Self-Images Among Swedish Peacekeeping Soldiers

An Analysis and Theoretical Discussion of Soldiers' National Self-Images in the Context of the Swedish Shift to an All-Volunteer Format

By Erik Hedlund

On July 1st 2010, Sweden abolished a system of conscription that had been in force for over a century, and moved away from the citizen-soldier idea to an all-volunteer force (AVF).[1] The main reason for giving up conscription was the new security situation in Europe after the Cold War, which led the Swedish military to focus more on participation in multinational (UN, NATO or EU) missions abroad.[2] Two consequences of this increased cooperation with coalition partner-nations in military operations ranging from classical peacekeeping to counterinsurgency and low-intensity combat are that the Swedish armed forces now have real military objectives and tasks, and need to become interoperable with other nations' armed forces.

The Swedish case is in some significant aspects quite different from most European countries and the US. Firstly, Sweden has had an extremely long history (almost 200 years) without any war,[3] meaning that external threats have often been perceived to be quite low.[4] Secondly, since 1905, Swedish foreign affairs and security policies have been premised on freedom from military alliances in peace and neutrality in war, which has made it possible for Sweden to stay away from any ongoing war without any binding military or political obligations to other countries.[5] This long period of peace, combined with over a century of conscription, has produced an armed force with a strong emphasis on peace, civilian self-images, values, attitudes and norms.[6] Thus there has not been any reason or potential for the Swedish armed forces to develop a significant warrior ethos and corresponding self-image. One of the strongest arguments of those opposed to giving up conscription was that

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[1] The new all-volunteer military system went into force on 1 July 2010. *Cf. Ett användbart försvar* [A functional defence] 2008/09, p.140 (http://www.regeringen.se, accessed on 20 September 2010).

[2] Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, Wednesday, 17 February 2010 (http://www.regeringen.se, accessed 20 September 2010) ; Prop. 2008/09, p.14, *Ett användbart försvar* [A functional defence] (http://www.regeringen.se, accessed on 9 September 2010). Haltiner (1998) concludes that being a member of defence alliances, being far from a direct military threat and participating frequently in international missions would facilitate the abolition of conscription.

[3] Since 1814, when Sweden defeated Norway and forced it to form a union with Sweden, a union that lasted until 1905.

[4] During the Cold War, the perceived threat was from the Soviet Union, but it was not perceived to be a very immediate one.

[5] This by no means implies that Sweden has not participated in military operations : quite the reverse. Since 1948, Sweden has been a party to 120 international missions in 60 countries, with approximately 100 000 officers and soldiers, mostly on United Nations missions but recently also on NATO missions (http://www.forsvarsmakten.se, accessed on 29 September 2010).

[6] Huntington identified five ideal types of civil military relations, of which Sweden's can be recognized as a combination of anti-military ideology, low military political power, and high military professionalism. A society which suffers few threats to its security is likely to have this type of civil-military relations. (Huntington, 1957, p.97).

a citizen force will guarantee a continuous flow of young civilians into the military, which in turn will lead to a high degree of influence of civilian attitudes, values and culture therein. This is classically viewed as the most efficient way of securing a democratic military, reflecting citizens' values and attitudes.[7] One central issue regarding the Swedish shift to an AVF is whether implementation of that option will also be a starting point for a significant transformation of military culture and Swedish soldiers' self-images.[8] During the debate that preceded it, quite substantial worries emerged that an all-professional force would lead to the growth of a distinct military warrior culture, alien to the values and self-images of civilian society.[9]

Similar concerns also emerged in neighbouring Norway. In a 2009 book entitled *War-Fighter Culture in a Peace Nation*,[10] various scholars discuss the Norwegian military's professionalization. They ask what will happen to military culture and soldier identity in the context of post-Cold War security and defence policies focused on participating in international operations rather than on defending Norway's territory,[11] and surmise that hardened warrior identities are a possibility – one that would involve glorifying the use of force as a solution to all sorts of problems. A war-fighter culture might create an armed force that primarily defines itself in terms of its own interests, and acts accordingly instead of operating for and on behalf of civil society, under the governance of those elected to represent it and rule.

So far, in the Swedish context, there has not been any extensive research regarding the AVF's potential impact on the relations between the military and civil society. Almost every day, Swedish officers and soldiers are involved in combat and warlike situations in Afghanistan, and are increasingly acting as war-fighters rather than as peacekeepers. Common sense has it that the shift to an AVF may mean that, through socialization processes of its own but also through continuous cooperation with other militaries on foreign deployments, over time Sweden runs the risk of seeing its military professionals and volunteers constitute a group that is both objectively and subjectively distinct from the parent society. In contrast to a mixed army of conscripts and professional cadres, an AVF – or so the argument goes – is apt to produce service members who primarily identify as soldiers, rather than as soldiers *and* citizens, and foster radical rather than pragmatic professionalism (Larson, 1974). These topics should no doubt be a high priority for

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[7] On the citizen-soldier concept, see Janowitz, 1979.

[8] For Swedish peacekeeping soldiers' self-images, see Hedlund & Soeters, 2010. On their motivation, see Hedlund, 2011.

[9] A worry most Western countries have had when moving from conscription to an AVF. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many American scholars and analysts were concerned that replacing a conscript – the prototype of the citizen-soldier – with a volunteer would produce either a praetorian or mercenary army that would fundamentally alter the nature of civilian control over the military. However, the experience in countries such as the United States, Canada and United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands and Belgium have demonstrated that one can have an AVF that is neither praetorian nor mercenary : Rukavishnikov & Pugh, 2006 ; Holsti, 1998.

[10] Edström, Lunde & Matlary, 2009.

[11] *Forsvarstaben, Forsvarets fellesoperative doctrine* – FFOD 07 (Oslo, FSTS, 2007).

political and military debate as such hypothetical outcomes would change civil-military relations significantly.

This Study's Aims and Hypotheses

Historically, one major concern over the development of military professionalism and a move away from citizen-soldiers has been the negative consequences of militarism, inasmuch as the armed forces were often seen as a "*wasteful and immoral institution which leads to aggression and war, and threatens the liberties of the people and the constitution of the republic*", manned by "*corrupt, autocratic, ignorant, and bloodthirsty*" officers and soldiers.[13] While such dire outcomes appear highly unlikely in the West under present circumstances, a current civil-military relations issue has arisen from the abolition of conscription in many European countries.[14] In the US, a research project conducted by Peter Feaver and Richard H. Kohn a decade ago revealed that among civilian elites now deprived of any first-hand experience of military service, confidence in the military drops quite significantly. Conversely, military elites develop more negative perceptions of civilian society, and display open (conservative) political partisanship in greater numbers.[15] Other American studies have produced evidence of trends pointing to a growing (social, cultural, political) gap between the professional military and civil society.[16]

Two important factors, though by no means the only ones, in the changes affecting civil-military relations under an AVF relate (1) to the dominant type of military ethos inherited from the country's history, possibly influenced at the margins (even if over time, that influence may become significant) by the kinds of missions the military is expected to perform; (2) to the degree of social and cultural representativeness and integration of those who enlist. To assess the relative weight of these two factors, the concept of self-image is a useful tool of analysis. It can be hypothesized that due to the traditional Nordic peace culture and the close proximity to civil society conscription generates, the Swedish case so far has been characterized by a convergence of the two, with the latter driving the former to some extent, resulting in self-images in harmony with dominant civilian cultural traits. The possibility exists that under the AVF the two factors diverge, with the former driving the latter – or worse, that the two converge, combine, and powerfully point in the opposite direction.

It is, of course, far too early to test the second hypothesis empirically. But in order to monitor future developments as regards Swedish soldiers' self-images, it may be of more than passing interest to provide a basis of comparison for studies to come, and to that end identify and analyze those that prevailed during the conscription period.

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[13] Ekirch, 1956; Miller, 1946 quoted in Larson, 1974.

[14] Karl W. Haltiner and Tibor Szvircsev Tresch show in their research that conscription has in fact ended in most European nations because of geopolitical changes which have taken place since the end of the Cold War and the increasing number of regional conflicts and ensuing operations abroad. Europe is undergoing a significant social change with an increasing pluralization of lifestyles and value cultures. See Haltiner & Szvircsev Tresch, 2008, and Szvircsev Tresch & Haltiner, 2008.

[15] Feaver & Kohn, 2001.

[16] Ricks, 1997; also Van der Meulen & Manigart, 1997.

This study's main aim is thus to test the first hypothesis by examining the self-images of Swedish soldiers on recent peacekeeping missions to Liberia (LA05, 2006), Kosovo (KS14, 2006-07 ; KS20, 2009-10 ; KS21, 2010) and Afghanistan (FS18, 2009-10 ; FS19, 2010) – before the coming into force of the new AVF. The analysis and theoretical discussion will proceed from the war-fighter versus peacekeeper perspective, and probe the influence of Swedish national self-images.

Review of the Literature

War-Fighter *vs.* Peacekeeper Self-Images

A traditional and still ongoing discussion of military culture and self-images has focused on whether or not, as some scholars argue, war-fighting and peacekeeping are fundamentally different activities requiring different self-images, mind-sets and attitudes.[17] A central empirical issue in that debate is which kind of self-image the soldiers in the field hold. In a study based on anthropological fieldwork and questionnaire surveys of German peacekeeping units deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH, 7th and 8th contingents) as part of the Stabilization Force (SFOR) in 2003-2004, Maren Tomforde (2005) studied the self-image of German soldiers of all ranks during and after deployment. She found that their self-images differed from those of their British, American[18] and French counterparts. While the latter still appeared to define themselves mainly as combat soldiers, with valued symbols of power and masculinity, German soldiers more often identified as peacekeepers, 'helpers in uniform' whose mentality suited peace more than combat and whose main interest lay in adventure and new experiences. In a study of two Dutch peacekeeping units in the field, the 'Grizzlies' (an artillery battery in Kosovo in 1999) and the 'Bulldogs' (an infantry company in Bosnia in 2000), Liora Sion (2006) found that the self-images of the Dutch soldiers were chiefly masculine and combat-oriented. Many of them rejected the peacekeeping identity as being too feminine, on the strength of the argument that "*[e]ven female soldiers can do peacekeeping missions*".

Torunn Laguen Haaland recently identified three professional identities among Norwegian officers. The 'war-fighter' type, bent on participation in high-intensity fighting, emphasizes combat skills, and displays cultural traits at variance with those prevailing in civilian society. The 'civil servant type' favours bureaucratic effectiveness, faithfully enacts political decisions, and exhibits a military culture not strongly dissimilar to that of civilian society. The third identity is that of 'homeland defender' – the traditional conscript focused on defending his country, and displaying a military culture close to that of civilian society. Haaland also found that the Norwegian 'war-fighters' do not identify with the more aggressive approach of their American and British allies.[19]

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[17] Tripodi, 2001 ; Battistelli, 1997 ; Miller, 1997 ; Miller & Moskos, 1995.

[18] The British Parachute Regiment and the US Army 82nd Airborne Division are strongly focused on combat skills : see Dandeker & Gow, 2000, p.64.

[19] Haaland, 2009.

Tripodi, Battistelli and others[20] found over a decade ago that Italian soldiers, like Swedish soldiers,[21] considered themselves to be the 'best peacekeepers' in the world. According to Tripodi, the most important reason for this was the conscript system then still in force, wherein peacekeeping soldiers had to volunteer for peacekeeping operations. These soldiers not only had the best personal motivation, but also the best approach towards their military/humanitarian duties and often the best disposition towards the local population. They were less aggressive than their counterparts in all-volunteer armies, and probably never considered themselves warriors or combatants. Battistelli argued that peacekeeping missions call for troops who can deal with a diversity of people and cultures, who can tolerate ambiguity, take the initiative and ask questions. These soldiers, says Battistelli, are the soldiers with 'post-modern' values, who love peacekeeping because they are looking for adventure, want to meet new people/friends in foreign cultures, mature as human beings, travel to exotic environments and so on. However, some scholars also suggest the existence of a basic common transnational military culture among soldiers and officers around the world[22] and a common, specific military mind-set.[23]

Is There a Swedish National Self-Image?

The question of whether a specific and uniquely Swedish national characteristic exists in Sweden, at least since the end of the Second World War, has essentially been a taboo subject.[24] By insisting that all 'big' common ideas and structures are dead, post-structuralism and post-modernism have further undermined all attempts and claims to define something as fleeting as a set of common national characteristics. In ethnographic and anthropological research and other literature which has tackled the issue of trying to identify, define, describe and explain the distinctive Swedish character, much space is allocated to addressing the question of whether it is at all possible to envisage a distinctive national and cultural character, bearing in mind the many and wide-ranging variations that together form a nation, involving such factors as sex, class, education, profession, interests, sexual orientation, to name but a few.[25]

The answer often tends to be that, despite all this, it appears possible to identify certain distinctive national characteristics.[26] Ethnologists like Åke Daun[27] and Linell & Löfgren[28] believe, for example, that a study of Swedishness must be conducted at an

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[20] Battistelli, 1997 ; Battistelli, Ammendola & Galatino, 1999, p.8. ; Tripodi, 2001.

[21] Hedlund, Weibull & Soeters, 2008.

[22] Lang, 1965 ; Soeters, 1997 ; Soeters & Recht, 1998 ; King, 2005 ; Tomforde, 2006.

[23] Abrahamsson, 1972. For ways of integrating personnel into the military organizational culture, see also Soeters, Winslow & Weibull, 2006.

[24] Arnstberg, 1989 ; Daun, 1998 ; Johansson, 2001 ; Daun, 2005.

[25] Arnstberg, 1989 ; Daun, 1998.

[26] For specific national culture, see for example, Hofstede, 2001 ; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005 ; Anonymous, World Values Survey, 2 ed. ; Inglehart, 1997 ; House, 2004.

[27] Daun, 1998 ; Daun, 2005.

[28] Linell & Löfgren, 1995.

abstract level, where similarities emerge despite any existing variations. Arnstberg[29] maintains that fundamental cultural structures must exist because otherwise social interaction would have no form and would be unpredictable. And in exactly the same way that it is possible to speak the Swedish language, despite all the variations in dialect and intonation, it should also be possible to identify certain structural traits in the Swedish mentality.

A common approach to trying to outline Swedish national characteristics is to allow people from other countries to describe what they see as typically Swedish.[30] However, Daun believes that assertions by foreigners about Sweden and the Swedes are often prejudiced and are formed partly by applying a counter-perspective in which similarities are excluded, something which also results from foreigners often meeting only a certain type of Swede and therefore only having limited access to the scope of Swedish culture. Daun believes this one-sided picture of Sweden and the Swedes must be complemented by images of other *sub-cultures* within Sweden. However, the term sub-culture would be meaningless if it did not apply to an element that was part of an overall national culture. Without carrying out an in-depth study into the question of the existence of national cultures, it soon becomes apparent upon reading literature on the subject that a number of marked, recurrent characteristics emerge when Swedes are allowed to describe themselves. Consequently, even if there are no specific Swedish cultural characteristics, amongst Swedes there definitely appears to exist a very widespread self-stereotypification depicting a number of cultural characteristics,[31] which Daun considers to be the most reliable form of stereotyping, even if there exists a tendency to self-aggrandizement.

What Are the Characteristics of the Swedish National Self-Image?

Prior to 1930, Sweden was regarded by many other countries in Europe and the world as a relatively undeveloped and anonymous country amongst the other nations in Scandinavia. However, the image of Sweden changed quite dramatically during the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, and Arne Ruth, the former cultural correspondent and debater with the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* describes in "Det moderna Sveriges myter" ("The Myths of Modern Sweden")[32] how that new national image was born amongst the display stands of the Stockholm Exhibition :

> It was possible almost month by month to follow both at home and abroad how the image of Sweden changed during the course of the Stockholm Exhibition. A new journalistic genre even emerged : the portrayal of Sweden as progress incarnate.

Ruth continues :

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[29] Arnstberg, 1989.

[30] Alopaeus, 1983 ; Nott, 1961 ; Phillips-Martinsson, 1981/1983 ; Rosen Svensson, 2003 ; Sontag, 1969.

[31] Arnstberg, 1989 ; Daun, 1998 ; Daun, 2005 ; Johansson, 2001 ; Karlsson, 1990 ; Linell & Mikael Löfgren, 1995 ; Löfgren, 1985.

[32] Ruth, 1995.

> Only very few countries receive so much acclaim that the views of the world pass straight into the national psyche. One's view of one's own country is that which has been projected from abroad. Sweden has undisputedly become one of those countries.[33] Over a period from the beginning of the 1930s until the end of the 1960s a glittering myth was created by foreign writers, journalists and politicians : the Swedish Model. The image is encapsulated in the idea of Sweden as an exception. Sweden's role in the world, her support for the United Nations, her position as mediator between east and west, her humanitarian engagement in the struggle against poverty and national oppression in the world, all could be seen as a logical extension of the inner aspirations of the world's most modern welfare state. Both externally and internally the Swedish model stood out, not as an expression of national egoism, but as the voice of universal reason. Sweden's national interests seemed to coincide completely with the conditions for international progress. What was good for the Swedes was good for the world.

The almost metamorphic transformation of Sweden and its image abroad described by Arne Ruth above, from the poor 'Dirt-Sweden' of the 1930s[34] to becoming the stronghold and frontline for modernity, has definitely shaped the way in which Swedes regard themselves and the outside world. Arnstberg postulates that since the 1960s, Swedes have cultivated the myth that the Swedish way of life is the best in the world and that Swedes believe that they know best – a sort of self-defined supremacy, which also includes the concept that Swedes also know what is best for others. The essential elements of the modernity project comprised the removal of the old, the dirty, the ugly, the inferior, the dark, the unexplored, the irrational, the unstructured, the undeveloped, the uneducated, the inequality-ridden – in short the un-modern !

Hence an apparent indication of extensive self-images as a reflection of Swedish national self-images among service members should be when the soldiers express qualities regarding themselves that significantly coincide with the Swedish national self-images of modernity, such as a high standard of hygiene, education, professional competence, quality of equipment, ethical, moral and organisational standards and so on.

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[33] Despite the fact that Ruth and many others felt that the Swedish model received a real buffeting as a result of the economic crisis of the 1980s and its aftermath, causing the image of Sweden as a leading nation to fade somewhat, reports still continue to appear about how good the Swedes are, especially in the social arena, e.g. that Sweden leads the world on the issue of gender equality, or accepts so many refugees, etc. A notably illustrative example of this occurred on 5 December 2008 when reports could be read in *Svenska Dagbladet* and heard on Swedish Television Channel 1 regarding the announcement that Sweden was the world's leading provider of humanitarian aid, according to a so-called independent media think tank, The Centre for Global Development. In the same study/ranking it emerged that Sweden was the country in the world most prepared to accept refugees and the fifth most open to immigrants (a sentiment with which considerably less than the whole population of Sweden would presumably agree). Sweden intermittently continues to claim to be a world leader in various spheres of the modernity spectrum, for example as the leading IT nation of the 1990s, and a world leader in design for the new millennium. The aspiration is always to be a world leader.

[34] Nordström, 1938. The Swedish title *Lort-Sverige* translates to 'Dirt-Sweden' and was the name of a series of reports on Swedish national public radio in the autumn of 1938, documenting the very low standards of living and housing in rural Sweden. The radio series was produced by journalist and writer, Ludvig (Lubbe) Nordström, who also wrote the book of the same name, comprising his own writing, transcripts from some of the radio interviews and 78 of his own illustrations.

Method

Two studies were conducted with the aim of identifying Swedish soldiers' self-images during the conscription period.

Interview Study

The first study employs lengthy, semi-structured, individual interviews, and to a limited extent, participatory observation[35] in Liberia and Kosovo to explore the self-images among Swedish peacekeeping soldiers. The informants were interviewed three times : during pre-deployment training, five months into the deployment, and six months after their return home. Twelve male infantry soldiers were interviewed in Liberia and fifteen in Kosovo (N=27). The soldiers were between 21 and 33 years old. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. The comprehensive interview material was analysed and structured in line with the themes and issues that were the focus of the study. Irrelevant information was gradually deleted, the reduced material successively analysed and restructured several times using content analysis in order to identify categories, patterns and overarching themes. The results section of this article reflects that process : the passages quoted are not always verbatim, but are concentrated and focused assertions derived from the content of the study material related to the issues raised. The research team had informal and spontaneous conversations on a daily basis with infantry soldiers, officers, men and women of all ages, "old hands" as well as "rookies". The impression gathered from all these conversations was similar to the opinions put forward by the informants and those that emerged from the informal, spontaneous conversations in Liberia and Kosovo.

Questionnaire-based Survey

The second study was aimed at following up the interview study and validating the results with a quantitative study conducted as a survey of soldiers on training prior to deployment to Kosovo (KS20/21) and Afghanistan (FS18/19). This survey was approved by the Armed Forces HQ and data were obtained from the structured questionnaire with close-ended questions. The questions were designed in light of the purpose of this study. A Likert Scale was adopted in order to grade answers from 0 (not at all) to10 (very much).

Sample

Questionnaire data were collected from 514 soldiers. We were not permitted to distribute the questionnaire ourselves for logistical reasons. We visited the pre-deployment training centre about halfway through the training programme of winter 2009 and spring 2010, and presented the survey to the officers in charge of the unit, who then took responsibility for distributing it to the soldiers. It took approximately three to four weeks for the survey to be completed, after which our contact officer returned the questionnaires to us by post. Of a maximum possible number of 1,057 questionnaires, 514 were returned,

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[35] Gellner & Hirsch, 2001.

constituting a 49% return rate.[36] After an initial check, 5 questionnaires were either incomplete or unidentifiable and thus this data was considered unusable for analysis. The final number of valid responses was reduced to 509, lowering the response rate to 48%. Data acquired from those 509 questionnaires were coded and analyzed through SAS statistical software.[37] Table 1 shows the soldiers' response rate.

Demographic Analysis of Sample

The sample consisted of 433 males (85.07%) and 76 females (14.93%), who had all volunteered for deployment abroad. The distribution of respondent age ranged from 20 to 60 years old. There were 253 (49.32%) respondents who had finished upper secondary/ vocational college, 93 (18.13%) who had earned an undergraduate degree, 143 (27.88%) who held postgraduate degrees and 6 (1.17) respondents who had only completed compulsory elementary school.

Table 1: *Demographic descriptions of sample*

Variables	Values	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Gender	Male	433	85.1%	
	Female	76	14.9%	
Age	20-23	153	30.1%	
	24-27	109	21.4%	
	28-31	72	14.1%	
	32-35	50	9.8%	
	36-39	42	8.2%	N = 509
	40 and older	83	16.3%	
Education	Elementary school	6	1.2%	
	Upper secondary school	142	27.7%	
	Vocational college	111	21.6%	
	Undergraduate degree	93	18.1%	
	Postgraduate degree	143	27.9%	
	Others	18	3.5%	

Results from the Interview Study

The Self-Images of the Swedish Peacekeeping Soldier

> We are number one here. Swedes and their desire to do their very, very best appear to be way above other nations' military contingents. I believe the Swedish system produces better peacekeepers rather than good war-fighters. The Swedes are more relaxed – they're here to do a job, while the Americans operate more like a war machine. I don't doubt for one second that the Americans would be better than the Swedes when the going gets tough, but for peacekeeping I think Swedes are much, much better.

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[36] Soldiers' survey participation was on a voluntary basis. For ethical reasons, it was not possible to ascertain whether non-respondents (those who refused to participate and return the questionnaire form filled in) offered socio-demographic characteristics at variance with those of respondents, in order to check for a possible sample bias. However, this appears unlikely : lack of time was reported to have been a more important factor than lack of interest.

[37] SAS Institute Inc., Cary, North Carolina, USA.

Among the Swedish soldiers and officers we have met (on this and other occasions) there seems to be a widespread belief that Swedes are excellent peacekeepers, and less than average war-fighters; more specifically, that they top the ranks of peacekeeping nations, or like the Italians, they are the number one peacekeeping nation. We would do well then, to take a closer look at the arguments Swedes put forward as to why they are good.

The basis for the Swedes' creation of their self-image consists of eleven factors that were identified through analysis of the interviews and observations. High levels of (1) *motivation* combined with (2) *ambition* appear to constitute the most important quality ensuring really outstanding personnel performance on a mission: "*I believe we are more motivated. We are really keen to do well*". The Swedes' level of motivation and their desire to do their absolute best appears to be more intense than that of other nations' military contingents. This higher level of motivation is thought to be engendered by the 'Swedish model', whereby individuals have to volunteer for international service: "*Our trump card is the positive effect of having to volunteer, of people having to choose to do international service*". These volunteers are first and foremost motivated by the idea of being able to take part in a real adventure: "*Above all else, having an adventure of your own is important. It has always been a dream of mine*". Nevertheless, the idea of experiencing a foreign and exotic culture, and hopefully making a contribution towards peace and improving the situation for the people of Liberia and Kosovo was also present[38]: "*It's the idea of making a contribution or that sort of thing; it's the trump card if you like*". Another important factor that was seen to set the Swedes apart was their high level of (3) *civilian education*, which Swedes felt raised their peacekeeping skills in a wide number of areas: "*In particular, our level of civilian education is higher than in many other countries. Many have studied at university level*". Moreover, Swedes often referred to having a very sound level of (4) *civilian professional experience*, which is seen as giving an important competitive advantage over other nations with regular soldiers who, according to the respondents, often have a lower level of civilian education and sometimes no professional training or experience at all, apart from that gained within the military: "*You have your civilian qualifications, which of course is also an advantage*". However, professional military ability was not a factor the informants emphasised to any great degree, possibly because they had hardly any need for more advanced military skills than patrolling or standing guard. There is, however, a strong, implicit belief that Swedes have a high level of (5) *military competence*: "*You know, the level of military competence is very high*". Swedes also believe that they possess extremely positive (6) *personal characteristics*, such as modesty, calm disposition, steadiness and loyalty:

> I believe that it has a lot to do with our culture; it's a bit to do with the way Swedes are, the idea that we are calm and steady. I think that Swedes have humility and considerable respect for others, and that's really important when you're going on a mission. We are also very loyal.

The Swedes described themselves as having very high (7) *ethical* and *moral* standards, which were considerably higher than those of other nations' soldiers and

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[38] A recent study (Hedlund, 2011) found the following nine motives as to why Swedish soldiers decided to participate in peacekeeping missions : (1) adventure, (2) meeting new people/friends in foreign cultures, (3) maturing as a human being, (4) travel to exotic environments, (5) comradeship, (6) putting oneself to test, (7) earning money, (8) useful for future (civil or military) career and (9) altruism.

officers. Amongst other things, the Swedes believe that they are better than soldiers of 'certain other nations' at staying neutral and impartial in relation to the parties involved in a conflict ; or as they say themselves, the Swedes are 'fair'.

> Ethically speaking, I believe we are held in particularly high regard around the world ; our ideas are based on a firm set of basic values. Our strength is that we maintain a clearly neutral stance, and we stick to it. This is clearly noticeable in comparison with other UN countries, like the Pakistanis, who show favouritism towards Muslims.

It is pertinent with regard to the ethical and moral qualities of which the Swedes are proud that they do not disobey general regulations and policies, such as those regarding not giving presents or money to the local population, leaving camp or talking to the local population when on guard. The Swedes also considered themselves very (8) *sociable* and *friendly* towards the other actors in the mission area, not least the local population. They did not find working within a foreign cultural environment especially difficult.

> I believe we manage to work within other cultures pretty well actually. Yes, I believe we interact well with people. We talk a lot with people when we are out in the town. We are quite open in our dealings with the local population, and then they obviously find it easier to talk to us and to trust us.

When Swedes described themselves and their common qualities in comparative light and other national contingents, their self-image was encapsulated in the words, 'fair', 'firm' and 'friendly'. These qualities together formed the common, prevailing leitmotiv not only for the soldiers of LA05 and KS14 but also for those on other international missions.

One thing that the Swedes often mentioned, and that became even more obvious as a result of our observations, was the importance and pride they attached to their (9) *standard of hygiene.* Everywhere in the Swedish compound in Liberia, and especially in lavatories and the canteen, you could see signs telling you to wash your hands with both soap and Alco gel. The Swedes boasted that they never had any illnesses, although at the same time were quite disparaging about the Irish having had frequent outbreaks.

The last but one component of this positive self-image was the outstandingly superior (10) *quality of equipment* and standards for vehicles, weapons and base camp facilities. Its members considered themselves in all respects by far the best contingent in Liberia.

> Yes, we think we are the best in class down here. We are Number One here – we are the best educated, have the best equipment and have good resources.

Finally, the Swedes also said that they had been (11) *frequently commended by other observers* for being professional and doing a good job in Liberia.

> We get visits from Majors and others, who have many links to the other contingents, who say that we are regarded as very professional.

In summary, we found the following eleven assertions that Swedes referred to when claiming that were the best peacekeepers : (1) high level of motivation, (2) high level

of ambition, (3) high level of education, (4) sound level of civilian professional experience, (5) high level of military competence (6) extremely positive personal characteristics, (7) very high ethical and moral standards, (8) very sociable and friendly nature, (9) very high standard of hygiene, (10) outstandingly superior quality of equipment and, (11) frequent commendation by other observers for being professional and doing a good job.

Survey Results

As we can see in Table 2, there is an apparent positive evaluation of the Swedish soldiers' qualities and all the assessments lie over 7 on a scale from 0 to 10, which validates the results from the interview study. Highest ranked is the motivation and ambition to go on a mission and to do their very best during deployment.

High scores for education, civilian professional experience and standard of hygiene coincide strongly with the general Swedish national self-images of modernity described earlier in this article.

Table 2: *FS vs. KS evaluation of qualities of Swedish soldiers on missions*

Qualities of Swedish soldiers on missions	N=501-509[39]	SD
high level of motivation	8.4	1.4
high level of ambition	8.4	1.4
high level of education	7.2	1.6
sound level of civilian professional experience	7.2	1.9
high level of military competence	7.3	1.6
very high ethical and moral standards	8.0	1.5
very sociable	8.0	1.4
very friendly nature	8.1	1.4
very high standard of hygiene	8.1	1.6
superior quality of equipment	6.9	1.8
frequent commendation by other observers	7.4	1.9
for being professional and doing a good job	7.3	2.0

In particular, a high standard of hygiene is a special landmark of Swedish modernity, was also observed at Swedish Camp Clara in Liberia, where the importance of good hygiene was a hot topic of discussion and widely advertised. Another striking reflection of Swedish modernity is the perceived frequent commendation by other observers for being professional and doing a good job. Being friendly and sociable is also a part of the Swedish national self-image. In contrast, military competence is not ranked higher than other qualities, which indicates that the soldiers do not readily identify with a specific military self-image or competence. In Table 3 (next page) we can see that the soldiers strongly identify with peacekeeper self-images.

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[39] While the number of valid questionnaires returned was 509, there were internal differences from one question to the next as regards non-respondent rates. However, as can be seen, the magnitude of such differences was remarkably low.

It is apparent that the Swedish soldiers in this study perceive themselves to be peacekeepers, or humanitarian workers in uniform, rather than war-fighters. Moreover, the empirical evidence strongly suggests that these soldiers attribute qualities to themselves that significantly coincide with the Swedish national self-images of modernity on the dimensions reviewed earlier.

Table 3: *Self-images as war-fighter or peacekeeper*

Self-images	N=501-509	SD
Peacekeeper	7.5	1.9
War fighter	3.9	2.8
Helpers in uniform/humanitarian worker	4.9	2.7
Civilian in military uniform	4.0	3.2
Police in military uniform	1.5	2.3

Discussion

When we analyze the elements of the self-image expressed by the Swedish soldiers, we can see that they consider themselves peacekeepers rather than combatants, and are focused on civilian skills and values rather on traditional military skills, activities and values. The results expounded above are hardly surprising since Sweden, like Norway, has been a typical Nordic peace nation which until recently only used to participate in peacekeeping operations under the umbrella of the UN. Self-images as peacekeepers may imply some difficulty for these soldiers in conducting combat operations. While Swedish soldiers may perceive themselves to be competent at military tasks, these have usually been marginal in peacekeeping contexts. In Liberia, for instance, the Swedes left the everyday 'close' patrolling and manning of roadblocks to African troops.[40] Nevertheless, Swedish soldiers have also shown that they can handle war-fighting situations, such as in Afghanistan where they have been involved in combat with the Taliban.

Swedish soldiers' identities can easily be related to broader self-images of Sweden as a nation in the vanguard of modernity and social progress. A distinct military ethos seems to be lacking among them. This is a very strong indication that Swedish military culture is closely aligned with that of civilian society. Also of interest here is that the soldiers' self-images seem to exist already *before* deployment to the mission area. They are thus not only formed by peacekeeping or war-fighting attitudes under pre-deployment training or during the mission, but more essentially by the self-stereotyping that Swedish people in general share. It is this positive national self-image which guides their understanding, interpretation and actions in the mission theatre, vis-à-vis belligerents, local population and allied contingents alike.[41]

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[40] Hedlund & Soeters, 2010.

[41] To illustrate, as already mentioned, the opinion held by the Swedes in Liberia regarding the Irish contingent with whom they shared Camp Clara for nearly two years was that the latter upheld almost the complete opposite standards and conditions to themselves : see Hedlund, Weibull & Soeters, 2008 ; Soeters & Manigart, 2008 ; Hedlund & Soeters, 2010. They were concerned and sometimes upset about other nations' and the local population's 'lesser' hygiene standards and unmodern equipment.

These feelings emphasise a 'them and us' mentality, as well as physical separateness manifested by maintaining a well-guarded compound. Such separation might hamper efforts to build up trust and reciprocity and 'win the hearts and minds' of the local population. Concerning the pride shown by Swedish soldiers and officers in regard to their superior standards of hygiene and quality of military equipment (especially in the compound), as witnessed during our visits to Camp Viktoria in Kosovo and Camp Clara in Liberia, one might consider that this has greater associations with Swedish modernity than with experience in the field. The perceived, frequently positive commendation by other observers regarding the Swedish soldiers is a reflection of Arne Ruth's idea that the Swedes have received so much acclaim that the views of the world pass straight into the national psyche, i.e. their view of Sweden and Swedish people is that which has been projected from abroad.[42]

Conclusions

The present article aimed to examine if particular self-images existed, before the advent of the new AVF, among Swedish peacekeeping soldiers on missions to Liberia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, and if so, how they could be interpreted in terms of the war-fighter/peacekeeper dichotomy, but also from the perspective of broader Swedish national influences.

One would have expected the soldiers to have been socialized into a collective self-image born of anticipation, training (three months), actual experience (six months) with the multinational forces, and possible influences from other national contingents involved. It then followed that self-images would probably have evolved. Our conclusion is that this is not the case, and our main hypothesis is fully borne out. Within each separate mission contingent as well as across the various missions under study, there seems to exist a sort of fundamental self-image, powerfully influenced by civilian society's own, in which a strong peacekeeping ethos enjoys pride of place. Moreover, that self-image does not change markedly over time and will mostly remain intact from pre-deployment training until six months after returning home from the operational theatre : nine months of intense team work will do absolutely nothing to change their perception of themselves and others. This indicates that they essentially had a fixed and fully formed stereotype self-image, which was very little affected by actual conditions.

The results of this study show great convergence between military and general national self-images of modernity, confirming Janowitz's portrayal of a conscription army as one of citizen soldiers who share civilian society values, attitudes, and self-images.

There are far too many factors involved for anybody to predict the changes that will probably affect the course of civil-military relations in Sweden under the new AVF. It will remain for future studies to assess them empirically, and hopefully the present study will prove useful as a basis of comparison with the situation that has prevailed until very recently. However, on the strength of its findings, this much can be said:

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[42] Ruth, 1995.

1) national self-images appear too solid for their influence on the Swedish military ethos to be overturned any time soon, even if coalition warfare of the Afghanistan type figures prominently among its future missions;

2) the old conscription system and the new AVF have an important feature in common that may well lessen the latter's impact on the social composition and cultural profile of the Swedish military : the soldiers surveyed in this study, professional cadres as well as rank and file conscripts, had all volunteered for participation in the various missions examined, and future contingents may as a result not be very different from they were previously.

So that, if all of the above is correct (and all other factors are held constant), the conclusion that there are grounds for optimism as regards future Swedish civil-military relations may not be unwarranted.

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