have benefited by gaining knowledge through numerous casual conversations and in-passing clarifications with individuals working with Afghanistan or other processes on military contributions to peace support operations. These are not included in the empirical material but I have gained extensive information that has guided my process-tracing or helped me ask the right questions during interviews.

This prior knowledge from my professional experience is a significant component of my research design. Without it I would not have been able to conduct a process-tracing based on interviews where I go back and forward between theory and empirics.

### Assessing empirical evidence and deciding when to stop?

The primary objective of the process-tracing is to gather information to penetrate and dissect, to thereafter reconstruct the decision-making process

that eventually led to one of the three identified parliamentary decisions. I spent a considerable amount of time on gathering a large number of diverse empirics to be able to reconstruct the chain of events and to explore how a consensus could be forged. There is an important distinction to be made at this point between the two different kinds of process-tracing that I employ in this analysis and how they address slightly different elements of the analysis.

When it comes to the reconstruction of the policy process I have used triangulation as much as I could to verify the evidence (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Bennett & Checkel, 2015; George & Bennett, 2005). I have tried to cross-reference with different independent sources, preferably using a different methodology. What I have learned in an interview I have tried to validate in another interview, with archival material, or in contemporary newspaper articles. There is one important distinction to be made here and that is concerning evidence on actors' perceptions and their reasoning. When the purpose is to identify the interpretation or the reasoning it is more difficult to infer from other evidentiary sources. This is slightly different from regular triangulation since it is difficult, if not impossible, to find matching material for the perspectives of the actors.

Since I assume that an individual's perception does not in any way stand in contrast to "hard facts" (Lilleker, 2003) I view the method of triangulation and the use of a diverse material differently in relation to the two kinds of process-tracing. It holds tremendous value for the more traditional process-tracing for cross-referencing and strengthening the validity of the research. However for the interpretative analysis triangulation cannot be used primarily to "evaluate interview data in light of other empirical material" (Mosley, 2013, pp. 22-23). The interpretations that I make as a researcher are not seen as "right or wrong but rather as different perspectives on the subject matter" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 38). Instead I place the emphasis on evaluating the uniqueness and certainty of evidence (Bennett & Checkel, 2015; Collier, 2011) instead of the duplication in other sources or material.

After settling on a decision from where to begin the process-tracing there are two major decisions that any researcher conducting process-tracing must face at one point. The first is to decide when the process started, i.e. to stop going backwards in time. Sometimes the starting point of the process can be traced to a decision, event or some other activity that is limited in time and place. Other times it can be more diffused, especially if a decision emerged over a long period of time. The important thing to bear in mind is that the analysis has to start somewhere. Most of the time this is a delicate decision based on the researcher's knowledge of the process. In the first empirical chapter I consider the request from the British Defence Attaché in Stockholm as the instigation of the process that led to the military contribution with Special Forces. However, in my analysis I venture still further back in time for contextualization and to explore the grounds for political conflict. In the second empirical chapter, the expansion to take over a provincial recon-

struction team in 2006, the process is triggered by a direct request from the Americans in 2003 to consider lead nation responsibility. In the final empirical chapter this kind of significant trigger is not as clear. Over the years following the PRT takeover the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated, the US involvement grew bigger, and the military contribution was increasingly questioned, both domestically and internationally. The tipping point for the preservation of the domestic foreign policy consensus lay within the Social Democratic Party. Therefore I consider the Party's congress in 2009 as the beginning of the end even though I find it necessary to draw on evidence throughout the period 2006-2009 in my analysis.

The second difficult decision is to decide to terminate the search for empirics, or more accurately phrased: to be satisfied with the empirics that are collected (Klocek, 2020). Good studies using process-tracing take a very long time to realize, something that is not always evident in subsequent presentations in books or doctoral dissertations. But there comes a time when a decision has to be made that the empirical material collected is enough. Bennett and Checkel recommend stopping when repetition occurs:

Yet in deciding when to stop, there is no escaping the de facto trade-off between the risk of stopping too soon and making poor inferences, and the risk of stopping too late and wasting time, effort, and resources on evidence that proves to have no effect on one's estimates on the verisimilitude of alternative explanations (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 28).

Bennett and Checkel could elaborate more on this as most researchers doing process-tracing, I presume, use some sort of snowballing technique when searching for respondents or documents in different archives. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow issue a warning that "snowballing risks enmeshing the researcher in the network of the initial participant interviewed... leading to or reinforcing the silencing of other voices" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 87).<sup>11</sup> This highlights the importance of prior knowledge (Yanow, 1999, p. 85) and conducting a process-tracing based on a plurality of methods (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). This is related to the issue of when is absence of evidence to be interpreted as evidence of absence (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 19). It is important to ask oneself if the interviews I did not manage to

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<sup>11</sup> For example, in my interviews I have never talked to any members of the Christian Democrats. In my own experience neither this party, nor any member of it, has been a player in foreign policy or in decisions on military peace support operations. It was, however, important that I did not let my preconceived notions be reinforced in the research process. One way would obviously have been to talk to a member of that party. But at the same time, as my research progressed, never in all of my 55 interviews is the Christian Democrats mentioned as a player, or even a potential player. The only time they surfaced during this process, other than in parliamentary debates, was in Ångström and Noreen's (2015) research when they refer to one statement of a Christian Democrat in the parliament as a call for deployment. They never appeared in my interviews or in my archival studies and on this basis I could confidently dismiss this alternative.

schedule, or the documents that I did not track down could possibly generate some information that could question or overturn my analysis. What would that evidence be, could I find it somewhere else, and what difference would that piece of evidence make? How confident am I that this information does not exist? Constantly asking myself these questions, I dealt with the termination of data-collection, the absence of evidence and alternative explanations simultaneously, and could balance these against each other.

One of the main advantages with process-tracing is the ability to ‘soak and poke’ the empirical material “through a combination of induction and deduction” (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 17). This can only be achieved “by placing the researcher in close proximity” to the empirics, which in turn is dependent on a collection of diverse empirical material. In a way I believe that once a process-study is initiated it will never be finished. There is always more evidence that could be collected and analyzed. I simply reached a point when I had to decide to proceed with the empirics that I had in order to finalize my dissertation.

## Methods and material

The primary material for this study has been based on interviews. This has been central to fully understand and document the actors’ perspective in these processes when political support is mobilized in a consensus seeking culture. In addition to interviews I have tried to follow the call from Bennett and Checkel to be “diverse and relentless” in the data-collection in order to build an in-depth understanding of this decision-making process and how a political consensus is constructed by the participants in the process.

Abundant material stemming from different sources is used not only to corroborate information extracted through my interviews but additively as well by providing new and different perspectives and building a more complete and rich in-depth description of the process (Davies, 2001, p. 75). Gathering and generating data to build an in-depth account for an interpretative approach is best accomplished through a diverse set of sources, such as interviews, participatory experience and archival studies (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015, p. 147ff). In the following sections I will elaborate on some methodological issues concerning first gathering and generating data through interviews. I will thereafter turn the focus over to reading and archival research.

### Interview methodology

I decided early on to conduct interviews in order to better map-out the decision-making process and identify for example not only actors but the relevant actors for the process. This would have been extremely challenging

without talking to participants with knowledge about the process. In addition, this is the key material for the framing analysis in order to capture their unique perspective, determine what the relevant aspects of the policy frame are, and through that identify the relevant political divisions, even if they are suppressed and not revealed in any other empirical material. Since interviews have been a vital element of my research design, I will elaborate on the methodological aspect of how I approach interviewing.

Throughout the project I have completed 55 in-depth interviews between the years 2013 and 2020 with politicians, civil servants, and military officers from all levels of the policy process ranging from ministers to desk-officers. To group them by their primary<sup>12</sup> organizational affiliation I have interviewed 11 from the Armed Forces, 13 in the Ministry of Defence, 13 in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and 10 situated in the Parliament. Among the interviewees are several ambassadors, three Chiefs of Defence, 27 civil servants and desk officers (12 of whom are military officers), three ministers,<sup>13</sup> nine political advisors, and 11 elected politicians. The interviews varied in length between 23 and 104 minutes, averaging about 65 minutes. About 50% of all interviews, or 27 of 55, were conducted during 2014.<sup>14</sup> When interviewing elites I found it important to be flexible to adapt to their, most often, hectic schedule (Harvey, 2010). I also benefited from it when some interviews expanded and lasted several hours. Also, it is important not to underestimate the value of the information I received on the way out of the door, or in the hallway walking to the elevator (Peabody et al., 1990).

Some researchers divide their interviewees into different categories depending on the purpose of the interview, for example respondents and informants (Björnehed, 2012). I have opted not to do so in this project since I have not interviewed any individuals who would strictly by definition be an informant only. There is no added value for this research project to use this distinction. Every interviewee has played a role in the process at some point. I therefore do not distinguish between informants and respondents as they all contribute to both the process study as well as the framing analysis. As a consequence, I use the terms respondent and interviewee synonymously.

An important task for my research is to understand how individuals within these policy processes reasoned and how they perceived of a particular situation. It was important to adopt a strategy that would not impose my preconceived notions upon the respondents but instead invite them to describe in their words without my interference. Interviews provide a subjective account of the process under study thus functioning as “an insight into

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<sup>12</sup> Very few of my respondents had the same position today as they did during the time of interest for this study. A majority served on different positions throughout the ISAF engagement.

<sup>13</sup> Five individuals have served as ministers in different governments but either in a position or in a time-period beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>14</sup> 5 (2013), 27 (2014), 7 (2015), 5 (2016), 4 (2017), 6 (2018) and 1 (2020).

the mind-set of the actor/s who have played a role in shaping the society in which we live and an interviewee's subjective analysis of a particular episode or situation" (Richards, 1996, p. 200). I built my interviewing method around Rubin and Rubin's concept of "responsive interviewing" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 7). It is a flexible framework for the interview situation that aims to capture "context and richness" through an exchange between two conversational partners where the two personalities will have an impact on the questioning.

I found this flexibility productive throughout all stages of my research process. In the early stages, when I was "soaking and poking" I could pursue different avenues when the moment presented itself. Later on, as my research project progressed, it allowed me to tailor my interviewing style to accommodate each respondent. This proved important when interviewing elites as I will discuss later. This qualitative approach to interviews is also important since a single interview with a pivotal figure in the decision-making process can provide key evidence to a particular interpretation. Through my interviews it was also possible to learn about certain things impossible to find in any material elsewhere (Davies, 2001; Mikecz, 2012; Richards, 1996).

### **Ethical responsibilities in interviewing research**

There is an ethical responsibility in interviewing that goes beyond the traditional principles of good research practice. As interviewing concerns interaction with human objects, caution must be taken so that the information that they disclose during the interview does not potentially damage them. The empirical material that I base my research on did not exist before I interfered and constructed it through my interviews.

One such potential area is the recording of the interview and the post-interview verbatim transcription. I opted to record the interviews and I will elaborate later on in this chapter for how I reasoned. For now I would like to reflect on the ethical risk of contributing to my respondents disclosing secret information. In conducting interviews in the economic sector, with Chief Executive Officers, Vice-Presidents, and Senior Partners, Harvey decided not to use a recording device due to concern with "disclosing confidential company information" (Harvey, 2011, p. 436). This was an obvious issue for me as well, dealing with foreign affairs and military operations, since some of the empirics that were discussed could potentially concern classified information according to Swedish law.<sup>15</sup>

I have afterwards, during the processing of the empirical material, been aware during my analysis of whether any information that appears could be

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<sup>15</sup> The Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act makes information concerning Sweden's relations with a foreign state or an international organization (Chapter 15 §1) and national security (Chapter 15 §2) confidential.

classified as secret. In cases where I have not been certain I have weighted the necessity to include the information against potential harm against primarily national security and secondly the individual disclosing the information. In all instances I have chosen to exclude the information since in no case has it been crucial or essential information for the purposes of this dissertation.<sup>16</sup>

Another way for me to honor the trust that the respondents showed me, and protect them from future ramifications, was to give my respondents anonymity (Shirazyan, 2017). Even though I did get approval from almost all of my respondents to use them by name in the dissertation I decided not to do so for two reasons.<sup>17</sup> First of all, in order to protect the confidentiality of those not opting for full disclosure, it would have been an enormous task if I could not hide them in the references. When it has been of importance who exactly displayed this point of view I have chosen to reference this in the text. Otherwise I have constructed broad categories to be able to construct some sense of anonymity.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, I have throughout the research process been sensitive to the things that have been shared with me during these interviews, as I have indicated above regarding the classification of the information in the interview. There is an additional difficult ethical aspect to this concerning sensitive political information that potentially does not reflect well on the respondent or their affiliating organization (Davies, 2001; Morris, 2009; Woliver, 2002). Anonymity solves this problem while at same time reduces the transparency of the research. I still maintain that this tradeoff is necessary in order to preserve an ethically sound ground for the dissertation as a whole.

### **Dealing with human beings**

There is a scholarly critique against using interviews that stems from the possibility that the respondents – either deliberately or inadvertently – misrepresent their accounts, roles, or actions in the interview (Mosley, 2013). I consider this a fair critique that scholars pursuing elite interviews take seriously (Lilleker, 2003; Mosley, 2013), however I believe that the dangers of this are vastly exaggerated. For example, King, Keohane and Verba dismiss

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<sup>16</sup> In addition to the trust given to me as a researcher to manage the transcription with care in several of my interviews respondents made claims “off the record” which indicates a trust in me as a researcher given that I recorded the interview.

<sup>17</sup> I also offered to send a full transcription of the interview to them to give them the option to read in advance. This was also a way for me to keep in contact and enclose a couple of questions that arose during my analysis of the interview (Richards, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Related to this issue is whether to mention other respondents already interviewed in order to add credence to my work, increase my knowledgeability vis-à-vis the respondent, and use former interviewees to formulate a position in a question. There are those who propose it (Richards, 1996) and those who argue against it (Leech, 2002). In some cases I did in fact drop some names, especially when I was trying to set up the interview. For example, in my letter to former Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors I casually mentioned that I had interviewed both his predecessor and as well as his successor (also from the same party as him).

all attempts to ask for other things than “facts” in interviews due to the “justifications, embellishments, lies, or selective memories” of the respondents (King et al., 1994, p. 112n). This presumption that respondents are disingenuous has led many researchers to “assume that they are going to be lied to” (Morris, 2009, p. 211).

Berry rephrases this critique in an interesting fashion when he recommends interviewers to “always keep in mind that it is not the obligation of a subject to be objective and to tell us the truth” (Berry, 2002, p. 680). The respondents will most definitely exaggerate their participation and highlight some things while neglecting others (Berry, 2002; Lilleker, 2003; Morris, 2009; Richards, 1996). However, it is my experience, and here I agree with Rathbun, that “dishonesty is not the norm” (Rathbun, 2008, p. 694). Elite interviewees might even welcome the opportunity to talk to scholars in order to explain their actions from their point of view and place it in context (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In addressing this issue from the perspective of the decision-makers it is far more likely that they will “commit sins of omission than commission, avoiding deliberately falsehoods and attempting to steer the conversations to other aspects of the subject” (Rathbun, 2008, p. 694). Adhering to this advice I have been more restricted methodologically by what my respondents have not said. I am interested in identifying the strategies that actor’s pursue in order to build political support for military operations. Central to this, as an example, is finding out how they perceive the political division, which in my approach is far more relevant than “the factual accuracy of those perceptions” (Davies, 2001).

In building trust and rapport with the interviewee I assume that I will be able to be seen “as a person who can be trusted to report fairly what [I] hear and as someone informed enough to ask interesting questions” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 75). Building rapport with my respondents, and actually trusting them to tell me their point of view, is not to equate my approach with a naivety on my behalf. I still estimated the validity of the statements against other empirical sources when appropriate and made a personal judgement on the accuracy of their information (Berry, 2002; Rathbun, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For more factual information disclosed in the interviews it was easier to triangulate with other interviews or empirical sources.

When it comes to the recollection of a respondent’s memory I tried to connect to other significant contemporary events, such as the 2004 Boxing Day disaster or 9/11 in order to give them an anchor to relate to. Davies encountered similar difficulties when interviewing older respondents where the interview turned out to be less of a “guided conversations” and more of a “guided reminiscence” (Davies, 2001). Richards pointed out that there is a balance between the distance from the event, especially if it is a sensitive political subject, and the willingness of interviewees to talk about it openly

(Richards, 1996, p. 200). The case of Afghanistan turned out to represent a rather good tradeoff between openness to talk about it and still remaining in the memory.

### **The art and craft of interviewing**

There is a balance to be struck between the craft and the art of interviewing (Peabody et al., 1990, p. 451). The mechanics can be taught but interviewing is ultimately an art that is best learned through experience. The responsive interviewing model places a lot of weight on the art of interviewing and it was therefore necessary to adopt a plan to tone my skills as an interviewer. In the beginning of the process I drew three circles inside each other and in the inner circle I placed actors of whom I directly could identify as important to the policy process. In the outer circle I wrote down actors, or mostly organizational and political positions, of lesser importance and worked my way to the perimeter circle where knowledgeable persons with a priori assumption of lesser influence would be placed. When I conducted my interviews I simply worked my way from the outside in, with an occasional visit to the inner circles due to scheduling or opportunities that arose, constantly updating this chart and moving people around and filling vacant positions with names. All this was according to the information I accumulated through my interviews.

This was not only a strategy to identify potential respondents and snowballing my way forward (Davies, 2001, p. 76; Karlén, 2017). It was also an analytical moment as I asked the respondent's view on who were the important actors with the purpose of mapping the process. Furthermore, this had an objective to acquire the art of interviewing as well as refining and clarifying questions. Harvey argues for the necessity to conduct pilot research for it is "beneficial to all elements of the research design" (Harvey, 2010). While there is no clear guidance on pilot studies using interviews my ranking of the respondents into different categories proved to be a productive strategy (Harvey, 2010; Richards, 1996). This way I saved the most important to last and pursued these interviews as I grew comfortable in my skills as an interviewer and increased my knowledge of the area.

In my approach interviews are not mere data collection. The interviews are also seen as a primary means to evolve and adapt the research design depending on the perspectives that emerge from the respondents' answers. This interaction is only possible through interviews since they offer the opportunity of shaping the data-collection through conversation.

The researcher's ability to hear what is said and change direction to catch a wisp of insight, track down a new theme, or refocus the broader questions is a core strength of the responsive interviewing model (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 39).

However, this flexibility and reliance on the skills of the interviewer also poses a challenging methodological issue. Different interviewers will probably interpret answers differently and therefore not probe in the same way and ask different follow-up questions (Berry, 2002). It is necessary to understand, however, that “eliminating the actual influence of the researcher is impossible, and the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence, but to understand it and use it productively” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). In preparation for the interviews the know-how of the craft helped me to build up a bank of follow-up questions and probes that were easily accessed during the interview. Previous literature on interviewing also prepared me for situations that arose during the interviews. Even though I lacked experience as an interviewer I am a natural conversationalist (Berry, 2002) and I have an inherent curiosity towards foreign policy decision-making. Working my way to the inner circle my skills progressed and I learned to follow-up unscripted and by the end I consider myself being proficient in keeping the flow of the conversation comfortably with the use of probes while retaining the semi-structured focus of the research interview (Leech, 2002; Rathbun, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 31). This is important, as Harvey points out, for the best interviewers are those researchers who are able to adjust their style and make the respondent feel as comfortable as possible (Harvey, 2011, p. 434). The conversational style in the interview situations is extremely important for the knowledgeability and positionality of the researcher, especially when interviewing elites.

The literature on elite interviews is divided on the use of a recording-device (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002; Berry, 2002; Harvey, 2011; Mikecz, 2012; Peabody et al., 1990; Richards, 1996). For me it would have been practically impossible to build a conversational relation with the respondent while at the same time taking detailed notes and keeping track of the questions. As Berry (2002) noted: “How can you make a clear-headed decision about your next question when you’re listening, trying to make sense of the answer, and taking notes all at the same time?” (Berry, 2002, p. 682). So the very practical issue of recording all of my interviews increased the validity of this research as it allowed me to be more present in the conversation and I could continually adapt to the conversational style of the respondent during the interview (Berry, 2002; Mikecz, 2012).

Even if I recorded the interviews I still had a notepad with me in which I scribbled down notes while I was listening to the respondent. This was a way for me to send nonverbal probes and literally display my interest to the interviewee during the interview. It was also a way for me to create a silence which “immediately creates tension and the interviewer should be patient to allow the subject to break that uncomfortable silence by speaking again” (Berry, 2002, p. 681; Leech, 2002). Berry’s suggestion that the interviewer should “say nothing and stare expectantly at the subject” (Berry, 2002, p. 681) is not endorsed while conducting elite interviews. Although silence was

productive at times throughout the interviews it was necessary to use it delicately and restrictively (Mikecz, 2012). In my experience, creating a natural silence as I was taking notes was a convincing way to implement it when dealing with professionals and in my experience it created the same results. I also noted an effect when I scrolled through my notes before asking a question. By referring back to an answer they had just given showed them that I was attentive and displayed a genuine interest in learning more about the subject (Leech, 2002).

## Interviewing elites

The methodological literature differentiates between different interviews on the basis of the respondents. Relevant to this research is the concept of elite-interviewing. This immediately sparks questions such as: what is an elite and why are they different? Or perhaps more relevant to this study: what sets elite interviewing apart from non-elite interviewing?

There is no unanimous definition of what constitutes an “elite” but reading about elite interviewing there is a general agreement in the literature that elites are generally hesitant to talk to investigators and reporters, they will offer you a restricted amount of time, and that there is a greater incentive to be informed about the subject matter before entering into the interview (Morris, 2009). I have used an inclusive definition of elites as “those with close proximity to power or policymaking” (Lilleker, 2003, p. 207). This connection to the policy process follows the interest as a political scientist as these individuals are “likely to have had more influence on political outcomes than general members of the public” (Richards, 1996, p. 199).

The individuals that I have interviewed in this study were “key decision-makers and/or had major influence on policy choices and/or were firsthand witness to decision-making” (Mikecz, 2012, p. 485). I have therefore approached all my interviews as an “elite interview” and treated the respondent accordingly, even if several of my respondents would fall outside of a relational, hierarchic, or social definition of elites (Mikecz, 2012). I have not chosen to shape my definition to match my respondents (Harvey, 2011). It is not relevant for the purpose of this study whether the respondent can be categorized as an elite or not. When interviewing people in close proximity to power, or highly educated people, the methods from elite interviewing are productive in order to strengthen the quality of the research process.

In research based on interviews, and elite interviews especially, the knowledgeability and positionality of the researcher are central for the validity of the research (Mikecz, 2012). They form the base for respondents’ willingness to open up and talk. The flexible responsive interviewer approach from Rubin and Rubin (2012) is suitable to accommodate for the different characteristics of an elite interview.

### **Knowledgeability: the informed researcher approach**

The literature almost unanimously advises researchers to “do your homework” and not to ask questions with obvious answers (Berry, 2002; Leech, 2002; Lilleker, 2003; Mikecz, 2012; Peabody et al., 1990; Richards, 1996). I took this advice but at the same time I did not want to impose my preconceived notions of what was important, or how events played out. It was important to display my in-depth knowledge of military operations and foreign policy, to avoid getting a basic lecture and to establish trust with the respondent (Mikecz, 2012), but at the same time I did not want to send an impression of being overly confident, risking the omission of important information that the respondent presumed I already knew. The practical solution was to approach as an “informed researcher” and to appear knowledgeable but not as knowledgeable as the respondent of this particular empirical situation (Björnehed, 2012; Leech, 2002). As Björnehed points out, “Elites may feel you are wasting their time and give you either a basic lecture or try to finish the interview as quickly as possible” (Björnehed, 2012, p. 73).

Björnehed offers two main techniques to appear as an informed researcher. First by using “anonymous namedropping” during the interview. This is something that I used sparingly to establish credibility during my interviews. Second, Björnehed also demonstrated previous knowledge in the way that she phrased questions. This was utilized in my approach as well. In early interviews I did not do this and was given a basic lecture of the political process and the relationship between government and Parliament. In these interviews I struggled to return to more pressing matters since I had to spend a considerable amount of time proceeding with the interview and (re)establishing my own credibility.

The questions, and especially the follow-up questions, were my primary means to signal to them that I am indeed an expert in this topic “who cannot be easily manipulated” (Rathbun, 2008). As an informed researcher it was still necessary not to display all my previous knowledge and to phrase my questions in ways that permitted unexpected answers or discovered unexpected things at the time I designed my research.

### **Positionality: building rapport**

In addition to knowledge, the validity of the questions also increased with experience in conducting interviews. The flexibility of my research design and accounting for the progression of my interviewing skill was one way to tackle this difficult methodological question. As Mosley writes: “early interviews that allow the researcher to discover how to best ask questions – not to get the answers she wants, but to get the right underlying phenomenon – can therefore be very important” (Mosley, 2013, p. 21).

In elite interviewing a skewed power-relation is assumed between the elite respondent and me as an interviewer (Morris, 2009). One thing that

greatly affects this positionality of the researcher is self-presentation (Mikecz, 2012, p. 484). While there are reasons to question the assumption that the balance of power in the interview situation is tilted in favor of the respondent (Kvale, 2006), it nevertheless does not absolve the researcher from any ethical responsibilities. This leads me to an important ethical aspect concerning positionality that is scarcely addressed in the literature but that I would like to highlight. This deals with an inherent duplicity in interview research.

I consider it unethical to assume dishonesty on the respondent's behalf while at the same time building a research approach based on (dishonest?) strategies for how to mask the true intentions of the researcher; by affecting the order of the questions (Leech, 2002; Lilleker, 2003), how informed I should present myself as being (Leech, 2002; Richards, 1996), or how I should behave to get access (Leech, 2002; Lilleker, 2003; Richards, 1996).<sup>19</sup>

As Morris points out: “[these strategies] involve the researcher doing precisely what they criticize elites for doing – being selective in what they present in order to elicit a particular response on others” (Morris, 2009, p. 213). I have used several of these strategies, as is evident in this chapter, but I have been aware of this double standard and approached the interview situation from a conversational point of view (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These strategies are not a “Trojan horse” to penetrate the defensive walls of the respondents. As Kvale points out: “Creating trust through a personal relationship here serves as a means to efficiently obtain a disclosure of the interview subjects’ world” (Kvale, 2006). It is therefore extremely important to reflect over this ethical dimension in the asymmetric relation between me as a researcher and my respondents.

## Archives, official publications and media reports

While interviews are the primary material for my research, I have collected a significant amount of written material to complement the analysis. The vast majority of this material comes from the Government Offices<sup>20</sup> archives. I have also visited the Swedish Labour Movement's Archives and Library as well as the Swedish National Archives and their collection from the Inquiry on Sweden's Engagement in Afghanistan (UD2015:02). Very important

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<sup>19</sup> There are researchers that even go so far as to suggest deeply unethical behavior such as “visiting the respondent unannounced at his desk” to get a “change to speed-read his desk” or inviting respondents to cocktails and “remain sober while your respondent drinks and discloses valuable information” (Becker & Meyers, 1974, pp. 608-609). This kind of behavior is not only deeply unethical; it also violates any decent standard of professionalism on behalf of the researcher.

<sup>20</sup> The Government Offices [*Regeringskansliet*] is the collective name for all ministries and the Prime Minister's Office. The two ministries of interest in this study were Defence and Foreign Affairs.

complementary materials have been contemporary media articles and diplomatic cables released through WikiLeaks.

### Dealing with secrecy and sensitive information in the archives

Previously in this chapter I have written about the easy to follow paper trail of the formal policy process in the communication between ministries, embassies and agencies through requests, referrals and instructions. This material has been central in increasing my knowledgeability and triangulating information from my interviews. If we focus, in figure 2 below, around the written products, presented as boxes, we can identify the official communication between the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces (a + b), the proposition from government to the Parliament (c), and the committee report produced in the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (d). The debate in the chamber is documented in minutes (e) and the following parliamentary (f) and governmental (g) decisions do not add any new information and are simply formal decision points. Parallel to the domestic process is the ongoing communication with international counterparts (h). This is mostly channeled through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs but not exclusively. The Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence have extensive contacts with other nations and international organizations through their channels.

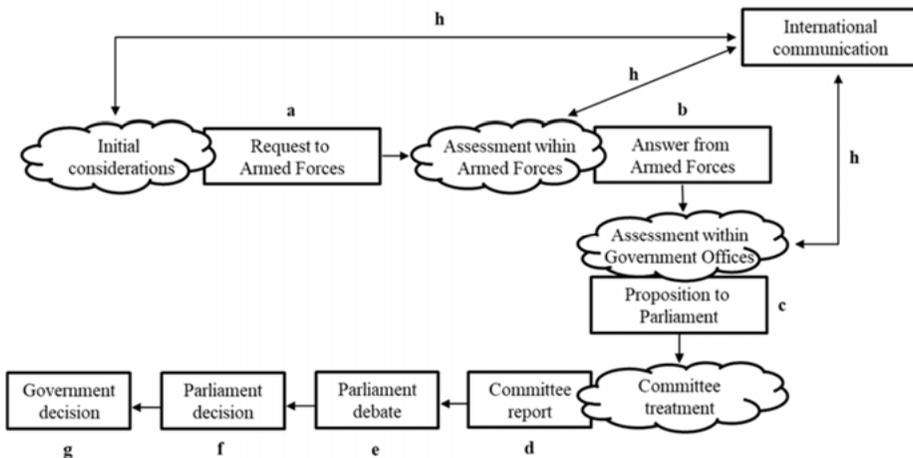


Figure 2. Written products in the formal decision-making process.

There are three points or issues concerning the validity and reliability of these documents that are necessary to discuss. One is access to information as statutory secrecy is standard on issues of foreign relations and military defense, under both of which jurisdictions peace support operations fall. The other is the omission of documentation due to weeding of documents before archiving and an oral decision-making culture. The final one concerns the rectifications when documents are written with the principle of publicity and public access in mind. While these concerns are not devastating for the re-

search design they are important to reflect upon in order to determine the validity of information that one can gain through the archives and how this information can be complemented by interviews.

In a historical analysis of the role of secrecy in Swedish defense Wallberg identified five different mechanisms used to withhold sensitive information from publicity: 1) classification, 2) weeding, 3) not to register, 4) not to document, 5) and to regard public documents as private property (Wallberg, 2005). Many of the documents that I requested from the Government Offices were redacted before I accessed them with reference to either national security or Sweden's relations with a foreign state or an international organization. Some have been classified in their entirety while in most instances there has only been sentences or paragraphs removed. There is an institutional difference between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence when it comes to the administration of this redaction process. This can partly be explained by the different classifications in national defense versus foreign relations. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has to a far greater extent classified entire documents while the Ministry of Defence on the other hand has been more willing to present parts of documents. I have only treated the information that I have gained access to and not tried to "read over" the gaps in the documents (see for example Agrell, 2013, p.9). There is most probably a lot of interesting information in those classified sections but I do not consider the unavailability to this information a substantial setback to the validity of this project. Yes, more information would always strengthen the reconstruction of the policy process with a more detailed account. However, together with interviews, I am confident that I have been able to identify the important aspects of the process. The documents that I collected through the archival research, circa 400, have had the primary function of mapping out the process and identify the different alternatives in the process and how the final decision was reached.

In addition to secrecy being a problem, there is also the issue of rectification or self-justification in the production of documents. Sweden profiles itself internationally as an open society, primarily based on the principle of publicity and public access [*offentlighetsprincipen*] which states that the public has the possibility to access to all public documents not covered by exceptions in the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (Marklund, 2014). National security and foreign relations are two of these exemptions. There is however a recognized paradox with this openness as observed by the Auditor General (and later Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services) Inga-Britt Ahlenius. In two op-eds in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* she criticized how written documentation is systematically distorted (DN, 2003-03-11, 2004-04-23). She wrote under the header "The myth of Swedish openness" that:

Letters from authorities to the government are of course carefully "prepared" with the Ministry before they are delivered and dated. Where do you find the documentation of these preparatory, and so interesting, underhand discussions (DN, 2003-03-11)?

The paper trail leaves a lot of documentation but one has to be aware of the status of these documents. In a study of British archives Booth and Glynn found a "self-justificatory element" in the documents in their analysis and that they are sometimes constructed purposively to mislead. They reached the conclusion that "the records may be more revealing in their omissions than in their contents" (Booth & Glynn, 1979, p. 315). Davies points out that records that are stored in archives tend to "mask over the political processes of debate and discussion and record only that which was or could be agreed upon" (Davies, 2001, p. 75). This holds even more true for bodies which seek a consensus (Herman, 1995).

One of the main obstacles in my research was the omission of policy alternatives and the absence of memorandums of political discussions in which policy alternatives were weighted against each other. From several of my respondents I learned that in the ministries they write shorter 'memo briefs' or 'decision memos' for the political level. These are, however, treated as internal working documents and not found in the archives. It appears that, in accordance with other researchers' experiences, these documents were either weeded out when desk officers moved to other positions or systematically destroyed after the proposition had passed the Parliament (Östberg & Eriksson, 2009, pp. 120-121).

One respondent also shared with me in confidence an example of a request from the Ministry of Defence to the Armed Forces which had been circulated via email before it was registered and officially sent to the Armed Forces. The desk officer at the Ministry asked their counterpart in the military beforehand if they could ask a subset of questions to the Armed Forces. The document was returned with comments inserted with Word's "track changes" function. While this can be a functional exchange between two professionals it is also an apparent example of how two individuals from different organizations within the Swedish bureaucracy come together to form a unified view on an issue and in the process potentially banishing any traces of conflicts or disagreements. The correspondence that is left in the public records is often formal and thoroughly prepared with the principle of publicity and public access in mind (Östberg & Eriksson, 2009, p. 118).

According to Ahlenius there is a widespread reliance on oral decision-making and informal discussions, which are not documented since the principle of publicity and public access would make these documents publicly available. I would add to her critique that in this case it appears that these documents are in fact produced but they are not saved in the archives. For example, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs took notes during the weekly

meetings on peace support operations but these are not systematically saved. I have found three memoranda [*minnesanteckningar*] from these weekly meetings, all saved within the Armed Forces archives. The memoranda and minutes are simply not considered a public document [*allmän handling*] but a working document and therefore, according to the Ministries not covered by the principle of publicity and public access. While it states in the law that everything that has led to a decision should be saved in the archives this was not the practice (Östberg & Eriksson, 2009, p. 115). This reliance on oral decision-making and systematic neglect of saving memoranda and minutes poses a considerable challenge to research, and in extension democratic accountability (Östberg & Eriksson, 2009).<sup>21</sup>

In the communication between the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces different alternatives of the configuration of the military contribution was assessed. This dealt with the number of soldiers deployed, which units were available, what areas were of interest, etcetera. But the step when this is translated to the political level and transformed into political action items is omitted in the archives. This is troublesome, not only as a methodological problem for my research but for the democratic process in general. This necessitates the reliance on interviews as a primary material for the study of these kinds of decision-making processes as some information will only be available through interviews (Davies, 2001; Richards, 1996, p. 200; Östberg & Eriksson, 2009, p. 121).

I reference written material from the Ministry of Defence with the acronym MOD and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs with MFA. Within MFA I also include foreign embassies and delegations but I try to reference the origin in the text. I reference as GOV those general materials that come out of the Government Offices or the Prime Minister's Office. All documents from the Swedish Armed Forces are referenced with SAFHQ (Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters). In all my citations from government documents, official publications, media and WikiLeaks I reference the date by using the International Standard YYYY-MM-DD.

### **Official publications**

Most research on military contributions has relied heavily on official publication of the communication between the government and Parliament. In figure 2 above, official documentation can be identified as the government's

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<sup>21</sup> An example of how the awareness of political sensitive decisions seems to have an effect on the documentation of decisions within foreign policy is the incident with two Egyptian nationals being extradited on a flight in 2001 operated by the US Central Intelligence Agency. Östberg and Eriksson write that "while the provisions of the Secrets Act would, in any event, have prevented such information from being released, even that safeguard did not prevent the decision being taken orally, with no written documentation" (Östberg & Eriksson, 2009, p. 122).

proposition (c), the committee report (d), and the protocol from the debate in the chamber (e) when the proposition is up for treatment. While the parliament has the *de jure* power to influence the process after the proposition has been presented it is *de facto* restricted in this capacity. This is extremely significant since this dissertation explores the process in which a consensus is forged. The proposition that is sent to parliament must be written to incorporate the necessary formulations to attract a broad parliamentary support.

The logic of consensus-seeking and advanced status of the international process at the time the proposition is sent to parliament reduces the room for maneuver to change the substantial content of the military contribution. In order to build political support and ensure a smooth treatment of the proposition, by the time the proposition is sent to parliament the opposition has already been consulted and the broader terms for the military contribution have already been decided upon. The propositions that are sent to parliament are purposed to present the government's alternative as the only possible way forward (Henke, 2017, 2020). They thus take the form of what Deborah Stone calls a Hobson's choice, i.e. when "one's preferred outcome appear as the only possible alternative" (Stone, 2012, p. 253). The proposition is not intended to scrutinize the issue or present different alternatives, only to mobilize support for the policy as is. In a way a proposition in foreign policy is an attempt to gain legitimacy for a decision already taken. While an overreliance on this kind of edited political text will hamper the analysis, this information is important to understand the formation of the political consensus and how politically sensitive issues are treated publicly.

During Committee meetings representatives from the government, the Armed Forces, and the military intelligence could provide information pivotal for the foundation of political support. Still there are no records of the Committee meetings other than attendance and the meeting agenda. The final product of the Committee's treatment of the proposition is the committee report which forms the basis for the decision in the chamber. This report includes motions raised by Members of Parliament as a reaction to the proposition, potential reservations to the decision and statements of opinion [*särskilt yttrande*]. The information presented in these segments is of importance for this study as it indicates deviating opinions and potential political controversy. While the bulk of report mostly reiterates the proposition and the position of the government, the Committee does try to present a "meaningful text that can both justify the opinion of the majority – which obviously most often corresponds more or less entirely with that of the Cabinet – and display the weaknesses and shortcomings of the opposition's arguments" (Matz, 2013, p. 191). The key to formulating a substantial text to motivate the Committee's decision to back the proposition lies, according to Matz, in an opportunity to signal resolve on an issue that most Members of Parliament take very seriously as well as to strengthen the Parliament's role as a legitimate decision-making body on peace support operations. Even if the Com-

mittee does not deviate from the government's position, a meaningful text with the Committee's considerations "conveys at least the impression that the Committee has devoted considerable and serious attention to the matter, pondered over key formulations and sentences, and reached a just and rightful decision" (Matz, 2013, p. 193).

In this dissertation I reference all official publication in accordance with their origin. A proposition (Prop.) from the government is referenced like this (Prop. 2001/2002:60) indicating that it is the 60th proposition from the parliamentary year 2001/2002. For a committee report [*betänkande*], or parliamentary report (Rep.), it is a slightly different reference (Rep. 2001/02:UFöU2). The letters in the end of the reference indicate which parliamentary committee it is (*in Swedish*): Defence (FöU – *försvarsutskottet*), Foreign Affairs (UU – *utrikesutskottet*), and Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (UFöU – *sammansatta utrikes- och försvarsutskottet*). In the time period for this study 13 propositions were sent to Parliament regarding ISAF and 13 committee reports were produced by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. One committee report was produced on ISAF by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. The protocols (Prot.) from parliamentary debates are referenced similarly (Prot. 2001/02:54).

### Media reports and WikiLeaks

Since the purpose has never been to extensively map out the public discourse in regards to Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan I have not included an extensive media analysis in which I have systematically processed media content. With that said, the media landscape still holds one important arena for political debates and especially for politicians (and the military) to get their point of view out. Through the database "Retriever Research" I have compiled 13 booklets with media articles from the four major papers in Sweden: *Dagens Nyheter* (DN), *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD), *Aftonbladet*, and *Expressen*.<sup>22</sup> These articles were sorted by events or time periods which I have used to complement my interviews and archival material. These booklets comprise a total of 5275 of pages with articles. They are, however, overlapping and articles are represented in several booklets depending on the keyword or event that I used to sort. I do not claim that I have exhausted the media discourse nor do I claim that I have captured all relevant articles for this project. I have also not systematically processed all 5275 pages of articles. That has not been my objective in this research design. I have used media articles primarily to capture how actors commented on events or issues in media. Through these booklets I have identified statements by specific individuals or searched for keywords in the articles. When I reference media articles I reference the name of the paper and then the date of the pub-

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<sup>22</sup>Occasionally I also refer to other news segments in *Sveriges Television* (SVT), *Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå* (TT), *Göteborgs-posten* (GP), *Arbetet*, *Aktuellt i Politiken* (AiP) and *Fokus*.

lication according to the international standard, for example (DN, 2001-12-03) or (Aftonbladet, 2001-11-19). Sometimes as I refer to an op-ed written by a person of interest for this study I try to reference the author in the text but in the reference it is still treated as a newspaper article.

In my material I have also included some 60 cables concerning Afghanistan and Swedish domestic politics sent from the US embassy in Stockholm and released through WikiLeaks.<sup>23</sup> The release by WikiLeaks of over 250,000 diplomatic cables was made possible by the felony of a private in the US Army who was arrested and sentenced to 35 years of imprisonment for the crime (Dickinson, 2011). This individual was later pardoned by President Obama but the reason why I chose to emphasize this is that it is relevant for the authentication of the validity of the material. The extent of the leak as well as the aftermath and political turmoil it caused increases the validity of the released cables. I have not found any reasons as to why the authenticity should be questioned. They are on the other hand the subjective perception of US diplomats and written for a specific audience which is an indication to proceed with caution using these kinds of material (Michael, 2015, p. 179). When I reference these cables I use US\_EMB (US Embassy) as the origin to emphasize when I use this kind of material, for example (US\_EMB, 2009-07-24).

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<sup>23</sup> These diplomatic cables have been accessed through the website [www.wikileaks.org](http://www.wikileaks.org) where I have searched on a combination of keywords including but not limited to: Afghanistan, ISAF, Bildt, Tolgfors, Ahlin, Sweden.

## Chapter 5 – Entry

We are a voice in a great global chorus singing almost in unison. It is enormously satisfying that Sweden is a part of that chorus. It would have meant a lot more political problems if we had stood by the side (Aftonbladet, 2001-10-08).

Göran Persson, Prime Minister 1996–2006.

The Swedish Parliament decided unanimously on January 18, 2002, to send a detachment of Special Forces to participate in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. This was a military operation in a new geographical environment, outside of Sweden's normal sphere of interest, and in close proximity to an ongoing US war on questionably legitimate grounds. Despite this, there was a widespread understanding that the military contribution was a natural consequence of that time and that it was rather evident for all parties involved that Sweden would contribute.

It is remarkable that this stable political support formed around the ISAF policy which made it pass the Parliament unchallenged. For it was not at all internationally expected that Sweden would participate, not to mention with Special Forces. The military contribution also rested on a foundation of political controversies that never surfaced in political deliberation.

How was the military contribution framed to manage the complicated and uncertain security situation, the US military presence and the war against terrorism? How can Special Forces be considered an appropriate contribution to a humanitarian intervention? How is it possible to incorporate all these contradictory values and ideas into a coherent policy for which a consensus can be built?

This chapter will explore how a stable political support could be formed behind a military contribution to Afghanistan with Special Forces. The focus is placed on how Special Forces emerged as the only alternative and how this particular course of action seemed reasonable for the parties involved.

It begins with a short review of the decision-making process, pointing out the significant events during the fall of 2001 that led up to the parliamentary decision in January 2002. It also serves the purpose of contextualizing the situation for decision-makers in the fall of 2001. Thereafter I open up the decision-making process and penetrate the different aspects brought up in

the short review. In this part of the chapter I also identify certain important features of the process that had an impact on the decision-makers.

In addition to understanding the twists and turns of the policy process I specifically set out to understand how and why a consensus was successfully constructed for the military contribution to Afghanistan. As argued in chapter three, the framing of the military contribution and how it resonates and dominates the process shapes reasoning in the domestic foreign policy process. Decision-makers cannot frame policy any way they see fit; it must resonate in the context and to be successful it must override competing alternatives. This framing process is central in order to understand how the domestic foreign policy consensus could be forged in support of the Special Forces contribution.

## Composed explorations following 9/11

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the fundamental principle of Swedish security politics, the policy of neutrality, underwent a seemingly minor but undoubtable makeover. The (then) Social Democratic opposition and the four-party non-socialist, or center-right, government under the leadership of Prime Minister Carl Bildt (1991-1994)<sup>24</sup> reached an agreement to seek membership in the European Community while also abandoning the orthodox interpretation of neutrality. Instead they agreed on the following formulation:

Non-participation in military alliances, retaining the possibility of remaining neutral in the event of war in our vicinity (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, p. 189).

After winning the election in 1994 the Social Democrats returned to power as a one-party minority government that lasted until 2006. In the period since World War II (1945–1994) the Social Democrats had been in power for 40 of those 49 years. The Social Democrats were thus in power during the formal admission to the European Community (later Union) in 1995, after Sweden also had joined the NATO's Partnership for Peace program in 1994.

This overall rapprochement to Europe and international politics is what gave birth to a more militarily active foreign policy through deployments to peace support operations (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015; Jakobsen, 2005; Matz, 2013; Ångström, 2010). This followed an international trend in the post-Cold War period where the number of peacekeeping operations increased substantially (Jakobsen, 2006; Ångström, 2010). Beginning with the deployment to Bosnia and two consecutive governmental propositions on

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<sup>24</sup> The four-party center-right coalition government consisted of the Moderates, Liberals, Center Party, and Christian Democrats.

defense transformation in 1995 and 1996 (Prop., 1995/96:12, 1996/97:4), Sweden started during the 1990s a long-term redirection of the Armed Forces toward military contributions to peace support operations (Edström et al., 2018). This was followed by a deployment to Kosovo and two propositions in 1999 (Prop., 1998/99:75, 1999/2000:30). However, despite this inclination towards internationalization it was not at all expected that a Social Democratic government would contribute militarily to the international efforts in Afghanistan as the events of 2001 played out.<sup>25</sup>

On October 7, as a response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington a US-led coalition launched offensive operations in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime and hunt down Osama Bin Laden. This campaign caused uproar in the peace movement in Sweden, which condemned the US for the use of excessive violence which, according to them, only produced more humanitarian suffering. This formed a division between support for the US military action and a need to end hostilities and refocus the efforts on humanitarian assistance. The ruling Social Democrats became fully aware of this division when, at their party national congress in November, factions within the party opposed the Government's solid position in support of the US.

Beyond official support it was doubtful whether the US wanted any Swedish help, and if it did, what Sweden could have offered, given the conditions set by domestic politics, which I will return to later in this chapter. According to the Research Service in the British House of Commons, Sweden immediately pledged non-military assistance and was willing to share intelligence with US authorities (Youngs et al., 2001).

During the fall, Sweden did not commit to any troop contribution but did explore a potential contribution to counter-terrorism and later a contribution to a UN operation, to be deployed after hostilities ended (MOD, 2001-11-09). But as long as there was no UN resolution this did not lead to any concrete policy alternative. The Minister for Foreign Affairs explored a humanitarian role for Sweden in the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Aftonbladet, 2001-11-15). Sweden monitored ongoing discussions at NATO headquarters in Brussels through the Swedish representation there about a potential NATO operation and the US exploration of interest for a humanitarian operation to complement the military that was underway (MFA, 2001-11-21a, 2001-11-21b, 2001-11-22b, 2001-11-29).

After the Bonn conference<sup>26</sup> in the beginning of December 2001 Sweden received signals of a coming UN force and predicted that Sweden would

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<sup>25</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> The Bonn Conference resulted in the Bonn Agreement, or as it is officially named The Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions. This established the ground rules for a transition period until a nationally elected government could assume power in Afghanistan. In addition to this transitional plan for governing Afghanistan the participants at the Bonn Conference requested

receive informal request in the next year. Without urgency the Ministry of Defence initiated a process to explore potential military contributions later in 2002. This unexpectedly changed when Sweden was approached by the Defence Attaché from the United Kingdom who specifically requested Swedish Special Forces<sup>27</sup> to take part of the UN mandated force that the UK has taken lead nation responsibility for. The British were set on a quick deployment, already before Christmas, and only countries willing to accept this quick pace would be considered at the upcoming force generation conference (MFA, 2001-12-11). This was a crucial turning point in the process which turned into a sink or swim moment, and which truly ignited the situation within the Ministry and Armed Forces. Only nine days later, on the 20th of December, a proposition was sent to Parliament requesting support to deploy a maximum of 45 soldiers to Afghanistan as part of ISAF.<sup>28</sup> At this point the Government had already committed the contribution at international troop contributing conferences. The process therefore entered a stage of irreversibility as the contribution with Special Forces appeared, and was presented, as the only possible alternative. The proposition was expedited swiftly in the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence in January.<sup>29</sup> In the report the committee states the following:

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the UN Security Council “to consider authorizing the early deployment to Afghanistan of a UN mandated force” (UN, 2001-12-05 Annex I). This force, the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), would maintain security in Kabul and surrounding areas with the option of expanding to other populated centers with time.

<sup>27</sup> Throughout this chapter I will return to the special character of Special Forces and recognize the way they stand out in comparison to conventional forces. According to NATO’s glossary Special Forces (or Special Operations Forces) are “specially designated, organized, trained and equipped forces using distinct techniques and modes of employment” (NATO, 2019). Tugwell and Charters place more emphasis on the different characteristics of Special Forces when they define special operations as “small-scale, clandestine, covert or overt operations of an unorthodox and frequently high-risk nature, undertaken to achieve significant political or military objectives in support of foreign policy” (Tugwell & Charters, 1984, p. 35). Swedish Special Forces are professional soldiers, the very best that Sweden can offer, with high availability as well as being better prepared and equipped to manage risks than conventional forces. This has direct implications for their political utility. Until this deployment Swedish Special Forces had remained outside of the public spotlight due to the level of classification. For a brief history of Swedish Special Forces see Alm (2017).

<sup>28</sup> A parallel decision was taken by the Government in tandem with the proposition (2001/02:60) on the 20th of December (GOV, 2001-12-20a). This decision states that the preparatory force only can only depart given a resolution from the Security Council and a suitable Military Technical Agreement between ISAF and the Afghan authorities. This process is however delayed and continues over the holidays and on the 7th of January the Military Technical Agreement is signed which clears the formal restraints to send the force to Afghanistan. This is however further delayed by logistical reasons up until the 16th of January when the first soldiers can depart from Sweden (SAFHQ, 2002). By then the commander of the Swedish ISAF contingent had already departed for Kabul to scout the area and coordinate logistics for the follow-on force (Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015, p. 18).

<sup>29</sup> The parliamentary report was prepared for a meeting on the 16th of January during which it was also finalized.

It is with satisfaction that the committee notes that there is agreement between the parties in the Parliament that Sweden should participate in an armed multinational security force in Afghanistan... In a stance of this kind it is an advantage that all parties endorse the decision of the Parliament. Also at previous instances, including the decisions to participate with troops in the IFOR/SFOR operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the KFOR operation in Kosovo, there has been a consensus among the parliamentary parties to support the Swedish efforts. *This political unity is a strength for Sweden as an international player and strengthens the credibility of our foreign and security policy* (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2, p. 10, my emphasis).<sup>30</sup>

This political unity was displayed in the chamber in the lack of controversy and conflict as the debate preceding the vote more resembled individual speeches in support of the deployment as there were no replies to previous speakers (Prot., 2001/02:54). The Parliament approved the proposition on the 18th of January in acclamation.

The contribution with Special Forces to ISAF did not raise any oppositional voices of significance as it was fitted into overall Swedish traditional foreign policy. It had a strong appearance of a UN centered mission, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan called for outside intervention, and the negative aspects of the US warfare in Afghanistan were isolated to that operation and as a result did not spill over to ISAF and the Swedish contribution. When the direct request came from the British, this created room for advocates within the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces to proceed with the Special Forces alternative.

Perhaps an obvious point to make, but this decision to deploy is central for the continuation of the Swedish involvement in Afghanistan. First of all, without a decision to enter there would still be a threshold for Sweden at later stages of considerations to join. Early on Sweden was now considered part of the in-group. Secondly, the early investment in Afghanistan made Sweden part of the international decision-making processes when an expansion of ISAF was discussed in 2003, which is the focus of the next empirical chapter.

This concludes the quick review of the process that led to the deployment of a Special Forces contribution to Afghanistan. In the remaining chapter I will return to these events and periods to place them in the context of the decision-makers perspective, how they reasoned in their way forward, and how they framed the military contribution in order to construct a domestic consensus. At a first glance this process does not display any obvious politi-

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<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that the three decisions to send troops to Bosnia came to a vote in the parliament as the Left, Green and Liberal party had reservations to the decisions. But it was still considered "political unity" by the participants as it was perceived that there was unity on the decision to deploy but disagreement on the details. The reservations and the disagreement did not concern support for the military contribution.

cal disagreements but a penetration of this process reveals that the uncontroversial nature of the decision is contested. It rests on a foundation in which political conflict has been suppressed and opposition acquiesced. But before turning to the framing strategies utilized by actors to forge a consensus for the military contribution to Afghanistan the attention is directed towards the decision-making process and how it unfolds. This is essential in order to identify the breeding ground for potential disagreement and to understand how political controversy was avoided and a consensus could be formed.

## The entry process 2001–2002

This section of the chapter will chronologically relate the events leading up to the parliamentary decision, with an emphasis on the important factors for the consensus to form. In order to understand the politics and how controversies were suppressed in this initial stage of the operation, it is necessary to understand how the contribution entered into political deliberations, who the initial advocates were, and how the form of Special Forces quickly gained support. But even before doing that it is needed to further contextualize the unfolding situation following 9/11 and the Government's position as articulated and driven by the Prime Minister himself.

### An early unconditional support of the US

Following the events of 9/11 the US was quick to launch a policy that no distinction was going to be made between the terrorists and the states harboring them (Rice, 2011). When the President addressed a joint session of the American congress he issued an ultimatum toward leaders worldwide: “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (Bush, 2001-09-20). It was clear that something had awakened within the US and within the Government Offices in Sweden it was a general concern that Sweden did not come down on the wrong side in this (Eriksson, 2012).<sup>31</sup>

Prime Minister Göran Persson (1996-2006) of the Social Democrats was an early advocate behind the US right for self-defense based in international law. In a public statement issued on the 21st of September the Prime Minister expressed support of American policies by declaring that “the Swedish Government stands behind the United States right for self-defense to prevent new terrorist attacks. This right has also been confirmed by the UN's Security Council in the resolutions 1368 and 1373” (Aftonbladet, 2001-11-19). He continued this rigid support throughout the fall, based on his conviction of the UN as the carrier of international law and personal consultations with

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<sup>31</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017.

Kofi Annan (see for example DN, 2001-12-03). During a 2004 interview Prime Minister Persson elaborated on this early stand:

*Interviewer:* But your position following September 11, how would, yes again, how would you describe the way it developed and your reasoning.

*PM Göran Persson:* Well I, I'm very sure about that, very sure, spot on. The United States has a right to self-defense, confirmed by the UN. The attack on the United States is not just an attack on the US but an attack on all of us. What happened the day after, my daughter lost her job since she is a tour guide for [a Swedish charter agency]. Destinations in Morocco were canceled, I'm saying, one of those almost lightning fast illustrations in relation to me personally, how things work. The way the world looks today, you know, that everything is sort of interconnected. So, no, it was an attack on the foundation of our society (Fichtelius & Schmidt, 2011, p. 1098).

Perhaps self-evident to many, the Prime Minister, in his very personal recollection of the days following 9/11, raises three important points necessary to understand the motivation of his unconditional support for the USA and how the terrorist attack induced many foundational values of the democratic society. First, a belief of a vulnerable interdependent western world in which an attack in one state has repercussions in other. Second, Sweden is no longer on an isolated island but an integral part of the western world and attacks directed towards the West might as well be directed at Sweden. Immediately after the terrorist attacks the Prime Minister wrote to the Swedish people in *Aftonbladet* stating that "ordinary people like you and I have been targeted for an anonymous evil, indifferent to human dignity" (*Aftonbladet*, 2001-09-12). This view is shared as well by the Minister of Defence, Björn von Sydow (1997-2002), who framed it as a question of collective security:

It was not only the emotional solidarity but we also reasoned in terms of collective security: 'one for all, all for one'. We imagined that any other country could be attacked by al-Qaeda (Fokus, 2010-02-11).

Third, that those terrorist attacks were aimed at "our model of society" endangering economic growth and openness but also democracy itself. But despite the 9/11 attacks and the threat from international terrorism it was still not evident that Prime Minister Persson had the support of the party to unconditionally support the US. This question of support for the US military action in Afghanistan was identified in advance of the Social Democratic national congress in November as an issue of potential conflict.

## The Social Democratic national congress

During the Social Democratic national congress in November 2001 the Afghanistan situation was heavily discussed and throughout the debate they

returned to the interpretations of the legitimate grounds for the invasion and to what extent it was approved, authorized and/or sanctioned by the UN. On one side were the opponents of the US military engagement in Afghanistan who objected to the notion that the UN somehow, either directly or indirectly, had sanctioned the bombing, illustrated here by the most critical delegate Maj Britt Theorin:

But let me at least say to my colleagues here that the United Nations never approved to the bombing of Afghanistan, never ever. Nor has Kofi Annan done it. He has, as I said, stated that there is no military solution to the Afghan problems and that bombing should come to an end as soon as possible (Social\_Democrats, 2002b, p. 48).

On the other side was the Prime Minister's position, defended most prominently by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anna Lindh (1998-2003), who emphasized in the debate that the US had support by the UN and in international law:

But remember that there are reasons for the Security Council to unite behind the United States. Here I firmly deny what Maj Britt said. The UN has in its Charter confirmed the right to self-defense even by military means. The UN has in the resolutions after September 11 confirmed the right of self-defense [...] So it is not the UN that says that the US and Britain need to bomb. But the UN has accepted and supported that the US and Great Britain have used their right to self-defense and thus also supported the campaign (Social\_Democrats, 2002b, p. 49).

For the Prime Minister, the UN Security Council holds a prominent position in the shaping of events. To him it was evident, and to some degree remarkable, that the US was operating in accordance with a UN authorization, which for him was unquestionable. In his reasoning the Prime Minister connects the unease with the bombing with the awareness that the bombing is legitimized by a UN interpretation of international law (Fichtelius & Schmidt, 2011). On November 14, a couple of days after the party congress and the debate on Afghanistan, the Prime Minister reflected on the events of the fall of 2001 and accentuates the important role of the UN in his understanding of the situation. His reasoning is worth quoting at length:

The UN was given a role since the Americans, as a result of international support, could allow the UN to play a role. The ones in American politics who want this kind of development as a result of receiving international support. The UN took a stand, quickly adopted a position, was powerful, was placed at the center. The Americans created a political alliance, then they struck, and right now, when we're sitting here on November 14, it looks like they're about to break this Taliban regime that's provided bin Laden with shelter, his network and training camps. And this is still in accordance with what's been decided by the UN Security Council; it's within the framework

of international law. In fact, I'm very moved by this and I'm also very happy that we were engaged in a deeper analysis. It was instinctive for me to actually, so to say, directly indicate where we stand. Yes, it was also easy, emotionally very easy, intellectually very clear, international law, the UN, self-defense, justified to actually also use military force. I'm glad that we, as it were, got things so right there. This has resulted in respect in Sweden. It has given us respect abroad and we thus have a debate on whether bombing is actually the right thing to do. And I've been very careful to say that I have no reason to be the one evaluating whether or not this is within the confines of international law, that's something that has to be done by the UN Security Council. And if I were to take over this assessment from the UN Security Council, then I can never, for instance, further down the line criticize great powers disregarding an assessment by the UN (Fichtelius & Schmidt, 2011, pp. 597-598).

In Prime Minister Persson's reasoning the primacy of the UN is vital from the perspective of a small state with limited military power. Adherence to international law replaces classical geopolitical structures with an institutionalized environment built on rules and compliance. His rationale is that if Sweden questions a UN decision on an issue it becomes easier for other countries to do the same on other issues. He builds his worldview on the predominance and indisputability of a UN decision.

The result from the congress was that the leadership's position won against the internal opposition and the majority of the delegates supported the Government (Social\_Democrats, 2002b). The issue was driven through by Foreign Minister Lindh who consolidated her position as the potential successor to the Prime Minister (Fichtelius & Schmidt, 2011; Franchell, 2009, pp. 209-210; Svenning, 2005, pp. 306-307). This was an important win for the Prime Minister, who had invested a lot of his credibility into this issue. As he expressed himself in an interview directly after the congress:

Had I received a majority of the congress against me, it would have made me "a lame duck", a person without a mandate to act. It would have been a very difficult situation and it would have been impossible to explain how I, an hour earlier had been reelected with a standing ovation, before I an hour later am dismissed in a central issue. It would have been difficult to handle. I honestly don't know what I would have done (SvD, 2001-11-08).

In media the debate on Afghanistan during the congress is presented as closely controlled by the Prime Minister and several previously potential critical factions of the party did not speak at all on Afghanistan, for example the Youth Organization (*SSU*), Christian brotherhood movement [*Broderskapsrörelsen*], or the Women's Association (*Aftonbladet*, 2001-11-11).

## A direct request from the British

During the fall, ideas were floating in the Government Offices on possible participation in Afghanistan and ways of contributing to the War on Terror. But the absence of a UN mandated military operation limited the alternatives for Sweden to contribute and demonstrate solidarity with the US. It was first in December that the process entered a stage in which concrete military contributions were considered and preparatory measures were taken. Governmental officials envisioned that the outcome of the Bonn conference could in the long run lead to a Swedish contribution and send an intelligence requirement to the Armed Forces on the 10th of December. In this they recognized the uncertainty and diffuse planning conditions but preferred to be in advance and explore the national provisions in case they receive an informal request (MOD, 2001-12-10). The memo states the following:

Despite the lack of complete information the Ministry of Defence would welcome a work which purpose is to provide the basis for a decision *when* a request of Swedish participation arrives (MOD, 2001-12-10, my emphasis).

There was no urgency at this time and the Armed Forces were to return to the ministry with a preliminary report on the 18th of December. This changed the following day (11th of December) when the Ministry of Defence summoned officers from the Armed Forces HQ to discuss a potential military contribution to Afghanistan (SAFHQ, 2002, p. 2; 2003-02-21, p. 83).<sup>32</sup> The ministry had at that point been approached by the Defence Attaché of the United Kingdom with a request whether Sweden would consider a contribution with Special Forces to the UK commanded International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).<sup>33</sup> A desk officer working with peace support operations remembers:

We had a waiting period after September 11th. We had dialogues with the ministry, but not even in October when they attacked Afghanistan did we receive any actual directives that we should do something [...] then suddenly in December the British Defence Attaché approaches us.<sup>34</sup>

The British had experience working together with Swedish Special Forces on the Balkans and requested this unit specifically. It mattered that the re-

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<sup>32</sup> The intelligence requirement sent to the military intelligence service on the 10th does not explicitly mention any incoming request but at 3 o'clock on the afternoon on the 11th of December officers from the strategic division in the Swedish headquarters meets with their counterparts in the Ministry to discuss the potential of a Swedish Special Forces operation in Afghanistan.

<sup>33</sup> The day before an informal question is posted to the Embassy in London on Sweden's position on a potential UN resolution. The report arrives at the Armed Headquarters on the 11th (MFA, 2001-12-10).

<sup>34</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015.

quest came from the British and that they approached Sweden. In the memo outlining the initial assessment of a Special Forces contribution to ISAF, the military emphasized the good experiences that Swedish Special Forces had working with the British in Kosovo, and the general good relations with the British on all military levels (SAFHQ, 2001-12-12). The Minister for Defence reflected on this in a letter to his British counterpart after the Parliament had approved the contribution:

It is pleasing for Sweden that we could offer you a unit that is suitable for the difficult tasks ahead. Our fruitful cooperation in Kosovo paved the way, I think, both in terms of the mutual understanding of the Modus Operandi and the actual deployment of these kinds of units (MOD, 2002-01-24).

This bilateral relation was an important reason why the specific request resonated so quickly and the political importance was shared by the Moderate Party in opposition. This party was generally more positive to western military cooperation and NATO in particular. In the debate the Vice-Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee remarked:

[MP Lennmarker, Moderate Party] It is the British who have been given the responsibility to lead this force, and the British have also asked Sweden to contribute to it with a small highly specialized unit, moreover, a unit that the British have had experience of working with in Kosovo. *It is honorable for Sweden to have received that request.* (Prot., 2001/02:54, p. 3, my emphasis).

In addition to an elevated international prestige, the request from the British also centered the deliberations within the Ministry on a concrete alternative that quickly gained traction.

In the time following the 9/11 terrorist attacks the US reached out to allies and partners around the world in request of support in the forthcoming war on terror. Sweden was on the receiving end on some proposals and explored during the fall possible contributions.<sup>35</sup> This ranged from general discussion

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<sup>35</sup> Agrell makes a point out of these proposals in his book emphasizing that the process was already ongoing when the UK reached out to Sweden in December to participate with Special Forces in ISAF and that “the first traces of preparations for a Swedish military engagement in Afghanistan goes back to October 23, 2001” (Agrell, 2013, p. 77). Lars-Gunnar Liljestrand, a leading figure in the vocal resistance to the Swedish involvement in Afghanistan, joined Agrell in arguing that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) surveyed potential contributions to the War on Terror after 9/11 (Liljestrand, 2012, 2015). What they both refer back to is an offer from Sweden to contribute with two units of experts from the Swedish Defence Research Agency to the war on terror and a memo prepared in the Ministry of Defence concerning military contributions to a potential UN operation in Afghanistan (Liljestrand, 2012, p. 10; MOD, 2001-10-24, 2001-11-09). Liljestrand references a ministry memo entitled “Possible Swedish military opportunities to take part in a coalition against terrorism”. According to him this memo points to staff officers, engineering, military police, a field hospital and transport flights as potential contributions. Liljestrand then links this memo to a following memo in early November in which potential contributions to a UN operation is suggested. I have not been able to confirm the validity of the early assessment but in the memo from the 9th of

on counter-terrorism support to potential military contributions explored for a UN operation in Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> In October in a press-release from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs a request for a Swedish military contribution to the US operation in Afghanistan was considered “highly unlikely” and Swedish emphasis lays instead on humanitarian aid and other kinds of cooperation within the framework on counter-terrorism (MFA, 2001-10-15).

Before the military operation was raised by the UK in December, Swedish efforts were oriented towards humanitarian aid work and being an active participant in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. For example, some individuals, such as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, did not consider military options to be something for Sweden in this conflict. Her two statements; “I do not think it is militaries that they want from us” and “We will focus on mine-clearance and humanitarian aid” (Aftonbladet, 2001-11-15); are both indicative of her position prior to the request from the British.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs displayed a willingness to take part in Afghanistan but throughout the fall they seemed determined on mine-clearance and military observers. Even after they were informed of the Special Forces contribution that were being processed in the Ministry of Defence they did not publicly deviate from this position. In an interview on the 15th of December the Minister for Foreign Affairs states that: “We have promised to discuss a smaller security troop [*säkerhetstrupp*]. Later there may be more people, and then for example is mine-clearance something of a Swedish specialty” (SvD, 2001-12-15). In this statement her choice of words to frame the military contribution under treatment is noticeable: “a smaller security troop”. It appears that either the Minister was not aware of what exactly Special Forces are, or was not comfortable discussing this publicly.

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November the operational assumptions are similar to those that Liljestrand refers to in the September memo. What stands out in this memo is however the uncertainty of the development of the international presence in Afghanistan and what the role the UN will come to play (MOD, 2001-11-09). The entire memo is instead based on vague assumptions (composition of the UN force, additional financial resources etc.) and the memo emphasizes that neither of the assumptions is presently realized. It is not until the UN receives a central role (after the Bonn conference) and that a specific alternative is requested by the British that a troop contribution gains momentum. “The first traces” are somewhat conflated by Agrell and Liljestrand and are the result of several different tracks pursued and explored simultaneously.

<sup>36</sup> A memo from the 9th of November mentions that if the UN mission more resembles UNPROFOR in the Balkans, i.e. that the UN will “secure and assist” humanitarian operations, that participation with intelligence assets or a mechanized battalion can be considered. However, the memo does not see these as probable alternatives. Participation with intelligence assets assumes both a corresponding withdrawal with units from Kosovo and that “the UN reconsiders its traditional view on intelligence”. A similar discussion is raised in regards to a mechanized battalion with the addition that there are questions concerning the adequacy of the vehicle fleet of the battalion entering readiness (MOD, 2001-11-09). In early November Sweden and Finland places an initiative in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council to identify areas of cooperation concerning measures against terrorism but nothing relates to military assets (GOV, 2001-11-07). As the discussions are expanded from pure counter-terrorism to potential military contributions to a UN operation the process was far from centered on any specific military option.

Important in her answer is both that she brushes off this first contribution by directly turning the focus to the next step and mine-clearance, and that there is a willingness to participate from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The military and the Ministry of Defence take advantage of the Minister for Foreign Affairs' position when they present a policy proposition with a Special Forces contribution, requested by the ISAF lead nation, which can be fitted well into the history of previous Swedish peace support operations. More important for the Ministry of Defence and the military, it was a solution to a previous problem: the slow deployment of a previous military contribution.

## Remedying Kosovo

A couple of years prior to the Afghanistan situation the Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence found themselves opposite each other in a dispute regarding the composition of the KFOR contribution to Kosovo. This originated in different risk assessments and the difficulties in defining peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations. This resulted in a considerably delay in the deployment (Ericson Wolke, 2015; SAFHQ, 2000-06-21).<sup>37</sup>

For Minister von Sydow and the military this debacle was perceived as a substantial loss of international credibility: a damage that could be remedied by a fast and successful deployment to Afghanistan. The Ministry of Defence worked hard to use the ISAF contribution as a way to “patch a bandage on the wound that Kosovo has caused”.<sup>38</sup> In order for the process to progress quickly and the deployment to be successful, Special Forces emerged as the only conceivable option. In the Ministry of Defence the Special Forces' unique capabilities resonated as a resolution to the potential problems that arose with a fast deployment to Afghanistan. The Desk Officer in the ministry explains:

It started with Björn von Sydow [Minister for Defence], and then it went down from there instead of the other way around, and I told him directly, I

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<sup>37</sup> According to the lessons learned report, the main issue was a disagreement between the military and the ministry regarding the balance between funding and an adequate and sufficiently military potent contribution (SAFHQ, 2000-06-21, p. 11). Sweden had, according to the report, sent mixed signals to NATO and without a decisive committal and a slow operating domestic process Sweden was sidelined from the international process (SAFHQ, 2000-06-21, p. 13). The report highlights that, due to the indecisive political performance and slow deployment, there was a potent risk that international confidence in Swedish political will and military capability had been undermined (SAFHQ, 2000-06-21, p. 3). In addition, it is noteworthy to point out that the Kosovo deployment was also treated in various formal processes as well, see for example the Parliaments Audit Office's report on International peace and support missions in which they raise criticism in how the process for the Kosovo mission was delayed (Rep., 2002/03:UU5).

<sup>38</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

said it, for it both to go fast and to be good, then it is only one capability that we can send from Sweden and I said you know as well as I do what that is.<sup>39</sup>

This perception of a readily available unit and the self-imposed time constraint for an early deployment pointed to Special Forces as the only, as well as most suitable, option (Alm, 2017). According to their counterparts in Britain this would designate a small detachment leaving Sweden as early as before Christmas. The Minister for Defence instructed his desk officer to “make sure that it will not turn to the same debates as with the Kosovo mission.”<sup>40</sup>

In the KFOR process, financial constraints from the ministry were placed against the risk assessment from the military (SAFHQ, 2000-06-21, p. 3). A Special Forces contribution would prevent any such disagreements to surface. Firstly, the two operations operated on vastly different financial levels.<sup>41</sup> Secondly, in the Kosovo case there was a disagreement on the numbers of Swedish soldiers to be deployed directly linked to the operational risks with a peace enforcement deployment.<sup>42</sup> Special Forces do not abide by the same restrictions as a conventional force does. Special Forces are highly trained for the entire conflict spectrum and on stand-by which does not require any additional training prior to deployment. They also mitigate political risks since they are fulltime employed professional soldiers and surrounded by secrecy. So while the military recommended against the wishes from the Ministry to deploy a multinational battalion with Finland in Kosovo the military instead “advocates strongly” in the ISAF case that the unit be placed under British command (SAFHQ, 2001-12-12).

## Congruence between the ministry and the military

The strong stance from Prime Minister Persson provided the political backing that Minister von Sydow and the Armed Forces perceived necessary to operate quickly once the opportunity opened.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> The discord over financial estimates that disrupted the Kosovo process dealt with numbers close to a billion Swedish Kronor (SEK). In the proposition in May the financial estimate is left out but in the governmental decision in August the Armed Forces disposes 900 million SEK for the KFOR mission. The initial estimated cost for the Special Forces contingent was 15-20 million SEK and was later raised to 35 million SEK in the proposition with a final outcome of 45 million SEK (Prop., 2001/02:60, p. 7; SAFHQ, 2001-12-12).

<sup>42</sup> A multinational battalion with Finland was desirable from a political and economic perspective but not recommended by the Armed Forces. In the lessons learned from the Kosovo mission the Armed Forces stated that “the Armed Forces position that multinationalism in a battalion in peace enforcement operations in accordance with Chapter 7 of the UN charter, where combat cannot be ruled out, is undesirable complicated both operational planning and the relations with Finland” (SAFHQ, 2000-06-21 Annex 1 p.2). The Ministry of Defence wanted to reduce cost by deploying together with Finland however this was not desirable from a military perspective.

There were two quick decisions after the British request that created a congruence of the force contribution between the ministry and the Armed Forces. First, the decision by the ministry to immediately summon the Armed Forces after the request and concentrate the inquiry towards Special Forces. The Armed Forces recognized the following day a time restriction placed by the first troop contributing conference, scheduled just two days away. The result from the meeting on the 11th at the Ministry of Defence was that the Swedish Armed Forces would write a memo on how a potential contribution with Special Forces would be organized followed by an engineer detachment in a following phase. This was still to be reported to the ministry by December 18, the same day as the intelligence requirement (SAFHQ, 2002). According to the minutes at the military headquarters the memo was supposed to outline the necessary UN, parliamentary and governmental decisions for a deployment. However, on the evening on the 11th, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received an invitation, forwarded by the Swedish embassy in London, to a force generation conference the very same Friday, the 14th of December (MFA, 2001-12-11). It reached the Armed Forces in the morning the following day, on the 12th (SAFHQ, 2002). The Embassy in London stressed the short timeframe and the necessity to participate at the meeting on the 14th if Sweden wanted to be a part of the initial force. An alert by the Swedish embassy in London read:

Those countries that come to the meeting on Friday must be able to deliver their contributions immediately, that is deploy at the latest 22nd of December [...] For those countries not able to contribute to the force immediately and concerning involvement not in question until January, future deliberations are being planned (MFA, 2001-12-11).

Quickly after this, things were set in motion and the deadline for the memo on a potential contribution with Special Forces was rescheduled and after being presented to the Armed Forces leadership the memo was handed over to the ministry at the end of office hours on the 12th. The memo was a one page outline of a potential SF contribution summarizing important constraints (SAFHQ, 2001-12-12). This congruence on the form of the contribution between the ministry and the military after the British request formed a critical decision point of the policy process. Each decision, with the purpose of an early deployment, placed the contribution on a self-reinforcing trajectory. After Special Forces entered the process, no other alternatives were considered and the process was oriented towards this contribution. This enabled the process to accelerate and for Sweden to be among the first group of countries to deploy within the ISAF framework.

For Minister von Sydow, this presented itself as an opportunity to remedy the disastrous planning process before contributing to the Kosovo operation. This would also enhance Sweden's international political status and also

broaden the perception of how Sweden can contribute by expanding beyond the traditional humanitarian assistance. In his diary the Minister wrote:

I assessed that this would be a good standing from us - it gives us political status, it comes now (but it is in a peace-enforcement situation, which requires [parliament] involvement) unlike what we already are very good at and what the US and others already acknowledge, i.e. the humanitarian (von Sydow quoted in Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015, p. 12).

It was a way to showcase Swedish forces in a peace enforcement situation and expand the foreign comprehension of what Sweden was capable of contributing internationally.<sup>43</sup> In accordance with the internationalization of the Swedish defense both the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence acknowledged the time after 9/11 as being pivotal regarding collective security and how an interdependent world increases Sweden's vulnerability. The Swedish defense was in the middle of a transformation from an anti-invasion defense toward an expeditionary force concept ready to be deployed internationally on peace support operations. This was part of a larger foreign policy reorientation gradually abandoning the old principle of neutrality in favor of a view of security best achieved in cooperation with others and not in isolation. While the EU membership and formal partnership with NATO stood as initiators for this transformation contributions to international military operations were quickly considered an instrument for manifesting this policy (Matz, 2013, pp. 186-187; Westberg, 2015, p. 197).

The Chief of Defence (CHOD)<sup>44</sup> also pushed hard for participation but mainly as a way to test the unit in a new geographical setting and gain access to intelligence structures.<sup>45</sup> Even if the practical experience of testing Special Forces in a new environment was valuable, the political importance of an early contribution trumped any such practical experience. This can be illustrated with an incident that occurred when the Special Forces Commander tried to withdraw the Swedish contribution at a force generating conference when they were not given adequate tasks suitable for Special Forces. He was scolded back in line by the political representative who clearly expressed the will for the operation to progress regardless of what duties the unit was tasked with.<sup>46</sup> The political pressure to participate was considerable and it would be a substantial political cost to withdraw at this point.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014, Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015 and Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> I have preferred the use of the international term CHOD (Chief of Defence) to translate *Överbefälhavaren* (ÖB) instead of for example using SC or Supreme Commander (Bynander, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014 and Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017.

The British specifically requested the Special Forces unit and the Ministry and Armed Forces were in agreement that it was the only conceivable option given the time constraint and the risks involved. Up until the request from the British, Special Forces had not been part of the calculations of potential contributions within the Ministry of Defence. When the specific request from the British to join the ISAF with a Special Forces detachment arrived in December it resonated quickly both on the political level in the ministry, and within the military.

From the military's perspective, after the request from the UK Special Forces was considered the only option given the self-inflicted narrow timeframe imposed by a will to remedy Sweden's credibility and deploy early. Other options that were previously discussed, such as mine-clearance, simply disappeared and did not return. Special Forces was one of the few standing units in the military, the only of high quality, and it mitigated the risks involved with deploying a unit under uncertain circumstances to a dangerous area of operations. The uncertainties that permeated Afghanistan in December, as well as the dangers associated with deployment to a combat zone, converged to a risky political enterprise. Risks which are mitigated by the character of the Special Forces. The Chief of Defence was clear in his reasoning that the operation demanded the best unit and that was the Swedish Special Forces.<sup>47</sup> In addition to high professional knowledge of the SF unit, his son was also one of the commanding officers. He knew just how good the unit was and that they were ready to break new ground.

An important incentive [...] is that we get training or we can test our systems. We get to test our material [...] that is always in there so to speak, in the background somehow and not only that but we get to test our capacity, our leadership.<sup>48</sup>

In a later newspaper interview he recalls this aspiration to enter the operation early: "We wanted to enter Afghanistan as quickly as possible. We did everything we could from our point of view to join" (Fokus, 2010-02-11).

## Deafening silence from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan

The military and Ministry of Defence conformed on a troop contribution with Special Forces, while the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was focused on the humanitarian role Sweden could play in the aftermath of the conflict. There is one noteworthy silence of an important humanitarian actor in the Swedish context that influenced the process: the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA).

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<sup>47</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

Out of several interviews a pattern emerges on how the SCA functioned as an enabling factor for the military contribution to meet reduced resistance in policy circles.<sup>49</sup> This pattern consists of four main features. First, the network of the SCA fed information back to Sweden of Taliban atrocities articulating the necessity of military force to oust the current regime in Afghanistan. Second, the SCA had access to the leadership of several of the parties and could therefore channel information directly to the political level. Third, the long commitment of the SCA constitutes almost a historic legacy of Swedish assistance to the war-torn country. Fourth and foremost, internal controversies within the organization led to an initial passivity to take a public stand on ISAF. This non-vocal opposition was interpreted by several actors as an alleged “extremely positive” support of a Swedish military contribution. This absent opposition, in turn, reinforced the interpretation of the military contribution as “a humanitarian” contribution.

The Committee was in fact split in two factions with opposing views on the military intervention in Afghanistan, and especially on the later potential Swedish contribution.<sup>50</sup> This was also mentioned in a report the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) submitted to the Inquiry on Sweden’s Engagement in Afghanistan.

The movement’s varied views on issues related to the legitimacy of the Afghan regime and the US War of War were reflected in *Afghanistan-News* [the organization’s quarterly magazine] and partly in the public debate and eventually also on SCA’s website, where there was a debate forum for a long time. A small group of members left SCA and formed the Association of Afghan Solidarity as a protest against the SCA leadership’s initial silence (and later wrongly-based opinion, according to them) about the US war in Afghanistan (Kristiansson, 2016, p. 10).

Since the organization could not reach an agreement the SCA’s management awaited to officially go public on a statement on the US involvement in Afghanistan.<sup>51</sup> A respondent with insight to the inner works of SCA explained

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<sup>49</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014, Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015, Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014, Interview Member of Parliament, 2014, Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014, Interview Civil Servant, Parliament, 2014 and Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015 and Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Not until May 2002 did the organization acknowledge the Afghan government’s right to invite foreign troops and that the UNSC Resolutions gave support and legitimacy to ISAF even if it did not meet the standards for a “regular UN-formed, -financed, and -led operation” (Kristiansson, 2016, p. 10). In October 2002 the former Social Democratic Minister for Foreign Affairs (1994-1998) and deputy Prime Minister (1995-2002), Lena Hjelm-Wallén, continued to express this acceptance of external military intervention in Afghanistan in an editorial following her appointment as chair of the SCA: “The different opinions on the situation in Afghanistan particularly concern the view of the foreign military presence. UN security troops

that “they could not unite on what Sweden would do militarily in Afghanistan and for that reason they never took a stance.”<sup>52</sup> In their passivity to take a stand, and perhaps most evident by not voicing a vocal opposition, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan’s view towards a potential Swedish military presence was interpreted as positive by many of the actors in the political process.

### In line with Swedish foreign policy

From the point when the proposition reached the Parliament it was never fully questioned and opposing views never fully mobilized. It was portrayed as a continuation of previous military contributions to peace support operations and “in line” with Swedish foreign policy. As the committee report reads:

The committee considers, like the Government, that *it is natural* for Sweden to participate in a multinational security force in Afghanistan.

The committee notes that for Sweden's part the legal foundation for a Swedish military operation in another country shall constitute a decision by the UN Security Council. *This is in line with Sweden's foreign policy* and our view on the importance of international law.

The overall assessment by the committee is that a Swedish troop contribution to the multinational security force in Afghanistan is of great value and *is in line with Sweden's already extensive humanitarian involvement* in the country and with Sweden's overall international commitment of promoting peace and security (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2, pp. 9-10, my emphasis).

This committee report was backed by all the parliamentary parties and there were no reservations filed in relation to the decision. There were three statements of opinion [*särskilda yttranden*] to the committee report raising general financial aspects, the neglect to mention historical US support to the Taliban, and arms exports to southern Asia. This unity behind the deployment of Special Forces was echoed in the parliamentary debate, illustrated here by the Social Democratic Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee:

[MP Ahlin, Social Democratic Party] The Committee finds it *natural* that Sweden contributes with troops in this UN sanctioned security force. It is

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are probably accepted by most within and outside of Afghanistan. More controversial is the US military presence, with its focus on hunting terrorists. I note for my part that the Afghan government wishes this presence, an opinion I accept. At the same time, I wish that the military terrorist hunt to be over as soon as possible” (Hjelm-Wallén, 2002). She voices a concern regarding the US military presence but still recognizes the sovereignty of Afghanistan to accept external bilateral support, even in the form of military force.

<sup>52</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

well *in line with Swedish foreign and security policy* and our traditions to support UN resolutions and the peace support operations that take place in the world based on a UN mandate” (Prot., 2001/02:54, p. 3, my emphasis).

The debate was not without criticism but this was not directed at the Swedish contribution or ISAF but elsewhere at the US role in Afghanistan and Swedish defense exports. The critique toward the US centered on the disapproval of previous US acquiescent policies toward the Taliban regime, the US bombing campaign, and the US disregard for the rules of war in the War on Terror. The more internally addressed critique focused on Swedish exports of military equipment to the region and the warring parties. These issues were separated from the deployment of a security force to Afghanistan for “humanitarian assistance to operate effectively” which was directly linked to the leading role of the UN: “an international force with a UN-mandate is the only possible actor for this purpose” (Prot., 2001/02:54, p. 6).

Additionally, the operation was portrayed in the official texts and debate as standard feature of Swedish foreign policy. The committee stated in their report that it was positive that the UN was engaged in an early stage in “both the short- and long-term efforts for crisis-management, reconstruction and development if the Afghan society” (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2, p. 25). The Government’s proposition and the Parliament’s committee report follows the same optimistic spirit as the Bonn conference. This indicated that ISAF was a temporary arrangement needed to secure the positive path for the Afghan government. It is recognized in the proposition that an “improved security situation” is necessary for “the political process to continue in a positive direction” and for humanitarian aid to reach the countryside (Prop., 2001/02:60, p. 6).

In the end the Parliament passed the contribution without controversy. As the Minister for Defence von Sydow recalled: “those who were against it were probably not so engaged, then again, it was a small unit, it seemed to be an uncontroversial setting, the objectives seemed reasonably natural.”<sup>53</sup> The vice chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee at this time, Mr. Göran Lennmarker from the oppositional Moderate Party, recalls that they were “very positive” to the mission: “a lot was self-evident, of course we are going to contribute, of course we have a responsibility for this, so I did not need to argue anything of this.”<sup>54</sup> Even the Left Party, who objected strongly to the US war in Afghanistan and was wary of any confusion between ISAF and OEF, still supported the Swedish contribution to ISAF. As their representative in the Committee on Foreign Affairs recalled: “I did not interpret any strong resistance [within the party] to the Swedish operation in isolation.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

While the proposition passed the Parliament without substantial opposition, the military contribution still rested on a foundation of political controversy, especially the controversial relationship to US operations which was suppressed in the process. This surfaced shortly after the proposition passed the Parliament when the Armed Forces acted to deploy liaison officers at US CENTCOM, the military command in charge of the war in Afghanistan. Even if this incident occurred after the entry phase theoretically had ended, I will develop the circumstances in the next part of the chapter, when I discuss how the Swedish military contribution is framed as separate from the US war. The reason for this is that it is an illustrative indicator for how the controversy was suppressed in the process.

This concludes the reconstruction of the decision-making process. In the next part of this chapter the focus carries over to the framing and the way that policy on the military contribution to Afghanistan was framed by the actors in the process. Already I have hinted at certain elements and situations of importance but in the following section these will be put under scrutiny and the different framing strategies placed in the forefront of the analysis. A political will does not transfer to a realization of a military contribution without actors successfully incorporating it with “the foreign policy line”.

It can be argued on good grounds that this particular operation was considered breaking new grounds by launching Special Forces under vague organizational arrangements, in a new geographical environment, and with very limited access to intelligence in the area of operations. Purposeful conduct by participants in the decision-making process managed to frame the military contribution as “natural”, “self-evident”, or “obvious” and through that act forged a domestic foreign policy consensus behind the deployment.

## Framing the entry

So far in this chapter the attention has been placed on the twists and turns of the decision-making process that ended up with a military contribution being sent to Afghanistan. The fast pace and an early focus on Special Forces provides us only with a partial answer as to how a consensus could be formed behind this policy alternative. For instance, the option to await the developments in Afghanistan and deploying later in 2002, perhaps with a more humanitarian related contribution, would not amount to the same level of political weight. Likewise the direct request from the British would explain why the option to backfill the Balkans did not materialize.

In the end, the military contribution rested on a foundation of political controversies that never surfaced in political deliberation. The complicated and uncertain security situation in Afghanistan was not ideal to rally support. A contribution with Special Forces would in practice manage this but would

not necessarily be regarded as an appropriate contribution to an operation with a humanitarian undertone. A Swedish involvement in Afghanistan would furthermore approach the US War on Terror. Would the political controversy on the ongoing military operations by the Americans in Afghanistan spill over to the ISAF operation? Especially since the nature of the relationship with the US war on terror was questionable and the reasons for a Swedish involvement in Afghanistan remained ambiguous.

In the following sections, the focus is placed on the framing strategies when actors frame policy and align it with “the foreign policy line” in order to construct political support for the deployment. Central features of this framing process are the UN mandate, the humanitarian undertone of the operation, and the dissociation of ISAF and OEF, and thereby the Swedish military contribution, from the US war in Afghanistan.

### The United Nations is framed at the center of the policy

The values that are usually promoted in a context of Swedish military contribution to peace support operations links in one way or another back to peace, democracy, equality and international law (Björkdahl, 2013). One should be wary of making the mistake of conflating the framing of these values with a positive implication of humanitarian ideals. The framing of these values can just as well be a front for a more instrumental *realpolitik* in which international institutions are primarily a means to safeguard small states in the international system (Doeser, 2014b). This is one reason why actors consider it effective to frame any military contribution in UN terms. In the Swedish foreign policy discourse the United Nations embodies both the humanitarian ideals and the more pragmatic approach. The UN occupies therefore a special place in Swedish foreign policy since it appeals to a large pool of supporters with divergent interests.

When it comes to the importance of a UN mandate for the initial participation in ISAF, and to international missions in general, a political advisor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs explained the strong position the organization holds within the Social Democrats, especially within the peace movement:

Then, one should not underestimate how the Social Democrats essentially need a UN mandate. It's a very strong argument every time someone takes their hat off and says that they do not want any part in that. For then they say “UN” and everyone is happy again. So one should be aware of that, you would never ever be close to an operation if you did not have the UN backing it up.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015. Other respondents support this claim.

The Social Democratic Party contains a wide plethora of different, and sometimes conflicting, interests. A UN mandate enables the formation of a policy which accommodates all these different interests. Further, what the political advisor also points to is how the UN is amplified in a policy in order to mobilize support behind it and manage potential defection. For as long as the policy is framed in UN terms support is almost inevitable.

So it is important to understand the almost unquestionable place for the United Nations in Swedish foreign policy, especially for the ruling Social Democrats. However, it should also be noted how this role is downplayed or accentuated depending on the overall attractiveness of the policy issue. For example, in parliamentary debates politicians often use the call from the UN or a Security Council mandate to gain support for a particular military intervention. But, as a lot of oppositional politicians often point out, many of the UN request for troops to conflict zones are also ignored by Sweden. So a UN call does not automatically transform into a military contribution. Following this line of reasoning it is apparent that actors only amplify the UN aspects when they are in support of a specific policy.

### **Afghanistan is framed as a “UN-mission”**

During the fall of 2001 the UN was primed differently during the two sequentially different phases. Initially, when the focus was on the American war in Afghanistan, Prime Minister Persson legitimized the aerial bombings by linking them to the UN Charter and the conduct of the Security Council. According to his understanding, the UN Security Council interpreted international law in favor of the Americans. This position spreads and established a wide support in favor of the US aerial bombings of Afghanistan as an act of self-defense in accordance with the UN Charter Article 51. This particular framing was important in order to win the support of the Social Democratic Congress. As one delegate expressed it: “Sweden has always supported the UN and its resolutions. I think it would be devastating if the party congress in continuation would not stand behind the UN and its resolutions” (Social\_Democrats, 2002b, p. 47).

Prime Minister Persson, through his unconditional support, reinforced the strength of the UN mandate and produced a link between the military operations in Afghanistan and the international community, above all the US. This framing caused some problems further down the road when the division between ISAF and the US led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) became paramount to building political support. For the interpretation that gained dominance, especially during the Social Democratic national congress, that the US acted on a UN mandate in Afghanistan was later downplayed by the Government when it was necessary to dissociate ISAF and OEF, a point which I will return to recurrently in this dissertation.

The next phase followed the Bonn conference, which was conducted under UN auspices with a call from the UN to form a security force. Arising

from this meeting was a widespread perception that the UN was going to be the main actor in charge of the reconstruction of Afghanistan. In this phase an amplification of the UN's role enabled a contribution to the military operation, aligning it with previously conducted military operations, all operating under a clear UN mandate. The first question from the Ministry of Defence to the Armed Forces after they had received the request from the British was to report what the Armed Forces needed in terms of a UN Security Council Resolution (SAFHQ, 2002).

In Sweden there is a strong tradition not to act militarily without a UN mandate or some other support in international law. On the other hand, it is important to point out, as I mentioned above, that this does not translate to an automatic causal relationship between a UN mandate and a Swedish military contribution, but a UN mandate is the clearest indication that the intervention rests on an international legitimacy. The ongoing US military operations complicated the situation, as the Minister of Defence recalls, but the endorsement at an early stage from the UN Security Council the decision was necessary in order to gain political support.<sup>57</sup>

The centrality of the Bonn conference conducted under UN auspices, and the call from the UN to contribute to the International Security and Assistance Force, placed the continued discussions on military contributions in a clear UN context. After the Bonn conference the UN Secretary-General himself, Kofi Annan, addressed the Parliament in Sweden on the 12th of December. He had just received the Nobel Peace Prize a few days earlier and was scheduled to address the Parliament before returning to New York (TT, 2001-12-12b). His presence in the Parliament advocating for the military force to Afghanistan as part of a UN reconstruction effort really amplified the linkage between ISAF and the UN and firmly placed the force in a UN context.<sup>58</sup>

This predominant focus on the UN was of central importance and early on the military operation was considered by many in the political deliberations as a "UN-mission."<sup>59</sup> This was a substantial shift from the situation during the fall when all military actions in Afghanistan were American in one way or another: 'American aggression' or 'American self-defense' depending on which side one was on. In the committee's report the UN's leadership in the reconstruction of Afghanistan is accentuated:

It is the UN's responsibility that the humanitarian aid enters the country and reaches the part of the population in need (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2, p. 7).

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<sup>57</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2013 and Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry of Defence, 2015. See also prop. 2001/02:60 p.8.

This perception of the Swedish military contribution as an UN-mission permeates the decision-making process at this time and solidifies the alignment of the ISAF policy with the Swedish foreign policy line. Never is the lack of UN leadership of the military force highlighted, or the coalition of the willing organizational structure, but the frame is built around the UN mandate. Up until the days before the proposition was voted on by the Government it was unclear whether a Chapter VI or VII mandate would be issued (MFA, 2001-12-17). Parallel to the Force Generating Conference the UK was working within the UN Security Council to draft a resolution for ISAF. Since a Chapter VII mandate was on the table informal contacts had been made at this point to the Parliament and the political opposition.

This perception, of a substantial role for the UN, was solidified when the Security Council issued a mandate for ISAF on the 20th of December. Due to the institutional and time constraints the Government voted on the proposition to the Parliament prior to the formal UNSC decision to authorize the ISAF force (Prop., 2001/02:60, p. 1; Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2, p. 4).<sup>60</sup> This is not normal procedure for the Government to proceed in this manner. However, given the urgency in the deployment and that the 20th of December was the last Thursday before the holidays (the cabinet always convenes on Thursdays for collective decisions). Postponing the Government's decision on the proposition would have created a domino effect that would affect the scheduled deployment which was dependent on a parliamentary decision in January. This caused the Government to continue with the proposition ahead of the formal UN decision. The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence points out in their report that the proposition did indeed precede the formal UNSC decision (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2). However, as the committee also points out, Sweden was early involved both in the discussions at the UN headquarters as well as in bilateral negotiations with UK and could therefore, according to the report, present an accurate description of the mission, the mandate and force structure ahead of the formal UNSC decision (Prop., 2001/02:60, p. 4; Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2). The important points here are not the fact that the Government preceded the UNSC Resolution, even if it deviated from customary procedure. Sweden was well aware of the progression of the process in New York and there is no prerequisite, either constitutionally or politically, of a UN mandate in order for the Government to decide on a proposition. The significance lies in the time pressure for an early deployment and that the contribution is distinctly placed in a UN context.

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<sup>60</sup> The UNSC decision came 1.13PM EST on the 20th of December 2001 when the council passed resolution 1386<sup>60</sup> and the Swedish Government had their weekly lunch meeting at 5.00AM EST (11.00 AM Swedish time). Press release SC/7248 20 December 2001 <http://www.un.org/press/en/2001/sc7248.doc.html>, (GOV, 2001-12-20b) and email correspondence 2017-10-19 with the Government's Archive and registry office.

## A UN mandate accommodates opposition

Within the political left there was considerable skepticism toward the US activities in Afghanistan and any Swedish involvement in these. The Left Party had internal debates but given the UN primacy of the military contribution it was argued that support to ISAF was a small cost to display a capability to compromise on important ideological foreign policy issues. A Swedish parliamentary election was scheduled for September 2002 and foreign policy had previously been one of the more divisive policy areas between the Social Democrats and the Left Party. Support for a military contribution to Afghanistan sent signals to the Social Democratic Minister for Foreign Affairs of responsibility and maturity. But the Left Party's opposition to the ISAF contribution was also never given the opportunity to mobilize as the most controversial issue was avoided and defection was accommodated through the centrality of the UN in the policy frame. The Foreign Minister's political advisor recollects:

The first deployment, that was initially very closely linked to the UN Security Council's decision. As well as the UN process. So, my recollection, but I'm not a hundred [per cent sure], that is that because this was decided in the UN there were really nobody who had any comments during the process. Even the Left Party jumped on the bandwagon.<sup>61</sup>

This linkage, between the perception of a UN primacy and the support of the Left Party, is central for how this actor understands the situation. "Even the Left Party", emphasizes that this would have been something that the Left Party might not have supported. This points to the necessity of having a UN mandate to be able to frame the operation in favorable terms which in turn would accommodate potential opposition.

Further, this amplification of the UN after the Bonn conference appealed directly to the Swedish self-image as a peace loving, UN backing, champion of the less fortunate. This situated the military contribution comfortably within the confines of what is generally perceived as the core of Swedish foreign policy. The ownership of the UN, especially through the Security Council mandate for ISAF, permeated the debate in the parliamentary chamber on January 18th. In the words of leading Social Democrat and chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs during the debate:

[MP Ahlin, Social Democratic Party] The committee finds it natural that Sweden contributes with troops in this UN authorized security force. It is well in line with Swedish foreign and security policy and our traditions to support UN resolutions and the peace-promoting [*fredsfrämjande*] efforts that take place in the world on UN mandate (Prot., 2001/02:54, p. 3).

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<sup>61</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

In this quote he frames the military contribution as “natural” and “well in line with Swedish foreign and security policy”, both expressions enabled with the association to the UN. The UN, having an almost unquestionable place in Swedish foreign policy, played a decisive role in the framing of the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan. The UN operates for a broad audience as a heuristic to legitimacy, solidarity, compliance with international law, humanitarian principles, and national security interests. Through this emphasis on the UN, the actors constructed the conditions to align this military operation with previous Swedish military experiences, as well as with humanitarian efforts constructing an alignment between the contribution and “the foreign policy line”.

### A framing approach to align humanitarian ends and military means

In the previous section the analytical focus was placed on the amplification of the UN in framing the policy of the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan. The UN has a normative appeal to a large and diverse audience and reinforces the way the mission can be interpreted and framed in humanitarian terms. In this section the analysis is placed on the framing of the Swedish military contribution as principally humanitarian. A contribution to a peace support operation in a geographical area of humanitarian distress resonates with the Swedish self-image.

In this part of the analysis I will show how part of the humanitarian framing was the shift to frame the overall purpose of the international military presence as essentially humanitarian and not military per se. This was initially done by extending the military problem in Afghanistan beyond disrupting Al-Qaeda operations and towards regime change. This was enabled by highlighting of the humanitarian situation on the ground in Afghanistan, caused by the atrocities of the Taliban in power. When the political discussion on the use of military force centered on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan the odds stacked in favor of the advocates of the military contribution. One enabling factor was the framing of Sweden having an active role in the humanitarian reconstruction of Afghanistan after the end of hostilities.

However, even with a solid humanitarian linkage, two obstacles still faced advocates of the military deployment. First, it was not obvious that the humanitarian situation entitled a military contribution from Sweden. Second, Special Forces would not necessarily be considered the obvious military unit in question for a traditional Swedish peacekeeping contribution to a humanitarian operation.

## **Framing the underlying problem as humanitarian**

During the escalation of violence in Afghanistan much of the focus centered on whether the US was conducting offensive operations in accordance with international law and Article 51 of the UN Charter. While this was heavily disputed, advocates for the US aerial assaults extended the legitimation to include the humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan. The primary advocate for this perspective was Prime Minister Persson. During a speech at the Social Democratic national congress in November 2001 he framed the aftermath of 9/11 as an opportunity to end the silent acceptance of the Taliban regime.

Maybe we were not so many that reacted when the Taliban blew up the nearly 2000 year old Buddha statues in the Bamyán caves. Maybe we were not so many that reacted when the requirement for a full veil was introduced for women. Maybe we were not so many that reacted when women were forbidden to work and girls from the age of eight were banned from school. But on September 11 everyone reacted. In a moment, the world became different (Social\_Democrats, 2002a, p. 13).

In this speech the Prime Minister extends the frame of the military intervention in Afghanistan beyond a collective security action as a response to international terrorism to include a response toward the Taliban and take into account the atrocities and violations committed toward the Afghan people. This support to take on the Taliban regime does not, according to the Prime Minister, contradict the US right for self-defense. The call to react toward the Taliban regime instead strengthens the existing claim to legitimize US actions.

Prime Minister Persson was definitely not the only one with this understanding. According to the Minister for Defence, Björn von Sydow, the decision to contribute militarily to ISAF was based on “the general feeling that the world needs to react against the Taliban regime”.<sup>62</sup> It did not, however, permeate the entire Social Democratic leadership. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anna Lindh, did not share the same conviction as the Prime Minister in conflating the terrorists and the Taliban regime. Despite her skeptical view towards the intervention she was tasked to unite the party behind the Prime Minister’s position at the Social Democratic Congress (Franchell, 2009, pp. 209-210). During the congress in her support for the US military intervention she contradicts herself and narrowly balances these two positions. She advocates use of force on the premise that there is no room for negotiations and that action is necessary to deal with this kind of evil:

We always use to say that one should negotiate, to come to an agreement and that one should work to find solutions. But here there is no one to negotiate

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<sup>62</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2014.

with. There are no terrorists that one can negotiate with. No one comes with a political agenda and says what they want to achieve. Terrorism is about spreading terror and despair and taking revenge on civilians (Social\_Democrats, 2002b, pp. 49-50).

However, while Foreign Minister Lindh links the terrorists to the Taliban regime, since they are the main target for the US bombings, she also repeatedly, throughout the debate, returns to an argument that the Taliban regime in Kabul could put an end to the bombing if they simply handed over Bin Laden to the US. This is incompatible with the Prime Minister's position to extend the framing of the military intervention to include the atrocities of the Taliban and stand in stark contrast to the opening statement by Prime Minister Persson in which he legitimized the US bombings by demonizing the Taliban.

In the opening address to the congress Prime Minister Persson referred to the Taliban regime in Kabul as "these damned murderers" ( *dessa satans mördare*), echoing a powerful expression from Olof Palme, a former Social Democratic Prime Minister of Sweden (1969–1976, 1982–1986) (Franchell, 2009, p. 209; Social\_Democrats, 2002a, p. 13). This expression stems back to a speech in 1975 in which Palme delivered a critique against the Franco regime in Spain after the execution of five nationalists from the Basque Autonomous Country. This expression echoes in the Social Democratic peace movement as one of the memorable moments when Sweden stood up for what was morally right in the same spirit as Palme's harsh critique against the US bombings of Hanoi during Christmas 1972. Using this particular expression Persson called for the congress to declare solidarity with the Afghan people and be reminiscent of Palme's legacy. It was rhetorically clever and amplified the moral dimension of the necessity to extend the frame to include a response to the Taliban, as well as painted the Taliban as the natural antagonist. Sweden would stand against oppression and for the morally right.

The Prime Minister was later criticized for this rhetorical move. Former State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1972–1977) and party fellow, Sverker Åström, expressed his opposition toward the Government's support of the US publicly in an op-ed in *Aftonbladet*. This was the day before the Government decided on the proposition on a military contribution to ISAF. In this piece he rejects the Prime Minister's extended framing of the UN Charter's right for self-defense as an incorrect interpretation of international law and further situates it as incompatible with social-democratic legacy.

Göran Persson has vigorously and deliberately, almost enthusiastically, defended the United States right to bomb. On the loss of civilian lives and proportionality he has spoken very little. At the party congress in Västerås he sought to appeal to Olof Palme's authority to win the delegates acceptance of

his position. Aside from the fact that it is always ethically and intellectually impermissible to invoke the memory of a dead man to warrant a position on a current issue, it has to be said that, if this is done in spite of everything in this case, consideration must be taken in particular to Olof Palme's disgust for all violence, his unconditional support for international law and his intrepidity before the Great Powers. It was against bombings in a previous case, Hanoi 1972, in which he delivered the sharpest protest of his political career (Aftonbladet, 2001-12-19).

This criticism from Åström was especially noticeable to elements within the Social Democratic Party given that he was a former close associate to former Prime Minister Palme. What is central to point out, in this critique that Åström articulates, is that it is still centered on the US and the bombings of Afghanistan and not aimed at a Swedish contribution to the UN authorized military force. This debate article is published at a critical time for the Swedish contribution, the day before the Government's last meeting before the holidays. Still, the problem in Afghanistan had effectively been extended from the terrorists to the Taliban regime and placed the Afghan population in the center of attention. The critique from Åström centered on the Prime Minister's support for the US bombings, not on a Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan. The key for the criticism against the US actions not to spill over on the Swedish contribution to Afghanistan was to hold these entirely separate, a point I will return to later.

When the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs united the congress behind support for the US bombings in Afghanistan there was an inherent paradox in their argumentation. They found legal support for the US based in Article 51, self-defense, while also invoking a legitimization out a humanitarian perspective. The extension of the problem formulation to include the Taliban regime and the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan consequently extends the object of security beyond a Western world threatened by terrorists to the people of Afghanistan facing an oppressive regime. This permitted a framing of a military involvement in Afghanistan based on internationalism and solidarity, making it an argument hard to counter. This is a decisive shift for the potential to build consensus since no military deployment to Afghanistan aimed at only countering a terrorist threat would have gained any broad political support.

The resolute support by the Social Democratic leadership had consequences, both for how Sweden is perceived by other international actors, such as the United States, but also for how the military was used to counter the humanitarian situation.<sup>63</sup> During the congress the Foreign Minister

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<sup>63</sup> The Swedish Prime Minister and the US President George W Bush connected when they met at the US-EU summit in Gothenburg in June 2001. This was the beginning of a relationship that, after the unconditional support for the US campaign in Afghanistan, paved the way for an invitation to the White House in December of 2001 (Thorsell, 2004, p. 278). President Bush conveyed his appreciation of Sweden's public political support at this meeting (Eriksson

pushed the humanitarian aspect hard and linked it to security as she advocated for the importance of the US bombings:

The central task for us today must be to support the people of Afghanistan humanitarily. It is a people who were initially struck by the Soviet invasion, then by the Taliban's reign of terror and now of the bombings [...] But the bombings is not that which has plunged Afghanistan in this disaster [...] There are those who wanted to see a stopping of the bombing. But I do not think stopping the bombings would make it easier for citizens of Afghanistan. On the contrary, paradoxically, stopping the bombings could even prolong the war and also increase the risk of aid being stolen by the Taliban regime (Social\_Democrats, 2002b, pp. 36-37).

In this statement she highlights the need for violence to end the humanitarian suffering for the Afghan people and also to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the ones in need. Others in opposition argued more explicitly for the redistribution of resources from military actions to humanitarian assistance. As Maj Britt Theorin, one of the leading figures of the movement within the Social Democratic Party to oppose the US bombings in Afghanistan, argued:

Terrorism cannot be fought in the short-term, and not with bombs. Ten years of war and 400,000 dead Russian soldiers shows the almost impossible task of winning a military victory in Afghanistan [...] What the Afghan people need is not bombs but food, water and medicines (Social\_Democrats, 2002b, pp. 38-39).

Regardless of policy position on the US bombings the need for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan is indisputable. The humanitarian situation for the people in Afghanistan dominates the foreign policy discourse as the US war in Afghanistan seemingly draws to an end.

### **Framing a humanitarian role for Sweden in Afghanistan**

The first instinct in Swedish foreign policy is seldom to react to atrocities with a military deployment. Sweden has a long tradition of engaging with the world through development aid and diplomatic means. The perception of the military campaign in Afghanistan as a means to counter the Taliban and the humanitarian suffering caused by the regime placed the operation in a humanitarian context. A strong enabling factor for this to resonate within Swedish foreign policy circles was the dominant role that the UN embraced after the Bonn conference. Before a military contribution even started to materialize within the Ministry of Defence, Sweden was part of the interna-

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& Roosberg, 2015, p. 12). The Bush administration was both very pleased and somewhat amazed at the uncompromising Swedish support for the US to pursue the right for self-defense under the UN charter.

tional deliberations on how to handle the aftermath in Afghanistan after the end of US military operations.

Following a meeting with the UN envoy to Afghanistan in mid-November the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced in the media that “for [a military contribution] to be relevant we must first receive a request and we have not received one. I do not think it is militaries that they want from us” (Aftonbladet, 2001-11-15). Sweden would instead, according to the minister, “play an important role in the reconstruction” doing what Sweden “does best” (Aftonbladet, 2001-11-15). Pure military options were perhaps on the table but not considered probable. For the Foreign Minister the focus laid elsewhere:

We will focus on mine-clearance and humanitarian aid. We can assist to start up the country’s schools. We want to focus on women. That they will get education and health care (Aftonbladet, 2001-11-15).

The humanitarian aspect, however, entrapped the Minister for Foreign Affairs later in December. In a short exchange during a question session with the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the parliamentary chamber on the 6th of December the Vice Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and leading Moderate on Foreign Affairs issues conveyed an intention of support from the center-right opposition on any future request from the UN of military contribution to Afghanistan.

[MP Lennmarker, Moderate Party] We moderates suggest that there is a value in that Sweden offers to contribute. Many forces of good are needed. I think the UN’s decision would be affected if Sweden offers a contribution (Prot., 2001/02:42, p. 74).

Foreign Minister Lindh, in her response, referred back to talks with the UN envoy to Afghanistan that there was no demand of Swedish military forces, the upcoming force would consist of mainly Moslem countries, and that Sweden instead should capitalize on civilian experiences. Minister Lindh explained:

When I met with Brahimi [the UN envoy] a couple of weeks ago and discussed a Swedish commitment with him, he was of the opinion that we should primarily build on the vast experience we have in the civilian sphere. We are one of the countries that has made the largest efforts in terms of education and health care in Afghanistan, primarily through the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. The UN considered it best that we continued to develop the strong commitment and wide knowledge we have in the civilian sphere (Prot., 2001/02:42, p. 74).

But she closed her final remark with an opening for a military contribution: “If there is a need for Sweden in any other area, Sweden will of course examine it in a positive spirit” (Prot., 2001/02:42, p. 74).

By the time that the Ministry of Defence and the military had conformed on the force composition and accepted an invitation to a Force Generating Conference in London (SAFHQ, 2002) the Minister for Foreign Affairs was still oriented towards a Swedish humanitarian contribution in the aftermath. After a meeting with her Norwegian counterpart on the 12th of December she stated in reference to Norway’s contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom:

A corresponding initiative is not relevant for Sweden, although Sweden may offer the UN military assistance to a peacekeeping force. We are already one of the largest humanitarian contributors. Then, we have said that the country that will lead a military force, it looks like it will be Great Britain, may also discuss with us what we might possibly do in terms of the military part (TT, 2001-12-12a).

Foreign Minister Lindh emphasized reconstruction and humanitarian aid but the contribution that was converged on within the Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence was Special Forces. The potential disagreement that could surface was more centered on the nature of the means, military force or humanitarian aid, than whether an engagement in Afghanistan was necessary to counter the humanitarian situation. The Foreign Minister imagined that it was the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan who would be the continued implementer of Swedish policy in Afghanistan and not the Armed Forces. As this statement reveals: “not least the experience and the extensive network of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan enables us to really help rebuild the country” (Aftonbladet, 2001-11-15). The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) functions as a heuristic for the long Swedish engagement and humanitarian commitment to Afghanistan. As a civil servant working in the Parliament relates the military contribution to a strong compassion with Afghanistan, mainly through the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup>

These strong linkages to civil society reinforced the idea of Swedish ownership of the humanitarian work that the SCA has done. However, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs reasoned that a secure environment was necessary for the aid work to continue. This line of reasoning was expressed by the Chief of Defence as he discussed how Afghanistan somewhat surprisingly opened up for remote interventions outside of the traditional sphere of Europe and Africa. In his reasoning as to why this emerged, he returns to the Committee as the linkage to enable a contribution to ISAF.

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<sup>64</sup> Interview Civil Servant, Parliament, 2014.

It should be remembered, however, what I perhaps was unaware of from the beginning that Sweden has had a rather strong aid [...] linked to the Afghanistan committee [...] so I think that has partly influenced the MFA's position in this, in that yes we must maintain it, we cannot let it go. I mean the money through the Afghan Committee, they could not be operational if it was a war that maybe we could do something about. I believe that probably contributed.<sup>65</sup>

This added a legitimization dimension to the general involvement of military force in Afghanistan. Whereas the military contribution would not directly deal with these issues, the linkage was constructed between the reconstruction of a society based on universal human rights principles and the need for security through military means. When the UN Secretary-General addressed the Swedish Parliament in early December he petitioned for contributions to the multinational security force that was being convened to operate in Afghanistan. In his talk he emphasized that this force was crucial for the humanitarian aid to reach the Afghan people bridging the role of ISAF with that of humanitarian aid (TT, 2001-12-12b).

### **Framing the military contribution as humanitarian**

When the proposition was presented to the Parliament the objective for the Government was to get it passed and mobilize as much political support for it as possible, preferably a consensus. When selling the military contribution to a wider audience, it was firmly placed in a context in which it would contribute to countering the humanitarian situation (Prop., 2001/02:60). This theme is reproduced in the committee report:

The humanitarian situation in the country is acute.

The appointment of the interim administration in Kabul is the beginning of a peace and reconciliation process.

Both public and civil society are rebuilt from scratch after been degraded after twenty years of armed conflict.

They must respect human rights regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion.

Creates a foundation for democratic development and a society in which the respect for human rights is at the center (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2, pp. 6-7).

These quotes are included to illustrate the humanitarian context that the military contribution was placed in when the Government proposed for the Parliament to deploy a military contribution to ISAF. They also serve to further support the argument that the underlying objective of the military engage-

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<sup>65</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

ment in Afghanistan was to topple the Taliban regime and introduce human rights and democratic principles in Afghanistan. “The Taliban regime has grossly violated the human rights” (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2).

In the parliamentary debate in the chamber several Members of Parliament frame these humanitarian concerns as the next step to address in the development of Afghanistan:

[MP Ahlin, Social Democratic Party] Conflicts, intolerant regimes, occupations, armed conflict, the Taliban regime - the list can be made long over the burdens that the Afghan population has endured.

[MP Ångström, Green Party] The need for the whole population to be guaranteed human rights, the need for a functioning judiciary, the need for functioning civilian infrastructure, the need for democratic institutions.

[MP Jóhannesson, Left Party] In this development stage, it is extremely important and necessary to take women's needs seriously and also include the women themselves in this work (Prot., 2001/02:54, p. 4).

Democratic values, human rights and solidarity with the Afghan people situates the military contribution within the Swedish approach to peace building efforts and resonates with the self-image of Sweden as a nation of peace (Wendt & Åse, 2016; Ångström, 2010). Especially gender issues and equality between sexes were placed in the forefront of the justifications of the involvement in Afghanistan. This is expressed not only in the debates but in the committee report as well (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2, pp. 7-8).

There were no defiant or challenging voices against understanding the situation in Afghanistan as one of dire humanitarian suffering. It was explicitly framed that the people of Afghanistan had endured so many burdens and that the regime change would facilitate a reconstruction of the society in which the humanitarian concerns could be addressed. The only thing that Afghanistan needs for this process to gain momentum was security, provided by the UN through ISAF. The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence states in the report:

An improved security situation is thus essential for the Afghan political process to continue developing in a positive direction and create the conditions for long-term stability (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2, p. 6).

This framing of security as a prerequisite for addressing humanitarian concerns, the security first argument, is accentuated in the chamber by both governmental parties and the center-right opposition:

[MP Ahlin, Social Democratic Party] The task for the international security force is to preserve security in Kabul and its surroundings to provide the in-

terim administration and the political future in Afghanistan with reasonable chance to develop in a democratic direction (Prot., 2001/02:54, p. 3).

[MP Lennmarker, Moderate Party] The first step in building development and even democracy in this country is of course to establish security (Prot., 2001/02:54, p. 3).

A stabile security situation was framed as a necessity for humanitarian aid to reach the ones in need. This reached a level of dominance in the political discourse that regardless if one supported military operations in Afghanistan or not the need for humanitarian assistance was undisputed. This linkage between security and development, or between the military and humanitarian, is a central aspect in order for the ISAF operation to resonate. The early shift to include the Taliban atrocities and the humanitarian situation in the problem description was an enabling factor to sell Swedish participation in a military force later on.

### **Downgrading the military component**

While there was a broad support for a military operation, for it attracted support throughout the political spectrum, perhaps for different reasons, there was still the issue of a force contribution consisting of Special Forces. To make things even more challenging this would be the first time this kind of force contribution would fall under the jurisdiction of the Parliament. Swedish Special Forces was surrounded by a cloak of secrecy which had kept them out of the public eye. Previous Special Forces operations in the Balkans had been housed within the overall framework of the deployment and not been the object of parliamentary approval as such (Alm, 2017). This time Special Forces constituted the whole contribution.

So even after creating a link between security and humanitarian aid one of the key challenges for advocates was to frame a contribution with Special Forces as a natural aspect of this operation. It needed to incorporate the two diverging positions of the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs. While for the Minister for Defence this was considered treading new ground, for the Minister for Foreign Affairs it still concentrated around “what Sweden does best”, i.e. the humanitarian element.

Downplaying the unique aspects of Special Forces, such as military techniques and tactics, enabled this contribution to be framed as part of a humanitarian operation and thereby suppressing potential oppositional views. Advocates, primarily the Ministry of Defence and the military, looked to a Special Forces contribution as the only legitimate alternative for this mission as it evolved. Special Forces not only reduced the risks of entering early, it was the only available alternative for an early deployment.

When the proposed contribution was made public, in conjunction with the publication of the proposition, the Armed Forces framed the contribution to

fit the perception of traditional Swedish foreign policy by downgrading the strict military aspects that easily can be interpreted as combat operations, especially concerning units conducting special operations. This can be demonstrated by observing the language officials used to describe the unit in media and the careful downgrading of conventional military characteristics. The head of the Strategic Division at the Armed Forces headquarters, General Kihl, said in an interview with a Swedish newspaper about the soldiers that they are “no adventurers or Rambo types. Their most important task is to avoid a combat situation” (SvD, 2001-12-21). This downgrading of the military characteristic is also evident when the military briefs the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. The representative of the Left Party expressed how the initial military deployment was framed in front of the committee:

What we received both during presentations in the Committee, and what we received in writing, it appeared as an operation that basically involved Kabul and the immediate area, the airport, and about civilian efforts, in principle a certain security work, but above all to secure for example schools, it was even so that at one point, one of the militaries we invited to the committee said that “it’s a little bit of carpentry work, some painting work”. He completely downplayed the military part of the operation.<sup>66</sup>

Despite being a deployment of Special Forces to Afghanistan under a coalition of the willing organizational structure, the Government framed the ISAF contribution as a continuation of previous Swedish efforts in Afghanistan. In the proposition for the ISAF contribution it states that “a Swedish participation in the peace force would be in line with Sweden’s already extensive commitment in Afghanistan” (Prop., 2001/02:60, p. 8). This alignment of the proposed military contribution to ISAF with Swedish previous engagements in Afghanistan is a crucial component for the overall narrative of humanitarian military assistance. The “extensive commitment” that is being referred to is the aid work accomplished by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). The framing of the military contribution as a continuation of Swedish previous aid efforts hung in the balance of the official position of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. As they were unable to reach an agreement, the silence that arose was interpreted by the surrounding actors as a passive support for the Swedish military engagement and played into the narrative of a continuation of Swedish foreign policy and in line with previous efforts.

The successful framing of the Special Forces contribution as a natural element of this operation trapped the Minister for Foreign Affairs by her own framing of the necessity to contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. So when the military and Ministry of Defence framed the operation in these

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<sup>66</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

terms it became a *fait accompli*. But what is remarkable with this framing is that Swedish ISAF policy was literally framed “in line with” previous humanitarian efforts and Special Forces as a reasonable “continuation” of humanitarian efforts. Bridging the humanitarian work and the military contribution raises the point that if military means are considered a tool of humanitarian assistance aligned with more traditional aid assistance. The tradition of acting in solidarity, with military means, as a response to humanitarian needs, has a history all throughout the Cold War and is the dominating perception of what military contributions are meant to deal with.<sup>67</sup>

Håkan Juholt, Social Democrat and chair of the Defence Commission, was one of the main actors behind the transformation of the Swedish defense and highly supportive of international deployments. According to him the Afghanistan operation entered the agenda in the middle of this transition and confirmed the direction that Sweden is taking its defense.

We build the peace with others, not alone. And it was, after all, the case that when the Afghanistan operation came it was in line with the transformation we had done and became another confirmation that this is what will be needed in the future.<sup>68</sup>

His recollection was that it was “obvious” that Sweden would participate and that the political discussions centered on the risks of the mission. This is an indication of a favorable context for an idea of a military contribution to be accepted. It is also important to point out that the transformation process that Juholt acknowledged placed the changing context in a state of continuity for the actors involved. The world is changing and Sweden is changing with it. This increased the threshold for rejecting incremental changes to the foreign policy as part of the way forward.

That Defence and Foreign Affairs had differentiating views on the ISAF contribution was not remarkable given that they have different responsibilities. The Minister for Foreign Affairs recurrently insisted publicly on Sweden taking a lead role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. This humanitarian focus followed the international optimism for the development of Afghanistan and how this military contribution, framed more as humanitarian assistance, would be limited both in numbers and length. After the request from the British the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces could highlight the humanitarian aspects and amplify the linkage to the UN and downplay more geopolitical reasons, especially any cooperation with the American military presence and the War on Terror. This enabled the framing of Special Forces

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<sup>67</sup> See for example the committee report on the initial KFOR contribution: “Sweden has long, through peacekeeping operations in the region and through extensive humanitarian assistance and other efforts, been involved in the peace process. There is a strong Swedish interest of participating in a possible peace force in Kosovo” (Rep., 1998/99:UFöU2).

<sup>68</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

as an appropriate and even natural military contribution to a continued humanitarian engagement in Afghanistan which made it difficult to mobilize an opposition against it. But this all rested on the perception of a Swedish military contribution that did not have anything to do with the ongoing US operation.

### Framing Sweden as separate from “the war”

When the US in October 2001 launched the campaign in Afghanistan they did so under a coalition of the willing framework with the support of many nations but primarily the United Kingdom. This operation was named Operation Enduring Freedom or OEF. While the Swedish Government supported the United States’ right to self-defense, on the basis of Article 51 in the UN Charter, there was considerable opposition toward the bombings of Afghanistan. Not only within the Social Democratic Party, as surfaced during the national congress, but also within the Left and the Green parties.

International use of force was a sensitive issue in Sweden, notwithstanding a change in norms in the post-Cold War period, especially as a result after the genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica. Despite the support in the UN Charter the US involvement was widely interpreted as an offensive campaign in Afghanistan. This led to the relationship between the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) being a central issue in the political deliberations which threatened the legitimization of the Swedish military contribution. Separating these two entities enabled a Swedish contribution framed to take part in the UN-led humanitarian reconstruction mission and not in the US war. This distinction was essential to appease the political left which fostered a strong opposition towards the US warfare. The Minister of Defence recalls that the separation toward the US led operations was essential not to stir the opposition and thereby secure a broad political support.

There were doubtful voices from the beginning and it did matter that we did not conduct, one should say, offensive warfare together with the Americans [...] it made it much easier. It would have been problematic to join the Americans direct warfare.<sup>69</sup>

Successfully separating the Swedish military contribution from the ongoing war in Afghanistan accommodated opposition and did not allow controversy to surface. As a result of this the military contribution could be framed as a “continuation” of previous efforts in Afghanistan and aligned with “the foreign policy line”.

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<sup>69</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2014.

Actors in favor of the operation constructed an organizational separation between ISAF and OEF by contrasting these operations. Any contact or overlap between the two was downplayed and diminished by the advocates. This organizational distinction was further reinforced by a geographical division where the Swedish military contribution was placed in the vicinity of Kabul while “the war” still lasted in other regions of Afghanistan. The desk officer in the ministry remembers that the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs came to visit him to get all the facts straight about the two missions and how they could be sold as separate.

How do we guarantee [that we are not working with the Americans]? Well I remember one day I had a visit by Urban Ahlin [...] He came into my room [...] I had maps and everything laid out with fairly high resolution of Kabul and he wanted to know exactly where the Swedes will be deployed and the whereabouts of Operation Enduring Freedom?<sup>70</sup>

This is a very literal example of the chairman seeking evidence for a geographical division. Different deployment areas makes for a very clear division of the two operations.

The Minister for Defence was an early advocate for the operation and he recalled that the political and bureaucratic process within the military ran smoothly. The desk officer working in the ministry, however, explains that although Minister von Sydow weighed in in favor of an operation, there was still no possibility that we would have gone in together with the Americans:

It was a Social Democratic government, although we had a new defense minister who is no longer called Thage G Peterson but Björn von Sydow but then Thage G's spirit is still alive huh, and this thing that it would be deployed in, so to say, in Afghanistan with the purpose to work together with the Americans and Operation Enduring Freedom, that was an absolute no-no.<sup>71</sup>

Thage G Peterson is a former Social Democratic politician and Minister for Defence (1994–1997) who became a leading vocal opponent of the military involvement in Afghanistan. When the desk officer alludes to his spirit it is the very same social democratic legacy that the Prime Minister tapped into in his opening speech at the Congress. So while the Minister for Defence early comes out in support of a military contribution to Afghanistan there was still a concern that he did not want to stir up too much turmoil within the party.

One of the central facilitating conditions, for contrasting ISAF and OEF, was that the massive criticism directed toward the US operation remained isolated to that particular operation. While the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces appeared not to be troubled by working together with the

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<sup>70</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

Americans, they recognized the political impossibility of this kind of military contribution. However, instead of trying to engage with the negative view of the American operation, the Government framed the new operation as separated from the American. The Government struggled, however, in the interactions with the US and British for the two operations was treated by them as different parts of a whole. To the extent that the two operations had to work together it was publicly defended by Swedish officials as a matter of coordinating operations not to jeopardize the safety of the soldiers on the ground.<sup>72</sup>

### **Downgrading the interface**

The organizational command structure for the initial stage of the international military involvement in Afghanistan was still, by the time of the decision on the governmental proposition to Parliament, intrinsically unclear. Two days before the Government's decision, the Ministry of Defence received an intelligence assessment of the present situation in Afghanistan in which it states that "the overall command structure for the interim force should be US CENTCOM"<sup>73</sup> (SAFHQ, 2001-12-19).<sup>74</sup> Further, the intelligence assessment specified in an organizational chart that a subsequent UN force was expected to take over in April 2002, and had two potential developments. Either to continue being led by US CENTCOM, under a coalition of the willing framework, or change into a UN mission led by the Department of Peacekeeping operations at the UN headquarters. That this unclear command structure is not mentioned in the proposition is remarkable. Two days before the text was decided on by the Government, the best assessment from the military intelligence placed ISAF under the operational command of US CENTCOM. With the knowledge that this was the most sensitive issue the omission in the proposition is a clear indication of downgrading this relationship in order avoid any political controversy on the issue.

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<sup>72</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> US CENTCOM is one of six geographical combat commands of the US military with area responsibility for the Middle-East, Egypt and parts of Central-Asia including Afghanistan. In addition, the US has four functional commands with global responsibility. The combatant commanders, in charge of their respective command, wield significant power and authority in their regions and answer directly through the chain of command to the Secretary of Defence and ultimately the President of the USA in accordance with title 10 of the Code of Laws of the United States. As NATO assumed operational command of ISAF (next chapter) the field commander of US troops under ISAF in Afghanistan answered to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and EUCOM (European Command), who are responsible for NATO issues. At the same time the field commander answers to the combatant commander at CENTCOM. These parallel structures created a situation in which military leaders with equal rank with different reporting chains must coordinate their efforts in order for each to succeed.

<sup>74</sup> Even if they do not refer to ISAF literally, they do refer to an operational timeframe from Christmas 2001 until the end of March the following year which is consistent with the planning for ISAF at this point.

“The uncertainty was significant, to say the least”, as the desk officer at the Ministry clarified, “who the hell will lead? What are our tasks? In what geographical area should we be? What will actually the yanks do?”<sup>75</sup> But these uncertainties, no matter the sensitivity, were not allowed to hamper the process in which the proposition needed to be treated in the Parliament for a quick departure of the force.

The decisive issue for the mustering of a political unity to support an IS-AF contribution was the coordination with US forces in Afghanistan or rather downplaying any aspects of it. The Minister for Defence recalled the balancing act from the part of the ministry and the military to avoid political controversy.

Yes. I remember that we had a lot of contacts on so to speak, about how staff interaction would happen, agreement on this. I defended it in the media that you have to be sure that there will not be any accidental firings, so to say, on units belonging to the other major operation. But still, you have a political need to clarify that we will not go there to carry out the military operations against the Taliban, but it was the maintenance of peace and security, primarily in Kabul and eventually there were changes, it was a complex command structure.<sup>76</sup>

In the proposition that the Government sends to Parliament there are only two mentions of the US led operation:

The US led coalition’s operations in Afghanistan had contributed to changes in power (Prop., 2001/02:60, p. 5)

This also includes taking a position to the needs of coordination vis-à-vis the American operation currently taking place in the country (Prop., 2001/02:60, p. 7).

Taking into account that US operations in Afghanistan was not only the triggering factor for opposition to a peace support operation but also that the entire Afghan conflict was set in a US context as a direct response to 9/11 it is notable that the Swedish proposition omits this kind of reasoning.

### **Omitting the relationship between ISAF and OEF**

When the proposition was treated in Parliament there was an additional indicative example of how the relationship toward the OEF was downgraded in the process. A letter attached to the original Security Council resolution (UNSCR 1386) from the UK minister for Foreign Affairs Jack Straw, in which he elaborates on the relationship between ISAF and OEF, was left out of the committee report.

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<sup>75</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2014.

This letter was distributed within the Security Council together with the resolution text on the day of the decision, 20 December 2001. While the Resolution 1386 was annexed to the committee report the letter from the UK minister was omitted (Rep., 2001/02:UFöU2). In the original letter it stated:

In respect of the relationship between the International Security Assistance Force and forces operating in the Afghanistan theatre under Operation Enduring Freedom, and for reasons of effectiveness, *the United States Central Command will have authority over the International Security Assistance Force* to deconflict International Security Assistance Force and Operation Enduring Freedom activities and to ensure that International Security Assistance Force activities *do not interfere* with the successful completion of Operation Enduring Freedom (UN, 2001-12-19, my emphasis).

This addressed a hierarchical relationship between the two operations. US CENTCOM would have “authority over” to make sure that ISAF activities “do not interfere” with OEF. While I have no indication that this exclusion was done purposely it is still a straw in the wind to support the widespread efforts of isolating ISAF from OEF altogether. So while the military intelligence assessment places US CENTCOM in the operational chain of command, and the UK letter points to an exchange between the forces, it does not fit into the narrative of the advocates trying to build a consensus for the operation in Sweden. This becomes evident when news of this letter reached the Left Party’s representative in the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Then it immediately turned into a political issue. He made clear his reasoning in an interview with *Aftonbladet* in February 2002:

The Government declared at the meeting [the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on Jan 16)] that, of course, this operation should not interfere with US warfare, but we received no information that the US Central Command would have the right to decide in the end. On the contrary, we received insurance on the opposite (*Aftonbladet*, 2002-02-07).

This incident is an indication of how any linkage between the Swedish military contribution, ISAF and the American warfare was extremely politically sensitive. The Ministry of Defence downplayed the relationship between US CENTCOM and ISAF and clarified that some coordination with the US led operation was necessary. The desk officer for ISAF in the ministry remarked on the vast difference of being subordinated the UK or the US.

We were with the British in Kosovo... we saw nothing strange to be subordinated to them even in Kabul, huh, but the US connection was burning hot.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

Support for the ISAF contribution had been politically impossible for the Left Party had not the separation of the American war and the ISAF peace mission been credibly and consistently given prominence. The separation between ISAF and OEF was also closely related to the humanitarian framing of ISAF. The Left Party's representative recalls that the military framed the operation as a strict humanitarian and reconstruction mission when they briefed the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

[They] completely downplayed the military part of the mission. It shows a little bit of the picture how it was presented to us [in the committee]. And then we [the Left Party] made the assessment that this was kept separate from the US war effort and that there was no coordination or that Swedish troops would not participate in the very war that we opposed.<sup>78</sup>

So the bridging of humanitarian goals and military means, in addition to the downgrading of the military characteristics of the ISAF operation and the Swedish Special Forces contribution, and amplifying the UN mandate all feed into the overall alignment strategy of contrasting the US war and ISAF. If instead the military aspect would have been articulated, no linkage to humanitarian aims established and/or that the coordination with US troops been dominating the deployment the military contribution would not have been congruent with the foreign policy line of Sweden.

The Left Party remained critical toward any US involvement but through the briefings in the Parliament they found the two operations as separate entities. The Left Party's support was influenced by the upcoming election 2002 and the close working relationship the party had formed with the Government. Elements within the Left Party were aiming for a seat in government and previously they had worked closely in most political areas except foreign and security policy. Support for the deployment to Afghanistan was framed within the party as a small concession to display to the Social democrats that they were government ready. The spokesperson on foreign policy for the Left Party had also developed an in-depth trust with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and they met once a month to discuss current international issues. According to him this trust worked as a countermeasure for the uncertainty surrounding the operation.<sup>79</sup>

In the parliamentary debate, in addition to bringing up the US bombings in Afghanistan and framing them as illegitimate, the Left Party also underlined the absence in the proposition of US previous support to the Taliban in the 1990's.

[MP Jóhannesson, Left Party] The Government does not include a word about the negligence of the international community and the US's support for

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<sup>78</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

the Taliban regime after the Soviet retreat. This is startling to say the least. The Taliban were equipped by the US, received political and military support from the US, and the Taliban won the civil war thanks to this support. But this part of the history of Afghanistan has been completely excluded by the Government (Prot., 2001/02:54, p. 5).

But despite this critique against the US offensive operations and aerial bombings, as well as towards previous US support to the Taliban in the 1990s, the division between ISAF and OEF was upheld during the treatment of the proposition in the Parliament. The relationship with OEF does not surface during the parliamentary debate.

The proposition was voted through Parliament with the full support of the chamber. However, a clear indication of the sensitive nature of the relationship between ISAF and OEF came just weeks after the deployment. Political controversy erupted as the military wanted to send liaison officers to US CENTCOM as part of Sweden's efforts in "the fight against terrorism" (GOV, 2002-03-14b). For people working in the bureaucracy this was considered the most difficult decision to pass or "sneak through".

### Epilogue to the entry: the ISAF-OEF controversy surfaces

The most illustrative example of the politically charged relationship between ISAF and OEF flared after the parliamentary vote and when the force had already been deployed in Afghanistan. While it occurred after the vote in Parliament it is still relevant for this chapter since it reveals the political controversy that was suppressed during the deployment phase in order to build a consensus.

The military capitalized on an opportunity to send a liaison officer to the Coalition Coordination Center at US Central Command (CENTCOM) in Tampa, Florida.<sup>80</sup> The process to see through the parliamentary decision had been a balancing act but now this exploration by the military jeopardized political support for the military contribution to ISAF. When the issue of liaison officers to US CENTCOM was raised by the military it became political immediately. As a desk officer in the Ministry of Defence expressed it:

Then suddenly during the spring, we take a breather and realize that now damn it, are we under way, huh. Then we became aware, hell, all of a sudden

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<sup>80</sup> The formal decision to place liaison officers at US CENTCOM was taken at the political level by the Government in March of 2002 and it was preceded by a rather swift process (GOV, 2002-03-14; SAFHQ, 2002-01-30, 2002-03-18). The issue was raised by the Swedish embassy in Washington and the Chief of Defence decides on January 25 that the Armed Forces would work towards placing an officer at US CENTCOM as soon as possible (MFA, 2002-02-21; SAFHQ, 2002). The initial direction from the military was to treat the deployment as a decision within their jurisdiction [*myndighetsbeslut*] but this was not shared by the Ministry of Defence who assessed the issue to be of a political nature.

the Armed Forces are going to send one, I think even two officers to Tampa, huh, what the hell is this thing?<sup>81</sup>

The Swedish military attaché in Washington at that time, Sverker Göranson (later Chief of Defence 2009-2015), was one of the initiators to the idea of placing liaison officers at US CENTCOM (MFA, 2002-02-21).<sup>82</sup> He recalls that this was a way for Sweden to obtain insight in operational planning by “placing our ears very close to the rails”.<sup>83</sup> It was a clear intent from the Armed Forces to use the deployment to Afghanistan to gain access to information previously out of reach for Sweden, especially concerning intelligence.

For the Armed Forces it was mainly seen as an information link between US CENTCOM and the Armed Forces headquarters but it bore stark political consequences as a clear distinction between US offensive operations and ISAF had been assured by the Government during the political process for the parliamentary approval (SAFHQ, 2002-12-17).<sup>84</sup> The Ministry expressed discontent toward the military in not accounting for the political ramifications in exploring this option.<sup>85</sup> According to the military, however, this was a military advice given without political consideration.<sup>86</sup> Domestically the two operations needed to be separate and distinct from each other in order to maintain political support. Internationally on the other hand, and within the Armed Forces it appears, they were seen as two parts of a whole.

In the unclassified terms of reference for OEF’s Coalition Coordination Center (CCC), attached to the initial request from the Armed Forces, it states that the primary function of the CCC is “to establish and maintain operational interface between national force commanders in order to facilitate and synchronize coalition force operations” (SAFHQ, 2002-01-30, p. 3).<sup>87</sup> It clearly states that it will not have operational control of forces and function as an “information conduit only”. However, it is interesting to note that “[t]he CCC will also facilitate information exchange about theater level forces’ operational capabilities, combined planning and operations, and will monitor the combat capabilities of all forces in order to attain *coalition unity of effort* toward the common objective” (SAFHQ, 2002-01-30, p. 3, my emphasis). As strictly as the organizational divide is presented in the Swe-

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<sup>81</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016, Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014 and Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014 and Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015.

<sup>86</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> This request is two-weeks later withdrawn by the CHOD Hederstedt “on the basis of changed state of affairs” (SAFHQ, 2002-02-13). I still consider the document relevant as it describes the current condition of the process.

dish political discourse, it is evident that from a US perspective, and I would argue from the Swedish military, the two operations (OEF and ISAF) are seen as different parts of a whole. Unity of effort is the military term for harmonizing the work of different organizations, often of different nationalities, toward the same objective.<sup>88</sup> In their initial request in January 2002 the military describes that the two operations are merely divided geographically and states that both are based on Security Council Resolutions:

ISAF's area of responsibility is limited to KABUL with its immediate surroundings. At the same time, in remaining parts of Afghanistan, continues operation Enduring Freedom under US leadership but with elements from other nations. Both operations are supported by UN Security Council resolutions (SAFHQ, 2002-01-30).

For the Government liaison officers to be in Tampa was of strong symbolic value as it consolidated the partnership with the US and filled the transatlantic link with substance.<sup>89</sup> As one respondent explained to me when we were discussing the importance of the Afghanistan operation:

R: But ultimately, it's always about the relationship with the United States according to me. Was it during this period that we started placing people at Tampa US CENTCOM?

I: Yes, it was just in the beginning of the Afghanistan effort.

R: Because that was one of the most sensitive things we had done in a long time. It was “hush-hush” and we had to dress it in fine words that we were placed over there [...] that we would have information that could protect our forces in Afghanistan because everyone knew that we really wanted insight in an American [military] staff and participate in the decision-making process, but we couldn't say that, *as that would freak out the Left*.<sup>90</sup>

The problems surrounding US CENTCOM liaison go to the core of the division of ISAF/OEF. The intentions of the ministry and the military could not be openly displayed as that would have jeopardized the potential to build a political coalition in support as “that would freak out the Left.” That there were going to be some exchange of information was no secret to anybody involved in the process but, as one desk officer at the ministry explains: “we would at least not officially have any, so to speak, collaboration with OEF. Then it would never had become an operation.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Unity of command would be a term to denote that all forces operate under a single commander with the authority to direct all forces in pursuit of a common objective.

<sup>89</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015 and Interview Desk Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014 (my emphasis).

<sup>91</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

Access in advance to the main features of US operations would according to the Armed Forces “improve overall” safety for the Swedish contingent (SAFHQ, 2003-02-21, p. 87). In my empirical material it is clear that safety for soldiers stands out as a genuine concern and continuously advocated in relation to this placement. A memo written in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs the military presence at US CENTCOM was arguably to “prevent friendly fire and guarantee resources from ISAF in case of an rescue or the evacuation of injured” (MFA, 2003-11-05, pp. 5-6). However, in interviews it is also raised by respondents as a way of “selling” the placement to US CENTCOM. A desk officer working with ISAF recalls how they constructed an argumentation around a potential hostage situation in Afghanistan and that the liaison office in Tampa would be necessary to coordinate a rescue operation. Sweden lacked the resources to conduct an operation of this magnitude and therefore needed a life-line with the Americans. In my interview with him, he emphasized that this was the official explanation but the underlying purpose was to strengthen the bounds with the US: “it was the excuse we had and it was accepted”.<sup>92</sup>

Another desk officer recalls that they linked the liaison office with “the safety of Swedish troops since the Americans controlled certain strategic capabilities that were essential and necessary for us”.<sup>93</sup> The initiator at the embassy in Washington recollected that he felt complete support for initiating the liaison exchange with US CENTCOM despite the political and medial commotion.<sup>94</sup>

This concludes the analysis of the framing of the entry. In this part of the chapter I have established how actors in the process highlighted and downplayed certain aspects of the policy in order to legitimize it with a broader political audience. The UN mandate, a central feature of not only Social Democratic policies but any Swedish government, combined with a humanitarian undertone of the military mission were important to garner political support. This placed the military contribution firmly within the confines of “the foreign policy line.” The significant framings in order to suppress and accommodate political opposition toward the military deployment were the organizational and geographical division of ISAF and OEF. Separating these two military operations was key for not letting the negative criticism, linked to US offensive operations in Afghanistan, spill over to ISAF and the Swedish contribution.

The expressed arguments frame the deployment as important to establish security around Kabul in support of the interim administration and eventuating effective development aid to address the humanitarian situation. The

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<sup>92</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

linkages to previous military contributions to peace support operations, the Swedish tradition of peace building, and previous Swedish humanitarian engagement in Afghanistan, were not challenged and the Swedish “foreign policy line” continued without interruption. Arguments and reasons heavily alluding to collective security invoked during the initial phase after 9/11 was surprisingly absent when the Government sought political support on the issue. Prime Minister Persson’s reasoning on how the terrorist attacks were an attack on democracy and the interdependent western world or the Minister for Defence’s argument “one for all, all for one” were notably absent. This silence is decisive to understand how political controversy is left out when the Government frames the military contribution and constructs a domestic foreign policy consensus.

## Constructing consensus for the entry

The decision to enter Afghanistan with Special Forces as part of the International Security Assistance Force was pushed forward in the decision-making process by a predominant political will to participate. However, a political will is perhaps necessary but not at all sufficient for a domestic consensus to form in support of the policy. In this case there are certain aspects concerning the form of the contribution, the US military presence, and the uncertain security situation, that would speak against a broad political support.

As I have shown in this chapter, advocates incorporated all these contradictory values and ideas into a coherent policy by highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others. In the end, a widespread understanding of the military contribution as a natural consequence of that time dominated the political discourse, making it evident for all parties involved that Sweden should contribute. But this consensus did not simply happen. Advocates worked meticulously to build domestic legitimacy and forge a consensus in favor of the military deployment.

It all started with the Prime Minister himself who was a strong advocate for a friendly policy towards the US. During the Social Democratic Congress in October 2001 a rift in the party emerged between critical voices to the US bombings and the party leadership’s position. Prime Minister Persson effectively suppressed opposition with the assistance of his Foreign Minister, Anna Lindh, and the pro-American position won the day. These signals from the highest political authority in Sweden gave subordinates in the Government Offices and the military a direction for policy and paved the way for the timing and configuration of this contribution. This expressed support for the US did not translate into apparent alternatives for action so there was no obvious way forward for Sweden until the British requested Swedish Special Forces.

As long as any military alternatives were directly linked to Operation Enduring Freedom it was a substantial political threshold to send military contributions to Afghanistan. However, as the opportunity presented itself, the contribution could be successfully framed in a UN and humanitarian context after the Bonn conference. A positive development was predicted for Afghanistan and the international process was permeated at this time by a sense of optimism. The only obstacle was a lack of security, which negatively affected the potential to rebuild Afghan institutions and for development aid to reach the Afghan population. The Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan was framed to fit a political context that favored international military operations in humanitarian interventions. The United Nations functioned in this context as an essential bridge between the authorization of violence through military means and the self-image of Sweden as a humanitarian power player legitimizing the use of the military force as a “force for good” (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015). A UN mandate functions as a heuristic to a wide range of interests ranging from national security interests (being of diplomatic nature or foreign policy influence) to legitimacy, solidarity and compliance with international law. A UN mandate accommodates opposition as there is a potential to interpret UN action in the light of the important interests of the oppositions, or at least provides opponents with a sufficient reason not to oppose the policy.

The results in this chapter show clearly that the UN mandate is framed differently depending on the policy issue and intentions of the actors. In the beginning when support for US military actions in Afghanistan was mobilized during the Social Democratic Congress, the UN mandate was a central piece in achieving this. It was used to mobilize action against the Taliban regime and remedy the atrocities committed against the Afghan population. That the object of security changed from the Western world being threatened by terrorists to an Afghan population suffering in face of an oppressive regime enabled the prospective of building a consensus. Regardless whether promoting a Special Forces contribution or a development aid approach, both advocates and opponents agree on the challenges of dire humanitarian suffering toward the Afghan people. Both policy alternatives unite behind the need to manage the humanitarian situation.

Later in the process, when a Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan had materialized and a consensus in support was requested by the Government, the UN mandate was not used to legitimize Swedish military actions against the Taliban. Then it functioned to place the Swedish force in a humanitarian context in which “the lack of security” was the problem to be addressed. The choice of the word “security” enables a connection to the humanitarian situation as the military action is not placed front and center. Addressing the lack of security circumvents potential linkage toward engaging directly with the Taliban and work in favor of advocates as the lack of security was perceived as threatening to humanitarian efforts. It further

aligns military means with humanitarian goals making the military a provider of humanitarian relief, through military means.

Prominent advocates for a deployment were found in the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces who sought redemption for the previous Kosovo debacle and placed ISAF as the way forward in the internationalization of the Swedish defense. The request from the British and convergence between the Ministry of Defence and the military on the form of the contribution quickly solved the issues of form and timing of the decision. Other alternatives never entered the process and the focus was thereafter placed on pushing the decision through Parliament with a broad political support. That the Social Democrats ruled through minority government did not affect this process in any substantial way since the Moderates in opposition fully supported the deployment.<sup>95</sup> They were even somewhat surprised when the Government suggested the military contribution.<sup>96</sup>

The genuine shock after 9/11 expanded the conception of what was politically possible. It cemented Sweden's place in the Western World and it was considered important for many actors, most notably the Prime Minister, not to come down on the wrong side in this. The status quo, or state of continuity, that dominated with the foreign policy elite, was that the world is changing and Sweden must change with it. At the same time as the pressure to be on the United States' side permeated the military and the Government Offices, these arguments were not articulated when political support for a Swedish military contribution was rallied. Support from the political left would be rattled if anything would have been included that potentially linked the military contribution with Special Forces with the US War on Terror. A contribution to UN efforts in Afghanistan to deal with the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan ticked all the boxes of what was considered a natural Swedish involvement. The "foreign policy line" that emerges in this process increasingly stacked the deck against those in opposition of a military intervention, placing the burden of proof on opponents to motivate inaction rather than engagement in Afghanistan.

There is notably a political instrumentality of "doing good" as Aggestam and Hyde-Price note: "Sweden's military undertakings are not simply a manifestation of altruism and ethical behavior, but serve to enhance Sweden's diplomatic and foreign policy influence" (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015). This was especially true considering that the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces saw a Special Forces contribution as an opportunity to impress foreign partners and the Prime Minister early declared solidarity with the US following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. The results in this study indicate that the addition of these arguments in the legitimizing narrative would have severely infringed the Government's potential to con-

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<sup>95</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

struct a consensus in support of military deployment with Special Forces. This is an important reason for why the military contribution to Afghanistan could be successfully aligned with “the foreign policy line”, constructing a sense of continuity within foreign policy circles. Given the tradition of solidarity and the track-record of Swedish peace support operations it was not peculiar to align the ISAF contribution with previous operations as an extension of humanitarian assistance. The difficulties lay in the composition of the contribution. Special Forces is an elite fighting unit out of the Armed Forces and the Government framed ISAF as a humanitarian intervention.

### Suppressing political controversy

The political risks associated with a deployment to Afghanistan – outside of Sweden’s regular geographical sphere of interest with limited intelligence and uncertain security situation – was mitigated with the form of the contribution: Special Forces. The severity of the military operation in Afghanistan partially contributed to the rally behind government policy. In the debate preceding the first prolongation of the contribution in June 2002 the Left Party representative in the Committee on Foreign Affairs stated in the chamber:

[MP Ohly, Left Party] I agree with those who consider the importance of unity on these issues. These are risky missions. They are missions that it would be an advantage if we in the Swedish Parliament unanimously could support. The Left Party is therefore also part of the decision and stands behind the Joint Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee’s proposal (Prot., 2001/02:123, p. 8).

Actors initially more centered on a more humanitarian approach in Afghanistan, like the Minister for Foreign Affairs or the Left Party, acquiesced to the military contribution after it gained an interpretative dominance as part of the humanitarian effort. The proposed ISAF force was framed as a humanitarian assistance mission to facilitate and accelerate the reconstruction efforts placing the military contribution in a UN and humanitarian context downplaying collective security and international power politics. Opposition toward US offensive operations united with advocates for the military contribution in common concern for the Taliban’s atrocities and revived the need for humanitarian assistance with an emphasis on the awful humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan. The invocation of a humanitarian language framed the contribution in line with previous engagements in Afghanistan.

Downgrading the military aspects of the force contribution and the silence from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan enabled the domination of humanitarian aspects. This successful framing of ISAF in humanitarian terms, resonating with many of the values that Sweden stands for, construct-

ed the military contribution as a response to the humanitarian need in Afghanistan. The military rhetorically became a humanitarian tool. This in turn created a favorable context for the military contribution and created “a slippery slope” toward participation (Henke, 2017). For it facilitated an entrapment of actors, perhaps resistant toward military participation but advocating humanitarian relief in Afghanistan, when Special Forces were framed as a suitable military contribution to a humanitarian operation in Afghanistan.

Bridging the military element with the humanitarian efforts was a vital framing for opposition to remain passive or suppressed. The successful framing of ISAF as a necessary element of a humanitarian reconstruction and the revitalization of the UN in Afghanistan both served a purpose, of insulating the policy issue from any oppositional critique. All the negative elements of a military intervention in Afghanistan could be contained to Operation Enduring Freedom while ISAF could be framed as an extension of a humanitarian effort. This was facilitated by the strong dominance by the UN in the context in which the ISAF operation was placed. There was never any need to “explain” or justify US involvement in Afghanistan, instead could the efforts be solely placed on the Swedish contribution to ISAF. The criticism toward the US War on Terror and offensive operations in Afghanistan never transferred to ISAF or the Swedish military contribution. One of the main reasons for this was that the two operations were framed as two separate organizations that operated in different geographic settings of Afghanistan. The US war received all public, and internal, criticism and the successful separation of the two operations, both organizationally and geographically, was the decisive factor to accommodate opposition by avoiding and suppressing this political controversy. Advocates did therefore not need to defend US actions and could instead focus on the positive humanitarian aspects of the Swedish policy, thereby placing it in the context of previous Swedish military contributions to peace support operations. This despite the contribution being comprised of Special Forces, the location was far away in Central-Asia, and it was realized against the backdrop of the US offensive operations.

### A selective framing that excludes as well as includes

The findings in this chapter challenge the conclusion reached by Noreen and Ångström that the opposition was accommodated by the heterogeneous “catch-all” strategic narrative presented by the government (Noreen & Ångström, 2015). I agree that with a “catch-all” framing, which includes an excess of arguments in order to satisfy all target audiences, the opposition is somewhat stripped of countering arguments. I would argue, however, that a consensus is forged through a process of appeasing the opposition and avoiding controversy by framing policy specifically to accomplish this. The

mechanism does not lie with a “catch-all” framing but a framing that includes, as well as excludes, crucial elements.

When the Government presents the proposition to Parliament, the strategy to legitimize it with a wider political audience was to formulate it as the only possible alternative (Henke, 2017, 2020). It is a way, as Stone writes, “to gain legitimacy for actions already taken” (Stone, 2012). Some aspects were necessary to be highlighted in order to craft a coherent policy that even if it did not mobilize support at least it does not stir opposition toward the Government’s preferred policy. Some oppositional views were deflected by the successful framing of the military contribution as part of a humanitarian operation. For this was the dominating view of Swedish foreign policy at this time: that the Armed Forces were to be deployed in these kinds of operations. The contribution aligns with “the foreign policy line” and with that raises the bar for a defection from consensus. Some arguments were however necessary to leave out of the policy framing when constructing a consensus. The silence of collective security arguments in the justification points to this conclusion. Support from the political left would not have been guaranteed if the military contribution was associated with the US War on Terror in any way. Contrasting ISAF with OEF and downgrading any exchange between the two operations was crucial but leaving out collective security kept the rapprochement to the US off the agenda. Even if this would have been an argument that added to the heterogeneous “catch-all” framing it was left out in the justification of the contribution when building a consensus.

Further, of course feelings of solidarity with the US and outrage over the terrorist attack did permeate the Social Democratic leadership, as it did with most of society, but I do not reach the same conclusion as Noreen and Ångström that there was a pressure from parliamentarians and public opinion to commit to ISAF (Noreen & Ångström, 2015, p. 285). The Government acted on its own prerogative and considered it important to participate for several reasons. The pressure from the Parliament to contribute, which Noreen and Ångström refer to, was a single statement from Member of Parliament Margareta Viklund (Christian Democrats) to deploy a peacekeeping force to separate the warring parties without reference to a Swedish participation. To substantiate the pressure from public opinion polls Noreen and Ångström reference an opinion survey which conveys a robust support for the United Nations and for Swedish participation in operations under UN command. However, there is nothing in this survey that references an operation in Afghanistan or in any way supports the claim that “opinion polls also called for Swedish participation” (Noreen et al., 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015, p. 285; Stütz, 2004).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> First of all the questions in the survey are retrospective. They ask respondents to evaluate a statement. Secondly, the wording of the two potential questions that they most probably refer to does not explicitly mention Afghanistan and is more focused on the use of force and the

In a generous interpretation, these factors enable the decision to contribute militarily to ISAF constructing a favorable context, or at least a context that would not actively oppose a military contribution rendering the political process rather uncomplicated. There is however no evidence supporting the claim that there was “a call” for intervention as Noreen and Ångström implicate. The perception of a substantial societal support paved the way for advocates of the intervention to exploit this favorable context but it would be erroneous to state that they were driven by it. In fact, in the aftermath of the Social Democratic national congress the media drew a connection between the decline in support in public opinion polls for the Social Democrats and the support for the US bombings in Afghanistan. While support for the Social Democrats drops support for openly critical parties like the Green and Left Party is increasing (Expressen, 2001-11-17).

To sum up, the chamber supported unanimously the decision to deploy Special Forces to Afghanistan signaling, as the parliamentary report stated, that “this political unity is a strength for Sweden as an international player and strengthens the credibility of our foreign and security policy” (Rep., 2002/03:UFöU2, p. 10). As I have shown in this chapter, despite it being perceived as rather uncontroversial, the decision still contained political dynamics and controversial issues that were suppressed in the process of constructing a consensus. The perhaps most illustrative example surfaced when liaison officers were placed at US CENTCOM.

There was no overt dissent from the policy but already in the deployment of the force we can detect a political fulcrum that lies within the Social Democratic Party. To the right of the Social Democrats on the political spectrum there are four oppositional liberal and conservative parties, in general more in support of military deployments and towards cooperation with Western military powers. To the left are the Greens and the Left Party, more anchored in the Swedish peace movement. This position in between these camps, being in control of the Government, and being the largest party in Sweden, the Social Democrats needs to balance the interests of both. The difficulties with the political left, already alluded to in this chapter, will manifest more substantially in the next chapter when a substantial expansion of the military contribution is raised and the Left Party abandons the domestic foreign policy consensus.

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transformation of UN mandated operations toward more Chapter VII peace enforcement (Stütz, 2004).

## Chapter 6 – Expansion

In December 2005 the Swedish Parliament gave their consent for Sweden to take command over a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) located in Mazar-e-Sharif (MeS) (Prop., 2005/06:34; Rep., 2005/06:UFöU1). A PRT is responsible for converging security, development and reconstruction efforts under one organizational entity, i.e. a fusion of civil-military capacities to assist the Afghan authorities. This particular PRT that Sweden ended up in charge over had the administrative responsibility for four Afghan provinces; Balkh (where Mazar-e-Sharif is the capital), Jawzjan, Sari Pul, and Samangan. This was on the surface the largest PRT in all of Afghanistan. Assuming lead nation responsibility entailed an expansion in scope, seize, and commitment for the Swedish military contribution in Afghanistan and was a substantial undertaking for a small non-NATO nation. This was considered by some, retrospectively, the most defining decision for Swedish peace support operations in the 2000's given the consequences that this commitment would entail.

The process to expand the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan that led to the takeover of PRT MeS spans several years and accentuates several defining considerations on Sweden's role in military operations and the direction of foreign policy in a post-9/11 world. The process needed to sort out where in Afghanistan the contribution should be directed and who should be the partners. An expansion of the commitment in Afghanistan revisits the controversial relationship between ISAF and OEF, at a time when the US military engagement in Iraq and the US War on Terror are widely questioned in Sweden. Whereas the Left Party opposes the proposition the Government continues with the expansion and consequently abandons the norm of having consensus on these issues. Why did the Left oppose the expansion when they previously supported the entry? Why did the Government choose to abandon consensus?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the long-term redirection of the Armed Forces and a security politics fixated on military contributions to peace support operations that takes off in the early 2000's. Part of this discussion is a short review of the time prior to the direct request from the US to consider lead nation responsibility for a PRT in Afghanistan which set in motion the expansion process. Thereafter is the expansion process opened up to unravel the process from the US request in June 2003 up until the parliamentary decision in December 2005 to approve increased resources for the

ISAF contribution and thereby indirectly approve lead nation responsibility for PRT MeS. This review is mostly chronological, with elements of important thematic clarifications. Following the reconstruction of the process the chapter turns to the analysis of how advocates and opponents frame policy on the military contribution. Finally, this chapter turns to the exploration of the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus and how the Left Party's defection from consensus is managed by the others actors.

## Expansion background: an expeditionary military in the making

As discussed in the previous chapter, a long-term redirection of the Armed Forces and security politics, fixated on military contributions to peace support operations, was under review in the Defence Commission in parallel to the policy process on Afghanistan (Edström et al., 2018, p. 72). This parliamentary committee functions as a forum in which all parliamentary parties are represented and they work to find consensus on the broader parameters of Swedish security policy. In 2003–2004 the commission presented three consecutive reports which definitely settled an increase in ambition for the military to operate in peace support operations. It also entailed substantial budget cuts and reduced peace-time organization, closing several regiments as well as air and naval bases (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014b, p. 152). The newly appointed Chief of Defence Håkan Syrén (2004–2009) recalls the challenge to transition from an anti-invasion defense to a focus on expeditionary operations and in tandem close 10 out of 30 military units.<sup>98</sup>

The idea that Sweden is best defended by engaging in international conflicts, preventing them from destabilizing international security and thereby spreading to Sweden, gained traction and widespread support. A direct military threat toward Sweden was not perceived as likely in the foreseeable future and it was considered by the commission that Sweden would instead focus on international security, which indirectly promotes Swedish security, and that it is “an essential security policy interest that Sweden acts together with other states to promote peace and security” (Ds., 2004:30, p. 13). It is noticeable that the traditional task for the Armed Forces to “defend Sweden against an armed attack” is omitted in this report (Prop., 1999/2000:30). The line of defense for Sweden is drawn abroad, initiating a reduced focus for the Armed Forces on an armed attack against Sweden. This blurs the distinction between what was previously strictly divided between national and international tasks (Ångström & Honig, 2012; Ångström, 2010).

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<sup>98</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

### **A changing context gain momentum: operations Concordia and Artemis**

Following the entry to ISAF Sweden decided in the first half of 2003 to contribute to two other operations of great importance for the internationalization to gain momentum: Operation Concordia in Macedonia (Prop., 2002/03:43; Rep., 2002/03:UU14) and Artemis in Congo<sup>99</sup> (Prop., 2002/03:143; Rep., 2002/03:UFöU2). Concordia was the very first mission under the EU's flag while Artemis was a French initiative to deploy Special Forces to the Congo, also under EU supervision. These two operations are significant for they signal a commitment and a political will to enter into a political unknown. The acceptance of risks and the political courage necessary to commit Swedish Special Forces to Artemis were substantial. Foreign Minister Lindh was an active player in realizing the Artemis deployment to boost the European Security and Defense Policy as a competitor for NATO (Alm, 2017, p. 17; Hederstedt, 2006).

Artemis is considered a watershed in Swedish policy on peace support operations and a catalyst paving way for future decisions to enter Liberia in 2004 and the expansion of the Swedish ISAF contribution.<sup>100</sup> Within some foreign and security policy circles in Sweden there is even a reference to a “before and after Artemis” (Hederstedt, 2006, p. 23).<sup>101</sup> A reason for this is that there were substantial risks associated with this particular mission. As a desk officer in the Armed Forces pointed out in regards to Artemis: “the ones that claim that politicians are cowards, they have not understood any of this. And moreover it went fast, the decision-making process”.<sup>102</sup> To understand the Swedish expansion in Afghanistan it is necessary to bear in mind the defining decision to contribute to Concordia and Artemis.

At the time of the Concordia and Artemis operations the Government was conducting an extensive assessment of all contributions to international operations in order to evaluate which operations that should be prioritized and possibly revised.<sup>103</sup> Initially the military assumed that Sweden would get a renewed role in the Balkans filling the gap for the US there after the strategic shift toward Iraq.<sup>104</sup> Sweden's ambition and existing military contributions to the Balkans propagated a Swedish credibility in UN, EU and NATO circles,

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<sup>99</sup> The parliament had previously given the approval for an Air Base Company to deploy to Congo part of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2002/03:UU15). This deployment was delayed by disturbances in the Bunia region which instigated the EU-led Special Forces deployment to fill the security vacuum in the region (Hederstedt, 2006).

<sup>100</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015 and Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>101</sup> See also Interview Chief of Defence, 2014, Interview Political Advisor, Ministry of Defence, 2014 and Interview Political Advisor, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh apparently saw the military contributions to Macedonia and Congo in 2003 as a way to keep contributions to the controversial US intervention in Iraq of the agenda (Hederstedt, 2006; Svenning, 2005).

<sup>104</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015. See also (MFA, 2001-11-22a).

that was “contingent in part on a regular and competent participation in international peace support operations” (Egnell & Abrahamsson, 2006, p. 46).

There was a clear political intent to expand involvement in international military operations and so far were the Swedish contributions in Kabul appreciated by the Commander of ISAF. Afghanistan had been prioritized by Sweden as an operation of interest. Uncertainties, however, surrounding the future of ISAF gave decision-makers no obvious alternatives to the Swedish contribution moving forward which slowed down the process.

### **A reserved process without obvious developments?**

The initial contribution with special Forces to ISAF was fairly quickly reduced to a minor token contribution, with small civil-military liaison teams operating in the vicinity of Kabul, while Sweden evaluated the future extent of the ISAF involvement (Agrell, 2013, p. 105; MOD, 2003-01-13, 2003-05-22). A transition of ISAF command from a coalition of the willing framework to NATO was deliberated in Brussels during the spring of 2003. Initially the UN mandate for ISAF limited military operations to the vicinity of Kabul and NATO planned and operated accordingly. At the same time there was a clear vision in the international community to expand ISAF beyond Kabul but the political decision-making body of NATO struggled to sort out important political issues, mostly related to alliance commitment, burden sharing, and adaptation to a new kind of war unfamiliar to NATO as an organization. While NATO emphasized continuity for ISAF “the decision portended great change” (Rynning, 2012, p. 47).

In 2003 the Ministry of Defence showed no clear direction of the ISAF contribution other than expressing an extensive political will to seek a substantial contribution. This is displayed in the indistinct communication between the Ministry and the Armed forces and the settlement for a continuation of the current contribution as a “cost-effective way to show that Sweden participates militarily in ISAF” while awaiting to see how the operation developed (MFA, 2003-04-09; MOD, 2003-04-25, 2003-05-22, 2003-05-28; SAFHQ, 2003-01-21, 2003-01-30; 2003-05-07a, p. 2). The military was on standby, observing the situation while awaiting the political level’s assessment of the development in NATO and the outlook of the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. There are especially uncertainties about organizational affiliation and legal mandate, concerns that are shared by other Nordic countries (MFA, 2003-04-09). The creation of PRT’s in Afghanistan during 2002 and spring 2003 was noted by the military and even discussed with Nordic counterparts as the potential evolution of Nordic contributions. This information is passed on to the Government without any observed feedback (MFA, 2003-03-26; SAFHQ, 2003-01-30, 2003-05-07b, 2003-05-17). The political level was briefed but since this would entail a contribution under Operation En-

during Freedom it was not acted upon.<sup>105</sup> This changed in June 2003 when Sweden received a direct request from the US to consider lead nation responsibility of a PRT.

## The expansion process 2003–2005

While there was considerable pressure to expand peace support operations, and that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) had been identified by the political leadership as one of the most promising operations to expand, the future of ISAF was uncertain and the presence of Operation Enduring Freedom obstructed the political process. Moreover, an increased Swedish engagement in international military operations did not necessarily translate into an increased participation in Afghanistan, let alone a lead nation responsibility of a PRT in the first NATO led operation outside of Europe. Also, in a complex multinational campaign there are several partners and geographical regions that Sweden could end up with. What would the force composition be, where would the contribution be directed and together with whom?

Almost two and a half years passed from the US request in June 2003 until the Parliament voted on the Government's proposition in December 2005. This part of the chapter will review this decision-making process. It unfolded in a twostep protracted process, each with a related parliamentary decision: First, was the geographical expansion of the Swedish force contingent from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif and subordination to the United Kingdom, who at that time had lead nation responsibility of PRT MeS (Prop., 2003/04:71; Rep., 2003/04:UFöU2). The second step was when Sweden assumed command of the PRT when the UK withdrew from MeS and relocated to southern Afghanistan (Prop., 2005/06:34; Rep., 2005/06:UFöU1).

### The PRT process is triggered

Early in July of 2003 the Armed Forces received an instruction from the Ministry of Defence to take a closer look at the concept of Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and a forthcoming change in the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan (MOD, 2003-07-10). This instruction concerned the time from January 1, 2004 and onwards for twelve months and specified three different alternatives for the form of the contribution. The first alternative involved Sweden as a lead nation for a PRT. The second was a combined PRT with preferably Nordic countries. The third alternative would imply that Sweden joins a PRT headed by a large, preferably European nation (SAFHQ, 2003-08-22). A month prior to this, on June 10, the Swedish

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<sup>105</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

Embassy in Washington received a direct request from the US to consider becoming lead nation for a PRT – not geographically specified – in Afghanistan.<sup>106</sup> The minutes from that meeting are classified in full, however in one of the slides from the PowerPoint presentation, it literally states that the US “request Sweden Consider Lead Nation Support for a PRT” under the command of Operation Enduring Freedom (MFA, 2003-06-11). The Armed Forces experienced a considerable international pressure to jump on the bandwagon in Afghanistan after Sweden had refrained to support the US in Iraq.<sup>107</sup>

A transition of ISAF command, from a coalition of the willing to NATO, was around the corner and this was not deemed controversial. Everything pointed in the direction of a NATO lead of ISAF in the summer of 2003 and there was substantial pressure from NATO to do something in Afghanistan.<sup>108</sup> The Armed Forces were still somewhat caught off-guard by the instruction when it arrived at the Armed Forces headquarters to explore a more substantial contribution through the PRT framework. This, however, sparked a transformation of the character of the process and expanded the scope beyond a token contribution. The PRT was a new operational concept and the initial problem for the Armed Forces was to identify exactly how this new

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<sup>106</sup> Former ambassador Pierre Schori mentions in his book *Draksåddens år* (2008, pp. 186-187) that Minister for Foreign Affairs Laila Freivalds, received the idea of a Swedish led PRT personally from US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz during a visit in Washington. There is no mention of when this meeting was. Ambassador Schori is a career diplomat and an important actor within the Social Democratic Party. Freivalds did, however, not assume her post as Minister for Foreign Affairs until October 2003, after the September assassination of Minister Anna Lindh. It is possible that Freivalds met with Wolfowitz prior to her assuming the role as Minister for Foreign Affairs, however this is very unlikely. More likely would it be that she receive this proposition as Minister. Freivalds' first and, as far as I have been able to reconstruct her schedule, only official trip to Washington as Minister for Foreign Affairs took place in February 2004 (MFA, 2004-02-11; SvD, 2004-02-16). In her schedule there is no mention of a meeting with either Wolfowitz or a representative from the Defense Department. Regardless, at that time the issue is already set in motion as a consequence of the US request on June 10, 2003 and the process was well underway (MFA, 2003-06-11; MOD, 2003-07-10; SAFHQ, 2003-08-22). Perhaps the idea did not originate with Freivalds and the aforementioned meeting with Wolfowitz, however, it may still be the case that the Foreign Minister was influenced at a later stage before the official declaration was made.

<sup>107</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014 and Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016. There was also a continued pressure from the US through diplomatic means. For example did the Under Secretary of Defence, Dov S. Zakheim, meet with former Minister for Defence, Björn von Sydow, and the current Minister for Defence, Leni Björklund, to discuss a potential PRT contribution (Zakheim, 2003-10-30). In his biography he writes: “One country, whose decision to open a PRT resulted in part from my efforts, was traditionally neutral Sweden... I travelled to Sweden to persuade my friend Bjorn von Sydow... to lobby for a Swedish-led PRT. After all, the war in Afghanistan was UN-sanctioned, and Sweden had moved much closer to the United States ever since it had joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994. American policy in Iraq was no more popular in Sweden than elsewhere in Western Europe... but Afghanistan was different” (Zakheim, 2011, p. 210).

<sup>108</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

concept translated to Swedish military thinking. A PRT was responsible to converge civil-military capabilities and support the authorities in reconstructing the Afghan state. One of the central issues at this early stage was for the military to identify potential partners and geographical locations and start building an understanding of what the PRT concept really was. The liaison office at US CENTCOM was now perfectly situated to communicate Swedish intentions and gather information to solve practical issues (SAFHQ, 2003-07-31).<sup>109</sup>

NATO decided in August 2003 to take command of ISAF. There was still a substantial Swedish military contribution to Kosovo at this point. This larger contribution limited the Ministry of Defence's financial discretion to explore an enlargement of the mission to Afghanistan as well as other contemporary operations of interest (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 96). The Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the other hand wanted to maintain a larger force contribution since that provided Sweden with diplomatic influence.<sup>110</sup> During a negotiation in Harpsund between the ministers from Foreign Affairs and Defence, Anna Lindh (1998–2003)<sup>111</sup> and Leni Björklund (2002–2006), the two operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan were weighed against each other. The outcome was a reduction of the military contribution to Kosovo in order to free resources to other peace support operations, most prominently Afghanistan (Ericson Wolke, 2015, p. 66). The process took an unpredictable turn, however, and the focus shifted away from Afghanistan to another conflict region.

### **The attention turns to Liberia**

The uncertain development of the international military presence in Afghanistan resulted in vague instructions by the Ministry of Defence to the Armed Forces to begin explorations as the Ministry awaited the political developments before making any commitments. All of a sudden resources were distributed to a politically prioritized operation in Liberia and ISAF was told to reduce to the lowest level possible (MOD, 2003-11-04).<sup>112</sup> As a desk officer in the Armed Forces explained to me:

But then Liberia came late, say November, and suddenly it became hard brakes on Afghanistan and full speed for Liberia [...] and resource-wise, the directive became for the entire Afghanistan; go down to the minimum possi-

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<sup>109</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014 and Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016.

<sup>110</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>111</sup> Following the tragic loss of the Minister for Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh in September 2003 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs receives new leadership in the former Minister for Justice (1988–1991, 1994–2000) Laila Freivalds. She assumed her new post in October 2003. I will return to this later in the chapter as this will have implications on the prospect of building consensus in support of a Swedish expansion.

<sup>112</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014 and Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

ble, and standby. So, we put the plans on hold; go down as much as we could in Kabul, to actually only one NSE [National Support Element] and 20's individuals operative. What the hell, hardly even 20 operational?<sup>113</sup>

With Liberia stealing the spotlight the directives were clear from the Government: a continuation of the contribution to ISAF was necessary to avoid a gap before a new form of troop contribution could be processed. An interruption in the Swedish military contributions would, according to the Government, have severe political implications and thereby weaken Swedish maneuverability and influence in international deliberations (Rep., 2003/04:UU8, p. 6). Perhaps most central, it would hamper the process of establishing a new contribution later on. The Swedish military contribution in Afghanistan was reduced to an almost symbolic deployment bordering what would constitutionally count as a military deployment, thus demanding a parliamentary approval.<sup>114</sup>

### The focus turns to the north and Mazar-e-Sharif

After NATO took over ISAF a plan for an immediate expansion of the mission to cover all of Afghanistan was set in motion (Rynning, 2012). That the command changed from a coalition of the willing to a NATO led operation did not cause any turmoil in the process. The barrier to operate under NATO command had been overcome with Swedish participation in SFOR, IFOR and KFOR in the Balkans – all NATO led operations – so the prospect of ending up under NATO command was therefore nothing unusual.<sup>115</sup> As one of the center-right members of the Defence Committee in the Parliament recalls:

And then we should remember that we had been heavily involved in the Balkans both in Bosnia and Kosovo. So that we would join and participate in a NATO led operation was not like a big issue, because that ice was already broken in very many ways.<sup>116</sup>

The decision by NATO to roll out the expansion counterclockwise over Afghanistan (see fig. 3) turned Sweden's attention to the north, mainly because Sweden wanted to have a contribution in early. The Desk officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs remembers that "Sweden was anxious to be a part of

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<sup>113</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

<sup>114</sup> Interview Civil Servant, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>115</sup> In Bosnia the UN peacekeeping force transitioned to NATO command (Prop., 1995/96:113; Rep., 1995/96:UU4) and Kosovo was a NATO-led operation from the start (Prop., 1998/1999:112; Rep., 1998/99:UF6U2).

<sup>116</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

this. To get going and get something done and not like sit and wait for a year.<sup>117</sup>

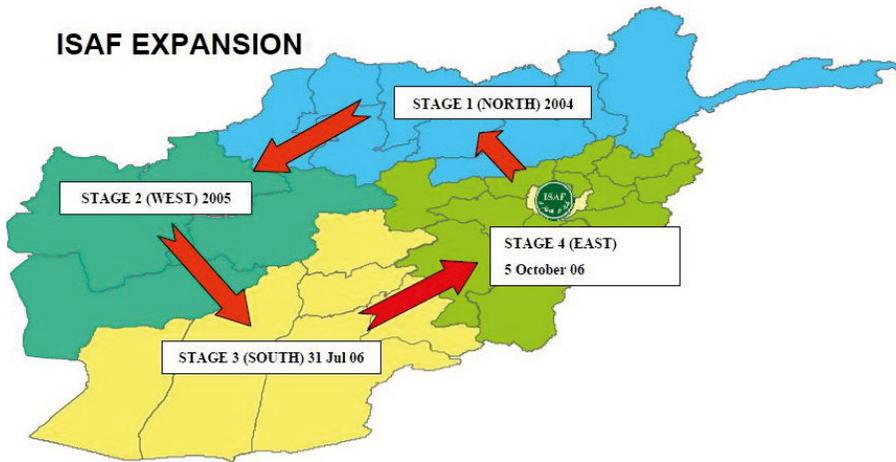


Figure 3. ISAF's geographical expansion in Afghanistan in four stages according to ISAF Placemats 2007 from NATO's official webpage. (NATO, 2007).

The military had explored, at the request of the Ministry of Defence, different alternatives, mostly in the eastern and northern parts of Afghanistan, for example Jalalabad, Bamyán, Kunduz, Mazar-e-Sharif and Charikat (SAFHQ, 2003-08-22). In a process that extends over the fall these areas are narrowed down to three: Kunduz (with the Germans as lead), Mazar-e-Sharif (UK), and Jalalabad (US) (MOD, 2003-10-24; SAFHQ, 2003-11-07). It is not clear in my material the extent to which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was involved in this geographical selection. In my interviews it appears that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had a diverging outlook when it came to potential PRTs to join or take over but that they were not fully included in the process.<sup>118</sup> The Ministry of Defence seems to have been dominant in this selection process and been consulting frequently with the military. The ministry operated on a general ambition for the ISAF engagement on the Government's behalf but it seemed to lack a clear vision. In November the Armed Forces demanded more specified instructions and clarifications on relevant partners, potential geographical areas, and a confinement of the role of the Armed Forces in a PRT (SAFHQ, 2003-11-21, pp. 3-4). In a report circulated in the Armed Forces headquarters the Chief of Operations assesses that:

Sweden wishes to make a clear statement of its commitment to Afghanistan and show that it is 'serious' about its contribution to security enhancing ef-

<sup>117</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>118</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

forts throughout the country. To be perceived as an actor of weight and obtain suitable staff positions it is required to also contribute troops on the ground, which should not be too trivial (SAFHQ, 2003-11-05, p. 8).

The Chief of Operations, however, recommends in that report that Sweden does not take on leadership for a PRT, regardless if it is shared with other Nordic countries (SAFHQ, 2003-11-05, p. 4). This is an opinion that is, as it turns out, either shared or followed by the Minister for Defence. The Ministry of Defence and Ministry for Foreign Affairs viewed favorably Jalalabad as an area of interest for a Swedish contribution to be placed. The desk officer in the Armed Forces headquarters, who received the first request for information from the Ministry of Defence, remembers that the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan was a decisive indicator their assessment of potential geographical areas.

And then we started to look at what there was and glance at possible regional areas, ok where can this end up, what could it be, the big map, big pictures. Where is the Committee for Afghanistan? But they are in the Kunduz area, so then there is an advantage that we could be there. They are also big in Jalalabad which is at the border to Pakistan and there was nobody else who had anything there.<sup>119</sup>

In November of 2003 the Armed Forces assessed Kunduz and Mazar-e-Sharif as potential areas for an expansion and recommended against Jalalabad (SAFHQ, 2003-11-07). “In light of the uncertainties surrounding the conditions for a PRT in Jalalabad the Armed Forces currently cannot assess whether this is feasible or appropriate” (SAFHQ, 2003-11-07, p. 9).<sup>120</sup>

During this time in the process the Nordic context was important to explore the PRT concept, especially during a form of uncertainty. In NATO’s expansion some PRTs would be transferred from OEF to ISAF and some will be started directly under ISAF command. There was a meagre interest toward joining a PRT under OEF command, as was the case with many other troop contributors to ISAF (Rynning, 2012). Other Nordic countries function as a kind of heuristic of what Sweden should do. It was therefore not strange that contributions from the Nordic countries share composition characteristics or are even deployed together (Godal et al., 2016; Oma, 2014; Tingsgård, 2017). A turn of events came during a meeting between Nordic Defence Ministers in Saltsjöbaden in late November 2003. A joint venture in Afghanistan between the Nordic countries had been on the agenda during the fall. During this meeting Defence Minister Björklund declared that this operation was not anything that the Nordic countries could manage by themselves, let alone Sweden. This line of reasoning had been voiced by the

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<sup>119</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

<sup>120</sup> The details of these uncertainties are redacted in the document.

Swedish military and also raised by the institutional body for Nordic military cooperation, NORDCAPS<sup>121</sup>, prior to the Saltsjöbaden meeting:

The establishment of a separated Nordic PRT operating on its own is not seen as a feasible option due to the fragile security situation and lack of appropriate military capabilities to guarantee the security and logistic support of deployed forces (MOD, 2003-11-07).

Defence Minister Björklund suggested that the United Kingdom should be approached with a proposal to lead a Swedish PRT, or Nordic PRT staffed substantially by Sweden (MOD, 2003-11-27, 2003-12-04). This turn of events took the Ministry for Foreign Affairs by surprise as this was not anything that the Ministry of Defence had consulted them on.<sup>122</sup> Sweden, as chair of NORDCAPS, was consequently tasked by the other Nordic countries to further explore this alternative with the British and following the meeting the Swedish Minister for Defence contacts her British counterpart and declared an interest which was well received by the British Minister (MOD, 2003-12-04, 2003-12-10, 2003-12-15). A high-ranking officer in the military recalls that Defence Minister Björklund was very committed to the expansion in Afghanistan and a humanitarian concept of the Swedish force.<sup>123</sup>

Sweden took the lead in several meetings in December to establish “a coordinated Nordic contribution to a British-led PRT” (MOD, 2003-12-10, 2003-12-15). These meetings began addressing practical issues such as geographical location, the size of contributions, organization, and the security situation. The Armed Forces received instructions from the Ministry of Defence in early January to sort this out on a practical level and collect information to provide the Government with grounds for a decision. This instruction included an authorization for reconnaissance in the “intended area” in January 2004 to provide the Government Offices with information on the potential to join a multinational PRT under British command (MOD, 2004-01-08). It does not specify what this “intended area” is exactly but according to my interviews the purpose was to take a closer look at the PRTs in Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad but security related circumstances led to Jalalabad being dropped from the reconnaissance.<sup>124</sup> Jalalabad never returns to the deliberations and the process is locked in on the north.

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<sup>121</sup> Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support.

<sup>122</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016 and Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>124</sup> The Armed Forces proceeded with sending a team only to Mazar-e-Sharif and is joined on this trip by the desk officers both from Ministry of Defence as well as Foreign Affairs (SAFHQ, 2004-01-19). After arrival in Afghanistan they are joined by Norwegian and Finish officers and they travel in northern Afghanistan and meets with representatives of ISAF, OEF and the UK led PRT MeS (SAFHQ, 2004-01-23).

The fact-finding trip, however, reached the same conclusion as the Chief of Operations and NORDCAPS did in the end of 2003. Sweden should not assume lead nation responsibility (MOD, 2003-11-07; SAFHQ, 2003-11-05, 2004-01-23). The reason for their recommendation was an uncertainty about the extent of the commitment, especially when it came to the level of back-up forces or reinforcements. Both the UK and US had substantial force presence and even if their concept of operations of a PRT was based on a light footprint, they still had capabilities in the area to deploy additional troops in case of crisis (SAFHQ, 2004-01-23).<sup>125</sup>

As far as I am able to reconstruct the process, during the spring Sweden continued to lead the contacts with the UK and explored the potential participation from Sweden, Norway and Finland in a UK-led PRT (MOD, 2004-02-11). Different geographical areas enter the discussion in addition to Mazar-e-Sharif, for example Meymaneh and Sheberghan, and the Armed Forces is tasked to evaluate these different areas (MOD, 2004-02-13). At the same time the Ministry was discussing specifically a contribution to the soon-to-be established PRT in MeS (MOD, 2004-02-11). After settling on a contribution to Mazar-e-Sharif, and clearly communicating this to the British at a Force Generating Conference in Mons on the 11th of March, the Ministry instructed the Armed Forces to proceed with their suggested troop contribution to PRT Mazar-e-Sharif (MOD, 2004-03-23; SAFHQ, 2004-03-04, 2004-03-12).

### **Merging civil and military capabilities in the PRT**

The principal idea of a PRT was to take responsible and coordinate efforts between civilian and military actors. ISAF had so far been confined to Kabul but the geographical expansion of ISAF as a whole and take-over of the PRT concept was not however met with enthusiasm by development actors. While the dominating justification on the political level was that the military operation enabled development aid to reach the recipients without interference, development actors argued that military presence brought insecurity. There was a growing concern, and skepticism, at this time from the civilian side towards the military and the impending risk to confuse civilian and military elements in Afghanistan, especially if the “peacekeeping” troops were placed under US command (Aftonbladet, 2003-12-27; SvD, 2003-10-09).

The military used the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan as an indicator for potential deployment areas. This was done with the intent from the military to create synergies together with development actors to launch a comprehensive approach.<sup>126</sup> Other reasons seem to have impacted the selection process. From the perspective of the development actors, one respondent

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<sup>125</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014 and Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

<sup>126</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

rejects the validity of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan being an indicator given the operational areas under consideration in the military: “That’s just hypocrisy, because we were not as strong in northern Afghanistan as we are now.”<sup>127</sup>

The advantage with the PRT operational concept, being a civil-military fusion, was not as evident as it was initially perceived by advocates in the process. Sweden struggled to implement a comprehensive approach to the operation in Stockholm. According to Dafinova the Government was skeptical and “focused more on caveats than on incentives for inter-agency integration” (Dafinova, 2018). The PRT planning process followed the traditional way of generating a military contribution despite the multifunctional aspect and that several ministries and authorities perhaps ought to have been involved in a process of that nature. The comprehensive approach appealed to decision-makers as it catered to a perception of what was considered a Swedish specialty, civil-military cooperation. The merging of civil and military capabilities fits well with a self-image of holding a comparative advantage in execution of this kind of operation. However, it was relatively easy to support this kind of mission but it was a considerable challenge to implement it and fuse two vastly different civilian and military cultures. One respondent, with a good understanding of development work and experience of non-governmental organizations, clarified the two different perspectives.

There was a strong fear of physical contact from the committee when the military was there. [The committee] were dependent on not being perceived as a part of the military operation, purely safety-related, and this was never really comprehended by the Swedish military, why they cannot socialize.<sup>128</sup>

The awkward relationship between the military and development actors did not only concern the implementation in Afghanistan and how they would relate to each other. A desk officer in the Armed Forces remembers how he struggled in including the development actors in the PRT planning process in Stockholm:

I remember that I was trying to arrange a meeting between the then Chief of Operations and then chairman of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, I think I was trying for a year, and in the beginning, they did not even answer, they were really against us that we should have Swedish troops in Afghanistan.<sup>129</sup>

While this dissertation does not concern the implementation of policy, it is important here to mention as this introduction of a new civil-military concept, the Provincial Reconstruction Team, did not change the domestic polit-

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<sup>127</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

<sup>128</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

<sup>129</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

ical process. The takeover of PRT MeS is addressed in civil-military terms, as a new comprehensive operation, but it is still framed as a continuation of previous military operations and institutionally treated as one. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs was the responsible ministry for the proposition, but the process was dominated by the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces. It was conceivable that the PRT would be different in composition and execution of previous peace support operations, but the planning process still followed the traditional way of handling a military contribution (Blomgren et al., 2007, p. 11). In the very first request that the Ministry of Defence sent to the Armed forces it painted the PRT composition as “mainly military with a potential limited civilian element” (MOD, 2003-07-10). The task to recruit a development advisor to the PRT was given to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) without being able to comment on the PRT configuration (Blomgren et al., 2007, p. 15). SIDA remained critical to the military as “lead agency for the delivery of development aid and peace building” and resisted close cooperation (Honig & Käihkö, 2014, p. 13). However, at the same time that the process is dominated by the military and that the civilian aspect was sidelined it seems that the civilian influences was paramount in providing a legitimate ground for the operation.

#### **Awaiting the transfer from OEF to ISAF**

The intention to join PRT MeS is publicly declared by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the 9th of March 2004 during an interpellation from a Liberal Member of Parliament on the future prospect of the Swedish ISAF engagement (Interpel., 2003/04:303; Prot., 2003/04:79). Foreign Minister Freivalds acknowledged in her opening statement that the Government “prepares a new substantial Swedish contribution to a security enhancing presence in the Afghan countryside within the framework for a so-called *provincial reconstruction/stabilization team*, PRT/PST” (Prot., 2003/04:79, emphasis in original). She continues by stating that the Government “wants the contribution to be made within ISAF under a UN mandate and led by NATO”. At that time, during the spring of 2004, the British PRT was under the command of Operation Enduring Freedom. The Swedish request to enter under ISAF command was also communicated internationally at a troop contributing conference in Mons in March 2004, where it stated in the talking points attached to the instruction that “for Sweden it is politically very valuable that our military contributions can be given to ISAF, i.e. a NATO led operation under a UN-mandate” (MOD, 2004-03-26). A Desk officer in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs recalls:

We wanted to be there under a UN mandate, and that meant we wanted to be there under NATO's chain of command, rather than under American informal leadership under Enduring Freedom.<sup>130</sup>

The UN mandate, based on Security Council Resolution 1510, was directly conditioned to ISAF with NATO being the lead. While the Swedish Government considered the invitation from the Afghan government as a sufficient legal ground for deployment there was a political will not to enter the PRT under OEF command. A contribution under OEF leadership, even under a shorter transition period, would be a lot more difficult to sell.

Sweden received indications from NATO that PRT MeS would be one of five PRTs that would be transferred from OEF to ISAF in conjunction with the NATO summit in Istanbul in June, but it was far from certain (MFA, 2004-03-26; SAFHQ, 2004-01-23). When the proposition was presented, on the 15th of April, this was still indeterminate and created some concerns for the Government (Prop., 2003/04:71, p. 12).<sup>131</sup> A memo to the political leadership at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs late March highlights the uncertainties surrounding the organizational affiliation of the PRT.

*If ISAF has not taken over [PRT MeS] when the first Swedes arrives, it is the Government's intention to establish the force in a *transition period* under British command within the framework of Operations Enduring Freedom. The support in international law then emanates from the invitation from President Karzai's transitional government and Statement made by the President of the Security Council in June 2003 (MFA, 2004-03-26, emphasis in original).*

In the proposition sent to the Parliament in April 2004 the Government requests, in addition to the geographical expansion to Mazar-e-Sharif, to increase the number of soldiers deployed from around 20 to 110, with an additional option to deploy 40 more should the security situation worsen (Prop., 2003/04:71). After the Parliament approved the Government's proposition the deployment had to wait for the transfer of the PRT from OEF to ISAF to be complete before the force could depart from Sweden. The parliamentary decision is taken in May 2004 but not until after NATO ultimately decides on the transfer during the summit in Istanbul in late June could a deployment progress.<sup>132</sup>

### **Political opposition emerges to expansion**

During committee treatment in the Joint Committee of Defence and Foreign Affairs in May 2004 the Left Party motions against the Government's propo-

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<sup>130</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>131</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014 and Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>132</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

sition. They later also vote against the proposition in the chamber. To an extent was the Left Party's opposition a consequence of a rift between the Social Democrats and the Left. During the initial stage of the ISAF operation the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anna Lindh, had a close working relationship with the Left Party representative in the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Lars Ohly. Even if they did not share the same view on policies the Foreign Minister kept the Left Party informed and reasoned with their representative. This relationship was not insignificant for the initial support during the entry phase. The Left Party representative pointed out that the initial decision to support ISAF was a product of intense deliberations within the parliamentary group. The decision to side with the Government in support of ISAF was "a small price to pay" to be seen as responsible and willing to negotiate in foreign policy.<sup>133</sup> The Left Party was positioning itself to join the Government after the election in 2002. But this was not only a strategic consideration and he stressed that "of course trust and confidence do affect the end result in the form of a position [on ISAF policy]".<sup>134</sup> This working relationship ended abruptly with the death of Anna Lindh before the expansion of the military contribution to ISAF was treated politically. The new foreign minister Leila Freivalds did not inform the Left Party nor did she include them in any deliberations. As the Left representative recalls:

Let me begin by saying that all cooperation that we had had in the area of foreign policy ended. I did not get any invitations [...] when Laila Freivalds was Minister for Foreign Affairs. So cooperatively we returned to a relationship where foreign policy was kept separate from our cooperation.<sup>135</sup>

This was demonstrated when the Social Democratic government presented the proposition with the expansion to MeS to the Parliament. The Left Party had been clear with the risks of expanding ISAF outside of Kabul but they received no information prior to the Government's decision to proceed.

I do not think that it came as a surprise to them that we left consensus. And I think it was cheap price to pay because they just got such a big support anyway behind the Swedish operation.<sup>136</sup>

It appears that the Social Democrats anticipated the loss of the Left Party with the expansion of the contribution. One respondent indicates that there were "nervous" discussions within the Government whether to proceed or not.<sup>137</sup> In the end the Government decided to continue with the ISAF engagement without the support of the Left Party in the Parliament.

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<sup>133</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>134</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>135</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>136</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>137</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

The Left Party was joined in their critique by the Green Party even if they still voted in favor of the deployment. The Green Party struggled in balancing a harsh critique against the US engagement in Afghanistan while still formulating a support for the governmental proposition. One potential explanation for this is that the Green Party had entered into a supporting alliance with the Social Democrats after the election in 2002 and was pressured to support the ruling party on security politics. Even if the party was internally divided the official policy was still to support the Social Democrats. Later, in 2007, they officially changed their position, a point to which I will return in the next chapter (Greens, 2007-03-01). For the Green Party the critique against the expansion was formalized in a separate statement of opinion [*särskilt yttrande*] attached to the committee report. In that way they could support the proposition and contribute to the broad cross-party support and still express their critique of US warfare. The support from the Green Party despite their voiced opposition is commended by advocates from the center-right, for example the Liberal Party (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 93).

The unity behind the Afghan deployment is thus abandoned, although the proposition was still approved by a cross-party support comprising the remaining six parties and 91.6% of the votes in the chamber (Rep., 2003/04:UFöU2; Prot., 2003/04:122). The Left Party's opposition to the expansion of the Swedish military contribution shaped the parliamentary debate and the treatment of the proposition in Parliament. The natural antagonistic relationship between the Left Party and the center-right parties facilitated a marginalization of the defection.

### PRT lead nation responsibility

One and a half years after the decision to expand the Swedish contribution and join the British PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif the Parliament faced a new proposition from the Government. This time it concerned a further expansion of the troop contribution and lead nation responsibility. On December 7, 2005 the Swedish Parliament approved the Government's proposition (Prop., 2005/06:34; Rep., 2005/06:UFöU1). Some respondents claim that the geographical expansion to PRT MeS in 2004 was a conscious step under the provision to take over lead nation responsibilities in the future. I have not found any evidence to substantiate these claims. However, what I have been able to verify is that Sweden did consider lead nation responsibility prior to the declaration to join the British PRT. The military advised against this in 2003 and the Minister for Defence adhered to this advice and steered the contribution to enter under British command. The idea of lead nation responsibility did not disappear from policy circles and the prospect of taking over PRT MeS resurfaces in the second half of 2004 when the UK started to prepare to redeploy to Southern Afghanistan where NATO were planning to expand in 2006.

## **The British vacates Mazar-e-Sharif**

There was a lot of water under the bridge between the recommendation against lead nation responsibility in 2003 and after the Swedish contribution had joined PRT MeS in the summer of 2004. The plan to expand ISAF was set in motion and NATO's role in Afghanistan was clearer. In addition Sweden had, in June 2004, volunteered for lead nation responsibility for a so called EU battle group operational in 2008. Participation in the EU battle group concept was seen as "an engine driving the reform" of not only the Armed Forces but the entire foreign and security policy community (Syrén, 2007, p. 31). For the Chief of Defence it was important to have a well-defined operation under an ISAF umbrella to generate structure in the intelligence process. There was also a budgetary concern as a long-term commitment would also create stability in the organization and the economy during a turbulent time for the Armed Forces.<sup>138</sup> ISAF, and the PRT concept, also proved to be an appropriate outlet for the Government's increased ambition in peace support operations.

The ISAF expansion process is set to expand to the more volatile southern regions in 2006 and the UK declared a will to concentrate their efforts there. The Swedish force commander in Afghanistan explains that he began exploring, with his British colleague, a potential shift in lead nation responsibility.

During the summer, early autumn, I start discussing with the British [...] about taking over Mazar-e-Sharif, I send home [reports] to the Chief of Army and then it continued to the Chief of Defense, my assessment was that we could do this, from a Swedish point of view, take over the same concept.<sup>139</sup>

In one of his reports to the Armed Forces in November 2004 he suggests that Sweden should plan for a lead responsibility of PRT MeS beginning in January 2006. In this report the underlying meaning is not that this would be a permanent solution but that it would be at least one year but with potentially other Nordic countries stepping up to relieve Sweden of command (SAFHQ, 2004-11-01, p. 3). Just before Christmas in December 2004 the CHOD visited Afghanistan and communicated to the commander of ISAF that Sweden was currently considering assuming command of the PRT.<sup>140</sup> According to the travel report he stresses that a political decision is not made yet (SAFHQ, 2005-01-20). As the Swedish force commander recollects:

I believe that the CHOD was down in December 2004 and then discussed with the British commander and gave him an intention: "Yes, that is some-

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<sup>138</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

<sup>139</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

<sup>140</sup> Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2018 and Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

thing we from the Armed Forces view positively and we recommend the political leadership to take over from the British".<sup>141</sup>

Right before the CHODs departure to Afghanistan, the Armed Forces communicated this to the Ministry of Defence in a military advice on the future for Sweden in Afghanistan (MFA, 2005-02-23, 2005-02-28; MOD, 2005-03-04; SAFHQ, 2004-12-15).<sup>142</sup> While Kosovo was kept as the priority, ISAF was placed as the second most important with the significantly increased ambition to take over lead nation responsibility for a PRT (SAFHQ, 2004-12-15).

The fact that the British raised the issue with Sweden brought a sense of flattery which was not insignificant for the ministries, especially for Foreign Affairs.<sup>143</sup> In a cable out of the American embassy in Turkey it appears that Turkey was also considering a request from the British to assume lead nation responsibility of PRT MeS (US\_EMB, 2005-01-19). Sweden was only expressing interest at that point to take over so the British pushed Sweden to openly declare the intention in order to refuse the Turkish bid.<sup>144</sup>

### **The PRT decision in the parliament: a fait accompli**

The prospect of assuming lead nation responsibility for PRT MeS was administered within the Government Offices and Sweden declared interest in proper channels in NATO and bilateral meetings during the spring (MFA, 2005-02-23, 2005-02-28; MOD, 2005-03-04, 2005-04-04a, 2005-04-04b, 2005-04-04c, 2005-04-06, 2005-04-18). In a governmental decision in June the Armed Forces received an instruction to plan and prepare for a transfer of command, under the assumption that Parliament would consent to increased personnel resources during the fall (GOV, 2005-06-22). The Parliament would therefore not directly address the takeover of PRT MeS but indirectly by approving the increased resources necessary to follow through on the transfer of command. The transfer started already during the fall of 2005, before the proposition was presented to the Parliament, and was so advanced that the Parliament did not have any credible way to actually decline the

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<sup>141</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> In their December assessment the Armed Forces suggest that Sweden would model the contribution after the British organization and predicts that this would entail an increase from 90 to 120 Swedish troops necessary in response to this ambition. During the spring this expands somewhat and when the Government decides to go ahead with the advanced plans in June the number is up to 150 soldiers for 2005 and 250 for 2006. Eriksson argues that the nature of the protracted process resulted in inadequate and outdated estimates from the Armed Forces being the basis for the decision (Eriksson, 2012, p. 14). In June 2005 the size of the force was locked-in and even as the outlook of the security situation changed and the Armed Forces demand additional soldiers the size was set and not amendable.

<sup>143</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014 and Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>144</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

Government's request. A no in the Parliament would risk a derailment of the entire process and amount to significant political costs internationally.<sup>145</sup>

When the proposition was presented to the Parliament in November of 2005 the Government suggested that the force compilation should reach 185 but that the cap should be placed at 375 in case of emergency.<sup>146</sup> This leeway was also motivated by the lead nation responsibility. Swedish calculations included other nations to provide troops for the PRT but with a lead nation responsibility it would fall upon Sweden to fill vacancies should these countries pull out of their commitments (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 16).

The Government's proposition to increase the contribution to ISAF enough to incorporate the lead nation responsibility was handed over to the Parliament late in October 2005. During the parliamentary treatment the Left Party retained their opposition and motion against the proposition (Rep., 2005/06:UFöU1). No apparent attempts were made in 2004–2005 to appease the Left Party or conform to their demands. The Greens continue their vocal opposition and issues a statement of opinion attached to the committee report. Still the party's official position is in favor of the Government's proposition but in the chamber five out of 15 Members of Parliament votes against. The Parliament still approved the proposition paving the way for Sweden to assume lead nation responsibility of PRT MeS in Afghanistan in March 2006: a substantial undertaking for a small non-NATO nation.

The treatment in the Parliament took an unprecedented turn in November 2005 when a detachment of Special Forces was attacked with a roadside bomb in the outskirts of Mazar-e-Sharif killing two Swedish Special Forces soldiers. This incident did not in itself cause any uproar in the political majority and while it left a dim mark on the final treatment in the committee and the following debate, it appeared to have strengthened the resolve of the political parties, not weakened it (Matz, 2013). These were in fact the first combat casualties Sweden had suffered since Lebanon in 1991 and before that in 1978. The unfamiliarity of combat casualties caused this incident to raise media awareness of the operation in Afghanistan and started a debate concerning the safety of the Swedish soldiers. By many actors in the process, this incident characterized the start of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan which will be a center piece of the next empirical chapter exploring the exit process.

The norm of consensus is consequently abandoned during this protracted expansion process. This is most observable in the 2004 parliamentary treat-

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<sup>145</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015, Interview Member of Parliament, 2016 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>146</sup> It is also interesting to note, in relation to this, that the 150 soldiers cap from the 2004 parliamentary decision is maximized during the fall in order to proceed with the plan to gradually take over the PRT ahead of the formal handover, consuming any room for reinforcements in case of a deteriorating security situation.

ment when the Left Party motions against the expansion. Despite supporting the entry in Afghanistan the Left Party decides to oppose the expansion and the Government does not undertake any substantial efforts to reel them in. Instead the Left Party is marginalized and a broad cross-party support could pursue an expansive policy in Afghanistan, aligned with the expansive foreign policy line of increased participation in peace support operations. This is not enough however in order to understand how the abandonment of consensus could still result in a legitimized policy. Several contextual factors and exogenous incentives pointed towards an increased contribution to the Swedish military engagement in Afghanistan. Advocates still faced several problems in addressing the external and internal pressures to intensify peace support operations. Following this reconstruction of the policy process I will turn the focus to the second dimension of my analytical framework and explore the framing of the Swedish military contribution. Advocates and opponents highlight and downplay certain aspects of the policy in order for it gain traction. This framing contest is central in the exploration of consensus in the expansion process.

## Framing the expansion

When Sweden assumed command over PRT MeS it was a substantial shift in Swedish ISAF and Afghanistan policy. As a non-NATO-nation it signaled commitment and resolve different from that previously displayed in the Balkans. The expansion of the ISAF contribution could have taken several different turns along the way of the protracted decision-making process however in the end it was a “particular type of intervention at a particular moment in time” that was conceived as the natural state of affairs by actors in the process (Henke, 2017, p. 319). Understanding how the alternative to join and later lead PRT MeS emerges in the decision-making process was the first step in understanding how, and why, the Government succeeded in framing policy for which support could be maintained. In the sections below the central features of the framing process are placed in the center of analysis. Certain aspects are highlighted while others are downplayed in order for the policy to gain broader acceptance.

Advocates build on the framings constructed in the entry process in order to maintain political support for the military contribution during the expansion. Even if new grounds was trodden and the PRT expansion amounted to a substantial policy change it was still accommodated in a climate of continuity. Advocates framed the expanding military contribution as a normal development of increased participation in peace support operations. It was also important to highlight civilian aspects of the PRT in order to enable a continued framing of the contribution in humanitarian terms. The most notable framing was the discursive firewall toward the more volatile regions in

the south, which housed the war in Afghanistan. This enabled the geographical expansion to northern Afghanistan keeping Sweden separated from the ongoing offensive operations in Afghanistan in a region that resembled the Balkans in conflict intensity.

## Reframing the foreign policy line to include expansion

Already evident during the entry process, Swedish defense and security politics was in a state of transformation. The absence of a security threat in the Baltic Sea region in the work of the Defence Commission turned the attention abroad to focus on military conflicts before they spread to Sweden (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014b). Consequently, in this new defense, peace support operations were placed front and center as the Armed Forces' *raison d'être*.

The takeover of PRT MeS was definitely a new avenue in Swedish ISAF policy and a significant reorientation, but it was embedded in a context of continuous change of the Swedish approach to international operations and the internationalization of the Armed Forces. The newly assumed role of Sweden as an active and responsible troop contributor manifested not only with this increased engagement in Afghanistan but also with other contemporary decisions on military contributions. Kosovo, Macedonia, Congo, Afghanistan and Liberia all came together as a whole and formed a development that pushed practice forward. This was part of a general reorientation toward peace support operations seen in most European countries (Holmberg & Hallenberg, 2016; Jakobsen, 2006; Ångström, 2010).

This internationalization expressed itself both in the deepened commitment in peace support operations but also in the EU Battle Group initiative which paralleled the process of the expansion of the ISAF contribution. The internationalization drove an expansion of military contributions to peace support operations and the PRT in Afghanistan was framed as a perfect outlet for this increased ambition. According to the chair of the Defence Commission, the deployment to Afghanistan and PRT takeover "was completely in line with the transition that we had done and became an additional confirmation that this is what is needed in the future"<sup>147</sup>. In the words of Major-General Michael Moore, military advisor to the Minister for Defence and later in charge of long-term planning:

You cannot defend Sweden by standing in the harbor of Ystad or at the Kalix River. The invasion threat is gone. We need to get out there and suppress, preferably prevent crises and conflicts in place. In a way, we defend Sweden indirectly by being in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Bosnia (Fokus, 2006-03-17).

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<sup>147</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

This framing of Afghanistan as the first line of defense is illustrative of how an expeditionary mind-set is established in the discourse. The same argument was heard among leading politicians. For example, in her Statement of Foreign Policy in front of the Parliament in February 2005 the Minister for Foreign Affairs referred to a figurative defense line that runs through Afghanistan (MFA, 2005-02-09). The expansion in Afghanistan was, with framings similar to these examples, considered as part of the new status-quo. This rather substantial reorientation of Swedish security politics gained momentum in 2003/2004. The Chair of the Defence Committee in the Parliament recalls how the decision to expand in Afghanistan and take over PRT MeS was accommodated within the boundaries set by a consensus in the Defence Commission on the general direction of security politics.<sup>148</sup> The changing context, with a perceived substantial pressure to deploy the Armed Forces, facilitated the framing of a comprehensive contribution in line with Swedish ambitions. A Member of Parliament explains this reasoning:

The question of taking over, doing this in a PRT, I think there were many who still thought, yes, it was something new, but it was also in the spirit of the time, that this is something that we should try, yes, an effort that was more comprehensive.<sup>149</sup>

That it was incorporated in the perception of “normal” for that time was also noticeable retrospectively. The Report from the Inquiry on Sweden’s Engagement in Afghanistan 2002–2014 noted that “the expanded military commitment in Afghanistan was in line with the defense policy orientation from 2004 that emphasized international operations” (Tingsgård, 2017, p. 72). The military contribution to Afghanistan conformed to the pattern of increased participation in peace support operations and the expeditionary mind-set to defend the borders of Sweden in countries.

### Framing the expanding contribution as a civil-military operation

The initial military contribution to ISAF was successfully framed as a continuation of Swedish humanitarian engagement in the country. The 2000’s saw an uprising in the way that military capability was seen as a tool to promote and protect humanitarian values. The idea of focusing on security, development and governance through the merging of civil and military competences appealed to “the Swedish view” on conflict prevention and how Sweden desired to work in a post-conflict environment. In the words of the then Minister for Defence Leni Björklund, echoing the political slogan of this time, there can be “no security without development – no development without security” (GP, 2006-01-29).

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<sup>148</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

<sup>149</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

The merging of civil-military means also resonated with the Swedish self-image of an actor well suited to conducting these types of operations to facilitate political reform. During a meeting in Washington during the fall of 2004 the Swedish CHOD expressed to the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, that Sweden had a comparative advantage in civil-military operations. According to the minutes from that meeting General Syrén derives this from a strong peacekeeping tradition going back many years (SAFHQ, 2004-11-10). This statement is important for two reasons. First, it clarifies how officials are selling the operation abroad. Sweden is promoted as a strong actor to be recognized when it comes to peacekeeping under circumstances when civilian and military capabilities are to work together. Secondly, it describes how Swedish military officials understand the present situation in Afghanistan and what the future developments of the ISAF expansion entails. Afghanistan is seen as a civil-military peacekeeping operation in a post-conflict environment. The situation is described by the military as that of a political power struggle between former warlords with elements of criminal behavior much similar to the situation that the Armed Forces face in Kosovo (SAFHQ, 2004-01-23). This framing was reinforced by a geographical demarcation between northern and southern Afghanistan which I will elaborate on later in this subchapter.

### **Framing the PRT as a civil-military fusion**

The overall objective for the operation in Afghanistan was framed as the humanitarian reconstruction of the Afghan society. The practicalities on how to do this, however, were difficult to settle and this process slowly progressed. NATO viewed PRTs as a key enabler of reconstruction and development but, as Rynning concludes, “failed to understand the kind of conflict they portended” (Rynning, 2012, p. 87). A Swedish official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs recalled that the idea of a PRT was sound theoretically but it was not well thought out how it would be implemented.<sup>150</sup> For the purposes of expanding the Swedish contribution a theoretical idea was sufficient since the civil-military character of the PRT allowed for the military contribution to be treated as a humanitarian in its essence. The Armed Forces changed their recommendation for lead nation responsibility and sponsor the PRT concept and argues that the close coordination of civilian and military activities, especially with civilian non-governmental organizations, is of “significant value” (SAFHQ, 2004-12-15, p. 2). When the CHOD visited Afghanistan in December 2004, he was met with disbelief by the development actors concerning the demarcation between civilian and military operations. The PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif was one the other hand given prominence as “an example of a functioning PRT” in which the division was perceived as “clear and relevant” (SAFHQ, 2005-01-20, p. 4).

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<sup>150</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

In the planning process there was a clear difference between this potential PRT contribution to ISAF and previous military engagements. As discussed in the previous chapter, in Kosovo the Armed Forces strongly advised against "multinationalism within a battalion during peace enforcement operations according to UN-charter chapter VII operations, where combat cannot be ruled out."(SAFHQ, 2000-06-21, p. 2 Appendix 2). In this regard the PRT is conceptually treated differently from previous experiences for this issue is never brought to the attention of decision-makers. Sweden continuously planned for, and implemented through decisions, multinational contributions; together with the Nordic countries, under British command, and together with other several countries after assuming PRT command. The difference from Kosovo is that there is a new operational concept.

In the proposition in 2005 the Government frames the primary objective for ISAF as "through security enhancing operations create conditions for the political process and enabling the UN and other aid organizations to conduct humanitarian operations and reconstruction" (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 10). The PRT works in this instance as a concept that enables a merger of civilian and military means under one organizational entity. In the geographical expansion the PRT is simply framed as a "regional unit for security and reconstruction" (Prop., 2003/04:71, p. 6 - see also prot. 2003/04:121, p. 85). In the proposition in 2005 the Government frame the purpose of the PRT as:

Through military observation activities, coordination, and advice and support to local authorities contribute to security and reconstruction in the country's provinces (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 10).

The coupling of security and development enabled this amplification of the humanitarian aspect of the PRT, even if the PRT in itself was not primarily equipped to deal with these problems. One alternative possibility would have been for advocates to focus on the military aspects of the PRT when promoting a PRT contribution. What if, for example, when advocates bridged the PRT and the long commitment of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (I will elaborate on this framing strategy later in the chapter) they instead had amplified the military aspects of the PRT or Swedish national interests? Defence Minister Björklund repeatedly cited the 25 years of humanitarian work carried out by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in her justification of Swedish military presence (DN, 2005-11-27, 2005-12-03; GP, 2006-01-29; MOD, 2005-04-07, 2006-06-07). Imagine if she instead had amplified for instance the success of the initial Special Forces operation, the transatlantic relationship or the objective to deny terrorists a safe haven in Afghanistan. This kind of counterfactual reasoning shows how the humanitarian aspects of the PRT were amplified and bridged with the development work in Afghanistan and the military aspects tuned down.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs noted in an internal memo that the mission of ISAF is not to reconstruct Afghanistan but “to enhance security” (MFA, 2004-07-16). This is done through the provision of “security enhancing presence and civil-military coordination” with the local warlords (Prop., 2003/04:71, p. 11). In the proposition the experiences from the establishment of PRTs in Afghanistan and the use of military observation teams to coordinate and advice Afghan authorities had been “positive” (Prop., 2003/04:71, p. 8). Development actors did not share this assessment and instead raised the controversial aspects of mixing military and development means. Within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs the antagonistic relationship between security and development was institutionally built into the organization of the Ministry and created some concern for how the comprehensive approach would be operationalized. As noted by an official working in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs:

This controversy surrounded the PRT-teams and this relationship between aid and the military. [...] And in some way, one saw a kind of connection between it, it is necessary with at least some kind of peace and calm to do meaningful development efforts. And in the other direction, it was very important with aid, the economic and social, to complement [...] what the military operations would achieve<sup>151</sup>

The Chair of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan writes in an op-ed in late 2003 that “the task to engage in both security and development operations has so far resulted in poor results in both” (Aftonbladet, 2003-12-27). In their annual report for 2003 the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan noted that they see the need for peacekeeping troops but found that development workers and soldiers are not appropriate partners (Kristiansson, 2016, p. 14). The Committee clarified their position to the Government that their support for peacekeeping troops and the PRTs in Afghanistan was conditioned on ISAF operating on a UN mandate and not under US command (Aftonbladet, 2003-12-27; Kristiansson, 2016, p. 14).

Advocates saw a clear purpose for the military and framed security as a presumption for humanitarian reconstruction. As the Liberals argued during the debate 2004:

[MP Wigström, Liberals] Achieving security and stability in Afghanistan is a necessary prerequisite for effective, humanitarian and democracy-promoting assistance. It is also a prerequisite for free and fair elections to be made and thus a prerequisite for social and economic development in Afghanistan (Prot., 2003/04:121, pp. 86-87).

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<sup>151</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

This framing established the precondition on security before other objectives can be reached. As the proposition highlights:

The greatest threat to democratic development and the rebuilding of the emaciated Afghan society is currently the fundamental lack of security and stability in large parts of Afghanistan. As the Government has previously pointed out, the link between security and development is evident in Afghanistan. Without these mutually reinforcing components, the country risks returning to a dangerous instability or open conflict ... Such an effort further becomes an important component of the collective support to promote security and development in Afghanistan. The contribution to ISAF is fully in line with the civilian and humanitarian efforts made by Sweden in Afghanistan (Prop., 2003/04:71, pp. 13-14).

The ISAF operation, and PRT MeS in particular, was framed to be of a peacekeeping nature in a post-conflict area, with a plan to merge civil and military capacities in a reconstruction effort. These characteristics nurtured the idea of Swedish international operations as peacebuilding and distanced the military engagement from the US and the war in Afghanistan. Even if this did not suffice for the Left Party, who broke the consensus when the deployment expanded to rural Afghanistan, it kept the issue of the PRT and the Swedish contribution to ISAF off the radar of major political controversy. The Swedish military contribution was not questioned, only its relation to the US war in Afghanistan. The expanding military contribution to Afghanistan could build on the already established humanitarian role for Sweden in Afghanistan. The link between security and development framed the military contribution as essentially humanitarian in essence.

### **Bridging the PRT and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan**

In the first empirical chapter the Swedish ISAF contribution with Special Forces was framed as a continuation of the development efforts in the Afghan context. The alignment of the military contribution with the previous humanitarian efforts was essential for constructing a perception of this military contribution as an unquestionable next step. This becomes even more important in this chapter when the operation expands. Advocates for the contribution could use the established humanitarian framing and strengthen it. A desk officer in the Armed Forces working with Afghanistan explains how they started to look at potential candidates for a Swedish ISAF expansion in 2003:

There were a number of towns that were up for discussion. So this was a way in which we tried to find possible candidates, is it something that would be relevant, it would be a just right bite to chew in the sense of both political and

military and development, that there is some presence of the Committee for Afghanistan.<sup>152</sup>

The presence of the committee became a central feature in the exploration within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence as well as the Armed Forces. The military looked to areas where the Committee operated in order to merge military and development.

We never decided on the southern parts, instead it becomes like the eastern part: Jalalabad, the northern part, especially Kunduz, a lot because we saw that the Committee for Afghanistan was there already. PRT is or was supposed to be “a reconstruction team” as it sounds. We are going to have development, we will have military, we will have a police, it will be the whole comprehensive approach.<sup>153</sup>

The committee is very much a factor in the planning process in the selection of potential geographical areas to deploy to. This is done with the intent on behalf of the Armed Forces to cooperate and to gain synergy effects of the deployment. What exactly these are is still unclear but in the absence of proper intelligence and a solid basis for decision-making, the presence of the committee is argued to be as good a reason as any. Much in line with the first decision to enter Afghanistan militarily the expansion, and later the lead nation responsibility of PRT MeS, was framed in civil-military terms as a continuation of both the development work conducted by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan as well as the military deployment. It catered to the Swedish self-image of being a perfect implementer of a comprehensive approach mixing civilian and military activities in reconstructing a post-conflict society. A member of the Committee observed how it was used by other actors in the process to legitimize the synergetic deployment between military and development actors.

All government delegations that came talked about, oh yes, we have such a long tradition [...] and they also rode on high horses on this. The committee has a very good reputation [...] And this was brought up all the time, and it was never matched with a dialogue with the committee.<sup>154</sup>

It was not obvious whether or not the Committee supported the expansion of the Swedish military contribution.<sup>155</sup> These two following quotes illustrate

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<sup>152</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>153</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

<sup>154</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

<sup>155</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry of Defence, 2014, Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2013, Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014, Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015 and Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

how the support from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan is interpreted differently, even within a ministry:

Perhaps it was also important that the Afghan Committee was so open or positive.<sup>156</sup>

Skepticism from [...] the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Swedish Red Cross, from Swedish MSF and so on.<sup>157</sup>

While there were different interpretations of the position of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in the construction of a consensus advocates used the Committee to legitimize the military contribution. The potential to bridge the military contribution and the Committee's work was central for the deployment. As a Social Democratic Member of Parliament argued in the debate about the takeover of PRT MeS:

[MP Forslund, Social Democrats] Sweden has participated in ISAF since 2002. But Sweden's commitment to Afghanistan goes much further back than that. Sweden has long been one of the largest aid donors to Afghanistan. The country is the third largest recipient of Swedish aid. Much of the assistance has been and is channeled through the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, which does a very good job. Almost all education for children and adolescents in Afghanistan has been established through the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan's schools and personnel on site [...] Our development assistance cannot be fully effective unless security is created and maintained (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 49).

Other advocates also referenced the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan when making the case for a PRT contribution. Despite representing the military the Minister for Defence recurrently uses the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in her talking points and press releases on Afghanistan and the PRT expansion (DN, 2005-11-27, 2005-12-03; GP, 2006-01-29; MOD, 2005-04-07, 2006-06-07). This shows how the Ministry of Defence frames the ISAF operation as a joint civil-military endeavor and how the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan is central in selling this theme. The controversy that did exist between military and development actors did not appear to have direct political consequences at this time. It concerned the inner dealings within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or when the Ministry of Defence and the military got involved. In some basic way was there a mutual understanding that "some sort of peace and quiet is necessary for meaningful development operations."<sup>158</sup> This will be further explored in the next chapter when the situation for the Swedish military contribution after the PRT take-

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<sup>156</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2013.

<sup>157</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>158</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

over when this relationship takes a political turn. Among the political parties there is during the expansion a consensus on the importance of international presence in Afghanistan and the Swedish “peacekeeping” presence. The existing controversy revolves around the relationship to the US led operation.

### Preserving the distinction from “the war” through the expansion

The geographical expansion challenged the division between ISAF and OEF that had been constructed in the process leading up to the initial contribution (see previous chapter). Initially in 2001–2002 was ISAF’s operational area restricted to the vicinity of the capital Kabul. This was already in itself a distinct division between the operational areas of ISAF and OEF. At that point minor efforts were necessary to frame it as geographically separate. It came naturally with the deployment being restricted to Kabul.

The relationship between the two organizations was the focus of the political conflict in the expansion process. Advocates framed it as an issue of coordination, keeping the two organizational entities separate, while opponents presented the confusion as a *fait accompli*. The UN mandate is used by advocates to further contrast ISAF and OEF by accentuating the difference between them. In addition to the organizational focus the framing process during the expansion clearly has a geographical element as well. Framing the north as a post-conflict region served two purposes for advocates. First, it strengthened the separation between the Swedish military contribution and OEF. Second, it situated the Swedish expansion within the confines of previous peace support missions and directed the Swedish force to an area where decision-makers felt comfortable deploying, since it was calmer.

### **Framing the relationship between ISAF and OEF as coordination**

US offensive operations in Afghanistan were starting to phase out which opened up for a prospective merging of the two operations. While the Americans considered the division between ISAF and OEF to be unwarranted they still recognized the delicate political situation in many European countries (Rynning, 2012, pp. 103-106). Kreps (2011) clarified that the transfer from combat operations (OEF) to stabilization (ISAF) overlapped in the case of Afghanistan. What is significant in her account is that both ISAF and OEF are viewed as a whole. But instead of being different chronological phases of a conflict it varied “more by geography and by whom the operations are conducted” (Kreps, 2011, p. 98). Larsen points out that the expanding role of NATO was supposed to be kept separate from the US war (Larsen, 2013, p. 8). During a meeting in Washington in October 2004 the CHOD received international signals that a “merged command” between ISAF and OEF should be seen as natural. At the meeting in Washington this was raised in conjunction with a positive prognosis for Afghanistan and a military opera-

tion that onward would extend only for a couple of years (SAFHQ, 2004-11-10). A first step toward unity of command for the Americans was the introduction of a high-ranking officer serving both chains of command. In the proposition in 2005 the Swedish Government maintained the division between the two operations and framed this dual hatted officer instead as a possibility to improve the coordination between the operations.

[T]he international security force ISAF and the coalition OEF will continue to be two distinctly different efforts that operate under separate mandates and chains of command. In order to improve the coordination between the two different operations and to exploit opportunities for synergies, a higher coalition commander is expected to be given the position as one of two deputy commanders of the international security force. When this person acts within ISAF, he or she does it within the framework of ISAF's crisis management mandate and chain of command (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 11).

This vague language left intentionally unspecified what coordination would actually entail for the relationship. This ambiguity surrounding coordination opened the way for different interpretations and enabled actors to engage with the framing of an organizational division and adjust their positions accordingly. This can be noted in the behavior of the Left and Green parties. They both direct harsh criticism and highlight the risks of confusing and merging the two operations. While the Green Party remains in support of the proposition the Left Party ends up in opposition. The Left Party uses the word “confusion” to frame the relationship between ISAF and OEF, which according to them is a result of the two operations being “fully coordinated” (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 47). The Green Party separates coordination and confusion and their representative argues in the chamber that “a conscious confusion of US efforts in Afghanistan and UN efforts in Afghanistan ... is in fact misleading and wrong” (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 65). The crucial issue for the Greens lies in keeping the chains of command separate. Later in the debate, in an exchange with the Left Party representative, the existing coordination is downgraded.

[MP Ångström, Greens] Coordination may sound compromising, but it is important that the two efforts have a coordination so that you do not start to kill each other (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 68)

Parties from the center-right support the Social Democratic government's position and recognize OEF as an important partner. A member from the Liberal Party questioned the critique that was raised by the Left and Green parties on the risk of confusing ISAF and OEF.

[MP Widman, Liberals] I can note that the different forces, ISAF and OEF, have objectives that partially coincide... I can also conclude that there is opportunity for cooperation and coordination between these [operations] that

can mutually increase safety for the troops involved (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 59).

In the debate, a member from the Moderate Party diminished the Left Party's stance by placing the risks of confusing the operations against the potential benefits of a Swedish contribution by pointing to the different objectives of the operations (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 56). A desk officer in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs remembers that the issue of coordination was sensitive politically and explains that a lot of effort was put in sorting this issue out:

On that issue we tried, from the civil servants' position, to create sensible distinctions. So you talk about roles and objectives, and what was about information, and that you are not subordinated and that you can function side by side without being codependent. Various things like that. So we tried to put in some form of degree on the word confusion. It is so open and ambiguous and can include anything and everything so it's hard to argue against.<sup>159</sup>

On the Government's behalf the division between the two operations was still an important element of the Swedish military contribution receiving legitimization in Sweden. While the Government supported an increased coordination between the military operations they still asserted that it was "significant" that the objectives of each operation and the chain of command were to be kept separated (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 17). Counterterrorism is attributed to OEF and peacekeeping and state building to ISAF. The Government asserts in the proposition to Parliament in November 2005 that:

The distinction between the tasks of the different forces can thus be described in a simplicity that the task of the International Security Assistance Force is to be oriented towards the protection of an area and its population (a geographic orientation) while the coalition's task is focused on known militant groupings (force-oriented orientation) (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 11).

The Social Democratic government walked a fine line between critiquing the US operation and accepting it as part of the whole international community's collective effort in Afghanistan. What was in the early stages of the ISAF commitment more framed as two completely separate campaigns is now more described as different organizational entities of the international community's collective resources. In the proposition the Government accentuates the need for coordination between the two operations.

Thus, the collaboration that already exists between the operations will need to increase; for example, to coordinate aircraft movements, prevents units from shooting at each other by mistake [friendly fire], and to increase the efficiency of respective missions. At the same time, the expansion increases the opportunities for creating synergies by exchanging information and intelligence

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<sup>159</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

and more efficiently utilizing the international community's collective resources for e.g. rescue and evacuation of injured (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 11).

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence notes this in the committee report and differentiates the counterterrorism mandate of Operations Enduring Freedom and clarify that "such tasks are not to be solved by the international security force" (Rep., 2005/06:UFöU1, p. 9). In the proposition it is clear that the Government considers OEF to be an important partner for the geographical expansion of ISAF and this is supported by the majority in the committee (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 11; Rep., 2003/04:UFöU2).

### **The UN mandate is amplified as a watershed**

Contrary to the initial decision the Government argues in the proposition that deals with the geographical expansion, that UNSC resolutions 1368, 1373, and 1378, that previously were adequate to support the US operations in Afghanistan politically, were now "not an adequate international legal basis for the coalition to act in Afghanistan" (Prop., 2003/04:71, p. 8). However, even if that interpretation of the legal arrangements for the coalition's presence had changed on the Government's part, they still stressed in the proposition that the invitation from the Afghan transitional government was a sufficient international legal base in itself. The UN mandate did therefore not differentiate any strict legitimizing differences between the two operations. However, the mandate did serve another purpose, to distinguish between the two military operations. This is apparent in this quote in an instruction from the Ministry of Defence to the Swedish delegation to NATO:

For Sweden, it is important that ISAF continues to operate under a UN mandate. The mandate issue was of particular interest in the Parliament's handling of the issue. [...] The future of ISAF, including the relationship with OEF, is a matter that concerns all countries as troop contributors for the operation. It is therefore important that non-allied troop contributors are involved early in the decision-making process (MFA, 2005-02-07).

This instruction demonstrates how the ministry recognized the importance of the UN mandate for the political process and pressed for a continued influence for non-NATO nations in these discussions. The UN mandate permitted security sector reform for ISAF while OEF was still directed towards "other activities", as it stated in the committee report (Rep., 2003/04:UFöU2, pp. 11-12). Not explicitly mentioning these "other activities" is a clear indication that the Government wanted to downgrade the counterterrorism activities and the offensive operations against Taliban still conducted by OEF. In the committee report in December 2005 the formulation of "other activities" is replaced with "tasked to actively fight remaining Taliban and Al-Qaeda groups" (Rep., 2005/06:UFöU1, p. 9). The report continues to highlight the different legal ground that the two operations base their presence on. The

different mandates are also used to contrast the two operations during the parliamentary debate, as exemplified here by a Social Democratic Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs:

[MP Forslund, Social Democrats] Madam Speaker! Sweden's forces are in Afghanistan on UN mandate. Never believe anything else! It is important to emphasize this. The UN mandate is an absolute prerequisite for our presence. It is also very important to distinguish between ISAF's mission and the activities of the US coalition under the name of Operation Enduring Freedom. They wage war on terrorism. ISAF's mission is to establish and maintain security. It is a separate mandate. They are separate missions (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 50).

This framing isolates the controversial aspects to OEF and places the Swedish military contribution to ISAF firmly within the confines of the foreign policy line. Emphasizing the UN mandate contrasts OEF from ISAF as a separate mission operating on a separate mandate. This division also enables the framing of the relationship as coordination, as previously discussed. For example, in the debate in December 2005 the Green Party member of the Defence Committee argued:

[MP Ångström, Greens] What concerns us in the Green Party is not this exchange of information. There is a reason for the necessity of it to avoid deaths, accidents and inaccuracies. That which is crucial, is that these two operations, where one has a UN mandate and the other is conducted under the leadership of the United States, has separate operational commands, which they already have (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 69).

As shown in the first chapter, the ISAF operation was framed as a UN mission. Both advocates and opponents continued during the expansion to frame ISAF and the Swedish military contribution as a peacekeeping force, operating on a UN mandate, which served the purpose of contrasting the two operations. For example, in the parliamentary debate on the geographical expansion to Mazar-e-Sharif the UN connection continuously returned in the argumentations from the Members of Parliament, regardless of party affiliation and position on the expansion (Prot., 2003/04:121, pp. 81-93).

Opponents and advocates shared an opinion of ISAF as a UN operation and reconstructed this frame in their opposition to the expansion. The issue for the Left Party was the risk of confusing ISAF and OEF, but in their argumentation they reinforced the framing of ISAF as a UN mission. For example, during the debate the representative from the Left repeatedly contrasts the two: “UN troops – ISAF – and the coalition forces”, “the coalition and UN troops” and “the coalition and ISAF, which is there on a UN man-

date” (Prot., 2003/04:121, pp. 78-81).<sup>160</sup> Even if they are supportive of ISAFs presence in Afghanistan they condition their support on a “demand that the coalition and its operations are immediately aborted” (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 80). For, as the representative argues: “It is important to emphasize that this is not about being against UN troops” (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 80). Indirectly the effort from the Left Party to criticize the coalition (OEF) served a different purpose, to reinforce the legitimacy of the ISAF operation and frame it in a UN context. This pattern is not as strongly discernible in the debate in 2005 where the Left Party instead focused on the “factual” confusion of ISAF and OEF and the merging of chains of command (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 47). While the linkage between ISAF and UN was upheld, the Left were critical toward the development. Still the Left argued that the UN should take over the entire military presence in Afghanistan (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 51).

Together all these examples show that there were no opposing views on the linkage between UN and ISAF, as both advocates and opponents framed ISAF clearly as a UN mission which firmly aligned it with “the foreign policy line.” The political controversy was present in the relationship between the US led coalition and ISAF.

### **Contrasting the post-conflict north and the war prone south**

When NATO went ahead with the geographical expansion and decided to begin by establishing regional command north under German supervision, the Swedish room for maneuver got smaller. The areas under scrutiny so far had been in the Northern and Eastern parts but the decision by NATO to initially expand to the north limited the options if Sweden wanted to expand quickly. The Government’s review of peace support operations had identified Afghanistan as an operation to manifest the ambition to expand. The reason for NATO’s decision to expand counter clockwise was that northern Afghanistan was safer compared to the other areas (Kreps, 2011).<sup>161</sup> Indirectly this accommodated Swedish interests as well. Sweden could expand early and to a calmer region of Afghanistan.

Reports, originating from the Military Intelligence, pointed to the difference in threat levels between the northern and southern parts of Afghanistan (MFA, 2003-11-05, p. 4; SAFHQ, 2003-08-22). In the north the threat, according to the military, mainly came from narcotics and factions fighting

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<sup>160</sup> When actors refer to “the coalition” they mean Operation Enduring Freedom, which is a *coalition of the willing* led by the United States.

<sup>161</sup> Agrell claims in his book *Ett krig här och nu* that even after the geographical expansion of ISAF there was an initial division between a northern ISAF area and a southern OEF, even if ISAF would have a mandate to operate in the south and OEF would have forces based in the north (Agrell, 2013, pp. 112-113). He does not, however, substantiate it with sources or elaborate on when in time this division was made, if it was a political deal or a consequence of the unfolding of the events. It is an interesting idea that could to a certain degree explain the background to the decision in NATO to initially expand ISAF to northern Afghanistan first.

internally and in these parts of the country Swedish forces were not directly affected by an ‘armed conflict’ and much less a participant in one (Agrell, 2013). The partition of a north and south Afghanistan was reconstructed repeatedly in reports circulating in the Government Offices and the military and reached a level of institutionalization where it was not challenged but considered a “fact” and unconsciously reconstructed by involved actors. The Hindu Kush was repeatedly used as a distinction between the Swedish operational area and the war in Afghanistan. As an ISAF desk officer working in one of the ministries clarified that there is “peacekeeping in northern Afghanistan, peace enforcement in southern Afghanistan and then we have the mountain range as demarcation”.<sup>162</sup> The former vice chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Parliament, Göran Lennmarker, also expressed this division:

Roughly speaking, one can say that north of the mountains, there has not been a war, it has actually been peace, even now. Since then there has been incidents but that has not been the image, that you can be given the impression that you are in a war zone.<sup>163</sup>

This partition of Afghanistan in a calmer north, in which Sweden could operate in more of a reconstruction effort, and a more war prone south served two purposes for the advocates of the Swedish redeployment. First of all, it kept Sweden separate from the war in Afghanistan. While acknowledging that ISAF’s expansion would increase the risks for the operation as a whole, the Government considered that a geographical confinement was an alternative that would be within the accepted margins of a Swedish military contribution. Secondly, it bridged the perception of previous peacekeeping experiences with this new phase of the ISAF operation. The framing of the situation in northern Afghanistan as a post-conflict situation bore a resemblance to the Balkans in that the main issues were related to warlord criminality and civil disobedience. This is for example evident in the composition of the different force configurations that were considered for the expansion. The military addressed for example “civil disturbance” and “riot control” (SAFHQ, 2003-11-05, p. 2). The travel report from the fact finding mission to Mazar-e-Sharif in January of 2004 highlights this perception of the north (SAFHQ, 2004-01-23). Part of that fact-finding mission was the desk officer from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs who clarified that:

It was a really low level of conflict... In practice, this was the case: the British were driving around in softskin [non-armored] cars, wearing berets, and basically had guns, but like no automatic weapons or something like that

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<sup>162</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2014.

<sup>163</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

when they went around town. Really low conflict level. There were incidents even then, but rather of the character of random violence.<sup>164</sup>

This view of random violence that he expresses is a direct result of the dominating perception of northern Afghanistan as calm. If we, for example, observe this statement made by the Minister for Defence just days after the attack that killed two Special Forces soldiers in November 2005: “Serious incidents can also happen in an area that is relatively calm and stable” (DN, 2005-12-03). Later in the interview she frames the Swedish area of operations as a different situation and exaggerate the characteristics of the north and the Swedish military contribution:

We are located in an area where Operation Enduring Freedom has not been. Up in Mazar-e-Sharif, the situation looks quite different compared to Kabul. They have never seen the Americans up there. People in these areas want one thing: peace and quiet so that they can go to school and make a living. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan has worked there for 25 years and the people trust Swedes since we did not return home once the war against the Soviet Union had ended (DN, 2005-12-03).

Keeping ISAF and the Swedish military contribution separate from OEF and the war in the south had a clear political element. The leading Social Democrat in the Committee on Foreign Affairs recalled that “we were rather satisfied to end up in Mazar and felt that it was an area that was considerably calmer.”<sup>165</sup> A military advisor in the Ministry of Defence clarified that “politically it was a rather easy decision... the situation was particularly calm in northern Afghanistan.”<sup>166</sup> Another viewed Mazar-e-Sharif as a “walk in the park.”<sup>167</sup> The perception of a calmer area in the vicinity of Mazar-e-Sharif appealed to decision-makers. A high-ranking officer remarked that one of the reasons why northern Afghanistan was politically preferable had to do with traditions. He explains that there was a “naïve” attitude toward the use of force and that politicians rather would be part of an operation that was focused on “peace-keeping” than “peace-enforcement”.<sup>168</sup> As the political advisor to the Minister for Defence expressed it:

It was easier for us to do anything in northern Afghanistan because it was more of a peacekeeping operation than a peace enforcement operation as was the case in southern Afghanistan, where it was terribly uneasy.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>165</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>166</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>167</sup> Interview Staff Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>168</sup> Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016.

<sup>169</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

The political preference to steer the military to calmer areas is perhaps most clearly manifested in a caveat placed on the troop contribution to be confined to the northern provinces (MOD, 2006-11-22). By confining the contribution to the north it ensured that Swedish troops would not be involved in the war in the south. As a member of the Defence Committee put it:

Interviewer: If I return to an earlier point that we are confined geographically to northern Afghanistan, why did we do that?

Respondent: Part of the answer is linked to the objectives we had there and simply linked to risks and safety in that we were not prepared, so to say, to participate in the kind of high risk operations that, as one perceives it, are carried out in the other parts. And above all in the south.<sup>170</sup>

This is echoed by the Swedish Chief of Defence. He explained that while ISAF received an operational mandate to cover all of Afghanistan this did not interest Sweden for several reasons.<sup>171</sup> The military had an elaborate perception of what would be tolerated by the political level, most prominently the Parliament as the ultimate decision unit. A Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan outside of Kabul had basically no other place to go other than the north, as events turned out. Circumstances steered the contribution north but it coincided with a perception of the north as “perfect”. As a political advisor to the Minister for Defence expressed:

Interviewer: How was the mission in Afghanistan received by the public [in Sweden]? How did discussions go?

Respondent: So that was one of the things that was always important when it comes down to it, and it was also related to political support in the Parliament, that we did not do peace enforcement operations, instead we did peacekeeping, possibly peace support, and it was something that was also important in relation to the public because it was gentler, a little less risky, more Swedish so to speak.<sup>172</sup>

This geographical division contributed to a distinction between the Swedish military contribution in the calmer northern Afghanistan and the coalition’s war efforts in the south. In the Government’s proposition in 2005 this frame was accentuated by highlighting the different security situations in northern and southern Afghanistan:

The decisive difference between the provinces in the north and the rest of Afghanistan is the comparatively weak presence and the limited threat of militant Islamist extremist groups (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 8).

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<sup>170</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

<sup>171</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

<sup>172</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

The proposition describes the geographical expansion of the ISAF operation as a whole and it is within this context that the distinguishing of a north and south is most prominent.

The expansion [of ISAF] does not just entail a greater geographical responsibility. With the forthcoming enlargements, the force will be responsible for areas where the Taliban movement has had and has its strongest support, and the security situation is worse there than in Kabul and in northern and western Afghanistan (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 11).

In summary, while many circumstances turned Sweden's attention to the north the framing of a post-conflict area, distinguished from the south, made it more politically attractive for a military deployment. The Swedish contribution could consequently be framed as separate from "the war" and any interaction with OEF as "coordination" and not cooperation. The focus could instead be placed on the humanitarian reconstruction of Afghan society.

## Maintaining consensus during the expansion

In 2003 the future of the transatlantic relationship was in the balance as the Iraq war infected relations between European countries and the US (Larsen, 2013, p. 6). An out of area operation in Afghanistan served the dual purpose of both repairing the relations with the US and providing NATO with a *raison d'être* in the post-Cold War era (Rynning, 2012). While NATO planned for a geographical expansion of ISAF this process was, as Sten Rynning puts it, "a slow and tortuous process marked by political debate and division" that essentially revealed serious tensions in the alliance regarding burden-sharing and alliance commitment (Rynning, 2012, p. 49).

The Swedish "foreign policy line" underwent substantial reorientation during this time, geared toward increased participation in peace support operations. What this would actually entail was not clear but the nature of the protracted expansion process gradually made Swedish decision-makers comfortable with developments that could have had an overly high threshold. For example, assuming lead nation responsibility in 2003 or 2004 was not a political possibility. Neither the Armed Forces nor the Ministries supported that idea wholeheartedly. Given time and small steps toward that end state, most prominently the geographical expansion and entry into the UK-led PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif, the Social Democratic government could grow comfortable to these ideas.<sup>173</sup> For even if there was a clear political intent to expand the Swedish contribution and explore the PRT option it was never clear where, with whom, or what level of ambition would be desirable or politically possible. These queries also depended a great deal on the question of why and

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<sup>173</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

the justifications that are presented for the expansion. In the end a takeover of PRT MeS, which objectively could be considered a substantial policy change, was aligned with the foreign policy line and regarded as a natural state of affairs.

While the PRT concept appealed to many decision-makers there was also the matter of deploying in an area where risks were manageable in order not to upset the consensus. The selection of PRT MeS was resolved when the Armed Forces could not scout Jalalabad and NATO decided to expand northward first. Sweden's intent to be involved early in the expansion narrowed the alternatives and the British approach to the PRT appealed to Sweden. Up until that point Jalalabad had been on the top of the military and Ministry for Foreign Affairs' list of potential deployment areas. Within the Swedish policy process northern Afghanistan was also framed as a calmer area in comparison to the south. In a post-conflict north could Sweden employ a peacekeeping posture and have a comparative advantage in coordinating civil-military activities.

From a military perspective the expansion was viewed as something new that would help stimulate the ongoing transformation of the Armed Forces to international operations, much in a similar fashion to the instrumental use of the establishment of the Nordic Battle Group. When the request to consider PRT participation entered the Armed Forces headquarters in 2003 the military remained initially skeptical to the idea of assuming lead nation responsibility. ISAF was not the highest priority, several uncertainties surrounded NATO's expansion of the operation, and other military operations consumed resources. When Håkan Syrén took the position as CHOD in 2004 the orientation toward the UK PRT was already a fact. He assumed the position with a clear mandate to transform the Armed Forces to an expeditionary force and wanted to create stability in the budgetary process. This reinforced his perception for the need of a substantial contribution sustainable in the long-term. Many of the earlier uncertainties had been settled and the military therefore changed its position and instead advocated a lead nation responsibility.

The Defence Commission appears to have played a central, albeit indirect, role in the expansion process. Despite the lack of formal power the Commission was the primary outlet for many of the deliberations and considerations of this time.<sup>174</sup> The PRT takeover was placed in a context of a long-term redirection of the Armed Forces and Swedish security politics, supported by a consensus in the Commission. From a foreign policy perspective the political gain was the international recognition that a substantial contribution to Afghanistan would entail. The many deployments to the Balkans, Afghanistan, Macedonia, Congo and Liberia formed a whole which propagated

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<sup>174</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry of Defence, 2014, Interview Member of Parliament, 2016 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

Swedish credibility within UN, EU and most evidently NATO circles. The political exposure from leading a PRT originates in Sweden's case not only from being a small country but also as a partnership country and not a formal member of the transatlantic alliance.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs had a change in leadership in 2003 and the newly acceded minister appears to have played a minor role in the developments and many of the vital decisions can be traced back to the military or Ministry of Defence. There was an apparent rift with development actors and despite deploying within a PRT concept, mixing civil-military elements, the process was dominated by the Ministry of Defence and the military. Despite this disbelief from development actors the PRT expansion could build upon the established framings from the entry process that placed the humanitarian reconstruction of Afghanistan front and center of the international engagement.

The duality of the PRT concept attracted a lot of support on the political level as many diverging interests united into one operational concept in the mutual reinforcement of security and development. It enticed the military who wanted a substantial contribution in a well-defined operation to test commanders as well as generate stability in the organization and the budgetary process.<sup>175</sup> But it also provided actors skeptical to the military contribution but positive to development work, such as the Green Party, with a rationale for supporting the military contribution. Security was necessary to enable development work. The Provincial Reconstruction Team was framed as an innovative mixture of military and civilian capabilities which appealed to decision-makers and placed the military contribution well in line with previous Swedish humanitarian commitments to Afghanistan. Ångström points to how "Sweden's usage of the PRT concept – and on the whole the acceptance of participating in Afghanistan - has more to do with the fact that this concept resonated in the Swedish (and Western) strategic culture" (Ångström, 2010, p. 196). If the dominating perception values civilian development efforts as more important than military it makes sense for advocates for the military contribution to clearly bridge military and civilian efforts.

## Acquiescence and opposition

The Left Party's defection from the consensus was in general based on the differences in the vision and execution of ISAF and the Swedish contribution, mainly the confusion with the OEF and US dominance. In order to understand how the Left could go from supporting the ISAF contribution in the entry phase to opposing the expansion there are two circumstances necessary to highlight. First, the decision to support the deployment to Afghanistan in

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<sup>175</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

2002 can be seen as a minor concession to the Social Democrats and the Left Party's willingness to display government capability. After the 2002 election they are kept excluded from influence in foreign policy stripping them from incentives to support this initiative from the Social Democrats. Second, after the change in leadership in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs they were insulated as the new minister simply does not reach out to the Left Party.

The military contribution caused some turmoil within the Greens as well and it was not evident that they would support the expansion. The party is born out of the peace movement which is still very strong within the party.<sup>176</sup> Given the similarity in their argumentation with the Left Party, and that they voted against the ISAF contribution in 2007, after they no longer were supporting party to the Government, the Greens should be considered in opposition to the deployment despite their yeas-vote. It appears as if the Greens were just overridden by the Social Democratic government but I have not substantial evidence to support this claim. The voting patterns for the Green Party suggest that individuals objected towards the leadership's decision to support the contribution.

Even in their opposition to the contribution the Left Party (and also the Green Party even if they voted in favor of the contribution) maintained several of the framings that the Government builds their argumentation on, for example the link between the UN and ISAF. Similarly, the Left Party's most clearly expressed critique was aimed at US violations of international law and not towards ISAF or the conduct of the Swedish military contribution. The defection of a party from consensus could have been devastating for the legitimacy of the policy. But since it was the Left Party, the political importance could be downplayed by advocates of the expansion and the norm of consensus transformed to a norm of a broad cross-party support in Parliament. The meaning given to cross-party support was similar to that given to consensus in the entry and therefore it did not upset the majority. The shift passed instead rather unnoticed as the Left Party was successfully marginalized and their reasons framed as illegitimate and reckless. Much linked to the Left Party's opposition towards US dominance in world politics and communist heritage. The Left Party's defection did therefore not risk the inherent legitimacy for deployment inherent in the consensus.

There was no incompatibility between the Social Democrats and the leading party of the center-right coalition, the Moderate Party, concerning the direction of the Afghanistan engagement. The political division that surfaced concerned procedural matters more than formulation of policy, for example the way that the increased ambition was financed in the budget, the lengths of the parliamentary mandate, or the lack of a general strategy for interna-

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<sup>176</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

tional operations (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014b; Matz, 2013).<sup>177</sup> Despite the strong perception of internationalization the ease with which the norm of consensus was abandoned it is still noteworthy, in particular since this norm has a strong history in Swedish foreign policy and in particular on sending armed forces abroad on international military operations (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, 2000; Egnell, 2015).

Before entering into Afghanistan there was a substantial internal debate during the Social Democratic congress in 2001. This debate concerned the interpretations of the legitimate grounds for the invasion and to what extent it was approved, authorized and/or sanctioned by the UN. In the next chapter we will see how the congress is the epicenter of an internal controversy on Afghanistan policy. During the Social Democratic congress in February 2004 and October 2005, however, the situation in Afghanistan is absent from any deliberations.<sup>178</sup> Indirectly there was a general discussion about UN mandates and whether peace-keeping or peace-enforcement should be a guiding principle for peace support operations (see for example the exchange between Juholt and Theorin - Social\_Democrats, 2005, pp. 200-201).

One explanation for this silence could be linked to the different international contexts. In 2001, the Swedish position on the subsequent military actions in Afghanistan following 9/11 was highly contested and debated, much in line with how Iraq was in the spotlight during 2003. An increased focus on Iraq could potentially have let Afghanistan pass under the radar. However, it is also important to recognize that the 2001 congress did not process a Swedish military contribution. This was not on the agenda at that time. One of the leading opponents toward the Swedish position in 2001 and later to the Swedish military involvement in Afghanistan, Maj Britt Theorin, recognized after the 2001 congress that “it’s simply the case that a Social Democratic congress does not oppose a party leader” (SvD, 2001-11-08). During the expansion, the Social Democrats were still in power and this limited internal defection from a position pushed by the Government.<sup>179</sup>

### **The burden of proof is placed on opponents**

A favorable context of increased international military operations placed the burden of proof on opponents to the military expansion. It fell on the Left Party to motivate dissent rather than on the other parties to motivate their reasons to support the expansion. This can in part be explained by the pre-

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<sup>177</sup> At this time there was a political debate of the origins of the finances made available for peace support operation, does it come from the defense or development aid budget? For example, as debated in the parliamentary chamber during the geographical expansion in 2004: “isn’t also peace and security building measures a kind of development aid?” (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 84). While this debate has consequences on how the relationship between peace support operations and development is perceived I will not elaborate on this in this dissertation and refer instead to Dafinova (2019) and Christianson (2020).

<sup>178</sup> The Social Democrats held an extra congress in 2004.

<sup>179</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

sent consensus on a general expansion of peace support operations and the shared view on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. It is also important to point out that more than 90% of the chamber was in support of the ISAF policy.

This shift of the burden of proof manifests itself clearly when we observe how the Left Party representative to the Defence Committee, Alice Åström, presents their policy stance in the parliamentary debate. In the debate on the proposition to extend the contribution to Mazar-e-Sharif she argued:

[MP Åström, Left Party] The Left Party has previously also been behind the decisions taken here in the Swedish Parliament to send troops to Afghanistan. That should be fair. We really should have been able to be unified in the committee, as we have always been in the past when we have sent Swedish troops abroad. I and the Left Party can nothing else than to regret that the situation is as it is (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 78).

This is perhaps even more notable in the opening statement debate in December 2005:

[MP Åström, Left Party] Madam Speaker! To begin with I would like to say that this is to some extent a difficult debate. It is difficult because it is customary, when we dispatch Swedish soldiers to international missions that are potentially dangerous, that we have a consensus. This is regrettably the second time that the Left Party is standing here, having a different opinion and demanding the proposition to be rejected and our reservation to be approved. But it is also important to emphasize that a consensus on these matters, important as it is, must not become a consensus in which we do not dare to confront reality. Although it is customary to have a consensus and that we are trying to achieve this as often as possible, we are not in favor of expanding the Swedish participation in the international security force in Afghanistan (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 46).

The Left Party's decision not to support the Government's proposition is confronted by advocates in the debate. Consensus is used by them as a political tool to place the blame on the Left Party, underlining the importance of unity in the chamber. The representative in the Committee on Foreign Affairs for the largest opposition party, the Moderate Party, emphasized the need for oppositional parties to rally behind government policy:

[MP Björling, Moderates] We have chosen not to file a separate statement of opinion. We do that because we want to see consensus in these decisions. As I said in the beginning is this a very serious decision. We would like to see unanimity behind the report [...] The reservation from the Left Party is only to regret (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 84).

The Liberal and Center Party also amplified the Left Party's defection from consensus. They refer to the "fundamentalist hatred of America" and how

the Left's reservation is "disheartening" (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 87). In the 2004 debate advocates also link the consensus on military deployments, or lack thereof, to the support of the troops (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 86).

The Left Party in their argumentation did not directly question the expansion or state that troop deployment to Afghanistan was unnecessary. Their policy stance was based on the geographical expansion which, according to them, placed the relationship of ISAF and OEF front and center. This was a crucial element in the framing of ISAF policy that caused the Left Party to break with consensus, even as the party felt a collective pressure to support military deployments with a united chamber.<sup>180</sup> Since "the foreign policy line" was perceived as expanding Swedish contributions to peace support operations the expansion of ISAF was interpreted in this light. In the committee report for the treatment of the initial expansion to Mazar-e-Sharif the majority in the Committee expressed how consensus on these decisions on military contributions had been the norm.

In report 2002/03:UFöU1 the Committee noted with satisfaction that, as with previous decisions on Swedish participation in an international security force in Afghanistan, there was a consensus among the parliamentary parties that Sweden should participate in such. Also at the decisions to participate with troops in IFOR / SFOR operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the KFOR operation in Kosovo, and in the case of the Swedish participation in an EU-led force in Democratic Republic of Congo and the United Nations Mission in Liberia, there has been a consensus among the parliamentary parties of the importance of the Swedish operations (Rep., 2003/04:UFöU2).

The formulation in this text is a remark to the Left Party that they break with the status quo, which is consensus in support of military deployments. In the debate, on both of these decisions (geographical expansion in 2004 and lead nation responsibility in 2005), the Left Party is marginalized by the majority of parties and repeatedly being questioned for breaking the consensus. The legitimizing narrative presented by the Government and supporting parties is pitched against the Left Party's deviation. In the proposition the Government builds on the framing of the contribution as in line with previous and present policies:

A Swedish contribution to a regional unit for security and reconstruction and a related forward support base in northern Afghanistan is a requested contribution to ISAF's enlargement in Afghanistan. Such an effort will also be an important component of the overall support for security and development in Afghanistan. The contribution to ISAF is entirely in line with the civilian and humanitarian efforts made by Sweden in Afghanistan (prop 2003/04:71, p.14).

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<sup>180</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

This way of aligning the ISAF operation with prior ISAF engagements is key in framing the Left Party as the deviating faction. One reason why the marginalization of the Left Party was successful is the history of the Left Party as divergent from the mainstream parties on foreign policy. When defecting from the consensus the Left Party's motivations were framed as irrational and inconsistent. A Moderate Member of Parliament accentuates this in the debate: "The Left Party has previously supported this kind of operations, even in Afghanistan despite the presence of OEF, Operation Enduring Freedom. Why not now?" (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 84). She continued in her following statement: "I wonder if the Left Party's US-hatred is so strong that it is more important that a confusion of ISAF and OEF – the US led coalition force – occurs than to participate in a UN led force to actually help the people of Afghanistan" (Prot., 2003/04:121, p. 85). The representative from the Moderates was joined in her critique by the representatives from the Center Party and Christian Democrats (Prot., 2003/04:121, pp. 89-90).

The confusion of ISAF and OEF is downplayed in this as a minor issue on the whole, but also the political controversy is relocated to the Left Party's hatred towards the US and not any confusion of ISAF-OEF. In the parliament's treatment of the expansion the two dominating parties, the Social Democrats and Moderate Party, downgraded all the problematic aspects of the linkage.<sup>181</sup>

This theme returned in December 2005 and the debate on the PRT takeover. The Deputy chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, from the Moderate Party, emphasized the broad support and how an "expanded force is in line" with what the majority pursues in this issue. She also raised the issue of how the Left Party escapes responsibility for the Afghan population by focusing on the US (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 54). A central feature of this is an approach which builds on the established framing from the entry as a continuation of the humanitarian efforts in the country, for example as a Social Democrat in the Committee on Foreign Affairs argued in the debate: "There can never be an alternative to get out of Afghanistan and leave the people there for their fate. Sweden has long supported the people of Afghanistan and their struggle for survival and development" (Prot., 2005/06:45, p. 50).

A party that broke away from the consensus could have been devastating for the legitimacy of the policy. The political importance of the Left Party was downplayed and the departure could be coupled with the Left Party traditional opposition toward transatlantic security politics. There was, however, also a consensus on the necessity for humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and a general agreement in support of peacekeeping troops and Swedish participation in ISAF. The controversy could therefore be limited to the ISAF-OEF relationship and to the Swedish contribution per se. And once the two major

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<sup>181</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

parties, the Social Democrats and Moderate Party, were in agreement there was a sense among actors in the process that the issue was settled.<sup>182</sup>

## Constructing consensus

Sweden was in the midst of a transformational period of Swedish defense and security politics that took off in the 1990's following the end of the Cold War (Christiansson, 2020; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a). A new military rose out of the ashes of the decommissioned anti-invasion defense and was organized to deal with international crisis management, and participate in peace support operations. The work in the Defence Commission cemented this reorientation in all parties. There was therefore a wide-spread perception amongst decision-makers on all levels that increased participation in international mission was an expression of Swedish foreign and security politics and a clear indication of where the Swedish defense is heading. This shifting "foreign policy line" created a context which facilitated arguments in favor of deployments and placed the burden of proof on any actor that breaks with this dominating perception. This is the reason why a substantial change in Afghanistan policy could be framed as a natural continuation of previous engagements.

In the first empirical chapter the importance of the UN mandate and the centrality of the UN was clear. The UN mandate placed the contribution in a context with a clear support in international law. When it comes to the expansion the UN mandate it is still central to the discussion but it is interesting to note a gradual shift in how the UN mandate is used not to indicate different legitimate grounds for the ISAF and OEF but instead to contrast the organizations. An invitation by the Government of Afghanistan is deemed by the Swedish Government as a sufficient support in international law to warrant the presence of OEF. Still advocates emphasize the UN mandate but not to delegitimize OEF but to differentiate the two organizations. This minor change has an important analytical implication with the addition of the contrasting alignment strategy. As the context changes, so does the use of alignment strategies. But it is not only the additional strategy that helps us understand this change but also that strategies can be used in combination. Amplification of the UN mandate was combined with the contrasting strategy in order to differentiate ISAF from OEF.

Advocates framed some coordination between ISAF and OEF as necessary but it was important to keep the two distinct when it came to formal command structure. The US exploration of a merging of the chains of command thwarted the advocates' efforts to keep them apart but opposition was contained to within the Left and Greens. This could have been a conse-

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<sup>182</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016, Interview Member of Parliament, 2014, Interview Member of Parliament, 2014 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

quence of the Social Democrats controlling government, and thereby also controlling the policy process.

The political risks associated with the operation in Afghanistan were always present in the deliberations over expansion. In the first empirical chapter risk management was expressed through the clear preference of a Special Forces contribution. This reduced the political risks of deployment and coincided with the readiness of the unit. During this process that led up to the expansion and takeover of PRT MeS the political risks are managed by the protracted nature of the process and that the contribution is steered toward Northern Afghanistan. The framing of a geographical divided Afghanistan with different conflict levels is important to construct the image of Afghanistan as a continuation of previous peace support operations. The post-conflict setting of the north resonates with traditional approaches to peace-keeping operations. A contribution to the north is considered “a walk in the park” that necessitated only a light footprint and soft-skin vehicles, in accordance with what the British had. The importance of the Swedish contribution being situated in the north is established in a geographical caveat notified to NATO restricting any troop movements outside of the four provinces (MOD, 2006-11-22).

Presenting a proposition for parliament was important not only due to the constitutional obligation to do so when deploying an “armed force” abroad. It was also a way for the Government to manifest a broad political support.<sup>183</sup> To display unity on these issues was considered a “common interest” shared by the Government and opposition.<sup>184</sup> It also encompassed an element of risk since, due to the political cost of not passing a governmental proposition in parliament, especially in foreign policy.<sup>185</sup> The proposition is therefore preceded by informal consultations between the Government and opposition in order to beforehand establish a safe passage through the parliament.<sup>186</sup> By many in these processes, this was interpreted as an agreement between the Moderates and Social Democrats.<sup>187</sup>

On this note, it is important to highlight the casual conversations between politicians on these issues, which, according to them, gave them a sense of the common ground politically. This evidently took place during committee treatments and Defence Commission meetings but also, as pointed out by

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<sup>183</sup> Interview Civil Servant, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>184</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014. See also Interview Member of Parliament, 2015 and Interview Minister for Defence, 2014.

<sup>185</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015, Interview Member of Parliament, 2016 and Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>187</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015, Interview Member of Parliament, 2014, Interview Member of Parliament, 2014, Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

several respondents, in the parliamentary cafeteria or in the hallways after a formal meeting.<sup>188</sup>

### **Expansion as continuation**

It matters that Sweden was already involved in Afghanistan and part of the formal intelligence and information processes. Without the first entry with Special Forces the PRT contribution would be an entirely new deployment. The expansion process would have been an entry process, but from the outside looking in. Consider the counterfactual that Sweden would not have any military personnel in Afghanistan and is thereafter approached by the Americans. While that still might have resulted in a lead nation responsibility of a PRT, Sweden would not have had the same access to information as a non-troop contributor and would have perhaps been absent in international deliberations. Take for example the liaison officers at US CENTCOM and their access to the US decision-making process.<sup>189</sup> Also the threshold to deploy would have been significantly higher, obstructing the potential to form a consensus. The Government could therefore focus on the maintenance of the already established consensus on Afghanistan. More importantly successful framings of the initial contribution, that have resonated and received acceptance, could be nurtured by advocates and already established framings are more challenging to alter by opponents (Benford & Snow, 2000; Bynander, 2015; Heath & Heath, 2007; Vertzberger, 1990).

This has four implications for the construction of consensus. First, the opposition faced tremendous difficulties engaging the already established consensus, especially since the opposition itself had previously been part of this consensus and supported the military deployment to Afghanistan (previous chapter). In addition, there was a consensus on the redirection of Swedish security politics toward internationalization of the Armed Forces. Opposing the ISAF contribution could therefore be framed as deviating from the consensus view of expanding international deployments. Second, since a consensus had already been constructed for the entry the change in semantics from consensus to broad cross-party support could maintain the perception of unity in a continuous support for the ISAF contribution. On the merits of their historic legacy, the Left Party's opposition was framed as deviating from the already established consensus, even if this decision constituted a significant policy change. Third, the political conflict could be contained to the issue of coordination versus integration between ISAF and OEF. Coordination was sufficiently vague and allowed for interpretations in support of one's own interests. Since there was a consensus on the humanitarian necessity of foreign military troops in Afghanistan the opposition did not discredit the Swedish military contribution or ISAF. As long as the division between

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<sup>188</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

<sup>189</sup> Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016.

ISAF and OEF was upheld, political controversy could be managed by the Government, and political cross-party support be constructed. Fourth, as in the entry process, the UN continued to play an important legitimizing role and placed the contribution firmly in a humanitarian context. Further the UN mandate reinforced the difference between ISAF and OEF. The civil-military character of the Provincial Reconstruction Team catered to the self-image of Swedish peace support operations: in support of the UN and in a post-conflict area where the role was to separate warring factions and provide the space for rebuilding efforts.

## Chapter 7 – Exit

The previous two empirical chapters dealt with the entry and expansion of the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan. After Sweden assumed responsibility for the PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif in 2006, the mission took a quite different turn than expected. It spiraled down a path of recurrent reinforcements and militarization of the engagement, changing the composition of the contribution.

Politically the Social Democrats lost power in 2006 and found themselves in opposition to a center-right coalition government led by the Moderate Party. As advocates within the Social Democrats lost their ground against opponents it eventually reached a tipping point after which support for the operation began weakening within the Social Democratic Party. The trend toward bipolarity in Swedish politics (Aylott & Bolin, 2019) entered the realm of foreign policy and the Social Democrats united with the Greens and Left Party and presented a common platform and pushed for a withdrawal from Afghanistan ahead of the 2010 elections. While politicization of foreign policy is not a new phenomenon it is still an unusual circumstance in Swedish election campaigns (Bjereld, 2010, p. 99; Bjereld & Demker, 2000).

The center-right government remained in power after the 2010 election and a settlement was negotiated with the opposition that secured support in the Parliament for the military contribution but also initiated a sharp reduction of troop presence starting in 2012 (Prop., 2010/11:35; Rep., 2010/11:UFöU1). This chapter will explore the process that led up to that exit decision. There are two interesting developments that are especially significant given the purpose of this dissertation, to explore the construction of consensus. First, the nature of the political conflict and the reasons why the consensus crumbled before the 2010 election. Second, the conditions that enabled the consensus to be (re)forged after the elections. In the analysis that follows I build on the results from the previous two chapters on the entry and expansion of the military contribution, and continue to explore the nature of the organizational and geographical distinctions towards the war in Afghanistan, the questioned UN primacy in Afghanistan (especially important for the Social Democrats), and the difficulties in combining a humanitarian mission and the use of military force in a counterinsurgency operation.

The analysis is placed on the decision when government and opposition unites behind an exit strategy and the process leading up to that point (2009–2010). It is, however, necessary to begin the chapter with a short summary of

some general developments from the PRT takeover up until 2009. Thereafter this chapter will walk through the process from the summer of 2009 and the succeeding political developments until the settlement between the Government and opposition that secured parliamentary support in December 2010. During this review, several important thematic elucidations are highlighted to provide the process with more context, in order to understand the political controversy. This chapter will thereafter, as the former two empirical chapters, proceed with first the framing of the military contribution followed by an analysis of the construction of consensus.

## The run-up to the exit 2006–2009

In the period between the 2006 PRT takeover and the start of the process that this chapter analyzes, there are no real political obstacles to the process. The disagreements were to a larger extent confined to intra- and inter-ministerial conflicts, i.e. between Finance, Defence and Foreign Affairs (US\_EMB, 2008-11-10).<sup>190</sup> After twelve years in power the Social Democrats lost the election in 2006 against a four-party center-right coalition, called “the Alliance” [*Alliansen*], consisting of the Moderates, Liberals, Center Party, and Christian Democrats. The Social Democrats entered a role of opposition toward the Government, balancing support for the contribution with a critique for the risk of confusing ISAF and OEF and ensured oppositional influence by demanding a one year term for parliamentary authorization (US\_EMB, 2008-01-22).<sup>191</sup>

The Moderate Party held more mandates in the Parliament than the other three coalition parties combined and filled, in addition to the position of Prime Minister, also Minister for Finance, Justice, Foreign Affairs, and Defence. That is, all ministries dominating the process of military contributions to international military operations. The Alliance government entered office with a declared ambition to increase involvement in peace support operations and the process of internationalizing the Armed Forces continued (Edström, 2016, p. 517; Holmberg & Hallenberg, 2016). During their first term in office, 13 parliamentary decisions were taken on military deployments abroad in peace support operations: Lebanon (2006, 2007), Bosnia (2007), Afghanistan (2007, 2008, 2009), Darfur (2007), Chad/RCA (2007, 2008), Kosovo (2008, 2009) and Gulf of Aden (2009, 2010).<sup>192</sup>

Under the leadership of the center-right coalition the Defence Commission, supported by all parties, introduced “the Solidarity Declaration”, which

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<sup>190</sup> Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

<sup>191</sup> In an illustrative example in April 2007 leading social democrats Jan Eliasson, Urban Ahlin and Ulrica Messing criticized the Government’s ISAF policy in an op-ed in *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD, 2007-04-07).

<sup>192</sup> All except Afghanistan are reached with acclamation in the chamber, see chapter 4 table 2.

was made official policy by the Government in 2009 (Prop., 2008/09:140).<sup>193</sup> It had a substantial symbolic value and this was considered by many as a dramatic change (Pettersson, 2018). The ambiguous meaning of solidarity signals both an “active involvement in the processes of Euro-Atlantic integration” as well as “the status quo preference for military non-alliance” drawing support from all political camps (Christiansson, 2010, p. 21). Solidarity could therefore be interpreted as part of a quid-pro-quo relationship with larger military powers and military contributions to peace support operations as a mean to receive support to the national defense.

It should be noted that Afghanistan was an important policy issue for the Alliance government. The Inquiry on Afghanistan remarks in their investigation “that before and during the Swedish presidency Sweden was a driving force in the formulation of an EU action plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The action plan, which was adopted on the 27th of October 2009, was Sweden’s most significant political and diplomatic effort within the EU during the period” (Tingsgård, 2017, p. 136). There was also international pressure on Sweden to be a part of this engagement at the same time as it signaled resolve to international partners.<sup>194</sup> The Moderate State Secretary at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Frank Belfrage, emphasized the significance of linking Afghanistan to the new solidarity doctrine:

There was a consideration that if we answered the call and supported the effort, if we take responsibility, then someone will come to our assistance eventually when we need it.<sup>195</sup>

This solidarity declaration was a definitive part of the larger reorientation of Swedish foreign policy that, more or less, paralleled the Swedish engagement in Afghanistan. Security was now achieved better in cooperation with others and not in isolation.

### **A deteriorating security situation**

After assuming control of PRT MeS Sweden was increasingly exposed to the activities of opposing military forces due to ISAF gradually changing military strategy to counterinsurgency and the fact that Sweden was geographically responsible for four PRT provinces. While not something entirely new, one can say that counterinsurgency (or COIN), as a result of the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, was “rediscovered” and a new COIN-doctrine

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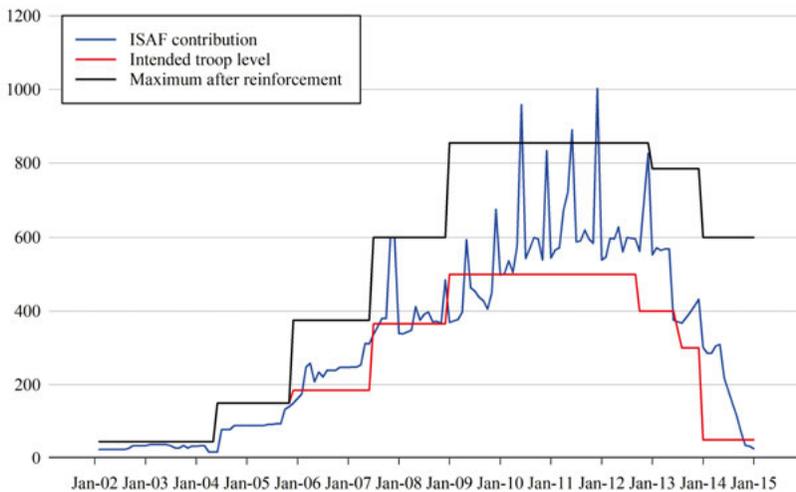
<sup>193</sup> “Sweden will not be passive if a catastrophe or an attack strikes another [EU] member country or a Nordic country. We expect those countries to act in the same way if Sweden is struck. Sweden should have the capability to give and receive military support” (Ds., 2007:46, p. 11; 2008:48). Similar wording can be found in EU’s Lisbon Treaty which entered into force on January 1, 2009 (Bjereld & Möller, 2015, p. 443).

<sup>194</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016 and Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016.

<sup>195</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018.

was launched by the US in 2006 (Eikenberry, 2013; Kaplan, 2013). In its essence, counterinsurgency is an approach merging civilian and military means in order to protect the population and establish legitimacy for the domestic authorities. The center of gravity in the conflict lies in the “hearts-and-minds” of the local population and by winning their support the opposing military force (the insurgents) are isolated and in extension denied access to logistics, intelligence and recruitment (Galula, 2006; Kaplan, 2013). While NATO early adopted the comprehensive approach, there was reluctance in formally adopting counterinsurgency (Larsen, 2013). In 2008 the COIN-doctrine started to impact ISAF’s operational planning but it was not until 2009 that it officially became the concept of operations (I will shortly elaborate on this in the next part of this chapter) (Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015, p. 32; Roosberg & Weibull, 2014, p. 44).

Over the years 2006–2009 the security situation in the four provinces under PRT MeS control, and in Afghanistan in general, deteriorated (Agrell, 2013; Jansson et al., 2015; Roosberg & Weibull, 2014; Rynning, 2012; Tingsgård, 2017). The challenges posed by the deteriorating security situation were primarily met by the military with increased numbers, armored vehicles and a return to “their professional comfort zone” (Honig & Käihkö, 2014, p. 219). During a relatively short period of time, from 2005 to 2008, Sweden gradually increased the force contribution to 500 soldiers as a response to the developments, see figure 4.



*Figure 4.* Intended, maximum-cap and actual troop levels in Afghanistan. The blue line indicates the actual troop presence in Afghanistan according to the Armed Forces monthly reports (SAFHQ, 2001-2014). Interpolations were made for a couple of months that were missing data. The spikes indicate periods of rotation. The red line represents the intended troop level according to the parliamentary decision. The black line shows the maximum troop level including reinforcements.

The military gradually replaced the primary maneuver unit, Military Observation Teams (MOTs)<sup>196</sup>, with rifle companies in a more taskforce oriented structure of the PRT (Derblom et al., 2010, p. 8; Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015, p. 29; Johnsson, 2017, p. 127; SAFHQ, 2009-05-15; SvD, 2009-07-25). A symbolic manifestation of the increased militarization of the PRT was when the force changed the colors on their vehicles from white to khaki (SvD, 2009-07-25).

If we take a look at table 3 we can observe a rather substantial shift in 2009 of the number of combat situations (or in military jargon “troops in contact” or TIC) as well as the numbered of injured soldiers as a result of combat in comparison to the years prior (see also Agrell, 2013, p. 231f). This escalation in 2009 therefore serves as the triggering point in my analysis of the exit process. It was the beginning of the end.

Table 3. *Combat situations and casualties, Swedish PRT forces<sup>197</sup> in Afghanistan 2002–2012.*

Year	2002-2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
TICs	7	32	71	54	23
Injured <sup>198</sup>	4	8	8	8	2
Killed	2	0	3	0	0

Source: Jansson et al. (2015) Tactical and Combat experiences Afghanistan 2002-2012. Swedish Armed Forces Land Warfare Centre. Page 74-76.

The militarization of the Swedish PRT, and the Afghanistan effort in general, also coincided with an increased Americanization of ISAF. Beginning with the geographical expansion of ISAF, described in the previous chapter, and a desire from the US to achieve unity of effort incremental steps were taken that gradually merged the command structures of ISAF and OEF (Kreps, 2011; Rynning, 2012).<sup>199</sup> In addition to the US assuming command

<sup>196</sup> This was a specially designated squad of 6-8 men which patrols the provinces and acts as ISAF interface with the local population.

<sup>197</sup> Part of the Swedish PRT are a Finnish contingent; they are not reported in the statistics in table 3. During this time period three Finnish soldiers have lost their lives (2008, 2011, 2011) and three suffered severe injuries (2009, 2009, 2010). Also, statistics for the Special Forces are not publicly available.

<sup>198</sup> Statistics do not include mental health disorders suffered from combat, for example post-traumatic stress disorder.

<sup>199</sup> The first step placed a US general in the chain of command within both operations. The US wanted an integrated command structure but was unable to receive political support for this in NATO. Supreme Allied Commander Europe, US General James Jones, worked out an arrangement in 2005 giving the ISAF Commander three deputies where one would be a double-hatted US general operating in both command structures (Rynning, 2012, p. 106). The second step was when the US also assumed the post of Commander ISAF with General Dan McNeil in February of 2007. Still general McNeil was only commander of ISAF and did not operate in the OEF chain of command. The third and final step came in October 2008 with the appointment of general McKiernan as the double-hatted Commander of both ISAF and OEF,

over ISAF they gradually decided to transfer troops from OEF to ISAF, as well as deploying additional troops to ISAF. In table 4 we can observe the increase of US troops in ISAF as well as an overall increase of US troops in Afghanistan.

Table 4. *US troop presence in Afghanistan compared with other ISAF contributors.*

	US OEF	US ISAF	OTHER ISAF*
2001	7.500	0	0
2002	8.500	0	5.000
2003	18.000	67	5.000
2004	18.000	67	6.000
2005	19.500	89	8.000
2006	11.300	12.000	10.000
2007	9.650	15.100	24.250
2008	11.100	20.600	29.350
2009	31.129	34.800	32.300
2010	7.000	90.000	41.100

Source: IISS. *The Military Balance*. 2002-2011. \*Agrell, 2013, p.214.

From being a completely non-US operation in 2002, the ratio between US and non-US troops in ISAF changed substantially from 2006 (55/45) to 2010 (69/31). So even if non-US contributions increased fourfold from 2006 to 2010, they still decreased in relative terms. This Americanization of ISAF cemented an understanding of Washington as the primary formulator of ISAF policy (cf. Agrell, 2013; Rynning, 2012; US\_EMB, 2009-10-06).<sup>200</sup> The relation to the US was politically sensitive but at the same time not controversial within the Armed Forces or Ministry of Defence. For example, in 2007 the Ministry of Defence decided to contribute with three officers to the Afghan Defense College in Kabul (GOV, 2007-02-22; SAFHQ, 2007-03-02). This was under the command of Operation Enduring Freedom and therefore considered a cooperation directly between Sweden and OEF (Holst, 2009, p. 10).<sup>201</sup> Conveniently, there is no explicit mentioning in the proposition of any cooperation and coordination on security sector reform with OEF.<sup>202</sup> This allows for this particular contribution to pass under the radar as association to OEF would have sparked political controversy.

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or from a US perspective the single-hatted commander of all US forces in Afghanistan (Rynning, 2012, p. 164).

<sup>200</sup> For example, the Swedish military turns to US CENTCOM for answers when ISAF can begin the transfer of PRT provinces to Afghan authorities (SAFHQ, 2008-08-08).

<sup>201</sup> The Swedish officers would be operationally led by Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, which in turn is led by US CENTCOM and part of Operation Enduring Freedom (SAFHQ, 2007-03-02, p. 2).

<sup>202</sup> In the proposition it is framed as a direct Swedish contribution to the Afghan Defence College and the organizational affiliation is omitted (Prop., 2006/07:83, p. 11). A couple of pages later, in the section describing the general ISAF operation, the relationship between ISAF and OEF is brought up. In the two paragraphs describing this relation there is no mention of the particular Swedish contribution to OEF.

These developments change the context for the Afghanistan mission. It transforms from a rather peaceful setting to a more combat related. The Americanization and militarization are both politically sensitive and challenges the newly declared solidarity doctrine, placing burden-sharing in multinational coalitions front and center in policy deliberations.

## The exit process 2009–2010

The period which preceded the settlement on an exit-strategy is different from the processes in the previous empirical chapters in three main aspects. First, a process dealing with an exit of a military contribution, if the Government still is in support, is more political and also more public. Second, while an exit decision could be the result of a particular event or outcome, this process appeared to be the result of a more gradually eroding support for the military contribution. Third, this particular process emanated during an election campaign. All these three aspects are especially interesting in a process in which consensus is highly desirable.

In the process preceding the Government's proposition to Parliament in 2009 the military suggests an increase for the year 2010 and later publicly criticizes the Government for not advancing this proposal in the proposition (SAFHQ, 2009-08-27, 2009-10-22). Sverker Göranson (Chief of Defence 2009-2015), recalls that after taking over as CHOD in March 2009 he visited Afghanistan and "noted in conversations with the commanders that the environment was harsher, a lot of incidents that were conventional firefights."<sup>203</sup> The CHOD recalls that he had a good working relationship with the Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt of the Moderate Party. They met on a regular basis and the CHOD could convey his expert military advice to the Foreign Minister, which the CHOD interpreted as taken into account and balanced with political considerations.<sup>204</sup>

The CHOD took an approach in which he predicted future casualties and did not shy away from addressing this in media relations, something media capitalized on building on the narrative on a deteriorating security situation. Exemplified here in an interview in *Svenska Dagbladet* in September 2009: "[Casualties] will happen, I am fairly convinced of that" (SvD, 2009-09-04). The CHOD was also critical to the public debate on Afghanistan which, according to him, did not separate the political dimension of the military engagement in Afghanistan and the support for the Swedish troops deployed there (see for example SvD, 2009-09-04). Part of the conscious strategy, to speak clearly to decision-makers and media, also took the form of extended

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<sup>203</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

<sup>204</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

invitations from the military to visit the force in Afghanistan.<sup>205</sup> In many of my interviews these trips are raised as a positive influence on the decision-making process, regardless of political affiliation. This removed any filters of the situation and brought them up close to the experiences of the soldiers. As the leader of the Left Party remarked: “It gives you a totally different understanding of what happens on the ground compared to sitting at home reading about it.”<sup>206</sup>

Several shootouts with opposing military forces during the spring and summer of 2009 intensified media reporting which started to question the idea of a traditional peacekeeping mission (Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015, p. 31; Roosberg & Weibull, 2014, p. 52; Sandman, 2019, p. 215). The media narrative portrayed a noteworthy change in Afghanistan, mostly with the Government unaware. This is considered by many working in the process as a major turning point in the Swedish political process on Afghanistan. An inconsistency concerning the perceived peaceful region in the north and increased number of combat situation challenged the interplay between media and decision-makers. As incidents on the battlefield come to light, the domestic political contestation was conditioned on the ability of decision-makers to interpret and explain these events to the public. War started to dominate media reports when describing the situation in Afghanistan (Sandman, 2019, p. 210), engendering a need to justify the presence of Swedish soldiers (Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015, p. 29). This increased need of explaining is perhaps best illustrated with the headline of the op-ed in *Dagens Nyheter* in July 2009 by Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors (2007-2012), of the Moderate Party: “That is why Swedish soldiers are in combat in Afghanistan” (DN, 2009-07-28).

However, a discrepancy between the official narrative and the situation on the ground in Afghanistan as being reported through media started to give the appearance of rather distanced and uncomprehending foreign policy elite (Agrell, 2013; Johnsson, 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Sandman, 2019). While the operation in Afghanistan had the support of a broad cross-party support, and the general perception of international peace support operations had the support of a consensus in the Parliament, there was a sense of failure of communicating why this was a good policy. This responsibility did not fall just on the Government but on all advocates in supporting parties, as one advocate within the Social Democrats explained:

We completely failed to explain that it strengthens our own security, it strengthens our Armed Forces, it serves the peace. It is better that we use the

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<sup>205</sup> Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016 and Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

<sup>206</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

Armed Forces than that it just sits there waiting to be used. We completely failed with that.<sup>207</sup>

The Social Democrats are, however, torn in satisfying a growing internal opposition and externally supporting the military contribution. The governing coalition pursues a policy more focused on creating “synergies”, mixing military and civilian means, in a so called comprehensive approach, which was met with skepticism in the ranks of Social Democrats (Dafinova, 2018, pp. 66, 77).

## The Social Democratic national congress 2009

Leading up to the Social Democratic Congress in late October, 2009, Afghanistan was already recognized beforehand as becoming an issue in which a heated debate was expected (AiP, 2009-10-19). Afghanistan emerged as a policy issue in which there was internal turmoil within the party and there was no apparent support for the central party board’s position to continue supporting the contribution. On the contrary, a growing opposition gained momentum and questioned Swedish military involvement in Afghanistan. The dividing line between the advocates and opponents of the ISAF contribution was in the interpretation of the US role in Afghanistan and how ISAF, and by extension Sweden, relates to this. The two positions can be summarized in two comments made in the Social Democratic Party’s own newspaper prior to the congress by the two most prominent opponent and advocate: Maj Britt Theorin and Urban Ahlin:

They bring us into a war on behalf of the United States (AiP, 2009-10-19).

It is not an American war. It is a UN mandated mission which the UN has asked NATO to take lead [...] It is natural that the US has large influence. They provide 80-85% if the soldiers (AiP, 2009-10-26).

Urban Ahlin, the leading advocate for the military contribution to Afghanistan within the Social Democratic Party, had started to notice a reduced support within his own party for the military contribution to ISAF.<sup>208</sup> The strug-

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<sup>207</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>208</sup> For example, in a report from the American Embassy in Stockholm in 2008 it states that Urban Ahlin signals to the Ambassador that it will be a “tough ride” to build support in the parliament extending the Swedish presence in ISAF and that he is “nervous about the passage” of the proposition (US\_EMB, 2008-10-28). Ahlin explains that support will depend on the position of former Minister for Foreign Affairs and a “senior leader on the left wing of the Social Democratic Party”, Lena Hjelm-Wallén. She sits currently as the chair of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan and according to Ahlin “she is the strongest friend and ally that we could have on the question of continuing our presence in Afghanistan” (US\_EMB, 2008-10-28). Ahlin had already emphasized in his contacts with the US embassy in Stockholm that there is a need for the Social Democrats to relate to “humanitarian stories” in Afghanistan in

gle within the Social Democrats did not go unnoticed by the Government as shown in a report from a meeting between the US ambassador and Swedish Minister for Defence, Sten Tolgfors:

Tolgfors said he was committed to be fully open with the SDP [Social Democratic Party] on the Afghanistan mission because he wanted to “keep them on board.” He noted that the SDP foreign policy spokesman Urban Ahlin had met with him for an extensive briefing the week before. Asked about reports that the Greens, coalition partners of the SDP, had recently begun to change their views on the continued military presence in Afghanistan, Tolgfors said that they were under pressure and were now talking only about the need for a withdrawal plan (US\_EMB, 2009-10-06).

Before the congress former Social Democratic State Secretary for Foreign Affairs (1982–1991), Minister for International Development Cooperation (1994–1999) and UN ambassador (2000–2004) Pierre Schori published a coauthored op-ed that reiterated his strong opposition to ISAF and how the operation is incompatible with a support for UN and central values cherished within the Social Democrats (SvD, 2009-10-10). The ideas that were given prominence in that op-ed are the same ideas that had spread within the Left wing of the party, which enters the congress with a momentum on their side. Maj Britt Theorin, who during the Congress in 2001 strongly advocated against the US bombings of Afghanistan, was a key figure in the movement to oppose the Swedish ISAF contribution during the 2009 congress. The core issue at the 2009 congress is a proposition (J42:4) filed by Theorin to push for withdrawal from Afghanistan:

The congress decides that Swedish troops are to be withdrawn from Afghanistan, since the command of ISAF and OEF has merged (Social\_Democrats, 2009, p. 220).

In 2001 the Social Democratic Congress set the stage for the deliberations for the coming military contribution with Special Forces in January 2002 (chapter 5). Opposition was voiced during that congress against the legitimate grounds for the US invasion of Afghanistan and the incompatibility between advocates and opponents was in the interpretation of international law and the UN mandate. Even if a UN mandate was still the ground for ISAF the perception of the UN linkage started to fade as the operation progressed.

There was not that much UN perspective, that disappeared quite early in Afghanistan, or more accurately it was NATO that entered and took command

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order to build support (US\_EMB, 2008-01-22). It is noticeable that in his relations with the US Ahlin still expresses an investment in the proposition even though the Social Democrats are no longer in government.

in Afghanistan. So the UN was not as weighty even though it out of a humanitarian perspective it always was sanctioned through the UN.<sup>209</sup>

The party's leadership, however, gained the trust of the party and the Prime Minister's position in support of the US operations was reinforced. In 2009 the Social Democrats were in opposition and the congress was now the stage for a significant internal opposition towards the Swedish military engagement. Afghanistan turned out to be "an issue that aroused emotions" at the congress mainly because the internal opposition "perceived the fundamental issue being if Sweden should be at war or not, and connects that to neutrality politics and Swedish tradition."<sup>210</sup>

The 2009 congress ended up being a vote of confidence for the spokesperson in Foreign Policy, Urban Ahlin, who was considered pursuing right-wing oriented foreign policy, something he was self-conscious of (US\_EMB, 2008-01-22). "Ahlin is best described as the Social Democratic right in foreign policy: a friend to the US, keen to preserve EU cooperation and cultivating relations to the east. He did not sound completely different from Carl Bildt [the Moderate Minister for Foreign Affairs]" (Fokus, 2015-03-13).<sup>211</sup> After first losing the vote on the recognition of the Armenian genocide during world war one and later also the recognition of Western Sahara, Urban Ahlin was benched by the party leadership in favor of former Minister on Foreign Affairs, Jan Eliasson, when the issue of Afghanistan was up for debate.<sup>212</sup> Eliasson is also a former UN ambassador, as well as former President of the UN General Assembly, and carries a lot of weight within the party on international issues. Eliasson managed to rally the congress behind the central party board's line and the proposition by Theorin was voted down. The party had the support of the congress but the internal opposition was noted and the room for maneuver for the party leadership on Afghanistan was constrained.

## After the congress 2009

After barely getting the approval from the congress it appears that the Social Democratic leadership acted on an increasingly questioned mandate. Ahlin himself recalls that he was "exposed to a great deal of internal criticism within the party".<sup>213</sup> As a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs noted about the reserved behavior from the Social Democrats in the treatment of the proposition in the committee.

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<sup>209</sup> Interview Desk Officer, Ministry of Defence, 2014.

<sup>210</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>211</sup> See also Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>212</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>213</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

I think that even if the Social Democrats have always been supportive, it is not my experience that they maintained a high profile in the committee discussions [...] they have maintained a slightly lower profile on, definitely, the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>214</sup>

After the congress it fell on Urban Ahlin to unify the opposition ahead of the upcoming election in 2010. The center-left opposition formed the red-green bloc and intended to run on a common platform which included foreign policy. During the era of Göran Persson (1996–2007) the Social Democrats excluded foreign policy from any cooperation with either the Left Party or the Green Party.<sup>215</sup> Under the leadership of Mona Sahlin (2007–2011) a working group was formed in order to come to terms with the different stands on foreign and security policy issues. The purpose was probably to show the electorate that the three parties could come together to form an alternative that could govern together as well as use foreign policy as an indicator for the ideological differences between what was depicted as two government alternatives. The center-right four party coalition now in power displayed a considerable unity and in order to pose a credible government alternative they needed to reconcile on foreign policy. This in fact divided all seven parliamentary parties into one of two opposing blocs: the governing center-right “Alliance” and the “red-green” association (Aylott & Bolin, 2019; Widfeldt, 2011).

The Left Party was still firm in their resistance to the military contribution. The Left Party was supportive of many contributions to peace support operations but “the decisions on Chad and Congo were much easier and that depends on the American warfare”, as the party leader Lars Ohly recalls.<sup>216</sup> The Green Party opposed the Government’s proposition in 2008 and announced during the fall of 2009 that they still opposed the operation in Afghanistan. This left the Social Democrats as the only party outside of government in favor of the contribution (SVT, 2009-09-29). With less than a year to the general election the Social Democrats reached out to the Greens to come together on this issue and display a capability of governing together.<sup>217</sup> As a political advisor in the Social Democratic Party explains that “it would have been painful for us if the Green Party were not involved.”<sup>218</sup> Politically this could also be a fruitful tactic to suppress vocal criticism from a party originating in the Swedish peace movement.

The Social Democrats, still supportive of the mission, found common ground with the Green Party on two main issues and thereby securing a prolongation of the contribution in 2009 and 2010. First, a budget increase for

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<sup>214</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

<sup>215</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>216</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>217</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>218</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

civilian efforts. The uneven ratio between military contributions and development aid was high on the agenda within the Social Democratic Party as individuals within the party were suspicious of the military's "mission creep."<sup>219</sup> Increased development aid would counter this imbalance and suppress the most intense opposition. Second, the launch of a strategic review that would be completed in 2011. A potential prolongation of the Swedish ISAF contribution in the fall of 2010 would be one of the first policy issues that a newly elected red-green government would need to settle. A review finished in time for the 2011 decision would postpone any uncomfortable discussion on Afghanistan a year into their new term in office and could curb the harshest critique from the left fraction of the Social Democratic Party (AiP, 2009-11-16; SVT, 2009-09-29).

Therefore, when the proposition was treated in the Parliament in December 2009 both the Social Democrats and the Green Party voted in favor of the Government. The two parties entered a joint reservation during the committee treatment, calling for a review of the military contribution to Afghanistan (Rep., 2009/10:UFöU1, p. 22). Together with the Left Party they filed a joint reservation to increase the civilian elements of the overall engagement in Afghanistan. It was especially development aid that was proposed to correspond to the costs for the military contribution.<sup>220</sup>

## The US surge and a definite change to counterinsurgency

During 2009 the newly elected Obama administration conducted a strategic review of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan (McChrystal, 2009; Riedel, 2013; Woodward, 2011). According to Rynning "the NATO allies and the [North Atlantic Council] knew of the process and had insights into it but they essentially took a wait-and-see approach" (Rynning, 2012, p. 182). The newly elected commander of ISAF (and OEF) General McChrystal conducted an initial assessment which resulted in a recommendation for a new strategy in Afghanistan. On December 1st 2009 President Obama announced that he would follow the advice of General McChrystal and change operational tactics to counterinsurgency, deploy a reinforcement with about 30,000 troops (plus an additional 10,000 from allies and partners), and shift

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<sup>219</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015.

<sup>220</sup> It is important to note that with increased political opposition the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence struggled to formulate so called decision points to uphold the consensus for the military contribution. In the parliamentary report 2009/10:UFöU1 they include three decision points. This allows for a broad support for the military contribution on points 1-2. On the third point dealing with development aid, however, the entire three party opposition votes together, which leaves the Government with only a five vote margin (Prot., 2009/10:33). This was a solution that benefited the Social Democrats and Green Party as well as the Government. The Government could claim consensus for the military contribution and the oppositional parties have not abandoned it and could not be attacked with dissolving national unity.

the operation to focus extensively on mentoring Afghan security forces (Obama, 2009; Woodward, 2011). This is what has been labeled as “the Afghan surge”. This was done with an explicit intention to escalate the conflict in order to push back the Taliban enough for the Afghan governmental forces to build up and take over. Already in his speech in December 2009 President Obama addressed an 18-month limit for the troop increase (Obama, 2009).<sup>221</sup> The change that occurred during the fall of 2009 with a US surge of forces to Afghanistan and a shift in operational conduct to a counterinsurgency approach for ISAF meant more exposure to opposing military forces as well as escalatory behavior going into areas previously avoided.

Counterinsurgency was met with skepticism within development circles in Sweden since it emphasized a merging of civilian and military means.<sup>222</sup> Forecasting the change in Afghanistan the Government had presented a strategy for development cooperation with Afghanistan in which 25% of all development aid was earmarked to the provinces of the Swedish PRT (MFA, 2009-07-09, p. 3). This number was a settlement between different positions amongst the divisions in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.<sup>223</sup> This follows the increased ambition from the Government to combine civilian and military means in order to create “synergies” in peace support operations (GOV, 2008-03-13). It also echoes the core idea of counterinsurgency operations in which development projects are used to win the hearts-and-minds of the population.<sup>224</sup> The military, led by the CHOD, was an “enthusiastic supporter” of a more comprehensive approach and pushing for a civilian leadership of PRT MeS, but this was, according to Dafinova, never fully embraced by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Dafinova, 2018, p. 300; DN, 2009-10-05b). The ministry supported the idea but faced considerable challenges when it came to implementing it in Afghanistan.<sup>225</sup>

When the focus of the Swedish contribution turned more to mentoring of Afghan army units, setting up so called OMLTs (Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams), it was necessary that they could follow the Afghan security forces wherever they would be deployed. While there was no actual geographical caveat placed on these units, as they were not part of the PRT forc-

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<sup>221</sup> This is further reinforced in a conference in London in January 2010 (and again later in Kabul in July) which marked the beginning of this new transition phase. Participants mapped out a process in which the Afghan government in Kabul would gradually, province by province, take over all security, governance, and development responsibilities, starting already in the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011 (MFA, 2010-02-01). NATO also declared its intention to withdraw all its forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 (Larsen, 2013, p. 3).

<sup>222</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

<sup>223</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018.

<sup>224</sup> The Swedish military addressed the operation in terms of counterinsurgency, using expressions such as “winning the hearts and minds” of the local population, which is a characteristic counterinsurgency term (see for example SvD, 2009-09-04).

<sup>225</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018.

es, it was a wide perception that the caveat applied.<sup>226</sup> According to the Alliance government was this potential caveat on the OMLTs conclusively lifted with the formulations in the 2009/10 proposition text. In the proposition it states:

One of the preconditions for OMLT personnel to fulfill their tasks is that they can follow the units they train. This is expected to be mainly in the northern area of operations, but they can also operate in other regions if necessary (Prop., 2009/10:38, p. 21).

The US was the main actor driving the development to counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and they put the Government under enormous diplomatic pressure to increase the deployment to do more in Afghanistan (see for example US\_EMB, 2009-07-24, p. 3).<sup>227</sup>

In February 2010 two Swedish officers were killed in a firefight under what was depicted in media as very unclear circumstances (Aftonbladet, 2010-03-12, 2010-03-13, 2010-03-14; Agrell, 2013, pp. 233-248; DN, 2010-03-17; Expressen, 2010-03-13). Perhaps best illustrated in this symptomatic headline in *Aftonbladet*: “Once again an epidemic idiocy erupts” (Aftonbladet, 2010-03-16). This incident further sparked a debate concerning the legitimate ground for the military contribution in Afghanistan and especially the rules of engagement for the Swedish force (DN, 2010-03-10; Expressen, 2010-03-04). There was a discussion within the Committee on Foreign Affairs whether it fell under the obligation of the Parliament to interpret the legal status of the situation and in extension the rules of engagement. According to the CHOD however a shift to more proactive rules of engagement was initiated and driven by the Armed Forces and already ongoing at the time of the casualties.<sup>228</sup> It was related in part to the deteriorating security situation but primarily to the new expectation of embedding and partnering with Afghan security forces in the mentoring and training programs. When the CHOD later during the spring decided to lift all restrictions on the rules of engagements it enabled the Swedish military contingent in

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<sup>226</sup> In an instruction to the Mission of Sweden to NATO in late 2006 the Ministry of Defence conveyed the Swedish view on national limitations, or caveats: “[Sweden] has pointed out a geographical limitation in relation to the PRT. This limitation is a consequence of the fact that the forces making up the PRT are specifically set up to operate in the northern area of Afghanistan – training and equipment are adapted to the threat level existing in northern Afghanistan... this restriction only applies to the PRT. There are no restrictions for other Swedish personnel in ISAF” (MOD, 2006-11-22, emphasis in original removed). This geographical caveat was only for the PRT forces but up until 2009 it was regarded from US and the NATO headquarters that it concerned the all personnel including OMLT (US\_EMB, 2008-04-11).

<sup>227</sup> The deployment of OMLT originates from a direct request from the Americans followed by a continued pressure to increase the OMLT contribution (US\_EMB, 2008-01-11, 2008-04-11, 2008-09-15, 2008-10-23, 2009-03-19).

<sup>228</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

Afghanistan to proactively engage with opposing military forces (Agrell, 2013; Bring, 2016; Carlson & Marklund, 2015, p. 51; SAFHQ, 2010-12-01; Tingsgård, 2017, p. 86).<sup>229</sup>

## Opposition unites on foreign policy but not on Afghanistan

The military contribution was quickly recognized as one of the key issues for the opposition's working group on foreign policy.<sup>230</sup> In February a joint platform for the upcoming election was presented, but the military contribution to Afghanistan is excluded from this settlement (Red-Green, 2010-02-17). The Left Party had demanded a withdrawal from Afghanistan which was not negotiable from their point of view. While this idea resonated with the Green Party (even if they held a low profile on this issue in the negotiations), the Social Democratic leadership was very reluctant about any inclusion of a date for withdrawal.<sup>231</sup> Urban Ahlin, the central actor for the Social Democratic Party, remained committed to exclude an end date in any settlement on Afghanistan. "We do not agree to set an end date", he stated in a media interview and continues that "Sweden has entered Afghanistan with other countries and then we shall leave together with them" (DN, 2010-06-27).

For the Left Party it was not necessary to reach an agreement before the election while the Green Party and the Social Democrats faced an increasingly harder internal critique and feared the potential of losing credibility in relation to the united center-right Alliance on this issue. A Social democratic member of the working group, Lena Hjelm-Wallén, acknowledged that "from a tactical perspective it would be good if we could come to terms" on Afghanistan because "the other side will use this against us if we are not in agreement" (Aftonbladet, 2010-02-17). The Green Party delegate agreed with her: "We must solve this issue before the election and preferably during

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<sup>229</sup> After Sweden had assumed command over PRT MeS and ISAFs mandate expanded to cover whole of Afghanistan, new rules of engagements (ROE) had been introduced for ISAF. These new ROE authorized the initiation of combat and were regarded more offensive and opening up for a proactive conduct. Under the mandate of ROE 421-424 force was authorized against an enemy force conducting a hostile act or displaying hostile intent. In ROE 429 on the other hand a hostile intent, hostile act or imminent attack is not required. Hostility is then presumed due to enemy affiliation. Swedish governments (both Social Democratic and center-right) considered that these ROEs, in the 420 series, could only be applicable in an armed conflict. The Government advocated, by virtue of the information in the propositions, that there was not an armed conflict in the area of operations for the Swedish contribution (Bring, 2016; Tingsgård, 2017, pp. 85-86). The Legal Advisor to the Swedish ISAF contingent present in Afghanistan at the time of the change writes in her final report that "the change of SWECON rules of engagement has resulted in a more offensive conduct by the force against armed opponents. With the support of ROE 421-424 the force have been able to act against an opponent who has shown hostile intent or committed a hostile act against the unit or ANSF" (SAFHQ, 2010-12-01).

<sup>230</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

<sup>231</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

the spring. The credibility would increase if we reached an agreement” (Aftonbladet, 2010-02-17).

During the spring the negotiations failed to reach any agreement on Afghanistan and the issue moves from the working group to the parties’ leadership (DN, 2010-06-27). But the leadership continue to display disagreement on this issue. “My position is that we should stay as long as we do something good,” says the Social Democratic Party’s leader. “The troops should be withdrawn within the coming four years,” says the spokesperson for the Green Party. The Left Party on the other hand withholds the “immediate withdrawal of the troops” (SVT, 2010-05-20). The opposition were struggling to unite behind a policy on Afghanistan but they were pushing for a fast withdrawal from Kosovo and to forsake the lead nation responsibility for the Nordic Battlegroup 2011 for the EU. In an op-ed in *Svenska Dagbladet* Defence Minister, Sten Tolgfors of the Moderate Party, criticize the center-left opposition.

The Social Democrats has through the cooperation with the Left abandoned the traditional Swedish line of international solidarity. Operations for peace have become a budget regulator for the Social Democrats, to harm for Swedish reputation and EU’s crisis management capability (SvD, 2010-06-13).

The Social Democrats’ reliance on the Left Party is one main aspect of the Government’s critique toward the opposition’s foreign policy in general. Urban Ahlin pointed out that “there will be a foreign policy line to the Left of Carl Bildt” (DN, 2010-06-27). The question that seems to arise is how far to the left the Social Democrats are comfortable leaning.

On the issue of Afghanistan, however, the general election approaches and they are still unable to find common ground. In an op-ed in *Dagens Nyheter* in the beginning of August, under the provocative headline: “we are open to sending more Swedes to the war”, representatives from each party of the ruling coalition write:

One of the first propositions the Government needs to put forward after the elections concerns the continued participation of Sweden in the ISAF operation. Barely two months before the elections, the red and green parties still lack a common approach with regard to the operation in Afghanistan (DN, 2010-08-02).

A decision on Afghanistan lurked on the other side of the September elections and the inability to come together challenged perception of the opposition’s ability to govern together.

## The opposition comes together on Afghanistan

The opposition's inability to reach a compromise on Afghanistan came however to an end on August 27, 2010, as the three opposition parties presented an agreement on ISAF policy acceding to the Left Party's demand on withdrawal:

We, the red and green parties, today make the assessment that one or more of the provinces currently under Swedish responsibility may be handed over already at an early stage of the next term. A red-green government will thus start withdrawing at the beginning of 2011 [...] A red-green government will, at the latest, have completed the troop withdrawal in the first half of 2013 (Red-Green, 2010-08-27).

While the Social Democratic leadership was still, in principle, against withdrawal the party leader, Mona Sahlin, succumbed to the Left Party's demand.<sup>232</sup> The Social Democrats anchor their position in the outcome of the Kabul conference in July 2010 and the US strategy to begin a transition to Afghan ownership and a focus on training Afghan security forces (SvD, 2010-09-04). Ahlin recalls that during his visit to Afghanistan in the summer of 2010 he realized that "this will go a lot faster than what everyone thinks, because everyone is eager to leave."<sup>233</sup> This opened a way for the Social Democrats to either reevaluate their position or shape the agreement within the bloc in accordance. The Left Party's representative from the working group recalls that the agreement was a compromise that could include the interests from both opponents and advocates:

I believe that the solution was that we also set a start date. [...] When we have won the elections we could say, we will initiate a phasing out. And the Social Democrats could say: when we have won the elections, we will still maintain the operation for quite a few years. It was like a classic, pretty clever compromise enabling you to maintain your honor.<sup>234</sup>

The red-green settlement was immediately attacked by the Government on the merits that the Left Party held a substantial influence on foreign policy, now on the policy issue on Afghanistan. The Foreign Minister proclaims:

I do not know whether I should laugh or cry when one read [the Social Democrats'] attempt to defend their abandonment of the broad political settlement on Afghanistan politics. [...] But the Social Democrats' deal with [the Left] destroys the broad national support (SvD, 2010-09-09).

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<sup>232</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>233</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>234</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

The consensus crumbled as the election campaign drove the two political blocs to form oppositional positions on Afghanistan. To an extent it was an interesting time in Swedish foreign policy and election politics. This was not only the first time that the Social Democrats, Greens and Left Party united behind a party platform and a common foreign policy (Bjereld, 2010). Furthermore they signaled an “offensive” foreign policy which went strictly at odds with the notion of seeking consensus, even in opposition.

## The aftermath of the 2010 election

The incumbent center-right government won the election on the 19th of September.<sup>235</sup> There are two important implications from this election that had an impact on the coming deliberations on Afghanistan. First, a new party entered the Parliament. The Sweden Democrats<sup>236</sup> ran on an anti-immigration platform and in defense and foreign policy they strongly opposed military involvement in other countries. Second, despite gaining over one percent of the electorate the number of seats in the Parliament was reduced to 178 for the center-right government. The red-green bloc received 172. This gave the Sweden Democrats the power to obstruct governmental propositions if they sided with the center-left opposition as it placed them in a position to tip the scale with their 20 mandates. After the new Parliament assembled, the Chief of Defence felt it necessary to invite all party leaders to a discussion Afghanistan (SAFHQ, 2010-10-14). The military perceived the process that followed as “smooth” with parties rallying behind the charted course “setting party politics aside” in support of the minority government.<sup>237</sup>

The Government, who had monitored the international development closely, started to realize that there was an opening for a settlement, and investigated their room for maneuver for the upcoming negotiations with the opposition. In a request directly after the elections in September 2010 the Ministry of Defence directed the Armed Forces to assess the consequences of maintaining the military contribution to 500 soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan. The request also echoed an outlook considering the possibilities to handover responsibility to Afghan authorities during 2011 and 2012 (MOD, 2010-09-23). The military estimated that NATO would decide at the summit in Lisbon in November to begin transitioning provinces to Afghan authorities during 2011. The four provinces in the Swedish PRT were part of the discussion to transfer at an early stage (SAFHQ, 2010-09-29, pp. 2-3).

The Government, sensing pressure to form broad support for the military deployment, opened for renewed negotiations with the Social Democrats and Green Party, effectively leaving out the Left Party (DN, 2010-10-12). All

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<sup>235</sup> For a short review of the general election 2010 see Widfeldt (2011).

<sup>236</sup> Not to be confused with the *Social Democrats*.

<sup>237</sup> Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

four parties of the Alliance government were keen on finding an agreement with the Social Democrats.<sup>238</sup> Given the Swedish Democrat's entrance into parliamentary politics the Alliance government could not proceed with a proposition on Afghanistan without the support from the Social Democrats, regardless of the norm of consensus. The task fell on the Foreign Minister's deputy, the State Secretary Frank Belfrage, to lead the negotiations with the opposition. The red-green opposition first signaled that they would take a stand on Afghanistan but they entered into negotiations with the Government who wanted to reach a compromise before the drafting of the proposition (DN, 2010-10-20, 2010-10-23; Expressen, 2010-10-19). The Left Party walked out of negotiations early for they saw no common ground between the settlement the center-left opposition have reached on Afghanistan and the concessions that the Government were willing to make.<sup>239</sup> As a Left Party MP recalls, "it was only one meeting because we realized quickly that the Social Democrats and Green Party were willing to leave our previous agreement and settle with the Government."<sup>240</sup> The Left Party's leader Lars Ohly recalled that he had no support whatsoever in the parliamentary group for a settlement that included anything less than what the red-green settlement had consisted of.<sup>241</sup> Mona Sahlin, Social Democrats, and Peter Eriksson, the Green Party, negotiated with the Government, and continuously informed the Left Party leader and tried to bring them back into the negotiations. While the Social Democrats and Greens intended to preserve the unity of the red-green bloc they also sensed that the Left Party was making domestic politics of foreign policy, a cardinal sin (Bjereld & Demker, 1995). According to an MP for the Greens, at a certain point in the negotiations, "the Moderates and the Left are really now completely in agreement that we should leave [Afghanistan]."<sup>242</sup>

The Government needed to reach a settlement with at least the Social Democrats in order to maintain the broad political support for international military contribution. The decisive issue before the election had been the issue of timetable for a withdrawal with the Swedish contribution. Even if the Government showed resistance towards a time table or set date for withdrawal in the election campaign, it appears that the Government was conforming to the international process. The coalition government had started to show a will to accommodate the opposition and set an end-date in 2013 under the conditions that that it is adapted to the Kabul conference and to the security situation in the area (DN, 2010-10-12; Expressen, 2010-10-21). The Moderates, their coalition partners in government and the Social Democrats

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<sup>238</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018.

<sup>239</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>240</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

<sup>241</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

<sup>242</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

were all reasoning along the lines that the Americans were leaving Afghanistan and nobody wanted to be the last man standing.<sup>243</sup>

The most pressing point was a renewed emphasis on the transfer of security responsibility to Afghan security forces by the end of 2014 (UN, 2010-07-20). A memo from the Swedish ambassador in Afghanistan to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs clearly stated that “no observer in place – Afghan or international – believes anything other than that the transition process is politically driven by the international community, with the purpose of withdrawing” (MFA, 2010-10-22). Both government and opposition now publicly supported the communiqué from the Kabul conference in July (DN, 2010-10-19).

A defining moment for the process came on the 16th of October when a roadside bomb killed a Swedish soldier in Afghanistan. The previous weeks the Swedish force had been in several firefights and suffered several severe injuries. According to media reports this changed the tone of the political debate which turned towards reconciliation and finding a settlement that both government and opposition can support (see for example Fokus, 2010-10-22). The incident raised the requisite to set domestic disputes aside and assume responsibility for the men and women on peace support operations. One issue that surfaced in this heightened media attention was the freedom of movement for the OMLT. The prospect of these units being deployed to more hostile regions in Afghanistan was met with disapproval from both oppositional as well as parties in the coalition government (Expressen, 2010-10-18).

## An exit settlement

The Government conceded to some of the demands from the opposition and opened up to the possibility to reduce the number of troops during the transition process and offered the Left Party to rejoin the negotiations. The Left Party however rejected that offer. The Green Party’s representative recalls:

So, my perception is that [the Left Party] wanted [withdrawal] quicker, but the main thing was that they made this into a political thing. I remember that I thought, what the hell, a few months [...] there were no major differences and then they turn this into a political thing [...] so I found this very odd. Our view didn’t really differ from the Left Party. For all intents and purposes, now even the Moderates and the Left Party agreed.<sup>244</sup>

Eventually the Social Democrats and the Green Party reached a settlement with the four-party coalition government which was presented on the first of November. Both sides were eager to find common ground and the nine point

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<sup>243</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2020.

<sup>244</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

settlement included increased civilian resources and a transition to a civilian leadership of the PRT.<sup>245</sup> The UN was placed in the center of attention together with the Kabul Conference. But it was point five and six of the settlement that were the paragraphs on which dispute would ensue and the consensus depended on.

5. During 2011, the planned Swedish military operation on the ground in Afghanistan is to consist of about 500 individuals. An addition aimed at improving security by means of two rescue helicopters is also made. We attach great importance to the security of all Swedish personnel (GOV, 2010-11-01).

The previous year the Parliament had approved an armed force estimated to approximately 500 soldiers (Prop., 2009/10:38; Rep., 2009/10:UFöU1). Now the settlement included the wording “on the ground in Afghanistan”. This way of calculating troop presence would allow for a de facto increase, as advocated by the Government.<sup>246</sup> In a media report a government official is on record claiming that the opposition was fully aware of the meaning of the formulation and that the purpose was to increase soldiers in Afghanistan (SvD, 2010-11-05). But the critical formulation to the settlement came with the introduction of the term “combat troops”. Point six of the ISAF settlement reads:

6. It is our assessment that the gradual handover of responsibility for security also in the part of Afghanistan covered by Sweden and Finland’s PRT could begin in 2011. This thereby creates a better basis for making a decision concerning the extent of the continuation of Swedish operations with *combat troops* in 2012 and thereafter. It is our aim that we in 2012 will be able to see the results of the process of transferring responsibility for security and that this may allow for a reduction in the amount of *combat troops*. Our strategy is a gradual change from *combat troops* to security support operations. Our ambition is that this process should be completed by the end of 2014 (GOV, 2010-11-01, my emphasis).

This paragraph allowed for both the Government as well as the two opposition parties to walk away from the negotiating table as winners. The removal of combat troops would not include soldiers needed for mentoring and training of Afghan forces, the new direction which the military contribution is heading. The Government and advocates could therefore continue with the charted plan for operational transition and the two oppositional parties could appease internal critics, by withdrawing “combat troops” from Afghanistan,

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<sup>245</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018.

<sup>246</sup> See figure 4 in the beginning of this chapter. This differentiation concerned the separation of the size of the force (including personnel on leave) and the actual boots on the ground. There was also a maximum cap which included military personnel on standby in Sweden for reinforcements due to security situations.

and still support a military presence in Afghanistan. In addition to “combat troops” the settlement also underscored the “actual development” in the provinces as conditional for any transfer of security responsibility to Afghan forces, and by extension and reduction in Swedish troop numbers. Linking withdrawal to the situation on the ground in Afghanistan was a way for advocates to maintain military presence in effect reducing the *de facto* impact of the six-party settlement.

The parliamentary debate that followed the Government’s proposition after the settlement was an indication of the ambiguity inherent in the settlement as most of the time at the podium was spent addressing what the settlement actually entailed (Prot., 2010/11:35, pp. 2-53). The following parliamentary decision was reached in the parliamentary chamber with acclamation securing a cross-bloc consensus for the Swedish military contribution (Prot., 2010/11:35, p. 112).<sup>247</sup>

## Framing the exit

There was a general election in September 2010 and while polarization on foreign policy issues is no new phenomenon the two opposing positions on Afghanistan was still considered an unusual circumstance (Bjereld, 2010, p. 99; Bjereld & Demker, 2000). Despite advocating two different developments for the military contribution a six-party settlement could be reached after the elections. The process that led to the “exit settlement” was characterized by a substantial amount of political positioning and bargaining. However, this can only provide us with a partial answer to why the consensus disintegrated in the election campaign and how it was reconstructed after the elections. Given the purpose of this dissertation, to explore consensus construction, these two phases are particularly interesting to explore.

The lead nation responsibility for PRT MeS and deteriorating security situation consequently led to an expansive period in which the military contribution underwent substantial changes both in numbers as in composition and a substantial mission creep regarding military objectives. The broad cross-party support, or cross-bloc consensus, rested on a foundation of controversy more and more exposed to the development on the ground in Afghanistan and international politics. The military’s dominating role together with the Americanization of ISAF contributed to more opposing voices to be heard in the debate on Afghanistan and Swedish rapprochement to NATO. It chal-

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<sup>247</sup> A report from the committee on a governmental proposition can include a number of formal decision points, each dealing with a defined portion of the issue at hand. The vote on the first decision point (continued presence in Afghanistan) passed with acclamation. The second decision point, based on reservation from the Swedish Democrats and Left Party, concerned a withdrawal of the deployment in 2013 and came to a vote. It passed with 290 yes, 20 no and 19 abstain.

lenged the idea of Sweden not being involved in “a war” in Afghanistan and by extension the conception of Sweden being a peaceful country. All these changes fundamentally challenged “the foreign policy line” forcing actors to navigate a new landscape in which traditional policies were weighted against new features. Both advocates and opponents of the Afghanistan policy worked meticulously to frame the different aspects and developments to their advantage.

In this part of the chapter I will explore what aspects of the policy on military contributions to Afghanistan are highlighted and downplayed and by whom? Which framing strategies are employed by advocates and opponents in order to frame policy to fit a “foreign policy line” in change? Building on the results in chapter five and six I continue to analyze central framing features and how they are expressed in the exit phase.

### The war dominates the context

With the deteriorating security situation and the increased number of combat incidents came an increasing need to justify the military presence (Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015). The Swedish Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors’ effort with the op-ed entitled “That is why Swedish soldiers are in combat in Afghanistan” is perhaps the most illustrative example of this (DN, 2009-07-28). But the efforts in justifying and explaining the effort to the public fall short and resulted in an increased discrepancy between the military practice and the political discourse (Agrell, 2013; Johnsson, 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Sandman, 2019). Advocates for ISAF policy, and supporters of the Armed Forces in general, attempted to incorporate combat into the ISAF frame by extending it and making it a “normal” part of international peace support operations, and ISAF in particular. They were successful in many aspects. One area in particular is veteran affairs, where many symbolic, organizational and policy changes are made (Robertsson, 2020; Roosberg & Weibull, 2014; Sundberg, 2016).<sup>248</sup> However, the increased attention given to veteran affairs is accompanied by a recognition of the dangers soldiers deployed to conflict zones are exposed to, most evident in the situation in Afghanistan. It also entailed acknowledging the physical and psychological consequences of combat. Successful incorporation of combat in the general perception of the ISAF policy frame inherently implied that the Swedish force was in fact involved in a war.

The framing strategy that advocates used to contrast the Swedish ISAF contribution from the US war in Afghanistan lost a substantial amount of traction in the context as a result of the framing of war gaining ground. Isolating the Swedish force from the war, by constructing an organizational

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<sup>248</sup> See also an op-ed by the Minister for Defence Tolgfors in March 2009: “Let’s strengthen the support for Swedish veterans” (DN, 2010-03-19).

separation as well as a geographical division between northern and southern Afghanistan, was challenged by the perception of a deteriorating security situation and an increased American influence and participation in ISAF. A distinction between Swedish activities in Afghanistan and US is important for political stability. Increasingly the US was perceived as a part of ISAF to the point, after President Obama assuming office, when the US totally dominated it. Advocates found themselves in a position where they could no longer isolate from the negative aspects of the US and Operation Enduring Freedom. Instead they must extend the Swedish policy frame to encompass cooperation and collaboration with the US. As a result the organizational division became less pertinent to uphold the distinction to the war, and the geographical became more appropriate, for the purposes of the advocates.

Opponents' strategy instead relied on extending the ISAF policy frame to include these elements of war and stands in stark conflict with the contrasting strategy. The deteriorating security situation and dominance of the US, especially with the Obama administration renewed strategic interest in Afghanistan, favored the arguments of the opponents and the advocates were increasingly struggling to frame a cohesive and credible ISAF policy. Sweden participated to a far greater extent in combat situations which reinforced the framing of Sweden being at war. No longer could the argument be made credible that Sweden, and ISAF, were to be regarded as exceptional to the war in Afghanistan (see, for example, Sandman, 2019, p. 217ff).

### **Difficult contrasting two merging organizations**

The confusion between the two military operations, ISAF and OEF, has in the two previous chapters been at the forefront of the political conflict. Contrasting the two has therefore been the chosen strategy of the advocates. The Social Democratic leadership, led by Urban Ahlin, supported the military contribution to Afghanistan but felt restrained by the coinciding American operation. Mr. Ahlin stressed that “even if we thought that they were two separate operations, it was still difficult. So obviously that sets the limits for what we can do.”<sup>249</sup> A political advisor shares Ahlin's concern. He argued that the double-hatted commander<sup>250</sup> led to an “unfortunate confusion that weakened our arguments.”<sup>251</sup>

The Social Democrats balanced a critique toward the Government on the risk of confusion of ISAF and OEF with a public defense of the division in order to legitimize their position to a broader public. This was a way for the leadership to appease critics and keep internal opposition suppressed while at the same time support a military contribution to Afghanistan. Exemplified here by Urban Ahlin in the 2009 parliamentary debate on ISAF:

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<sup>249</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>250</sup> An American general serving in both ISAF and OEF chains of command.

<sup>251</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

[MP Ahlin, Social Democrats] One thing is that the military operation Sweden is engaged in should focus on protecting Afghan civilians, not like the American-led operation in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom, has done and what has also been the case in other areas of Afghanistan where Taliban forces are hunted down (Prot., 2009/10:32, p. 158).

In this statement it is worth noting a small, but significant, confusion of the US warfare and ISAF. Ahlin addresses the American warfare in “other areas of Afghanistan” essentially meaning forces under ISAF command in southern Afghanistan. I will shortly return to the geographical contrasting of Swedish ISAF policy and the war but the organizational and geographical divisions were becoming interdependent. Later in the parliamentary debate, in an exchange with Hans Linde over the use of the term war, Ahlin returned to this geographical division and tried to conceptually merge it with an organizational division:

[MP Ahlin, Social Democrats] I share the view that something we could describe as a war is taking place in many parts of Afghanistan, especially the American combat mission Operation Enduring Freedom, which we have criticized (Prot., 2009/10:32).

While framing the “American combat mission” as a separate enclave in Afghanistan there was also a simultaneous necessity for advocates to extend the policy frame to incorporate the Americanization of the ISAF organizational structure and maintaining cooperation with OEF. The framing of the American war in Afghanistan conducted through Operation Enduring Freedom still resonated and had an interpretative advantage in the debate over Afghanistan. When the US increased its involvement in ISAF it was framed by opponents as the transfer of “the war” from OEF into ISAF. In *Dagens Nyheter* in March 2009 former Minister for Defence and Social Democrat, Thage G Peterson, wrote an op-ed together with Maj Britt Theorin where they argued:

Parliament has made it clear that there should be a definite distinction between ISAF and the American force OEF. As has been noted by the CHOD, ISAF and OEF are getting increasingly closer and without a decision in Parliament, *Sweden is dragged into a true war* (DN, 2009-03-06, my emphasis).

The opponents to the military contribution kept pushing three elements of the blurring of the organizational distinction between ISAF and OEF: the double-hatted US commander of both ISAF and OEF,<sup>252</sup> the transfer of operational objectives from OEF to ISAF, and the transfer of US troops from OEF to ISAF (see for example Prot., 2009/10:32, p. 165). Advocates could

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<sup>252</sup> Legal scholar Ove Bring concludes that after the American commander of OEF also became the commander of ISAF “the clear distinction between the two operations is lost under international law” (Bring, 2016, p. 16).

not disregard these organizational changes and as a consequence transitioned to a strategy of extending the policy frame to accommodate these changes as uncontroversial. Part of this strategy was the amplification of the UN mandate and a downgrading of the significance of US involvement in ISAF. This can be exemplified in a statement by the Social Democrat Ahlin in October 2009, right before the Social Democratic congress:

This is not an American war. It is a UN mandate involving 42 countries. That the Americans have a great deal of influence it not surprising considering the large amount of troops they participate with (TT, 2009-10-22).

Even critics of the military contribution sensed that there was a rationale to the US calling the shots and not the UN.<sup>253</sup> In order to suppress opposition the Government downplayed these organizational changes which brought ISAF and OEF closer. The final proposition from the Social Democratic government in 2005 (chapter 5) contrasted the distinction between the two operations in this way:

The Government concludes that it is crucial that ISAF continues to operate under a mandate from the UN Security Council and believes that ISAF and OEF should continue to be distinct operations with different missions and chains of command (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 17).

The propositions that the center-right government hand over to Parliament 2007–2009 address the organizational evolution but downplayed the element of change.

Collaboration occurs by retaining the mandate of each respective operation and is facilitated by someone in the top command of ISAF also being included in the top command of the coalition forces (Prop., 2006/07:83, p. 13).

Collaboration occurs by retaining the mandate of each respective operation and is facilitated by the commander of ISAF in his national capacity also having command responsibility for the coalition (Prop., 2008/09:69, p. 15).

The commander of ISAF in his national capacity also has command responsibility for the coalition. A basic principle for collaboration is that it is carried out in full agreement with the mandate and distinct nature of each respective operation (Prop., 2009/10:38, p. 13).

The opponents to the military contribution frame the division between ISAF and OEF as only theoretical and effective in minds of decision-makers in Sweden and not on the ground in Afghanistan. The representative from the Left Party made this case during the debate (Prot., 2009/10:32, p. 161). This

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<sup>253</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2018.

framing was strengthened by the Green Party in the chamber, which in practice implied that Sweden were part of the US warfare.

[MP Rådberg, Greens] It is unfortunate that the Swedish troops should act together with the American OEF – even if they are today more or less one single organization, this perspective nevertheless exists (Prot., 2009/10:32, p. 166).

Despite this criticism the Green Party still supported a prolongation after the settlement with the Social Democrats to jointly call for a review of the contribution and postpone the issue until after the elections.

### **The difficulties containing the war to the south**

As previously discussed, the organizational division of ISAF and OEF were increasingly questioned by opponents to the military deployment. As a result of the surge some of the American troops (about 3500) were to be deployed in the Swedish area of operations. After this became public in the spring of 2010 Peter Rådberg, from the Green Party, expressed a concern that the renewed involvement by the US in the north would change the conditions for the Swedish contribution who “will be dragged further into the war” (DN, 2010-03-03). The increased Americanization of ISAF weakened the argument of two separate organizations and consequently led to advocates shifting strategy to instead isolate the appearance of a war to the southern regions. This had the advantage of incorporating the general perception of a deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan while framing the Swedish PRT in MeS as exceptional. Minister for Defence Tolgfors suggested that the Swedish area of operations was indeed different and exceptional:

They were very large differences in the security situation within Afghanistan as a country and even if this changed it was still better in our PRT than in many other places so the challenge was different.<sup>254</sup>

This differentiation of areas in Afghanistan was also something that Tolgfors highlighted in official remarks, for example in a speech at the Society and Defence [*Folk och Försvar*] annual conference in January 2010 where he asserted “that the security situation in our part of Afghanistan has deteriorated, not the least in connection with the elections, but is completely different than in the south or east” (Tolgfors, 2010). In the Government’s Afghan strategy different regions in Afghanistan are distinguished, where the south and eastern parts are home to “anti-government groups” (GOV, 2010-07-08, p. 4). This differentiation of regions in Afghanistan was a widespread understanding in the Government Offices. A civil servant expresses similar thoughts as the Minister: “So it gets a lot better, not least in the area where

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<sup>254</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2017.

we are, in Mazar in the north, in the southern part you can be damn pessimistic.”<sup>255</sup> However, there is also an element of politics to this understanding.

For the Government their political strategy depended on the prospect of upholding the distinction between a calmer north and a more warlike south in Afghanistan. Maintaining a geographical division to the war was considered important for the Government to keep the consensus together. When in May 2010, at the height of the political controversy, the Ministry of Defence requested information from the Armed Forces for the outlook of the operation in the years 2011-2012 they specifically demanded the Armed Forces to be explicit in their reports and highlight the differences between the southern/eastern parts and the northern/western (MOD, 2010-05-24).<sup>256</sup>

Contrasting geographical regions in Afghanistan also had legal implications. When the Alliance government presented their first proposition on Afghanistan the term “internal armed conflict”<sup>257</sup> was for the first time present in the text. It also stated that ISAF was a warring party in this conflict. However, while the legal term implies that it would apply to the whole territory the internal armed conflict was framed as a conflict confined to the southern regions:

In the southern part of the country there is an internal armed conflict. The eastern and western parts of the country, as well as Kabul, are subject to extensive terrorism and disturbances, while in the central and northern parts of the country there is an unstable post-conflicts situation (prop. 2006/07: 83 p.9).

In the southern parts of Afghanistan regular warfare is fought and there is an internal armed conflict between on the one hand the Afghan government supported by ISAF under the current United Nations mandate, and on the other hand various armed resistance groups (prop. 2006/07: 83 p.13).

These paragraphs framed the internal armed conflict as something geographically bound to southern Afghanistan while the other regions displayed a different conflict dynamic. In addition to successfully framing the Swedish contribution as separate from the war in the south, this points to a government fully aware of the implications of the framing. They carefully worded the description of the situation in Afghanistan in order to undermine oppositional critique of the Swedish contribution.

In January 2007 the Department for International Law, Human Rights and Treaty Law in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs prepared a memo responding to a question from the Swedish International Prosecution Authority on

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<sup>255</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>256</sup> This was not in the request the previous year 2009 (MOD, 2009-06-05).

<sup>257</sup> The correct legal terminology is “non-international armed conflict” (Engdahl, 2009) but in this discussion I will follow the language of the proposition and refer to the internal armed conflict.

whether there was an armed conflict in Afghanistan in the fall of 2005.<sup>258</sup> Citing a ruling from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia they conclude that there was an armed conflict in Afghanistan at that time and that humanitarian law should be applied to the entire territory even if the actual fighting had not reached the Northern provinces (MFA, 2007-01-23).<sup>259</sup>

In the proposition in October 2009 the Government wrote that any use of force “must be in accordance with human rights and, *in applicable cases*, international humanitarian law” (Prop., 2009/10:38, my emphasis). According to a leading scholar on international law the wording “in applicable cases” should be interpreted as an indication that the occurrence of warlike situations was considered an exception and not the rule (Bring, 2016, p. 4). Further, he argues, the wording indicates reluctance from the Government’s behalf to draw attention to the risk of engaging in warlike situations. Consistent with the official legal term is “international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflict” but the proposition remarkably avoids “applicable in armed conflict” (Bring, 2016, p. 6). Minister Tolgfors further displayed frustration in meetings when discussing with the military the extent of the “internal armed conflict” and the application of law of war (*jus in bello*) in Afghanistan. “He didn’t want to speak of the matter”, as one respondent made clear,” then it would be a lot harder to form an alliance in Sweden.”<sup>260</sup> The military wanted to fully transition and remove the restrictions on rules of engagement, which was enacted by the CHOD on May 1, 2010.

The formulations in the governmental propositions on the geographical division of Afghanistan therefore hold a specific political purpose framing the Swedish military contribution as separated from “the war” and not a legal one. The Government, writes Österdahl, “wanted to avoid the impression that Sweden was ‘at war’, almost at any price” (Österdahl, 2016, p. 65). Bring reached a similar conclusion that there was an obvious need for the

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<sup>258</sup> This memo is noteworthy of two reasons. First, it is jointly prepared with relevant departments in both the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, as well as Ministry of Justice. This understanding of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan and legal interpretation of the status of humanitarian law was therefore widespread in the Government Offices. Secondly, this stands in contrast to the official position by the Government presented in the propositions to the Parliament. The very existence of an armed conflict in southern Afghanistan presumed an application of the laws of war in all of Afghanistan but the Government maintained the position that this did not apply in the Swedish area of operation.

<sup>259</sup> The 2007 memo from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs clearly defines the situation in Afghanistan as an internal armed conflict, all in accordance with the proposition texts. However, it reaches a conclusion that it is not possible to make a distinction of specific regions of Afghanistan: “The internal armed conflict had not reached the northern parts of Afghanistan and thus neither the four provinces where most of the Swedish troops were. In accordance with the Court’s [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia] reasoning above, this does not affect the applicability of humanitarian law in the whole of Afghanistan’s territory” (MFA, 2007-01-23).

<sup>260</sup> Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2018.

Government “to avoid references to ‘war’ and ‘warfare’ not to jeopardize popular support for ISAF” (Bring, 2016, p. 17). The Government wanted to avoid the perception of Sweden being “at war” and therefore let political considerations take precedence over legal (see also Engdahl, 2012).

When it was discovered that the Swedish-manned OMLTs<sup>261</sup> could be sent to southern Afghanistan it was challenged by both the Left and Green parties but also by coalition members of the center-right Alliance in government (Expressen, 2010-10-18). This indicates that support for Sweden to get involved in the more troublesome areas of Afghanistan might not be unconditional in the Parliament, even amongst the governing coalition, let alone the center-left opposition.

### A war for peace?

With combat situations and war dominating the context advocates turned to a strategy of extending “the foreign policy line” to include these elements in what would be considered “normal” peace support operations, so called peace-enforcement. For example, advocates attempted to downplay the change to counterinsurgency by framing it as a showpiece Swedish event, something that Sweden was already doing in Afghanistan. In this way they extended Swedish ISAF policy to include counterinsurgency. There were also minor attempts by advocates aimed at downgrading the significance, or deviation, of Afghanistan compared to other peace support operations. For example when Foreign Minister Bildt compared the situation in Afghanistan with Bosnia in the 1990’s: “It was all out war there, it was far worse than it is in Afghanistan now, far worse” (Expressen, 2010-10-22).

Opponents on the other hand aimed at contrasting a NATO mission in Afghanistan with UN missions in other regions. Opponents also framed counterinsurgency as a surrender to the American warfare. An area of conflict between advocates and opponents centered therefore on the military’s role in the PRT and the increased use of force as a sign of failure in Afghanistan. Restating that the mission, whatever it was, had a clear UN-mandate was a way for advocates to legitimize deployment and the use of force. Still, a strong opposition existed which conveyed a view of the UN and a combat mission as incompatible.

### **The legitimizing factor of United Nations**

Although NATO’s leadership of the operation had never been an issue within the Moderate Party and the governing coalition government, the UN functioned as an acknowledgement that the operation was conducted in accord-

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<sup>261</sup> Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams

ance with international law.<sup>262</sup> The UN primacy was a recurrent theme in official statements on Afghanistan, especially reiterating the call from UN to participate in Afghanistan. In October 2009 Foreign Minister Bildt asserted that “we also want to heed the UN Security Council’s call to continue to participate in ISAF” (DN, 2009-10-22). In May 2010 he proclaimed that “we shall remain [in Afghanistan] as long as necessary and as long as the UN wants us to be there (SVT, 2010-05-20). On the 17th of October 2010, the day after the incident in Afghanistan killing a Swedish soldier, the Foreign Minister wrote on his blog: “We are not there to win a war – but to build a peace. On the behalf of the UN” (Bildt, 2010a). All these statements signal that the ISAF operation was conducted in accordance with international law, a well anchored principle in the “foreign policy line.” Amplifying the UN mandate and the legitimizing ground for the military contribution also served an additional purpose for the Government. It was helpful for the Social Democrats in their struggle to manage internal opposition. As the Green Party and parts of the Social Democrats started to display opposition on Afghanistan the Moderates were keen on keeping them “on board” on Afghanistan (US\_EMB, 2009-10-06).

The United Nations occupy a special position as a “linchpin for Social Democratic security policy” and the Social Democrats “pushed the UN mandate clearer and harder as the engagement expanded.”<sup>263</sup> As the Social Democratic Party gathered for their National Party Congress in October 2009 the left wing opposing the military contribution entered into the congress with a momentum of a turning tide on the Afghan issue. A participant remembers that the Party’s most prominent advocate for the military contribution, Urban Ahlin, was struggling in gaining the confidence of the congress:

As I recall, Urban Ahlin was the one responsible for these issues and he did not manage to get the congress on board in relation to this. He first managed to lose two issues [the Armenian genocide and Western Sahara]. And it was not that great when he lost this, so when Afghanistan came up, we realized that this could end really badly, so they sent up Jan Eliasson, who takes up the UN Charter from which he reads out loud in front of the congress, which he then wins over.<sup>264</sup>

What is central in this recollection of the congress is how the UN was amplified at a moment of crisis in order to rally the congress to support the leadership’s position on ISAF. This further underlines the empirical manifestation

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<sup>262</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

<sup>263</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015 and Interview Senior Civil Servant, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2014.

<sup>264</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015. See also Interview Desk Officer, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2017 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

of the UN as a central pivot point that was used in the Social Democratic Party to rally internal support for a military contribution. By sidelining Urban Ahlin, the leadership could shift the focus to the heart and soul of the Social Democratic foreign policy: the linkage to the UN. Presenting Jan Eliasson to the congress to argue for the ISAF contribution sends a signal to the congress of the centrality of the UN and the values at stake. Jan Eliasson is not only a former Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs (2006) but also a former Ambassador to the UN as well as a former President of the United Nations General Assembly. Eliasson is often referred to as “Mr. UN” and his voice weighed heavily in favor of a contribution. He leads off his statement on Afghanistan by placing the UN front and center:

I would like to state that we have an absolute clear UN mandate for the Swedish presence there. Our Swedish soldiers are there on a clear UN mandate (Social\_Democrats, 2009, p. 229).

This amplification of the UN serves the purpose to retain the policy aligned with “the foreign policy line” by reminding the congress about the tradition to unite in support behind the UN. For the Social Democratic Party, the UN remains a box that always needs to be ticked.<sup>265</sup> A leading Social Democrat pointed out that the challenge in upholding support for the operation in Afghanistan lies with the UN primacy. In his words:

To be involved in the prevention of a genocide in Europe on behalf of the UN and the wonderful Kofi Annan, that's okay. But the same thing in faraway Afghanistan, if you sense that Bush has decided it, then it's not okay.<sup>266</sup>

In many aspects the congress was once again an area in which conflicting views on the role of the UN in Afghanistan were front and center (see chapter 5). The two sides are united in their interpretation of the UN as a central factor in Swedish foreign policy but not of the link between ISAF and the UN and whether the engagement in Afghanistan was consistent with the values of the UN. According to opponents this extended to the credibility of a nonalignment position and the relationship to NATO. Former Minister for International Development Cooperation and UN ambassador Pierre Schori was one of the more active and influential opponents to the military contribution to Afghanistan in the Social Democrats. In August 2010 he wrote an extensive op-ed in *Dagens Nyheter* in which he criticized the Social Democratic leadership for abandoning Social Democratic values. In this piece he clearly builds a separation between UN operations on the one hand and NATO led on the other:

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<sup>265</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>266</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

The war in Afghanistan is a crime against Olof Palme's solid commitment to the UN and Sweden's nonaligned position [...] Nor is there a single UN symbol, the operation is not on the list over UN operations and it is entirely controlled by NATO and the Pentagon. Such outsourcing to a Western defense alliance in the Islamic world ought to be anathema for those claiming to be friends of the UN [...] Sweden has made a political choice and opted out of participating in the 18 real, UN-led peace operations – like in the Congo of mass rapes or the Darfur of mass murder. Not a single Swedish armed soldier participates in UN-led operations, they are instead found in NATO in Afghanistan (DN, 2010-08-21).

As the excerpt conveys, the op-ed is structured around amplifying the UN as a central part of the “foreign policy line” and downgrading the weight of the UN in Afghanistan. This internal conflict within the Social Democrats was present already in the entry and expansion of the military contribution to Afghanistan but as the Social Democrats lost power and moved into opposition this conflict was consequently more difficult to suppress for the leadership. Placing the UN against NATO in this way was a framing that resonated within the parts of the Social Democratic Party that recognizes neutrality and nonalignment as fundamental pillars of Swedish foreign policy. It is a perception of Afghanistan as a deviation from the peacekeeping tradition through the UN that advocates attempt to forestall. Schori recurrently pushed his argument that a contribution to Afghanistan was not consistent with support for UN (see, for example, GP, 2010-05-30).

Advocates within the Social Democratic Party were not the only ones amplifying the UN in the ISAF policy frame. The media, probably unintentionally, served the purpose of the advocates by continuing to refer to the military contribution to Afghanistan in UN peacekeeping terms: UN peacekeeping force, peacekeeping mission, Swedish peacekeeping force, the UN mission, UN-based peacekeeping operations etc. (Sandman, 2019, p. 213). The media therefore contributed to reinforcing the advocates' intention to align the Swedish military contribution to the “foreign policy line” by amplifying the United Nations' role in Afghanistan.

### **The incompatibility of UN and a combat mission**

It was not anything new that Swedish troops were acting on a UN Chapter VII mandate which included “all necessary measures” authorizing military force to fulfil that mandate. For example, the peace support operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Congo, Liberia, Lebanon and Chad were all conducted under a UN Chapter VII mandate. There was however a clear watershed after the end of the Cold War where the classical UN model of peacekeeping (impartial, consent and non-violence) was replaced with a more coercive use of force (Jakobsen, 2006; Ångström, 2010). As Österdahl asserts:

The peace operation in Afghanistan obviously does not belong to the classical kind of peace-keeping operations where there was a peace to passively keep and where force could only be used in self-defence by the participating troops (Österdahl, 2011, p. 30).

Already the first entry deployment with Special Forces in 2002 was backed by a chapter VII mandate. Similarly, the geographical expansion to northern Afghanistan and the takeover of Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Mazar-e-Sharif (MeS) were authorized by a UN Security Council Resolution sanctioning lethal force. However, Sweden issued so-called caveats, i.e. self-inflicted restrictions, on the Swedish use of force removing the more offensive rules of engagement (MOD, 2006-11-22). As the Swedish force encountered more combat situations and the military lifted the restrictions on using force in “offensive situations” the understanding of the mission in Afghanistan in peace-keeping terms was challenged and a clash between conducting peace-keeping and peace-enforcement becomes more evident. In the discussion on rules of engagement this becomes evident, exemplified here by the leader of the Social Democratic Party Mona Sahlin: “Sweden is not at war. We are there on a UN mission. But we can never accept that one shoots first and ask questions later” (SvD, 2010-07-08). A senior staff officer in the Armed Forces clarified that there is a negative bias against using force, even for good:

Peacekeeper, that is you guard something, a peace, an agreement, a lot of people believe that that is really something good, but to use force to create this agreement [...] it is a lot of difference between peace-keeping and peace-enforcement.<sup>267</sup>

While the UN is a central aspect of the Social Democratic identity, the notion of using force for good and the idea of peace-enforcement is controversial. Former Defence Minister Thage G Peterson was one of the primary critics, together with Pierre Schori and former political advisor to Prime Minister Olof Palme and UN ambassador (1983–1988) Anders Ferm. Peterson framed, for example, the Swedish presence in Afghanistan as “peace-enforcing, combat-equipped, Swedish soldiers trained for combat, prepared to kill” (Peterson, 2009). Just days before the congress in 2009 Peterson together with Ferm writes under the headline “the biggest foreign policy mistake of the post-war period” (*Arbetet*, 2009-10-23).<sup>268</sup> In this article they framed ISAF as a US mission requested by and in solidarity to George Bush and not the UN, and further questioned the peacekeeping nature of the ISAF contribution.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016.

<sup>268</sup> *Arbetet* is a magazine for the Swedish Trade Union Confederation.

<sup>269</sup> There is no mentioning of the newly inaugurated President Obama, as of January 2009.

Schori also alluded to this theme when he argued that “there is no peace to keep in Afghanistan” and that the fundamental problem with ISAF is that it departs from UN’s basic principles (SvD, 2009-10-10). The essence of the problem being, as framed by opponents to the military contribution after the settlement with the Government in November 2010, “the presence of combat troops, in contrary to peace-keeping, produce much more violence” (SvD, 2010-11-03). The internal opposition in the Social Democratic Party was perceived by the leadership to propose a more traditional position with a view of peace support operations more akin to UN peacekeeping operations during the Cold War and “the mental picture that the Armed Forces should only be used here [in Sweden].”<sup>270</sup>

So far in Sweden a division between the national and international has premised the use of force to be a national affair, while internationally peaceful conflict resolution has been conveyed (Ångström & Honig, 2012; Ångström, 2010). As Ångström and Honig explicate: “It is only for national defence that the use of force is legitimate and unproblematic” (Ångström & Honig, 2012). This coincides with the notion of conducting peace support operations driven by humanitarian values and not by national interests. The political left therefore responded more vigorously when the Government, and advocates of the internalization of the armed forces increasingly drew upon peace support operations as an objective of national security and not international solidarity. For example, in the op-ed in *Dagens Nyheter* in July of 2009 Defence Minister Tolgfors defended the deployment to Afghanistan and explained that “Sweden is in Afghanistan because it affects Swedish security” (DN, 2009-07-28). He draws upon traditional humanitarian elements and human rights but in this article he also references the acts of terror on 9/11 and the consequences Sweden suffers being part of an independent world.

After coming to power in 2006 the center-right Alliance government continued in the same direction as the previous Social Democratic government and emphasized the humanitarian aspect and the overall responsibility of the UN. In the summer of 2010, the Government presented a strategy for the comprehensive support to Afghanistan in which several reasons and arguments were compiled.

The basis for this ambition lies in a number of universal norms and values such as democracy, respect for the rule of law and human rights, equality and dignity, and the conviction that these are best secured by a world order that through international cooperation based on international law actively contributes to peace, freedom and reconciliation (GOV, 2010-07-08, p. 14).

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<sup>270</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

In this strategy they amplified humanitarian values such as compassion and solidarity as well as a support for the global security regime through the UN charter:

Sweden has a *responsibility through compassion and solidarity* to help stabilize and democratize Afghanistan, enforce a respect for human rights and human dignity, as well as help to rebuild the country [...] As part of a *global responsibility*, Sweden supports a security regime based on the UN Charter, which also paves the way for the most challenging tasks in terms of peace and security support and reconstruction (GOV, 2010-07-08, p. 15, emphasis in original).

In these two paragraphs we can identify the amplification of humanitarian values and how the Government links these values to the changed situation for the Swedish force in Afghanistan. The support for an international security regime based in the UN charter implied that Sweden should take responsibility for more challenging tasks, i.e. peace enforcement situations. What was remarkable in this strategy was that, in addition to humanitarian and international security reasons, they presented the ISAF operation as “a traditional security interest” for Sweden (GOV, 2010-07-08, p. 16).

### **An imbalance between civil and military means**

While counterinsurgency places a substantial emphasis on civilian efforts, the change in military strategy was regarded by opponents as surrender to the American warfare. Counterinsurgency was, according to them, what previously Operation Enduring Freedom had implemented. If we recall the wording from the proposition in 2005, the division between ISAF and OEF was presented as the “protection of an area and its population” versus a focus “on known militant groupings“ (Prop., 2005/06:34, p. 11). Now with the change to counterinsurgency there was a risk that these two not only merged, but constrained the prospect of disassociating ISAF and OEF further. For counterinsurgency also implied that the military actively took the fight to the insurgents, seeking combat, in an attempt to ‘clear and hold’ an area in order to ‘build’ governmental institutions and achieve economic and social development (Larsen, 2013, p. 10).

Advocates attempted to bridge with counterinsurgency and framed it as a change toward a comprehensive approach and a Swedish showpiece event. As argued by Jan Eliasson, shortly after two Swedish soldiers were killed in February 2010:

In the hunt for extremist Taliban, mainly in southern Afghanistan, the American forces under the Bush-administration used methods that turned the population against the foreign presence [...] President Obama has now chosen a strategy better suited to protecting the civilian population (Aftonbladet, 2010-02-10).

Eliasson also linked the negative aspects of the US warfare to the Bush administration trying to catch the momentum that President Obama injected with the 2009 surge. At the same time advocates framed counterinsurgency and the population centric approach as something already implemented in the Swedish area and not something new (Agrell, 2013, p. 280ff). In the proposition in 2009 it stated that the proposed changes by McChrystal “also coincide with how the Swedish force operates” (Prop., 2009/10:38, p. 14). This is reinforced by the Minister for Defence himself who claims that the new strategy of “anti-guerilla warfare” correspond with how the Swedish military already acts in northern Afghanistan (SvD, 2009-10-23, 2010-06-24).

Considerable obstacles emerged with counterinsurgency, however, since the strategy postulated the merging of military and civilian means. This raised doubts amongst development actors over the association with the military and the rationality in allocating development funds to the Swedish PRT. Advocates and opponents clashed in their view of the military’s dominant role in the Swedish PRT and in Afghanistan in general. The ambitious objectives in Afghanistan set a high bar and invited the opposition to criticize the lack of progress while the advocates continued to push for the importance of military presence in order to continue to build the Afghan society and improve humanitarian conditions. In the parliamentary debate 2009, as an example, Urban Ahlin of the Social Democrats argued for the necessity of a military presence in order for development work to be effective and for girl’s schools and women’s centers to remain open (Prot., 2009/10:32, p. 164).

The advocates lost the initiative to the opponents on this issue of progress however. The optimism that permeated the ISAF operation during the entry of the Swedish military contribution, which continued during the expansion, is now questioned by the opponents, drawing on an increasingly negative international conception of the outlook of Afghanistan (see for example Prot., 2009/10:32, p. 160). With the success of the operation being questioned, the opposition managed to link this to a general lack of the values that the Swedish Government and the international community were claiming being fronted in Afghanistan. This was indirectly supported by a general disappointment in the international community with the outcomes of the Afghan elections which were permeated by election fraud and a government apparatus in Afghanistan that continues to be based on corruption.

Development actors frame this lack of progress in Afghanistan as a result of the Swedish effort being “exclusively militarily” and the imbalance in funds between military and development efforts (DN, 2009-10-05a). This was a fraught issue within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and between the Government and development actors. The Social Democrats and the Greens sided with the development actors and pushed in their agreement in 2009 for a new “civilian” approach to Afghanistan with increased development aid. The Government realized the controversy on this issue. The Minister for

Defence downgraded the imbalance since it posed domestic problems for the Government. This emerges in a meeting with the US ambassador.

Tolgfors noted that he was not speaking too much publicly about the need for more civilian aid himself because he did not want to highlight the imbalance between military and civilian commitments (US\_EMB, 2009-10-06).

The Social Democrats tried to counter this imbalance by amplifying the humanitarian elements in the Afghanistan policy.<sup>271</sup> When the Social Democrats needed to suppress opposition within the party to unite the party in support of the military contribution, they not only amplified the centrality of the UN but also returned to the humanitarian situation. Advocates within the party reconciled the military contribution with “the foreign policy line” by amplifying the international humanitarian solidarity to a nation in need. At the congress, Eliasson argued:

We now see how a movement seeks to blow up women and children, cut the fingers of those wanting to participate in democratic elections [...] It is also a question of solidarity – solidarity with the UN, solidarity with the Afghan people [...] If we leave - what effect does it have on this operation, what price will be paid and what will we say in a year or two? (Social\_Democrats, 2009, pp. 216, 230).

Taliban atrocities and violations toward women’s rights had been a returning justification since the initial deployment in 2001/02.<sup>272</sup> The increased political awareness of UN resolution 1325 concerning women and security most likely contributed to this heightened concern. The humanitarian concerns united both opponents and advocates whose inherent difference lay in the means to counter these sufferings. During the Social Democratic congress, the polarization between advocates and opponents on the issue of the military contribution to Afghanistan continued. Opponents questioned the need for military presence, the deprioritization of humanitarian aid, the lack of progress and the rapprochement to NATO. In the development strategy for Afghanistan in 2009 the Government attempted to balance an ambition for civil-military synergies with a respect for the principle to keep security-

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<sup>271</sup> In January of 2008 in a meeting at the US embassy, Ahlin had requested US support to “getting a senior Afghanistan government official to come to Sweden to relate humanitarian stories such as how the Swedish and NATO efforts are allowing girls to go to school” (US\_EMB, 2008-01-22). Similar requests were also brought forward by other higher-ranking officials working with Afghanistan. The US embassy reached the conclusion that these visits from US officials were “especially important given Sweden’s growing awareness of the deteriorating security situation in the North and the public’s concerns over civilian casualties” (US\_EMB, 2009-07-24).

<sup>272</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015, Interview Member of Parliament, 2014, Interview Civil Servant, Parliament, 2014, Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015, Interview Member of Parliament, 2018 and Interview Chief of Defence, 2014.

building measures separate from development cooperation (MFA, 2009-07-09, p. 14). The problem was the comprehensive nature of counterinsurgency and the predominance on security and military solutions. In the Strategy for Afghanistan, published by the Swedish Government in the summer 2010, the overall objective of the Swedish effort was formulated as:

Sweden's engagement is to strengthen Afghanistan's capacity to maintain stability and security, democracy and human rights, and to offer its inhabitants opportunities to improve their lives, as well as equitable and sustainable development (GOV, 2010-07-08, p. 14).

In the strategy, the wording of a united civilian-military action is tuned down, instead pursuing civilian development efforts "in parallel to" military operations and not "in tandem with" (Dafinova, 2018, p. 87; GOV, 2010-07-08). The previous echo of the international slogan "no security without development – no development without security", that was used to justify the expansion of the contribution (chapter 5), receded and in this strategy the Government declares that "the internal armed conflict in Afghanistan is presently the single most important obstacle for a positive development in the country (GOV, 2010-07-08, p. 2).

### Framing their way back together

The consensus broke down during the election campaign as the two blocs positioned themselves against each other, exaggerating the differences in policy. The weeks before the elections there were two clear alternatives on the future of the military contribution to Afghanistan. The center-right Alliance continued to support the present course and even pushed for a slightly increased military contribution despite waning support in the opposition (DN, 2010-08-02). Behind the electoral rhetoric the Government closely monitored the international process leading toward a transition of the Afghanistan mission to training and mentoring and a reduction of troops during the following years. The Social Democrats joined forces with the Greens and the Left Party and backed a policy of withdrawal which inevitable polarized the two political blocs on Afghanistan (Red-Green, 2010-08-27).

After the election the political rhetoric was turned down and the parties could gradually return to "business as usual." Reinforced by the killing of an additional Swedish soldier in October, the national interest of unity on foreign policy and military contributions took precedence. The Social Democrats, whose leadership was supportive of Afghanistan, entered the negotiations with an increased room for maneuver because they lost the elections. It was no longer necessary for the Left Party to be included in any settlement

and the internal opposition could be rallied behind the national interest to reach consensus on these issues.<sup>273</sup>

The Moderates lost the majority in Parliament and needed to reel the Social Democrats back in both to practically get the proposition through Parliament but more importantly to have consensus on this policy issue. The opportunities to find common ground on Afghanistan were thus favorable. The most pressing concern was to frame a settlement where both sides could walk away as winners.

### **Amplifying the inherent value of consensus**

Consensus on military deployment is a significant part of the “foreign policy line” as it is considered a national interest in itself to display unity on these issues. The Alliance government was therefore to an extent dependent on the support of the opposition, at least the Social Democrats, and being in an election campaign had complicated the matter. For at the same time as they wanted to distance themselves to the opposition and point out the weaknesses in their politics, they also needed to keep the Social Democrats in and not let the oppositional forces gain control of the party’s agenda. This was a tricky situation considering the growing opposition against the ISAF contribution.

This balancing act was solved by first attacking the red-green opposition for not having a collective policy on Afghanistan and therefore not being a credible alternative to govern Sweden. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Carl Bildt, called out, for example, the Left and Green parties for their opposition to the military contribution as putting domestic politics ahead of international obligations (SVT, 2010-05-20), the cardinal sin in Swedish foreign policy (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, p. 17). The second part of this strategy was to shield the Left Party from any influence on foreign policy. Despite being directed at the Left Party, this second strategy was indirectly aimed at the Social Democrats, not so much on merits of policy ideas, but their association to the Left Party and the Left’s influence on their common foreign policy. Four members of the center-right coalition’s working group on foreign and security politics write:

Foreign policy must be characterized by greater precision and reflection than any other policy area [...] However, the Social Democrats are now forced to devote considerable power in retrospect to reinterpret the red-green settlement on foreign and security policy (DN, 2010-08-02).

As the Social Democrats decided to unite with the Left and Green Party the Government framed this as a departure from national unity and placed the burden of proof on the Social Democrats for this departure from consensus.

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<sup>273</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

On his blog the Minister for Foreign Affairs alludes to historical settlements between the Social Democrats and the center-right bloc and frames the Social Democrats' "dependence" on the Left Party as troublesome for Swedish foreign policy credibility (Bildt, 2010b). The unity, important for foreign policy, that the Moderate Foreign Minister refers to does not include the Left Party. He writes in an op-ed in *Svenska Dagbladet* in the days following the red-green settlement that foreign policy cannot be "dictated by parties on the outer edge whose cloudy motives are unfortunately too obvious" (SvD, 2010-09-01). In this op-ed the Foreign Minister frames a continued participation to peace support missions from the Congo in the 60's through Bosnia in the 90's to Afghanistan. In this way he frames a national unity behind "the foreign policy line" in which "the Left Party have held a fundamentally deviating line" (SvD, 2010-09-01).

The center-right Alliance government won the election in 2010 but lost their majority in Parliament. Even if the media portrayed it as a potential conflict, building on the narrative from an election year, ISAF policy was never going to be settled by a narrow vote in the chamber, given the underlying consensus between government and opposition.<sup>274</sup> Initially the center-left opposition signaled that they would take a stand on Afghanistan but it quickly appeared as important to be perceived as willing to negotiate; something both blocs emphasized in the weeks following the elections. These negotiations were given an extra push with the tragic death of a Swedish soldier in Afghanistan in mid-October. Most likely this incident accentuated the severity of military deployments abroad and returned the discussions to the importance of displaying unity. The center-left oppositional parties made clear that they were ready to abandon parts of their previous agreement (DN, 2010-10-23). The leader of the Social Democrats, Mona Sahlin, assessed that there are good prospects for a settlement: "We have all expressed a great desire and need for the future of Swedish troops in Afghanistan to be solved broadly across bloc lines" (Expressen, 2010-10-22). Publicly amplifying consensus in this way should be interpreted as a call to the Government that they should be ready to deliberate on this issue, thereby ensuring influence through a seat at the negotiating table. It is also internally directed toward their own base in order for them to have leeway in the upcoming negotiations. The same argument can be made for the Government. For example, when Prime Minister Reinfeldt stated that "there is an expectation from the Swedish people that we display the broadest national unity possible" (Expressen, 2010-10-21) it is a call equally made to their own base in order for them to approach the Social Democrats on this issue and find a common ground. The Moderate Party had in this aspect a responsibility to the Swe-

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<sup>274</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015 and Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2020.

dish people to bring the Social Democrats back into the fold, even if this would entail certain concessions.

The process of forging consensus would force the two sides, the Social Democrats and the Moderates, toward each other once again. But what is interesting is that the election settled on whose terms the consensus would be forged. As representatives from both the Greens and Social Democrats openly acknowledged in the parliamentary debate, they were not in a bargaining position after losing the election (Prot., 2010/11:35, p. 13). Since the Social Democratic leadership had been reluctant to give in to the demands from the Left Party this was an easy way of framing their constrained room for maneuver in returning to support the military deployment. During the parliamentary debate the Social Democrats, Green Party, and Left Party spent a substantial amount of speaking time to sort out the different interpretations of the settlement and compromise that was made between the Government and the Social Democrats and the Greens. The governing parties on the other hand were reserved in their engagement (see for example Prot., 2010/11:35, p. 21).

There is one additional important aspect to highlight from the statements coming from the governmental parties. They give the Greens and Social Democrats a lot of credit for coming together and forming a broad support for the contribution. A driving force for the Greens throughout the negotiations on Afghanistan could have been to gain recognition as a party capable of settlement in foreign policy, by primarily the Social Democrats and Moderate Party.<sup>275</sup> For example the Minister for Foreign Affairs:

[Foreign Minister Bildt, Moderates] There is also a trace of Peter Eriksson [Green Party leader] in the wordings now endorsed by Parliament. I want to express some acknowledgment in relation to this. We want an open debate where we can go in different directions, be divided and adopt different perspectives. Hopefully, to some extent we enrich each other in this discussion. But when we send combat troops, as it is called abroad, it has been the goal of this government, as well as the goals of previous governments, that this needs to be based on broad agreements in Parliament. In this regard, I want to express my appreciation to both the Social Democrats and the Green Party (Prot., 2010/11:35, p. 45).

Even if he does not avoid an opportunity to point out the squabbling amongst the opposition parties on foreign policy this statement is an example of how Foreign Minister Bildt amplifies the value of coming together and forming unity on this issue. This inherent value of consensus is further amplified in this process by placing the men and women in uniform in the center of the policy framing. The military had been a leading actor in trying to separate

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<sup>275</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

the political discussion from the support for the troops.<sup>276</sup> However, the support for the troops had a substantial political capital in domestic politics in reinforcing the need to come together in support of ongoing peace support operations. Consensus is framed as an imperative for troops to feel supported by the Parliament. The Minister for Defence, Sten Tolgfors, reasoned:

It is really important to have broad political support both for the long-term mission but also for the serving soldiers to feel that they have Sweden behind them. It is not an acceptable situation to send soldiers in the direction of danger and then at the same time have a domestic discussion that is undermining [their work].<sup>277</sup>

Similar views, expressing the principal character of consensus in the deployment of soldiers, were conveyed by many actors. For example, Foreign Minister Bildt, the newly elected Chair of the Defence Committee, Social Democrat Håkan Juholt, and Prime Minister Reinfeldt (Bildt, 2010c; DN, 2010-10-20). This is a way to signal that it is Sweden, as a nation, that deploys troops and does not squabble domestically. “The frontline needs to feel support from home” as the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs expressed it.<sup>278</sup> The time of political conflict, that polarized the debate during the election campaign, was in effect over and it was quickly, and without controversy, replaced with a period of consensus seeking. So far the decisive issue had been that of a time-table for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. With the dust settled after the election both sides realized that they saw eye-to-eye on the implications from the Kabul conference and the international process. In reality the Social Democrats and governing coalition had never deviated on Afghanistan. The possibility to find common ground on Afghanistan was thus favorable.

### **The exit of “combat troops”**

The sixth paragraph of the settlement after the election introduced the term “combat troops”, and it is included in the following proposition (Prop., 2010/11:35, p. 26).<sup>279</sup> The application of “combat troops” in the settlement extends the policy frame to incorporate elements of war and combat situations. However, the political salience lies in the temporality since it signals a withdrawal of combat troops and a transition to training and mentoring of Afghan security forces. It therefore acknowledges the presence of war but downgrades the political relevance of it since the settlement is already focused on the transition. The term “combat troops” constructs in fact two

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<sup>276</sup> Interview Senior Staff Officer, Swedish Armed Forces, 2016 and Interview Chief of Defence, 2016.

<sup>277</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2017.

<sup>278</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018.

<sup>279</sup> This term has never before been used in propositions or committee reports.

categories of soldiers in Afghanistan: combat troops and a residual category of “other troops”. In this way the term “combat troops” addressed the controversy of peace-enforcement within the peace-movement in the political left. One could make the argument that this permitted a division of peace-enforcement and peace-keeping troops.

While the red-green settlement addressed the reduction of troops in general, as in a complete withdrawal, the introduction of “combat troops” and a strategy to “change from combat troops to supporting security operations” opens up for troop presence after a set end date: a troop presence with Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams, so called OMLT, whose main purpose was to serve as a liaison capability between the Afghan Security Forces and ISAF. The OMLTs regularly followed the Afghans out on operations which resulted in many combat situations.

Opponents attacked the framing of “combat troops” on the merits of being indecisive and too vague. Four members of Parliament representing the Green Party questioned the ambiguity of term combat troops in the settlement. In an op-ed on the day of the day of the parliamentary debate they protested the settlement:

There is no end date for bringing our troops back in this agreement, which confines itself to a non-binding ambition that combat troops – if conditions on the ground so permit – should be phased out during the period leading up to 2014, while “support troops” should be able to remain without a time limit and *without a clear definition of this term*. We cannot possibly support an agreement so vague that – in a worst case scenario – it opens up for a never-ending war (DN, 2010-12-15, my emphasis).

These objections toward the settlement were advocated in the chamber as well by the Left Party (Prot., 2010/11:35, p. 7). In the chamber the representatives of the Green Party defended the settlement and persistently referred to the withdrawal of “combat troops” from Afghanistan. For example, “Let’s turn the page and start, with today’s decision, to begin the retreat of our combat troops” (Prot., 2010/11:35, p. 15). The ambiguity in the choice of the term “combat troops” when framing the Swedish exit-strategy opens up for different interpretations depending on political affiliation and policy position. The Alliance government could continue with the planned transition to train and mentor Afghan security forces, retaining a military presence in Afghanistan, and still propagate a reduction of “combat troops” (GOV, 2010-07-08, p. 20). The Social Democrats viewed it as an appeasement to the internal opposition and could continue to support the Afghanistan policy and the current developments. As Sandman notices in her dissertation there is a substantial shift in how the Social Democrats labels the military engagement in Afghanistan as “war” once the settlement to withdraw combat troops was reached with the Government (Sandman, 2019, p. 126). This was

a way for the Social Democrats to concede to the changed context, and the occurrence of war, but at the same time politically dissociate them from it.

## (Re)forging a consensus for the exit

Given the prominence of consensus in the Swedish “foreign policy line” there are two things that stand out in the process analyzed in this chapter. First, political conflict over Afghanistan policy in the election campaign. Why did the center-right government continue to push for an expansion despite the waning support within the oppositional Social Democrats? Perhaps even more noteworthy, why did the Social Democrats settle on a withdrawal date and give in to the Left Party’s demand and thereby placing the oppositional government alternative on a collision course with the Government? These behaviors do not make sense in a process permeated by consensus, so how did the consensus break down? Second, once the dust settled after the election, the two sides, except the Left Party, found common ground without controversy or conflict. Why did this go so smoothly given the polarized position the two blocs had been in just weeks prior to the deliberations?

### A context favoring opponents

The foundation for the domestic political conflict was there from the start. In the first empirical chapter I described the disorder that surrounded the American war and the necessity to distinguish the Swedish military contribution both organizationally and geographically in order to suppress opposition. The military contribution was successfully aligned with “the foreign policy line” as the Left, Greens, and Social Democrats all supported the deployment. This disorder grew in the second empirical chapter as the Green Party voiced opposition towards the decisions and the Left Party voted against the expansion of the contribution which thereby challenged the consensus. The governing Social Democrats and the four Alliance parties were still in agreement towards the expansion and development of the Swedish force contribution. This did not in fact challenge the idea of consensus but it instead transformed it to notion of broad support, or cross-party support, which in effect excluded the Left Party.

The Swedish inquiry on Afghanistan clearly concluded in their report that “the role of the Swedish troop contributions has moved from stabilization, to combat, and finally to security assistance” (Tingsgård, 2017, p. 21). It is this period of combat that impaired support and thereby weakened the consensus.

### **The consensus hinged on the Social Democrats**

After the Social Democrats lost power in 2006 and during the developments up until 2009–2010, the internal opposition within the party grew stronger.

Internal opposition among the Social Democrats existed from the very first deployment in 2002. Even if the party leadership and leading Social Democrats within defense and foreign policy supported the operation media reports of internal factions questioning the operation (see for example GP, 2007-03-27). It reached a tipping point in the run-up to the 2010 election, in which the party leadership did not perceive the support within the party as solid and needed to reach an agreement with the Left Party in order to display a governable alternative to the electorate. The Social Democrats took a chance and opted to settle within the red-green bloc, despite the strong notion of seeking consensus in foreign policy.

What this chapter has shown is that actors cannot successfully frame a policy in any way they want. The framing must adhere to the context, they need to adapt their strategies and to be successful the framing must also have the ability to countermand competing alternatives. The successful strategy of contrasting ISAF with the US military presence backfired for advocates as a result of the Americanization of ISAF and the deteriorating security situation. Previously all the negative aspects of the war in Afghanistan were confined to the US engagement. This successful framing “stuck” and entrapped actors now in a later stage of the Afghanistan engagement as ISAF were Americanized. The framing of the Afghanistan operations as a “war”, and something different from the traditional UN peacekeeping missions, gained ground and, with this, support faded within the Social Democrats. This empirical finding shows how actors’ perceptions of the discursive context changes and consequently, as I will elaborate on below, also their framing strategies. It is therefore necessary to include both positive and negative framing in the analysis in order to analytically capture this dynamic.

The internal opposition was most prominently led by former Member of the European Parliament; Maj Britt Theorin, former Speaker of Parliament and Minister for Defence; Thage G Peterson, former UN ambassador and advisor to Prime Minister Olof Palme; Anders Ferm, and former State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Minister for International Development Cooperation and Ambassador to the UN; Pierre Schori. This group pointed out several inconsistencies with Social Democratic ISAF policy and continuously questioned the party’s position publicly in op-eds. They provided a considerable challenge toward the party leadership, most notably during the national congress. There was a weakened support for Urban Ahlin within the party and at a time of crisis within the party they regrouped behind the UN banner and amplified the humanitarian aspect of the engagement to better situate it within the traditional “foreign policy line”. Jan Eliasson, Mr. UN, played a key part in this, especially during the congress.

Primarily this was a polemic between two interpretations of the foundation of Swedish foreign policy (see for example Edström, 2017). The opponents to the development of Swedish ISAF policy argued for a more traditional approach to foreign policy, based on a strict interpretation of neutrali-

ty, humanitarian norms and use of force only in self-defense in peace-keeping operations. The Social Democratic leadership on the other hand, embraced a more pragmatic Western oriented and NATO-friendly foreign policy based on international solidarity that also introduced Sweden to other advantages gained from military deployments, such as access to interoperability cooperation and military exercises but perhaps most crucial political influence and diplomatic access (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015; Agrell, 2013; Tolgfors, 2016; Ångström, 2010, 2019).

The arrival of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan posed considerable challenges to the Swedish understanding of civil-military relations. On the one hand the military considered these comprehensive approaches to be a Swedish showpiece event. Counterinsurgency was framed as something the military was already doing in Afghanistan. The development actors, on the other hand, did not enthusiastically agree. Dafinova emphasized that there is a long tradition in Sweden of separating military and civilian means, which is a reason why counterinsurgency, or COIN, fitted so poorly with the “foreign policy line” (Dafinova, 2018). The allocation of 25% of development aid to the Swedish PRT provinces is typical of this controversy. What the center-right government, and advocates within the Social Democrats, pushed as business as usual, or a Swedish approach to peace support operations, was met with skepticism by opponents, especially in the peace movement, who questioned mixing civil-military means.

In the settlement after the election, the Social Democrats agreed on a withdrawal of “combat troops” which signaled to the internal opposition that the soldiers doing the fighting are going home, which also opened up for the possibility to remain with a continued presence in Afghanistan, albeit with a different composition. Once the dust settled after the election skirmish, both sides were in agreement on the international process coming out of the Kabul conference. For the Social Democrats to “return” to the consensus was no difficult decision for the party leadership. First, the Social Democrats had been the party to initiate a change in policy and thereby deviate from the “foreign policy line.” The loss in the election settled that it was the Government who still represented continuity. In order not to be perceived to be the party breaking the national unity the Social Democrats had incentives to be invited back in. Second, the party leadership were still supportive of the operation. Third, a return to consensus and deliberations with the Government would entail an oppositional insight and influence on foreign policy.

Framing the policy as a withdrawal of “combat troops” settled how both sides were to come out of the negotiations as winners. The Alliance government could continue the set course for the development of the military contribution: remaining in Afghanistan with a military presence but a transition to training and mentoring Afghan security forces. The Social Democrats, and Green Party, also had an interest in staying the course but could frame the settlement as an exit, in accordance with their pursued policy. In a time of

growing international opposition towards Afghanistan and two major contributors, Canada and the Netherlands, announcing their withdrawal, a settlement to stay the course was important for Sweden to signal resolve toward the US and NATO.

### **A shifted burden of proof**

When there is a strong notion of consensus there is a tendency to argue procedural matters instead of the substantive issue (Bjereld & Demker, 1995). In this process there are indications of this both during the transition to ROE and when the geographical deployments of OMLT were discussed. Instead of questioning the policies the opposition instead argue that Parliament had not received any information or that it should be up to the Parliament and not the Government to decide.

Earlier in the Afghanistan engagement, at the entry and expansion of the ISAF contribution, the opposition framed change as something bad. The Parliament had in unity decided on a limited contribution to Kabul and it was when this framework was expanded that the Left Party opposed the decision. The Government and supporting parties on the other hand extended the frame to include the expansion to Mazar-e-Sharif and the takeover of a Provincial Reconstruction Team as a reasonable next step in an evolving Swedish foreign policy. The changes were incorporated into “the continuation” of ISAF participation and the Swedish “foreign policy line.” By contrasting ISAF and OEF opposition was marginalized and the effect on Afghanistan policy was minimal during the entry and expansion. Now in 2009–2010, on the other hand, we can see a different dynamic emerge in the relation between the Government, their supporting parties and a vibrant opposition. All of the sudden, the burden of proof shifts from the opposition to the advocates. This shift in the debate was noticed by actors in the process as well.<sup>280</sup>

As the security situation deteriorated and the organizational changes in the ISAF command structure were imposed, the Government and supporting parties were trying to extend the ISAF policy frame to accommodate these changes. The challenge for the advocates was that these aspects were previously part of the contrasting strategy of framing two different organizations, and distancing Sweden from the war in Afghanistan. The opposition’s strategy was instead to fully extend the ISAF frame to incorporate “the war”. Combat situations and warlike circumstances that were previously accredited to the American war, either through organizational (OEF) or geographical implication (in southern Afghanistan), were now part of the activities that engaged the Swedish ISAF contribution. Washington became more and more involved in Afghanistan and after “the Afghan surge” in 2009 it fully came to dominate Afghanistan and the perception of an Americanization of ISAF was complete. The reality on the ground in Afghanistan created obsta-

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<sup>280</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

cles for the contrasting strategy and the context therefore pushed the advocates to incorporate these elements into the ISAF frame. The strategy for the proponents appears to be to gradually adopt elements and recognize the changes that the operation has undergone, without extending it too much and include “the war”.

Framing processes are never finished. They are “dynamic, negotiated, and often contested processes” between actors but they never cease to end (Snow & Benford, 2005, p. 206). What I mean by this is that once a framing is expressed in can never be retracted. It is out there, yet it seldom lives a life of its own. It is necessary to feed the frame, to reconstruct it, in order for it to retain an interpretative dominance since there are always challenging frames in contestation. The successful framing of the American war as illegitimate now played in the hands of the opposition as the advocates were entrapped by these frames. The Government and supporting parties attempted to accommodate the exogenous changes by extending the ISAF policy frame and downgrading the American involvement. The difficulties in managing this were located in the balancing act between extending the ISAF policy frame to include American leadership, combat situations, and a heightened cooperation with US forces but still retaining a division to “the war” in Afghanistan.

Upholding a perception that keeps Sweden separated from the war becomes increasingly difficult for the Government and supporting actors. “The war” starts to resonate in the public debate and the attempts to extend the ISAF frame to include “combat” without opening it up to include “war” were not very successful. Especially since war was the preferred term internationally, for example by the US, and in media narratives.<sup>281</sup> Against that background the attempts from politicians to distance themselves from “the war” lost traction in the context, and more resembled Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Politicians formulating policy in order to construct a consensus became perceived as distant and ignorant to the situation on the ground in Afghanistan (Agrell, 2013; Johnsson, 2017; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Sandman, 2019). As Aggestam and Hyde-Price observe, the differences between actions (e.g. increasing involvement in war-like missions under NATO command) and political rhetoric (the internationalist tradition of “doing good”) create a decoupling between what is done and what is being said

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<sup>281</sup> It is worth pointing out that in this research I primarily use interviews, archives and print media (major newspapers). The Armed Forces lessons learned report states that the increased number of documentaries, articles and books resulted in “several parallel, and sometimes incompatible, images of the operation’s content, meaning and motives” (Eriksson & Roosberg, 2015, p. 30). However, their claim that blogs were given advanced role is defused by Wagnsson & Hellman who question the significance of new media platforms and suggest that these blogs mainly reinforced the governmental narrative and did not counter it (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2013).

in Swedish security policy (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015). This has implications for the long-term durability of policy.

In this case a lot of effort was put into formulating policy so it resembled traditional security politics on the basis of neutrality, non-use of force and peace-building, which was important especially for the Social Democrats. The controversial relationship to “the war” and the US OEF was there in the entry and expansion phases but could relatively easily be concealed. In the long-term these framings created problems for advocates as the framings were hard to sustain when the context changed and the party leadership supported a foreign policy with military activism.

### Conflict and consensus between government and opposition

Consensus is considered important in foreign policy in order to signal resolve and national unity to both allies and adversaries (Schultz, 2001). Domestically consensus can be viewed as a sort of insurance policy in case the military operation goes adrift (Doeser, 2014b). A Member of Parliament explains:

There are policy issues where politicians must sense that this is above party politics. It concerns defense, it concerns security, it concerns foreign policy. It applies to such things as pension issues, as well as energy issues and such. Thus, things that are of great importance to many generations and that are of important to Sweden. And I'll be damned if you cannot come to an agreement. And foreign policy is a good example of that.<sup>282</sup>

Even if a consensus was not required constitutionally it is still politically relevant to seek the support of a consensus in Parliament in order to document the consensus and increase the likelihood of compliance, and support, of the Government's policy.<sup>283</sup> An appeal for consensus can thus be viewed as a way to raise the bar to engage in political conflict in foreign policy (Andrén, 1996; Bjereld & Demker, 1995; Hegeland, 2006).

While the notion of consensus permeates the political debate on Afghanistan the amplification of the value of consensus came at a time when the two blocs were forced to approach one another. National unity was amplified as an imperative for supporting the troops. The dangerous security situation in Afghanistan for the Swedish soldiers was reinforced with the incidents after the election where several soldiers were injured and one soldier lost his life. This shifted the process toward a display of statesmanship and reconciliation amongst the two dominating parties.

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<sup>282</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>283</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018 and Interview Civil Servant, Parliament, 2014.

The amplification of consensus can also be interpreted as signaling, both internally and externally. Internally there is a need to be prepared to give concessions in negotiations in order to reach an agreement with broad support. Previous party policies might be needed to be abandoned in deliberations where both sides must give and take. Externally, to a broader public, it signals responsibility, competence and credibility. For the opposition the amplification of consensus also serves as a notice to the Government to secure oppositional influence in the process. Without the notion of consensus there would be no necessity for the Government to seek the support of a political opposition. For the Social Democrats, who not only chose to oppose the Government but suggested a radical change in withdrawal, needed to remind the Government of their relevance and essentiality in constructing consensus.

### **An underlying bipartisan consensus**

In Sweden the norm to seek consensus on foreign policy, especially on a military contribution to peace support operations, is strong. Nevertheless, the two blocs ended up in a confrontation over Afghanistan in the 2010 election campaign, which after the elections was solved in a six-party settlement. It was the diminishing support within the Social Democrats that put the two blocs on a collision course. The leadership of the Social Democrats was in favor of the deployment and they had barely gained the support of the congress. Up until August 27 when the three center-left parties came together on a policy of withdrawal, the Alliance government did not critique the position of the Social Democrats but their collaboration with the Left Party in foreign policy. When the Social Democrats decided to confront the Government it was, by the way that the Government argued, considered a break with traditional historic settlements between the Social Democrats and the center-right parties and delegitimized on those grounds. Out of this reasoning I strengthen the conclusion from the previous chapter that the Left, and even the Green Party, are not considered vital supporters of “the foreign policy line.”

In relation to this, it is necessary to recognize the elevated position in Swedish politics in general, and in foreign policy in particular, that the Social Democrats and Moderates assume. While arguments are made that it is a “potentially new trend”, that the Social Democrats and Moderates set the foreign policy agenda (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014b, p. 275), the opposite emerges in my research. Instead, it is considered conventional wisdom in foreign policy circles that once the two dominating parties had settled, in informal deliberations before the proposition was written, then the course was set and the process could proceed.<sup>284</sup> This is what happened after the 2010 election as well. State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Frank Belfrage led

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<sup>284</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016, Interview Member of Parliament, 2014 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

negotiations with the opposition before the proposition could be presented to parliament. The settlement included increased civilian resources, civilian leadership of the PRT and withdrawal of “combat troops” and transition to training and mentoring Afghan security forces. The choice of the term “combat troops” did in fact open up for different interpretation and a way for the Social Democrats to appease internal criticism.

Both the Moderates in government and Social Democrats in opposition were eager to find common ground and display unity on this issue, not only for the sake of passing the foreign policy proposition but as a national interest in itself.<sup>285</sup> The two parties would always find it necessary to strive for unity or as broad agreement as possible, but “in practice it was sufficient that Social Democrats and Moderates were in agreement.”<sup>286</sup> Regardless of the polarizing positions in the election campaign it appears that the two parties never really departed substantially from one another. One way of understanding this, which has support in my empirical analysis, is that there is an unarticulated foundational agreement between the Social Democrats and Moderates out of reach of the public debate. When the consensus was (re)forged after the election one could depict a consensus operating on two levels. In the outer debate the two blocs had moved to polarized positions in the competition for the electorate. There is, however, a foundation in Swedish foreign policy established by the two dominating parties.<sup>287</sup> The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs explained that the Moderates and Social Democrats never substantially departed from each other: “One thing is the political debate, another is the realpolitik deliberations and the basic policy of formulating mutually acceptable compromises.”<sup>288</sup>

The policy positions on Afghanistan of the Social Democrats and Moderates were perhaps not as far apart as the election campaign indicated, which individuals in the process pointed out. Circumstances originating in the election campaign appear to have enhanced, or even exaggerated, the political conflict. In order to preserve the “foreign policy line” and not deviate too much it becomes essential to use the most alluring language to lead the public in favor of their preferred policy. The discrepancy between the political discourse and the military practice in Afghanistan can most likely be traced to politicians crafting their public statements “in order to attract favorable press coverage and ‘win’ public support for what they desire” (Jacobs &

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<sup>285</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014 and Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>286</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014. See also Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015 and Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

<sup>287</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016, Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2020, Interview Minister for Defence, 2017, Interview Member of Parliament, 2015, Interview Member of Parliament, 2016, Interview Political Advisor, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015 and Interview Civil Servant, Parliament, 2014.

<sup>288</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2020.

Shapiro, 2000, p. 27). In an election campaign this was even more evident as parties competed for the electorate.

### **The veto players of foreign policy**

The Social Democrats have held a dominant position in Swedish politics and have maintained the privilege of deciding the content of “the foreign policy line” (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, p. 368). The only true challenger to this hegemony has been the Moderate Party with the support of other center-right parties. The Moderate Party held a position of dominance in the Alliance government, holding more mandates in the Parliament than the other three parties combined and controlling the ministries of Finance, Justice, Defence and Foreign Affairs in addition to the position of Prime Minister. Whether the Moderates ‘ran the show’ or if the four party center-right coalition have aligned in foreign policy (Edström, 2017, p. 189) is beyond my study to determine. My explorative study honed in on political controversy and process-traced the divisions between government and opposition. In this chapter when controversy on Afghanistan peaked these deliberations took place between the Moderates, representing the government, and the Social Democrats, representing the opposition.

According to both leading Social Democrats and Moderates, but also to other actors with insight into the process, there was never any doubt that a consensus would be formed after the elections, through this bipartisanship. A leading Moderate of the Committee on Foreign Affairs recalls the situation after the 2010 election:

Do you remember after the 2010 elections, there was a massive discussion concerning the mandate for the prolongation of Afghanistan. And then it was presented as if it might sort of turn into a shaky vote [...] because then we were no longer the majority, we had a minority government [...] I don’t see any instance where a mandate could be based on winning by just one or two, three votes. I see it as absolutely unthinkable [...] the whole situation after the elections when there was a lot of focus on the issue of the mandate was based on a lot of ignorance, I would argue.<sup>289</sup>

Obviously any kind of consensus would be inconceivable without the support of the two parties. In addition, the Moderate Party and the Social Democrats have assumed positions as veto players, in which major changes in foreign policy would be highly contestable without the support of the other (Tsebelis, 1999, p. 591). I regard this as an unspoken foundation of “the foreign policy line”. Foreign policy needs to be supported by this bipartisanship. This, however, is a sensitive issue for these two parties. They do not wish to be perceived in this way and this therefore widens the ambition to reach broader agreements and consensus on foreign policy.

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<sup>289</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2015.

There is an agreement between the two parties on the internationalization of the Armed Forces and the solidarity doctrine. For the Social Democrats it is interconnected with the strong support for the UN and collective security.

For if no country [takes responsibility for international peace and security], the world will be a great battlefield, where the will of the strongest is imposed and where weapons in hand have a great significance. If we want to live in an international world where there is, in fact, some order and stability, then countries like ours must assume our responsibility.<sup>290</sup>

This way of reasoning on burden-sharing is also closely associated with the substantial support both parties display for the solidarity doctrine. Afghanistan became the first stress test of this doctrine and is through this linked to Sweden's security policy. The close relationship that Sweden had established with NATO manifested in the engagement in ISAF (Bjereld & Möller, 2015). Some even argued that Sweden was in effect already "in NATO" (Dahl, 2012; Petersson, 2018; Ydén et al., 2019). As stressed throughout this chapter, the Social Democrats struggled in the articulation of a burden-sharing Afghanistan policy, based on traditional principles and consistent with "the foreign policy line", when the organizational and geographical discursive division toward the war dissolved. Historically the Social Democrats could successfully combine idealistic principles and pragmatic self-interest in the neutrality doctrine. The presence of "war" in the discourse on Afghanistan, however, strengthened the arguments of opponents and weakened those of the advocates. Fighting "a war for peace" in Afghanistan for Swedish national interests was perhaps acceptable to the foreign policy elite but did not resonate within the left-wing of the Social Democrats, nor with the Greens or Left Party. Compare, for example, how the heuristic of alliance burden-sharing was available in the Norwegian and Danish context when they legitimized their military contributions to Afghanistan (Godal et al., 2016; Mariager & Wivel, 2019a, 2019b; Oma, 2014).

### **Consensus stipulates reciprocity between government and opposition**

The Government monitored the internal conflicts within the Social Democrats and saw their confrontational position on Afghanistan as a need to take a stance in the outer debate. There was always a mutual trust and dialogue between the Government and Social Democrats. This enabled an accommodation of the criticism raised within the Social Democrats and the Government tried to prevent several of the grounds for criticism through different actions. In a discussion on how the Government responded to the increased opposition within the Social Democratic Party, the State Secretary explained that increased amplification of human rights, development aid and gender equality contributed to arriving at a common position. "We knew that there

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<sup>290</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2016.

were tensions within the Social Democratic Party that we naturally picked up echoes from and which we tried to respond to whenever possible.”<sup>291</sup>

The Government held a natural prerogative in foreign policy with the position to define the national interest and an informational advantage due to the secretive nature of security issues and negotiations with foreign counterparts (Hegeland, 2006). The Government recognized a need to assist the Social Democrats in keeping their house in order. When reflecting on politically sensitive questions for the military contribution the Minister for Defence explains:

If you’re asking about politically sensitive issues, they primarily exist in other parties and between other parties, and this was also seen in the negotiations held by the parties prior to the 2010 elections and how they looked upon the mandate and the operation in general. You see, in an operation, there are always a lot of difficult questions, but if you’re referring to politically difficult questions, I think they mainly existed on the other side. However, they have an indirect effect to the extent that we want a broad agreement on the mandate since this is actually necessary for the soldiers and because we can’t send out soldiers without broad support at home.<sup>292</sup>

The Minister for Defence recognized the difficulties in achieving broad agreements when opinions are divided.

Achieving a broad agreement is crucial but doing so is not all that simple and when you sense that support for the operation is perhaps wavering in some parties.<sup>293</sup>

Despite the controversial situation with two opposing alternatives during the election campaign the Government could reach a compromise with the opposition, so carefully worded that it disarmed critics from their main argument and suppressed opposition. While the Left Party remained outside and the Green Party was indecisive and divided on Afghanistan, it looks as if the settlement to withdraw “combat troops” simplified the work for the Social Democratic leadership.

A counterfactual reasoning would validate my argument. What if the center-left coalition had won the election, would the outcome have been different? Well, the Social Democratic leadership were reluctant to unite on Afghanistan with the Left Party, but still they did so. It would have been an enormous risk to pick a fight within the new government over Afghanistan. Putting that aside, there are three things supporting a similar outcome. First, the overriding importance of consensus. The Social Democrats would be in a

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<sup>291</sup> Interview State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 2018.

<sup>292</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2017.

<sup>293</sup> Interview Minister for Defence, 2017.

position to determine the terms for consensus but still the Moderates would need to be reeled in. The loss of an election could even have prompted the Moderates to make larger concessions. Second, the policy positions of the Moderates and Social Democrats never really deviated substantially. As shown in the previous empirical chapters the ideological position of the Moderates had so far not been an issue for a minority Social Democratic government. The Left Party would still be a minority party in a Left-of-Center government, and Afghanistan could potentially be used as leverage in other policy areas. Third, it appears that it was not difficult for the Social Democrats in opposition to abandon their agreement on Afghanistan and settle with the center-right Government. There are no indications that they would not do the same and settle with a center-right opposition in government.

## Chapter 8 – The politics of consensus construction

Listen, don't mention the war!

I mentioned it once, but I think I got away with it all right.

Basil Fawlty, *Fawlty Towers*

“Our country is *at war* for the first time in 200 years,” proclaimed a Member of Parliament opposing the prolongation of the Swedish military contribution to Afghanistan during the 2009 parliamentary debate (Prot., 2009/10:32, p. 161). “We are not *at war*”, was the immediate response from one of the advocates. “This is *something* we are in together with the people of Afghanistan” (Prot., 2009/10:32, p. 163). This exchange between Social Democrat Urban Ahlin and the Left Party’s Hans Linde in the chamber 2009 is indicative of the process by which a domestic foreign policy consensus is constructed through framing. Actors operating in these policy processes shape and formulate policy in order to influence how the policy is received.

One of the central empirical findings is the importance of a geographical and organizational discursive division toward the war in Afghanistan in order to construct a consensus in support of the Swedish military contribution. Advocates’ strategy to not mention the war and frame the military contribution as a traditional Swedish approach to peace support operations clashed with a more militarized framing of the mission in Afghanistan. The discursive divisions were contested. This caused the support within the Social Democratic Party to waver and eventually left the future of consensus uncertain. The potential to forge consensus hung in the balance of the perception of Sweden being at war or not in Afghanistan.

Throughout this dissertation I have argued for an approach based on framing analysis to understand the process in which consensus is forged. In the beginning of the dissertation, I presented three questions to guide the theoretical and empirical exploration of the process by which a domestic foreign policy consensus is constructed:

- *What actions constitute the foreign policy process of the entry, expansion and exit of the Swedish military contributions to Afghanistan?*
- *How do actors frame policy on the military contributions to Afghanistan in the foreign policy process?*
- *How has the domestic foreign policy consensus on military contributions to Afghanistan been constructed over time?*

In this concluding chapter I will summarize the main findings and implications of my analysis. The foundation for the entire study rests with an in-depth understanding of how these decision-making processes unfolded. The primary contribution is the expansion of our knowledge of the domestic politics of foreign policy consensus construction. I showed that an inclusion of actors and agency with a focus on the framing of policy is central to fully understanding the political dynamics behind consensus. I also made an important theoretical contribution to framing analysis with the addition of two alignment strategies that expand the analytical toolbox to understanding the dynamics in a framing contest. The results have wider implications for our understanding of the domestic politics of Swedish foreign policy, providing an important view of how the general reorientation following the Cold War was managed.

## Constructing consensus through framing

In this research project I set out to explore and analyze the process by which a domestic foreign policy consensus is forged through framing. The concept of consensus was, therefore, at the center of the analysis. More specifically, my research focus has been on how and why Swedish governments of different political color succeeded in constructing political legitimacy for these decisions. As a case study I approached Swedish decisions on military contributions to Afghanistan 2002–2014 and divided the engagement into three phases: the entry, expansion and exit. The differentiation of the three phases offered a within-case analysis of the construction of consensus, as well as an opportunity to study the process over time. In addition to archival material, 55 in-depth interviews with politicians, civil servants, and military officers from all levels of the policy process, ranging from ministers to desk-officers, generated rich empirics. They provided new insights that reach beyond the formal process and the publicly available empirics, namely into not only the inner circles of power but also into the reasoning of actors. The research is still, however, based on a single country case study on a single policy issue, i.e. military contributions. Therefore a note of caution on generalization is in order before these theoretical claims and empirical results have been validat-

ed in other countries and on other policy issues. The potential is nevertheless promising, Sweden is not the only country with a strong culture of consensus or that historically have strived for consensus in foreign policy. More research is called for to determine further if there are differences in the process of consensus construction between countries and democratic institutions.

While research has long challenged the normative assumption that politics ought to stop at water's edge I have in this study approached the issue from an empirical view and explored what happens to political opposition in a process permeated by consensus. There is a lot of bargaining, positioning and exercise of political power which is enabled or constrained by how the policy is interpreted and understood. The construction of consensus is therefore intimately linked with the interplay of partisan politics, public opinion, coalition-building and competition of political power (Elman, 2000; Groeling & Baum, 2008; Hagan, 1993, 1995; Kaarbo, 2013; Kaarbo, 2015; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Rathbun, 2004; Schultz, 2001). In my approach I have taken advantage of the strong norm of consensus in Swedish politics and explored the discursive nature of consensus (Buzan et al., 1998; Heffernan, 2002; Holland, 2013; Krebs, 2015; Krebs & Jackson, 2007; Krebs & Lobasz, 2007; Stone, 2012). In an analysis that balances the agency of the actors within these processes with the discursive influences, which constrain and enables certain actions, I proceeded with a theoretical approach that centered on framing analysis. Consensus is, I contend, forged in a framing contest between advocates and opponents to a policy. It was therefore vital to take into account how actors framed policy on the military contributions to Afghanistan in the foreign policy process in order to fully understand the process of consensus construction.

Central to this dissertation is the recognized entrepreneurial push that some actors engage in when promoting particular policies or norms (Buzan et al., 1998; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Henke, 2017, 2020; Payne, 2001). This role of actors has a tradition in policy analysis with the seminal work of Kingdon (2011) but is fairly unexplored in relation to military interventions with the exception of Henke (2017, 2020). The findings of this study substantiate Henke's argument to include agency and the creation and spreading of a legitimizing framing in the analysis. Further, it contributes to her work by providing a nuanced analytic framework, which captures different framing strategies that actors employ. This adds to our understanding of *how* a legitimizing framing comes into place and the role actors played.

This case informs us that even when structural incentives to form a consensus are present there is still a need for actors to engage and frame policy for a consensus to emerge in favor of deployment. A consensus does not simply happen but it takes effort to forge and sustain. At a general level this supports the overall relevance of including actors in an analysis of foreign policy decision-making, highlighted by Foreign Policy Analysis (Hudson, 2014). These decision-making processes under study would have taken dif-

ferent turns if it had not been for the involvement of certain actors at particular times. These human factors should be included in any account of decision-making and studies that wish to understand how decisions emerge. Through an analysis that both accounts for actors' reasoning and discourse, we can build an understanding through framing analysis of how actors maneuver the discursive landscape and mobilize political support for their preferred policy.

Actors shape the substance of policy to satisfy their political interests. It involves policy decisions such as the decision to send Special Forces in the entry, the decision to go to PRT Mazar-e-Sharif in the expansion or the withdrawal of all combat troops in the exit. However, as I have shown in this dissertation, actors also frame policy by highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others, most times but not always, to advance a political agenda. I have reached the conclusion that a consensus is not just something that happens when interests align in the foreign policy domain and political actors seemingly agree on a policy. Rather, in this dissertation I have demonstrated that a consensus is forged through a process whereby advocates and opponents to a policy frame it in order to attract political support for their position. Consequently, my primary contribution is that it is only through a proper analysis of the actors, the framing contest that they are involved in and the strategies they use we can build a better understanding of the political dynamics behind the construction of a domestic foreign policy consensus.

### The framing of the entry, expansion and exit of the Swedish ISAF contribution

One of the main empirical findings was the organizational and geographical discursive divisions between the Swedish military contribution and “the war” in Afghanistan. Advocates framed the Swedish military contribution to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) as organizationally separate and geographically distinct from the US Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), downgrading any existing interface between the two operations. This is reasonable considering the negative connotation of “war” in the Swedish context. If the military contribution is associated with this it is directly detrimental to any attempt to attract political support for a policy in favor of that military contribution. When faced with this situation the advocates for a military contribution tried to contain opposition by contrasting “the war” to the policy frame of the military contribution. This framing strategy focused on the US military engagement in Afghanistan, with the purpose of mobilizing support, or rather suppressing opposition, for the Swedish policy.

The amplification of the UN mandate for the ISAF operation was often used in combination with the contrasting strategy to differentiate the two

organizations. Even in opposition to ISAF policy the Left and Green parties maintained key framings such as the central role of the UN, the UN mandate for ISAF, and the legitimacy of the ISAF operation. All these framings reinforced the difference between ISAF and OEF and buttressed the advocates' efforts to frame the two as distinct.

Critique of the US military engagement in Afghanistan was isolated to Operation Enduring Freedom in the beginning and remained unanswered by advocates for it served the purpose of the Government to contrast the two operations. As US participation in ISAF grew this negative framing of OEF came back to haunt advocates of the military deployment. No longer could these aspects be isolated to OEF and entrapped advocates in this negative framing of the US. Advocates then shifted strategy to focus on the geographical division, i.e. US ISAF troops in southern Afghanistan, to contrast the Swedish military contribution in the "calm north" isolated from the war. But "war" increasingly permeated the understanding of the context in 2009–2010 as the conflict intensified. The burden of proof, in the differentiation of Sweden from the war, shifted from opponents to advocates which spurred a momentum for opposition, especially salient within the Social Democratic Party.

After the 2010 election the equivocal settlement between the Government and the majority of the opposition can be considered a success in terms of the ambiguity of "combat troops". This allowed for different interpretations dependent on political position. It enabled advocates, both within the Government and opposition, to simultaneously acknowledge the war but at the same time downgrade the relevance of it since the combat troops were withdrawing. The transformation of the operations could progress as planned for it signaled to the oppositional fraction that the operation is going through a substantial change and that the demand for withdrawal was met.

The persistent framing of the military contribution to Afghanistan in the language of the traditionalists created a gap between the official accounts, the public narrative and the events on the ground in Afghanistan as depicted in media (Agrell, 2013; Johnsson, 2017; Sandman, 2019; Ångström & Noreen, 2016). Problems that could be veiled in the short term eventually erupted and influenced the process in the long-term. This analysis, through the lens of consensus, makes this behavior understandable even if it can be questioned normatively. The primary objective was to forge consensus in the Parliament.

Ambiguously defined policies have the potential to embrace different political ideologies and policy positions. Andrén, for example, has contended that the politics of neutrality operated as a constraining axiom, due to the inclusiveness of both realist and liberal and arguments in support (Andrén, 1996, p. 17). While this is a valid point, that contradicting interests can be suppressed when they take place within the boundaries of a prevailing ideological framework, it is also about carefully highlighting and downplaying

certain aspects of a particular policy in order to mobilize political support. One interesting implication of this study is that the inclusion of a wide plethora of different factors and interests is not necessarily pivotal for political support but instead that a frame is carefully constructed. Previous research has pointed to a “catch-all” policy frame constructed to accommodate all oppositional interests (Noreen & Ångström, 2015). On the contrary, my findings point to the opposite, that the military contribution was framed meticulously to specifically highlight certain elements and downplay others in order to avoid overt dissent. I have shown in this study that the supremacy of certain ideas is a prerequisite for the approval of military contributions. Contrasting the Swedish military operation from the war in Afghanistan was paramount for consensus, and later broad support, to emerge. The primary example of an important framing is the previously discussed organizational and geographical division of Afghanistan.

### Frame alignment in an unfavorable context

In the process of constructing a consensus, actors shape policy frames to form a congruent and complimentary foreign policy that takes into account and resonates in the discursive context, what Benford and Snow conceptualize as a “frame alignment process” (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986). Frame alignment is an overlooked concept in previous research on foreign policy that this dissertation highlights. It provides the researcher with a number of strategies to use in an analysis of how actors draw upon the dominant discourse and package policy to embed it in the context, in order to gain support and convince each other of the merits of their proposal in the policy process. This particular phenomenon to frame policy and use rhetorical tropes to situate policy within a dominating discourse is not unique to the Swedish context, as for example Löfflmann finds in his analysis of President Obama’s foreign policy:

[President] Obama sought to modify rather than to replace the existing strategic paradigm, using the exceptionalist rhetoric of hegemonic continuity to augment a moderate policy change toward greater military caution and foreign policy pragmatism (Löfflmann, 2019, p. 601).

Consensus has previously been addressed in studies that directly and indirectly center on the discursive conditions for foreign policy (Holland, 2013; Krebs, 2015; Krebs & Jackson, 2007; Krebs & Lobasz, 2007). The discursive nature of foreign policy not only “shapes political contestation and policy outcomes” but also limits the range of policy options that could be legitimately expressed and sets the very boundaries for what is politically possible (Heffernan, 2002; Krebs & Lobasz, 2007, p. 450). The application of alignment strategies opens the possibility up to assess the role of actors in shaping

the context in their advantage, but also how they in turn are shaped by their discursive understanding. It is reasonable to assume that this would not be exclusive to actors in Sweden, nor to the study of military contributions.

In my empirical material, bridging appears to be the primary form of alignment strategy employed to construct the initial consensus on military contributions. This is consistent with empirical findings within the social movements literature (Snow et al., 1986). The reason for this is straightforward. Given the tradition of humanitarianism integral in dominating orthodoxy stemming from the Cold War, military means are initially treated with skepticism. Any military involvement needs to be based on the UN principles of consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of force, except in self-defense. Bridging military means with humanitarian goals seemed therefore to be the initial priority for advocates. Sometimes does this process go unnoticed; sometimes it takes more work in aligning the contribution. It depends on how the overall operation is interpreted.

Once a framing is established in the discursive context are amplification and downgrading perhaps the most frequently used alignment strategies by actors, especially when there are two clear alternatives in conflict. I find this rather expected as the core of framing policy involves highlighting and downplaying certain aspects. For the Social Democrats the amplification of the United Nation is intimately linked to the moral dimension of standing up against oppression and displaying solidarity with the surrounding world. This way of tapping into “the foreign policy line” was frequently used when mobilizing support and suppressing opposition. One illustrative example is former Foreign Minister Eliasson’s amplification of the UN at the party’s congress. Eliasson was the best suited person in the party leadership to administer the legacy of late Prime Minister Olof Palme and amplify the values intrinsically linked to him. Most of the opponents to the Afghanistan contribution worked closely to the Prime Minister and held high positions in his government (state secretaries, ministers and political advisors). These opponents on the other hand amplified the UN as a central part of “the foreign policy line” but then downgraded the UN’s influence in Afghanistan with the purpose of contrasting the Swedish military contribution and “the foreign policy line”.

A diversity of strategies used together with many various combinations during the three phases of the protracted military engagement showed adaptability on the actors’ behalf to overcome contextual constraints in order to forge a consensus. All these observations together support a general conclusion regarding frame alignment strategies: no strategy is used in isolation. In order to contrast the two operations or bridge the Special Forces contribution with humanitarian assistance some elements of the policy need to be amplified while others downgraded. For example, the amplification of the UN’s role and the Security Council mandate was used to contrast the legal grounds for ISAF and OEF. There is always an element of complementary alignment

strategies providing some challenges for the empirical analysis. This furthers our understanding of the framing contest between opponents and advocates of a specific policy.

Previous research on framing has noted the enabling and constraining effects of the discursive context (see for example Buzan et al., 1998; McDonald, 2015, p. 655). The framing literature highlights several frame alignment strategies, including but not limited to frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986); jurisdictional framing (Erikson, 2015, p. 460; 2017, p. 45); frame stretching, frame bending, frame shrinking, and frame fixing (Lombardo et al., 2009). In my analytical framework I utilized bridging, amplification and extension as framing strategies that actors employ when they purposefully attract supporters. However, I argue that actors use different strategies depending on if they interpret the discursive context as favorable or unfavorable to their interest. The framing literature has not specified the different strategies that actors use when faced with an unfavorable context. This reasoning was based on an observation by Björnehed that there is a reason to separate between “positive frames with which the actor wishes to be identified [and] a negative frame [which] incites rejection” (Björnehed, 2012, p. 231).

This study thus contributes theoretically by identifying two additional strategies that can be employed by actors in an unfavorable setting. First, frame contrasting is the strategy when two frames, in a structural or ideological relationship are contrasted in an attempt to separate them. This strategy can be used when actors face an undesirable linkage that does not favor the policy position that they advocate. The primary empirical example in this study is the contrasting of ISAF and OEF. This served the purpose of framing the Swedish force to be consistent with the peacekeeping tradition and not part of the US warfare. Second, when faced with an element of the policy frame so dominant in the context that it is not possible to change the frame, downgrading is employed in order to trivialize and reduce the importance of those elements of the frame. Sometimes downgrading the unattractive characteristics of a policy frame can be the primary strategy in order to attract political support. The US warfare in Afghanistan was successfully framed as something bad and distinct from the Swedish military contribution (contrasting). When the US engagement in ISAF increased and combined operations together with Sweden occurred the relevance of this was downgraded in official accounts in order to precede potential opposition toward the Swedish contribution based on the association with US forces.

Previous research on frame analysis has so far focused on the main actor, in this case the government, and restricted the analytical conceptualization of the oppositions conduct to “counter-framings”. In this study I have shown that as the perception of the context changes so do alignment strategies and an advocate amplifying certain things in the early stages of the conflict can

downgrade them later on, depending on how the process evolves, how “the foreign policy line” is interpreted, and the perspective of the actor. I found that actors, regardless of whether they are in opposition or advocating for the operations, change strategies according to how they perceive the context, depending on whether it is favorable or not to their policy position.

This theoretical addition has increased our knowledge of the phenomenon of consensus construction with the inclusion of the opposition in the framing contestation. It has increased the conceptual framework with two additional strategies beyond the general “counterframing”. For a consensus to emerge the attraction of political support is not always necessary, sometimes it is enough to not mobilize opposition. Avoiding negative connotation can be sufficient in achieving this objective. It also enables an analysis of the variations of strategy over time. As the burden of proof changes so does the alignment strategies. The utility of this theoretical contribution does not end with studies on consensus construction. Negative framing has received insufficient attention in the framing literature and would provide other framing studies with a richer analysis of the counterframing dynamics. This theoretical contribution, therefore has the potential to travel to other studies using framing strategies in their conceptual framework.

## Consensus, cross-bloc and bipartisanship in Swedish foreign policy

As seen in the discussion above this new approach to studying consensus construction through framing makes it possible to capture the involvement of actors and how they maneuver the discursive context. The theoretical expansion of frame alignment strategies enabled an analysis of the framing contest and the political dynamics over time of the military engagement. In the following sections I will elaborate on the empirical results of the domestic politics of consensus construction and the wider implications for Swedish foreign policy. It is evident that the meaning of consensus shifted in the within-case analysis of how the domestic foreign policy consensus on military contributions to Afghanistan has been constructed over time. The results also point to the formation of a foreign policy consensus around a bipartisanship between the Social Democrats and Moderates.

### Shifting meaning of consensus

The literature has not been clear on what exactly constitutes a domestic consensus and this elusive status of consensus was the starting point of my explorative study. Previous research has referred to it as a decision-making regime, culture, broad consensus, ideology, broad political support, political

unity, or broad parliamentary support (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, 2000; Doeser, 2014b; Egnell, 2015; Matz, 2013; Noreen & Ångström, 2015; Sundelius, 1989). According to my results, they are all in a way all correct. I presented a working definition of consensus as the absence of overt dissent on a policy issue. In combination with consensus I conceptualized “the foreign policy line” as the dominating perception within the foreign policy community of the continuity of Swedish foreign policy. These two concepts have complemented each other in the empirical study since consensus exists on several levels in different ways. It can exist as part of the discursive context. That is, it is the dominating perception that there should be a consensus on a foreign policy issue. A consensus can also be constructed in the parliament, which is the reference point of this study. In that context, there is no overt dissent on a policy issue. What counts then as overt dissent? In my empirical investigation I have found interesting results that the meaning that actors give consensus shifted over time.

Sweden is recognized as a traditional consensus democracy (Lewin, 1998; Lijphart, 2008) which is perhaps even more evident when it comes to foreign affairs (Andrén, 1996; Bjereld & Demker, 1995, 2000; Brommesson & Ekengren, 2007, 2013; Hegeland, 2006; Jerneck, 1996). While a strong norm to strive for consensus on military deployment decisions exist (Doeser, 2014b; Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014a; Egnell, 2015) we can observe differences and changes in the meaning that actors ascribe to consensus. The entry decision was in line with previous decisions on military contributions supported by a consensus in the Parliament. However, as the Left Party broke with the status quo and voted against the expansion there was a shift away from consensus. The defection of a party from consensus could have been devastating for the legitimacy of the policy. The Left Party’s relevance could however be downplayed by the remaining supporters and instead a transition to a norm of broad cross-party support or cross-bloc came about.<sup>294</sup> This transition was facilitated by the Left Party’s traditional place as an outlier in foreign policy. It was not until 1994 that the party gained a seat in the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs [*utrikesnämnden*]. Isolating the Left Party from influence in foreign policy had strong support during the Cold War and this historic legacy persisted for many years. It still does, even within the Social Democrats.<sup>295</sup> So, through the eyes of the majority, the meaning was still more or less the same regardless of whether it was “consensus” during the entry or broad cross-party support in the expansion. This

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<sup>294</sup> The literature most often refers to bipartisan or cross-party support to indicate a broad agreement over political boundaries, mostly relevant in a two-party system. In Sweden, with the emergence of two clear political blocs, the term cross-bloc consensus came to be synonym with broad cross-party support. Even if I term the relationship between the Social Democrats and Moderate Party as foreign policy bipartisanship, it does not have the same connotation as the bipartisanship between Republicans and Democrats in the US context.

<sup>295</sup> Interview Political Advisor, Parliament, 2014.

way of delegitimizing defection from consensus was also visible during the 2010 election campaign when the governing coalition focused their attention at the Left Party's deviating stance on foreign policy and indirectly attacked the Social Democrats for associating with the left. When the red-green bloc eventually reached an agreement on Afghanistan, at odds with the Government's position, the Social Democrats were attacked for deviating from the cross-bloc consensus on Afghanistan and siding with the Left Party.

Consensus shifted character from unity to broad support but given the dominant position of the Social Democrats and Moderates I conclude that consensus has a foundation of bipartisanship. The covenant of these two parties forms the stability in foreign policy as these two actors fill the role of veto players, i.e. "actors whose agreement is necessary for a change in the status quo" (Tsebelis, 1999, p. 591). Contrary to conventional wisdom the consensus in Swedish foreign policy is therefore better conceptualized as a bipartisanship than unity. However, the broader the support in Parliament the more legitimate the policy issue is perceived. Especially on this issue of deploying the military abroad and in harm's way. There are, therefore, incentives for these two parties to strive for substantially broader coalitions that extend beyond the bipartisanship. Preferably with several parties, significantly more than the majority, in support.

### The informal bipartisanship of foreign policy

A general view prevalent in the foreign policy elite is that Sweden should strive for regional and international influence. Military contributions to peace support operations were considered an instrumental means to reach this diplomatic and foreign policy influence (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015; Dahl, 2012; Dalsjö, 2010; Edström et al., 2018). As a partnership nation, Sweden gained access to decision forums within NATO through the substantial PRT commitment in Afghanistan.

In the top layer of defense and security politics in Sweden there is a group of people with shared interests of internationalization of the Armed Forces and a common view on the solidarity doctrine and what it necessitates. This clique of advocates of military contributions in the leadership of the two largest parties has been central to the process. These are individuals including, but not limited to, the chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs; Urban Ahlin (2002-2006), chair of the Defence Commission; Håkan Juholt (2000-2007) and Defence Minister; Björn von Sydow (1997-2002) in the Social Democrats. In the Moderates the chairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs; Göran Lennmarker (2006-2010) and Karin Enström (2010-2012), and Foreign Minister; Carl Bildt (2006-2014). In their respective institutional locations, they have worked together with their counterparts to shape and formulate policy supported by a consensus, in what they consider being in the national interest. With this I am not saying that they fully share policy

ideas, there are still ideological differences, but that they share a fundamental view on the foundation of security politics and especially the need to reach cross-party support.

My results have pointed to informal talks as one of the primary outlets of deliberations between government and opposition, implying significant levels of trust between actors. Therefore, we cannot overlook the importance of personal relationships in a process permeated by consensus. In the entry process the relationship between Foreign Minister Anna Lindh (1998–2003) and the representative for the Left Party in the Committee on Foreign Affairs Lars Ohly (1998–2004) provided the Left Party with a privileged access to decisions that satisfied their exclusion on cooperation within foreign policy. In chapter seven, during the rule of the center-right government, this manifested in the need to include the Social Democratic leadership in the deliberations as the internal turmoil within the party restricted their room for maneuver. There was, for example, a deepened informal working relationship between Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and then vice chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Urban Ahlin. This unity between the Social Democrats and Moderates was also shown toward foreign actors, such as the US ambassador in Stockholm.

Between the two dominating parties, the Social Democrats and Moderates, there exists an expectation of future reciprocity in order for the cooperation to work. There is obviously a power game between actors, representing the two largest parties aspiring for government. In the next round of deliberations on security and foreign policy the roles can be reversed as the opposition and government could trade places after an election. In order for a consensus to be durable the interests of both parties must be, if not satisfied, at least entertained. In a way this balances the power between the party in government and the party in opposition. “We both have nuclear weapons” as one respondent explained.<sup>296</sup>

The relationship between government and opposition, however, is more complex than that. In addition to the instrumental view there is also a normative aspect. For influential actors in the foreign policy elite this is intimately linked to credibility for Sweden as a political entity. There is, therefore, a concern to achieve stability in order to eliminate any drastic shifts in foreign policy, given a government could be replaced in an election. This normative push for consensus formed the basis to establish the neutrality line during the Cold War (Andrén, 1996; Sundelius, 1994). It is still relevant today simply because decision-makers find it relevant. In the interest of signaling resolve and unity toward potential adversaries (as well as friends), it is a national interest in itself to make politics stop at the water’s edge, or at least have political discussions behind closed doors for a consensus to be credible

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<sup>296</sup> Interview Member of Parliament, 2014.

(Bjereld & Demker, 1995, 2000; Jerneck, 1996; Schultz, 2001; Wagner et al., 2018; Weldes, 1996, 1999).

One important thing to point out, in relation to this dissertation's purpose, is that in the Swedish official discourse a consensus, or broad agreement, is overwhelmingly presented as something positive, a national unity behind a nation's foreign policy. But as Jentleson has remarked, referring to US Cold War politics: "national solidarity is one thing, the delegitimization of dissent quite another" (Jentleson, 2010, p. 28). The delegitimization of ideas and policy suggestions merely on the ground that they deviate from the majority's views, or the prevailing "foreign policy line", is perhaps an available tactic but does not necessarily imply that the quality of foreign policy improve. Several times in Swedish history has "the foreign policy line" been used to delegitimize domestic opposition. The so-called *Hjalmarson-affair* [*Hjalmarson-affären*] in the 1950's is perhaps the most decisive example of this (Bjereld, 1997; Björklund, 1992). The Social Democratic government took a stance against the leader of the Conservative Party [*Högerpartiet* – the contemporary Moderate Party], Jarl Hjalmarson, after he had issued some critical statements directed at the Soviet Union. The Government proclaimed that the neutrality line demanded domestic unity. The Prime Minister himself reasoned that the Swedish official policy could not accommodate "neither distrust from any of the great powers nor expectations of deviations from the selected course of action" (Erlander quoted in Andrén, 1996, p. 97). The debate over whether this course of action was conditioned on *realpolitik* and in the national interest or simply an attempt to silence domestic debate and legitimize the neutrality line continued in modern times (Bjereld, 1997, p. 13).

The idea that a breakdown of consensus would have enormous implications on foreign affairs continued to influence the relation between the Social Democrats and Moderates on the issue on military contributions and Afghanistan. Respondents emphasized that all the way up to the moment when the proposition was sent to Parliament the oppositional party could veto the deployment through informal channels. Previous research has centered on the formal exchange between Parliament and government (Matz, 2013). However, if government sensed that they did not have the support needed in Parliament then the proposition would not be sent. It would be devastating for any government to fail to pass a proposition on military contributions in the Parliament. Interviews revealed that for the Social Democratic minority government this was never an issue since they sensed a clear support from the Moderates. They still held informal consultations, however. The Moderates, on the other hand, paid more attention to the internal debates of the Social Democrats, even when a center-right majority government ruled. Results both from interviews and leaked documents from the US embassy indicated that the Alliance government monitored the internal conflict and tried to assist the Social Democratic leadership to suppress opposition by adhering

to certain demands and framing policy in a way that insulated critics. After the 2010 election neither of the two parties felt that they had strayed from each-other, other than in the political rhetoric of an election year. “Backstage,” as one respondent expressed it, they had been in agreement all along. And, as interviews revealed, when these two parties had reached an agreement then it was considered settled by others in the process.

### Identifying the tipping point of the consensus

A central empirical finding from this study is that the consensus hinged on the support from the Social Democrats. The Left Party could defect, the Green Party also, but when the Social Democratic Party started to hesitate and eventually oppose the military contribution it triggered a warning. The Alliance government was not interested in pursuing military contributions that did not have the support of the Social Democrats. That the tipping point is located within the Social Democratic Party is not surprising considering the Social Democrats’ ideological position between the left and the center-right parties. On this particular foreign policy issue the ideological equilibrium is found within the party’s constituents. There is also the historic legacy of being the dominant party in Sweden. The Social Democrats have had the privilege to decide the content of “the foreign policy line” (Bjereld & Demker, 1995, p. 368). The traditional position of neutrality and humanitarian activism through the UN still holds a strong position in the party.

The Social Democratic leadership embraced the internationalization of the Armed Forces, closer cooperation with NATO, and a new burden-sharing role through the Solidarity Doctrine. There was a considerable challenge for the party leadership to balance a declamatory political rhetoric with a more pragmatic approach to security politics that deviates from the policy of neutrality. Of course, the Social Democrats was challenged by a tension between idealistic principles and pragmatic interest-based politics already during the Cold War. Then again, it can be well argued that all foreign policy balances these two extremes (Andrén, 1996). Dalsjö argues, however, that one of the primary motives for the Cold War neutrality doctrine was that it was “the only path on which agreement could be found between the political parties and *within* the dominant Social Democratic Party” (Dalsjö, 2014, p. 176, my emphasis).

It appears that on Afghanistan the party leadership implemented a new approach to security politics but framed policy differently in order to satisfy the traditionalist. This instigated internal turmoil within the party as individuals opposing the party leadership’s position made their voices heard. For these internal opponents the historical legacy of neutrality and social democratic approach to peace building conflicted with an apparent rapprochement to NATO and a militarization of the mission. For them, the military contribution to Afghanistan was a creak in the Swedish self-image of 200 years of

peace. Some of the individuals questioning the party's position and opposing the contribution to Afghanistan were former Defence Minister and Speaker of Parliament; Thage G Peterson, former Member of the European Parliament; Maj Britt Theorin, former UN ambassador and political advisor to Olof Palme; Anders Ferm, and former UN ambassador and State Secretary for Foreign Affairs; Pierre Schori. The common denominator among this group was a devotion to the traditional neutrality line and to the legacy of late Prime Minister Olof Palme. This caused frustration for advocates, such as Vice Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs; Urban Ahlin, who felt constrained and struggled to manage internal opposition within the Social Democrats.

More research is needed on the internal politics of the Social Democrats to be conclusive but on the policy issue of Afghanistan these divisions are discernable in the debates at the Social Democrats national congress and in the actions of the leadership. The security politics of the Social Democrats appear to have changed mainly through deliberations in the leadership and through the interactions in the Defence Commission and other informal venues, excluding the grass-roots. This would in part explain why the congress functioned as an area for debate on the issue of Afghanistan.

## The continuity of “the foreign policy line”

The empirical analysis in this study show how actors use frame alignment strategies in order to frame credible and congruent policy frames that resonate in the discursive context. In this study I introduced a definition of “the foreign policy line” as *the dominating perception within the foreign policy community of the continuity of Swedish foreign policy*. This was the starting point for the framing analysis for it sets the perimeter for debate and the politically possible. Actors understand Swedish foreign policy through “the foreign policy line” and therefore also what policy and actions that are considered legitimate. Any foreign policy that deviates from “the foreign policy line” is more prone to be challenged. Therefore are actors both enabled and constrained when they frame their foreign policy vision to fit “the foreign policy line.” This is why alignment with “the foreign policy line” is crucial for consensus to emerge on a policy issue. Without accessible heuristics, that the overarching framework of “the foreign policy line” provides, the potential to frame policy which resonates with a diverse domestic audience become difficult.

Inherent in the concept of frame alignment lays a leeway for a change to be accepted as the status-quo, a band-width for the political room of maneuver. Even if political parties and other actors do not agree on a cohesive understanding of “the foreign policy line”, they are still forced to relate to the dominating perception of the continuity. If they attempt to engineer a change

or frame policy that deviates too much, they risk either upsetting the consensus or being attacked as dissolving national unity. In the Afghanistan engagement can this be observed in chapter 5 and the framing of the military contribution to ISAF as a continuation of a humanitarian engagement in Afghanistan. The quintessence being alignment between Special Forces and the non-governmental organization Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, two entities that at first hand are not likely to align with each other. However, as described in chapter 5, advocates within the process shaped and formulated a policy frame that could accommodate this particular altercation within the confines of the traditional understanding of “the foreign policy line.” This constructed a consensus behind the deployment in the entry process. As the operation continued over the years, advocates’ strategy to not mention the war and separate Sweden, organizationally and geographically, from the hostilities was increasingly questioned. It reached a point when it was no longer possible to frame the mission in Afghanistan as a traditional Swedish approach to peace support operations. The problem for the potential to construct consensus was the inability to frame ISAF policy in accordance with “the foreign policy line.”

### The historic shadow of neutrality and non-alignment

Previous research has pointed to a pragmatic balancing act in Swedish foreign policy between *realpolitik* and a more liberal idealism (Andrén, 1996; Doeser et al., 2012; Wagnsson, 2011; Westberg, 2015). This pragmatism has an origin in a two-layered security politics during the Cold War. The official foreign policy stressed the importance of a credible neutrality, which was coupled with an idealistic rhetoric. While at the same time in smaller circles a different foreign policy was coveted with a “life-line” toward the US and UK (Dalsjö, 2006, 2014). This is the same kind of pragmatism that surfaces in this analysis of consensus construction, most evident in the relationship between the Social Democrats and the Moderates, the bipartisanship of Swedish foreign policy. An agreement on the new direction of Swedish foreign policy in the post-9/11 world apparently did not have the full support of the Social Democratic Party. The obstacles for consensus construction were in this case the difficulties in framing the contribution to Afghanistan in the language of the traditionalists in order to preserve political calm in the left wing of the Social Democrats.

The breakdown of the consensus in chapter 7 was in many ways a symptom of two colliding interpretations of the foundation of Swedish foreign policy. On the one hand the traditional view, compatible with the neutrality doctrine, where UN led peace-keeping operations and humanitarian norms set the example of how military force would be used abroad. On the other hand, the military contribution to Afghanistan began to reveal other advantages to be gained from military deployments. For example political in-

fluence, combat experience, a western interoperability, and diplomatic access (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015; Agrell, 2013; Ångström, 2010, 2019). According to Aggestam and Hyde-Price is the increased participation in peace support operations a sign of an “activist military policy” which cannot exclusively be explained by Sweden’s membership of the EU and NATO’s Partnership for Peace. Instead they argue that it “reflects something more essential and deep-rooted within Sweden’s foreign policy role conceptions and its strategic culture” (Aggestam & Hyde-Price, 2015, p. 480).

The PRT was a substantial commitment in the campaign in Afghanistan signaling a Swedish resolve towards the US and other NATO partners. While closer cooperation with NATO members did not upset advocates it was deeply controversial for the traditionalists and their strong support of neutrality. The Afghanistan commitment was a defining military operation at a pivoting time for Swedish foreign policy. It has not been part of my research agenda to establish whether a NATO rapprochement drove ISAF policy or vice versa. I can, however, observe that they at least are mutually reinforcing.

The closer cooperation with NATO through ISAF paved the way for military contributions in Libya in 2011 and Iraq 2015 as well as NATO granting Sweden Enhanced Opportunities Partner in the 2014 Wales Summit and signed a memorandum of understanding on Host Nation Support. In 2017, units from the US, France, Germany, Norway, Finland and Denmark, as well as the Baltic States, participated in the Swedish military exercise Aurora. This was the largest military exercise Sweden conducted since 1993 and it sent a clear, and explicit, geopolitical message in light of a deteriorating security situation in the Baltic Sea Area. Sweden also participated in NATO exercises with an Article 5 collective defense scenario, for example Trident Juncture 2018. It is worth noting that most, if not all, of these outcomes would have been unthinkable in the entry phase of Sweden’s engagement in Afghanistan.

At first glance, consensus has continued to be a significant part in the Government and Defence Commission’s work to restore the national Swedish defense as part of a reorientation away from the expeditionary focus on peace support operations (Edström & Gyllensporre, 2014b, pp. 269-271). The uncomfortable, but perceived as necessary, relationship to NATO continues to haunt the process of (re)constructing consensus on Swedish foreign and security politics. Even more so as the Social Democrats returned to government in 2014, together with the Greens, and they now face four center-right parties that all are in support of NATO membership. It appears that the divisions within the Social Democratic party on military contributions to Afghanistan found in my empirical study continues to be relevant on the issue of NATO integration (Ydén et al., 2019, p. 15-16). This raises the same kind of questions that I asked in this research process. Accordingly, only a proper inclusion of the actors and the framing contest that they are involved

in can build a better understanding of how a domestic foreign policy consensus has been forged.

## Democratic control over Swedish foreign policy

In a democratic society it is unavoidable to conceive that decision makers in foreign affairs are somehow aware of being responsible to the society that lies behind the political process because, as V.O. Key so famously put it; “[u]nless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense” (Key, 1961, p. 7). Perhaps the most important decisions that citizens entrust upon their elected representatives are the decisions to send military forces into combat. Amongst Members of Parliament consensus is prominent as a particularly “democratic” decision. Parliament acts as the representatives of the people and should stand united behind any military deployment. Through this research project I have closed in on the democratic aspects of these decisions and touched upon some of the tensions in a democratic society that can arise on matters that deal with national security.

Given the irrevocability of these decisions and the brute nature of warfare these tensions are extremely consequential in the debate over whether citizens have or should have a say or if representative democracies are destined to be ruled by elites. Many practitioners and academics have considered foreign policy as deviant from regular politics and exempt from traditional democratic mechanisms. Many argue that there is no room for democracy in matters of foreign policy, or put differently: “there is an inherent incompatibility” as Goldmann writes, “between this ideal and the realities of international politics” (Goldmann, 1986, p. 1). This ‘incompatibility thesis’ consists of both a normative desire to hold popular influences out of foreign affairs and the empirical possibility that it is impossible to match democratic politics with international affairs (Everts, 2002; Goldmann, 1986). It is this disorder between this classical model of *realpolitik* and more liberal influences that become apparent in the forging of a domestic foreign policy consensus.

In the beginning of the dissertation I raised the normative question of how we can ensure democratic constraint in a foreign policy process, permeated by consensus and without strong political opposition. When national interests and democratic ideals clash, as they do in foreign policy, the role of opposition and the balance between consensus and dissent are at the center of considerations (Dahl, 1966, p. 387). To begin with it is necessary to recognize that this is an institutional paradox impossible to resolve. There are democratic influences in this arena that prevent the government from pursuing policies that are perhaps best left out of the public’s and adversaries’ sight. That foreign policy requires closed doors and actions in the national interest is difficult to circumvent. Oppositional influence in shaping and

formulating policy challenges accountability but democratic influence does not necessarily imply popular influence.

This dissertation raises two points derived from the empirical investigation in contribution to the general debate of the place for democratic politics in foreign policy. First, the logic of consensus places political opposition in an awkward position as criticism directed toward the government could be interpreted as upsetting national unity. The inherent importance of foreign policy issues and the national interest raises the threshold for parties to question “the foreign policy line”. This hampers the process in which policies are scrutinized before implementation.

Second, the opposition exercises substantial influence in informal talks with government before any proposition arrives at Parliament. In effect this involves talks between Social Democrats and Moderates. Another venue for opposition influence is informal consultation through the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs, led by his majesty the King.<sup>297</sup> The Advisory Council is surrounded with statutory secrecy which makes any insight into the deliberations difficult, both for a doctoral student as well as the general public. I have not found any empirical evidence in my study that the Advisory Council would have had any direct impact on the process. The picture that has emerged in my research is that informal talks take place directly between government and opposition before going to the Advisory Council. Similar to the position of Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Parliament, the Advisory Council holds a position of control station that the Government needs to pass. The opposition, therefore, base their power in these institutions even if the actual negotiations and deliberations take places informally in advance of the formal treatment.

It appears, however, that opposition is invited to respond to foreign policy initiatives but takes minor part in substantially formulating policy, other than signaling discontent. This is reasonable, considering that the foundation of the Swedish democracy is that the government has the prerogative to “govern the Realm”, according to Chapter 1 Article 6 of the Instrument of Government. In foreign policy, however, this divorces oppositional influence to an extent. The restrictive access to information on military operations gives the government an advantage which empowers them with the potential to construct a policy frame for which a consensus can be built.

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<sup>297</sup> According to Chapter 10 Article 9 of the Instrument of Government: “In all foreign policy matters of major significance, the Government shall confer with the Council, if possible, before making its decision.”

# List of interviewees

Organization	Primary Role	Date	Location
MFA	Senior Civil Servant	2013-09-25	Stockholm
MFA	Desk Officer	2013-09-26	Stockholm, MFA
MOD	Desk Officer	2013-10-02	Stockholm, MOD
SAF	Staff Officer	2013-10-22	Stockholm, SAF Headquarters
PARL	Political Advisor	2013-10-24	Stockholm
MOD	Staff Officer	2014-02-05	Stockholm, SAF Headquarters
PARL	Political Advisor	2014-02-17	Stockholm
PARL	Civil Servant	2014-02-25	Uppsala
PARL	Member of Parliament	2014-02-26	Stockholm
MFA	Senior Civil Servant	2014-02-27	Uppsala
PARL	Member of Parliament	2014-02-28	Phone
MOD	Political Advisor	2014-02-28	Uppsala
MOD	Political Advisor	2014-03-05	Stockholm
MOD	Staff Officer	2014-03-07	Stockholm, SAF Headquarters
PARL	Political Advisor	2014-03-12	Stockholm
SAF	Staff Officer	2014-03-17	Stockholm
PARL	Civil Servant	2014-03-17	Stockholm
SAF	Staff Officer	2014-03-18	Stockholm, SAF Headquarters
MOD	Staff Officer	2014-03-19	Stockholm, SAF Headquarters
SAF	Staff Officer	2014-03-21	Stockholm
MOD	Minister	2014-03-24	Stockholm, Swedish Parliament
PARL	Political Advisor	2014-03-26	Stockholm
PARL	Member of Parliament	2014-03-27	Uppsala
MOD	Desk Officer	2014-04-04	Stockholm
MOD	Staff Officer	2014-09-09	Stockholm, SAF Headquarters
MFA	Desk Officer	2014-09-15	Stockholm, MFA
SAF	Chief of Defence	2014-09-26	Uppsala
PARL	Civil Servant	2014-10-14	Stockholm
PARL	Member of Parliament	2014-10-15	Stockholm, Swedish Parliament
MFA	Senior Civil Servant	2014-10-16	Stockholm, MFA
MFA	Senior Civil Servant	2014-10-21	Stockholm
SAF	Chief of Defence	2014-12-17	Stockholm
MFA	Political Advisor	2015-02-10	Stockholm
PARL	Member of Parliament	2015-02-19	Stockholm, Swedish Parliament
PARL	Member of Parliament	2015-03-09	Stockholm, Swedish Parliament
MFA	Desk Officer	2015-03-18	Stockholm, MFA
SAF	Staff Officer	2015-03-19	Stockholm
MOD	Senior civil Servant	2015-04-01	Phone
PARL	Member of Parliament	2015-11-28	Stockholm, Swedish Parliament

Organization	Primary Role	Date	Location
MOD	Minister	2016-04-04	Stockholm
SAF	Senior Staff Officer	2016-04-11	Stockholm, Swedish Parliament
SAF	Chief of Defence	2016-04-18	Stockholm
PARL	Member of Parliament	2016-06-17	Stockholm, Swedish Parliament
PARL	Member of Parliament	2016-06-22	Stockholm, Swedish Parliament
MOD	Minister	2017-06-30	Stockholm
MFA	Senior Civil Servant	2017-10-13	Stockholm. MFA
MFA	Desk Officer	2017-10-13	Stockholm. MFA
MFA	Desk Officer	2017-12-31	Phone
PARL	Member of Parliament	2018-01-17	Stockholm
MFA	State Secretary	2018-01-31	Stockholm
PARL	Member of Parliament	2018-02-07	Stockholm
SAF	Staff Officer	2018-02-26	Stockholm, SAF Headquarters
SAF	Senior Staff Officer	2018-03-21	Stockholm, SAF Headquarters
MOD	Desk Officer	2018-06-20	Stockholm, MOD
MFA	State Secretary	2020-04-09	Phone

MFA = Ministry for Foreign Affairs; MOD = Ministry of Defence; SAF = Swedish Armed Forces; PARL = Parliament

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# Statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala

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