

Peace-washing:

The pacification of the Swedish arms export

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Abstract

Sweden's role internationally is often cited as a paradox which is argued to have its origin in the opposition between the state's international humanitarianism and its large arms export. The tension here has often been examined from the perspectives of militarization in research on the subject. This thesis instead argued that a comprehensive understanding of peace is needed to analyze the paradox holistically. By semiotically engaging with the Swedish Government's annual reports on arms export control, this thesis could identify the construction of peace within the arms export during the years 2014-2021. A usage of the combined perspectives of pacification, militarization and an in-depth review of the peace concept, allowed for a comprehensive understanding of peace within these discourses. The thesis discovered that elements of the Swedish arms export were framed as (1) a precondition for peace, (2) an agreement of peace, and (3) an enhancement of peace. Moreover, the material revealed the juxtaposition of two different versions of peace, one liberal and one emancipatory understanding. As these versions are associated with different values and practices of peace, their coexistence in Swedish arms export is argued to be the heart of Sweden's foreign policy paradox.

Keywords: Sweden, pacification, militarization, critical peace studies, critical military studies, semiotics, arms export, defense industry

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1. Introduction and research problem

Researchers of sub-fields in International relations (IR) suggest that Sweden's international presence is characterized by a paradox (Larsson, 2020; Coetze, 2019; Aggestam & Hyde-price, 2016; Feldman, 2013; Simons & Manoilo, 2019, Davis, 2002). On one hand, Sweden has a reputation and a self-image as a global defender of human rights (Becker-Jakob et al, 2013:224; Åkerström, 2016:13), but on the other hand, the state is a disproportionately large exporter of arms (Becker-Jakob et al, 2013; Svenska Freds a, 2023; Davis, 2002:216). This paradox has been subject to journalistic investigations, e.g. Nils Resare's "Bribes, power and developmental aid: Jas and the South African affair" (Resare, 2010) and it has been immortalized in popular culture with Swedish indie band Radio dept. criticizing the practice in their song "Swedish Guns" (Ljung, 2016). Still, academic findings indicate that this paradox has proven profitable for the arms industry. The humanitarian character of Sweden is being used instrumentally in arms export to distinguish Swedish weapons from its competitors (Resare, 2010; Coetzee, 2017; Coetzee, Larsson & Berndtsson, 2023). This development is mirrored by changes in the nature of weapons, as the lines between military equipment and civilian technology are increasingly hard to define (Larsson, 2020). In addition to this, the arms industry is developing to an impactful voice in society and in discussions on the Swedish arms industry and its role in society (Jackson, 2016; Jackson et al. 2017; Jackson, 2019). Today, ideals such as human rights are commonplace in discourses on weapons with the world's 39th biggest arms producer Saab arguing that "it is a human right to feel safe" (SIPRI Arms Industry Database, 2023; Larsson, 2020:40).

The research that acknowledges the Swedish paradox has primarily examined it through theories of militarization, i.e. how military values increase their presence in civilian life. While it is important to trace this process, it is questioned here whether this can wholly unpack the paradox. It seems that the arms industry is only one part of the paradox, and focusing solely on militarization risks leaving the humanitarian ideals of Sweden under-theorized. It is the aim of this thesis to more holistically review this paradox by also looking at the humanitarian ideals present in the Swedish arms export. These ideals are here understood as constructions of peace, and they are argued to be representative of how Sweden understands peace as a concept. To engage academically with peace in this context is important in order to understand how Sweden reconciles its role(s) globally. As Oliver P. Richmond argues, "[k]nowing or speaking peace always reproduces some version of it." (2008:463). By drawing on a constructivist understanding of peace and the theory of pacification, it is argued in the

thesis that peace as a concept is dependent on how it is perceived and practiced, and that this perception feeds into what form it takes in regulation and action (Bevir & Rhodes, 2016:10). A “true” meaning of peace is rejected, and instead, different versions of peace can co-exist in different discourses and places (Richmond, 2020:20). By engaging with different versions of peace, this thesis seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes peace and how it can be used, as well as Sweden’s role internationally. It does so by creating a theoretical framework that mainly consists of the pacification theory, but that also includes perspectives of militarization and a liberal and emancipatory understanding of peace. While this structure might seem overly disparate, a review of the subject literature suggests that more conversation is needed among the different theories of the field.

To better understand how peace is present in the Swedish arms export, the governmental discourse on export regulation will be examined during the years 2014-2021. These years represent an extreme case as the paradox during this time is particularly pronounced. The government during this period was led by the Social Democratic Party which has historically been characterized by pacifist ideals (Feldman, 2013:9) and several idealistic developments were also made in foreign and export policy. Yet, the arms export also grew substantially during these years to reach new heights (Svenska Freds a, 2023). Examining the yearly communication from the Swedish Government in their Strategic Export Control reports during 2014-2021 is therefore argued to be a rich source of information about the perception and construction of peace. As the thesis is made in accordance with interpretivist tradition, the aim is to develop a deep comprehension of how peace can be used and understood. To examine this, a semiotic methodology is utilized to linguistically engage with the material and the meanings that are created here.

1.1. Research questions

The thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent is peace present in discourses on the Swedish arms export during the years 2014-2021?*
- (2) How can the construction(s) of peace be understood?*

1.2. Scope of research

While the aim of this thesis is to examine how peace is perceived and constructed within arms export, the scope of the research in terms of material and time period means that the results can only ever be indicative. As the recent security environment has changed dramatically with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the thesis neither develops how this has affected the Swedish paradox, nor how the following NATO membership has changed the Swedish security and defense reality. The material from the chosen time period does not engage with these questions, so the limitation of the time period hinders any inclusion of this. The thesis is therefore situated at a very specific point of time, which might now have passed due to recent events, but the findings can still be valuable for both practical and academic purposes as they expand an understanding of peace.

Although this thesis seeks to critically engage with the perception of peace within Swedish arms export, the purpose here is not to delve into the purpose of the arms industry at large or to criticize specifically the Government during the years 2014-2021. This is both outside the scope of the thesis and academic research. The point is likewise not to investigate possible inconsistencies in the Swedish arms export in a more practical manner. Yet, the introduction of the emancipatory peace concept brings with it a normative aspect to the research through its origins in critical research (Visoka, 2021:643). Moreover it is recognized that a researcher can never fully be removed from that which they study (Chandler, 2017:273). Therefore, while this thesis does not have any normative aspirations, these can never fully be removed from a research context. It can be noticed, however, that the primary interest of IR was the quest for peace, so the effort to better understand the concept is argued to be a natural continuation of the field (Rolf, 2022:554-555).

2. Background

This section will briefly introduce the context of the Swedish weapon industry as this contributes to a greater understanding of the thesis overall. It will not be a comprehensive review, but rather this section aims to describe the industry (its history, actors and regulation) in broad strokes.

2.1. History

Swedish lessons from the Second World War created a need for an independent defense industry (Stenlås, 2016:5-6; Bromley & Wezeman, 2013:7; Feldman, 2013:16-17; Hagelin, 1990:37). This was further emphasized by Sweden's choice to remain neutral during the Cold War (Edström & Westberg, 2020:195). A neutral state must be able to guarantee the sanctity of its neutrality and to do so, Sweden chose to signal that any transgressions of the neutrality would be met with a forceful military opposition (Wither, 2020:70; Åkerström, 2016:16). By choosing the option of armed neutrality (Becker-Jakob, 2013:229), having an efficient indigenous arms industry and research and development has been vital for Sweden ever since the Second World War (Hagelin, 1990:37). Yet, the Swedish arms industry have never been fully self-reliant or neutral and both practical and economic reasons have demanded some cooperation with other states, e.g. the U.S. It has also relied on an export, even though the Swedish state for a long time was the primary customer (Bromley & Wezeman, 2013:7; Hagelin, 1990:38, 71, 106). The need expand internationally was exacerbated by the end of the Cold War as this heavily diminished the state's military expenditures and its spending powers (Bromley & Wezeman, 2013:7-8). When the state relinquished ownership over the defense industry in 1996, this required the industry to become even more independent in finding and closing deals outside of the Swedish state (Åkerström, 2018:23).

2.2. Actors

Although the state is no longer the prime customer of the Swedish weapon industry, it remains an important sponsor by advocating for Swedish companies abroad and supporting international export deals (Bromley & Wezeman, 2013:8). Within the state's support, a range of actors can be found. Examples are the economic and military agencies that provide support, as well as the Swedish embassies that serve as important meeting places. Even the Swedish Royal house contributes to PR-campaigns and other cultural activities promoting a positive image of Sweden can likewise be initiated (Åkerström, 2016:183-186, 189).

The overarching responsibility of the arms export lies with the Swedish Government but the practical responsibility has historically been accorded to different departments as the Foreign ministry or the Trade ministry (Åkerström, 2016:34). However, the agency Inspectorate of Strategic Products (ISP; Inspektionen för strategiska produkter) is responsible for the permits that allow export of defense materials. Other agencies can contribute to its decisions by, e.g. providing intelligence (Ibid.35-36). If ISP is concerned with a particularly complex export permit, the agency can consult the Export Control Council (Exportkontrollrådet) which is a parliamentary council with candidates from the Swedish parties mirroring the parliamentary representation (Ibid.45-46). Information from the meetings of the Export Control Council is neither open to the public, nor to other politicians (Ibid.46). Within these meetings, other agencies or departments also participate. The defense department, for example, can provide the council with the defense value of a specific deal and this attestation is considered important. The council members vote to either approve or decline a permit, which then functions as a recommendation to ISP. The advice is not obligatory for ISP to follow, but thus far this has been the case (Ibid.47).

A final important set of actors within the Swedish arms export are the companies in the arms industry. As of 2022, 75 Swedish companies are actively exporting defense materials (Svenska Freds b, 2023). Among the biggest companies are Saab, BAE Systems Bofors, BAE Systems Hägglunds and Nammo (Ibid). All of the bigger companies in Sweden are partly owned by actors outside of Sweden (Axelsson & Lundmark, 2007:9). Both Bofors and Hägglunds are owned by BAE systems (Ibid.10), which is ranked as the 6th biggest among global arms companies (SIPRI Arms Industry Database, 2023).

2.3. Regulation

A final piece of the Swedish arms export is the regulation that constrains or allows it. There are three overarching regulations that influence this: the international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) from the UN, the EU guidelines and the national regulation (Svenska Freds, 2018). Before the ATT won legal power in 2014, the regulation of global arms trade was essentially nonexistent. The treaty mainly makes a connection between already institutionalized texts on human rights, peace and security with the arms trade. The states that have signed the ATT are obligated to exercise an effective control over their arms trade, which can encompass not exporting to states that are under embargoes or to states where the weapons risk being used in genocide or violations against human rights (Åkerström, 2018:110-111). The ATT currently has 113 state parties (ATT, 2022). Some states, such as Turkey, the U.S., Israel and Ukraine have signed the

treaty, but not yet ratified it and 54 states stand completely outside of the treaty (Ibid.). Within an EU context, the EU common guidelines follow the themes of the ATT in that it presents minimal requirements for exports and is binding for its member states (Åkerström, 2016:106-109). The Swedish regulation on arms export can be found in the law, decrees and guidelines (Svenska Freds, 2018). The regulation is characterized by a judgment of the entirety of the export (totalbedömningen) as the Swedish regulation includes both factors speaking for and against export. The dominant factor that speaks for export is security and defense policy reasons, while foreign policy reasons might speak against export. There are some hindrances that are unconditional, such as exporting to a state that is part of armed conflict, has internal unrest or where violations against human rights occur. Previous assessments and praxis are also important for decisions on export (Åkerström, 2016:121-125).

While arms export is generally shrouded in secrecy, Sweden was among the first to be somewhat transparent in the issue. Since 1984, the report called the Strategic Export Control is issued by the government (Hagelin, 1990:14) and in this time it has undergone several improvements to promote more transparency.

2.4. Summary

As detailed by this brief background, the Swedish arms industry is characterized by a number of elements that are sometimes contradictory. While there are a variety of actors within the Swedish export, their interests converge even though their motives might be mixed. Arms exports can serve a commercial logic, as well as promote Sweden's international image or national security (Coetzee & Berndtsson, 2023:173). Since it includes several elements, this background section has sought to situate the industry historically, domestically and internationally to provide information that is needed to recognize elements mentioned in the rest of this thesis.

3. Literature review

The research that is relevant for studying the Swedish arms export and the use of peace here, spans over various academic domains. Three areas have been identified as relevant for this thesis. The first one is connected to the empirical case, i.e. how specifically the Swedish arms export can be characterized. The second strand of research focuses on studies of militarization. Finally, the study of peace, and specifically its meaning, will be mentioned in the conclusion of this section.

3.1. Literature on the Swedish paradox

Research that critically engages with Swedish security, defense and foreign policy, argues that there is a paradox within Sweden's arms export. An early work in this vein is Björn Hagelin's comparative study on the foreign military sales of four neutral states, Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland from 1990. Being somewhat dated, it cannot give a comprehensive understanding of the situation today, but it exemplifies how the perception of Swedish arms export as a paradox has existed historically. According to Hagelin, Sweden stands out among similar neutrals in that it has continually implemented new requirements on its arms export since 1945 (1990:56). His explanation of this rests on two factors: (1) that Sweden had no official restrictions from other treaties and thus had to create their own and (2) that public opinion in Sweden has been successful in swaying the national policy toward more restrictive requirements (Ibid.56-57). While this public control is important, the information about arms deals is scarce and it is often made public only after a deal has been closed (Ibid.92-93), thus leaving little room for the public to act in real time. And while there is a comprehensive regulation, Hagelin argues that this has only been loosely implemented, i.e. leaving a large gap between what is said and what is done (Ibid.104-105).

Some researchers take it a step further by labeling the Swedish stance not just a paradox, but a contradiction. Fiona Robinson founds her characterization of the Swedish policy on the so-called inconsistency of proclaiming a feminist foreign policy (FFP) while concurrently exporting weapons to Saudi Arabia, a "flagrant denier of women's rights" (2019:22). The policy is argued to be misguided and ignorant toward the ways that the Swedish feminist understanding, that was imposed on Saudi Arabia, actually reinforced power imbalances and therefore never could realize its potential (Ibid.30). Rather than making universal statements on what is "good" in the world and claiming authority on the matter, an

ethical and critical perspective calls for a continued awareness that definitive positions cannot exist (Ibid.32).

While the paradox can be described problematically, it can also be commercialized. When Swedish products are sold internationally, researchers have noted the creation of a specific Swedish “security brand”. A “Swedishness” is created which is characterized by progressive ideals, solidarity with struggles for freedom and peace-work. This security brand is then used instrumentally as a potential commercial success factor in Swedish arms export (Coetzee, Larsson & Berndtsson, 2023:6, 11). The Swedish brand serves commercial purposes as it constructs a division between a progressive Sweden and other, less progressive arms producers (Ibid.12-13). A revealing case study of this is the Sweden-South Africa Gripen deal (Coetzee, 2019). This affair has been subject to much scrutiny, and the questionable use of development aid, culture and alleged bribery to close this deal has also garnered journalistic attention (Resare, 2010). Constructing a morally good Swedish identity, e.g. by highlighting Sweden’s early support for the abolition of apartheid, was imperative to gain trust and access to South African politicians for the affair (Coetzee, 2019:108-109). This duality in the foreign policy is argued to distinguish Sweden from contemporary, European neutrals/non-aligned (Ibid. 119).

Another approach to this duality has been to examine the changing connotations of security. Sebastian Larsson examines the paradox of a growing interest of the arms industries to engage in civil security issues (2020:27). Civil security became a natural path for the defense industry (e.g. Saab) to take in order to meet the challenges of a post-Cold War security context (Ibid.30-31). The diminishing delineation between civil and military technology confuses the definition of what constitutes a military product, as arms producers can adapt technologies with civilian elements by adding military components (Ibid.33, 36-37). It also means that material can be marketed under a civilian banner to controversial regimes, but later be revealed to include military elements (Ibid.40). The civilian component of the arms industry results in a specific way in which Sweden’s arms export can be branded. Particularly the way that Saab portrays themselves a safeguard for human rights, is noted to be an example of how the arms industry actively seeks to influence public perception of themselves (Ibid.40).

3.2. Literature on arms export and militarization

The idea that our perception of the delineation between military/civilian life can change, is a contribution of the works on militarization. Susan. T. Jackson is critical towards the lack of engagement with militarism in IR (Dunnage et al. 2019) and examines the way in which the

arms industry promotes militarization in their social media presence (Jackson, 2016; Jackson et al. 2017; Jackson, 2019). Jackson argues that this process contributes to a normalization of military values within civilian life (Jackson, 2016:68). Her work also contributes to an understanding of the agency in militarization, i.e. that it as a process requires continual maintenance (Ibid.). Jackson's work on Saab argues that the defense industry is a relevant actor to study within IR research as it represents "...an important part of official constructions about national security as military security..." (Jackson, 2019:258). Moreover, it is by its essence a non-neutral actor in discourses surrounding national security as its profitability can radically change depending on what discourse is currently hegemonic (Ibid.262). Jackson's findings suggest that Saab seeks to construct a Swedish citizen identity in which military involvement/engagement is 'good, natural and necessary' (Ibid.271). The concept of the 'good, natural and necessary' aids in problematizing the privilege that military values have over civilian life in certain discourses. It "...stems from the state sovereignty principle that calls on military security to provide national security..." and the frame of GNN makes this common sense and difficult to contest (Jackson, 2016:70).

Another strand of work that is closely aligned with this, is research on so-called liberal militarism. Victoria M. Basham looks specifically at public actors in her exposé of what she defines as the liberal militarism present in the U.K. and how this enabled a legitimization of British involvement in Syria (2018). A liberal state, with self-identified liberal values, makes this identity a legitimate referent object for security and military measures (Ibid.33). For the U.K. Basham argues, the justification for military engagement in Syria in part sprung from a perceived need to defend values associated with liberalism such as democracy, human rights and a global humanitarianism (Ibid. 33-37). Liberal militarism is thus argued to change the perception and the rationale for war and violence. The ATT has likewise been criticized for promoting liberal militarism. While the treaty aims to restrict the spread of arms, it also creates legitimacy for weapons that are exported "correctly". Thus, the ATT permits the possibility to increase arms export to states that adhere to the boundaries of the treaty (Robinson, 2019:29). The concept of liberal militarism illustrates the discursive elements of militarism and the way idealistic concepts become co-opted in militarization processes. A liberal discourse can obscure the fact that a division between "good" and "bad" military practices seldom makes a "good" military practice any less connected to violence and a general decline of human rights (Ibid.).

3.3. Summary

To sum up, a range of researchers have taken an interest in the alleged paradox of the Swedish arms export and its possible connections to processes of militarization. However, to examine this phenomena only through the critical perspective of militarization is not enough to grasp the ways in which arguments of peace can be used in these discourses. One important contribution that amend this lacuna is Amir Lupovici's work on pacification. This research presents an interesting development of securitization theory, and asks why peace is sometimes prioritized over security when presenting a specific issue (2013:205). Peace has not always been a convenient catchphrase; at times it has even been invoked in association with radical or disarmament agendas (Ibid.208). Yet, today, this appears to have changed. To engage with the new ways that peace is used, Lupovici launches the theory of pacification. Through this theory, he examines how discourses of peace have been used to promote democracy (and interventions) in Afghanistan and Iraq, and how China instrumentally uses its peace-keeping forces to appear more peaceful in its international relations (Ibid.216, 219). What further constitutes pacification, how this can be used in a study on Swedish arms export and how this concept can be connected to critical understandings of peace, is further elaborated in the following sections.

4. Theory

4.1. Theoretical considerations

As evidenced by the literature review, a range of researchers have taken an interest in the alleged paradox of Swedish arms export and its possible origins in the changing perception of the military. From critical viewpoints, the Swedish case and similar phenomena have often been studied as cases of militarization. However, no study thus far has examined how peace is featured within these discourses and the possible implications of this. Part of why peace is absent from discussions of militarization and/or securitization is because of a rupture in IR between Critical Security Studies (CSS) and Critical Peace Studies (CPS). This rupture is important for the analytical considerations here made. While CSS have a theoretical focus on security issues in IR, CPS is more practice-oriented with a multidisciplinary approach to peace resolution at a local level (Rolf, 2022:556-557, 563-564; Visoka, 2021:645). Despite these differences, the two fields do have commonalities, as in CSS' concept of *human security* and CPS' understanding of *positive peace* (Rolf, 2022:560, 562). Still, it is argued that CSS has yet to live up to its critical prefix. It remains far removed from local practices and perspectives, thus reinforcing existing power imbalances and current perspectives on security (Ibid.563-565, 568). Therefore, the concept of *peace* from CPS will be used here, rather than *human security* from CSS, to address the "idealistic" values and ideals that seeks human fulfillment. Moreover, *militarization* is chosen over *securitization*, as militarization examines that which is already securitized, which the arms export context is argued to be (Stavrianakis & Selby, 2012:7-11). The two academic strands also differ in their focus. According to the Copenhagen School of security studies, securitization is a process by which an issue is transformed into a security issue, thereby justifying extraordinary means to address it (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998:23-25). Militarization, on the other hand, is the spread of military measures (and values) into an issue where they were previously absent (McCormack & Gilbert, 2022: 180-183). Some argue that militarization is guided by false binaries, e.g. war/peace and military/civilian, and that security is the more comprehensive reference point (Bernazzoli & Flint, 2009:449). Using militarization rather than securitization in this context is not an argument for the former's *greater* relevance, it is rather to actualize the *continued* relevance of the binary military/civilian. As aptly illustrated by Larsson (2020) in the literature review, this binary still has significant consequences. Militarization also fits the context of arms export better, as it is clearly militarized and both directly and indirectly connected to violence. Even in those instances where weapons are not used to physically hurt, the arms export can still substitute violence in

subtler ways (Richmond, 2020:2). Funds that states use to import weapons inevitably disappears from other areas of life where they could be used to build a more peaceful society (Åkerström, 2018:28).

This theory section attempts to reconcile *militarization*, its oppositional process *pacification*, as well as a thorough understanding of *the peace concept*, which is lacking in these two theories. While the theoretical concepts here used might appear disparate, this is necessarily so, as it is argued that all three perspectives are needed in order to make an understanding of the Swedish paradox more holistic. Having made clear these considerations, the remainder of the section will delve into the theoretical concepts themselves and their interlinkages.

4.2. Militarization

Militarization is understood through a sociological perspective that challenges the role of the military in society as a whole (Stavrianakis & Selby, 2012:12-14). It can be summed up by the definition of militarism as “the penetration of social relations in general by military relations” (Shaw, 2012:20). Accordingly, it is compatible with constructivist theory that argues for the relevance of the social world in shaping institutions and actions (Halperin & Heath, 2012:45). This makes militarization closely related to both securitization and pacification. Critical military studies (CMS), and especially feminist research, have long fostered an understanding of how language affects the way we think about military and security issues (Stavrianakis & Selby, 2012:3-4; Wibben, 2018:137; Basham, Belkin & Gifkins, 2015:1). Examples of such research include the examination of the linkages between military and patriarchal language and values (Stavrianakis & Selby, 2012:14), the way that militarization can use feminist tropes to be constructed as something liberating and thereby encompass more aspects of life (Wibben, 2018:137), or how militarism increasingly expands spatially into humanitarianism and humanitarian operations (McCormack & Gilbert, 2022: 180-183). A definitive work on this is Carol Cohn’s “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals” (1987). Over a period of time, Cohn familiarized herself with the language and “every day” of men dealing with weapons of deterrence. As time passed, Cohn found that her own understanding of the world of deterrence changed (1987:687-688). When she started to use a militaristic language, she gained insight into the logics of the defense intellectuals and gained their respect, but she also lost the ability to express her own ideas and values that were critical of the logic of deterrence (Ibid.707-708). For example, she found that the word peace was entirely absent from the discourse as the only end-point that could be achieved by deterrence was strategic stability.

The construction of a language that was entirely removed from a social context, obscured the presence and any considerations of humans in these spaces (Ibid.708-709). Importantly, Cohn notes that “...when we realize that the only language and expertise offered to those interested in pursuing peace refers to nothing but weapons, its limits become staggering...” (Cohn, 1987:712).

According to both Cohn’s experiences of it and the previous examples, militarization is here understood as a process that changes or obfuscates meanings in particular contexts to expand militarism. It can hide existing realities behind a highly desensitized or overly technical language, but it can also dress itself in civilian or critical perspectives to insert itself in these spaces. And here is the link to pacification. While CMS examines that which becomes more militarized, it ignores the collateral damage in this process. To rectify this, pacification will complement militarization as a theoretical perspective to capture the full spectra of this process.

4.3. Pacification

Amir Lupovici presents pacification as a concept that mirrors securitization. It “...is a process of framing an issue as related to “peace” in order to justify taking certain measures.” (Lupovici, 2013:210). This does not guarantee that the measures taken following this framing actually enhance peace, instead pacification illustrates the possibilities to instrumentalize peace (2013:205). That peace does not have a given meaning allows for a flexible usage of the concept, and what constitutes peace in pacification can vary greatly (Ibid.207). Lupovici contends that the other concepts that are usually presented as opposites to securitization, such as de-securitization, cannot encompass the agency of the concept of peace as a speech-act. While they might lead to a similar outcome and a more peaceful approach to an issue, they also disregard issues that have not started out as securitized (Ibid.207-208).

To achieve *pacification success*, the audience must agree on an intersubjective level with the enunciator that an issue can be regarded as one of peace, while the presentation of an issue as peace-related is a *pacification attempt* (Lupovici, 2013:210). An enunciator, an actor with the power to influence discourses, may attempt pacification for several reasons that can be both benign and/or sprung out of self-interest (Ibid.). Lupovici asserts that pacification requires the enunciators to be authoritative on peace (Ibid.212), but it is difficult to definitely assess what makes someone a legitimate peace-actor, as opinions may differ regarding this. Moreover, an actor may still attempt pacification despite not having authority on the issue, and may succeed in swaying its legitimacy in the issue by framing it in a certain way. Pacification

occurs through three phases where: (1) an issue is presented as a precondition for peace, (2) it is framed as a part of an agreement of peace or (3) it is described as a way to enhance a state of peace (Ibid.214). Linking militarization and pacification, one could thus imagine a situation opposite to that of Cohn's, where those pursuing policies of violence refer to nothing but peace.

Pacification as a theory has not been widely used since Lupovici's article, nor has it been utilized on other cases than those he examined. By further developing the theory through a discussion on peace as a concept and examining it through more cases, this thesis evolves the theory and speaks for its relevance.

4.4. The concept of peace

Despite Lupovici noting that pacification can be more or less peaceful, he does not delve deeper into this difference. At the heart of this thesis is not only how peace is *used*, but also what it *entails*. To examine this issue closer, a discussion about how peace can be understood is crucial.

Although peace is commonly understood as an opposition to violence and war, this delineation can often be difficult to discern concretely (Richmond, 2020:218). Some hold that violence is an inherent part of many of the ideals associated with peace, such as freedom or democratic movements (Keen, 2000:8, 1). Likewise, they point to the difficulties in resolving conflicts without elements of violence, noting that values such as justice might have to be abandoned in order to reach reconciliation (Ibid.12). Yet, others argue that the understanding of peace as inherently violent is the result of a faulty interpretation of it. Instead, it can be seen as the result of a version of peace as it is constructed through powerful, Western institutions (Kühn, 2008:397-398). If peace is something enforced and reflects a specific global hegemony, the concept becomes ambiguous. Yet, this is not a fault in the concept itself, but rather our understanding of it and the way it is implemented (Ibid.405). Other understandings of peace might have the possibility to contradict hegemonistic logics and deliver emancipation (Ibid.406).

It is clear that peace can be understood differently. Extending this argument, peace viewed in a constructivist manner argues that it is, and that social actors are a part of this construction (Wallis, 2021:82). Accordingly, the way that peace is perceived will have an effect on what form it takes in reality (Ibid.78-79). This also aligns with a sociological perception of peace where its meaning is linked to its practice (Lupovici, 2013:210). A constructivist understanding argues that the meaning of peace is both pluralistic and contestable (Wallis, 2021:77; Richmond, 2020:16). This plurality means that there is no agreed-upon definition of peace and the sheer size of this debate (Wallis, 2021; Lupovici, 2013; Richmond, 2008;

Richmond, 2020), makes it impossible to bring up here. This lack of a “true” peace concept instead leads to a realization that all conceptions of peace stem from ideology and context (Richmond, 2020:6).

To exemplify the plurality of the field, two versions of peace are here presented as they are understood by Richmond. Neoliberal peace and its emancipatory critique are argued to be most relevant in both academia and practice today. The *liberal peace*, with its origins in idealist philosophy and universal norms, is the founding basis behind many of the institutions and organizations that work with peace today (Richmond, 2020:31, 42-43). It functions through a belief that humans have intrinsic rights, and that peace is achievable if these rights are in place (Ibid.). Liberal peace is something that can be forced, through violence if necessary, and particularly the democratic peace theory has been a source of such enforcement (Richmond, 2020:42; Nausheen, Srivastava, & Seth, 2021). This theory perceives an inherent peacefulness of democratic states as it argues that the specific restraints of a democracy makes wars irrational (Nausheen, Srivastava, & Seth, 2021:171; Teorell, 2016:209; Visoka, 2021:645). The democratic peace theory has since its birth been much debated and it is argued that other factors are involved in its truism, such as the fact that democracies do go to war, just not with each other (Teorell, 2016:212; Hayes, 2012:87). Richmond argues that the (neo)liberal peace has been the *modus operandi* for Western states and (consequently) global institutions since the early 2000s (2020:113). Efforts guided by a liberal perception of peace have been criticized for falling short on many accounts in post-conflict societies such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq and Afghanistan (Visoka, 2021:647; Heupel, 2016:210-211).

A critique to this, partly sprung from these alleged failures, is *emancipatory peace* (Visoka, 2021:641). This will be used as a catch-all type of peace that includes critical, post-structural and post-colonial perspectives. These all share fundamental ideas of a necessary, everyday plurality of peace’s practices and its practitioners (Richmond, 2020:143, 190). Rather than viewing peace as an end-objective, it is here understood in a dynamic and post-structuralist manner as a method and a process (Richmond, 2008:457; Richmond, 2020:162). As an emancipatory practice, peace is inherently political, bringing with it considerations of power, ideology and identity (Richmond, 2020:203). While it sprung from a critique of the liberal peace and its system of hierarchies, emancipatory peace still remains attached to liberal ideals such as human rights and democracy and their role in human fulfillment, while also recognizing the power inherent in these concepts (Ibid.164). This peace seeks to go beyond serving governments, states and elites and instead focuses on the basic needs of societal groups and the local (Ibid.169-170). Important actors of peace might exist outside of the common institutions,

and they are argued to be necessary inclusions in peace processes for it to be locally anchored (Visoka, 2021:642). Emancipatory peace seeks to be a practice that is not merely working *for* the subject, but *with* those affected by conflicts, leading to self-empowerment and sustainability (Richmond, 2020:219, 210). While it envisions a different world (and peace) than the liberal doctrine of it, emancipatory theory has been criticized for its inability to translate these ideas into practice (Visoka, 2021:641). It has also been blamed for perpetrating a Western perspective on conflict-ridden societies (Ibid. 652-653). Against this, the theory retorts that it is guided by practicality and that its concepts of hybrid peace and local legitimacy are foundational to its endeavors (Ibid.645, 650-652). Hybrid peace recognizes the distinct sociological, cultural and political surroundings that could affect potential peace practices (Ibid.651). It seeks to overcome the fundamental opposition of “the outsiders” versus “the insiders” to genuinely engage with local actors across the spectrum and to be consistently self-reflexive in how indigenous authority structures are affected (Donais, 2009:14-18). An aspect of this locality can also be found in viewing peace processes less as an interventionist endeavor, and more as a facilitative and consultative effort (Visoka, 2021:651-652). This does not exclude that peace might require interventionist and enforcing elements in early stages, but emancipatory peace hints at the crucial expansion of peace-enabling practices following this, as intervention itself can never enable a peaceful society (Ibid.). Peace processes that have been led by an emancipatory awareness have been successful in finding agents of peace in “unexpected places” and through this, they have been able to locally anchor peace (Richmond, 2011; Nilsson et al. 2020; Wallensteen, Melander & Höglbladh, 2016; Ní Aoláin, Francesca Haynes & Cahn, 2011).

5. Method and research design

The aim of this thesis is to examine the presence of peace in discourses of the Swedish arms export in order to uncover the meaning of peace that is constructed here. This will be done by examining the Government's discourses on arms export through the yearly communication of it called Strategic Export Control (Strategisk exportkontroll). The research is situated in an interpretivist tradition where "meanings are constitutive of actions" (Bevir & Rhodes, 2016:3). This epistemological position prioritizes an understanding of human behavior, rather than an explanation or a prediction of it (Halperin & Heath, 2012:6). Because meaning is argued to be created socially, interpretivism contends that a researcher's understanding can never be fully removed from their research and that their relation to reality will always remain subjective (Ibid.10, 40). As social phenomena are seen to have a social or discursive basis (Ibid.40), the interpretivist method must be cognizant of this and there are many different methods to choose from (Bevir & Rhodes, 2016:12,13). Analysis on discourse also mirrors the idea that language is a dynamic vessel of action and function (Halperin & Heath, 2012:311). Discourses are understood here as "socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001:4). To access and analyze the meanings created within discourses, a variety of methods can be used to discern meaning in words, phrases, even punctuations (Halperin & Heath, 2012:309-310). To be able to answer the research question and to analyze any shifts of meaning present in the material, semiotics have been chosen as a method. According to Peeter Selg and Andreas Ventsel "...semiotics is research based on a linguistic methodology that studies institutions/social facts related to the arbitrariness of the meanings of signs that are contingently articulated in communication.[italics in original]" (2020:165-166). It is thus argued to be a good fit for research aiming to examine the meaning of peace within a militarized context.

5.1. Semiotics

Semiotics is a broad field with several theoretical assumptions about language and methods to analyze it (Chandler, 2017:3). The type of semiotics that will be used here is found within linguistic structuralism and its post-structural critiques (Chandler, 2017:5). Generally, semiotics predominantly seems to be present in research that seeks to understand culture and society on a deeper level in line with an interpretivist tradition (Chandler, 2017:xv). It is not widely used as a method in political science, or IR, but it is not absent either. For example, it has contributed to research surrounding the legal meaning of nuclear weapons (Teraoka, 2017), opinion

formation on social media in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks (Leone, 2015), the symbols of state power within the Helsinki Final Act (Mininni, 1990) and in the study of public policy (Atkinson, 2019). Moreover, while semiotics have not been explicitly influential in political theory, it is a notable source of inspiration for Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's deliberations on post-structuralism, which can be seen in their use of semiotic concepts (Selg & Ventsel, 2020:108-109). Semiotics is thus a worthwhile instrument in political science, as it gives insight to meaning-making in an increasingly complex and diverse world (Atkinson, 2019:62). Using semiotics to study social and political action means putting an emphasis on the human signification of these concepts (Heiskala & Selg, 2022:109; Selg & Ventsel, 2020:2). The theory and method is multidisciplinary with a heavy influence of linguistics, but it also looks beyond the particularities of language to employ a critical perspective of how the world is constructed and understood (Chandler, 2017:3-4).

Semiotics deal with the meaning of signs (Chandler, 2017:1). It is situated in a social constructivist setting where the human experience is argued to be mediated by the interpretation of signs (Ibid. xvi). Signs are that which surrounds reality and the interpretation of it (Ibid.2). It can be anything from physical signs (e.g. those indicating the availability of Wi-Fi at a café), to words, body language or sounds. The meaning of signs is argued to be outside of "the thing itself", i.e. its physical representation, as it requires an individual interpreting it (Atkinson, 2019:69; Chandler, 2017:11). Thus signs are understood to encompass three aspects: (1) a *physical* representation (in the broad sense of the term), (2) an individual *conceptual* understanding of the same and (3) a *reference* to other signs within the sign system (Chandler, 2017:14, 8, 11-12). By studying signs, semioticians examines "...how meanings are made and how reality is represented (and indeed constructed) through signs and sign systems." (Chandler, 2017:1-2). Semiotics' founding-father, Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (Selg & Ventsel, 2020:1) argued that the relational aspect of signs is the basic foundation of language. It is only through a systemic contrast with other, related words, that value is determined (Chandler, 2017:19-20). Signs in themselves have no intrinsic value, they are arbitrary, and their meaning is instead relative and established by social usage and general agreement (Ibid.). As this process is both social and individual, representations are sites of struggle where meaning can be contested (Atkinson, 2019:71). With the exclusion that invariably occurs as a semiotic system stabilizes, power becomes an inherent part of this process, which again underscores the use of semiology in social and political sciences (Selg & Ventsel, 2020:121-122, 162).

Semiotics' focus on both power and relations makes it a particularly fitting method for studying peace. In this understanding, peace's relations to violence is constitutive of its

meaning, i.e. peace cannot be peace, unless violence is violence. Their relation is *necessary* for assessing their respective value (Selg & Ventsel, 2020:19-20, 21). To assess how peace is constructed within the material, four methodological tools of linguistic structuralism will be used (Chandler, 2017:97). One such tool is *oppositions* and the meaning of relational difference that is created here (Ibid.106). The inherent arbitrariness of signs makes oppositions unstable and the porous boundaries between two opposed signs can be examined to uncover how this opposition contributes to meaning (Ibid. 121, 109). *Markedness* is another tool which uncovers the way something is described as specific. In oppositions, the two signs might be valued differently, with one *unmarked sign* that covers the general and one *marked sign* which has an attribute. The unmarked sign is primary, while the marked sign is secondary, as it is speaking to a specific condition. For example, in street signs, the male sign is used to denote people in general, and only in opposition is the female sign introduced, thus being marked (Ibid. 110-111). *Alignment* is a third tool, concerning the cluster of symbolic attributes surrounding signs and especially oppositions. Alignments are also understood to contribute to the meaning of the signs, through the referential understanding, and are subject to change (Ibid.117). Finally, *narrative* will be used in its most basic sense to identify sequential, temporal events that relate to a chain of meaning (Ibid.129, 133).

5.2. Data and data selection process

5.2.1. The case

As it is the Swedish paradox that guides this thesis and its research question, Sweden is the natural case for the study. This thesis is made in an interpretivist tradition, so the objective is not to produce law-like observations that would be applicable in a different setting. Rather, the aim is to contribute to new understandings of the construction of peace within the Swedish arms export through an in-depth analysis. As an interesting case study should add both to the literature on the subject and to the case, Sweden is argued to be the ideal case for examining this (Halperin & Heath, 2007:205). The case is also valuable from a theoretical standpoint, as Lupovici describes certain issues needing little persuasion in their pacification process, such as disarmament (2013:213). This makes arms export a particularly interesting topic for pacification to examine, as it by its nature would contradict such a process.

5.2.2 The enunciator and the material

Linda Åkerström describes the Swedish arms industry to be protected by three different secrecy protections: Commercial secrecy, foreign affairs secrecy and defense secrecy (2016:46). This could make data collection tricky, but as the focus is on pacification processes that require an audience, open sources can be used that are directed to the public. Only the Swedish state is chosen as the enunciator, since it is argued to be most influential in the creation of a Swedish paradox, thus representing “influential public discourses” (Halperin & Heath, 2012:310). While other actors, such as representatives of the Swedish defense industry or NGOs could have been chosen as well, the resources of the thesis only allows for a limited amount of material to be studied. Moreover, actors such as Saab have already been subjected to research, so it is argued that a focus on the Swedish state would be a valuable contribution to these studies.

The material chosen for the study is eight reports called Strategic Export Control (Strategisk exportkontroll). These annual reports are written by the Swedish Government to summarize the previous year of arms export. The reports detail the Swedish arms export through summaries of developments and events that influence the national regulation or permit process and provide statistical overviews of the export. As the primary focus of the thesis is the constructions of peace in the text, the statistics will only be engaged with in the instances where they relate to peace.

The time period of the reports is 2014-2021 which is when the Social Democratic Party held governmental power together with the Swedish Green Party (Riksdagen, 2023). This time period is chosen in order to remove any influences of different foreign policies on the material. This creates a limitation to the extent that the material can provide an understanding of a general Swedish position, as the material only represents two political parties. Yet, decisions on the Swedish arms export are often consensus-based. All the political parties of the Parliament are represented in the Export Control Council and the Parliament also votes on any changes to the national regulation. Moreover, the perception of a Swedish paradox has never been specifically related to any political party, although the Social Democratic Party has been characterized by a long history of international activism and solidarity (Feldman, 2013; Becker-Jakob et al., 2013:231). Indeed, the denomination of a “Swedish” paradox, rather than e.g. a “socialist” paradox implies that this is larger than any one political party. What contributed to the periodization of 2014-2021 is also the changes that were implemented in the export regulation during this time. In 2014, Sweden became the first state in the world to introduce a feminist foreign policy (FFP) (Regeringen b, 2019). The effects of this is contestable, with a government committee concluding that ISP was the only agency within the foreign affairs

compartment that did not receive any governmental directives that included equality goals (Towns, Bjarnegård & Jezierska, 2023:47-48, 55, 61). Yet, both the FFP and the democratic criteria that was introduced in 2018 with parliamentary support, are situated within the Export Control Report and as idealistic ideals these policies can give insight into how the Government understands peace at this point of time. The period of 2014-2021 is thus argued to provide rich material for an examination of the construction(s) of peace within the Swedish arms export.

5.3. Operationalization

This section will detail how the different components of this thesis are combined in order to analyze the material.

Lupovici argues that pacification can be examined in the same way as securitization, i.e. through “...the social context, the enunciators, their audience, as well as the language and the practices.” (2013:211). The scope and the material of this thesis limits the possibility to review all of these instances, and it will therefore only focus on the language. As the focus of the thesis is to examine the construction of peace in the way that it is presented in the Swedish arms exports, semiotics is argued to be a fitting method for this purpose. Semiotics, and its accompanying linguistic instruments of opposition, markedness, alignment and narrative, have the possibility to explore where and how meanings of peace are formulated within the material. Pacification sees peace to be represented by more than the actual word “peace” (Lupovici, 2013:213). Thus, semiotically, peace can be identified in the reports even in its absence. If other signs are present that are interpreted as related or aligned to peace, these will be understood to represent a construction of peace. Through the use of these linguistic instruments, the meaning of the signs will further be examined in relation to their context. Hence, the pacification theory and the semiotic analysis will complement each other in their understanding of how peace can be constructed. The semiotic findings of the construction(s) of peace will be presented in relation to the pacification processes. To reiterate, these are (1) an issue being presented as a precondition for peace, (2) an issue being framed as a part of an agreement of peace or (3) an issue being described as a way to enhance a state of peace (Lupovici, 2013:214). Finally, these constructions of peace will be related to the liberal and emancipatory understandings of peace to more fully engage with the meanings created here.

Neither the lines between the pacification processes, nor a liberal/emancipatory version of peace, are definitive. While the existence of definitive divisions in the social world can be questioned, it could be argued their absence makes it difficult to classify the findings. This thesis does not reject this criticism, but rather argues that these processes and versions are

argued to be constitutive of each other. Instead of seeing these classifications as absolute, they are argued to be instruments that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of peace. Liberal and emancipatory versions of peace are used as ideal types to encourage a discussion about the different types of meaning of peace. They are both understood as they were presented by the theory section. The liberal version of peace is thus argued to emphasize universal values, the enforced possibility of peace, institutions and a hierarchy between states who help and states who are helped. The emancipatory version of peace also recognizes values such as human rights and democracy, but it puts a bigger emphasis on the necessity of local perspectives on this. It is likewise critical of an understanding of peace that enforces global hierarchies and removes agency from those with lived experiences of conflict.

5.4. Reflexivity

The analysis will largely be an interpretation of how peace is constructed and how it can be comprehended. As previously detailed, semiotics argue that this process involves an individual understanding of the sign. This means that researchers' interpretation of signs and their construction might differ from one another. As Daniel Chandler describes it "...there can be no 'exhaustive' semiotic analyses because every analysis is located in its own particular social and historical circumstances." (Chandler, 2017:273). Moreover, by contributing to categorizing and analyzing peace, this thesis will add to the construction of the concept. By being transparent of the theoretical considerations taken in the thesis, hopefully, eventual biases can be laid clear even though they can never be fully removed from the process.

6. Analysis

This section seeks to answer the two research questions: (1) *To what extent is peace present in discourses on the Swedish arms export during the years 2014-2021?* and (2) *How can the construction(s) of peace be understood?*

The material shows that peace is present to a large extent in the reports. The constructions of peace are identified through the semiotic meaning that is assigned to the values, processes and actors within the material. Yet, a semiotic analysis of the constructions of peace can only create a discursive understanding of peace. Pacification theory, militarization and a liberal and emancipatory version of peace are thus used to further elaborate on the meaning of peace as it is understood socially and politically. The Strategic Export Control is here argued to contain frames that relate the Swedish arms export to preconditions, agreements and enhancements of peace. It is likewise argued to be characterized by primarily a liberal understanding of peace, based on the presence of universal values, international regulations and a Swedish exceptionalism. Yet, an emancipatory version is also present in the reports, as there is a recognition of the importance of a locally anchored peace. This is argued to create tensions within the Swedish arms export, and to be at the heart of the Swedish paradox, which will be further elaborated on in the discussion.

6.1. Preconditions for peace

6.1.1. Norms of peace

Arguably the most important theme here, as can be seen by both liberal and emancipatory versions of peace and Lupovici's own research on the democratic peace theory, is that there are ideals connected to a peace process or a state of peace. This can continually be seen in the Strategic Export Control, as norms and ideals of peace are marked in the reports throughout the years. Democracy is a foundational precondition for peace as understood by the Swedish Government. This begins in 2014 through the state-led investigation that seeks to examine the possibility of restricting export to non-democratic states. This intention is said to reflect Sweden's commitments to international export control regimes and its human rights obligations (Regeringen, 2014:6). In 2017, a revised national regulation is offered as a proposition to the Parliament, where it is suggested that the receiving state's democratic status should be a central requirement for the permit process (Regeringen, 2017:7), as an addition to the current central requirement of respect for human rights (Regeringen, 2017:96). The proposal is to a large degree accepted in 2018 (Regeringen, 2018:4). Accordingly, the democratic status of the

receiving state is now a central requirement for the permit process (Regeringen, 2018:74-75). The reason behind this change is, according to the Government, that promotion of democracy, human rights and sustainable development have become more important parts of the Swedish foreign policy (Ibid.). The markedness of the democracy criteria as a *unique* part of the Swedish guidelines on export control (Regeringen, 2021:7), can be interpreted to imply that Sweden expects democracies to handle possible exports responsibly. For example, in relation to the Yemeni civil war, the Government (along with the Liberals and the Center Party) decides that Sweden will principally not allow arms export to the *non*-democratic states participating militarily in the conflict (Regeringen, 2019:4-5). There is already a criteria that prohibits arms export to states even risking participation in armed conflict and export of other military equipment is likewise banned to states actively part of an armed conflict (Regeringen, 2014:79-80). The secrecy surrounding arms export makes it difficult to assess if the non-conflict criterion, which is unconditional, could have been used in this context to attain the same result. In relation to pacification, however, it is noteworthy that democracy was marked as a condition, as this illustrates the importance of this ideal to the Swedish government. The emphasis put on democracy implies a liberal perception of peace on which the democratic peace theory is founded on. This theory sees a democratic regime as a guarantor for respect toward human rights, international law, that weapons will be used in a deliberate manner and, most importantly, that a state will not go to war. Yet, the formulation about the Yemeni civil war indicates that democracies do go to war (after all, export to the democratic states involved in the conflict remains unmarked). It is nevertheless implied that they do this in a special way that is less related to violence and more to peace. Through this understanding of democracies, the Swedish democracy criteria functions as a precondition for a liberal peace and this allows Swedish arms export to retain its discursive distance from war. An emancipatory perspective on peace also recognizes the value of democracy for a peaceful and just society, but democracy alone cannot be the criteria to decide on the peacefulness of a practice.

In the democracy criteria, there is also a connection to human rights. This is another important value that is connected to peace according to both the liberal and emancipatory perception. In the reports, human rights are taken for granted as desirable and something that Sweden strives for in an international context. “Human security” is introduced within an EU context in relation to the potential negative effects of dual-use products (e.g. surveillance technology) that could be used for internal suppression (Regeringen, 2016:29). A new proposal suggests that the export of dual-use products should be rejected if the exporter receives information that suggests that products might be used in human rights violations or

internal suppression (Ibid.). Human security, according to the EU understanding, would encompass considerations of human rights and the security of the EU and its member states (Ibid.). Surprisingly, the introduction of human security is not accompanied by any mentioning of Swedish engagement, as is usually the case when idealistic concepts are introduced into international regulation. Instead, it is followed by a section which confirms that human rights are a priority for Sweden and that the Government wishes to introduce this into the external aspects of the EU. This could be interpreted to represent a distinction of how the EU and how the Swedish Government seeks to work with human security/human rights. While the EU concept focuses on the humans of the member states, the Government has a more internationalist ambition for human rights (Ibid.). Arguably, the Swedish position can be classified as more emancipatory than the EU's position as it acknowledges considerations of human rights beyond the EU.

Human rights can also be understood within other contexts of the reports. In 2016, the national action plan for entrepreneurship and human rights is presented which seems to suggest that sustainability is primarily perceived socially and that sustainable development for Sweden is an all-encompassing enterprise (Regeringen, 2016:9). In 2020, the value that Sweden puts on human rights is further marked. First, there is a reference to human rights in the section that deals with information about Sweden's notifications of rejections (of permits) to other European states. Out of a total of 18 rejections, only 1 is connected to a lack of human rights as understood by EU regulation. Thus, the reasons for the remaining 17 could be elaborated on further, but it still serves to align Swedish decisions with a respect for human rights (Regeringen, 2020:16). Second, a new feature in this report is the inclusion of the Human Development Index (HDI). Previously, a chart showed how the export was distributed among states with varying degrees of income – from high-income countries to low-income countries (Regeringen, 2019:50). Now, this has been replaced by a similar chart, but instead the states are divided into degrees according to HDI (Regeringen, 2020:57). This is indicative of a Swedish recognition that respect for human rights is an important founding block in a peaceful society, which aligns with both liberal and emancipatory peace. Yet, it appears more liberal as the context is considered. The respect for human rights here is primarily connected to a form of sanctioned violence. Weapons in their entirety are not contested, but rather which states use them. This is more connected to liberal peace, as it makes a division between states that are eligible to use weapons and those that are not, which feeds into global power hierarchies. Naturally, also emancipatory peace would agree with the decision not to export weapons to states that abuse their own population and lack respect for human rights. Yet, an emancipatory

version of peace entails a critique of armament and the role that weapons have in all societies as a whole, as militarization, according to this understanding, never can create values of peace.

A final norm that is constructed as a precondition of peace is the feminist foreign policy that is introduced in the 2015 report. In lieu of the unmarked foreign policy, which could mean almost anything, the marked *feminist* foreign policy brings with it specific symbolic attributes. This is confirmed by the Government's intention to systematically strive "for results that strengthen women and girl's rights, representation and resources" (Regeringen, 2015:8). Illegal and irresponsible accumulations of SALW's (Small Arms and Light Weapons) are connected to this aim, as these are described to cause violence and conflict in societies. By noting this in relation to the FFP, the violent effects of SALW's are specifically connected to violence against women and girls (Regeringen, 2015:8-9). Measures that are presented by the Government within the FFP is that ISP will be educated on the issue and that data collections that capture the effects of SALW's on women and men, girls and boys, will be strengthened (Ibid.). The FFP brings with it interesting meanings to peace. Both a liberal and emancipatory understanding of peace calls for a meaningful contribution of women in peace processes and in society as a whole. Yet, critical militarization studies show that feminist arguments can be co-opted to further a militaristic agenda. Thus, whether the FFP will actually lead to emancipation for women and girls depends on how it is translated into practice. As it has been previously noted, the review of the FFP noted that ISP was not given governmental directives in relation to the policy. In an emancipatory understanding, the effects of the FFP can thus be questioned. If it primarily serves to create a discourse around Swedish foreign policy and arms regulation that uses an emancipatory language, without implementing this in practice, it can be seen as serving militarization and entirely loses its emancipatory potential.

The idealistic norms that are presented as a precondition for peace in the Strategic Export Control illustrates a major tension between liberal and emancipatory peace. In a liberal and Western understanding, these values are universal and exportable. The adherence to these norms also serves as a major opposition between states that are deemed responsible in their usage of weapons, and states that are not. This cements traditional power hierarchies in the world between West and the rest of the world, where Sweden has a self-image as natural leader in these issues. Sweden's own role in global power imbalances is not questioned and its legitimacy and moral high-power as an actor eligible to work and express ideals for peace are taken for granted. While an emancipatory understanding of peace does not oppose these ideals per say, it views their implementation critically and calls for a meaningful exchange of values as these are

context-dependent and have to be locally anchored. The perspectives presented here can be argued to be ignorant to versions of peace that would contradict a Swedish, Western understanding, leaving little room for emancipatory practices that goes beyond the institutionalized understandings of democracy and human rights. If the institutionalized and Western versions were discussed with people who had experience of conflict, their version might differ from what the Government understands as preconditions for peace. By not allowing these perspectives into the discourse on arms export, possible contradictions in the policy are prevented. Rather than emancipatory peace, this as a whole thus reads as a liberal version of peace.

6.1.2. Actors for peace

Another precondition of peace that is presented in the reports is the variety of actors that are incorporated into Sweden's peace efforts globally. For example, Sweden's work toward a just and sustainable global development is said to be guided by perspectives from "the poor" and a justice perspective (Regeringen, 2014:7). It is not further detailed who "the poor" are in the reports, or what is being done to incorporate their perspective. In 2020, this is further marked by the principle of "no one is left behind" which guides the Government's implementation of the Agenda 2030 goals. In its connection to perspectives of justice and "the poor"-discourse, the "no one is left behind" principle can be interpreted to particularly encompass minorities and those without power in a society. An alternative to this principle could be "everyone is included", but "no one is left behind" marks those individuals and groups in a society that might be forgotten by a more general formulation. This is further established by the assertion that "no one is left behind", neither in Sweden nor internationally and that this politics will be systematically integrated at all levels (Regeringen, 2020:9). In relation to the FFP, the Government also asserts its focus on equal representation in international processes according to the UN convention CEDAW that seeks to end all discrimination of women, and to work with these issues on several levels (Regeringen, 2021:8-9). An equality-integrated and multi-dimensional perspective is also included in Sweden's work on SALWs, where Sweden contributes to several funds (Regeringen, 2021:20-21). The later reports also mention specific organizations that Sweden collaborates with in regulation issues. Among them is Saving Lives Entity, established within the UN's peacebuilding fund (Regeringen, 2021:20-21), in which Sweden is active and "one of the biggest contributors" financially (Regeringen, 2020:10, 21-22). The fund's purpose is to combat the effects of SALW's and armed violence in an equality-

integrated and multidimensional manner (Ibid.). In this setting, Sweden also clarifies that they work with non-state actors, citing the NGO Control Arms (Regeringen, 2020:5).

This presents wholly an emancipatory understanding of peace. By including non-state actors and people with lived experience of conflict in Swedish work on arms export regulation, the Government acknowledges that these perspectives are vital for practicing a locally grounded peace. This indicates that the view on actors with potential for change goes beyond state-centricity. The principle of “no one is left behind” illustrates an awareness that all members of society are valuable and worthy to be part of processes of societal change and betterment. This, together with a particular markedness of perspectives from “the poor”, portrayed Sweden to be aware and seeking to remedy power imbalances at all levels according to an emancipatory version of peace.

6.1.3. Weapons for peace

A final precondition of peace is the arms industry itself. The 2014 report articulates the aim to contribute to international peace and security by actively engaging in international peace-promoting activities (Regeringen, 2014:8-9). In all other reports, this formulation is changed to articulate an aim to contribute to international crisis management missions instead (Regeringen, 2015:10). As neither report goes into detail on this, it is difficult to know if it is the scope or direction of the missions that have changed, or if it is simply a new way to present it. Regardless, such missions and threats against peace and security are best described to be best averted in collaboration with others. This requires Swedish material to be effective, available and interoperable with that of collaborative partners, i.e. it requires the existence of a domestic arms industry (Regeringen, 2014:8-10).

This precondition serves as the major legitimizing factor of the Swedish weapons industry as a whole, and as described by the Background section, export of Swedish weapons is argued to be needed in order to keep the industry competitive in a global market. This construction of peace creates a tension within the concept. In this context, peace becomes aligned with defense and hard-security issues rather than human fulfillment. It also directly connects peace with weapons, as weapons are the main instruments to create this kind of peace. Arguably, this is mainly a liberal understanding of peace that is represented here. While an emancipatory perspective acknowledges the need for weapons to stop immediate violence, it is also recognized that weapons alone never can create a long-lasting and locally anchored peace.

6.2. Agreements of peace

6.2.1. *Legality as an agreement of peace*

In the reports, an important opposition is created through the markedness of illegal and uncontrolled weapons, and the unmarkedness of weapons acquired legally in accordance with export regimes. The former represents a problem (Regeringen, 2014:13) and the transnational, illegal arms trade is throughout presented as feeding armed violence and armed conflicts over the globe, while legal weapons are entirely removed from this context (Regeringen, 2014:16-17). In a revelatory section, illegal and uncontrolled weapons are further aligned with other negative traits through a sequential relation. This narrative sees uncontrolled weapons as the origin of armed violence, which creates instability at a regional or national level. In turn, this causes widespread human suffering and obstructs and/or decimates economic development (Ibid.). By attributing a specific meaning of violence to illegal weapons, legal weapons are excluded from this negative chain of events through their opposition to their illegal counterparts. This follows the same logic that the ATT has been criticized for, that by naming some weapons as bad, other weapons become “good”. Accordingly, while the legality of weapons can be seen as an agreement of peace and a pacification process, it simultaneously cements a liberal militarization that allows for some weapons to be used as a precondition for peace, as seen above.

6.2.2. *Regulation as an agreement of peace*

Although Swedish weapons are legal, they are also aligned with negative effects on the efforts to contribute to a just and sustainable global development (Regeringen, 2014:7). There is a recognition that Swedish weapons can be used to violate human rights, but through national and EU regulation of arms export as an agreement of peace, this tension is reconciled (Regeringen, 2014:79, 11). By taking human rights into consideration in the permit process, regulation becomes an agreement of peace. The respect for human rights is marked by noting in the Swedish guidelines that a permit “should not be given if it is intended for a state where widespread and gross violations of human rights occur” (Regeringen, 2014:81). “Widespread” and “gross” marks human rights and leaves room for interpretation within this commitment to peace, and any deliberation on these criteria is not presented. Thus, although Swedish legislation seeks to be strict, the fact that the permit process considers the totality of relevant factors creates an important limitation here. This is likewise apparent in the democracy criterion where ISP makes it clear that the democratic status will only be a conditional hindrance

(Regeringen, 2018:74-75). Defense and security policy considerations for export, such as follow-up deliveries and international cooperation, are put in opposition to grounds that speak against export, such as democratic status and respect for human rights (Regeringen, 2018:7-8).

Related to this, is the opposition between Swedish weapons and active armed conflict. Again, this might seem contradictory, but through the positioning of a sequential relation whereby Swedish arms export is banned even in the eventual risk of armed conflict, Sweden distances itself from active conflicts. Export of other military equipment is also banned to states actively part of an armed conflict or subject to internal violence (Regeringen, 2014:79-80). This puts Swedish weapons in opposition to war as it is commonly understood, i.e. active combat and violence. Naturally, weapons can never be entirely removed from this context, as the reason for their existence lies in conflict, but through this construction, their meaning is distanced from the sphere of war. Yet, the distinction between Swedish weapons and war is only logical in a liberal understanding of peace. The emancipatory version of peace criticizes any distinctions that serve to create a moral hierarchy between various levels of violence.

6.2.3. Transparency as an agreement for peace

A final agreement of peace could be argued to be the transparency that the Swedish government seeks in its export control. In a portrayal of transparency, the Government is throughout the reports clear on how Swedish weapons have a negative effect on peace. In accordance with the value that is put on transparency, this discourse is continually deepened throughout the years. In the 2014 report, Swedish weapons are illustrated as having more of an *indirect* negative effect on positive efforts for peace, rather than *directly* causing violence in the same way as the illegal weapons (Regeringen, 2014:7). Moreover, these negative effects are not elaborated on. In 2016, “conflicts of interest” are mentioned in relation to politics for a sustainable development which hints at a recognition of the paradox in Sweden’s foreign policy. The Government asserts that any conflicts should be clearly announced and then dealt with in a conscious and deliberate manner (Regeringen, 2016:7-8). The resolution of these conflicts remains unclear, but again, transparency is presented as an important value. In 2017, it is more pronounced as it is stated that the permit process should consider whether export would *counteract* sustainable development (Regeringen, 2017:7). This is the first time that export is illustrated as having negative effects *directly* on sustainable development (Ibid.), rather than having an *indirect* negative influence on the Swedish efforts to contribute to a sustainable development (Regeringen, 2016:8). In the European regulation, there is already a similar formulation, yet this one also uses the word “hinder”, rather than “counteract” (Regeringen,

2017:13). “Hinder” does not connote the same kind of agency or negative effect as “counteract” does. This new formulation aligns Swedish weapons more directly with violence, regardless of which kind, and more clearly illustrates the tensions within Swedish foreign policy.

Transparency as an agreement of peace, can be seen as a way for Sweden to take responsibility for its arms trade in an emancipatory version of peace. Yet, transparency only for the sake of transparency can have little emancipatory potential if it is not followed up by changes in practices. As this is not detailed in the reports, it could be argued that emancipatory ideals are again used to create a specific meaning discursively, but not in practice.

6.3. Enhancement of peace

6.3.1. Swedish internationalism as an enhancement of peace

As could be seen through the previous pacification processes, Swedish values and regulation illustrate how the Government understands and practices peace internally. These together are combined to construct Sweden as an enhancer of peace in an international setting. The reports are full of instances where Swedish work internationally is marked as a positive force for peace. Swedish engagement in international efforts to develop the export regimes is continually marked where Sweden is connected to contributions (financial and participatory) to the ATT (Regeringen, 2015:4, 17-18) and other international control regimes such as the UN Register of Conventional Arms as well as the Wassenaar group (Regeringen, 2016:4). Swedish participation and support is also underscored in the combat against SALWs, with concrete examples of how Sweden contributes to a UN action program on the matter (Regeringen, 2015:18-19), and Sweden is likewise marked as “one of the biggest contributors” to the Saving Lives Entity (Regeringen, 2020:10, 21-22). Moreover, Sweden is portrayed as responsible for a guideline book on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Regeringen, 2021:20-21). Finally, the contribution of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute to the EU regulations on dual-use products is also mentioned (Regeringen, 2015:4, 17-18), creating the image that the Government as well as domestic organizations contribute to peace internationally. Continually, Swedish participation in efforts to create a more equal world and efforts to limit negative effects of weapons are marked, detailed and exemplified, which aligns Swedish foreign policy to these issues.

Swedish national legislation and guidelines serves as an important legitimizing factor for the construction of Sweden as an enhancer of peace. By making the FFP a national

policy, Sweden receives international legitimacy in the feminist issue, and is described as successfully advocating for an inclusion of feminist awareness in the ATT (Regeringen, 2015:8-9). This is further accentuated in 2018, when Sweden and other (un-named) states successfully insert the notion of Gender Based Violence in the ATT. This represents the first time that the term is being used in an internationally, legally binding document (Regeringen, 2018:8-9). By singling out Sweden in these initiatives and hiding potential collaborative partner states, Sweden is marked as a progressive force in the international community. The democracy criterion likewise allows Sweden power to insert its values internationally. Within the EU work council group COARM, Sweden is presented as actively being a part of the re-examination of the current EU regulation by attempting to introduce a democratic consideration (Regeringen, 2018:14-15). This succeeds in 2019 when formulations on democracy are described as appearing three times in the EU guideline to the common policy on export control (Regeringen, 2019:4-5, 14-15). This construction contributes to a narrative where Sweden first examines its internal processes on arms export, revises these to fit idealistic norms, and thereafter works to make them internationally legitimate.

Both a liberal and emancipatory understanding of peace would argue that an inclusion of more human rights and idealistic values within international export regimes is positive. For a liberal peace, this is largely how it is practiced. Cooperation within international institutions and regulation is made more progressive to better combat problems that are connected to uncontrolled weapons. Yet, an emancipatory peace might question the effectiveness of these regimes, and the idealistic values within them. As the larger setting still allows weapon export, this again serves to create a division between weapons that is largely discursive. Moreover, to introduce these formulations into control regimes might create an image that these issues are fully dealt with, that weapons do not go to states who are un-democratic or un-feminist. But if this is not the case, the formulations primarily serve a discursive purpose.

6.3.2. Swedish rigidity as an enhancement of peace

A final theme within the reports is Sweden as an enhancer of peace through the way that it commits itself to a strict regulation. This is constructed both through an opposition to states who are refused Swedish permits, as well as a differential opposition which distinguish Sweden from its contemporaries. An illustrative example of this, that is included in every report, is the opposition that is created between Sweden and the EU in how China is treated. It is noted that the EU has issued an arms embargo on China following the events at the Tiananmen Square,

and thereafter it is noted that Sweden, on its end, “does not allow any arms material export to China” (Regeringen, 2014:14-15). By marking the Swedish position with “any”, this seems to imply that Sweden goes beyond what the EU dictates, having its own, stricter rules. Throughout the years, there is also an increasing emphasis on a changing global security environment with ISP referring to a general, global armament and a return of the “great strategic game” (Regeringen, 2018:73-74). This is later accompanied by a growing concern of an increasing number of armed conflicts. In relation to this, it is emphasized that the defense and security policy will weigh heavier than the foreign policy on issues connected to Sweden’s defense capabilities (Regeringen, 2020:90-91). This new geopolitical setting is argued to make the permit process more challenging, which is noticed in an increasing number of rejected permits and by more detailed information of possible receiving states (Regeringen, 2018:80). In 2014, the term “traditional cooperative partner states” is used to mark those states that are deemed acceptable to cooperate with (2014:5). In 2016, both “traditional” and “established” are used interchangeably (Regeringen, 2016:5-6). In 2017, only “established” is used and instead of “cooperative states”, “receiving states” is used (Regeringen, 2017:5). For every year, the states which are included into the categories of established and non-established receiving states differ (Regeringen, 2018:6). In 2019, however, the latter group is elaborated on by denoting those states that seem especially “non-established” as receiving states. Both Turkey and Saudi Arabia are mentioned together with longer explanations of their export permits. Regarding Turkey specifically, ISP withdrew its export permit to the state with reference to the Swedish foreign minister’s [Ann Linde during this time] statement that Turkey’s military operation in Syria violated international law and the UN charter (Regeringen, 2019:76-77). This can be compared to how Russia’s invasion of Crimea was described in 2014: ”Due to the EU’s sanctions against the Russian Federation, the Government decided in December 2014 to initiate a total embargo on Russia” (Regeringen, 2014:14). By explaining it more in detail and marking Turkey, the withdrawn permits to the state become an important opposition to Sweden. This is further accentuated by the clarification that “[n]o other EU state than Sweden revoked export permits to Turkey during 2019...” (Regeringen, 2019:76-77) which marks Sweden from its contemporaries. It is difficult to know whether the difference in how Turkey versus Russia is portrayed lies in the different relations to these states, or if this is an effect of the ongoing transparency work.

In another report, specific events are mentioned due to their effect on the Swedish permit process such as the conflict in Yemen and the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Here, the Government marks the Swedish policy in relation to Saudi Arabia in

opposition to the policies of Germany, Denmark, Finland and Norway. It is explained that Germany, Denmark, Finland and Norway have decided to no longer issue export permits for new military equipment to Saudi Arabia, while it is also noticed that Sweden has maintained this position since 2013 (Regeringen, 2018:77). By first aligning Sweden with like-minded states, to thereafter note that Sweden was slightly better in its control compared to these states, Sweden is marked as the most responsible of the group. Yet, the report also notes that Germany went beyond “the other states” to temporarily stop follow-up deliveries of previously exported material to Saudi Arabia (Regeringen, 2018:77). With this formulation, it is difficult to know whether Sweden is included in “the other states” or not. Thus, it is not specified clearly in the instances where Swedish regulation could be less strict than that of other states. Moreover, when Sweden could be criticized for lacking in its export control, an opposition is constructed where Sweden is not necessarily connected to positive values, but rather a lack of negative value. The tension between human rights and potential defense and security concerns that could override this criteria, is remarked on in one report. ISP here notes that granted permits to states with, e.g. grave deficiencies in their democratic status, will remain unusual and primarily concern follow-up exports where the Swedish military is engaged in international operations with other close partner states, such as the U.S. or the U.K. (Regeringen, 2020:90-91). This continues a tendency to align Sweden with a stricter export regulation while concurrently removing responsibility from Sweden in those instances where Sweden is not entirely living up to its own ideals. Instead, other states, who are marked, become responsible for Swedish deficiencies toward its ideals.

In an emancipatory understanding, Sweden’s refusal of export permits to states with grave deficiencies in human rights is positive. It illustrates Sweden as living by its own rules, and taking responsibility for its arms export and being a leading figure in the global work toward this. Yet, the tension that has continually existed between defense and security policy and foreign policy will always allow Sweden to abandon its ideals. This creates a constant uncertainty whether Sweden can actually be a leader and a positive force within emancipatory peace, or if it mainly uses the language of emancipatory peace without putting this into practice. A liberal understanding of peace, on the other hand, better encapsulates this tension, as it allows for hard-security issues to be coupled with the intentions of human rights. While there is a recognition that human rights need to be incorporated into a society to create peace, it is likewise reconciled with the fact that armed alliances are an important part of peace and that this might require deviation from previously expressed ideas.

7. Discussion and implications

The semiotic analysis shows that peace is present to a great extent within the Strategic Export Control reports 2014-2021. While the main constructed elements of peace are found early within the texts, it was clear that these were expanded on as the reports progressed. Through the pacification theory, the way that peace is constructed in the discourses on arms export becomes clearer. It is argued that through pacification, elements within the Swedish arms export can be constructed as preconditions, agreements and enhancements of peace. Naturally, frames of violence will exist in these discourses as well, but the systematic use of concepts and signs related to peace is indicative of a pacification attempt. As stated in the report, promotion of democracy, human rights and sustainable development became increasingly important elements in the Swedish foreign policy during the years here examined (Regeringen, 2018:74-75). This can be seen in the way that the Swedish export control experiences large changes during the years, becoming more and more progressive and incorporating more emancipatory ideals and actors.

The different pacification processes cannot be completely separated from each other, instead they should be seen as constitutive and interdependent. The way that *preconditions for peace* are constructed, influences the construction of the *agreements of peace* and vice versa. Combined, both of these processes highlight the role of Sweden as an *enhancer of peace*. Arguably, here is where the construction of peace as a whole in the Swedish arms export comes together. Without the view that Sweden is exceptional and unique in its respect for human rights, democracy and feminism, there could be no Swedish internationalism. It is therefore argued that together, these pacification processes are at the heart of the Swedish paradox. Yet, the liberal and emancipatory comprehensions of peace also contributes to the understanding of the paradox. An examination of these values within the Swedish arms export reveals that there are distinct versions of peace within the material that establish opposing meanings and values to peace. Liberal peace is dominant within the discourses. If only liberal peace were presented in the Swedish arms export, arguably, there would be no paradox. In a liberal understanding, weapons can be divisioned into groups of legal versus illegal weapons, and as Swedish weapons belong to the former group, they are legitimized. Moreover, Swedish efforts to better regulate the international arms trade and Swedish work to develop its national regulation could be seen to counteract any negative effects. Likewise, Swedish internationalism is legitimized as the ideals democracy, feminism and human rights are “fully” realized domestically. Yet, the emancipatory version of peace that is also present in the discourses complicates this picture. The reports’ focus on an inclusive range of actors and their

perspectives illustrates a recognition of the need of disenfranchised groups and people with lived experiences to be present in peace processes. This is made clear through the Government's emphasis on perspectives of justice and perspectives from "the poor", as well as the policy of "no one is left behind". Thus, the Swedish arms export also presents a meaning of peace that goes beyond the liberal understanding of it. However, the constant tension between the foreign policy and the security and defense policy, and the priority of the latter, assures that an emancipatory understanding can never fully be realized.

It could be argued that, even if it is lacking in power, the introduction and increasing presence of emancipatory peace in discourses of Swedish arms export is a good thing. The Swedish understanding of peace partly seeks to be emancipatory, and through this, Sweden's normative power in these issues has been able to positively influence regulations on all levels. Partly due to these efforts; gender, democracy and human rights are now included in deliberations on export permits all over the world. Perhaps this could be viewed as a first step away from the criticized liberal peace. Yet, the theoretical and methodological considerations of the thesis emphasize the relational aspect of our social reality. Semiology understands relations to be a fundamental element of meaning-making while militarization highlights the risk of emancipatory discourses being co-opted in militarized settings. If the emancipatory version of peace primarily serves a discursive function, while the liberal version remains the main way that peace is practiced and understood within Swedish arms export, the emancipatory understanding risks being co-opted. This is assumed to affect the way peace is commonly understood, as it restricts a view of peace that seeks to transcend the liberal vision of peace.

In environmental and queer-movements, the process of utilizing emancipatory concepts for instrumental purposes has been dubbed green- respectively pink-washing (UN, 2023; Jansson, 2021). As has been shown by the previous literature and researchers such as Larsson, Jackson and Coetzee, Swedish arms producers increasingly seem to use a language of human rights to legitimize their products. As the analysis in this thesis illustrates, this trajectory is mirrored by a similar pacification process within governmental discourses on weapons. Perhaps then, this development calls for the formulation and introduction of peace-washing.

8. Conclusion

This thesis began by presenting the puzzle of the Swedish paradox, which characterizes the state's contradictory foreign policy. While Sweden was the first state in the world to introduce a feminist foreign policy and is generally associated with peaceful efforts globally, it has simultaneously been accused of exporting arms to states with bleak human rights records. This duality has usually been examined through the perspectives of militarization, but in this thesis it is argued that an investigation of the construction and the meaning of peace is needed to fully and holistically unpack the paradox. Through the combined lens of militarization, pacification and a discussion of what peace actually entails, the Swedish arms export has now been examined discursively. This has led to the finding that, firstly, constructions of peace are an important element in the Strategic Export Control. Secondly, the meaning of these constructions can be understood as pacification processes. Within these processes, new meanings of peace are created as they can be related both to a liberal and an emancipatory understanding of peace. This showcases a tension within the Swedish arms export. It is mostly a liberal version of peace that permeates the policy and this serves as an important legitimizing factor of the different and opposing aspects present here. Yet, emancipatory understandings of peace are also present in the material, but these cannot be reconciled with the larger frame of the Swedish arms export, as they also require emancipatory practices to be truly realized. The way that peace is understood in the discourse of the Swedish arms export is argued to influence discourses on peace. If some aspects of peace are never fully realized, peace in its emancipatory dress becomes a concept with discursive power rather than practical. Just as green- and pink-washing is utilized to describe those instances where concepts are watered down and lose their transformative power, peace-washing is presented as a description of those instances where peace is instrumentalized, but not meaningfully used.

By engaging with this topic, the thesis contributes to research from several different viewpoints. Academically, it attempts to reconcile several different fields by bringing together concepts from Critical Peace Studies to Critical Security Studies/Critical Military Studies. Arguing for the relevance of both the peace concept and militarization also actualizes concepts that are needed to capture the construction of both threats and peace issues globally. Methodologically, a semiotic study shows the relevance of a method that genuinely engages with the construction of meaning of the social and political reality. In terms of material, the thesis has likewise provided an in-depth study of how the Swedish Government understood peace during the years 2014-2021, which adds to previous research that has primarily looked at the arms industry.

8.1. Limitations and future research

This thesis cannot say for sure whether the pacification process is successful or if it remains an attempt, as it only looks at one side of this process. More research is therefore needed to capture the possible success of the pacification. There is likewise no ability to determine any causal relation, rather, this thesis can be seen as contributing to a constitutive relation of peace, as has been previously stated. Moreover, an important limitation is the time period. While the Social Democratic Party has been characterized by idealistic and global ambitions, the period of 2014-2021 might be argued to be extraordinary. This has been followed by a renewal of great power politics with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and a new Government that can be argued to have a different view of peace and Sweden's international ambitions. Therefore, findings of the thesis are situational, but this does not discredit the contributions of the thesis as a whole. As its opposition, peace will always be present in issues of violence, whether it is explicitly mentioned or marked by its absence. Thus, to understand the construction and meaning of peace will be no less important just because the world is currently preoccupied with war.

The ways that this research can be continued appears to be endless. The meaning and construction of peace can be researched in more contexts, both through other material or actors and by comparing different state understandings of peace. Other methods can also be used. While semiotics is fitting to capture the construction of meaning, more traditional discourse analysis such as Laclau and Mouffe might better capture elements of power within this process. Likewise, to study peace as an empty signifier might be fitting in contexts where there are many different versions of peace competing. The other end of the pacification process can also be examined by looking at how these versions of peace are received by the general public. More work can also be done to incorporate lived stories and experiences from people who live under conflict to bridge the gap that exists, not only between practice and reality, but also between reality and academia.

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