

The Change of the Meaning of the Word “Neutrality” in Sweden Throughout the  
Twentieth Century (1938-1990s)

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April 22, 2015

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to my thesis advisor, Thai Jones, whose endless support and positive encouragement made writing this thesis a challenging yet rewarding experience. His enthusiasm about each and every detail of my writing had a great impact on my argument. Thank you to Professor Victoria de Grazia whose History of Soft Power class sparked my interest in this particular subject and whose class provided me with the original idea that still provides an argument for this thesis in its final form. A special thank you to my family, who always encourage me to try my best. Translating the Swedish documents would not have been possible without their insistence that speaking a foreign language proves helpful intellectually and culturally. I am very thankful that I was able to use my Swedish roots and apply it to my academic pursuits at Columbia. Lastly, thank you to my friends who listened to my endless rants about this project and supported me no matter what.

## Introduction

It is a well-known fact that Sweden, although always claiming to be neutral, breached this neutrality several times. The most evident breaches of Swedish neutrality occurred throughout the Second World War. Firstly, Sweden broke its economic neutrality. Trade during World War Two was tricky, both Germany and the allied powers wanted to trade with Sweden, but both was not possible. After the German invasion of Denmark and Norway, the Germans blocked off goods from Sweden for Britain. Meanwhile, Sweden continued exporting iron ore and ball bearings to Germany, materials that clearly went towards the war effort. Iron ore was the material highest in demand and accounted for a high percentage of exports during the war years.

<sup>1</sup> To curry favor with the Allies, Sweden also allowed the British to use some of its merchant marine vessels and allowed the allied powers to use Swedish air bases. Secondly, Sweden accepted the so-called Transit Agreement with Germany in 1940 in order to avoid further aggression towards Sweden. This German-Swedish Transit Agreement allowed for the transportation of German troops and goods through Swedish territory. Thirdly, there was also some clearly defined anti-semitism in Sweden. During the European “refugee crisis” of 1938 at the beginning of the war, Sweden refused to let more than a handful of escaping Jews into the country.<sup>2</sup> However, even after the end of World War Two, Swedish neutrality remained a blurry concept. During the Cold War, for example, Sweden promised to remain “unaligned,” but secretly cooperated with NATO. However, the point of this thesis is not to discuss how Sweden breached its neutrality, but how the meaning of the word neutrality changed over the course of the twentieth century. Since Sweden was not actually neutral, the word “neutral” did not have

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf L Bindschedler, et al. *Schwedische und Schweizerische Neutralität im 2 Weltkrieg*. (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1986), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Bruchfeld, Ste, and Paul A. Levine. *Tell Ye Your Children--: A Book about the Holocaust in Europe 1933-1945*. (Stockholm: Regeringskansliet, 1998), 56.

much credence, therefore the word often came to mean something else entirely while still attempting to keep Sweden out of the war.

During World War Two, neutrality policies were shaped by the new, Social Democratic Welfare State which influenced new Swedish national values. These national values became the largest reason for implementing neutrality. During the Cold War, there was an evident shift in Swedish policies. Sweden's neutrality policies were now defined as "non-aligned during peace and neutral during war" which allowed for more flexibility in terms of foreign policy. This new term came with Swedish international cooperation, a large attempt was made by the Swedes to send humanitarian aid to wherever it was needed. During the 1990s, there was another shift, and neutral policies were largely defined by domestic and international cooperation and development, both politically and economically. Despite these constant changes of the meaning of the word itself, when it comes down to it, Swedish neutrality was the most largely defined by Swedish national values, and the idea that Sweden needed to protect those national values by enforcing a neutrality policy.

## **Historiography**

Many scholars have focused on these breaches of neutrality and interpreted them and most of them have come to the conclusion that Swedish neutrality was not a reality. Anne Sofie-Dahl, in her "Myth of Swedish Neutrality" makes several claims about Swedish neutrality, and her main argument related Swedish neutrality to the concept of the myth. She outlines her argument with the definition of the "myth." First of all, she claims that a myth must be universal. She claims that the Swedish policy of neutrality is not only an official policy, but also a state of

mind, she says, “To be a good Swede is to be neutral.”<sup>3</sup> Secondly, she claims a myth must come to being over a long period of time. Sweden has a long history of neutrality, starting in the Napoleonic era. Thirdly, a myth must incorporate repetition. She claims that the word is used so often in response to any foreign policy problem that it has become a myth, especially because the problems don’t always go away with just a simple utterance of the word. Lastly, she argues that a myth is meant to evoke a certain response. She claims that in Sweden, the word neutrality evokes a positive reaction. She says, “In times of international change, with a wider debate on the future direction of Swedish security policy, a nostalgic quality surrounds the belief in neutrality and nonalignment: it is associated with those prosperous days when Sweden topped every statistic of achievement and living standards; when the welfare state was intact and expanding; and when the privileged Swedish way of life promised to continue forever.”<sup>45</sup> This thesis will cover several of these arguments, however, my thesis does not seek to prove whether Swedish neutrality was a myth or not, but how the meaning of the word neutrality itself changed over time. My argument discusses the relationship between the meaning of the word neutrality and Swedish national values, just like Anne-Sofie Dahl does, but in a different context. My thesis assumes that Sweden was not neutral, but that the word itself represented Swedish foreign policy differently throughout the years.

Another important aspect of Swedish neutrality debated by scholars, is the way Swedish neutrality is presented in history. John Gilmour in *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin* argues that Sweden went through several phases to ensure a positive international outlook of Swedish neutrality policies throughout the twentieth century. The first phase in his argument is “Small-

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<sup>3</sup> Cymbol Buffet and Beatrice Heuser, Edit., *Haunted by History Myths in International Relations*, (Providence, Oxford: Berghen Books, 1998), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Cymbol Buffet, et al. ed., *Haunted by History Myths in International Relations*, 36.

<sup>5</sup> Cymbol Buffet, et al., ed., *Haunted by History Myths in International Relations*, 28-40.

State Realism”, in which he argues that Sweden was often strong-armed into doing what the Germans said due to their size. Sweden released several documents in 1943, which claimed that Sweden had no choice but to collaborate with the Germans. The second phase of Gilmour’s argument is “Moral Interpretation,” in which Sweden was heavily criticized for breaching moral grounds by supporting the Germans throughout part of the war.<sup>6</sup> My thesis argues that whether or not Swedish history should be looked at from the perspective of Small-State Realism or a Moral Interpretation, that Swedish neutrality was mostly defined by Swedish national values, which can be interpreted as either selfish or as a country looking out for the best interest of its people.

Swedish neutrality is most often debated in terms of whether it was moral or not. Some critics argue that Sweden was anything but moral, especially because it often supported leftist, revolutionary movements in the Third World, such as in Vietnam. However, others argue that Sweden’s foreign policy is an exemplary political model and should serve as a role model for other countries. More specifically, the debate centers around the idea that Swedish foreign policy and its humanitarian aid after World War Two can be seen two ways: as universalist (promoting universal values), and as promotionalist (aiming to improve Sweden’s standing in the international community).<sup>7</sup>

However, despite what scholars have said, Swedish neutrality is a largely accepted policy and therefore it has been successful. In this same article on Sweden, Anne Sofie-Dahl, the same historian who wrote about Swedish neutrality as a myth, discusses the idea of Sweden as a moral superpower. “For quite some time, Sweden’s international image was centred on its exceptionally activist foreign policy, which reached widely around the globe-all the way from Stockholm to Vietnam and on to Sandinist Nicaragua and back. According to its prominent

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<sup>6</sup> John Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin, The Swedish Experience in the Second World War* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 270-287.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Sofie Dahl Sweden, “Once a moral superpower, always a moral superpower?,” 897.

advocates, this multifaceted Swedish internationalism merited the country the title of “the moral superpower.”<sup>8</sup>

This thesis closely analyzes the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents from 1938 to the 1990s, and is divided into three sections and will discuss the meaning of the word neutrality during World War Two, the Cold War, and the 1990s, all of which are periods of time, which presented Sweden with different foreign policy challenges in relation to its neutrality policies. Although all of these historians present important information in order to understand the background of Swedish neutrality, the aim of this thesis is not to discuss whether or not neutrality was breached and whether or not Sweden was morally correct. I argue that the meaning of the word itself is, how it was interpreted internationally and how it was used in the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents, is more important than how Sweden failed to uphold its neutrality. This thesis also argues that the word neutrality has several implications, it is a word that does not only exemplify a Swedish foreign policy, but a state of mind.

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<sup>8</sup> Dahl Sweden, “Once a moral superpower, always a moral superpower?,” 895.



## Chapter One: The Meaning of Swedish Neutrality during World War Two (1938-1945)

On September 1, 1939, the Swedish government declared that Sweden would observe strict neutrality upon the outbreak of war between the Polish and German governments,<sup>9</sup> which marked the beginning of World War Two. Sweden's neutrality during World War Two is especially complicated because not only did Sweden not remain neutral while claiming to be, but the meaning of the word itself also changed over the course of the war. Throughout the majority of the war, despite claiming neutrality, Sweden in fact aided both sides by providing them with certain war goods, such as ball bearings and iron.<sup>10</sup> Towards the beginning of the war, Sweden strongly "allied" itself with Germany and allowed the German troops to cross through Swedish territory to attack another part of the Nordic Region. Due to these constantly changing circumstances, Swedish neutrality policies during World War Two were inconsistent and changed drastically from the beginning of the war to the end of the war. Originally, in the early 1940s, Swedish neutrality meant Swedish "freedom" and "unity." In other words, Swedish neutrality meant protecting the Swedish people themselves and sticking to the new ideas of the Swedish Welfare State, which promoted Swedish national values over all others. However, towards the end of the war, the Germans were losing and the Allied powers gained on them and Swedish policies changed as a result. Many argue that Sweden felt a moral weight on their shoulders for not supporting the other side sooner. Towards the end of World War Two, neutrality came to mean supporting Swedish national values while also promoting humanitarian aid.<sup>11</sup> Overall, Swedish neutrality was largely based on selfish Swedish interests due to the fact that Sweden cared more about the wellbeing of its people than the wellbeing of the countries

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<sup>9</sup> *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1938-1954*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> For more information see: Henrik S. Nissen, *Scandinavia during the Second World War* (Minneapolis, 1983)

<sup>11</sup> See more information on morality in John Gilmour and Jill Stephenson, *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy* (London, New York, 2013, Bloomsbury Academic)

under attack. In this chapter, I will discuss how the meaning of the word neutrality in Swedish politics changed throughout the years of 1939-1945 and what factors played a key role in this change.

### **Sweden's Social and Political Environment**

Sweden's neutrality policy during World War Two was largely shaped by the political environment in Sweden at the time. First of all, a new government, led by the Social Democrats, formed in response to the impending threat of war. The Swedish Social Democratic Party took power in 1939, when the four Swedish democratic parties united to form one coalition government under the leadership of Per Albin Hansson due to the threat of the impending war.<sup>12</sup> The new Social Democratic Party's goal was to represent not only the working classes, but also the Swedish society as a whole, and also aimed to unite the Swedish economy.<sup>13</sup> This idea of uniting the Swedish economy, and more importantly Swedish society, helped define neutrality and also became an important outline for the Welfare State.

Secondly, the emergence of the Swedish Welfare State right before the beginning of World War Two strongly influenced Swedish neutrality. Most importantly, the Welfare State encouraged little to no involvement in the war because its primary goal was to protect the Swedish people. This new social movement was supported by social changes such as the rise of urban life and the declining population in Sweden. With the rise of urban life, came higher expectations: this included, rising standards in terms of housing, nutrition, clothing, education, and leisure time. Secondly, there was a rapid birth rate decline. According to George Nelson, "By 1921-30 birth rates had fallen from more than 30 per thousand to about 20 per thousand

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<sup>12</sup> Ernst Ekman, "Försvaret, folkhemmet och demokratin: Socialdemokratisk riksdagspolitik 1939-1945 [Defense, the Welfare State, and Democracy: Social Democratic Parliamentary Politics 1939-1945] by Karl Molin," *The American Historical Review* 80, No. 5 (1975), p. 1351.

<sup>13</sup> Nissen, ed., *Scandinavia during the Second World War*, 27.

inhabitants, the lowest birth rate being reached in Sweden in 1934 with 13.7 per thousand.”<sup>14</sup> The Swedish government feared this could have several social, economic, and military consequences, especially at a time of impending war. Sweden was threatened with population and decline, a low fertility rate, and a decrease in the standard of living. As a result, the Swedish government sought a solution to the problem, one that was rooted in the Welfare State.

While these political and social changes largely shaped neutrality policies and the meaning of the word neutrality itself, Per Albin Hansson, the leader of the Swedish Democratic Party and Prime Minister of Sweden, was the first to define Swedish neutrality in the twentieth century.

### **Defining “Neutrality”**

After Sweden’s official declaration of neutrality in 1939, Per Albin Hansson, the Swedish Prime Minister and head of the Social Democratic Party, gave a speech regarding what neutrality would mean during this time period. In Hansson’s speech, he claimed,

“The appalling, that which we had last hoped, that the world would avoid, has occurred. A new, large war has broken out...For us Swedes, it is important, with quiet determination, to keep our country out of the war, to preserve and protect our national values and in the best way overcome the future’s evils. The will for strict neutrality, that embodies our people, has after discussion with the government been approved by the king.”<sup>15</sup>

Several key terms appear in this official speech including “Swedes,” “our country,” “national values,” and “our people.” All of these terms would define the word neutrality throughout the whole war, even after breaches of Swedish neutrality. Overall, although Sweden did not remain neutral for the entire period of the war, the word neutrality was used not necessarily to claim neutrality, but rather to make a statement about Swedish national values, clearly outlined in this speech by Per Albin Hansson.

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<sup>14</sup> George R. Nelson, *Freedom and Welfare* (Denmark: Krohns Bogtrykkeri), 235.

<sup>15</sup> Translated from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1938-1954*, 1955, pp. 8.

## **A Breach of Swedish Neutrality: The German-Swedish Transit Agreement**

After this initial speech declaring neutrality, the neutrality policy was continuously reinforced although not necessarily upheld; however, the meaning of the word remained the same, representing Swedish national values over the importance of neutrality itself.

Germany always posed a threat to Swedish neutrality; however, once Germany invaded both Norway and Denmark, Germany became more of an immediate threat.<sup>16</sup> Sweden feared a German attack and was also highly aware of the fact that they no longer had buffer states protecting them from the Great Powers. Due to this new impending threat, Sweden decided sacrificing “neutrality,” at least for a short period of time, was a small price to pay. This breach of neutrality was officially called the German Swedish Transit Agreement of April 1940. It was the Minister of Justice, Karl Gustav Westman, who finally persuaded the Swedish government to accept the agreement with Germany in order to avoid further aggression towards Sweden. On April 17, the Swedes agreed to allow medical supplies to be sent through Sweden to Norway, a country that was now under attack by the Germans.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the months to come, the German Swedish Transit Agreement expanded and eventually allowed German troops to pass through Swedish territory in order to access a military post in Narvik, Norway. Soon thereafter Hansson gave the Germans railway access through Sweden to access Norway and Finland, a move that further endangered the political ties between Sweden and Norway. By the end of April, the Germans had a “red Cross” train, or so they called it, that allowed for regular German shipments of nonmilitary goods, such as food, clothing, medical supplies, petroleum, and coal to

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<sup>16</sup> Gilmour, *Hitler's Scandinavian legacy: the consequences of the German invasion for the Scandinavian countries, then and now*, 104.

<sup>17</sup> Nissen, ed., *Scandinavia during the Second World War*, 105.

be transported across Swedish grounds.<sup>18</sup> Overall, a total of 2 million German soldiers were transported across Sweden, 75% more than the terms allowed.<sup>19</sup>

King Gustav gave a speech on May 6, 1940, regarding this agreement, claiming that: “Sweden's intention was to assert neutrality in all directions, while the Germans declared themselves to be committed to respect this neutrality.”<sup>20</sup> This speech was followed by a separate speech by Per Albin Hansson, the Swedish Prime Minister, directly after the Transit Agreement was signed. In his speech, Hansson claims,

“The main task is to keep our country out of the war with preserved freedom and independence... In our efforts to keep our country out of the war, neutrality and national preparation play a role...Furthermore, the Swedish government has fulfilled the German request, that the German military, mostly German soldiers, will be allowed to cross through our land to the he homeland from Norway and eventually return there.”<sup>21</sup>

In this speech, the one time neutrality is mentioned, Hansson mentions its’ importance in maintaining “freedom” and “independence.” Therefore, this speech evidently links the meaning of neutrality to the “freedom” and “independence” of the Swedish people. Since neutrality at this time meant freedom of the Swedish people, breaking this neutrality only made sense in order to be able to support Swedish neutral values (or in other words, Swedish national values) in the long term.

### **Sweden and the Nordic Region During World War Two**

The entire Nordic Region (including Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway) has always shared close cultural ties. There were several reasons for this close cooperation, including

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<sup>18</sup> John M. West, “The German-Swedish Transit Agreement of 1940,” *Scandinavian Studies*, 50, No.1. (Winter 1978), 76-99.

<sup>19</sup> “Tidlinjen pa Levande Historia,” Levande Historia Forum, accessed April 21, 2015, <http://www.levandehistoria.se/search/tidlinjen>.

<sup>20</sup> Translated from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Svensk Utrikespolitik under andra Vaerldskriget*, 1955, pp. 325.

<sup>21</sup> Translated from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Svensk Utrikespolitik under andra Vaerldskriget*, 1955, pp. 327-328.

the romantic notion of unifying all of the Scandinavian people, and then there were also political benefits. However, despite the cultural ties and the political benefits, at times of battle, the Nordic Region has consistently been separated. This is especially evident with Sweden and the rest of the region during World War Two.

While the German Swedish Transit Agreement demonstrates the importance of Swedish national values of the time in relation to neutrality, it also demonstrates the unimportance of the Nordic “brotherhood,” which was emphasized around the time of the German invasion of Denmark and Norway. Swedish neutrality strictly meant preserving Swedish national values, and despite their better efforts to prove this otherwise, it also meant breaking their cultural ties with the rest of the Nordic Region. In a speech on April 12, 1940, three days after the German invasion in Norway and Denmark, Per Albin Hansson claimed,

“In this context, I do not need to need to interpret our feelings towards our Scandinavian brothers. Everyone should understand that, despite our own freedom, our senses have been deeply shaken. In the meantime, however, we need to think about ourselves, our possibilities to preserve our peace, freedom, and honor. Sweden has done everything possible to uphold its proclamation of neutrality....In order to preserve this neutrality, it is important that we take care of ourselves.”<sup>22</sup>

Just like in his speech about the Transit Agreement, Hansson underlined the importance of “freedom” and “peace.” He also puts emphasis on the word “ourselves.” While mentioning these words he clearly ties them to Swedish neutrality and Swedish neutral values. Therefore, the word neutrality does not necessarily mean remaining out of conflict, it means protecting Swedish national values.

After this initial breach of neutrality, Sweden continued to protect its actions with the meaning of the word neutrality, by continuously referring back to the wellbeing of its population

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<sup>22</sup> Translated from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Svensk Utrikespolitik under andra Vaerldskriget*, 1955, pp. 319.

and the conservation of Swedish freedom during World War Two. The words “freedom,” “unity” or “togetherness,” were constantly repeated in several speeches thereafter, becoming primary reasons to remain neutral and also meanings of neutrality.

Towards the end of the war, Sweden’s policies towards the rest of the Nordic community, as well as Sweden’s attitude towards the rest of Europe began to change into a more supportive role. In 1944, the war took a dramatic turn for the better. The Allied powers were winning and the Germans were losing. This turn of events meant that the Swedes were faced with a moral dilemma after having helped the Germans indirectly for so long and were also afraid to get drawn into the war in the last minute. The Norwegians and the Danish, who were still under German control, feared how the Germans would react after the Allies took over Germany. Neither the Danish or the Norwegians had enough forces to fight off the Germans and they also feared Soviet attack. Therefore, the Danes and the Norwegians thought the best solution would be Swedish military intervention. However, Sweden refused to break its neutrality despite its cultural connection to the North. With that said though, Sweden attempted to aid the North in other ways. The Swedes took several steps to help Norway and Denmark without direct military involvement. For example, at the end of the war, Sweden cooperated with President Eisenhower of the United States and allowed for Allied troops to pass through Swedish territory if the Germans in Norway fought back.<sup>23</sup>

This is further discussed in the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents, where leaders were unsure whether aiding their Nordic brothers was more important than breaching their neutrality. A specific example was when the Nazis closed the University of Oslo in 1943, which caused significant negative reactions among the Scandinavian population. The reason why the Nazis

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<sup>23</sup> For more information see: Nissen, *Scandinavia during the Second World War*, 309-311.

closed the University was due to the Nasjonal Samling party's failure to implement the Nazification program within the school. After the University was closed, several students and professors were sent to concentration camps. This made the Swedes nervous and concerned.<sup>24</sup> In a speech by the Foreign Policy Minister Guenther, on December 1 1943, he claimed, "The Swedish Government has, with the utmost care, taken note of the existing measures against students and faculty at the University of Oslo. It cannot but earnestly solicit, that these measures must be adjusted...In the ongoing Swedish-German relations, the Swedes turn to the Germans to accommodate Sweden's wishes."<sup>25</sup>

Sweden's new relationship with the rest of Scandinavia proved an important development in Sweden's neutrality policies. Swedish neutrality policies now encapsulated a larger community, including the Nordic Region and other struggling countries in Europe, such as Hungary. The word neutrality took on a new meaning, one that associated itself with Swedish national values and also the protection of other people's rights. Whether this new meaning of neutrality was sparked by a new sense of morality or a sense of regret for not helping sooner is heavily debated among scholars.<sup>26</sup>

### **Swedish Humanitarian Aid**

Although Sweden refused to get involved militarily, even in their own neighborhood, they were willing to provide humanitarian aid. While Swedish national values had dominated the meaning of neutrality throughout the majority of the war, neutrality now largely meant promoting the human rights of others as well.

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<sup>24</sup> "Nazi's closed down UiO in 1943," University of Oslo, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.uio.no/english/about/facts/how-uio-changed-norway/nazis-closed.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Translated from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Svensk Utrikespolitik under andra Vaerldskriget*, 1955, pp. 557.

<sup>26</sup> See more information on morality in Gilmour, *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*



A key example of Swedish humanitarian aid at the time was in Hungary. A key player in this Hungarian mission was Raoul Wallenberg, who is now a Swedish national hero. Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat from a noble Swedish family, is considered one of the many heroes of the Holocaust. In 1944, the international community finally realized the horrors of the Jewish situation in Germany and its occupied territories. With the creation of the War Refugee Board (WRB) created by Franklin D. Roosevelt, the international community hoped to save the remaining Jews in occupied Europe. The WRB turned to Sweden, as it was neutral and it had no political objections, for help and Raoul Wallenberg was sent to help the Jews in Budapest in July 1944. The main goal of this initiative was to give the Jews provisional Swedish passports. The “svenskhusen” or “Swedish houses” the Jews temporarily escaped to, were set up in the countryside and declared neutral territory in Hungary. Meanwhile, Wallenberg attempted to negotiate the Jewish situation with Hungarian officials. Through this long and dangerous process, Wallenberg managed to save thousands of Jews about to be transported into concentration camps by often making up false information about their identities. Obviously the Nazis were extremely resistant to Wallenberg’s efforts and he was referred to as “judehunden” or the “Jew Dog” by Eichmann, a German Nazi who was one of the main organizers of the Holocaust. Eichmann attempted to resist Wallenberg’s movement by exterminating the remaining 60,000 Jews in the Budapest ghetto.<sup>27</sup> Wallenberg was eventually captured by the Soviets and put into prison, which became a national Swedish scandal. The disappearance of Raoul Wallenberg is discussed further in later foreign policy documents throughout the twentieth century.

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<sup>27</sup> Forum för Levande Historia, Levande Historia, <http://www.levandehistoria.se/search/tidlinjen> (April 30, 2014)

More evidence of such humanitarian aid became evident in the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents of World War Two towards the very end. On June 30, 1944, King Gustav was sent to the Hungarian Regent Horthy following the appeal concerning the treatment of Hungarian Jews. In his speech, he claimed,

“After obtaining knowledge of the extraordinarily harsh methods that the government resorted to against the Jewish population in Hungary, I allow myself to turn personally to you, Your Highness to in the name of humanity beseech you to take action to save them, who still remain afraid of these unhappy people. This appeal has been prompted by my old feelings of friendship with Your country and my sincere concern for Hungary's reputation in the community of nations.”<sup>28</sup>

Although this is the only mention of the Hungarian case in the entirety of these Swedish Foreign Policy Documents, it is an important development because it shows a step forward in Swedish policies and although it does not show direct involvement, it did show Sweden's attempt at humanitarian aid.

Overall, the meaning of the word neutrality throughout World War Two changed over the course of seven years. While the Swedes neutrality policies continued to emphasize the importance of Swedish national values, even at the end of the war, they also emphasized the importance of other people's rights, in particular the Hungarians. At the very end of the Foreign Policy Documents of the Second World War, the Foreign Policy Minister of the time, Christian Guenther, underlined the benefits of Sweden's neutrality policy, especially in relation to the Swedish people. He claimed, “It is not impossible that we will soon enough be invited to join a new League of Nations. The Swedish people harbor a dislike, yes an abhorrence of war, which could not be greater, if we helped in the past world wars. In no other country would one have greater satisfaction to end a war between the earths powers, and to prevent the emergence of new

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<sup>28</sup> Translated from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Svensk Utrikespolitik under andra Vaerldskriget*, 1955, pp. 319.

war and secure the freedom of nations.”<sup>29</sup> With this statement, the foreign minister claims that not only did the Swedish neutrality benefit the Swedish people, but also may have benefited the rest of the world by promoting peace and stability. While summing up the meaning of Swedish neutrality during the war, this statement also provides justification for Swedish non-involvement, a way out of criticism from those countries who believed Sweden could have contributed positively in more ways than one. Furthermore, the end of the war set the tone for the Cold War, where Swedish neutrality came to be defined as international cooperation in the form of humanitarian aid.

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<sup>29</sup> Translated from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Svensk Utrikespolitik under andra Vaerldskriget*, 1955, pp. 581.

## Chapter Two: The Meaning of Swedish Neutrality during the Cold War

During the Cold War, Sweden was put in a difficult position because of its location between the East and the West and its close proximity to the Russian, Communist border. Therefore, Sweden made sure to continue building up its defenses, in order to deter other countries from invading Swedish territory. However, despite its strong efforts to protect its national values, Sweden's foreign policy took a new turn towards the end of World War Two and officially during the Cold War. Not only did Sweden's official foreign policy change from that of a neutral country to that of "non-aligned during peace," their cooperation with the rest of the world improved drastically. This officially occurred after the creation of the Scandinavian Defence Union (SDU), based on "common neutrality" in the Nordic Region, failed.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Swedish neutrality took on an entirely new meaning during the Cold War.

Humanitarian efforts during the Cold War showed the international community that Sweden had to make military and personal sacrifices in order to aid those in need even without its direct military involvement in the war. Unlike World War Two, the Cold War took on a different tone in Swedish politics and words like "International Assistance Activities, The European Council, and The United Nations," became common in the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents during this time. These organizations were particularly significant because they all had one thing in common: international cooperation. During most of the Second World War, Sweden pursued a strict neutral policy, and although this neutral policy was broken more than once, they related their actions back to the protection of the Swedish people and their Swedish values. During the majority of World War Two, the word neutrality in Sweden was very much connected to Swedish national values and the people of Sweden. Therefore, neutrality in Sweden during the

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<sup>30</sup> Juhana Aunelmo, *Britain, Sweden and the Cold War, 1945-1954* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), xvii.

Cold War meant something different than it did during World War Two, and the meaning of neutrality was more connected to international cooperation rather than only the protection of the Swedish population and Swedish national values. In fact, Swedish values embraced the need to protect others. Whether this new form of neutrality was one of national security and protection or one of goodness remains debatable. In this chapter, I will discuss how the meaning of the word neutrality changed throughout the years of 1945-1990, the period of the Cold War, and what factors played a key role in this change

### **The Meaning of the Word Neutrality During the Cold War**

First of all, it is important to note that the Swedish Foreign Policy Department took a different international relations stance during the Cold War. Specifically, Sweden's policy changed from "strict neutrality" to "alliansfrihet i fred syftande till neutralitet i krig" or "non-alignment during peace to neutrality during war."<sup>31</sup> This marked a very important change in Swedish foreign policy because it gave Swedish foreign policy a new tone, one of good will rather than one of self-interest, and especially one of ambiguity. The phrase "non-aligned during peace but neutral during war," is not only ambiguous, but it also clouded Sweden's intentions, perhaps purposefully so during the Cold War.

The term "non-alignment" is an interesting term, one that gave Sweden more flexibility in terms of foreign policy. The word is very important when we consider Sweden's role during the Cold War because although non-alignment implies no alliances, it did not prohibit the Swedes from taking a particular side or taking a moral stance. For example, this is evident in the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents of 1950-1955, in a speech by the Swedish Foreign Policy Department where they declared,

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<sup>31</sup> Auneslumoa, *Britain, Sweden and the Cold War, 1945-1954*, xvii.

“The picture of Sweden’s foreign policy would be incomplete if I did not add that we are a democracy which abhors dictatorship whether in the guise of Nazism or Communism. In other words, we are conscious of our affinity to Western Democracy. Part of the picture, too, is that we believe that freedom is worth sacrifices.”<sup>32</sup>

Such a statement was not made during World War Two, although the Swedes clearly aligned with different sides throughout the war. Instead during the Second World War, Swedish foreign policy was aimed at proving neutrality and protecting Swedish national values. During the Cold War, rather than using the people as their primary focus for their neutrality policies, Swedish foreign policy focused on international cooperation, which gave the word neutrality an entirely new meaning. There are two key words in this statement including “democracy” and “freedom,” two words that came to define Swedish neutrality at this time. It is also evident in this statement that Sweden decided to side with the US despite its claim to non-alignment.

Since Swedish neutrality took on a new meaning during the Cold War, one that offered Swedish foreign policy with new opportunities and more openness and flexibility, and one that was often characterized by “freedom” and democracy,” not only in Sweden, but also abroad, Sweden was more able to assert its authority in the international field. Sweden’s foreign policy aimed at protecting international values rather than only national ones, as it had done during World War Two. For example, Sweden claimed the goal of its non-alignment policies was to prevent further conflict. In a statement to the Riksdag on Foreign Policy on March 22, 1950, Sweden claimed,

“We do not wish to pursue a foreign policy that might help to make our corner of the world a centre of unrest and a cause of friction between East and West....If Sweden were to join a military Great-Power bloc, this would not appreciably affect either the general policy of the leading States or the balance of power between them. Nor do we imagine that we are able to play

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<sup>32</sup> *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 39. Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 319.

a part in bridging the gap that exists between the groups of the Great Powers.”<sup>33</sup>

In another statement made in an interview given to “Le Monde” by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1951, he declared,

“Our attitude has been further influenced by the belief that a re-orientation of our traditional policy would increase the number of points of friction between West and East. If Sweden joined the Atlantic Pact her adherence might give rise to the idea that the United States had advanced their position in our part of the world to the very frontiers of the Soviet Union. In our view, the fact that Sweden-like Switzerland-represents a neutral zone in Europe cannot but further the general cause of peace, as well as the interests of the nation.”<sup>34</sup>

Both of these statements make it clear that Sweden wanted no part in any military alliance, at least not openly. Not only that, but these statements also claim that by not participating in military alliances, the Swedes are in fact aiding the world in achieving peace. Therefore, Sweden’s role in achieving peace and “democracy” in the world became an important underlying meaning of neutrality in the second half of the twentieth century.

### **Sweden’s Involvement with NATO**

As suggested in all of the Foreign Policy statements, Sweden made an active effort to avoid joining any treaties or groups such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). In other words, Sweden did not wish to pursue any type of “military alliance.” NATO, was an organization that was formed in 1949 by the United States and 11 other Western nations in order to prevent Communism from spreading. The members of NATO are “committed to collective self defense, initially with the USSR in mind.”<sup>35</sup> NATO pursued an “open door policy” which encouraged anyone to join: “The door to NATO membership remains fully open to all European democracies which share the values of our Alliance, which are willing and able to assume the

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<sup>33</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 51.

<sup>35</sup> *A Dictionary of Human Geography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

responsibilities and obligations of membership, and whose inclusion can contribute to common security and stability.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite its claims, Sweden was so strategically placed (between the East and the West) that complete non-involvement was not entirely possible.<sup>37</sup> Officially, Sweden chose not to formally align with NATO, unlike some of its other Nordic counterparts, however, since “non-alignment,” was not official, Sweden made secret agreements instead that would help them stay out of war in the long-run and be backed by the right powers. Despite Swedish claims to remain out of NATO, Sweden’s policies proposed several contradictions. In fact, Sweden believed that aligning itself with NATO would in fact benefit Sweden because “the West would provide military help in case neutrality failed and Sweden was attacked by the Soviet Union.” Secondly, in the 1950s, Sweden undertook several measures to secure its standing with several NATO Allies, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, and Denmark.<sup>38</sup> Sweden and NATO’s secret relationship was often discussed and Sweden was often jokingly known as NATO’s “17<sup>th</sup> member,” at a time when NATO only had 16 members total.<sup>39</sup>

One specific example of Swedish involvement with NATO, in the mid 1950s, was a radio program known as Försvarets fasta radiolänknät (FFRL) or Defense Radio was built in order for the Swedish military could communicate with NATO and the Norwegian and Danish governments directly.<sup>40</sup> Also, a statement was released that claimed, “Cooperation with Sweden was desired by the West largely because Sweden was in an excellent geographic position to

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<sup>36</sup> Leo G. Michel, “Finland, Sweden, and NATO: From “Virtual” to Formal Allies? (paper presented at the Strategic Forum at the National Defense University, Washington DC, February 2011)

<sup>37</sup> Petersson, Magnus. "The Scandinavian Triangle: Danish-Norwegian-Swedish Military Intelligence Cooperation and Swedish Security Policy during the First Part of the Cold War." *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2006), 607-32.

<sup>38</sup> Michel, “Finland, Sweden, and NATO: From “Virtual” to Formal Allies?”

<sup>39</sup> Dahl, “Sweden: Once a Moral Superpower, Always a Moral Superpower?,” 895-908.

<sup>40</sup> Sveriges hemliga NATO-foerberedelser, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.kalla-kriget.se/sverige/gemensamt/hemligt/nato-foerberedelser.php>.



gather certain types of intelligence from the Western Soviet Union.”<sup>41</sup> All in all, Swedish involvement with NATO was kept quiet.

### **Sweden’s Involvement with the United Nations (UN)**

On the other hand, Sweden had more of a direct and less secretive involvement with the United Nations, which was formed right after World War Two. Perhaps the main reason for more open involvement with the United Nations was the fact that it was not a military organization. It was through its discussions about and with the UN in which Sweden demonstrated its new foreign policy of international cooperation rather than domestic seclusion. The United Nations was a good example of how neutrality came to have a new meaning. However, ironically Sweden decided to side with the country that they thought was the most effective, which coincidentally happened to be the United States (whom they had also allied with secretly in NATO). Although Sweden claimed that the United Nations seemed ineffective, in a Statement to the Riksdag on Foreign Policy on March 22, 1950, Sweden also stressed the importance of the United Nations as a peaceful force.

“Sweden, on the other hand, considered it her duty to take part in the work of creating an international organization. We wish-in the other words of the peace manifesto of the Scandinavian Labor Movement- to collaborate in creating a league of nations that shall be truly universal and become a real instrument for peace capable of settling all international disputes. We wish to help to bring it about that all Governments shall respect the decisions of the United Nations.”<sup>42</sup>

By releasing this statement, Sweden placed its faith in an international organization to benefit countries other than its own, a selfless act in comparison to their actions during World War Two. Overall, Swedish “non-alignment,” which was the new neutrality at this time, was very much defined by international cooperation, rather than neutrality itself, especially in relation

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<sup>41</sup> Michel, “Finland, Sweden, and NATO: From “Virtual” to Formal Allies?”

<sup>42</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 39.

to organizations like the United Nations which allowed the Swedes to be actively involved in humanitarian aid, without engaging in any direct military attacks.

### **Sweden and the Nordic Region**

Although Sweden actively participated in international cooperation, Sweden refused to cooperate with its closest neighbors, seeing it as a threat to their neutrality policies.

“Considering that Denmark and Norway have joined the Atlantic Pact, military technical cooperation with them along these lines would be tantamount to our becoming indirectly engaged in that wider community which the Atlantic Pact has created. Consequently the Swedish Government are of the opinion that technical cooperation of this kind would be irreconcilable with the policy approved by the Government and Riksdag.<sup>43</sup>

This statement implies that although Sweden became more flexible in its neutrality policies, it would not join any military alliances under any circumstances. In a Statement by the Riksdag on Foreign Policy on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1950, the Swedish Government claimed,

“The principles that govern our own foreign policy are the same now as they have been ever since the end of the World War. Sweden is taking an active part to the best of her ability in what is being done in the field of international cooperation, both in the United Nations and in the various international organizations formed for specific purposes....Our foreign policy aims primarily at serving our country’s interests in peace-time. It is not based on the assumption that war is imminent. The idea of a coming world war cannot be allowed to dominate our minds to such an extent as to make us neglect the interests that present themselves in peace-time.<sup>44</sup>

While there are many other examples of how Swedish neutrality policies changed during this time period, the inability to cooperate with the rest of the Nordic Region was not one of them.

### **Swedish Neutrality and the Korean Question**

An example of Swedish international involvement and one of the most prominent problems that comes up several times in these documents is the so-called “Korean Question” and Sweden’s involvement with it. The Korean Question emerged in 1950 after the North Korean Communist troops launched an attack against South Korea. The United Nations Security Council

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<sup>43</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 14.

met and asked the North Koreans to remove their troops unsuccessfully and therefore the Security Council decided to oppose the North Korean aggression. As a result, this was seen as a breach of the peace. Sweden was not happy with the UN's decision. In a speech by the Prime Minister at Oestersund and Japan on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July in 1950, he claimed "What has happened has undoubtedly strengthened the conviction of the Swedish people that it is the right policy for us to endeavor as far as our resources permit to build up a defence for the independence of Sweden and for the freedom of her citizens."<sup>45</sup> Although Sweden did not want to provide military forces, they were debating providing other resources related to humanitarian aid. As a result, the Swedish government began preparing to send a field hospital to South Korea, manned by Swedish personnel.<sup>46</sup> Sweden agreed that its involvement in the Korean Question was one of "moral support," a new attitude that emerged in this era.<sup>47</sup>

The involvement of Sweden in the Korean Question is vital in understanding the change of the meaning of neutrality, a change that the Swedish Government itself acknowledged. During World War Two, efforts to help other countries provided too great of a threat to even consider until the very end. This was evident in Sweden's negotiations with the other Scandinavian countries at the time, whom they chose not to help even though they considered them "brothers." Even the Swedish government itself acknowledges that certain changes occurred in terms of foreign policy, especially in relation to the Korean Question. This is evident in a speech in Stockholm by the Prime Minister on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, 1951,

"The concern we have felt during the last few weeks has been due to the sharpness of tone with which the Korean crisis has been debated. This seems to have made some

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<sup>45</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 90.

<sup>46</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 42.

<sup>47</sup> Ake Sandler, "Sweden's Postwar Diplomacy: Some Problems, Views, and Issues," The Western Political Quarterly, 13 (December 1960), 924-933.

people believe that unanimity on the conduct of our foreign policy has come to an end.”<sup>48</sup>

### **Swedish Neutrality and the Vietnam War**

In 1968, Olof Palme, the Swedish Prime Minister participated in an anti-American demonstration next to the North Vietnamese. Palme also released a statement comparing the US in Vietnam to the German Nazis.<sup>49</sup> On Christmas Eve in 1972, Olof Palme gave a speech regarding the bombing in Hanoi, Vietnam. He claimed:

“One should call things by their right names. And what is happening today in Vietnam, it is a form of torture. There can be no military motives for the bombing of this magnitude. Military spokesmen in Saigon have said there is no charge from the north the Vietnamese side. It cannot reasonably be due to some obstinacy from the Vietnamese side of the negotiating table. All commentators agree that the main opposition to the October agreement in Paris has been given by the President Thieu. What you do now is only to torment people. Plague a nation to humiliate it, force it into submission in the language of force. And therefore bombing an atrocious amount, and of this we have many examples in modern history. And they are generally associated with a name. Guernica, Oradour, Babi Yar, Katyn, Lidice, Sharpeville, Treblinka. These are places where violence has triumphed....Now a new name has joined the line, Hanoi Christmas in 1972.”<sup>50</sup>

Olof Palme’s evident disagreement with the United States policies in Vietnam is an evident act of Sweden’s new neutrality policies, whose primary aim was to provide humanitarian aid to those people in need. The Vietnam War and the Korean War are two examples of where the Swedes were in disagreement with others responses in handling violent situations, and therefore they took an evident stance against it. This proves that Sweden’s new neutrality was more flexible because it showed active involvement in trying to improve a situation they found hateful. This was not so evident in World War Two, where Sweden was a happy bystander and even aided the Germans in achieving their goals.

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<sup>48</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 100.

<sup>49</sup> Dahl, “Sweden: Once a Moral Superpower, Always a Moral Superpower?,” 895-908.

<sup>50</sup> Translated from <http://www.svenskatal.se/19721223-olof-palme-jultal-1972-om-bombningen-av-hanoi/>

## Neutrality in 1955

The year of 1955 was especially important in the Documents of Swedish Foreign Policy because this year marked the ten-year anniversary of the end of the Second World War. While international problems, especially in relation to the United Nations, were constantly discussed, there was no mention of Swedish “non-alignment” policies (in other words, there was no mention regarding neutrality policies). This is an important foreign policy development because it once again demonstrates the change of the meaning of Swedish neutrality or non-alignment. It demonstrates that Sweden’s neutrality policy was no longer as important as world peace. Instead these chapters focus on international problems, mostly in relation to the United Nations and the Soviet Union. Sweden was concerned and claimed that most of the United Nations tactics have been unsuccessful. In a speech by Ulla Lindstroem, the Minister of State, in the Economic Committee of the UN General Assembly, she claimed,

“To judge from the atmosphere in my own country, public opinion is now becoming mature to the idea, or rather the necessity of really serious efforts to bridge the economic gaps between the peoples of the world. For the Technical Assistance on a bilateral basis in which Sweden is engaged, a voluntary nation-wide appeal in the spring of this year has resulted in substantial contributions from all groups of society, and, I am glad to say so, from both rich and poor. The interest and concern among the Swedes for the problems of the less advanced countries is continuously increasing and the feelings of solidarity have deepened.”<sup>51</sup>

The key word in this speech is “solidarity,” which is a key word that helped define Swedish non-alignment or neutrality at the time. This idea of solidarity and unity came to define Sweden’s longing to pursue international cooperation under the title of “non-alignment during peace.”

### Swedish Relations with the Soviet Union

Meanwhile, Sweden’s relationship with Russia also improved, although the Swedes were very clearly still worried about Russian intentions. In a telegram from the Chairmen of the Soviet

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<sup>51</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 86.

Union and the Soviet Nationalities, they claimed, “The Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, which desires to contribute to the further development of good relations between the people of the Soviet Union and the people of Sweden, has the honour to invite a delegation from the Swedish Riksdag to visit the Soviet Union.”<sup>52</sup> This is an important development because the Soviet Union was considered Sweden’s biggest enemy.

Overall, Sweden’s more active role in the international environment, including its involvement in great conflicts like the Korean War, its participation in organizations like the United Nations and the European Council (and its secretive participation in NATO), provided Sweden’s neutrality or non-alignment policy with a whole new meaning. The term “non-aligned during peace” while “neutral at war” gave Sweden more flexibility in its policies, and although they refused to get involved in any endeavor militarily, they supported several international initiatives as best they could. Therefore, the word neutrality embodied international cooperation, democracy, unity, and solidarity, and most importantly, freedom of all peoples. It also gave their neutrality a moral tone, one that did not exist for most of World War Two. Whether this new sense of Swedish neutrality was sparked by the goodness in their hearts or just the best way to defend their country is debatable. Overall, Sweden’s new sense of solidarity embodied the definition of non-alignment and neutrality, at a time when Sweden was also not necessarily non-aligned.

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<sup>52</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Swedish Foreign Policy Documents 1950-1955*, 1957, pp. 118.

### Chapter Three: Swedish Neutrality during the 1990s

The destruction of the Berlin Wall in the early 1990s presented Europe with new domestic and foreign challenges. The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of domestic peace and therefore governments were searching for new ways to cooperate with their neighbors.<sup>53</sup> Sweden, which had often been forced to choose a side whether they wanted to or not, was freed from such unwanted collaboration. Open cooperation was now the new, most sought for type of governance. According to an opening speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sten Andersson, in the parliamentary debate on foreign affairs on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1991, “In the autumn of last year, all the CSCE states signed the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, confirming that, after so many centuries of war and mistrust, we, the peoples of Europe, were finally on the threshold of a new era which was to be characterized by peace, freedom and reconciliation between peoples.”<sup>54</sup>

The 1990s were characterized by peace, freedom, and cooperation throughout Europe, and Sweden was happy to serve as a vessel in the process. There were several organizations that Sweden wanted to participate in, in order to ensure domestic cooperation. Sweden was especially eager to join the European Community (often referred to as the EC), which is now the European Union, in order to promote European economic integration. Sweden also continued to play an active role in the United Nations throughout this time period. As well as Sweden’s new desire to actively participate in these organizations, Sweden also continued to pursue several humanitarian efforts.

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<sup>53</sup> Alexander B. Murphy, “The Emerging Europe of the 1990s,” *Geographical Review*, 81 (1991): 1-17.

<sup>54</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991*. (Stockholm.: Norstedts Tryckeri AB, 1992), 19.

Overall, the meaning of the word neutrality exemplified all of Sweden's new political and social initiatives both domestically and internationally. The word neutrality became less important, as Sweden's role as an international and domestic actor expanded and therefore, the word itself took on a new meaning once again during this time period. Sweden's primary goal was to ensure the economic and political progression of the world; therefore, Swedish neutrality in our modern day and age has little significance, instead neutrality is more connected to open international and domestic cooperation rather than neutrality policies themselves. This chapter will discuss the new political developments in the 1990s, which influenced the new meaning of Sweden neutrality during this time period, and what the word neutrality came to mean in this decade.

### **The Meaning of Swedish Neutrality in the 1990s**

There were several factors that encouraged new foreign policy changes at this time. Political factors, as well as the new idea of international and domestic cooperation, contributed to the change of the meaning of the word neutrality in Swedish foreign policy. This new cooperation is evident in the emphasis on the word "uniting" in the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents. In a speech by Sten Andersson on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, he claimed,

"The problems and difficulties we are now facing make it increasingly important that we latch on to what unites us rather than what divides us. This applies to our commitment to assist our Baltic neighbors and to our ambitions to become a full member of the European Community. It applies to our action in the Gulf crisis and to our efforts to strengthen the United Nations. And, we must never forget, it applies to our solidarity with the Third World."<sup>55</sup>

Just like during the Cold War, the world still faced several issues that divided it, but instead of taking sides, the Swedes (as well as many others) encouraged unity rather than division. This

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<sup>55</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 20.



statement clearly shows how Swedish neutrality took on the meaning of “unity,” and therefore put an emphasis on domestic economic cooperation and integration.

In previous years, Sweden was not openly involved in European domestic issues because they saw it as a potential threat to their neutrality. Sweden had also been very careful not to choose between the United States and the Soviet Union, at least not openly or permanently. The 1990s drastically changed this pattern. In another speech by Sten Andersson, he claimed,

“A new security order, based on common security, has replaced the fragile security which rested on the armaments of the military pacts and on the threat of mass destruction. The countries of Europe are cooperating with each other in various organizations and different regions to solve common problems and, together, to create security and prosperity for the citizens.”<sup>56</sup>

To further add to this statement, the most telling summary of the new meaning of Swedish neutrality is summed up in three words by Sten Andersson, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, he claimed, “three key words to denote Sweden’s foreign policy: security, solidarity, and consensus.”<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Sweden’s neutrality embodied these three words, actively playing a larger role in the domestic and international fields surrounding them, while also sticking to their national values.

Perhaps the most important organization that played a role in Sweden’s new desire for economic and political cooperation is the European Community, which is now known as the European Union. The European Community was to be “the first task is to take Sweden into full European cooperation by means of negotiations.”<sup>58</sup> The key word tying this speech to Sweden’s new definition of neutrality, is “cooperation.” Sweden officially joined the European Community, now known as the European Union (EU), in 1995. The European Union, created

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<sup>56</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 20.

<sup>58</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 30.

right after World War Two, is an economic and political partnership between 28 European countries. Its first goal was economic integration, which resulted in the creation of a single market. Now, the European Union also focuses on political issues such as development aid and the environment.<sup>59</sup>

Swedish neutrality or “non-alignment” also took on a new meaning of Swedish benevolence, one that not only benefited the Swedish people, but also benefited people from foreign countries. Swedish foreign policy largely consisted of protecting human rights, something which began during the Cold War. This is especially evident in several conflicts in the 1990s era in which Sweden actively took a stance in the international world. For example, Africa became an important location for Swedish aid because of the intense poverty and armed conflicts. “Africa’s problems call for long-term Swedish development cooperation. Sweden’s aid policy will continue to give priority to the poorest nations.”<sup>60</sup>

This new idea of neutrality and openness in foreign policy meant that Sweden no longer needed to hide its opinions because it was no longer in danger of being attacked by a larger power. During World War Two and the Cold War, Sweden was very adamant about keeping its opinions quiet due to the persistent threat of attack from a larger, more powerful country. For example, during World War Two, Sweden had a secret campaign to silence the Swedish local population to protect Swedish neutrality. This campaign was known as the “Swedish Tiger” campaign, inspired by the expression “Loose lips sink ships.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, it was not open about its opinions about Hitler’s dictatorship, and when it was, it was often in support of his policies

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<sup>59</sup> “Sweden’s road to EU membership,” Government Offices of Sweden, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.government.se/sb/d/3470/a/20685>

<sup>60</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Jenny Leonardz. “Strid om en ‘Svensk Tiger.’” 6 October 2005. SvD. 26 November 2014 [http://www.svd.se/kultur/strid-om-en-svensk-tiger\\_464111.svd](http://www.svd.se/kultur/strid-om-en-svensk-tiger_464111.svd)

because it benefited their foreign policy and their longing to stay as neutral as long as possible. The Swedish Foreign Policy Documents explain this new phenomenon. Ingvar Carlsson, the Swedish Prime Minister of the time, claimed, “Furthermore, the Swedish policy of neutrality does not mean any kind of ideological neutrality. Sweden is not, and never has been, neutral between democracy and dictatorship, between international law and the crude language of force, between human rights and oppression.”<sup>62</sup> Although this statement is not entirely true, it does represent Sweden’s new definition of neutrality, the word taking on a meaning of ideological goodness. Sweden, while still pursuing neutrality or “non-participation in alliances with peace with the aim of neutrality during war,” no longer had to protect itself from a larger power, and therefore they could more openly pursue their own political goals whether they were domestic or foreign. Although still adamant about their right to neutrality, Sweden now honestly proclaimed that neutrality did not mean ideological ignorance.

### **Swedish International and Domestic Cooperation**

The new meaning of the word neutrality was also evident in several humanitarian efforts Sweden participated in during this time, including promoting the self-determination of the Baltic States and its non-military involvement in the Gulf War. Another act of humanitarian aid was Sweden’s new cooperation with its Nordic neighbors, a task that had been overlooked throughout the past several years. According to the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents, “Sweden’s national security, the freedom of our people and our independence depend to a large extent on our loyalty to the world community, on our adherence to international law and on the consistent pursuit of our policy of neutrality.”<sup>63</sup> During World War Two, the idea of neutrality was largely based on the protection of the Swedish people and during the Cold War, international cooperation was the

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<sup>62</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 30.

prime target of neutrality. The 1990s presented a period of time when Sweden could do both, and promoting domestic and international cooperation as their way of doing so.

### **Conflicts in the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania)**

The conflicts in the Baltic Region are an example of how Sweden's neutrality meant protecting those in need, for example the people without self-determination in the formerly owned Soviet Union Baltic Region. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are all examples of countries seeking independence in the early 1990s. The reason why achieving independence was so difficult is because everyone had a different perspective about what should happen once independence was granted. Not only did the political parties have differing views, but the general public seemed oddly indifferent. In Latvia and Estonia, Congress movements were founded to restore the pre-1940 government and citizenship to what it was before Soviet control. They had a strong desire to remove all the Russian speakers from their territories who had infiltrated their land during Soviet control. In Lithuania, on the other hand, attitudes towards the dictatorship in Smetona were divided Lithuanians were divided between creating closer relations with the West or breaking away from the norm and creating their own "Lithuanian way."<sup>64</sup> Overall, however, the Estonians, the Latvians, and the Lithuanians all had one goal: to break away from Soviet control and achieve self-determination.

The Swedes wanted to help the Baltic regions achieve this goal because Sweden was pursuing a new policy of foreign political and economic cooperation and aid. This new policy aimed to support the rise of democracy, expulsion of Communism in Europe, and the expansion of the European market economy. Sweden wanted to use its neutrality to help other people rather

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<sup>64</sup> Lieven, Anatol. *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Path to Independence*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 215.

than shying away from the rest of the world. This is evident in a speech by Sten Andersson, in the parliamentary debate on foreign affairs on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February. Andersson claimed:

“Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have clearly expressed their desire for independence in a democratic manner. We support this wholeheartedly, and we demand that serious negotiations without threats and coercion should be initiated in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act....As neighbors of the Baltic Republics, with ties which go back many centuries, we in Sweden have special obligations to these republics. Many of our people have been involved in meeting these obligations through cooperation and different kinds of support. We are united in this task. Responsibility rests in the first instance with us, and our Nordic neighbours, to help the Baltic republics join the European cooperation. The Swedish Government has commenced this work by practical cooperation, by its presence in the Baltic republics and by support to facilitate Baltic contacts with the rest of the world.”<sup>65</sup>

This statement evidently supports the new meaning of Swedish neutrality. However, the statement is also hypocritical. During the Cold War, Sweden’s view on such foreign aid would have been entirely different because Sweden feared the wrath of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Sweden would not have dared aid the Baltic region in fear of Soviet attack. As a result, this statement shows an important shift in Swedish foreign policy, and more specifically the change of the meaning of the word neutrality.

### **Swedish Involvement in the Gulf War**

A second example of Swedish foreign humanitarian aid is the Gulf War. The Gulf War, which started on January 17<sup>th</sup> in 1991, and its primary goal was to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. Eventually, Iraq surrendered announcing that it would leave Kuwait. The UN security council declared that Iraq must destroy all of its biological and chemical weapons, although Iraq refused to comply.<sup>66</sup> Sweden played an active role in attempting to end the Gulf War mainly because they believed that this international crisis affected Europe’s security as well. Sweden,

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<sup>65</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>66</sup> The gulf war. (2006, Nov 17). *Current Events*, 106, 2. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/196424640?accountid=10226>

while actively pursuing anti-nuclear weapon policies, also openly discussed its concern about the Gulf War. In a speech by Steen Anderon, the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time, he declares:

“Very close to Europe, a devastating war is raging, which in all its horror is considered necessary to liberate a violated people from a ruthless aggressor-an aggressor who did not let himself be moved by the appeals of the world community. The Gulf War is a dramatic reminder that we Europeans cannot build our prosperity and freedom in isolation, behind walls and ramparts. We must always have a global dimension to our policies and we must stand up for peace, democracy and international law just as forcefully outside Europe. There is no security in a world where the law of the jungle prevails and where might is right.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Sweden and the Soviet Union**

Sweden’s new meaning of neutrality also meant the strong support of the European free market economy and democracy. Therefore, the Soviet Union still posed a threat to these new Swedish values. Sten Andersson expresses his concern in a speech on February 20<sup>th</sup> to the parliamentary debate on foreign affairs.

“Mr. Speaker, there is considerable uncertainty about developments in the Soviet Union. Democracy has made significant progress, but, at the same time, we are seeing more and more disquieting signs that the democratization process may be cut short. Nor has any method been found to even begin to overcome the ever deepening economic crisis. The Unions continued existence has emerged as the most important issue.”<sup>68</sup>

The fear of communism was an underlying factor in Sweden’s mistrust in the Soviet Union. In a speech by Alf Svensson on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October in the parliamentary general policy debate, he claims,

“After the European revolution of 1989 and 1990, I believe we are all able to observe, around Europe and also in our own country, an ardent desire or at any rate quite a strong inclination to get as far away as possible from extreme communism. The tendency now, not uncommonly, is to adopt an extreme form of capitalism.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 20.

Overall, Sweden's new policy of neutrality was largely influenced by capitalist policies, even though Sweden was run by the Social Democrats at the time. Capitalism was the desired form of economy in the rest of Europe, and since Swedish neutrality was largely connected to domestic and international cooperation, this meant that they were also pursuing capitalism as a main form of economy.

### **Sweden and the Nordic Region**

Throughout World War Two and the Cold War, Sweden hesitated when it came to cooperation with its Nordic neighbors. These countries include Iceland, Denmark, Norway, and Finland. This was one of the many things that changed in the 1990s. In a statement by Mr. Ingvar Carlsson, the Swedish Prime Minister at the time, he claimed, "Throughout the post-war period, the situation in the Nordic area has been characterized by a high degree of stability and peaceful development. Sweden's position outside alliances and our strong defence have contributed substantially to this Nordic stability."<sup>70</sup> A main reason for cooperation with the Nordic Region was cultural and historical. Cooperating with the Nordic Region meant further economic and political development, something which Sweden was striving for at the time. At this time, Sweden was facing economic decline and they believed that cooperating with the Nordic region would in fact help their position.<sup>71</sup>

### **Neutrality and Swedish National Values**

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<sup>70</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 26.

<sup>71</sup> Bailes, Alyson J. K. *The Nordic Countries and the European Security and Defence Policy*. (Sweden: SIPRI ;, 2006).

Not only did the word neutrality take on a new meaning during this time period, but the Swedish government officials emphasized that they had full control over how their neutrality would play out. Swedish neutrality in the 1990s was largely shaped by Sweden's control over its neutrality policies, which had not been the case in the past 60 years. "Non-participation in alliances is one of the instruments in our security policy, but it is not a goal in itself. It is not written into our constitution, nor is it laid down in any international treaty. We decide ourselves what is compatible with our policy of neutrality."<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, in a speech by Ingvar Calrsson, he claimed,

"Sweden's security policy is based on a firm and consistent policy of neutrality. For many years, we have found that this is the most appropriate means for achieving our objective of securing peace, freedom and independence of our country, our democratic social order, and the right to shape our future in accordance with our own values."<sup>73</sup>

During World War Two and the Cold War such an open-ended statement about Sweden's neutrality policies would not have been possible. The reason for this is because Sweden's political decisions were often influenced by the goals of the super powers. For example, during World War Two, Sweden was afraid Germany would attack them and therefore they originally took provided Germany with benefits that strayed from their neutral policies. During the Cold War, Sweden actively and secretly made alliances with NATO and the United States, while openly stating they were "alliance free." During the 1990s Sweden was officially freed from such obligations. Sweden's neutrality policies have often portrayed Sweden in a negative light due to their cowardly choice not to participate in any alliances, and even siding with the enemy in some instances. However, Sweden's slow integration into the international environment

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<sup>72</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 60.

<sup>73</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 25.



through foreign aid and humanitarianism allowed this image to be erased and replaced it of that of the hero.

In order to understand the importance of the word neutrality or “non-alignment” in relation to the Swedish people themselves during this time period, there are several passages we can look at from the Swedish Foreign Policy Documents. During the Cold War, Swedish neutrality was not emphasized as often as it was in the 1990s because Sweden’s position swayed and its neutral policies were often in danger due to the international climate of the time. However, the 1990s presented Sweden with the opportunity to return to its national values and the roots neutrality had during the Second World War, which was largely connected to the Swedish people. In a speech by Invar Carlsson, the Prime Minister, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June to the Parliament, he claims, “Sweden’s national security, the freedom of our people and our independence depend to a large extent on our loyalty to the world community, on our adherence to international law and on the consistent pursuit of our policy of neutrality.”<sup>74</sup> The strong emphasis on the “freedom of our people” is important because it emphasizes that neutrality has a positive impact on the Swedish citizens themselves.

Also, in terms of humanitarian aid, Swedish politicians found a way to frame humanitarian aid as a way to benefit the Swedish people. In a speech by “International solidarity is therefore not just a moral obligation. It is also in our national interest. To act and speak in a spirit of international solidarity is to accept our responsibility for Sweden in the world. This awareness must continue to determine Swedish foreign policy.” Interestingly enough, the word neutrality is not mentioned in this particular sentence.

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<sup>74</sup> Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1991, 1992*, pp. 25.

While Sweden pursued openness internationally, its new policy of neutrality also emphasized its domestic policy on foreigners, a new development of the time. “Sweden is an open country, characterized by openness and tolerance. Peoples from other cultures and with different philosophies of life must be able to live side by side in harmony. (35-36) This had not always been the case.

Overall, the 1990s shaped Swedish neutrality in ways like never before. It allowed for a meaning of the word that World War Two and the Cold War had not allowed for because Swedish foreign policies were often limited and restricted to what larger and more powerful countries wanted, including the United States and the Soviet Union. The 1990s, although not a time of international peace, was a time of international and domestic cooperation, openness about foreign policies, and overall benevolence for the Swedish government. While the Second World War and the Cold War had severely restricted Swedish foreign policy, the 1990s presented Sweden with a new era of openness and cooperation. Meanwhile, the word “freedom” underlines the importance of the freedom of not only the Swedish community, but also the rest of the international community.

## Conclusion

The Swedish foreign policy objectives of the 1990s remain largely in tact today and are a result of the many political, economic, and social changes throughout the twentieth century. Every year there is a foreign policy debate held in the Swedish Riksdag. This debate generally begins with an outline of Swedish foreign policy objectives. In the 2015 Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, the Swedish government officials outlined Sweden's foreign policy today. The last speech of the documents is a good summary of the newest Swedish foreign policy:

“The values that guide Swedish foreign policy still stand out as an uncommonly modern basis on which to organise a community. Cooperation with our neighbours, to guarantee peace and create common security. Solidarity that knows no borders, aimed at increasing equality and eradicating poverty. Gender equality and a feminist foreign policy, since human rights are also women's rights. Sustainable development, in light of the fact that last year the world was warmer than at any time since records began in 1880. These are the building blocks for a foreign and security policy to feed into a broader discussion in our country. A policy that is guided by the necessity of common security and the realisation that we share a common destiny. Where my destiny is your destiny, and the destiny of others is our own. The Government is determined that, in these unsettled times, Sweden will take global responsibility by being a strong voice in the world. For freedom, peace and human rights. For democracy, equality and solidarity.”<sup>75</sup>

Overall, this statement proves that although Sweden claims to be non-aligned or neutral, even today, it is no longer an important part of Swedish foreign policy, as it had been through the rest of the twentieth century. However, the values that drove Swedish neutrality in the past are still very much present. The phrase “For freedom, peace and human rights. For democracy, equality and solidarity,” all mention aspects of the Swedish neutrality policies of the twentieth century. World War Two emphasized “freedom,” and the Cold War and the 1990s encompassed a variety of these terms. Although the word neutrality itself may no longer have any significance,

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<sup>75</sup> Regeringskansliet, Government Offices of Sweden, *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs* (Stockholm, 2015).

the underlying meanings of the word neutrality, which defined the word for so many years, still do.

Throughout history, Sweden has generally been overlooked as unimportant and un-influential territory. However, this thesis proves that Sweden, in fact, played a larger role in world politics than most people are aware of. It also proves that despite Sweden's moral discrepancies, for example during World War Two, in the end, their good deeds outweigh their bad. Their dedication to unite Europe, both economically and politically, their attempt to solve world problems peacefully, and their constant patriotism and support of their own people, proves that Sweden is in fact an overlooked role model. Its neutrality throughout time has often been misguided, but in the end, their claim to neutrality was also misunderstood. For the word neutrality did not necessarily represent neutral values all the time, but in fact had a much greater meaning, one that is shown in Sweden's attempt to preserve national values, their attempt to provide humanitarian aid, and their attempt to help unite Europe.

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