1. Sweden and *Our Military Profession:* Building a Common Identity or Creating Friction?

Joakim Berndtsson

Introduction

In 2016, the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) adopted a policy given the name *Our Military Profession* (Vår militära profession.) The document, part of the SAF Strategic Orientation of 2015, serves to outline and explain the core principles of the Swedish military profession (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016). While issues of professionalism, expertise, responsibility, values, ethics and jurisdiction in the SAF have certainly been discussed and described before, the policy represents a first effort to formulate a coherent, official narrative. The timing of its adoption is interesting; it comes in a period of political demands for increased territorial defence capabilities and a rebuilding of the Swedish "total defence" organisation, and follows a series of recent and ongoing organisational changes. The policy explains the need to define the profession by referring to new and complex conflicts, multifaceted threats and a changing role for the armed forces in Swedish society, including a need to increase trust in the SAF among the Swedish population (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016, pp. 4, 7). In this context, the policy states, "conditions for command, leadership, coherence, communication and identity formation change" and there is thus a need for a "solid foundation" for the organisation and its members, including a common understanding of "expertise, values and

responsibilities" (Swedish Armed Forces 2016, p. 7). In essence, the policy can be understood as a way for the SAF leadership to take control over the content and meaning of the military profession in times of change and uncertainty (Ledberg, 2019, p. 26).

The policy speaks to (and about) both military and civilian members of the organisation, but also to wider Swedish society and beyond. It mostly avoids the concept of identity, although the policy clearly forms part of an identity-building effort designed to shape the ways in which members of the organisation understand and identify with their roles and responsibilities. As with all such endeavours, it may serve to promote and strengthen a sense of belonging and common purpose. Yet centralised efforts to "regulate identity" are not necessarily embraced or internalised by organisation members, and policies such as *Our Military Profession* may create or increase internal opposition and disagreement (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The aim of this chapter is to contribute to our understanding of the ongoing construction of the Swedish military profession and to identify potential sources of contention or friction. To achieve this aim, the chapter will both analyse the Swedish military profession as defined in the policy, and address how key aspects resonate or come into conflict with professional self-images and identities among officers. Theoretically, the analysis is informed by James Burk's definition of the military profession as comprising a specific expertise, jurisdiction and legitimacy (Burk, 2005), and by the concept of collective or shared identity as outlined by Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and McDermott (2006). Empirically, the analysis draws on official SAF documents as well as interviews conducted with a group of Swedish officers.[1]

The chapter proceeds as follows: the next section outlines the theoretical framework, centred on the concepts of the military profession and (professional) identity. From this, we move on to research design and methods. Next, a short background to the Swedish case is sketched, before proceeding to the main analysis section and, finally, to the conclusions.

1 Data collection for this study was conducted in 2016–2018 and formed part of a project on relational aspects of professional identities and professional competition between the armed forces and the private security industry. This part of the project was published open access in *Defense & Security Analysis* (Berndtsson 2019). The present paper draws on a similar theoretical framework and design, but uses mainly previously unpublished data in the analysis. The focus of the present chapter is placed not so much on relational aspects and "significant others" (i.e. Private Military and Security Contractors) but rather on vertical relations between the leadership/organisational level and military officers. See also the methods section of this chapter.

The Military Profession and Professional Identities

The concept of the military profession helps structure the analysis of how the SAF constructs its current, organisational self-image. Yet as we move down from the level of SAF leadership, it becomes clear that organisation-level conceptualisations are insufficient. As Snider (2005, p. 12) reminds us, there are at least three relevant levels of analysis: the client (society), the profession (army or military) and the individual (officer identity). This chapter is primarily concerned with the relationship between the latter two, focusing on the organisational or policy level and the level of officers, focusing on individual and shared identities. As professional self-images and identity formation processes are clearly shaped by the wider social and political context, however, the background section describes some of the wider challenges and changes currently facing the SAF. The remainder of this section outlines a framework for understanding the military profession in relation to professional identities among officers.

The question of how to define and delineate the military profession has engaged scholars since the publication of influential works by Huntington (1957), Janowitz (1960), Abrahamsson (1972) and Moskos (1977). Decades later, there is still no general agreement about how to define the profession, or whether the military should be treated as a "proper profession," as one or several professions (for example, the army, navy, air force etc.), or as including different "types" such as the "soldier-scholar" (Downes 1985; Moskos 2000; Abbott 2002; Burk 2005; Brante, Johnsson, Olofsson & Svensson, 2015; see Brænder, this volume). Additionally, the characteristics that define a profession more generally – claims to specialised knowledge and a well-defined jurisdiction, for instance, or formal and informal rules governing membership – remain disputed, dynamic and changing (Abbott, 1988; Snider, 2005, p. 19; Bruneau, 2013, p. 16).

This chapter uses Burk's definition of a profession as "a relatively 'high status' occupation whose members apply abstract knowledge to solve problems in a particular field of endeavor" (Burk, 2005, p. 41). For Burk, a profession includes three co-constitutive elements: expertise, jurisdiction and legitimacy. The first element is the mastery of abstract knowledge, produced in systems of higher education. The second refers to the control over a jurisdiction (a field of endeavour) in which this knowledge or expertise is applied. Finally, there is the match between the form of professional knowledge and the "prevailing cultural belief or bias about the legitimacy of that form to others, which is the source of professional status" (Burk, 2005, pp. 43–44). Applied to the modern military, members of the profession draw on specialised knowledge, acquired through training and (increasingly academic) education, the core of which relates to the application and

management of organised violence. Traditionally, the military's jurisdiction has been warfighting but, in many cases, it has expanded to include national defence and crisis management, international peacekeeping, disaster relief and beyond. Finally, the legitimacy of the military is rooted in the acceptance of its expertise by principals (governments), partners (other military forces or civilian organisations) and wider society (popular support). Underlying such acceptance is also the expectation that the use of military expertise is ethically and legally sound (Snider, 2005, pp. 11–12).

Burk's approach allows us to analyse changes within and differences between cases. In the manner of other countries, Canada and the United States have adopted official policies that define their national military professions; these have been set out in the publications *Duty With Honour* (Canadian Department of National Defence, 2009) and *The Army Profession* (U.S. Department of the Army, 2015). These documents both communicate norms, responsibilities and duties internally and help project a coherent image of the military profession to wider society, potentially helping to build understanding, trust and legitimacy. Although descriptions of professional membership and characteristics differ, they all relate to aspects of expertise, jurisdiction and legitimacy. Like the U.S., Sweden has embraced an inclusive idea of the military profession, encompassing both military and civilian employees (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016). While this contrasts with the Canadian policy of including uniformed personnel alone, the Swedish policy agrees with Canada's *Duty with Honour* in both style and language. Without taking these comparisons further, the Swedish policy may be understood as an expression of "isomorphism," where the SAF seek to model themselves on similar organisations and international professional standards (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In the analysis below, the three elements set out by Burk (2005) serve as overarching themes for the analysis of the Swedish military profession at the organisational level, and as a basis for posing questions about professional identities among officers.

Before proceeding, it is useful to recall that militaries are large bureaucratic organisations, shaped not only by their expertise in the production and management of organised violence but by a need to develop and maintain administrative systems and processes internally and with external partners. In this respect, military organisations operate much like other large organisations in society today, increasingly shaped by pressures to become more efficient and to adopt business-style systems of management and organisation (Norheim-Martinsen, 2016). This "dual nature" (Snider 2005, p. 13) has led researchers to consider the consequences of different and sometimes competing organisational or institutional logics in military organisations. Administrative systems, procedures and routine

application of "non-expert work" may be seen to come into conflict with the ability to develop and maintain the core expertise of the military profession (Snider 2005, pp. 14–16; Ledberg 2019, pp. 73–76, see also Ydén, this volume). As we shall see, ideas about "bureaucratisation" are important for how Swedish officers reflect on their work.

There are many ways to approach the study of social or professional identities (see, for example, Brown, 2019; Alvesson, Ashcroft & Thomas, 2008; Abdelal et al., 2006). Here, identity is understood as multifaceted, variable, and as constructed in social contexts and in relation to others through contrasts, differences and similarities. The chapter focuses on a specific group or collective – military officers – and the characteristics that help define identification with the Swedish military profession. Professional identity is defined as a "constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (Ibarra, 1999, pp. 764–765). Drawing on previous work in organisation studies, the new Swedish policy is seen as (more or less explicitly) aiming to produce "identity work" among organisation members, engaging them in forming or strengthening a shared identification with a particular set of desirable or mandated competencies, norms and ideals (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). As such, the policy is an attempt to regulate and govern identities within the organisation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). While potentially strengthening coherence and feelings of belonging, a dominant, normative identity discourse may also generate "identity threats" that challenge individuals' and groups' preferred "identity narratives" (Brown & Coupland, 2015, p. 1318). From this perspective, understanding how the organisational image of the Swedish military profession relates to self-images or identities among officers is an important undertaking.

Essentially, the policy endeavours to construct a collective identity for specific professional groups (such as officers) and other members of the SAF. Abdelal et al. (2006) define collective or group identity as an intersubjective social category that varies along two basic dimensions: content and contestation. Content, according to the authors, "describes the *meaning* of a collective identity" while contestation "refers to the degree of *agreement* within a group over the content" (2006, p. 696, italics in original). In turn, the content (or meaning) of collective identity is made up of four overlapping and non-mutually exclusive "types": constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and cognitive models; we thus end up with four additional themes to guide the analysis of military professional identities.

First, constitutive norms are made up of formal and informal rules that define group membership, obligations and roles; they "appear to fix meanings and set collective expectations of members of the group" (Abdelal et al., 2006, p.

697). Studying the self-images of military officers, these norms are both legal and social, and include characteristics such as personal ethic and civic duty, professional jurisdiction and ideas about commitment that bind members together and shape mutual expectations and behaviour (see also King, 2013). Secondly, social purposes refer to goals attached to the group, which also create obligations among members to engage in practices to achieve these goals. In the case of military officers, one such goal is protection of the country, which in turn is connected to issues of both jurisdiction and legitimacy. Thirdly, relational comparisons refer to the issue of defining the group in relation to what it is not. This is a key aspect and includes self-perceptions and ideas about expert knowledge and legitimate professional status among officers, especially in relation to significant "others" such as civilian employees or military contractors (Berndtsson, 2019; Dunigan, 2011). Finally, a cognitive model refers to a "worldview" or a framework that "allows members of a group to make sense of social, political, and economic conditions" (Abdelal et al., 2006, p. 699). Among officers, this includes the ways in which they understand and describe the socio-political realities of being a military professional.

The four facets of meaning of shared identities overlap and vary both across time and space and in levels of contestation. The normative and purposive aspects of collective identity, along with ideas about group membership, professional jurisdiction and expert knowledge clearly link aspects of meaning to the three overarching themes of expertise, jurisdiction and legitimacy. The framework allows us to analyse how officers articulate aspects of professional identity, how such descriptions converge or diverge in terms of shared norms and meanings, how they relate to significant others and, most importantly, to the meaning given to the profession at the level of SAF leadership. Considering the changes and challenges currently facing the SAF, it is important to understand both the organisational structure of the Swedish military profession and the potential "identity threats" that these might engender.

Materials and Methods

In terms of methods and sources, this chapter draws on a previous study on professional competition between the military and private security actors in Sweden (Berndtsson, 2019). The study collected data on several aspects of professional identity but focused chiefly on external, relational aspects of identity formation. While this chapter adopts a similar exploratory design and theoretical framework, it centres on relations and self-images within the organisation, thereby adding to our understanding of the construction of the military profession in Sweden.

As noted above, the chapter focuses on two of the levels of analysis where the content or meaning of the military profession is defined and where sources of contestation may be found: the organisational level and the level of military officers. Empirically, the chapter draws on different sources of data, including official policy documents and semi-structured interviews and text from the open-ended questions of a small-scale survey. *Our Military Profession* provides both the basis for the analysis of how the SAF officially defines the military profession in Sweden and a point of reference when studying self-perceptions among officers. Finally, previous research on military transformation and professionalisation in Sweden is used to provide a background to the analysis.

To understand professional self-images and identities among officers, the analysis uses mainly unpublished material from interviews and replies to open-ended survey questions. The previous study targeted a group of 60 experienced officers, all enrolled in the Advanced Command and Staff Programme at the Swedish Defence University.[2] Naturally, the views of this group are not representative of the Swedish officer corps as a whole. Yet these students, drawn from all branches of the SAF, are well advanced in their careers and can be expected to be grounded in, and reflexive about, their professional identities. Studying officers in higher education is also suitable as they can be seen as being, or becoming, "custodians" or "stewards" of the military profession in Sweden (Snider, 2017). To supplement these data, the analysis also includes discussions on the military profession in *Officerstidningen*, the periodical of the Swedish Association of Military Officers (2018b). This material provides valuable insight into the views of the largest union for officers, soldiers and sailors, representing about 13,500 members.

Data collection was mainly conducted between 2016 and 2017, that is, around the time of the publication of the new policy. The survey consisted of nine questions, three of which were open-ended and dealt with past changes and future challenges to the military profession in Sweden.[3] In addition, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with students on the Staff Programme. The interviewees were self-selected (volunteers) and questions covered various aspects of being a Swedish military officer, including past and present challenges, understandings of professional knowledge and expertise, as well as issues of popular trust and

2 Out of the 60 students in this cohort, all participants were Majors (Army/Air Force) or Lt. Commanders (Navy). The largest portion (36) were made up of Army officers, while the rest were distributed equally between the Air Force and Navy. Seven of the students were women; ages spanned between 36 and 48.

3 For a more detailed description and analysis of the survey data (not used here), see Berndtsson, 2019.

support. Interviews were recorded, fully transcribed and sent to interviewees for reference and, in some cases, for comments and minor corrections.

All interview and survey sources were assigned numbers (e.g., Interview, Staff Programme Participant 1–6; Free Text Comment 1–65), and then systematically coded and analysed using a version of thematic analysis, a qualitative approach focusing on eliciting meanings from mainly (but not necessarily only) textual sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The thematic analysis in this chapter is guided by pre-defined themes to probe meanings and levels of agreement, that is, expertise, jurisdiction and legitimacy for the profession's principal characteristics, along with the four "aspects" of identity: constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons and cognitive models.

Military Transformation and Professionalisation in Sweden

During the Cold War, Sweden's neutrality and later non-alignment was backed up by a comparatively large military, tasked with defending the entire territory. From the early 1990s, however, the SAF followed a wider European pattern of military downsizing, specialisation, and transnationalisation (King, 2011). The mission of the SAF was increasingly shifted towards international deployments and expeditionary capabilities, including participation in ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan (2002–2014). In this period, Sweden also became an increasingly active NATO partner country (Ydén, Berndtsson, & Petersson, 2019; Petersson, 2018). Recently, and in response to what has been described as a deteriorating regional security situation, there has been a marked territorial (re)turn, with a renewed focus on national defence and increased military spending (see, for example, Swedish Defence Commission, 2017). Additionally, the Cold War concept of "total defence" has been revived, and with it an emphasis on war preparedness and, as in many other countries, on civilian-military collaboration and integration (Goldenberg et al., 2019). The territorial turn and the resumption of total defence planning creates challenges for civilian and military organisations and professionals alike, potentially leading to uncertainty or even competition around areas of expertise, responsibility and jurisdiction.

Another challenge for the SAF since the 1990s has been a relatively low level of popular support and trust, signalling a weak connection with the "client." The SAF has been described as a "well known but poorly understood" institution, where understandings in many instances are based on "traditional" and "stereotypical" images (Ledberg, 2019, p. 182). In the Strategic Orientation decision of 2015, increasing the public's knowledge about the SAF and building internal and external trust are identified as key tasks for improving credibility and legitimacy.

The policy published as *Our Military Profession*, an annex to the current strategy, forms an integral part of these efforts. In recent years, public trust in the SAF has increased. This increase coincides with the return to territorial and total defence, the reinstatement of (gender neutral) conscription, increased defence spending and considerable effort on the part of the SAF to become more visible in society (Berndtsson, Bjereld, & Ydén 2019; Strand, 2019). However, the SAF enjoys less trust than many other public institutions, and increasing knowledge and understanding of the institution remains a challenge.

Parallel with transformations on the political and strategic levels, the SAF and the officer corps have undergone several organisational changes. A three-year academic officer programme was introduced in 2008, followed by the introduction of "senior NCOs" (non-commissioned officers, or *specialistofficerare*) into the ranks of the SAF (Hedlund, 2013). In 2010, Sweden decided to abandon (temporarily, as it turned out) conscription in favour of an All-Volunteer Force (AVF).[4] This move fundamentally transformed the ways in which the SAF "branded" itself as an employer and forced the organisation to compete in an open labour market (Strand & Berndtsson, 2015). The transformation of the Swedish military can be seen in many ways as a move towards "professionalisation," both in terms of the contractual arrangements for soldiers and in terms of overall competence and capabilities (King 2013, pp. 211–22; see also Victor Tillberg, this volume). In addition, and mirroring New Public Management trends in many other countries, changes brought about in Sweden since the 1990s have often been aimed at streamlining the military to make it more cost-effective and to increase the level of political oversight and control (Norheim-Martinsen, 2016).

There have been several studies dealing with the military profession in Sweden, among them a large-scale study of Swedish professions, including that of the military officer, conducted by the late Thomas Brante and colleagues (2015). In their study, military officers are seen as belonging to a "semi-profession" – different from "traditional professions" (e.g. doctors) in terms of a shorter period of specialised education (expertise), and with a larger focus on practical (rather than scientific) knowledge. Further, Bolin (2008) points to several ambiguities when it comes to professional identity among officers, partly stemming from increasing bureaucratisation and a growing area of peace-time responsibilities (jurisdiction)

4 On 2 March 2017, the Swedish Government decided to partially re-instate (a gender-neutral) conscription in order to fill the ranks of the armed forces. In practice, the decision means that from January 2018, Sweden has a mixed system of recruitment based both on coercion (legal obligation) and on attracting volunteers.

for the Swedish Armed Forces and the officer corps. Finally, Ledberg (2019) examines the development of the military profession in Sweden and the relationship between the military organisation, political leadership and wider society; in her discussion of the new policy, she notes that while it can be seen as a way to define and control the content of the military profession, it may also cause disagreement within the organisation.

The Military Profession in Sweden: Self-Images and Professional Identities

The analysis is divided into two parts. The first focuses on ways in which the Swedish military profession is officially defined at the level of SAF leadership and policymaking. The second concentrates on self-images among officers. Together, the two parts provide insight into some of the prospects and challenges of building a common identity around the concept of "our military profession."

The Organisational View: the SAF Leadership and Our Military Profession

While debates and discussions about the military profession in Sweden are not new, the recent move to establish a coherent narrative outlining the meaning of the concept indicates a renewed interest in the topic among SAF leadership. The policy working group started in 2011 and after several rounds of referrals (to internal SAF working groups, the Swedish Defence University and trade unions), the new policy was published on 1 July 2016 (Swedish Armed Forces, 2017, p. 67). The policy was subsequently printed as a booklet in 2017, with a foreword by the current Supreme Commander, General Micael Bydén.[5] *Our Military Profession* is mainly aimed at an internal audience and serves the purpose of outlining foundational principles, helping members understand the "unique role" of the profession and their "contribution to the security and safety of all citizens" (Swedish Armed Forces 2016, p. 4–5). In addition, the policy seeks to communicate SAF expertise, jurisdiction, values and responsibilities to the client – the Swedish people and society at large (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016, p. 4). As of late 2020, the policy is also being translated into English, further widening its intended audience and clearly underlining the importance attached to it.

5 In addition to the foreword, the booklet version also has a slightly different introduction and includes some more details about the work process. References to the booklet version are dated 2017 while the references to the original policy document are dated 2016.

In the foreword to the booklet version, General Bydén describes the core of the military profession in Sweden:

> The mission of the [Swedish] Armed Forces is to defend the country under all circumstances and, in the last instance, against an armed attack. This involves great responsibility and the most difficult of situations. Therefore, the core of the military profession is comprised of our collective expertise in armed combat. Equally, it is shaped by the fundamental values we are tasked to protect – freedom, democracy and equality. (Swedish Armed Forces 2017, p. 5, author's translation)[6]

Reference to the defence of the country and to armed combat as the cornerstone of the military mission and expertise is familiar terrain. Yet it is interesting to note that the "collective" that makes up the military profession includes *all* members of the SAF: "civilian and military personnel, temporary and permanent staff, conscripts, the Home Guard [Hemvärnet] forces and volunteer organisations" (Swedish Armed Forces 2016, p. 4). Thus, the policy takes a very broad view of the military profession. Considering the recent revival of the total defence concept in Sweden and its emphasis on integration and collaboration across the civilian-military defence continuum, this inclusive view of the profession is not surprising.

The policy goes on to develop a conceptual framework based on clearly recognisable characteristics of the military profession: jurisdiction, expertise, responsibility, core values and codes of conduct (Swedish Armed Forces 2016, p. 14–24). It then goes into some detail to explain how all categories of personnel form part of the same collective, but does not specify formal requirements for membership in "our military profession." Rather, inclusion is based on shared norms and on direct or indirect contribution to a common social purpose (defending Sweden and Swedish interests and values). The policy underscores the importance of a combination of "military" *and* "bureaucratic" competencies, emphasising military operations at sea, in the air and on land, but also areas such as IT, logistics, Human Resources (HR) and economics (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016, p. 16).
In essence, the policy departs from a narrow idea of a (military) profession, presenting instead a unifying concept for all groups of personnel, civilian and military alike. The notion of "our military profession" is understood broadly as an

6 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are made by the author.

"area of expertise" within a certain, politically defined jurisdiction and comprising several different occupations and professions (Swedish Armed Forces 2016, pp. 7, 25). Although the policy explicitly avoids defining the concept, it is clear already from the title that this is essentially an effort to construct a collective or shared organisational identity, flowing from the concept of "our" military profession. The policy states that "the profession in itself *creates identity* and we identify to a large extent with our work. Identity is important and is based on our collective military profession" (Swedish Armed Forces 2016, p. 5, emphasis added). From this perspective, "our military profession" is a "unifying core which is the basis of all that we do" (Swedish Armed Forces 2016, p. 13).

The policy describes the role and remit of officers, senior NCOs, squad leaders, soldiers/sailors, and civilian employees. In the case of officers, this category is termed "the officer profession" and here we find a more narrowly defined view of specific expertise (management of violence), jurisdiction (military operations) and legitimacy (adhering to and embodying professional normative expectations of wider society). While the policy does not differentiate between different branches of the military, it does emphasise the importance of combining formal (theoretical/scientific) and practical knowledge, the officer's ability to combine a military (professional) logic with public administration (bureaucratic) skills, a strong moral and ethical foundation, and collective and individual responsibility for professional development (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016, pp. 25–30, 40).

Although the policy's definition of the officer profession is thus more restrictive, it still appears in the context of the much broader concept of "our military profession." When officers consider their professional identity, it is not evident that they will accept the broad, all-encompassing view of "our military profession," its seemingly porous lines of distinction or indeed the inclusion of all officers into one category. Similarly, it is unclear if civilian SAF employees will embrace their new membership in the Swedish military profession. As noted above, SAF leadership may see the policy as a way of taking control of the meaning of the military profession; this analysis indicates that they clearly conceive it as an important part of widening, building and projecting collective identity. The policy is relatively new, and it is not clear if it will create a "solid foundation" and a "developed view of the profession" shared by SAF members (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016, p. 4). However, by studying officers' ideas about their profession we can gain an understanding of both the range of different meanings given to, and levels of agreement about, key aspects of the policy.

Views from Within: Self-Images and Professional Identities among Swedish Officers

In early 2018, the Swedish Association of Military Officers (Officersförbundet) launched a series of articles in its periodical *Officerstidningen* discussing different aspects of the military profession and the new SAF policy. As Ledberg (2019, p. 25) observes, it is noteworthy that the largest union for military officers in Sweden initiated this series by distancing themselves from the term military profession:

> The ways in which we relate to the concept of the profession in military contexts is fundamental to our services, our work and us as individuals. The [Swedish] Armed Forces have chosen to call this the military profession and we, the [Swedish] Association of Military Officers have chosen to call it the officer profession. (Swedish Association of Military Officers 2018a, p. 14)

The statement emphasises the importance of the profession but clearly adopts a narrower view of the term, instead opting for the concept of "officer profession." However, the text also underscores that this is done "without in any way intending to compete with the Armed Forces about terminology" (Swedish Association of Military Officers 2018a, p. 14). As Ledberg (2019, p. 26) notes, the Association's positioning vis-à-vis the policy indicates that the concept of a profession may be interpreted differently and used to serve the interests and needs of different groups. When it comes to substantive issues of expertise, jurisdiction, legitimacy and core values, the Association's views largely mirror those expressed in the policy (Swedish Association of Military Officers 2018a, p. 14; Swedish Association of Military Officers 2018b, pp. 16–19). Yet by focusing more or less exclusively on the *officer* profession, the Association not only signals a different take on basic constitutive norms surrounding membership, but also effectively avoids potentially thorny relational issues such as civilian-military lines of distinction.

As we move to the officers in the Advanced Command and Staff Programme, issues of content and contestation become more complex. To start off, among the Staff Programme group, the survey shows that about half of the participants agree that military officers are a profession like the medical or legal profession. At the same time, a large majority of the group see the profession as shaped by a strong *esprit de corps* based on both practical and scientific knowledge and as rooted in common ethical values (Berndtsson, 2019, p. 11). Thus, there is agreement about group cohesion and common values (or constitutive norms) and about the dual (practical/scientific) nature of specialised knowledge, which in turn forms

the basis for claims to expertise. There is less agreement, however, when it comes to seeing officership as a profession, which in turn suggests an absence of a strong internal discourse or shared cognitive model.

Asked to describe the major changes to their work over the past five years, two officers stated that "the profession has moved more towards being a civil servant" and that it "has been watered down and become more like any other occupation" (Free Text Comment 31, 32). By contrast, another officer noted that although for some time, being an officer was more like any other job, it "is now beginning to return to a profession that you *are*. I *am* an officer; I don't just work as one" (Free Text Comment 30, emphasis added). A similar sentiment is expressed by one of the interviewees: "I don't want to say that this is an *occupation* for me, but a *profession*" (Interview, Staff Programme Participant 5, emphasis added). Yet another interviewee observes: "We should not forget that in many ways, the officer profession is far from a calling for everyone, but it is a job that one enjoys" (Interview, Staff Programme Participant 3). As we can see from these statements, there is some dispute among officers in the group when it comes to understanding the shared identity *as a profession* (a cognitive model). This in itself is not surprising; collective identities are never fixed or stable but always vary in levels of agreement over meanings (Abdelal et al., 2006, p. 700). At the same time, too much disagreement may also indicate a lack of cohesion and conflicting views on normative and purposive elements of the shared identity. From this perspective, the identity-building ambition of the policy can be seen as one way of trying to widen and clarify the meaning of the military profession in Sweden and to increase the degree of agreement around the concept among members.

Several of the officers agree with a need for clarification of what the profession *is*, both internally and in relation to other groups. As one officer notes: "I believe in a clearer … communication of what the Armed Forces and the military profession are, once we have put our foot down and determined what that entails" (Interview, Staff Programme Participant 5). Developing a similar argument, another officer observes:

> I think the status of the profession must increase. [This can be achieved] if we can make [the meaning of] our profession clearer, if we can make the purpose of serving the profession clearer. The idea of a profession may appear a worn-out concept, at least to me, in the academic setting. But if we can make its meaning clearer … and create more concrete purposes and goals around why we do what we do, and what we are really good at, create pride in what we do, then that is a very good start. (Interview, Staff Programme Participant 4)

Here, the purpose of clarifying content or meaning is linked to both the status of the profession and individual pride. As such, this observation appears to be in line with the stated aims of the policy. However, and as shown above, officers also take issue with the ways in which the policy frames the concept of the/our military profession. The following quote develops this argument:

> I know that we discussed the *officer* profession some time ago, but now the discussion is more about the *military* profession. I have read it [the policy] and I … strongly disagree in some regards. I think that it contains a rather diluted definition, and … they use the concept of the profession to create some sort of identity, as I see it. And I think they got it wrong, so to speak. One thing is that it is used as a sort of identity marker, and then this idea that all personnel in the armed forces are included … [T]hat means that the core of the profession is diluted to fit everyone. (Interview, Staff Programme Participant 6, emphasis added)

Again, the issue here is the use of a broad, inclusive (or "diluted") concept of the military profession to create a common, collective identity. Continuing, it becomes clear that, for this officer, the key question is about group membership in relation to core expertise:

> Because [the policy] does not differentiate between different groups and members of the profession, it is very strange if our HR administrators who, according to our own … the definition, are also part of armed combat. I agree that they make it possible … but they are not part of it as such. … I wish we would define it more narrowly. (Interview, Staff Programme Participant 6)

From these observations, we can see that ideas about expertise as well as relational aspects of identity – expressed here as a lack of differentiation between officers and civilian personnel – may play a central role in shaping officers' willingness to accept the idea of "our military profession." The widened definition of the military profession may be perceived as an "identity threat," challenging officers' perceptions of unique expertise, jurisdiction and status.

Across nearly all interviews and open-ended survey questions, themes of "armed combat" and "management of violence" are central in officers' descriptions of their core expertise and links to both normative, purposive and relational aspects of their professional self-images. For instance, officers in this group gen-

erally see the return to territorial defence as welcome and as positive for building a common social purpose understood both within the Swedish Armed Forces and among the public. At the same time, themes linked to core expertise also figure prominently in descriptions of current and future problems and challenges. Here, refences to "too much bureaucratisation" or "administration" and "too little focus on training/preparing for war/warfighting" are frequently linked to a decreasing sense of purpose and meaningfulness.

In addition, many officers in this group touch on the issue of "academisation," that is, the increased focus on academic competencies among officers. This development is described in positive terms as a form of professionalisation, but also in negative terms as sometimes resulting in too much focus on "theoretical knowledge" in officer education at the expense of practical (warfighting) skills. Discussing these issues in relation to future challenges for the SAF, some officers express a need for the organisation to find a new or improved "balance" between academic/theoretical and practical knowledge (Free Text Comment 52, 53). Finally, a few officers also associate the decreasing focus on war/fighting with an increasing and, in their view, negative focus on "gender," "gender research" and "1325 work" (Free Text Comment 16, 43). Such images, although not prominent in the data on this group, are clearly linked to gendered understandings of military ideals, expertise and occupational boundaries (e.g. Persson 2010; also Sløk-Andersen & Persson, this volume).

To sum up, professional self-images among Swedish officers are varied and multifaceted. There are signs of agreement around the meaning of basic normative and purposive aspects, but also several signs of contestation and disagreement, especially, perhaps, around relational aspects and the widening of the profession.

Conclusions

This chapter aims to contribute to our understanding of how the Swedish military profession is defined at different levels of the organisation and to identify key challenges and sources of contestation. Questions about the military profession and professional identity are important in Sweden at present, especially in the face of ongoing changes that include the rebuilding of total defence structures and attendant demands for cooperation and coordination across civilian-military organisational and professional boundaries. In turn, such developments reshape the role of the SAF in society, raising new questions about, and potential competition for, military expertise, jurisdiction and legitimacy – all of which are at the heart of conceptualisations of the military profession.

The analysis has focused mainly on two levels: SAF leadership or policy level, and the level of military officers. As we have seen, there are clear signs of agreement around certain aspects of collective norms and characteristics, especially around identification with issues of core expertise, social purposes and normative foundations of the profession. It also seems that the policy's ambition of clarifying the meaning of the military profession internally is in line with what many officers see as a necessary step in the development of the SAF. Further, the policy serves the purpose of clarifying and communicating the role, mission, expertise and ethical values of the Armed Forces to the wider public, political leaders and other organisations. The fact that the policy is being translated into English is further testament to the importance attached to it by the leadership of the SAF.

The SAF's effort to regulate and govern identity through a central narrative appears, however, to have generated resistance and friction, too. The Association of Swedish Officers clearly rejects the constitutive norms around membership of "our military profession," a reluctance equally evident among Staff Programme officers. Even though the policy clearly makes a distinction between "our military profession" and the "officer profession," this move to create a collective identity is seen as distorting officers' professional self-images founded on ideas about – and relational boundaries around – unique expertise, jurisdiction and sources of status and legitimacy. The concept of "our military profession" does not yet offer a strong and shared cognitive model or discourse around which members can build their professional self-image. In fact, some officers do not even see officership as a profession at all, but, rather, as "any other job." It is likely that this will continue to be the case – but for these individuals, the road to accepting and internalising the idea of "our military profession" is arguably longer.

The analysis indicates additional points of disagreement around, for instance, the realities of combining and balancing military expertise (armed combat, leadership and management of violence) with the role as administrator or "bureaucrat." There are also differing ideas about the foundations of specialised knowledge/expertise, where some officers are critical of the "academisation" of officer education. While this does not mean that these officers reject academic education altogether, such sentiments do suggest a perceived imbalance between theoretical and practical or experience-based knowledge. Certainly, we should be careful when drawing conclusions from a small population or specific collective; more research is clearly needed to understand both questions of identity formation on a larger scale and for further assessments about key challenges and the long-term, identity-building potential of *Our Military Profession.* Still, this analysis has pointed to potential sources of friction and questions around meaning that merit further attention.

Future research should aim for multi-level analyses based on larger samples, and on specific sub-populations and groups. It would be interesting to study how the idea of "our military profession" resonates with members of different branches of the military (i.e., the army, navy and air force), as well as with civilian SAF personnel, senior NCOs, reservists and members of the Home Guard. Comparisons between groups might tell us more about professional identity formation and friction in and between different parts of the organisation. In addition, it would be useful to investigate how the content of the policy relates to the individual self-images of senior SAF officers – that is, the "custodians" of the military profession in Sweden. Analyses should also probe additional sources and sites of identification in educational, political and social contexts. Finally, international comparisons of policies and doctrines could shed additional light on the nature and characteristics of the military profession in different social and cultural settings, tracing the influence of certain ideas, perspectives and modes of organisation.

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