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# **Boots on the ground?**

How Strategic Culture Influences the Role of the Armed Forces in  
Domestic Counterterrorism

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# Abstract

Similar countries are often expected to respond to threats in similar ways. Nevertheless, in Europe alone, similar countries have responded significantly different to the threat of terrorism. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how strategic culture, based on five elements (dominant threat perception; core tasks of the armed forces; willingness to use force; civil-military relation, and public opinion) have influenced the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism in Belgium and Sweden. Albeit previous research has addressed the role of the armed forces in domestic security and counterterrorism, it has not empirically conducted a systematic comparison of two countries with differing roles. Moreover, the theoretical explanations have been insufficient in explaining why some countries use their armed forces whilst others do not. Thus, by employing a comparative case study, utilizing a qualitative content analysis aimed at analysing strategic and defence documents, articles, and previous research, I sought to investigate how strategic culture have influenced the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism between 2014-2020, something that has been largely neglected in previous research. The findings demonstrated differences in all five elements, indicating that strategic culture likely influence the role of the armed forces in Sweden and Belgium.

**Keywords:** strategic culture, counterterrorism, domestic security, Belgium, Sweden, armed forces, war studies.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Research Problem

On May 25, 2014, Mehdi Nemmouche, armed with an AK47, attacked the Jewish Museum in Brussel killing four people. The attack constituted the first of many terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Islamic State (IS) on European soil (Renard et al 2016:61). As a response to the attack, the mayor of Antwerp requested the deployment of the Belgian armed forces to secure sensitive locations, a request denied by the government (Lasoen 2018:953). Comparatively, in January 2015, France, responding to the increased terror threat and the Charlie Hebdo attacks, launched Operation Sentinelle deploying 10,000 troops onto the streets (Resteigne & Manigart 2019:23). Following France's response and as a direct consequence of the increased terror threat, the Belgian government decided to take further measures to prevent terrorist attacks on Belgian soil and deployed their armed forces domestically. Accordingly, Operation Vigilant Guardian (OVG) was launched, deploying 150 soldiers to support the police in the streets of Belgium to prevent future terrorist attack (Resteigne & Manigart 2019:18). Moreover, following the terrorist attacks in March 2016 in Brussel, soldiers were henceforth deployed to guard nuclear facilities in Belgium (Belgian Defence 2022).

Similarly to Belgium and France, other European countries experienced terrorist attacks perpetrated by an IS-motivated individual, for example Germany and Sweden. On December 19, 2016, Anis Amri drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing twelve people (Counter extremism project 2022). Similarly, Rakhmat Akilov, on April 7, 2017, drove a truck through a pedestrian street, Drottninggatan, in central Stockholm, killing five people (NOA 2017:3). Nevertheless, contrary to Belgium and France, Sweden and Germany remained reluctant to deploy their troops as means of counterterrorism, and counterterrorism have remained a law enforcement matter (Clarke 2016:66; NOA 2017:35). Consequently, the different responses sheds light on an interesting research puzzle: Why some states use their armed forces in domestic counterterrorism situations while others refrain from doing so.

The role of the armed forces is generally understood to be the protection of sovereignty and the populations of a nation-state. Thus, in case of an armed aggression, the military are often seen

as the primary actors responsible to tackle the threat. Nevertheless, with the increased frequency of terrorist attacks in Europe following September 11, 2001, and again in 2014, an interesting phenomenon has come to light. The role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism differs significantly between European countries, shedding light on an interesting research problem and puzzle, as despite the countries facing similar threats, namely terrorism, their responses vary significantly. Moreover, although previous research has demonstrated the increased role of the armed forces in domestic security, it has not systematically compared two cases that demonstrate different roles (Clarke 2016; Wilkinson 2011; Hughes 2011). Additionally, previous research has neglected the influence of strategic culture on domestic counterterrorism and the domestic role of the armed forces. The research problem hence centres on why the armed forces in some Western liberal democracies play a noteworthy role in domestic counterterrorism, whereas they in other countries have a very restricted role despite retaining important resources, experiences, and knowledge.

## 1.2 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this novel research is to illustrate how strategic culture influences domestic counterterrorism by means of a comparative case study on the role of the armed forces in Belgium and Sweden between 2014-2020. Sweden and Belgium were chosen using an approach inspired by Mill's Most Similar System Design, as the two states share many similarities but differ regarding the role of their armed forces in domestic counterterrorism. Moreover, there is a lack of comparative research concerning the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism, and previous research has proven insufficient in explaining the differing roles. Additionally, strategic culture research has been mostly focused on international deployment of troops and decision-making regarding the use of force, thus neglecting the domestic dimension, motivating this research. By utilizing strategic culture as the theoretical framework, this thesis therefore aims to deepen the understanding of domestic counterterrorism and the role of the armed forces. The research intends to demonstrate how the differing roles in domestic counterterrorism have been influenced by the inherent strategic culture in Belgium and Sweden. Moreover, this thesis aspires to contribute to the study on strategic culture by expanding its empirical reach and focus on its influence in a domestic context. Furthermore, the thesis provides an empirical contribution by doing a comparative study, focusing on decision-making

in small Western states<sup>1</sup>. Thus, in sum, this thesis aims to contribute to the study of strategic culture by conducting a cross-case comparative case study on domestic counterterrorism, something that, to the authors knowledge, has not been done before. Accordingly, the research questions are the following:

- 1) *What role does the armed forces have in Belgium and Sweden with regards to domestic counterterrorism, and what differences and similarities can be identified between the countries from 2014-2020?*
- 2) *How has strategic culture influenced the role of the armed forces in Belgium and Sweden with regards to domestic counterterrorism?*

### 1.3 Disposition

The following chapter provides an overview of previous research on the expanding role of the armed forces in domestic security and counterterrorism. This is followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework, focusing on the debate on strategic culture and the conceptualization of the theoretical framework. The fourth chapter present the research design, with emphasis on the method, material, and operationalization. The thesis then moves onto the analysis. The first part presents the role of the Belgian armed forces and Belgium's strategic culture. This is followed by a presentation on the role of the Swedish armed forces and Sweden's strategic culture. The second part analyses how strategic culture have influenced the differing role of the armed forces in the two countries. The concluding chapter presents the findings, and deliberates on the contributions, limitations and provides suggestions for future research.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study small state are understood as small due to their lack of (military) capabilities and power asymmetries (influence) in relations to great military powers such as the US or France (Edström et al 2019:4).

## 2 Previous Research

### 2.1 The expanding role of the Armed forces in Domestic Security

Accompanying the changing threat environment following the Cold War and the change of the dominant strategic lens through which security was understood, the armed forces of some Western nation-states increasingly took on new, less traditional roles (Edmunds 2006:1059; Kalkman 2019:2). Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union many Western states saw a disappearance of a strong external enemy and territorial defence was seen as being abundant and expensive as the threat of invasion significantly decreased (Clarke 2016:1; Schnabel & Krupanski 2018:5). Moreover, following the 9/11 attacks, security threats have also been seen as much more diffuse (Kalkman 2019:2). The armed forces of Western nations have subsequently taken on increasingly non-traditional roles, corresponding with the expanding understanding of security, such as countering terrorism, smuggling, illegal migrations, border control, crime investigations, guarding major public events, cyber operations and emergency and domestic crisis (Clarke 2016:26; Schnabel & Krupanski 2018:61).

There is an academic agreement that “the armed forces are currently undergoing a profound series of shifts in their core roles and are increasingly playing a domestic role” (Kalkman 2019:2). T. Edmunds argues that this has resulted in the previously recognised division of the armed forces and the police has become significantly weakened (Edmunds 2006:1071). The argument is echoed by M. Head and S. Mann, who states that there is an international trend towards establishing greater executive and governmental power to deploy armed forces for domestic and political purposes (2009:1). They use Italy as an example and highlight the deployment of troops to fight crime, illegal immigration and during protests and strikes “on vague and undefined grounds, employing terms such as security, emergency and domestic violence” (ibid.). The authors emphasise the change in threat environment and broadening understanding of security to explain the expanding role of the armed forces in domestic security. Nevertheless, they also stress the unique historical role of the armed forces in a given country.



J. Clarke argues that there is an increased tendency to deploy the armed forces in a domestic context due to changes in the threat environment, the decline in demand and budgets, the professionalization of the military, and the accompanying militarization of the police force and civilian authorities (Clarke 2016:43-45). Clarke argues that as a result, the Western armed forces have been seen as a cheap resource and their deployment domestically has often been viewed as being free of both risks and costs (Clarke 2016:2). He conducts a case study on Germany, illustrating that Germany has, post-World War II, been extremely reluctant to employ their armed forces domestically and have one of the most restrictive legislations in Europe. Nevertheless, in August 2012 a historical ruling took place, allowing armed forces to be employed for domestic purposes and for civilian support in case of state emergencies of “catastrophic proportions, including a terrorist attack” (Clarke 2016:23). Clarke moreover states that “soldiers are far more likely to be employed domestically than abroad” (Clarke 2016:9), highlighting the importance of understanding why and when the armed forces will be deployed.

## 2.2 The role of the Armed Forces in Counterterrorism

Previous research highlights that militaries are commonly deployed in response to domestic emergencies, in which terror attacks are often mentioned, justifying the deployment of the armed forces (Chalk 1995:17; Wilkinson 2011:85). Terrorism remains a significant security problem and following 9/11, but perhaps more significantly the metro bombings in Madrid 2004 and London 2005, many European states reviewed their counterterrorism strategies. The responses between countries vary significantly, and Peter Chalk argues that liberal democracies have struggled to adequately respond to terrorism in a manner that conforms with the norms of legitimacy and acceptability (1995:17). Furthermore, he states that despite the military having superiority with regards to equipment, expertise, and experience, it remains essential that counterterrorism is a police responsibility, and that the military should be seen as a last resort (*ibid.*). This juxtaposition underscores much of the contemporary discussions on domestic counterterrorism and highlights the quandary between counterterrorism being a police- or a military matter.

As a result of the blurred line between terrorism being a criminal offence and an act of war it is no surprise that democracies adopt policies that have elements of both. G.Hughes argues that contemporary counterterrorism often includes defensive and preventative measures to minimize

the ability of terrorist/insurgent groups to inflict violence against civilians, for example emergency legislations, banning membership in extremist organizations, increased police and military patrols (Hughes 2011:22). Counterterrorism can also incorporate offensive means to undermine terrorist groups and neutralize its members, sometimes with the assistance of the armed forces in a domestic setting (ibid.). The main tasks of the armed forces are often however limited to intelligence gathering and sharing, as well as patrolling public spaces and important infrastructure. Moreover, maritime and air force units can be deployed to intercept terrorist personnel, arms shipments and for border control (Hughes 2011:40-41). Nevertheless, Hughes stressed the importance of the armed forces being a last resort as it is fraught with political, practical, and ethical problems and warns of the dangers of a militarization of counterterrorism (Hughes 2011:88).

Following the 'War on Terror' many governments undertook changes that would under different circumstances be considered unacceptable and as substantial infringement on civil liberties (Boyle 2019:385). Counterterrorism has consequently been framed as a war effort, resulting in a militarization of the domestic security environment. This has therefore led to an increased deployment of military forces domestically. M.J. Boyle argues that due to the increased unstable security environment and the tactics used by the terrorist, the military has a comparative advantage in dealing with certain kinds of terrorist incidents and their aftermaths due to their high levels of training, unique command, generous budget, and resources (Boyle 2019:384). The armed forces are therefore a crucial complement to law enforcement when dealing with terrorism. However, he stresses the pitfalls of an overly militarized counterterrorism strategy in a domestic context and argues that only some states can afford to use their armed forces (Boyle 2019:385).

Paul Wilkinson states that some researchers argue that terrorists wage wars, and thus the most effective response is a militarized response. Nevertheless, a fully militarized approach is very distinctive from the armed forces providing aid to civil authorities and is unlikely to take place in a democracy (Wilkinson 2011:85). A fully militarized approach would, according to Wilkinson, mean a suspension of the civil legal system which would be replaced by material law, summary punishment, the impositions of curfews, censorship, and extensive infringements of civil liberties (Wilkinson 2011:86). Wilkinson argues instead that although domestic counterterrorism remains primarily a law enforcement matter, specialist roles such as hostage rescue, bomb disposal and specialist military units might be essential in case of a terrorist attack

(Wilkinson 2011:101). He also states that as a result of the increasingly dangerous and volatile strategic environment, the armed forces are expected to play an increased role in domestic counterterrorism but holds that they should be deployed as a last resort or when the military is needed to perform special tasks (Wilkinson 2011:111). Otherwise, counterterrorism can damage the legitimacy of the governments and disfigure the democratic system.

## 2.3 Summary and Research Gap

There is an academic consensus that the role of the armed forces in domestic security has increased and previous research puts great emphasis on the transformational impact on the end of the Cold War and 9/11. Previous research highlights that the armed forces can provide valuable resources, expertise and specialised knowledge that can be effectively used in counterterrorism. Nevertheless, previous research has to a large extent been focused on large powers such as France, the UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, and the United States (US). Consequently, there is a lack of research concerning smaller liberal democracies, necessitating future research. There is moreover a lack of comparative research concerning why some countries utilize their armed forces whereas others do not despite facing similar security threats. Additionally, there is a research gap concerning small states, domestic counterterrorism, and the deployment of armed forces in a domestic security context, thus motivating this thesis. Explanations for decision-making and strategic behaviour has to a large extent been limited to single case studies discussing civil-military relations, changes in threat environment and the socio-political landscape, focusing on external factors and subsequently overlooking the inherent strategic culture of a given country and how it influences the decision-making with regards to the use of force. Accordingly, this research is motivated by an empirical research gap which have largely overlooked the differing roles of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism, as well as a theoretical gap where previous theoretical explanation has been insufficient in explaining why some countries use their armed forces while others do not. This thesis therefore aims to bridge the research gap by focusing on how strategic culture can explain the differing roles in Belgium and Sweden.

# 3 Theoretical Framework

## 3.1 Strategic Culture Debate

The theory of strategic culture is used in security and war studies to explain strategic behaviour and to integrate cultural inferences about decision-making regarding the use of force. Strategic culture presumes that decision-makers' interests are constructed by consistent patterns of perceptions about the use of military forces towards achieving political objectives and predisposes decision-makers towards certain options while disregarding others (Neumann & Heikka 2005:6). The theory aims to make up for the lack of explanatory value found in realist and neorealist theories when explaining differing defence and military strategies and decisions. It introduces a cultural perspective to challenge the dominating theories in war studies which rests on the assumptions that actors behave rational and in pursuit of interests largely determined by material factors (Biehl et al 2013:10).

Strategic culture was coined by Jack Snyder in 1977 to explain the differences in nuclear policies between the Soviet Union and the US (Snyder 1977). Snyder held that states act rational, but contrary to realism and neorealism, rationality is determined by the inherent strategic culture. He concluded that the different policies were due to their strategic culture, as their doctrines had been developed in different organizational, historical and political contexts (Snyder 1977:V). Snyder defined strategic culture as “the sum total of ideas, conditioned empirical responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitations” (Snyder 1977:8). Strategic culture is therefore a perceptual lens through which security issues and problems are evaluated by, and which influences, but not determines, strategic responses (Snyder 1977:V). Following Snyder a number of researchers have focused on strategic culture and its influence on strategic behaviour. Accordingly, four generations of research have developed.

Together with Snyder, one prominent researcher within the first generation is Colin Gray. Gray defined culture as “socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, habits of mind, and preferred methods of operations that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community that has had a necessarily unique historical experience” and argues that culture can

slowly change over time as new experiences are absorbed (1999:51). Moreover, the first generation states that culture and strategic behaviour are inseparable as actors are encultured and will behave in ways that are influenced by their cultural perceptual lens (Gray 1999:68). The first generation holds that rationality is culturally encoded, and states act accordingly. Furthermore, strategic culture is seen as a guide to strategic actions which influences a state's behaviour, while behaviour simultaneously shapes the cultural context.

The second generation draws insight from contemporary critical constructive theory and argues that there is a difference between what leaders portray and what they do (Klein 1988:138). Bradley Klein (1988) proposed that one must focus on the production of legitimacy and investigate how strategic culture is produced. Nevertheless, following a long period of inactivity of the second generation, Edward Lock sought to "refine the concept of strategic culture" and build upon Klein's approach (Lock 2010:685). Lock perceived strategic culture "as a practice that represents both the site at which strategic culture operates and the site at which strategic culture is produced". Compared to the other generations, he sought to critically investigate how strategic culture is constituted and how it predisposes certain behaviour and collective identities within a security community (Lock 2010:698).

The third generation researchers, most notably Alistair Iain Johnstons, criticised the first generations for being overdeterministic, while simultaneously being underdeterministic. Moreover, he criticised the first generation for lacking methodological rigour and sought to develop an understanding of strategic culture that could be falsified and argued that "strategic culture [...] limits behavioural choices. But I also assume that from these limits one ought to be able to derive specific predictions about the strategic choice" (Johnston 1995:46). Strategic culture is therefore understood as a creating long-lasting strategic preference with regards to the use of force. The third generation perceives culture as an independent variable, whose effect on behaviour could be observed, measured, and falsified.

The newly established fourth generation builds on the positivistic approach from the third generation but incorporates aspects of constructivism. Tamir Libel argues that prior generations fail to account for change in behaviour (Libel 2020:354). Libel builds on Alan Bloomfield's approach, claiming that strategic culture must be understood as a competition between multiple subcultures. The hegemonic strategic culture at a given time is therefore the outcome of that

competition (Bloomfield 2012:453). The fourth generation holds that it provides a new approach to identifying change in strategic culture by focusing on subcultures (Libel 2020:361).

The debate between the first and third generations has however defined much of the strategic culture literature. This thesis takes its point of departure from the first generation, and holds that strategic culture is a guide to strategic actions and as influencing, but not determining, the response compared to the third generation (Snyder 1977:V). Strategic culture is therefore seen as an interpretive prism through which decision-makers view the strategic landscape, and which predisposes decision-makers towards certain actions over others (Doeser & Eidenfalk 2019:7).

## 3.2 Conceptualization of Strategic Culture

Despite the lack of a universal definition of strategic culture, there are two commonalities inherent in the theory, namely the focus on decision-makers perception towards the use of force, and that historical experiences are an important component of strategic culture. Moreover, there is an academic consensus that the sources of strategic culture form long lasting and persistent strategic preferences about the role of military force (Doeser & Eidenfalk 2019:6). Howlett and Glenn argue that the most influential source of strategic culture is history, geography (proximity to great powers), ideas, shared values, political cultures, and membership in regional or international institutions (2005:122), thus highlighting some of the sources of strategic culture. Strategic culture is frequently used as the theoretical framework to explain how it influences behaviour, but the focus has often been limited to the international dimension (Howlett & Glenn 2005; Biehl et al 2013; Doeser 2017; Doeser & Eidenfalk 2019). Accordingly, there seems to be a theoretical and empirical gap on how strategic culture influences the use of force in a *domestic* setting. This study is therefore motivated by an attempt to bridge this gap and investigate how strategic culture influences the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism.

This research conforms with the first generation of strategic culture, understanding strategic culture as predisposing decision-makers towards certain options, and disregarding others, regarding the use of force. Strategic culture is therefore seen as a contextual factor “that structures what options are considered to be appropriate by a specific actor in security and defence, hence influencing, but not determining behaviour” (Biehl et al 2013:11). Strategic culture is used as the theoretical framework as it contains explanatory value when analysing

defence strategy, the role of the armed forces and why certain policies are pursued. The theoretical framework is based on an extensive analysis of previous research on strategic culture but is adopted and uniquely produced to create a framework that can adequately be applied when investigating the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism, thereby bridging the research gap and contribute to the theoretical development of strategic culture. The theoretical framework is therefore based on five distinctive elements of strategic culture that influence strategic behaviour and is reflected in policies and strategies.

The first elements concern a state's *dominant threat perception(s)*, focusing on which threat(s) have been perceived as most dangerous since the end of the Cold War (Doeser & Eidenfalk 2019:7). The dominant threat perception(s) are used as it is assumed that enduring threat perceptions can be incorporated and reflected in a state's strategic culture, and reflects what should be protected, "from the states own territory [...], to other territories, or perceived global values such as human right" (Doeser & Eidenfalk 2019:7). Moreover, by studying threat perceptions, it becomes apparent what is (not) considered a military problem (Ångström & Honing 2012:672). Thus, by studying the dominant threat perception, motivations for the role of the armed forces in the defence and security strategy can be identified.

The second element is the *core tasks of the armed forces*. The core tasks can vary from expeditionary-orientated forces to territorial defence (Doeser 2017:744: Doeser & Eidenfalk 2019:8). By studying the core tasks of the armed forces, perceptions on the use of armed force and when it should be used are highlighted. Moreover, the prioritization, such as participation in international operations, territorial defence, or homeland security can be identified. Additionally, the organizational structure provides valuable insight into the capacities and priorities of the armed forces as resource allocation towards certain capabilities are a central part of the state's perception on the use of force and is therefore reflective of the strategic culture (Biehl et al 2013:16). The core tasks of the armed forces therefore reflect the strategic culture, which in turn provides justifications for the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism.

The third element of strategic culture is the *willingness to use force* which focuses on the "reluctance and unconstrained acceptance to use military force as an instrument of security policy" (Biehl et al 2013:16). It moreover focuses on for what purposes a state is willing to use force, for what reasons the armed forces can be deployed (offensive or defence purposes), and

how the armed forces is defined compared to other actors (ibid.). By studying the willingness to use force, it is possible to identify how the strategic culture influences the role of the armed forces in a domestic setting and in counterterrorism.

*Civil-military relations* are an inherent aspect of strategic culture as it influences the decision-making process with regards to the role of the armed forces and is based on historical developments of power-sharing. The civil-military aspects of strategic culture focus on the key actors in security and defence policy and what the decision-making process for the deployment of the armed force looks like. Moreover, it focuses on the constitutional and legal regulations regarding the armed forces, and what powers the government, parliament and head of state have in the decision-making (Biehl et al 2013:15). By studying the civil-military relations, decision-making processes are highlighted, reflecting the inherent perception on the use of the armed forces.

The last element is *public opinion*. Albeit an uncommon element used to study the influence of strategic culture, I argue that by studying the public opinion it is possible to identify to what extent strategic culture is anchored and established in a given society. The public opinion (understood as a unique security community) can be seen as a subculture, reflecting the acceptance or refusal of the strategic culture and to what extent there is a consensus on “cultural identification and interpretations of the state’s friends and foes” (Libel 2020:356). By studying how the public perceives the role of the armed forces and what the public perceives as being the dominant security threat, it is possible to study how anchored the strategic culture is (ibid.)



# 4 Research Design

## 4.1 Comparative Case Studies

This thesis employs a comparative case study research design. As the thesis builds on the understanding that rational action and strategic behaviour is unique within a specific context, a comparative case study provides an excellent research design to investigate similarities and differences between two cases. Comparative case studies are based on a strategic selection of cases and are appropriate to use when testing the explanatory value of a theory to identify unique characteristics of a specific case and uncover empirical relationships and mechanism (Bryman 2008:76; Halperin & Heath 2017:154). Additionally, the research questions are both explanatory and descriptive, enabling a hypothesis-driven research design informed by a set of expectations derived from previous research and the theoretical framework (Halperin & Heath 2017:115). As a result of the explanatory nature of the research, a comparative case study design is favourable to other comparative research designs as it allows a cross-case analysis of similarities and differences. A comparative case study research design is hence used to answer the research puzzle of why some Western liberal democracies utilize their armed forces to greater extent in domestic counterterrorism compared to others, and seeks to analyse and interpret how strategic culture influences the findings.

### 4.1.1 Case Selection

This thesis is limited to Sweden and Belgium. The two countries were chosen using an approach influenced by Mill's Most Similar System Design, based on selecting cases that share many theoretical characteristics but differ in one critical aspect (Halperin & Heath 2017:219). Despite Belgium being a federal state and Sweden a unitary state, they share many political similarities. Both are constitutional monarchies with parliamentary multi-party system, proportional representational electoral system, coalition governments, and important members of the European Union (EU). Some political differences are however prevailing as Belgium is, for example, a founding member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), while Sweden is not (yet) a member (Biscop 2013:33-35; Edström & Gyllensporre 2014:158-159). Nevertheless, Sweden has long been a strong partner to NATO and has subsequently been influenced by this partnership (Edström & Gyllensporre 2014:176). Another difference that has influenced the

strategic behaviour is their geographical position, as Belgium is geographically located in a more stable area while Sweden is located in an increasingly strategic region where Russian and NATO presence has increased (Biscop 2013:31; Edström et al 2019:26).

Furthermore, socially and demographically the two countries share many similarities. The quality of life in both countries are high and similar in standard. Both countries are welfare states with similar values, cultures, norms, and identities (Berghman et al 2016:775; Ruffa 2013:344). Similarities can also be found in counterterrorism where the main actors are the law enforcement authorities in both countries. Moreover, both countries have a legislation that allows, but also restricts, the role of the armed forces in domestic situations (SFS 2002:375; Lagasse & Saideman 2018:27). The critical aspect that differs between the two countries are related to the research problem as they demonstrate differing roles regarding their armed forces. Thus, by analysing these two cases, the number of factors that can influence the outcome can be reduced and therefore increase the credibility of the research and the theoretical framework.

## 4.2 Method

### 4.2.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

A qualitative content analysis is a data collection method used to analyse textual units. A content analysis can be both quantitative and qualitative, but for this study a qualitative content analysis is chosen as it is well suited to answer the research questions (Halperin & Heath 2017:336). The method assumes that it is possible to observe and identify meanings in the text and identify latent content. Accordingly, the method is suitable when analysing empirical material and identify important units (Halperin & Heath 2017:245). By analysing the empirical material, an understanding of how strategic culture influences the role of the armed forces is enabled. The content analysis is conducted using a deductive approach, where the theoretical framework guides the analysis and enables a systematic analysis of the explanatory value of strategic culture (Fejes & Thornberg 2019:24). The coding (the process of reducing and focusing the raw data) is therefore established using a pre-selected list of theoretical variables against the empirical material, also known as selective coding (ibid.). The coding scheme is therefore selected on the basis of the most important elements of the theoretical framework (see table 1 for examples). A content analysis of the empirical material enables a deep understanding

of how the five elements of strategic culture influences the strategic behaviour of Belgium and Sweden and assesses the explanatory value of the theoretical framework.

### 4.2.2 Operationalization of Strategic Culture

The operationalization of strategic culture is based on previous research and takes inspiration from predominantly Biehl et al (2013), Doeser (2017), and Doeser and Eidenfalk (2019). It is nevertheless adopted and reformulated to answer the research questions. The focus is therefore primarily on domestic factors that influence decision-making with regards to the use of force, differentiating itself from the previous research. In order to operationalize strategic culture, further clarification concerning its conceptualization is needed. The first clarification is made with regards to where strategic culture is held. Within strategic culture research it is generally accepted that the policy-making elite are the holders of strategic culture, and the ones being influenced by it. Moreover, this paper understands strategic culture to be monolithic. While acknowledging that strategic culture changes over time and that subcultures exist, the hypothesis holds that strategic culture generates recognisable patterns and expectations over time. The underlying assumption is therefore that there is a dominant strand reflected in the discourses and policy practice, enabling the analysis (Biehl et al 2013:12).

In order to conduct a systematic comparison between the cases, strategic culture has to be made measurable and provide analytical dimensions that can be empirically observed. Using a deductive approach drawing on previous research, five elements are identified reflecting the strategic culture and its influence on the outcomes. The five elements of strategic culture (see chapter 3.3) are operationalized as followed:

**Table 1:** Operationalization of the theoretical framework.

<i>Strategic Culture Elements</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Examples of phrases coded in the sources</i>
<i>Dominant threat perception(s):</i>	What/who is seen as the main threat? How is it perceived and described? What/who should be protected?	“Today however, it is a fact that terrorism linked to other security issues constitutes a threat to our security, including that on our own territory”
<i>Core tasks of the armed forces:</i>	What is the core task(s) of the armed force? Is there a prioritisation towards territorial or expeditionary defence? How are they organised and what capabilities do they have?	“The armed forces are undergoing a reorientation where the defence of Sweden is prioritized”

<i>Willingness to use force:</i>	For what purposes is the state willing to use force? Should it be used for self-defence only or also for offensive purposes? Has there been an attempt to prioritise tasks?	“above all, Belgium’s contribution is well above that of most other European countries since only four other EU countries [...] participate in the airstrikes in Syria and Iraq”
<i>Civil-military relations:</i>	Who are the key players in security and defence policy? What does the decision-making process for the deployment of the armed forces look like? What constitutional and legal regulations exist regarding the armed forces?	“support can only be provided if the armed forces have appropriate resources and if it does not hinder the ordinary operations”
<i>Public opinion:</i>	What is the main threat according to the public? Do they perceive measures to be adequate?	“in 2017, 26% of Belgium’s populations saw terrorism as the main threat towards Belgium.”

Additionally, a clarification regarding the role of the armed forces is needed. The role of the armed forces will be understood using a scale, where the role can be passive, moderate, or active. An active role is exemplified by a recurrent use of covert reconnaissance and operations, summary punishment, curfews, martial law, hostage rescue, special operations, censorship, and direct combat (Hughes 2011:23-24; Wilkinson 2011:86). A moderate role includes occasional and periodical infrastructural guarding, surveillance and protection, border controls, and patrolling on the streets (ibid.). Anything less than moderate is a passive role. Thus, the aim of the research is to investigate if and how the strategic culture of Belgium and Sweden have an influence on whether the armed forces have a passive, moderate or an active role in domestic counterterrorism.

#### 4.2.3 Research Strategy

Given the theory consuming approach of this study, the coding instrument was chosen based on the theoretical framework and is systemically applied to the empirical material to investigate and interpret its influence. The theoretical framework was applied to the material to systematically reduce it in order to identify the meaning-bearing units (the part of the text that contains relevant information). These were then transcribed into Word-table to be condensed and categorised using the five elements of the theoretical framework as coding scheme (see table 1), enabling a cross-case comparison. In order for a structured comparison, I chose to describe the role of the Belgian armed forces in counterterrorism and Belgium strategic culture first. This was followed by a presentation of Sweden following the same structure. This was then brought together in a structured comparison, using the structure of the theoretical framework to answer the research questions.

## 4.3 Material

The empirical material is based on a number of different sources, for example official government documents, reports, and national defence- and security strategies written between 2014-2020. The timeframe was chosen as Europe during 2014-2020 saw an increase, peak and an eventual decrease in frequency of terrorist attacks. The timeframe allowed me to investigate relevant documents of threat-perceptions and the role of the armed forces. The focus on primary data is moreover an unobtrusive data collection method and an attempt to limit the impact of the researcher on the data and reduce biases (Halperin & Heath 2017:176). Additionally, official documents have authority, are generally trustworthy, representative, and meaningful (Bryman 2008:488). Primary data is therefore used to identify similarities and differences in the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism and their strategic culture. The primary data is complemented with secondary data such as academic literature due to a lack of publicly available documents regarding Belgium's security and defence as well as English documents<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, all Swedish documents and quotations has been translated by the author. While language is an acknowledged weakness of the study, I have attempted to make up for this through triangulation. Triangulation enables cross-checking the data through multiple sources in order to increase the reliability of the data and data collection by corroborating data with multiple sources (Halperin & Heath 2017:161). Subsequently, secondary data, such as academic literature, was used to complete the primary sources, and it provided essential material when identifying the strategic culture of the countries and in the construction of the theoretical framework.

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<sup>2</sup> Due to limited English documents, online translation devices have been used. Moreover, the Belgian Defence News translation device on their online website has been used. It should however be stressed that few documents have been translated and no quotations have been used that have not originally been Swedish or English. Thus, texts that have been translated have only been used in order to provide context.

# 5 Empirical Analysis

## 5.1 The Role of the Belgian Armed forces in Domestic Counterterrorism

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris January 7, 2015, and the dismantling of a jihadist cell by the Belgian police in Verviers on January 15, the Belgian government initiate OVG to increase the (theoretical) deterrence level and combat terrorism (House of Representatives 2018: Clearman 2018:360-361). Concurrently, the threat level in Belgium, decided by the Threat Assessment Coordination Body (OCAM) was increased from two to three (on a scale of four), authorising military involvement (Clearman 2018:362). The objective was to guard and protect sensitive sites in Belgium, such as embassies, in order to support the police authority whose capacities were overstretched. On January 17, 150 soldiers, mainly the Chasseurs Ardennais and Paratroopers from the Land Component (army), were deployed (Belgian Defence 2022). Moreover, succeeding the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, the threat level increased to four and the number of troops in Belgium significantly increased. Following the attacks, Brussels went into lock-down between 21-26 November, when the threat level was reduced back to three (Lasoen 2019:954). Despite the decrease in threat level, the number of troops increased to 1428. Moreover, OVG were transformed into a more mobile mission, where patrolling, guarding, and protecting became the main objectives (Belgian Defence 2022). Furthermore, following the terror attacks in Brussels at the Zaventem airport and Maelbeek metro station in March 2016, the number of troops increased and reached an all-time high at 1828, and between April and November 2016, the number of troops were consistent (ibid.). Since 2017 the number of troops successively decreased, and on September 1, 2021, OVG was discontinued.

Additionally, on March 5, 2016, the parallel Operation Spring Guardian (OSG) was launched. The main objective of OSG is to secure and protect the nuclear facilities in Belgium. Contrary to OVG, OSG is not a support mission, but rather a military mission where soldiers form a rapid response unit and are authorised to take necessary measures to protect the facilities (Belgian Defence News 2018). Initially, OSG consisted of 140 soldiers but has since been reduced to an estimated 40. The operation was expected to end on January 1, 2023, which would signify the

first time since January 2015 that no soldiers are deployed domestically (Belgian Defence 2022)<sup>3</sup>. The threat level in Belgium has since 2018 remained at two (ibid.). Throughout the operations, the Land Component has constituted the majority of the soldiers, while the Medical Component have contributed but to a lesser extent. Additionally, the Belgian military intelligence service, General Information and Security Service (ADIV), under the Ministry of Defence plays a constant role in domestic counterterrorism, as they are tasked with “gather, analyse, and process information about any activity that could threaten the security of Belgium and its citizens on its territory” (House of Representatives 2018:45). Accordingly, due to the activities of the Belgian armed forces, with expectation of the ADIV, the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism is here interpreted as moderate.

## 5.2 Belgium’s Strategic Culture

As a result of the historical experiences of war, its geographical location and proximity to great (allied) powers, Belgium has developed a strategic culture that is firmly anchored in defence and security cooperation, internationalism, and a perception on the use of force as a suitable means to achieve security (Biscop 2013:38). Having its neutrality twice violated by Germany, first in August 1914 and then in May 1940, Belgium has developed a strategic culture based on international cooperation, collective defence and security anchored in NATO and the EU. Moreover, Belgium has become one of the most active and loyal ally to the US in the War on Terror and in multilateral interventions, for example Afghanistan, Lebanon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and against ISIS in Iraq and Syria (Haesebrouck 2020:45). Additionally, Belgium has a history of deploying security forces for domestic purposes in response to civil strifes, riots, and terrorism (Restigne & Manigart 2019:17). Thus, following both World Wars, the Cold War, domestic unrest, and the War of Terror, the Belgian strategic culture predisposes decision-makers towards a typical strategic behaviour, namely the use of the armed forces to achieve security, as well as a modern, mobile, and expeditionary oriented defence.

### 5.2.1 Dominant threat perception(s)

Following the Cold War, terrorism has been seen as a dominant threat towards Belgium, both domestically and internationally. Moreover, Belgium has not faced a traditional security threat

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<sup>3</sup> As of writing (2023-01-05), no updates regarding OSG’s discontinuation have been found.

post-Cold War, and territorial defence has been deprioritised (Strategic Vision 2016:27; Kalajic et al 2021:6). Comparatively, non-traditional threats, in which terrorism is explicitly mentioned, have been considered the dominant threat to the Belgian territory, the Belgian values and democracy, and it is acknowledged that internal security is fundamentally dependent on Belgium's external actions (NCSI 2016:43). In the 2016 Belgian defence paper *the Strategic Vision for Defence 2030* it is stated that “the security on the streets of Belgium and the protection of Belgium's economic interests remain closely connected with the security in the world” (2016:35). Furthermore, a dominant threat is the growing influence of international security issues on internal security, where the “conflict in Syria provides the clearest illustrations of the link between external and internal security (Strategic Vision 2016:25). It is possible to identify a blurred line between the external deployment of troops for counterterrorism purposes and internal security as:

Ideally, our security is ensured as far away from our borders as possible through expeditionary deployment within the framework of collective security. Today however, it is a fact that terrorism linked to other security issues constitutes a threat to our security, including that on our own territory (Strategic Vision 2016:55).

In the Civil Crisis Management Strategy, it is moreover highlighted that:

Our internal security is determined by promoting peace, security and stability beyond our borders and the same time will also have an impact on priority setting for civilian crisis management, for instance by the increased focus on the fight against terrorism, on the prevention of violent extremism or the fight against organised crime of irregular migrations flows in fragile states (FPS Foreign Affairs 2017:1).

The fight against terrorism is hence listed as a priority for ensuring internal security and domestic terrorist attacks have confirmed the link between external and internal security (FPS Foreign Affairs 2017:1; Strategic Vision 2016:55; Comprehensive Approach 2017:3). Moreover, in the National Assessments by OCAM during 2014-2018 it is possible to identify that terrorism has remained a significant threat to Belgium, as the threat level has on average been level three, with occasional increases to level four (House of Representatives 2018:9). Nevertheless, since 2018 the level has been reduced to two, indicating a reduced threat. Furthermore, Belgium does not face a direct traditional security threat, but could be included in a territorial confrontation through NATO or EU (Kalajic et al 2021:10; Struys 2017). Moreover, while Russia, China, and Iran, among others, are mentioned as threats to the international order they are not seen as directly threatening Belgian territory nor security (Biscop 2013:38; Strategic Vision 2016:39).



## 5.2.2 Core tasks of the armed forces

The Belgian strategic culture is reflected in the core tasks of the armed forces, and are stated as followed:

Contribute to the collective defence through NATO to defend the Alliance's territorial integrity; contribute to the collective security through crisis management operations in a multilateral or international framework, preferably mandated or organised by international organisations, to ensure peace and security in the world; to protect Belgian citizens all over the world (Strategic Vision 2016:37-38).

Since the Cold War, however, collective defence has shifted into the background and collective security and expeditionary operations are prioritised (Kalajzic et al 2021:6; National Security Strategy 2021:40). In addition to the core tasks, the Belgian Defence has a significant role in ensuring the security of the Belgian state by undertaking a number of non-core tasks, such as supporting internal security, in which counterterrorism and consequence management is mentioned (Strategic Vision 2016:39). It is also stated that:

Apart from the limited structural tasks, the expertise of Defence and the capabilities available are used at national level during national crises. However, in the first instance they are intended for the expeditionary deployment. The capabilities referred to include: the surveillance detachments made available by the land forces because of the higher terrorism threat; [...]; Special Forces in support of the Police special units (Strategic Vision 2016:57).

Participation and contribution to international operations are moreover prioritised over territorial defence, and the organizational structure confirms this. Belgium ended conscription in 1993 and was one of the first European countries to do so (Biscop 2013:34). Additionally, the armed forces experienced a significant reduction in size and budget which has shaped the current force structure (ibid.). The armed forces are currently organised for expeditionary operations and consists of 25 000 personnel, divided between the Land component, organised in a motorised brigade and Special Operations Force, the Air Component, a Medical Component, and the Naval Component consisting of two multipurpose frigates, five minesweepers and a number of non-combatant vessels (Strategic Vision 2016:145-146). There is a strong emphasis on the Land Component as the primary actor to support the police in internal security. Nevertheless, the air force and the navy also have explicit roles in domestic counterterrorism if the request is made, for example being able to conduct Renegade missions (Strategic Vision 2016:55,137). Moreover:

Within the framework of counterterrorism, the Defence's Special Forces are already deployed for direct actions under the supervision of the Police. Defence could reinforce the cooperation with the Police's Special Units by organising training and the acquisition of equipment in a more structured way together (Strategic Vision 2016:124-125).

It is moreover stated that:

Defence is the last bulwark for the security of our society, it will optimise the use of its capabilities [...] within the framework of internal security. That being said, Defence already carries our internal security missions in a structural way. On the one hand it makes the specialist assets available that are covering territorial aspects of collective defence for a role in internal security (Strategic Vision 2016:55).

It is also possible to identify an increased convergence between internal and external security and tasks, hinting towards a transformation into a postmodern force structure. Postmodern armed forces are more likely to participate in non-traditional operations and take on increasingly non-military tasks, such as “fishery control, the struggle against trafficking [...], the conservation of the environment and support in case of disasters and incidents” (Strategic Vision 2016:157; Kalkman 2019:2; Clarke 2015:43). The armed forces during the initial phases of OVG furthermore took on some arguably police responsibilities as they conducted luggage checks in metro stations (Clearman 2018:363). Moreover, historical experiences have taught Belgium that the use of armed forces are appropriate for domestic security, for example through the employment of the Gendarmerie in 1985 against the left-wing extremists Cellules Communistes Combattantes, in a mission that closely resembles OVG (Clearman 2018:345). Subsequently, Belgium's historical experiences on the use of armed troops in support of the police predisposed them towards the option of deploying them for counterterrorism (Resteigne & Manigart 2019:17). Accordingly, the Belgian armed forces are tasked with non-traditional responsibilities, corroborating the juxtaposition between the police force and the military (Struys 2017:4; Schanbel & Krupansk 2018:18). While it becomes apparent that the dominant focus of the armed forces is expeditionary operations, it is possible to identify a mission creep as they are increasingly used for domestic security. Furthermore, the strategic culture based on historical experiences predisposed decision-makers to perceive the armed forces as suitable for domestic counterterrorism.

### 5.2.3 Willingness to use force

Belgium imposes limited restrictions on the use of force provided it conforms with international law and has been prone to deploy their troops for international peacekeeping, peace enforcing, stabilization-and counterterrorism missions (Biscop 2013:38). Additionally, the executive

(Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister) does not need to obtain approval by the parliament to deploy troops domestically. Nevertheless, consensus is sought after and the government rarely deploys troops without it (Biscop 2013:36; Lagasse & Saideman 2019:20). The deployment of troops to support the police therefore reflects the strategic culture and willingness to use force in different circumstances. Moreover, historical experiences have taught Belgium that the use of force is a necessary tool for political objectives, as “[n]on-military means plays a central role in the promotion of a tolerant, safe, and prosperous world. However, defence remains a necessary tool in the state’s toolbox” (Strategic Vision 2016:24). Additionally:

Defence also is and remains a security actor on the national territory, inter alia, for specialised tasks such as air defence, maritime patrol, and clearance of explosives from both world wars and of parcel bombs, in particular within the framework of counter-terrorism (Strategic Vision 2016:33).

Belgian decision-makers have moreover been prone to deploy troops and “takes pride in having contributed with significant capabilities to all major multinational peacekeeping and crisis management efforts in which Europe as a whole has been involved” (Biscop 2013:35). Subsequently, Belgium has established a willingness to use military force as demonstrated by, for example, sending four F16 to ISAF in Afghanistan, 14 fighter-crafts to Operation Allied Force in Kosovo, and conducting over 620 sorties in Libya during Operations Unified Protector (Biscop 2013:39). Additionally, they contributed to the US-led coalitions against ISIS following its initiation 2014 and has since sent six F16s and is one of four European countries that have actively partaken in airstrikes in Syria and Iraq (Haesebrouck 2020:45; Renard 2016:71). Moreover, former Foreign Minister Didier Reynders, following the increased terror level in November 2015, stated:

[T]he threat is imminent and precise, because we actually fear that some terrorists, and we do not know the exact number of terrorists, could act and follow a modus operandi similar to what happened in Paris that is urban guerrilla attacks with heavy weapons (Euronews 2015).

It is therefore insinuated that the terrorist attacks are means of warfare, and the responses to deploy troops are therefore a legitimate countermeasure. Moreover, former Interior Minister Jan Jambo stated, following the 2016 Brussel attacks, that “we are in a war”, stressing the severity of terrorism, justifying the domestic presence of troops (Politico 2016). Moreover, there appears to be little regulations on the use of force, demonstrating Belgium’s willingness to use force for different purposes (Schnabel & Krupanski 2018:61; Kalkman 2019:2).

#### 5.2.4 Civil-military relations

The use of force and the role of the armed forces is controlled in the Constitution, in a number of laws and Royal Decrees. Moreover, the control over the armed forces is divided between the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary, where the executive holds superiority (Clearman 2018:350). The most significant regulatory laws are Article 167 in the Constitution, and the Law of May 20, 1994 (d'Argent 2003:195). While Art.167 §1 states that “the King commands the armed forces” it is in practice the Council of Ministers that takes all decisions with regards to the armed forces, their deployment, and use of force (Constitution 2020). Moreover, the Constitution does not explicitly describe the role of the armed forces and therefore imposes no limitations for external nor internal purposes. Accordingly, this is up for interpretations by the executive (Struys 2017:8; Clearman 2018:340). Additionally, the Law of May 20, 1994, decides when and where soldiers might be used. Nevertheless, it is wide and open for interpretations and covers nearly any kind of military engagements, provided it conforms with international law (d'Argent 2003:192). The parliament does not have any executive power but holds legislative power and can indirectly regulate the armed forces through budget- and size constraints (d'Argent 2003:199). Hence, while always considering the views of strategic and defence committees and councils, the Council of Ministers are the primary actors involved in the decision-making with regards to the use of the armed forces (Struys 2017:4). Nevertheless, as stated previously, Belgium has a strategic culture in which consensus is sought (Biscop 2013:36). Additionally, the Minister of Defence *de facto* controls the military once deployed, while the Council of Ministers provides the overall directions of the defence policy. It is also possible to observe that the Minister of Defence and Chief of Defence are subordinated to the wills of the Government, demonstrated by their repeated requests for the reduction and dissolution of OVG and OSG, which has persistently been rejected (Brussel Times 2019).

During peacetime, the armed forces can participate in different kinds of operations according to Law 20 May 1994, such as crisis management, humanitarian aid, and cooperation with other governmental authorities in case of emergency (d'Argenet 2003:194). Counterterrorism operations fall into the latter kind of operations, and in accordance with Article 175 of the Communal Law and Article 129 of the Provincial law, the mayors of the federal states and the governors of the provinces can request the intervention of the armed forces in case of riots and other civil strife (d'Argent 2003:194; Clearman 2018:348). These may however be refused by the Council of Ministers (Struys 2017:4). Additionally, the Law on the Federal Police, Article

111, allows the Chief of the Federal Police to request the assistance of the armed forces in situations of urgency if the police lack adequate resources, as was the case with OVG (Clearman 2018:348). Accordingly, the use of the armed forces in internal emergency situations is possible but is legally seen as a matter of last resort (d’Argent 2003:194). The armed forces can never act completely independently of the police, and while the commander of the military detachments remains in command of the deployed unit, the police authority remains in charge of the operation (Clearman 2018:345). Nevertheless, as stated above, the role of the armed forces is wide and open for interpretation and, conforming with the regulations and legislations, the armed forces can be deployed for subsequently any (non)military missions provided it conforms with international law (d’Argenet 2003:195; Constitution 2020).

### 5.2.5 Public Opinion

According to the Eurobarometer, the Belgian public has perceived terrorism to be a significant threat. In 2014, 11% of the Belgian population (partaking in the survey) perceived terrorism to be the most significant threat facing the EU, and 4% saw terrorism as the most significant threat facing Belgium (Eurobarometer 2014). In 2016, 23% saw it as the main threat facing Belgium (Eurobarometer 2016). In 2016, 50% of the Belgian population moreover saw a high risk of a future terrorist attack, and 46% saw that there was some risk (ibid.). In 2017, 38% saw terrorism as the dominant threat towards the EU, while domestically the number had increased to 26%, tying with immigration as the number one perceived security threat (Eurobarometer 2017). In the following surveys, there is a significant decrease in threat perception, as in 2018, only 24% saw it as the main threat to the EU, and 13% towards Belgium (nevertheless, higher than average in Europe 2018) (Eurobarometer 2018). In 2019 only 4% saw it as the dominant threat, and in 2020, 1% saw it as the main threat towards Belgium (Eurobarometer 2019; Eurobarometer 2020).

**Table 2:** Belgian public opinion on terrorism.

Year	Primary threat towards EU	Primary threat towards Belgium
2014	11%	4%
2015	25%	9%
2016	33%	23%
2017	38%	26%
2018	24%	13%
2019	12%	4%
2020	4%	1%

Note: A summary on the % of people who perceived terrorism to be the primary threat towards EU and Belgium.

N = 1000–1500/per year.

Source: Eurobarometer 2014-2020

Additionally, following the terrorist attacks 2015, surveys were conducted in order to investigate the public opinion on the response by the Government. Accordingly, 45% approved of the Prime Minister's response in the wake of the Paris attacks (Politico 2015). Moreover, according to La Libre, 75% supported the deployment of the military personnel in the streets in 2015 (Resteigne & Manigart 2019:22). Likewise, by the end of 2016, 81% expressed confidence in their armed forces (Struys 2017:13). It is therefore possible to identify that the Belgian population considered terrorism to be a significant security threat. Moreover, the Belgian population showed strong support for the deployment of soldiers on the streets.

### 5.3 The Role of the Swedish Armed Forces in Domestic Counterterrorism

Following September 11, 2001, the metro bombings in Madrid 2004 and London 2005, investigations were launched into Sweden's counterterrorism strategy, including the armed forces support to the police. In the Governmental proposition (2005/6:111) 'The Armed Forces support to the Police in the Fight Against Terrorism' a number of suggestions were made to enhance the cooperation. As a result, Act (2006:343) was drafted, allowing the armed forces to support the police in case of a terrorist attack. The armed forces can therefore, if requested by the Police Authority or Security Service, provide support, surveillance and assists from land, air, and sea. Moreover, the Special Forces are often seen as the primary supporting actor. Following the London attacks 2005, the Government decided for highted state of alert in Stockholm, increasing the legal means available in order to defend Sweden. Whilst the police were ordered to patrol the metro stations in Stockholm, the military was never requested (SVT 2005). Following the attacks in Stockholm 2010 and 2017, Sweden did not heighten the state of alert. Moreover, after the 2017 attack, a dialogue was conducted between the Armed forces, Police Authority and the Security Service in order to establish if the armed forces were needed. It was nevertheless concluded that the Police Authority had enough resources themselves and no further action was taken to engage the armed forces (NOA 2017:35).

Although the role of the armed forces has been passive, the Swedish Military Intelligence and Security Service (MUST) has a pronounced role in counterterrorism. While not specified, MUST are tasked with information gathering and sharing with regards to terrorism (MUST 2016:7). Moreover, the Special Forces conducts yearly exercises with the Police and Security Services to increase cooperation between the agencies in case of a large-scale terrorist attacks

(SVT 2019). This has hitherto never been actualised. Thus, in sum, due to the (non)activities of the armed forces, their role in domestic counterterrorism can be interpreted as passive, as while they have opportunities and capabilities to participate, these have never been actualised.

## 5.4 Sweden's strategic culture

As a result of historical experiences and the geographical location, Sweden has developed a strategic culture anchored in territorial defence and a reluctance to use force for purposes other than self-defence (DS 2017:51). The historical experiences of neutrality and non-alignment during both World Wars and the Cold War have shaped Sweden's perceptions on the use of force as a tool of last resort, perceiving other tools as more appropriate (Ångström & Honing 2012:677). Moreover, Sweden has a strategic culture rooted in a strong separation of external and internal security. While Sweden during 2000-2010 had an ambiguous security and defence policy due to significant changes in the international landscape and threat perceptions, they have nonetheless retreated back to policies resembling those of the post-Cold War era (Westberg 2021:216). Albeit decreased focus on national defence during 2000-2010, it is argued that the separation between internal and external were prominent. While Sweden recognised the increased influence of international events on the internal security, their strategic culture predisposed them towards military commitments internationally limited for humanitarian or strategic reasons, as opposed to ensuring internal security externally. Due to Sweden's historical experiences, absence of war in the last 200 years, neutrality and non-alignment policy, and the strong focus on Russia throughout history, the strategic culture predisposes decision-makers towards a strategic behaviour in which the use of force is seen as legitimate for self-defence and humanitarian purposes. Moreover, Sweden's historical policies have required a self-dependency on their own military for defence.

### 5.4.1 Dominant threat perception(s)

While the security- and defence policy have undergone noteworthy changes, Russia remains the dominant threat towards Sweden's perceived security. Immediately post-Cold War, Sweden remained anchored in traditional defence. Nevertheless, due to changes in the security environment, the armed forces underwent budget and size reduction in the late 1990s (Westberg 2021:216). While significantly later than many other European countries, Sweden began to transform their armed forces towards more modern forces, suitable for the broadening security concept. Consequently, the Government Bills from 1999-2008 focused increasingly on

international security missions and peacekeeping interventions with the background that a “military attack against Sweden was considered unrealistic during at least the upcoming decade” (Edström et al 2019:100). Nevertheless, following the Georgian War 2008, focus has since been on territorial defence and Russian activities. It is stated that:

The security situations have deteriorated in Sweden’s immediate vicinity and in Europe. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea are contrary to the United Nations (UN) prohibition of violence and have fundamentally challenged the European security order [...]. The Russian actions in Georgia in 2008, in Ukraine since 2014 and in Syria since 2015 show a Russian willingness to use military means to achieve political goals (DS:2017:17).<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, since 2008 and more pronounced in 2014, Sweden’s dominant threat has been Russia, especially in the Baltic Sea region. Moreover, while in 2014, it is stated that “it is unlikely that Sweden will be attacked” (DS 2014:19)<sup>5</sup>, it is in 2017 stated that:

An armed aggression against Sweden cannot be ruled out. Nor can it be ruled out that military means of force or threat of force might be used against Sweden. Sweden will inevitably be affected if a security policy crisis or armed conflict arises in our immediate area. The total defence must be designed and dimensioned to be able to face an armed attack against Sweden, including acts of war on Swedish territory (DS 2017:61).<sup>6</sup>

Whilst Russia is seen as the dominant threat towards Sweden, terrorism constitutes a threat towards the EU and regions outside Europe. It is stated that “the majority of terrorist attacks in the world take place outside European borders” (Skr 2015:4) and that “terrorism threatens international peace and security, national security and our fundamental rights and freedoms” (Skr 2015:6). According to the National Centre for Terrorist assessment (NCT), the threat level between 2014–2020 has on average been on level three (out of five). Whereas NCT increased the level to four in November 2015 it was decreased to three in March 2016 (SVT 2016). It is moreover acknowledged that while terrorism continues to be the dominant threat towards certain countries globally and in Europe, it is not towards Sweden (DS 2017:18; DS 2019:39). Additionally, Sweden’s security is ensured in its immediate vicinity, and a separation of the internal and external is identified. This is also reflected in the fact that Sweden seeks partnership primarily with neighbouring countries, most importantly Finland, rather than through expeditionary operations (DS 2019:45). Accordingly, the dominant threat towards Sweden is

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by the author

<sup>5</sup> Translated by the author

<sup>6</sup> Translated by the author



the Russian activity in the Baltic Sea region and the potential consequences following acts of armed aggression in the region.

#### 5.4.2 Core tasks of the armed forces

The Swedish strategic culture, albeit ambiguous between 2000–2010, is based upon an understanding of self-dependency and a strong territorial defence. In 2004 it was stated that an armed aggression was seen as unlikely and that the armed forces should be organised to counter broader security threats (DS 2019:135). Moreover, in the 2011 Swedish Counterterrorism Strategy, it is stated that:

The Swedish Armed Forces are undergoing a transition from depot-based invasion defence to deployable operational defence. This improves the capability of the Swedish Armed Forces to assist other parts of society and other agencies with its existing capacity and resources, when required, with tasks including counterterrorism and the management of the consequences of attacks (Skr 2011/12:19).

Nevertheless, by 2009, against the background of the Georgian War, the Government proposed a defence strategy that differed from the Counterterrorism Strategy (focused exclusively on terrorism) and held that defence should be primarily focused on national defence. In the 2009 Government Bill, national defence together with international operations were seen as the core tasks (DS 2019:23). In the following Government Bills and defence decisions, international operations were however written-off as a core task. Thus, in 2015 “the armed forces are undergoing a reorientation where the defence of Sweden is prioritized” (DS 2019:131)<sup>7</sup> and that “defence must be designed primarily to be able to meet an armed attack and defend the Swedish territory” (DS 2019:138)<sup>8</sup>. Accordingly, since 2015, the core tasks are to:

Defend Sweden against an armed attack; assert Sweden’s territorial integrity and prevent sovereign rights and national interests in Sweden and outside Swedish territory in accordance with international law; promote our security and prevent and manage conflicts and wars by conducting operations in peacetime on our own territory, in the immediate area and participating in international peace-promoting efforts, and; protect society and its functionality by using existing capabilities and resources to assist the rest of society both in peace and at high alert (DS 2017:81).<sup>9</sup>

The prioritisation of national defence is reflected in the organisation of the armed forces and the reintroduction of conscription from 2018, which was dormant since 2010 (Edström et al 2019:170). It is expected that by 2025 the armed forces will have 90,000 employees, and by

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<sup>7</sup> Translated by the author

<sup>8</sup> Translated by the author

<sup>9</sup> Translated by the author

2030 estimated 120,000 (DS 2019:172). Moreover, the army is transforming into three mechanised brigades, one reduced motorised brigade, and one enhanced mechanised battalion stationed on Gotland (DS 2019:165). The navy will strengthen its air-defence capabilities and acquire additional sea-target missiles. Additionally, increased emphasis will be placed on submarine warfare and the number of submarines will increase from three to five in 2025 (DS 2019:166). The air force will remain with six fighter divisions but is expected to increase its fleet with 60 new JAS Gripen (DS 2019:167). It is therefore possible to identify a significant quantitative increase in the organisation, confirming the re-emphasises on territorial defence. It is however acknowledged that:

[...] the Swedish Armed Forces is still an attractive player, also internationally, and our commitment contributes to the Swedish interest in stabilizing the situation in the world. Moreover, Swedish participation in international operations strengthens the competences and capability of the Armed Forces to act on a national level (Swedish Armed Forces 2021:14).

Albeit recognising its importance, international operations are seen as a way to increase the armed forces capabilities and interoperability with other states. Furthermore, although tasked with domestic security in the event of serious threat, the support has often been limited to rescue missions, logistical measures, and to situations where armed force is not required (SOU 2016:29; DS 2017:158). It is repeatedly stated that support to the civilian community will take place with existing resources and may not hinder the ordinary operation of the armed forces (DS 2017:83). Moreover, it is frequently specified that the Special Forces have the primary role of supporting the police in counterterrorism (Skr 2015:31). The Special Forces are tasked with maintaining “a high readiness for defence of Sweden, for providing support to the police against large-scale terrorism and Swedish security policy” (Swedish Armed Forces 2021:44). Since 2015, there have been little regulations on when the Special Forces can assist with counterterrorism (Skr 2015:31). Nonetheless, albeit conducting yearly exercises to increase the interoperability between the different authorities, the Special Forces have never been used for domestic counterterrorism purposes.

#### 5.4.3 Willingness to use force

The Swedish strategic culture has predisposed the decision-makers towards a reluctance to use force domestically and for offensive purposes. Because of its historical policy of non-alignment, Sweden’s policy has been not to intervene in armed conflict as one of the warring parties and

other strategies have often been used preceding the deployment of the armed forces (Ruffa 2013:350). Moreover:

The overarching foreign and security policy goal of Sweden's participation in international peace-promoting efforts is to contribute to peace and security, to prevent conflicts and create conditions for sustainable poverty reduction. Sweden's involvement in a peace-promoting effort should be part of a joint approach where civilian and military efforts are an integrated part of foreign, security and defence policy (DS 2019:287).<sup>10</sup>

The armed forces may therefore be deployed in international operations as long as they are deployed for humanitarian purposes (*ibid.*). This is reflected in the commitments in a number of operations as Sweden's participation is often limited to Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (IRS), advisory and protection tasks (Edström et al 2019:175; Swedish Defence 2022). Sweden has contributed with a light infantry unit in Mali since 2020, conducting security operations such as protection of objects, persons, support to the national police, and escort of transport. In Iraq, they support the armed forces with developing capabilities and training. Sweden's unwillingness to use force for other purposes than national defence and humanitarian operations is furthermore reflected in the fact that Sweden has, since 2014, withdrawn and significantly reduced its presence abroad (Edström & Westberg 2020:200), and:

The changed security situation has recently led to increased military focus on Sweden's neighbouring region, which lowers the Armed Forces' ambition regarding international operations. Operations outside Sweden's neighbouring regions will therefore be reduced, in size as well as scope (Swedish Armed Forces 2021:51).

This confirms and reflects the willingness to use force for national defence, and the fact that international operations are an additional task. It is furthermore stated that the main objective for Sweden's defence is to increase the operative capability of the combat units to defend Sweden's territory (DS 2014:11). As discussed prior, the armed forces are authorised to support the police in counterterrorism and to use armed force for self-defence and in order to hinder an obvious attack (SFS 2006:343). Additionally, prior to 1931, the armed forces were frequently deployed for law-and-order purposes. Nevertheless, in 1931, the armed forces fired onto a group of protesters in Ådalen, killing 5 people. Since then, decision-makers have been considerably unwilling to authorise the use of force domestically (Prop 2005/6:17). While the law on the support by the armed forces to the police marked a significant change in the legislations, as it henceforth allowed the armed forces to use force domestically, the strategic culture has influenced its limited implementation (Prop 2005/6:17). Accordingly, the armed forces are

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<sup>10</sup> Translated by the author

rarely used domestically for other purposes than to support the civil society through non-violent means, reflecting the reluctance to use force domestically.

#### 5.4.4 Civil-military relations

The use of force and the role of the armed forces is controlled in Chapter 15 of Regeringsformen (RF) (one part of the Swedish constitution) and specific laws. In RF chapter 15 it is determined that the Cabinet has the mandate to deploy the armed forces in case of an armed aggression or threat of such in accordance with international law (SFS 2022). It is furthermore the Cabinet who assess when the situation classifies as an (threat of) armed aggression (DS 2017:35). Thus, in reality, there is no regulation on when the Cabinet can deploy the armed forces domestically. Moreover, since the 9/11 Inquiry, issued by various governmental bodies, it was decided that armed forces may be deployed in order to counter aggression originating from non-state actors (SOU 2003:55-56). With regards to international deployments, the Parliament's approval is nevertheless needed. Moreover, while the Parliament's approval is needed to formalise the deployment, they are always consulted beforehand, and the Cabinet would not propose a bill without their prior support (Edström & Gyllensporre 2014:192; Ruffa 2013:347). Sweden's strategic culture is thus underpinned by a political culture of consensus, influencing the decision-making.

The role of the armed forces domestically is regulated mainly by Act 2002:375 on the Armed Forces Support for Civilian Activities and Act 2006:343 on the Armed Forces Support to the Police in the Fight against Terrorism. Act 2006:343 states that the armed forces can be used, if requested and approved by the government, for counterterrorism operations that involve the use of force or coercion against individuals (SFS 2006:343). The government's consent is not needed in urgent cases that involve danger to human life or health or extensive destruction of property. In such cases, the requesting authority must immediately notify the government that a request has been made. Henceforth the governments decide to support or discontinue the mission (SFS 2006:343). Moreover, the requesting authority has command and the soldiers deployed inherit the rights and responsibilities of the policemen (SFS 2006:343). Furthermore, Act (2017:113) on the Armed Forces support for the police with helicopter transport authorises the police to request helicopter transport (Ministry of Defence 2020:135).

Nonetheless, support can only be provided if the armed forces have appropriate resources and if it does not hinder the ordinary operations (Ministry of defence 2020:134). Furthermore, the

final decision-making remains with the Supreme Commander (or relevant decision-makers at the headquarters). The Supreme Commander therefore ultimately decided if support is given or not (Prop 2005/6:13). According to the armed forces they provided helicopter transports five times between 2017–mid 2020. Nevertheless, in 50 cases the requests for support for civilian activities were denied due to lack of resources or when the request was outside the scope of the regulations (Ministry of Defence 2020:135). Furthermore, the armed forces have during the last decade gained more decision-making power regarding support to civilian activities (RIR 2011:28). Since 2014, the support to society has not been a core task but is now considered a complementary task if the resources exist and the Supreme Commander authorises it. Thus, while the Cabinet has the power to deploy the armed forces domestically, the Swedish strategic culture makes this an unlikely solution.

#### 5.4.5 Public Opinion

According to the Eurobarometer, the Swedish public does not perceive terrorism to be a dominant threat. The Swedish population (partaking in the survey) perceives terrorism to be a significant threat to EU but holds that the threat to Sweden is low. In 2014, 1% saw terrorism as the dominant threat to Sweden, and 2% towards the EU (Eurobarometer 2014). In 2015, 3% saw it as the dominant threat to Sweden, while 18% saw it as the dominant threat to the EU. In 2017, 6% perceived terrorism to be the most significant threat to Sweden, and 27% towards the EU (Eurobarometer 2017). The numbers in 2017 represent the highest numbers and the Swedish population thus perceived terrorism to be most acute during 2017. Succeeding 2017, the number decreased and in 2020, only 2% saw terrorism to be the dominant threat towards Sweden, and 8% towards the EU (Eurobarometer 2020). Subsequently, the public opinion polls demonstrates that terrorism was not perceived as a significant security threat and is thus consistent with the strategic culture of the decision-making elite. Moreover, the Swedish National Operations Department (NOA), following the terrorist attacks in Stockholm 2017, asked people whether they would feel more secure if security personnel would be armed with reinforcement weapons<sup>11</sup>. The majority of the people in the survey responded that they would feel a reduced sense of security as security personnel with reinforcement weapons would suggest that something dangerous has happened and that it would happen again (NOA 2017:40). The sense of insecurity with increased armed forces moreover highlights the perception of terrorism being

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<sup>11</sup> Own translation from '*Förstärkningsvapen*' – *literal translation to 'reinforcing weapon'*: A type of weapon that is not regularly used in operations but is brought out in certain special situations.

a law-and-order concern, rather than a military problem and reflects the reluctance to have boots on the street.

**Table 3:** Swedish public opinion on terrorism

Year	Primary threat towards EU	Primary threat towards Sweden
2014	2%	1%
2015	18%	3%
2016	20%	3%
2017	27%	6%
2018	24%	3%
2019	13%	4%
2020	8%	2%

Note: a summary on the % of people who perceived terrorism to be the primary threat toward Europe and Sweden.

N = 1000-1500/per year.

Source: Eurobarometer 2014-2020

## 5.5 Comparative analysis

In order to investigate the explanatory power of the theoretical framework, a comparison between the two countries' strategic culture is needed as well as how it influences the roles of respective countries' armed forces.

**Table 4:** Main aspects of the Belgian and Swedish Strategic Culture Beliefs

Strategic Culture Beliefs	Belgium	Sweden
<i>Dominant threat perception(s)</i>	Terrorist attacks on the Belgian territory, on universal values and the Belgian population: weak and failing states externally	Russian aggression in the vicinity of Sweden and in the Baltic Sea Region.
<i>Core tasks of the armed forces</i>	Ensure internal security through external missions: Collective defence and security within NATO-framework	Territorial defence and defence of neighbouring countries
<i>Willingness to use force</i>	Use of force to ensure security both domestically and internally; few regulations provided it conforms with international law	Use of force for self-defence and humanitarian purposes. Strong unwillingness to deploy troops and use force domestically.
<i>Civil-military relations</i>	Council of Minister are Executives and decides on the role; consensus is sought after; no regulations on the deployment of troops externally or domestically	The Cabinet holds primacy over deploying troops domestically: No regulations on the deployment of troops domestically: consensus is sought after from Parliament
<i>Public opinion</i>	Perceives terrorism to be a significant threat towards EU and Belgian between 2015-2018.	Terrorism is seen as a significant threat to the EU, but not to Sweden.

### 5.5.1 Dominant Threat Perception(s)

One significant difference between the two countries is their perceived dominant threat, which fundamentally influences the role of the armed forces. Belgium continuously refers to terrorism, failed and weak states and conflicts outside their borders as the main source of insecurity post-Cold War. Accordingly, the external environment is fundamentally linked to Belgium's internal security. Comparatively, Sweden's dominant threat originates from Russia's increased activity in Sweden's vicinity. Albeit acknowledging terrorism as a security threat, it is seen as a threat towards the EU, the international order and as a global phenomenon and does not compare with the threat of Russia that is deeply embedded in the Swedish strategic culture. Accordingly, it is possible to identify that Belgium perceives terrorism as a more dominant threat and are thus more likely to deploy their armed forces and have a more active role than the Swedish armed forces (Clarke 2014:43). Additionally, with the convergence of internal and external, the Belgian strategic culture perceives terrorism to be a military problem.

Moreover, while previous research accentuates changing security environments as the drivers for the changing roles of the armed forces (Wilkinson 2011), this alone does not explain the different responses by the countries. When OVG was initiated, the threat level was three, indicating a high, but not immediate threat. This corresponds with Sweden's four. Whilst the levels are comparable, Belgium decided to deploy troops while Sweden refrained from doing so. The Belgian troops have thus been deployed throughout the scale varying from level three, four and then level two. Accordingly, the Belgian strategic culture predisposes the decision-makers towards the option in which the use of the armed forces for domestic counterterrorism is appropriate. Terrorism is moreover seen as a direct threat to Belgian security, justifying the moderate role of the armed forces. In Sweden terrorism has not been seen as the dominant threat, justifying the passive role of the armed forces. The different and enduring threat perception of the two countries therefore plays a significant part in the role of the armed forces in counterterrorism.

### 5.5.2 Core tasks of the armed forces

The core tasks of the armed forces likewise differ between the two countries. The Swedish strategic culture, based on historical experiences of self-dependency and territorial defence influences the core-tasks towards territorial defence. Although it is stated that the Swedish Special Forces are playing an increased role in domestic counterterrorism, they have yet to be

deployed domestically, validating the passive role in domestic counterterrorism. Comparatively, the core tasks of the Belgian armed forces are contribution to the collective defence and security within the NATO-framework and the protection of Belgian citizens globally. Accordingly, while the Swedish armed forces focus on territorial defence, the Belgian armed forces are expeditionary oriented, more appropriately organised for the broadening security concept. Moreover, while Sweden is vague regarding what support can be given post-2014, Belgium explicitly mentioned support to internal security in which counterterrorism is stated (Strategic Vision 2016:39).

The strategic culture, influencing the core tasks and the perception on the use of force is moreover reflected in the organisation of the armed forces. The Belgian forces are organised towards expeditionary and broader security missions, while the Swedish armed forces are undergoing an increased quantitative return towards territorial forces. It is also possible to identify a convergence between internal and external tasks with regards to Belgium, hinting towards a transformation of the armed forces into a postmodern force. In accordance with previous research, this transformation highlights the blurred line between the police and military which increases the likelihood of the armed forces being deployed for domestic purposes (Kalkman 2019:2; Clarke 2016:2). This has contributed to a more active role of the armed forces in counterterrorism as the strategic culture of Belgian decision-makers predisposes them towards considering the deployment of troops onto the streets as a suitable option.

### 5.5.3 Willingness to Use Force

With regards to the willingness to use force, the Swedish strategic culture influences an unwillingness to use force for other purposes than defensive and humanitarian purposes. Sweden's strategic culture, based on non-alignment and neutrality, predisposes decision-makers towards options that prefer other means than armed force. Moreover, as a result Ådalen 1931, Sweden has developed a strong reluctance to use force domestically. While there has been increased debate on using the armed forces to counter domestic issues such as gang- and drug related violence, there remains a strong unwillingness to do so by the majority of the government. Accordingly, the strategic culture influences the (passive) role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism. Comparatively the Belgian strategic culture imposes few restrictions on the use of force, provided it conforms with international law. Belgium has been



prone to deploy their troops for international missions, tasked with both defensive and offensive tasks. Comparatively Sweden's participation is often limited to IRS, advisory and protection tasks. Moreover, Belgium has historically been prone to use their security forces for domestic order and counterterrorism purposes, demonstrating a willingness to use force for different purposes. Accordingly, the Belgian strategic culture predisposed decision-makers towards options in which the use of the military for domestic counterterrorism are a viable option. Consequently, the Belgian armed forces have adopted a moderate role, compared to Sweden's passive role, aligned with their strategic culture.

#### 5.5.4 Civil-military relations

In both Sweden and Belgium, the main powers reside with the executive. Furthermore, similarities are found within the Constitutions, as it is possible to identify regulations with regards to international deployment of troops, and lack thereof regarding domestic deployment. In both Belgium and Sweden, the executive holds the power to interpret a situation and henceforth deploy the armed forces domestically. Moreover, similarities are found within the civil-police-military relation and legislation as the requesting authority becomes the commanding unit. Nevertheless, in Belgium, the armed forces remain under military jurisdiction and do not inherit any police rights. Comparatively, in Sweden, the armed force adopts the duties and rights of a policeman. Another significant difference is that, regarding the support to the civil society or the police in counterterrorism, the Swedish Supreme Commander has more influence on the decision-making. The Supreme Commander may reject the proposal if they perceives it to interfere with ordinary operations or fall outside the scope of the regulations. In contrast, the Belgian Chief of Defence (comparable with the Swedish Supreme Commander) repeatedly requested withdrawal and reduction of OVG, which was frequently denied. Thus, while the legalisation in both countries allows the executive to interpret and in practice deploy troops domestically, the civil-military relations influence the role of the armed forces in practise. The Belgian strategic culture predisposed decision-makers towards utilizing the armed forces to a greater extent than what is seen in Sweden. Additionally, the strategic culture of Belgium influences decision-makers towards considering the use of force by the armed forces at home, allowing for a more frequent employment than what is seen in Sweden.

#### 5.5.5 Public Opinion

The public opinion reflects the overall perception and the strategic culture of each country. In Belgium, terrorism is perceived as a dominant threat, both towards the EU and Belgium. Moreover, the majority of the public supported the Prime Minister's response and 75% supported the deployment of troops on the streets. Comparatively, the public opinion in Sweden does not perceive terrorism to be a dominant threat to Sweden, but rather towards the EU. Correspondingly, the perception of terrorism as the dominant threat is on average higher in Belgium. While establishing an empirical relationship between public opinion and defence strategies is beyond the scope of this investigation, it can be theorised that public opinion both reflects and contributes to the responses by the government. As two democratic countries, it can be expected that the government is influenced by the public opinion, and vice versa. It is moreover assumed that the public opinion reflects the dominant and established strategic culture (Libel 2020:356). Accordingly, it can be presumed that the inherent strategic culture is reflected in the public opinion. Threat perception and support of the counterterrorism measures by the public opinion can therefore justify the moderate role of the armed forces in Belgium. Comparatively, the public opinion in Sweden does not perceive enforcement of security forces as an adequate measure, justifying the passive role of the armed forces.

# 6 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

## 6.1 Discussion

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate if and how strategic culture, based on the five elements, have influenced the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism in Belgium and Sweden between 2014-2020. By employing strategic culture as the theoretical framework, the thesis aimed to answer the questions:

- 1) *What role does the armed forces have in Belgium and Sweden with regards to domestic counterterrorism, and what differences and similarities can be identified between the countries from 2014-2020?*
- 2) *How has strategic culture influenced the role of the armed forces in Belgium and Sweden with regards to domestic counterterrorism?*

Based on the empirical analysis and theoretical framework, a number of differences and few similarities have been identified with regards to the role of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism. While Sweden has mostly taken on a passive role, with exception for MUST who have a constant role in counterterrorism, the Belgian armed forces have taken on a moderate role. The Belgian armed forces, following the terrorist attack in Paris 2015, were deployed to support the police authorities, tasked to guard certain sites and vulnerable infrastructure. In 2016, the number of troops deployed peaked at 1828. Accordingly, the Belgian armed forces have played a moderate role. Comparatively, while Sweden increased its threat level following the terrorist attack in Paris to a four, indicating a high possibility of a terrorist attack, the Swedish forces were not deployed or used for any counterterrorism purpose. While the armed forces are authorised to support the police if requested, this has not been done, validating the passive role between 2014-2020.

The additional aim of the research was to analyse how the strategic culture has influenced these roles in a domestic setting. The theoretical framework, divided into five elements of strategic culture provides explanations for Sweden's passive and Belgium's moderate role as Sweden and Belgium exhibits differences with regards to all five explanatory elements. While all five elements demonstrated differences, *the dominant threat perception, core tasks of the armed*

*forces* and *willingness to use force* demonstrates the most explanatory value for the different roles of the armed forces. The dominant threat perception serves as the basis for military prioritization and is therefore fundamental for the role of the armed forces. Moreover, it is significantly intertwined with the core tasks as it influences what decision-makers perceive as appropriate countermeasures by serving as a guide for the security environment. The core tasks of the armed forces and threat perceptions moreover has explanatory value as it determines their organizational structure and capabilities.

With regards to domestic deployment of troops, the willingness to use force provides one of the most evident differences in the analysis, as there is an expressed unwillingness to deploy troops and risk using armed force on Swedish soil. Comparatively, Belgium's strategic culture influences decision-makers to see this as a viable measure to ensure security. Albeit showing differences in the civil-military relations, these are not fundamental for the roles identified above, as the executives decided the overall aim and tasks of the armed forces, and where their roles are regulated in the Constitution and specific laws. Despite the fact that Sweden's Supreme Commander has arguably more influence on decision-making than the Belgian counterpart, both countries' strategic cultures are based on consensus and the primacy of civilian decision-makers over military ones. Furthermore, even if the public opinion reflects both countries' general strategic cultures and show its deep anchoring in society, it is not possible to determine any empirical relationship between public opinion and the role of the armed forces based on this investigation. Nevertheless, all elements contain differences, attesting the explanatory value of the theoretical framework on the differing role of the armed forces.

## 6.2 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, it is argued that strategic culture, based on the five elements and the two cases, is influential with regards to the roles of the armed forces in domestic counterterrorism, attesting the explanatory value of the theoretical framework. The differences in strategic culture thus predispose the Swedish and Belgian decision-makers towards considering different options, where Sweden's armed forces has taken on a passive role and the Belgian armed forces a moderate role. Moreover, the thesis indicates that strategic culture influences the domestic role of the armed forces in counterterrorism, thus expanding the theoretical reach and development of the theory. In accordance with the stated aim of the research, the thesis has therefore demonstrated how strategic culture influence the role of the armed forces.

### 6.2.1 Contribution, Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the neglected area of how strategic culture influences the role of the armed forces in *domestic* counterterrorism. This thesis has demonstrated that strategic culture most likely influenced the role of the armed forces in Belgium and Sweden. Thus, by applying strategic culture to a domestic dimension, a research area that has been significantly limited, the study contributes both empirically and theoretically to the study on strategic culture and corroborates previous research regarding cultural explanations. Accordingly, it expands the empirical reach and explanatory value of strategic culture as it sought to explain why similar states act vastly different. While the thesis was confined to two cases, thus limiting the empirical generalizability, it provides valuable insight into strategic culture and its influence domestically. As previous research on the influence of strategic culture on the domestic role of the armed forces has to a large extent been neglected, this novel research contributes to bridging the research gap. In sum, the thesis contributes to the study of strategic culture by conducting a distinctively produced comparative case study on domestic counterterrorism. Additionally, it contributes to the study on the expanding role of the armed forces in domestic security and different strategies of small states, further attesting its relevance for War Studies. Nevertheless, future research is necessary.

While there is extensive research on strategic culture and on the role of the armed forces, more research is required to fill the research gap regarding its influence on domestic policies. Moreover, this research does not claim that strategic culture is the only explanatory theory as it has not controlled for every other explanation. A suggestion for future research is therefore to expand the case selection in order to demonstrate the explanatory value of strategic culture. Potential future research can also focus on other elements of strategic culture or in different material selection as the official and public documents tend to be formalised, generalised, and lack specific details. One example of different material is to conduct interviews with, for example, the Chiefs of Operations or Police Commanders, to get more detailed description and motivations, hence increasing the reliability of the research. Additional suggestion for future research is to study the domestic debate on the role of the armed forces in order to investigate the (non)expanding role of the armed forces in domestic security. Future research might also find it interesting to investigate the empirical relationship between public opinion and strategic culture to expand the theoretical reach of the theory.

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## Empirical Material

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